

Theology and Activism in Latin America: A Reflection on Jon Sobrino's Christology of the Resurrection and Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence

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Boston College

The Graduate School of the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences

Department of Theology

THEOLOGY AND ACTIVISM IN LATIN AMERICA:
A REFLECTION ON JON SOBRINO'S CHRISTOLOGY OF
THE RESURRECTION AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS
PROTESTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A Dissertation

by

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Theology and Activism in Latin America:
A Reflection on Jon Sobrino's Christology of the Resurrection and
Grassroots Organizations Protesting Gender-Based Violence

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Abstract

As ethicists, we have a responsibility to engage with major issues around the world. In Latin America, gender-based violence has become a reality for far too many women, and community organizers from faith-based organizations are working to change attitudes and structures in society. Many women from these organizations are using theological resources to aid them in their activism.

This dissertation will examine how theological resources contribute to the activism of Latin American women. Through an examination of Jon Sobrino's Christology, we can see that "resurrection" serves as a major theme for women who are fighting gender-based violence, and that specific concepts within this Christology can inspire hope. Sobrino's work offers women a theological framework through which they can understand their protest activities as an important part of their spiritual lives.

Although Sobrino provides this helpful paradigm, his writing refers to all Latin Americans in general and does not take the contextual specifics of women's lives into consideration. Therefore, in order to add a gender lens to the conversation about women's uses of theological resources in Latin America, this dissertation places Latina feminist theologians in conversation with Sobrino. Although liberation theology has contributed to an important foundation for feminist theologians, liberation theologians often do not consider the realities of women's lives as unique experiences. By looking at

the writings of Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Ivone Gebara, María Pilar Aquino, and Nancy Pineda-Madrid we can see that a gender lens is especially important for women who are using theological resources to animate their protest activities.

In addition to offering important resources for women struggling against the reality of gender-based violence, it is also necessary for theologians and ethicists to develop responses to gender-based violence and to support activists in their work for change.

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Introduction

This project looks at the role of theology in grassroots activism, specifically, activism throughout Latin America. The type of activism on which we will focus is the activism of faith-based organizations whose members are protesting the high rates of extreme violence against women. The problem of violence against women contributes to a variety of issues throughout Latin America, and many groups as well as individuals are working to draw more attention to this critical issue. Many women throughout Latin America are participating in grassroots organizations that are focused on ending gender-based violence. By gender-based violence, we mean violence that is directed at individuals based primarily on their gender. Although it is possible to find this type of violence directed towards men, in this project, we will focus on violence that has been perpetrated against women because they are women. For our purposes, we will use gender-based violence to mean violence against women committed by men. This dissertation will look at the widespread problem of gender-based violence in Latin America and also the activism that fights against this problem. By looking at this activism through a theological lens, we can see that the activism in which these women are participating is rooted in important theological themes.

This dissertation will explore the relationship between theology and activism in Latin America. It will also highlight central theological themes that encourage activists to continue in their struggle. Theological themes inform grassroots activism in Latin America, and it is possible to see how activism can be understood as a religious practice.

Latin American activism exists in many forms, but as we have indicated, one of the most important issues in Latin America right now is the problem of gender-based violence and especially femicide. Throughout this dissertation, we will examine the realities of gender-based violence and highlight the prevalence of femicide in specific places.

Women are being killed in Latin America at an astonishing rate. International statistics and reports indicate that violence against women exists as one of the most pressing global issues. Gender-based violence is an especially potent socio-political reality in Latin America. The type of gender-based violence with which we are most concerned in this project is femicide. The term “femicide” can be defined as the misogynistic killing of women by men. The term itself has changed since it first appeared in the academy in 1976. At that time, Canadian anthropologists Jill Radford and Diana E.H. Russell presented the word “femicide” to talk about the patterns of women being killed. As the phenomenon has grown, the term has been adapted to “femicide” in order to capture the systematic nature of these killings. In the 1990’s Marcela Lagarde, a Mexican anthropologist, with the permission of Radford and Russell, modified the term from “femicide” to “femicide” as a way of further distinguishing femicide from homicide. Lagarde also felt that using the term femicide helped to align this reality with larger, more systemic problems like genocide. Femicide highlights the fact that women are being killed simply because they are women. Authors and scholars still use both “femicide” and “femicide,” and “femicide” has now been recognized as a legal term in Latin America. Perpetrators have been found guilty of femicide. For scholars, using “femicide” rather than “femicide” indicates that they believe there are systemic problems behind these killings. The reality of femicide is

that killings are often marked by significant trauma to the bodies of women. Women are often found after they have been ritually stabbed, dismembered, or sexually violated. The unusual trauma that accompanies these killings places them in their own new category and distinguishes them from other types of homicides. Another important aspect of these killings is that they are often marked by impunity for the perpetrators. These killings are rarely investigated and arrests of any kind are hardly ever made. The impunity that goes along with femicide highlights some of the systemic problems that contribute to this major problem.

Femicide has proven to be a social-ethical-political problem that needs to be addressed throughout the world, but especially in Latin America. In Latin America, the general response to femicide has been at the grassroots level. Authorities and political figures have been slow to comment on the femicide or to make any significant changes that could stop it. Instead, communities of women have taken action. Women have organized themselves into grassroots organizations committed to fighting this epidemic.

This dissertation will begin by looking at the reality of femicide in three specific locations in Latin America where femicide has been a devastating problem. We will highlight reports on femicide in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico; Guatemala City, Guatemala; and San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Following an investigation into these case studies, we will consider some of the activists that have been working to combat femicide and its hold on society throughout Latin America. Faith-based organizations have grown out of communities of women who mourn their daughters, mothers, sisters and friends. We will argue that theology plays an important role for these organizations.

Theological themes are present in the mission statements and activities of these organizations. The ideas of hope, community, solidarity, love, and resurrection echo throughout the work Latin American activist communities. Each of these ideas has a deep theological richness. If we look at the situation of femicide in Latin America through the lens of resurrection, we can see that the power of resurrection is present in the activism of communities of women.

Resurrection serves as a powerful theme within the work of Latin American activists because of the hope that the resurrection generates. The “Resurrection Event” of Jesus’ rising from the dead after his crucifixion inspires those who have been oppressed and marginalized to fight for justice. The resurrection of Jesus can be seen in the perseverance and persistence of activists struggling for change. Resurrection is one of the most important theological themes that we can see within the activism of women in Latin America because it parallels the suffering and resilience of women. This project will therefore continue by looking at a theology of the resurrection, but it will do so from a specific lens. We will explore the resurrection from the perspective of Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino.

Sobrino has written about and discussed the societal impact of the resurrection of Christ. His theology, being Christ-centered and concerned with the person of Jesus, is a Christology. His Christology of the resurrection focuses on Jesus as both a victim of historic injustice and the second person of God. Sobrino has written about how the people of El Salvador who have been oppressed by the poverty in Latin America can live into the resurrection of Christ. He refers to the poor in El Salvador as “a crucified people” and can therefore talk about a post-crucifixion resurrection like the one Jesus

experienced. In this project, we will examine five important concepts that compile Sobrino's Christology of resurrection. These five are: living as risen beings, the reality principle, the crucified of history, hope for the victims, and the reign of God. These five concepts help to make up Sobrino's thoughts about the resurrection. They also illustrate how the theme of resurrection is especially relevant for those who have been victimized and marginalized, as women in Latin America have been. By exploring Sobrino's understanding of the resurrection, we can see how this idea serves as a pertinent theological theme for activists. The theme of resurrection is present in the work of faith-based organizations in Latin America.

Despite the fact that Sobrino's analysis of resurrection is helpful and leads us to understand some of the ways activism and theology relate to one another, there are limits to the work of Sobrino. While Sobrino has advocated for the poor in El Salvador, his understanding of the poor does not highlight the specific circumstances of women in Latin America. Sobrino writes about the poor as a single body and does not take the different experiences of men and women into account when he writes about "the crucified of history." In reality, women's experiences differ vastly from men's, and women suffer in ways that are unique to their gender. For example, women face the threat of femicide. Women have also been responsible for doing the majority of the protesting against femicide.

Our analysis of Sobrino's Christology of resurrection will prove that the theological idea of resurrection is present within the activism of women in Latin America, but in order to introduce a gender lens to the discussion of theology and women's activism, we will turn to Latina theologians whose work has been influenced by

Sobrino's. A gender lens, as offered through the theological writing of women, will further support our claim that theological themes are present within the activism of faith-based organizations in Latin America. We will introduce the concept of intersectionality, which is a framework often used by social scientists to talk about the intersecting identities of individuals. Intersectionality highlights the fact that women's genders play an important role in shaping their experiences and should not be overlooked. Therefore, Sobrino's lack of attention to gender needs to be supplemented by engaging with Latina theologians who have written about their experiences of faith and activism.

In order to bring a gender lens to the conversation about theological ideas and activism, we will look at the writing of five Latina theologians. These five are: Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Ivone Gebara, María Pilar Aquino, and Nancy Pineda-Madrid. These women do not engage with Sobrino's concepts explicitly, but they write about themes and ideas that resonate with Sobrino's work. Each of these women writes about her experience of being a woman and working to bring faith and praxis together in meaningful ways. The concepts that Sobrino introduces in his Christology of resurrection are present throughout their writing, and these women can speak to the realities of being involved in activism. Through their writing, theology is seen as a contributing force of Latin American activism.

Ultimately, this project highlights the relationship between theology and activism, and asserts that theological ideas play an important role in Latin American social engagement. The dissertation will offer practical proposals for activists and theologians to work together more collaboratively in order to eradicate femicide and seek justice for women. We will highlight important ways that the ecclesiastical community needs to

come forward in order to aid activists in their work, and we will examine larger international bodies that can provide further support to grassroots organizations that are fighting the realities of gender-based violence. Through this dissertation we will prove that theological themes contribute to Latin American activism in unique ways.

Throughout Latin America, communities of women are striving to combat a general culture of violence, which has resulted in high rates of violence against women. The type of activism in which they engage is informed by their Christian identity. Latina scholars have written extensively about how Latina life and religion are enmeshed. We can therefore see many theological themes in the activism of Latin American women. One important theme is resurrection. In order to understand how resurrection relates to those suffering in Latin America, we can turn to Sobrino's Christology. The activism of women in Latin America illustrates Sobrino's claims about the poor in Latin America. Their faith and struggle in fact exemplify Sobrino's theology of resurrection as not limited to an afterlife, but as including this-worldly empowerment, especially empowerment for and of "the poor." We can see many examples of these grassroots groups combatting violence. At the same time, Sobrino needs to be more open to understanding the specific situation of women in Latin America, as several Latina authors have noted. Women who suffer not only poverty but also social discrimination, even within their own communities, and violence, embody the "crucified peoples" about whom Sobrino writes. Hence we will turn to Latina feminist theologians to help bring this theology of the resurrection into the situation of gender violence.

Communities of women in Latin America, fighting gender-based violence, are engaging in a unique type of activism that has its foundation in Christianity. We will look

at these communities in light of Jon Sobrino's theology of the resurrection in order to recognize how activism in the face of gender-based violence can be understood theologically, and can lead to new theological insights with which to understand and advance their goals.

Overview of Chapters

I. In chapter one, we examine the reports of violence against women and femicide that have led to faith-based activism. The rates of violence against women around the world are too high, and they are particularly problematic in Latin America. This violence has led to the development of many grassroots organizations that are involved in various types of activism and protest.

Several elements factor into the prevalence of gender-based violence in Latin America. For example, drug culture as well as *narcotraficantes* or drug-traffickers dominate society and have led to an increased gang presence. When gangs are in charge of neighborhoods, violence inevitably spikes, and more women have become victims of gang rituals and sexual violence. Women are also affected by gang violence when they join a neighborhood gang, which increases their risk of being targeted by rival gang members. Women's bodies have also been found in conditions that indicate a perpetrator was likely using drugs during the time of her murder. The drug culture, which is prevalent in Latin America, has had a significant impact on the rates of violence against women.

The dual cultures of *machismo* and *marianismo* throughout Latin America also lead to violence against women. Machismo refers to a general attitude of "manliness" that includes misogyny and a domination of women. While men in Latin America feel

the need to prove their manhood, women are subsequently frequently asked to be meek and submissive. Marianismo refers to adopting a posture that resembles the Blessed Virgin Mary for women. This type of attitude leads women to be obedient and subservient, especially to their husbands or authoritative men. The dual problem of men being especially misogynistic and women being submissive leads to skewed societal roles and norms. As these attitudes have become more and more ingrained in society, they have become harder to undo. It has become more commonplace for men to be violent or even just patronizing towards women. At the same time, women are seen as less important members of society and are considered to be generally more disposable. Their voices generally matter less. These attitudes have also led to higher rates of violence against women throughout Latin America.

Maquiladora culture can be seen as a third reason for the increase in gender-based violence in Latin America. Countries like Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras all have hundreds of *maquilas* or factories where women work long hours for little pay. Many of the *maquilas* are located on the outskirts of cities and towns and women have been victimized on their way to or from work. The *maquilas* employ hundreds of women and the women are often seen as merely parts on an assembly line that can be easily replaced if they go missing. The rise of *maquiladoras* in the wake of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) in 1994 has corresponded to the high numbers of women being killed. Women are rarely in positions of leadership within the *maquilas* and they have subsequently been placed at risk. *Maquiladora* culture and the ways in which women's voices have been ignored have both contributed to growing rates of gender-based violence.

Violence against women and femicide are major problems throughout Latin America, but chapter one focuses on three locations specifically where the rates of gender-based violence are especially high. Ciudad Juárez in Mexico is the most historic site we will examine because femicide was first discussed here in relation to the murders of women that took place outside the city limits. Juárez has become the “classic” example of violence against women and also serves as one of the most vibrant locations in terms of responsorial activism. Guatemala City, Guatemala has seen rates of violence against women increase tremendously in the last few years. The legacy of the civil war in Guatemala still plays a role in the way women are treated by men. Corrupt government officials and police forces have let the drug trafficking in Guatemala City to spiral out of control and as a result, women are at risk. Guatemala has had the highest numbers of women killed by femicide in the last few years.¹ Despite changes in Guatemala’s court system, perpetrators are still not being prosecuted effectively. The third location we focus on in chapter one is San Pedro Sula, Honduras. San Pedro Sula has been the “murder capital of the world”² for the last few years, and women have been especially victimized. The 2009 presidential coup d’etat has left San Pedro Sula unstable and unsafe. While there has been an increased military presence in the wake of the coup, there has also been a significant increase in gang activity. Women’s lives are not valued

¹ Marilyn Thompson, “Guatemala: Region’s Highest Rate of Femicide,” *Latin American Bureau*, March 27, 2013, accessed July 2, 2015, <http://lab.org.uk/guatemala-regions-highest-rate-of-murder-of-women> and Anna-Claire Bevan, “Guatemala Tops ‘Femicide’ List in Central America,” *The Tico Times*, December 18, 2013, accessed July 2, 2015, <http://www.ticotimes.net/2013/12/18/guatemala-tops-femicide-list-in-central-america>.

² Jorge Ramos, Dan Lieberman and Roberto Daza, “Why they Flee: Life in the Murder Capital of the World, San Pedro Sula, Honduras,” *FUSION*, August 20, 2014, accessed July 2, 2015, <http://fusion.net/story/6333/why-they-flee-life-in-the-murder-capital-of-the-world-san-pedro-sula-honduras/>.

and society is generally in a state of unrest. These three locations highlight the epidemic levels of femicide in Latin America. Subsequently, many grassroots organizations have emerged to protest this violence.

This chapter also reports on the activities of grassroots organizations that have been working to combat gender-based violence in these locations. Women from faith-based organizations participate in protests, marches, and rites of memorial for victims of femicide. Through these activities, we can see theological themes permeating the structures of these organizations. Ideas of memory, solidarity, community, hope, and love help the women involved in these organizations continue with their work. These very theological ideas help us see how the type of activism in which these women are participating is imbued with theological themes.

II. The second chapter identifies “resurrection” as an important theme for women engaged in faith-based activism and explores how resurrection is related to grassroots organizations. Jon Sobrino’s Christology of the resurrection offers us the opportunity to look at the situation of activism through a theological lens. Sobrino’s understanding of the resurrection highlights all of the ways that the resurrection is present in the work of women struggling against violence. We explore five important concepts that relate to Sobrino’s Christology of resurrection and are relevant for women engaged in activism. These five are: living as risen beings, the reality principle, the crucified of history, hope for the victims, and the reign of God. Each of these concepts highlights how the resurrection of Jesus is relevant for women engaging in social activism.

Before exploring these concepts, however, this chapter introduces the idea that there are different levels of theology. When we look at how theology and activism are

related to one another, we need to distinguish what we are referring to when we talk about theology. Chapter two defines three levels of theology. Level one can be understood as “classic” theology or theology as it is understood in the academy. This includes theology that has been taught and discussed in classrooms for many centuries. Theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid calls the second level of theology “popular theology” and this level is actually split in two. One kind of popular theology is the theology being done by trained scholars and academics who are working alongside activists and organizers. The second kind of popular theology is theology that gets developed from the activists themselves and from communities who are working independently. The third level of theology is “popular religion.” Popular religion refers to the theology that exists as part of the lived culture. It includes the activities and experiences that participants do not necessarily understand as “classic” theology but is imbued with significant meaning. Popular religion exists in many corners of Latin America where activism shapes how individuals interact with their circumstances. These three levels of theology help us understand how theology plays a role in various aspects of life throughout Latin America. The theological theme of resurrection exists in each of these levels in different ways.

Sobrinó’s Christology of resurrection illuminates how the resurrection is present in the activism of faith-based organizations in Latin America. The five concepts from Sobrinó that we have identified each relate to the experiences of individuals in Latin America. For example, “Living as risen beings” refers to the idea that for those who have suffered, they are living in the light of the resurrection. They have persevered and recognized the resurrection of Christ as a liberating idea that they can access. The resurrection of Christ has empowered activists in Latin America to continue with their

struggle. These individuals are therefore “living as risen beings” because they have acknowledged the saving power of God’s love. The poor in Latin America are living as risen beings when they continue to work for justice.

Sobrino’s second concept, “the reality principle” refers to the reality of poverty and oppression throughout Latin America. The reality of this oppression is related to the reality of oppression Jesus suffered. Recognizing Jesus’ resurrection also requires Christians to recognize the realities of suffering throughout the world. The resurrection of Jesus invites us to be more aware of other realities where injustice is present. Activists are very aware of the reality of femicide and we can see their realities through the reality of Jesus’ suffering and resurrection.

The third concept, “the crucified of history,” also highlights the relationship between Jesus and those who have suffered in Latin America. Sobrino refers to the poor in El Salvador as the crucified of history because of the injustices that they have suffered. Women who are victims of femicide have been brutally victimized, but their friends and family members who are left to mourn them are also victims of systemic injustice and negligence. In this way, Latin Americans have been victims of different kinds of deaths and oppressive situations. Sobrino’s concept of the poor in Latin America as the crucified of history helps us see how the resurrection is tied into the activism of grassroots organizations.

“Hope of the victims” illustrates the fact that even though the poor in Latin America are suffering crucifixions, hope is generated through their activism. The resurrection offers hope for those who have been oppressed and allows those who have suffered to continue in their struggle as risen beings. Activists who are empowering one

another provide hope for the future in the same way that the resurrection encourages hope. Activism generates hope for something better. The resurrection of Christ promises that something better is possible.

Sobrinó's fifth concept "the reign of God" refers to the idea of what is possible on the horizon. The reign of God offers liberation for those who have suffered and justice for those who have been victims. The resurrection of Christ makes the reign of God possible. Activists are working toward their own version of the reign of God and their ability to live as risen beings is tied to an understanding of what the future holds. These five concepts relate to Sobrinó's understanding of the resurrection, and we can see that the resurrection is an important theological theme present in the activism of women throughout Latin America.

In addition to these five concepts, Sobrinó's Christology also contains three ideas that are extremely helpful in terms of seeing how theology is present in the activism of women in Latin America. He talks about orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy. These three ideas relate to the ways individuals experience theological ideas. Orthodoxy refers to the faith that is generated from dogmas and doctrines. Orthopraxis includes theology that comes from practices and engagement. Orthopathy refers to the faith that comes from "right affection" or the feelings that develop from our relationality and community. Sobrinó discusses the importance of all three of these ideas working together to inform our knowledge of theology. Practices, feelings, and doctrine are intertwined when we talk about the Christian faith. Faith-based activists in Latin America have cultivated a relationship with each of these ideas and we can see that theological themes are present in

their actions, protests, and marches as well as the relationships they form with one another.

This chapter concludes by looking at the limits of Sobrino and highlights the fact that although his Christology of resurrection is a helpful way of looking at the relationship between activism and theology, his method of talking about the experiences of the poor as universal undermines the reality of women's experiences. In order to counter this method and to include the voices of women, the third chapter introduces Latina theologians who have drawn on Sobrino's theology in their own work.

III. The third chapter continues to look at Sobrino's Christology of resurrection, but as it is necessary to hear women's voices speak about women's activism, introduces five Latina theologians who have written about the experience of being women in Latin America. These women have been impacted by Sobrino's theology and have continued to build on his work. They have however highlighted the importance of recognizing the experiences of women in Latin America and talking about the unique challenges that women face. Since the activism with which we are engaging is primarily activism by women, we need to include this critically important gender lens. Sobrino talks about the poor in Latin America with broad strokes but the majority of the poor are women who are suffering unfairly.

In order to highlight the importance of women's experiences, this chapter introduces the idea of intersectionality. Intersectionality is an important framework that discusses the intersecting aspects of an individual's life and weighs each one differently. Intersectionality says that an individual's gender, race, and class all need to be analyzed when making observations about experiences. Intersectionality has not been widely used

within theology, but we are using this framework as a way of highlighting the importance of women's experiences in this project. Gender and class play an important role in determining how women are treated in Latin America. Intersectionality proves that we need to include a gender lens in this conversation, and in order to do that we will look to five Latina theologians. These five are: Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Ivone Gebara, María Pilar Aquino, and Nancy Pineda-Madrid.

The theology of Marcella Althaus-Reid takes the experiences of women in Latin America into account. Althaus-Reid worked alongside activists and worked for women's voices to be heard within society and within theology. She felt that it was inadequate for women's voices to be left out of the conversation about theology and she demanded that women's experiences be validated. Althaus-Reid writes about the women living as risen beings in community with one another. Her theology illustrates the fact that theology happens when individuals are in solidarity with one another.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz writes about the experience of women's suffering and how women's liberation needs to be recognized throughout the world. She has also been actively engaged in women's activism throughout Latin America and she highlights the way women's practices shape their theology. She says that women are "doing theology" through their active engagement and struggling for liberation. Women's experiences reflect the way theology is present through community and practices.

A third Latina theologian to whom we turn, Ivone Gebara, has written about how her own theology was shaped by her experience as a woman. She highlights women's suffering as unique and more intense because of the way Latin American society does not respect women's input. Gebara's theology rejects the suffering of Jesus as something to

be admired and believes that Jesus' suffering has been harmful for women engaged in social activism. The activism of women reflects the religious nature of engagement throughout Latin America. Women are "doing theology" in a variety of different ways and theological themes are present within their activism.

María Pilar Aquino also writes about the experience of women in Latin America and highlights how women have been required to reimagine scripture passages that have traditionally been harmful for them. Aquino's theology stresses engagement with the scriptures but invites women to redefine what the Bible has meant for them. She has also worked alongside women in Latin America who are struggling for liberation and she illustrates various ways for women to participate in their religious traditions. She wants women to see Jesus as a figure who has been in solidarity with them and who recognizes their struggling. She tries to call other male theologians to the attention of women's realities and the ways women are participating in religious practices.

The fifth Latina theologian we see in this chapter is Nancy Pineda-Madrid who writes about the phenomenon of religious activism in the face of gender-based violence in Latin America. Pineda-Madrid talks about how women's activism is an extension of their religious practices. Theological themes are present within their activities. Pineda-Madrid reflects on the Christian symbols and practices within the women's resistance movement. These symbols illustrate the relationship between the activism and theology for women.

The third chapter verifies that theological themes are present within this unique type of activism in Latin America. The resurrection theme we introduced in the second chapter continues in the third chapter and we look at how Sobrino's ideas about the

resurrection resonate through the work of Latina theologians. The resurrection theme is present within the activism of women. In addition to this major theological theme, we also see why it is important for women's experiences to be discussed by women. Latina theologians can speak to the unique suffering of women, which leads to the unique activism in which these women are engaged. This chapter introduces an important gender lens and continues to prove that theology and activism share a unique relationship.

IV. This project concludes with a chapter highlighting where Latin American activists can go in order to seek greater support for their work. Because activism in the face of gender-based violence is uniquely related to theological themes, there are a variety of ways to continue to think about how to tap into this activism. Theology continues to affect and inspire activism in Latin America, but faith-based activists also play an important role instructing new ecclesial practices and movements. In addition to ecclesial bodies, grassroots organizations can also work alongside major international organizations in order to reach their goals and eradicate gender-based violence. Many of these major organizations focus on the promotion of human rights around the world in addition to the promotion of public health. In order to look at how these smaller grassroots organizations can work with these larger bodies, this chapter looks at how women's human rights are understood in Latin America.

This chapter therefore begins by looking at the history of women's human rights and illustrates human rights organizations that help smaller organizations in their work. The United Nations, the World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization, and Amnesty International are all discussed as important global organizations that work to support grassroots organizations. There are more ways that

women's activism can play a role in the data collecting and community building of these major organizations. Many important strides have been taken since women's rights were first recognized by the United Nations in 1979, but there is still a long way for these organizations to go.

We continue in this chapter by highlighting the ways churches need to offer further support for women engaged in activism. Because, as we have established, women's activism is related to important theological themes, the churches should be in the foreground of supporting women. Unfortunately, neither the Catholic Church nor the growing number of Protestant churches has done enough to support women's faith-based organizations. Guatemalan scholar Carlos Aldana Mendoza has criticized the churches for not speaking out against the realities of violence against women and for in fact helping contribute to the violence through their silence. American scholar Monica Maher, however, has written about the ways that Latina women are taking their activism into their own hands and using elements of the faith that are meaningful for them to build community. Mendoza and Maher illustrate what the churches in Latin America need to do more effectively in order to support the activism of women.

The chapter continues by looking at examples of when women's organizations in Latin America successfully made a difference either by prompting legislative actions or establishing memorials. Women's organizations will only consider their work done when all women are safe, but these little victories help encourage women in their struggle. In Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras small strides are being made in order to eradicate gender-based violence.

We conclude the fourth chapter with a look at theological responses to gender-based violence. Theological themes are present within the activism of women in Latin America, but we can also continue to think theologically about various aspects of femicide. Theological responses help to broaden the conversation about the relationship between theology and activism. The themes of hope, love, solidarity, and resurrection can be seen through the activism of women, but the themes of human dignity, and sacramentality also help us think about the work that women are doing theologically. The human dignity of each individual needs to be honored and acknowledged and this will only happen through the growth of community and the power of solidarity. The promise of the resurrection inspires women with the hope to continue in their struggle for liberation. Faith-based activists can work together with larger organizations like ecclesial bodies and major human rights organizations in order to have a significant impact on the reality of the situation. Change can begin with these small organizations and continue to end the problem of violence against women.

Inspiration

This project was inspired by a 2010 trip to San Pedro Sula, Honduras. After the June, 2009 coup d'état in Honduras, I had the privilege of traveling to San Pedro Sula with a fact-finding human rights delegation from Harvard University. In the face of many horrors and a government that was crumbling around them, I met women who were committed to fighting for their rights and for their friends who had been killed. Many of these women were inspired to continue in their struggle by their practices of faith. Although the ecclesial bodies did not necessarily support their work, they felt that religion had led them to a place of resistance and their practices constituted ways of

living their faith. There was a deep theological richness in their experiences and how they spoke of their inspiration to continue in their struggle. The activism in which they were engaged was imbued with theological themes. It draws from their Catholic identity and uses teachings, symbols, and rituals that have meant something to them to inspire them continue. This project attempts to give words to their experiences and to honor the work that they have done.

Chapter 1: Femicide in Latin America

Introduction

Women in Latin America are participating in faith-based communities that are struggling to combat gender-based violence.¹ The issue of gender-based violence throughout Latin America cannot be ignored, and women are working to make the general community more aware of the dangers they face. Latin America, as a region, has a number of problems that need to be addressed if the overall quality of life for the majority of the people who live there is going to improve. Levels of education are low and there is little economic stability. Governments are often corrupt and the quality of healthcare is substandard. All of these problems contribute in different ways to the high rate of gender-based violence in this region. They each need to be addressed, but that is beyond the scope of this project. The issue that concerns me most is how faith-based grassroots organizations are working to make the eradication of gender-based violence a

¹ My use of the term “gender-based violence” is based on the work of anthropologist Sally Engle Merry. In her book *Gender Violence: A Cultural Perspective* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), Merry defines gender-based violence as “violence whose meaning depends on the gendered identities of the parties. It is an interpretation of violence through gender”(3). Although gender-based violence takes many forms (physical, psychological, sexual, verbal) and does not necessarily exclusively refer to violence committed by men against women, I am specifically looking at occasions of women who have been victimized by men. I am narrowing my scope of gender-based violence to an examination of incidences of women being killed by men because of their gender. Domestic abuse is an increasingly concerning problem in Latin America, but my research has been focused on the incidences of women who have been killed and whose perpetrators have not been prosecuted for the crime. In some cases, this is certainly a spouse or partner, but it also refers to murders of women by strangers. Gender-based violence is considered the central human rights issue for women by the Women and Development Unit of the United Nations. Gender-based violence reflects the imbalance of power between men and women, and aggressors often feel the need to reinforce male power and privileges (United Nations, 1993).

higher priority for those who have power in Latin America, and how theology contributes to their activism.

In order to examine the relationship between theology and activism, we will describe the reality of gender-based violence in three specific contexts and highlight organizations that are working to empower women, advocate on behalf of victims, and prevent future violence. We will also look at the way religion contributes to the ways Latin American grassroots organizations and communities define their missions and goals. These faith-based communities have religious themes and traditions present within their structures, and religion plays a role in shaping their frameworks. Three locations where gender-based violence is particularly problematic are Ciudad Juárez, Mexico; Guatemala City, Guatemala; and San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

Femicide

The type of gender-based violence that we are most concerned with in these locations is femicide.² Femicide is defined as the misogynistic killing of women by men because of their gender, and includes the phenomenon of murder with impunity. The high rate of impunity surrounding these murders is generally considered the most

² “Femicide” and “femicide” are often used interchangeably. In 1976, Canadian anthropologists Diana E.H. Russell first used the term “femicide” as way to differentiate the killing of women from “homicide.” In 1992, Russell and fellow anthropologist Jill Radford defined femicide to mean the misogynistic killing of women by men. In 2001, Russell expanded the definition to mean the misogynistic killing of women by men because they are women. In 2004, Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, with the consent of Russell, modified the term femicide to “femicide” as a way to illustrate the systemic and systematic way that these killings have been taking place and the impunity for perpetrators. Scholar and theologian Nancy Pineda-Madrid also talks about how the term femicide includes not only impunity but also the way these killings have gone uninvestigated and largely overlooked by the local authorities in Latin America. Femicide is the more frequently used term, but I will refer to these killings as femicides unless femicide is used in a cited quotation.

troubling aspect of this trend. Amnesty International specialists who have investigated femicide have said that “[t]he most important factor is just impunity. . . . Criminals know they can get away with murder,”³ which does nothing to deter them from committing these crimes. Despite this horrifying reality, there are organizations that are tirelessly working to rectify this problem and to make the prosecution of femicide perpetrators a higher priority in national and local courts. The women who participate in these organizations refuse to let the deaths of their daughters, mothers, or sisters continue to be ignored by government and police forces.

The cities of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico; Guatemala City, Guatemala; and San Pedro Sula, Honduras will be highlighted in this dissertation due to their troubling status as three locations in Latin America with the highest rates of femicide.⁴ Historically,

³ Nicole Akoukou Thompson, “The War on Guatemalan Women: Gangs Murder with Impunity,” *Latin Post*, July 9, 2014, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.latinpost.com/articles/16751/20140709/war-guatemalan-women-gangs-impunity.htm>.

⁴ There is ample evidence from a variety of sources stating that these cities are particularly dangerous: United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Women and Development Unit, “No More! The Right of Women to Live a Life Free of Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean,” LC/L.2808/Rev.1, March, 2009. Angélica Cházaro, Jennifer Casey, and Katherine Ruhl, “Getting Away with Murder: Guatemala’s Failure to Protect Women and Rodi Alvarado’s Quest for Safety” in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, eds. Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 93-115. Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal A.C., “San Pedro Sula Otra Vez la Ciudad Más Violenta del Mundo; Acapulco la Segunda,” *Seguridad, Justicia y Paz*, trans. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald, February 7, 2013, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.seguridadjusticiaypaz.org.mx/sala-de-prensa/759-san-pedro-sula-otra-vez-la-ciudad-mas-violenta-del-mundo-acapulco-la-segunda>. This article highlights the fact that in 2013, San Pedro Sula was ranked as the most dangerous violent city in the world. Guatemala City was ranked #12 and Ciudad Juárez #19 out of 50. Christina Sterbenz, “‘Satan Himself Lives in San Pedro:’ Scary Pictures of the Most Violent Place on Earth,” *Business Insider*, December 6, 2013, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/san-pedro-sula-is-the-most-violent-city-on-earth-photos-2013-12?op=1>.

Ciudad Juárez has received the most international attention for its high rate of femicide. Femicide became an issue in Ciudad Juárez in 1993 when the bodies of women started to be discovered in the desert outside of the city limits. This phenomenon has attracted scholars, activists, journalists, and authors who have written about it extensively. Despite all of the attention it has received, the problem has continued, and it has spread to other cities in the region as well.

In each of these locations, communities of women have been the most consistent force struggling to combat this epidemic, organizing themselves, and protesting against the governmental powers that allow these murders to take place. Although some new laws have been put in place due to protest efforts, scholar Hilda Morales Trujillo notes that “the wave of misogynist violence has yet to provoke outright indignation among civil society.”⁵ The laws have not been effective, and women continue to be killed while perpetrators are not investigated or prosecuted. In light of this reality, women continue to struggle against oppressive forces that do not recognize their voices. Protest activities for these communities include political marches through major cities, funerary processions where victims of femicide are remembered and honored, disrupted military ceremonies, silent vigils in public spaces, public confrontation of government officials, lying down in

The rate of violence against women is also very high in El Salvador, but there has not been as much research into the history of the violence in El Salvador. Violence in El Salvador also certainly needs to be addressed. I am using the three cases I have chosen to illustrate trends across Latin America, which is meant to include El Salvador.

⁵ Hilda Morales Trujillo, “Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala” in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, eds. Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 135.

front of city buses, and intentionally holding up traffic on bridges.⁶ In addition to engaging in activism, women in these faith-based communities also join together to mourn the friends and family members they have lost. Rituals of memory and lament function as important practices within these groups. The common practice of carrying and planting crosses in order to honor the memory of a victim of femicide symbolizes the connection women feel between their faith in Jesus Christ and their activism.

In Ciudad Juárez, Guatemala, and Honduras, gender-based violence continues to be a critical issue that needs to be addressed from a variety of different angles. Communities of women who are organizing themselves and protesting against the governmental powers that allow these murders to take place have been the most consistent force struggling to combat this epidemic. Before looking at the theological connections to these communities, we will look briefly at each of these situations.

In the face of the devastating reality of femicide in these locations, grassroots organizations are motivated by their religious backgrounds to work together and build stronger communities. These faith-based organizations and small communities can improve the ways that local and international governments are addressing the issue of gender-based violence. These groups strive to make sure that the women who have disappeared remain visible, and they use resources from within their religious traditions to keep the memory of these women alive. Communities of women join together in solidarity to protest the government officials who are letting these murders take place and they are offering support to one another. Grassroots organizations are using their

⁶ Melissa W. Wright, "Paradoxes, Protests and the Mujeres de Negro of Northern Mexico," in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, eds Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 315.

religious traditions to motivate their activism in Ciudad Juárez, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Ciudad Juárez

In Ciudad Juárez, in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, the reality of femicide is impossible to ignore. Femicide has, in recent years, become part of the identity of the city because of the way the media has written about the high numbers of murdered women. The international aid organization Amnesty International reported in 2007 that approximately 400 women had been killed in the city of Juárez between 1993 and 2006.⁷ Those figures have continued to grow, although the worst years of femicide in Ciudad Juárez are considered 2009-2010. It is difficult to get exact numbers of the women who have disappeared from Ciudad Juárez since reports are not always filed correctly and because there is no single resource keeping track of women who have disappeared, but sources have said that 304 women were killed in the city in 2010 alone.⁸ A *New York Times* article reported that 60 women had been killed in the first six months of 2012, with 18 femicides in the month of April.⁹ These numbers are shocking, but the stories that families tell about how authorities respond to these killings are even more disturbing. Families of victims report that authorities do not investigate the killings at all and often insinuate that the young women in question could have run away to the United States or become prostitutes. They will also imply that the women should not have dressed a

⁷ United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Women and Development Unit, "No More! The Right of Women to Live a Life Free of Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean," March, 2009. 75.

⁸ Damien Cave, "Wave of Violence Swallows More Women in Juárez," *The New York Times*. June 23, 2012, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/world/americas/wave-of-violence-swallows-more-women-in-juarez-mexico.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

particular way or gone out at a certain time of day or night and that the violence that was perpetrated against them was “deserved.”¹⁰ There is a sense that there is no accountability for these crimes and killers know that they will get away with murder.

Ciudad Juárez is known for these killings for a number of reasons. The city “became infamous for a wave of attacks beginning in the 1990s that left hundreds of women dead over the course of a decade.”¹¹ One contributing factor to these feminicides is Ciudad Juárez’s border location. The city sits on the U.S. border, and there are frequently violent “coyotes”¹² lurking in the desert, waiting to prey on those who are hoping to cross into the United States. The nearby desert also often serves as a common isolated “dumping ground” for women’s bodies after they have been mutilated. Occasionally, women’s bodies are not discovered for months or years after the women had initially been reported missing. Extreme violence is often evident on the bodies of women who have been killed as part of this feminicide. Recovered bodies show evidence of ritualized torture, dismemberment, strangling, sexual violence and other extreme assaults (such as 30 or more stab wounds).

¹⁰ “Police and other government officials frequently accuse victims of gang associations, drug abuse, or prostitution; the female victims’ physical appearance or attire is often cited as cause for delay or for the failure to investigate and prosecute,” according to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, “The International Violence Against Women Act: Could IVAWA Save Guatemala from Femicide?” August 5, 2010, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.coha.org/the-international-violence-against-women-act-could-ivawa-save-guatemala-from-femicide/>.

¹¹ Cave, “Wave of Violence Swallows More Women in Juárez.”

¹² “Coyote” is a term used to describe individuals who profit by helping groups or individuals cross the border from Mexico into the United States. Coyotes are also known for over-charging and bribing people to get more money. They have also been accused of raping women and girls while “helping” them through the desert and killing both women and men who could not pay them their fees.

Gangs control the streets of Ciudad Juárez, and due to its location on the border, drug cartels actively work to smuggle drugs into the United States. Violence related to drug trafficking is therefore considered merely a part of life in Ciudad Juárez. *The New York Times* interviewed Hector Hawley who is responsible for investigating and documenting the crime scenes of the majority of women killed in Ciudad Juárez. He has said that the women are “a more vulnerable group”¹³ because of their status in society. Hawley specializes in women’s murder cases and in his view, “the stunning tally of women killed is mostly caused by the increased local involvement in gangs and drugs; and jealous men. Often, both gangs and jealousy come together in a single case.”¹⁴ Drugs, the border, and the desert, however, are not the only factors that contribute to the high rate of femicide in Juárez.

Ciudad Juárez, like many Latin American cities, is home to many *maquiladoras* or factories where women work for very little pay. Many of these *maquiladoras* or *maquilas* are located on the outskirts of town and the overwhelmingly male managers arrange shifts that require women to either come in very early in the morning or leave in the middle of the night, which puts them at risk. Women, for the most part, have not been invited to participate in the conversations about what would be safer for them, so they continue to work in dangerous situations. *Machismo*, or the pervasive attitude of masculinity that considers women’s contributions invalid and their lives less valuable, in Latin America contributes to an overarching culture that does not include women and is in fact often openly hostile towards women. Due to the culture of machismo throughout Latin America, women are oppressed and economically restrained. It is therefore

¹³ Cave, “Wave of Violence Swallows More Women in Juárez.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

necessary for women to get whatever jobs they can, despite the fact that jobs in maquiladoras put them at significant risk. The maquilas also put women in a position where they are treated as easily replaceable. In this way, maquila culture underscores the idea that women are not as valuable as men and that they serve merely utilitarian purposes.

American journalist Robert Andrew Powell writes about how the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) changed the economic makeup of Ciudad Juárez. He says that NAFTA, “enacted in 1994, moved Mexico from an agrarian peasant economy to a system dependent upon manufacturing. Jobs harvesting the fields...transferred to the maquiladoras along the Texas border.”¹⁵ As a temporary resident of Ciudad Juárez, Powell has discussed the economic poverty that is evident there. While he lived there, he learned that NAFTA brought thousands of Mexicans to Ciudad Juárez in order “to fill jobs at more than three hundred borderland factories. Few of these maquiladora jobs pay a living wage, and turnover at many factories tops 100 percent, meaning the average employee doesn’t last a year.”¹⁶ Many of the workers in these factories are women who are constantly at risk of being victimized. Women are especially vulnerable when they are trying to get to their places of employment at odd hours when most of the streets are deserted and no one else is around. Women have been killed waiting to take the bus home after getting off of their late night shifts or heading in to start working before dawn. The policies of maquiladoras contribute to the high rate of femicide in Ciudad Juárez.

¹⁵ Robert Andrew Powell, *This Love is not for Cowards: Salvation and Soccer in Ciudad Juárez* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

Rafael Luévano, associate professor at Chapman University, talks about “four discourses” that “surround the Juárez female workers and their murders.”¹⁷ He asserts that the patterns of feminicide involving maquiladora workers need to be examined. Luévano names these discourses as the *maquiloca discourse*, the *maquiladora discourse*, the *backlash discourse*, and the *culture of violence discourse*¹⁸ and he discusses each one in depth. Although Luévano examines each of these discourses in relation to murders in Juárez, these discourses also apply to the situations of women being killed in Guatemala and Honduras.

The maquiloca discourse refers to the way women who make their own money disrupt the cultural norms for women. The maquiloca discourse “asserts that female maquiladora workers ‘go crazy,’ embarking on a so-called wild life now obtainable due to their increased income.”¹⁹ This discourse examines women’s “recently attained status as workers” and the shift away from traditional gender roles for men and women in Mexico. Women are seen as “going crazy” when they spend the money they have made in the factories on the Juárez nightlife; visiting bars, clubs and other locations thought to be inappropriate. The maquiloca argument “claims that women are using their newly gained salaries to finance a ‘party’ lifestyle in which they may use their recent liberty in a manner that leads them down an adventurous but obviously destructive path.”²⁰ But, as Luévano makes clear, this is obviously an “exaggerated portrayal” of the women of Ciudad Juárez and does not reflect the reality of women’s experiences. Women in Juárez

¹⁷ Rafael Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez: Theodicy at the Border* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012), 39.

¹⁸ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

often have too many responsibilities at home to spend their time at nightclubs. They also do not actually make that much money and they often work the night shifts at maquiladoras, making it impossible for them to participate in the Juárez nightlife.²¹ This discourse, therefore, gets broken down when examined alongside the lived experience of women in Juárez.

The maquiladora discourse examines the way women are utilized at factories and how they are seen as merely means of more production. The maquiladora discourse “describes a female Mexican factory worker who fluctuates between value and waste in the labor force, but whose eventual fate is to be used up by the maquiladora industry and then discarded.”²² In the maquiladoras, women are not full humans and therefore, when they are no longer productive, they no longer matter. Luévano quotes Melissa W. Wright, professor at Pennsylvania State University who says that “Mexican women thus represent workers of declining value since their intrinsic value never appreciates into skills but instead dissipates over time.”²³ These women come to be seen as merely disposable. Luévano also notes the dangers of the maquiladora industry because “many of the victims of the feminicides were abducted while commuting to or from work, yet the maquiladora industry has made no effort to improve women’s safety.”²⁴ Changing the policies surrounding working hours in Ciudad Juárez would not be difficult, but it has not been done. Luévano reflects on this saying, “It seems that Mexican working women are not sufficiently valued to be saved from serial killings, since when a woman leaves or

²¹ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 41.

²² *Ibid.*, 42.

²³ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

is lost a multitude of temporary workers is waiting to replace her.”²⁵ Women at the maquiladoras are seen as pieces on an assembly line, which can be easily replaced if necessary. Their inherent worth and their human dignity is not considered.

The third discourse is the backlash discourse. This backlash discourse “refers to the retaliatory rage that some men vent on women in an attempt to compensate for their own sense of ‘failed masculinity.’”²⁶ This discourse has grown out of disrupted gender norms in Ciudad Juárez because women have started to earn more money than men. Luévano says that “women have violated traditional gender roles in both the workplace and the home; men, in response to the collapse of their patriarchal constructs and control over women, retaliate violently.”²⁷ This is especially problematic in a society that has been staunchly built on paternalistic as well as chauvinistic values. Machismo throughout Latin America contributes to the problem of gender-based violence, but the structural history of machismo is present within this discourse. “In post-NAFTA Mexico,” Luévano says, “women’s new roles and responsibilities test conventional gender identities, a scenario that generates domestic tension. ...A new kind of Mexican woman has emerged in Ciudad Juárez.”²⁸ Her new independence and any new relationships she has created “make her far less likely to accept the naturalized ideology of female subservience.”²⁹ Women are beginning to take their lives into their own hands and men do not like it.

²⁵ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Out of this backlash discourse, we can see how women are building community among one another and having these discussions themselves. Women are talking about their own situations rather than listening to others who are talking about them. The empowerment of women in Ciudad Juárez means that women are more comfortable fighting for their rights and establishing themselves as independent from their husbands and fathers. Women, joining together in new ways, are structuring their own discourse and contributing to the larger conversation about gender-based violence from their own perspective.

The fourth discourse, according to Luévano, is the “culture of violence discourse.” This discourse, Luévano says, “reaffirms that we should understand femicide and everyday violence as interrelated.”³⁰ He says that this culture of violence discourse “focuses on the effect this violence has on the local community, engendering an environment deadly to women. ... These factors are so prevalent that civic life has assimilated violence to the point of making it a normative and acceptable course of action for the average citizen.”³¹ In a culture such as this, woman-killing becomes a generalized norm rather than a tragedy.

These four discourses help highlight the intricate problems of femicide in Juárez. Luévano says that they illustrate the fact that “the parties responsible for these deaths cannot be limited to the immediate perpetrators. The maquiladora industry, investors, and governmental interests must be held liable for failing to confront...derogatory attitudes toward women.”³² The issue of femicide throughout

³⁰ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 47.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 49.

Latin America does not have a simple solution, but there are individuals and communities who are working to correct the injustices behind feminicides.

Across Latin America, including Juárez, the dominant *machismo*³³ and *marianismo*³⁴ cultures also contribute significantly to the way that women are viewed and to the acceptance of violence against women. Marianismo culture refers to the way that women are expected to imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary by acting in ways that are domestic, obedient, and docile. Marianismo indicates that an “ideal women” is supposed to be submissive to the men in her life and to serve as an ideal housewife. In addition to marianismo and machismo, drug trafficking in Mexico, and especially Ciudad Juárez, also contributes to the culture of violence and the high rate of feminicides. Narco-traffickers try to get drugs into the United States through Ciudad Juárez, and the prevalence of drugs as well as abundant gang activity in the city makes it a dangerous place to live. All of these factors contribute to the high rate of feminicides in Ciudad Juárez.

Despite the horrific numbers of feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, convincing the world that this is a systemic problem has not been easy. Gender-based violence and

³³ “Machismo” is a term used to describe cultural expectations of masculinity. Authors from the *Journal of International Women’s Studies* say that “the extreme form [of machismo] is manifested as hate and extreme physical and psychological violence against women and it has been reported in a number of Latin American countries to differing degrees by the United Nations ‘specialist on violence against women.’” Karen Englander, Carmen Yáñez and Xochitl Barney, “Doing Science within a Culture of Machismo and Marianismo,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 13.3 (2012): 68.

³⁴ Karen Englander, Carmen Yáñez and Xochitl Barney in their piece, “Doing Science within a Culture of Machismo and Marianismo” say that that idea of marianismo is derived from the fact that the ideal Mexican woman is a mother who should be a source of boundless love and self-sacrifice. They say that the “maternal ideal is justified because women are ‘spiritually and morally superior to men’, so they should be ‘self-negating and martyrs for their children’” (69).

femicide are popular topics of discussion in Juárez, but it must be noted that there are those who argue that the number of murdered women is not actually disproportionately high when compared to the high number of murders in Juárez in general. Some say that Juárez is a violent place for everyone and that the murders of both men and women deserve attention from experts. Journalist Powell says of his time in Ciudad Juárez:

The longer I've lived in Juárez, the more I feel the city's problems have little to do with gender. ... The problem is that life itself in Juárez, across the board, has been devalued. Murder is effectively legal. You can kill almost anyone you want just about anytime you want.³⁵

Powell thinks that it might be a mistake to separate the numbers of women killed in acts of femicide from the numbers of men being killed because that could be seen as a misrepresentation of the culture of violence in Ciudad Juárez.

American anthropologist Molly Molloy is also critical of the “hype” generated by researching femicide in Juárez, but she believes that it is important to value all human life. Powell quotes Molloy as saying about the original eight women found in the cotton field in 2001, “Even if they were not statistically significant they are certainly significant in human rights terms.” She continues saying, “The fact that the families were ignored and spurned and even ridiculed by the government officials is really important.”³⁶

Molloy commends groundbreaking feminist activist Esther Chávez Cano (1933-2009) and says that the work she did in calling the government to account for these crimes “was a good, important and risky thing for her to do.”³⁷ Whether femicide in Ciudad Juárez

³⁵ Powell, *This Love is Not for Cowards*, 191.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

is viewed as a casualty of the overall high level of violence or whether it is interpreted as a disturbing trend of men exhibiting their masculine power over women, these murders are taking place. Hundreds of women have died and communities of women are left trying to make sense of the deaths of their friends.

The murders of women in Juárez are markedly different from the murders of men in both their motive and their method. Generally, the murders of men are the result of gang or drug activity, which does not make them acceptable, but differentiates them from the murders of women. The pattern of violence against women makes the plight of women in Latin America more visible and helps elucidate the way women's lives are seen as disposable. Women are easily replaced in factories and according to the men in charge, are indecipherable from one another. Unfortunately, the pandemic of femicide has spread beyond Mexico into other Latin American countries where women are victimized and oppressed.

Guatemala

Another country deeply affected by the horrors of femicide is Guatemala, and Guatemala's femicide is also staggering. Like the situation in Juárez, there are different reports trying to calculate the exact numbers of women who have been killed, but Amnesty International reported in 2007 that there had been 2500 feminicides since 2001, and 299 between January and May in 2005.³⁸ And these numbers continue to grow. The conditions that lead to high numbers of feminicides in Guatemala are similar to those of Ciudad Juárez. There are many maquiladoras in Guatemala, and over 80% of the workers there are young women who work longer hours than the men and make half

³⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). "No More!" 75.

as much money.³⁹ There is a significant presence of drug trafficking and drug lords who are trying to transport drugs up to North America. The reality of femicide in Guatemala, however, is also leftover from the history of the 36-year civil war in Guatemala from 1960-1996. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs reports that during the Guatemalan civil war, “thousands of men were trained to commit acts of gender-based violence. When peace was established in 1996, those same men effortlessly rejoined society.”⁴⁰ An entire generation of men grew up in Guatemala learning about different ways to abuse women as part of their military training, and when the war ended, they could not merely forget what they had learned, and violence had become “normalized.” Currently, “Guatemala continues to bear the mark of the civil war: common methods [of gender-based violence] include rape, dismemberment, torture, and mutilation, acts reminiscent of tactics used during the war.”⁴¹ This history of the civil war in Guatemala contributes to a culture where women, especially indigenous women, are not valued as highly as men are and where violence is an everyday occurrence.

Despite attempts to restore peace in Guatemala in the aftermath of the civil war, violence continues to dictate Guatemalan life. The Guatemalan military has been accused (and in some cases convicted) of carrying out massacres in the villages of indigenous peoples in the northern part of the country during the civil war.⁴² The

³⁹ MADRE: Demanding Rights, Resources and Results for Women Worldwide, “Guatemala: Country Overview,” accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.madre.org/page/guatemala-90.html>.

⁴⁰ Council on Hemispheric Affairs. “The International Violence Against Women Act.”

⁴¹ Council on Hemispheric Affairs. “The International Violence Against Women Act.”

⁴² Several former Guatemalan Army commanders are in prison because of their involvement in massacres during the Guatemalan civil war. Various news outlets have reported this. For example: Dan Whitcomb, “Ex-Guatemalan Army Officer Tied to Massacre Sentenced to U.S. Prison,” *Reuters*, February 10, 2014, accessed October 10,

genocide that the military was performing often included raping groups of indigenous women before killing them or leaving them to be humiliated in their villages. The practice of rape as a tool of war was fully utilized during the Guatemalan civil war, which has been documented in the truth and reconciliation commissions REMHI and CEH.⁴³ Even though peace has been declared for many years and both the political community and the Catholic Church have tried to heal the country by establishing truth commissions, the legacy of violence, especially gender-based violence, remains. The rate of not only femicide but also violence against women in all forms – domestic violence, rape, and psychological violence – continues to be extremely high in Guatemala. A recent report stated that Guatemala has the third highest rate of murders of women in the world with

2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/10/us-usa-guatemala-massacre-idUSBREA1920H20140210>. In 2013, Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity. Elisabeth Malkin, “Former Leader of Guatemala is Guilty of Genocide Against Mayan Group,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2013, accessed October 10, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/11/world/americas/gen-efrain-rios-montt-of-guatemala-guilty-of-genocide.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. Although a higher court in Guatemala overturned the guilty verdict based on a technicality and ordered a retrial, which has not yet taken place, the general feeling among Guatemalans is that the guilty verdict is still true. Kelly McEvers’ interview with Pamela Yates, “Guatemalan Ex-Dictator Ríos Montt Found Mentally Unfit for Genocide Retrial,” *NPR*, July 8, 2015, accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/07/08/421225062/guatemalan-ex-dictator-rios-montt-found-mentally-unfit-for-genocide-retrial>. In this interview, filmmaker Pamela Yates says that according to many Guatemalans, there is a saying: “la sentencia esta vigente – the verdict is valid. He was judged to be a genocidaire, and in their minds, he is a genocidaire.”

⁴³ Following the Peace Accords in Guatemala in 1996, the Guatemalan state launched a project attempting to uncover the truth of what had happened during the war. The state project is known (in English) as the Commission for the Clarification of History or CEH (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico). At the same time, the Catholic Church created its own commission called the Recuperation of Historical Memory Project or REMHI (Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica.) These works were titled *Memoria del Silencio* and *Nunca Más* and they were published in February 1999 and April 1998. Rachel Hatcher, “Truth and Forgetting in Guatemala: An Examination of *Memoria del Silencio* and *Nunca Más*.” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 35.67 (2009): 131-162.

“9.7 murders for every 100,000 women, and Honduras is seventh with an average of seven.”⁴⁴ Gender-based violence in Guatemala needs to be addressed if Guatemala wants to try to move forward as a country, and some of the only organizations looking at the statistics of gender-based violence are grassroots communities of women who are eager to eradicate this pattern.

There is no shortage of literature and news reports stating that Guatemala is an extremely dangerous place for women to live, yet little has been done in the last decade to curb Guatemala’s high rate of femicide. News outlets frequently report that “Guatemala and other Latin American countries are the most dangerous countries in the world for women, where poisonous levels of machismo have given way to ‘femicide.’”⁴⁵ Countries in Latin America are dangerous for all citizens, male or female, but “it is exponentially worse for women.”⁴⁶ The statistics surrounding gender-based violence and femicide are tragic, but the reality is that these deaths have actually had very little impact on society. Despite the high numbers of murders, these killings continue without any changes in local policing or governance. The numbers of murders continue to rise and in 2013, “759 women were murdered in Guatemala, an increase of 7 percent from the year prior.”⁴⁷ These 759 deaths can be examined further by determining the ways in which women were killed. Reports indicate that of these 759, “[t]here were 522 deaths from firearms, 70 from stabbings, 156 from asphyxiation, and 11 from decapitation or dismemberment... And, those deaths routinely occur after women are sexually violated

⁴⁴ Thompson, “The War on Guatemalan Women.”

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

one or more times by murderers.”⁴⁸ These deaths are largely uninvestigated and the perpetrators have rarely been identified.

Organizations like Amnesty International and the World Health Organization have said that the impunity that accompanies these crimes is perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the phenomenon of femicide. Journalist Nicole Akoukou Thompson reports, “For cases that somehow make it to court in Guatemala, 90 percent of defendants are not convicted. And, less than four percent of all homicides in Guatemala result in convictions.”⁴⁹ The issue of impunity for murderers is probably the largest problem that communities of women who are fighting gender-based violence are trying to combat. They insist that there must be justice for their daughters and sisters who have been killed and they are determined to make the government care about these murders.

In an attempt to improve the situation of impunity, Guatemala passed a law in April 2008, declaring femicide to be a punishable crime and establishing a court to hear cases of femicide, but this action has been far from sufficient in stopping these killings or prosecuting killers. As the Council of Hemispheric Affairs has reported, “Despite the law’s symbolic innovations, it has done virtually nothing to stem Guatemala’s rising femicide rates.”⁵⁰ Guatemala also appeared to make steps towards progress when it was the first Latin American country “to establish government-funded women’s shelters in 2009 (El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua followed suit in 2012), [but] women continue to be violated and murdered and uninvestigated deaths persist.”⁵¹ Rather than finding hope and a sense of empowerment through the passing of this law, Guatemala

⁴⁸ Thompson, “The War on Guatemalan Women.”

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Council on Hemispheric Affairs, “The International Violence Against Women Act.”

⁵¹ Thompson, “The War on Guatemalan Women.”

continues to be ranked as one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman. “For decades, female victims have been tortured, strangled, shot, burned and mutilated, and laws designed to protect victims appear only to be lip service.”⁵² Time will tell whether the 2008 law makes any significant difference in the prosecution of femicide perpetrators, but it has mostly been an ineffective tool thus far.

Guatemala’s “dismal record for protecting women’s lives” can be examined by looking at “the conditions that give rise to the feminicides, including a legacy of military violence, a history of impunity and systematic discrimination against women.”⁵³ Each of these problems requires time, resources, and passionate personnel who are willing to devote themselves entirely in order to address it. The general opinion seems to be that “[e]ven with adequate laws, the challenges to slowing the increase in violent murders of women are substantial. The Guatemalan government must take a variety of concrete steps aimed at stemming the epidemic levels of violence against women.”⁵⁴ These steps include but are not limited to the creation of a database that contains information about all of the women who have gone missing, which would be accessible to all of the official bodies of law enforcement, an immediate search plan for missing women, better training for those involved in all aspects of searching for missing women, more information distributed and a heightened awareness of gender-based violence, and more efforts made toward training judges and prosecutors.⁵⁵ More statistics report that “[i]n the course of

⁵² Thompson, “The War on Guatemalan Women.”

⁵³ Angélica Cházaro, Jennifer Casey, and Katherine Ruhl, “Getting Away with Murder: Guatemala’s Failure to Protect Women and Rodi Alvarado’s Quest for Safety” in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, eds. Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 94.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

seven years [2000-2006], about three thousand women have been murdered in Guatemala, and no one has been identified as responsible in the majority of the cases.”⁵⁶ The perpetrators of these crimes therefore remain untouched. The international community is left to conclude that “Guatemalan feminicides constitute the clearest manifestation of the lack of protection from life-threatening violence Guatemalan women suffer.”⁵⁷ Clearly, there is more work to be done in addition to passing laws.

Communities of women played a significant role in getting the laws passed in 2008 and they continue to be an important presence in Guatemalan society. For example, grassroots organizations in Guatemala City and in the highlands of Guatemala are dedicated to eradicating femicide and gender-based violence. Many of the victims from Guatemala City are women who came to the city from different parts of the country in order to pursue opportunities and work. Like Ciudad Juárez, women in Guatemala are facing institutionally embedded machismo in addition to a history of violence. The rates of femicide in Guatemala reflect the violence that exists in Guatemala City and the urban presence of gangs and drug lords. Gender-based violence is also a problem throughout the highlands, however, and cannot be ignored when looking at the overall problems in Guatemala’s gender relationships. Women in both the city and in more rural areas of Guatemala are eager to put a stop to gender-based violence.

⁵⁶ Trujillo, “Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala,” 127.

⁵⁷ Cházaro, Casey, and Ruhl, “Getting Away with Murder,” 95.

Honduras

In Honduras, femicide has become a greater reality since the 2009 coup d'état that left the state of Honduras divided and unstable.⁵⁸ As a result of this instability, the rate of femicide in Honduras has risen sharply in the last five years. One report by the Mesoamerican Initiative of Human Rights Defenders states that feminicides in Honduras have risen by 62% since 2009. The Observatory of Violence at the National University of Honduras says that at least one woman was killed every 13 hours in 2013, resulting in 629 feminicides.⁵⁹ Due to a lack of unified progress since the 2009 coup d'état, Honduras has remained a turbulent country and issues of gender-based violence have become a more central focus.

Since 2009, Honduras has been sharply divided between those who supported the original president Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, and those who supported the coup and the newly elected president Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo. Because of this disruption, Honduras has become extremely violent. Zelaya was largely considered a leftist president, which led to many of the reasons why he was ousted. He supported the development of women's groups and he defended women's education programs. He raised the minimum wage significantly and provided funding for programs that were judged by more right-wing politicians to be "too socialist." As a result of this, many women, especially poorer women, and more *campesinas* or women who live in rural areas supported Zelaya and

⁵⁸ There is a lot of information on the Honduran coup d'état on June 28, 2009 in the following New York Times article: Elisabeth Malkin, "Honduran President is Ousted in Coup" *The New York Times*, June 28, 2009, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/world/americas/29honduras.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁵⁹ Dan Beeton, "The Legacy Children of the Honduran Coup," *Al Jazeera America*, June 28, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/6/violence-in-hondurasunaccompaniedminorsimmigrationtous.html>.

opposed the coup. These women have not remained silent about what they feel was a violation of their constitutional rights. They have continued to speak out against the coup and they have regularly participated in protest activities. Because they do not approve of the political activism of women in Honduras, members of the police force, which is largely a military-run police, have participated in practices of femicide and violence against women. There are many stories of women being injured or killed by police for their participation in democratic demonstrations and protests, and in other situations women have been targeted for their involvement.⁶⁰ Femicide in Honduras looks like it might continue to escalate Juárez-like levels if something is not done about it.

It has been reported that police and military forces targeted and tortured those who opposed the June 2009 coup and those who continue to work for their constitutional rights to be reinstated.⁶¹ Women are already especially at risk because of their social vulnerability, and in 2013, a United Nations report said, “Honduras has the highest

⁶⁰ For example, coup protester Irma Villanueva was at a demonstration in August 2009 when she was arrested by police officers along with other demonstrators. She was taken away from the protest and beaten and raped by four police officers. She told her story on the Jesuit-run radio station Radio Progreso. Robert Naiman, “Coup Protester Gang-Raped by Honduran Police,” *Just Foreign Policy*, August 24, 2009, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/node/304>. The testimony of Irma Villanueva was documented by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Human Rights Watch announced a report generated by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on August 25, 2009 which said that “women [in Honduras] were especially subject to acts of violence and humiliation because of their gender.” “Honduras: Rights Report Shows Need for Increased International Pressure: Widespread and Continuing Abuses Documented by Inter-American Commission,” *Human Rights Watch*, August 25, 2009, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/08/25/honduras-rights-report-shows-need-increased-international-pressure>.

⁶¹ Dana Frank, “The Thugocracy Next Door,” *Politico Magazine*, February 27, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/02/honduras-the-thugocracy-ext-door103883.html#ixzz2uXKTrNFH>.

murder rate in the world.”⁶² Government forces regularly threaten and censor news outlets and radio stations, and anyone who opposes the current government, including groups of women, is targeted. More than 30 journalists and 74 lawyers have been killed since the coup.⁶³ The organization “Reporters without Borders” has declared Honduras one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist and in April 2014, a staff member at the leftist Jesuit-run radio station “Radio Progreso” was murdered in his home.⁶⁴ The director of Radio Progreso, Fr. Ismael Moreno Coto, known as Padre Melo, has been threatened many times, but he says that those threats are merely a part of the work to which he is dedicated. The Honduran state has generally been declared to be “a spectacular human rights disaster,”⁶⁵ and the situation could not be any worse for women.

As the country has attempted to move forward since 2009, the political situation has not stabilized. In November 2013, another right-wing president was elected in Honduras on the campaign promise of “a soldier on every corner.”⁶⁶ This election is well known to have been “tainted by fraud, vote buying and military intimidation. . . . Leading up to [the] election, at least 18 activists in LIBRE, the new opposition party, were assassinated.”⁶⁷ Honduras’ volatility has led to soaring numbers of murders as well as gender-based violence. Reports from human rights organizations indicate that “only one

⁶² Frank, “Thugocracy Next Door.”

⁶³ Beeton, “The Legacy Children of the Honduran Coup.”

⁶⁴ Reporters Without Borders, “Radio Progress Employee Murdered After Getting Threats,” *Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information*, April 14, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://en.rsf.org/honduras-radio-progreso-employee-murdered-14-04-2014,46143.html>.

⁶⁵ Frank, “Thugocracy Next Door.”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

percent of crimes in Honduras are followed up by a police investigation.”⁶⁸ This climate makes combatting gender-based violence and femicide nearly impossible.

As we have seen in the examples of Juárez and Guatemala, there is almost no accountability for those who commit crimes against women in Honduras. A 2014 United Nations visit to Honduras resulted in a report that claimed, “In Honduras, violence against women is widespread and systematic. ... The climate of fear... and the lack of accountability for violations of human rights of women is the norm rather than the exception.”⁶⁹ The rate of violence against women in Honduras has risen significantly in the last few years. UN Special Rapporteur Rashida Manjoo reported “an increase of 263.4 percent in the number of violent deaths of women between 2005 and 2013.”⁷⁰ She also noted the high rate of impunity that accompanies almost all of these crimes. The rates of violence in Honduras which have occurred as a result of the instability and general militarization of Honduras are devastating on their own, but when the patterns of femicide that exist in other parts of Latin America are factored into this violent situation, it becomes even more clear that gender-based violence is a central and pressing issue. There is much work to be done and there are small communities of women who have not given up on this work yet.

Although violence against women is an important issue throughout Honduras, the northern city of San Pedro Sula is the most violent part of the country. San Pedro Sula

⁶⁸ Dawn Paley, “War on the Poor in Honduras: Social Control, Gangs and the US’s Role in Remilitarizing Central America,” *Toward Freedom*, February 12, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://www.towardfreedom.com/archives/31-americas/3431-war-on-the-poor-in-honduras-social-control-gangs-and-the-uss-role-in-remilitarizing-central-america>.

⁶⁹ “Honduras Must Address Widespread Impunity for Crimes Against Women, Girls – UN Expert,” *Big News Network*, July 10, 2014, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.bignewsnetwork.com/index.php/sid/223695909>.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

has, since 2013, been called the most violent city in the world.⁷¹ In 2011, San Pedro Sula had a rate of 169 murders for every 100,000 people and citizens have said, “People kill people here like they are no more than chickens.”⁷² The violence in San Pedro Sula affects both men and women, but women are seen as being more vulnerable. Most of the violence in San Pedro Sula is related to drugs and gangs but the rate of femicide is also extraordinarily high. Women in San Pedro Sula face intense poverty, violent gangs and a military force that has no qualms about firing freely and arresting people from whom they feel a threat. The San Pedro Sula municipal government has a long way to go if it wants to reduce the level of violence in the city. It should start by demilitarizing the police force if it wants to keep women safe. The current right-wing government of Honduras is proud of having a military-style police force, but the “soldier on every corner” model has not prevented or reduced the number of deaths in Honduras or in San Pedro Sula.

The machismo culture throughout Latin America is often blamed for letting femicide get out of control in places like Ciudad Juárez, Guatemala and Honduras, but gang violence, drug trafficking, and institutional violence are also to blame. Even though there have been laws passed attempting to protect women in Latin America, “the laws have made scant difference in the escalating numbers of women who are killed because

⁷¹ Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal A.C., “San Pedro Sula Otra Vez la Ciudad Más Violenta del Mundo; Acapulco la Segunda,” *Seguridad, Justicia y Paz*, trans. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald, February 7, 2013, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.seguridadjusticiaypaz.org.mx/sala-de-prensa/759-san-pedro-sula-otra-vez-la-ciudad-mas-violenta-del-mundo-acapulco-la-segunda>. This article highlights the fact that in 2013, San Pedro Sula is ranked the most dangerous violent city in the world. Guatemala City was ranked #12 and Ciudad Juárez #19 out of 50.

⁷² Christina Sterbenz, “‘Satan Himself Lives in San Pedro:’ Scary Pictures of the Most Violent Place on Earth,” *Business Insider*, December 6, 2013, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/san-pedro-sula-is-the-most-violent-city-on-earth-photos-2013-12?op=1>.

of their gender.”⁷³ There are reports that say in 2012, “there were 1813 victims of femicide in Central America, an increase of more than 670 women from the previous year.”⁷⁴ Despite the fact that gender-based violence and feminicide are demoralizing cities in Latin America, there are small organizations, which have grown out of church groups that are willing to struggle against these violent realities.

Communities Working for Change

Although the numbers of women who have been killed throughout Latin America are daunting, there are small pockets of hope, organized by communities of women who are struggling against this bleak situation. These communities often have their foundations in Christianity and they draw on teachings from their tradition to motivate and animate them. Before examining one teaching in particular, Jon Sobrino’s understanding of the resurrection, we will first look at a few examples of these communities.

One such organization in Honduras is a group called *Misericordia Tejedoras de Sueños* or Mercy Dreamweavers. The Dreamweavers program began in 1999, after Hurricane Mitch damaged much of northern Honduras.⁷⁵ The Dreamweavers program is an initiative of the Catholic Sisters of Mercy in San Pedro Sula, and it brings laywomen and Catholic sisters together. The program focuses on “women’s political, economic,

⁷³ Deborah Hastings, “In Central America, Women Killed ‘With Impunity’ Just Because They’re Women,” *New York Daily News*, January 10, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/femicide-rise-central-america-article-1.1552233#ixzz38DviUtM3>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Monica Maher, “The Truth Will Set Us Free: Religion, Violence and Women’s Empowerment in Latin America,” in *Global Empowerment of Women: Responses to Globalization and Politicized Religions*, ed. by Carolyn M. Elliott (New York: Routledge, 2008), 270.

social and spiritual empowerment,”⁷⁶ and it provides classes, workshops and projects that help women build community with one another as well as independence from their households. Because it is coordinated by the Sisters of Mercy, it operates within the mission of that order which is “ ‘to act in solidarity with the poor, especially women and children’ and to ‘build a society where women enjoy fullness of life and equality in church and society.’ ”⁷⁷ Dreamweavers serves as a perfect example of a small community, operating in the midst of a tragic situation and working to combat the violence that surrounds it. Dreamweavers offers small-group seminars and creates retreats that focus on “conflict resolution, trauma healing and feminine spirituality as well as classes in practical skills. The organization also campaigns for women's health programs and protection from domestic violence and against the targeted murders of women and girls.”⁷⁸ Dreamweavers focuses on empowering women so that they can find hope in the midst of the suffering and sadness of gender-based violence.

Enabling women to achieve their leadership potential is one of the major goals of Dreamweavers and the program works to “accompany women’s groups in order to strengthen their organizational initiatives and leadership capacity.”⁷⁹ As an associate of the Sisters of Mercy, Carmen Manuela “Nelly” Del Cid is responsible for the success and ongoing progress of Dreamweavers. Del Cid could see that Honduras was becoming more dangerous for women even before the 2009 coup, and since the political instability and the virtual establishment of a militarized state, she has seen feminicides increase.

⁷⁶ Maher, “The Truth Will Set Us Free,” 270.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 270-271. From the Vision Statement of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

⁷⁸ Paula Wolf, “Activist to Speak of Honduran Struggles,” *Lancaster Online*, October 7, 2012, accessed October 15, 2014, http://lancasteronline.com/news/activist-to-speak-of-honduran-struggles/article_c3de0413-1b09-559a-bd3b-7ca176f7247d.html.

⁷⁹ Maher, “The Truth Will Set Us Free,” 271.

Despite the presence of turmoil and suffering, however, Mercy Dreamweavers has continued to be a force for good in society. Women participate in programs that allow them to explore their potential and their capacities, and they find support from other women. They build relationships and form alliances that provide them with strength and solidarity.

Dreamweavers groups have participated in protests and marches in San Pedro Sula to let the government officials know that they are not satisfied with the way their city has been turned into a militarized zone. The murders of women in San Pedro Sula have continued and the women of Mercy Dreamweavers take part in specific actions and protests to voice their suffering and their pain. Del Cid is trained in leading “Alternatives to Violence” (ATV) programs, which encourage individuals to engage in activism peacefully. She has offered ATV trainings through the Dreamweavers program and has taught non-violent methods of resistance for women in the resistance movement in Honduras.

Dreamweavers women are largely involved in the *Feministas en Resistencia* or Feminists in Resistance movement in Honduras. The Feminists in Resistance movement developed after the coup d’etat, and women comprised more than 60% of the protesters who were demonstrating daily and fighting for their rights.⁸⁰ Feminists in Resistance have organized activities and workshops to illustrate their opposition to the current government. The Nobel Women’s Initiative reports:

⁸⁰ Nobel Women’s Initiative, “Defensoras: Feminists in Resistance, Honduras,” January 30, 2012, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://nobelwomensinitiative.org/2012/01/defensoras-feminists-in-resistance-honduras/>.

Under the slogan “No coups and no violence against women” (¡Ni golpe de Estado, ni golpe a las mujeres!), Feminists in Resistance have maintained a permanent presence in all anti-coup proceedings and have organized their own actions by and for women, including sit-ins in front of the UN building, a march to the US Embassy, occupying the National Institute for Women building, visiting hospitals and detention centers, video recording demonstrations, sending out information bulletins in print and electronic form, documenting violations of women’s rights, and staging demonstrations to defy the curfew.⁸¹

The women of Dreamweavers have participated in many of these demonstrations as a way of fighting against the violence that surrounds them. The Feminists in Resistance movement is working to encourage more women in Honduras to find a voice and speak out in defense of their rights as well as calling for a more stable government with better representation of women and those who are marginalized. Adelay Carias, a Honduran feminist and scholar, has outlined the groups’ hopes for moving forward by saying, “We’re fighting for new forms of political participation, where women have access to public offices and are part of the political processes to change the country. We demand that government budgets reflect a gender perspective so that all programs and projects take into account a fair distribution of resources for women.”⁸² Feminists in Resistance have made significant strides in creating a national presence in Honduras and in ensuring that the government knows that they are not abandoning their hopes. Dreamweavers works alongside women in the resistance movement.

⁸¹ Nobel Women’s Initiative, “Defensoras.”

⁸² Adelay Carias, “How Honduras’s Military Coup Gave Birth to Feminist Resistance,” *Americas Program: A New World of Action and Communication for Social Change*, July 19, 2010, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/2815>.

Feminists in Resistance compiled a collection of grievances and complaints about what they have suffered since they got involved with protesting the coup d'état. They presented this list to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). This document, titled "Violations of Women's Human Rights in Honduras Within the Framework of the Coup" included "heavy blows with clubs, physical aggression (kicks, punches), insults, and sexual abuse."⁸³ The women also report at least seven cases of multiple rapes by the National Police. These rapes were conducted as punishment for women's involvement in protest activities and peaceful demonstrations. Some women died from complications that came from breathing toxic gases and others were shot or killed during protests. The Feminists in Resistance documented all of their findings and noted all of their altercations so that they could bring their grievances before an international human rights organization, but they have not been able to get anyone in a position of authority to prosecute those who committed these crimes. They continue to work with women's groups throughout Honduras to protest unconstitutional violations and to fight for their rights.

Mercy Dreamweavers existed before the 2009 coup (unlike *Feministas en Resistencia* which was born out of the coup), and the roots of Mercy Dreamweavers are in the Catholic Church. The Sisters of Mercy affiliation that Dreamweavers maintains provides the organization with a mission and framework that has grown out of Latin

⁸³ IACHROAS (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States), "Hearing on the Situation of the Rights of Women in Honduras Within the Framework of the Coup," *Americas Program: A New World of Action and Communication for Social Change*, November 23, 2009, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/1931>.

American liberation theology.⁸⁴ The Sisters of Mercy (*Hermanas de la Misericordia*) in Honduras believe in supporting human rights and in providing a strong voice for the women in the community. They believe in participating in social justice activism and incorporating their spirituality into their actions. The Sisters of Mercy have helped create groups like Dreamweavers where women are encouraged to get involved in political activism and social justice advocacy. The Sisters of Mercy are called to engage in these practices through their commitment to their faith. According to the mission statement of the Sisters of Mercy of the America, “As Sisters of Mercy...we embrace lives of both prayer and service. In our times of prayer, we recognize God’s mercy in our daily lives and respond by offering ourselves to be a merciful presence and resource for others.”⁸⁵ Organizations like Mercy Dreamweavers have benefited from collaboration and sponsorship from the Sisters of Mercy, and the mission of the Sisters of Mercy has helped frame this activism as motivated by faith and solidarity.

Another example of a grassroots organization making strides in a country plagued by gender-based violence and femicide is *Fundación Sobrevivientes* or Survivor’s Foundation in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Norma Cruz created survivor’s Foundation in 2001, and its mission is to accompany victims and the families of victims of violence in Guatemala.⁸⁶ Cruz believes that Guatemalan society needs to recognize more fully the human rights of women and girls so that their human dignity is upheld. Survivor’s

⁸⁴ Liberation theology will be examined in subsequent chapters, but the term refers to a type of theology that grew out of Latin America and South America in the 1970’s and 80’s. Liberation theology prioritizes experience over doctrine and emphasizes the idea that the church is on the side of the disempowered.

⁸⁵ Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Spirituality, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.sistersofmercy.org/spirituality/>.

⁸⁶ Pamela Redela, “Fighting Femicide: Guatemala’s Grassroots Women’s Movement Works to End Violence,” *Ms. Magazine*. 21.1 (2011): 26.

Foundation strives to empower women and seek justice for victims of gender-based violence.⁸⁷ Cruz has seen the numbers of victims of gender-based violence in Guatemala climb and she believes her organization, Survivor's Foundation, can make a difference for those who are suffering.

Guatemala's grassroots community has a significant Mayan presence as well. Many Mayan women are learning more about their rights and trying to empower their communities to work for more social justice issues like the eradication of gender-based violence. The indigenous community in Guatemala is becoming a more active force in the fight against gender-based violence because many women from their community have become victims of femicide. The indigenous community had been especially targeted during the Guatemalan civil war and many victims of violence during the war continue to carry the scars of that era. Grassroots organizations are emerging to address the current situation and help the country move away from a general culture of machismo and violence. One such organization, created by indigenous women, is *Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas de Santa María Xalapán Jalapa* (Association of Indigenous Women from Santa María Xalapán Jalapa or AMISMAXAJ). AMISMAXAJ has been considered "another example of courageous organizing"⁸⁸ in Guatemala. The women in this organization work to "eradicate the machismo and racism that plague their tribal governed community,"⁸⁹ and they are striving to combat the general complacency that accompanies violence in Guatemala.

⁸⁷ Fundación Sobrevivientes, *El Inicio*, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.sobrevivientes.org/present.html>.

⁸⁸ Redela, "Fighting Femicide," 26.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Another grassroots organization established by Guatemala's indigenous community is AFEDES, which stands for *Asociación Femenina para el Desarrollo de Sacatepéquez* (or Women's Association for the Development of Sacatepéquez). AFEDES was founded by a group of Mayan women in Guatemala who work together to create a better society for one another and their families. "With over 1,000 members, their most important work focuses on promoting women's rights, civic participation, and leadership development."⁹⁰ AFEDES fights gender-based violence by encouraging education and empowerment for women in Sacatepéquez (a department of Guatemala.) Many women in Guatemala know neither what their rights are nor how they can participate in civic engagement and political activism. Organizations like AFEDES try to support women in all walks of life and accompany them through a process of empowerment and learning to speak up for themselves.

Women from AFEDES developed a program called the "School for Women's Political Education" which focused on themes like "Ways to understand and respond to oppression, Human rights and women's rights, Political participation, Relationships between women and local authorities, Women and feminist movements in Guatemala."⁹¹ Concrete programs like these try to encourage women struggling in an uphill battle against systematic oppression and gender-based violence.

Some of these organizations are joining forces to be more effective at the national level. The *Red de la No Violencia Contra las Mujeres* or Network of Non-violence

⁹⁰ "Photo of the Week 8/11/14," IDEX: International Development Exchange, August 11, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, <https://www.idex.org/blog/tag/school-for-womens-political-education/>.

⁹¹ Kat Zavala, "AFEDES: Grassroots Efforts of an Indigenous Women-led Organization to Stop Violence Against Women in Guatemala," *World Pulse*, December 11, 2012, accessed October 5, 2014, <https://worldpulse.com/node/62363>.

against Women is a network of ten women's organizations that are all working to make Guatemala safer for women. This network "played an important role in lobbying for approval of the Law to Prevent, Sanction and Eradicate Intrafamily Violence,"⁹² but the law has not been enforced with enough authority to be effective. Representatives from this network have said, "In the years that the law has been in effect, administrators generally have shown a reluctance to comply with its mandates."⁹³ This means that women's organizations have had to continue to advocate for the safety of women in Guatemala and to make the well being of women a greater priority for the local and national government offices.

As greater understandings of human rights have developed since the Guatemalan civil war, women's rights have become more aligned with human rights. Human rights organizations like the *Centro de Acción Legal para Derechos Humanos* (CALDH) or the Center for Legal Action on Human Rights take the concerns of women and the defense of women's rights very seriously. Women's rights are becoming a central focus for human rights organizations and groups that are dedicated to seeking justice for those who have been victims. These organizations are making small advances in making gender-based violence a more focal issue on the national stage. These organizations and these communities of women are responsible for doing the majority of the advocacy around ending gender-based violence and calling for the laws to be enforced with greater strength.

Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala are all predominantly Catholic countries and their Catholic identity has had a significant impact on how people are motivated to get

⁹² Trujillo, "Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala," 135.

⁹³ Ibid.

involved in their communities. Religious iconography can be seen in the artwork, throughout Mexico and specifically in Ciudad Juárez. The religious climate in Ciudad Juárez has contributed to the activism in which women and organizations are engaging. Robert Andrew Powell learned during his time in Juárez how much religion impacts daily life. He says:

Juárez, like most of Mexico, is Catholic. Seeds of faith planted by Spanish missionaries still bloom, full and lush. ‘Ciudad Juárez: The Bible is real. Read it’ was painted without permission onto a mountain face visible everywhere in the valley. Juárez officials have let the message stay up for years, claiming no one really disagrees with it. The Juárez Cathedral defines El Centro.⁹⁴

The religious overtones of Mexico play a role in the ways women’s organizations and communities get involved in activism.

There are many examples of women’s grassroots organizations that are working to end gender-based violence in Ciudad Juárez where this issue has gained international attention. The rallying cry among women in Ciudad Juárez is “*¡Ni una Más!*” (Not One More!). One of the most important figures in the movement to end femicide in Ciudad Juárez is Esther Chávez Cano. Chávez helped women in Juárez pay closer attention to what was happening as the stories of femicide started to emerge. She advocated for a fuller understanding of femicide in Latin America and beyond. Scholar Rafael Luévano stated that “[l]ong before most cared, Chávez kept track of the slain women in Juárez.”⁹⁵ This proved helpful for international agencies trying to collect data years later. One of Chávez’s major contributions was the “February 1999 founding of the nonprofit

⁹⁴ Powell, *This Love is Not for Cowards*, 73.

⁹⁵ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 125.

Casa Amiga, an old house in Juárez that was converted to serve as a refuge of ‘survival and healing for violence-tormented women and children.’”⁹⁶ The mission of *Casa Amiga* is to “promote a culture free from violence, based on equality and respect for the physical, emotional and sexual integrity of women and children in our community.”⁹⁷ It was the first safe home of its kind in Ciudad Juárez and its creation led to a greater awareness of gender-based violence. *Casa Amiga* offers trauma services as well as legal services, and it strives to educate the general public as well as school-aged children about the impact of violence in the community. This organization prides itself on having both programs of intervention and programs of prevention so that current victims and families of victims can receive support from the community and so that they can also work to eradicate the overall culture of violence.

Every year, community members from *Casa Amiga* and other organizations participate in *Ni Una Más* marches in Ciudad Juárez and Mexico City. The “symbolic leaders” of this movement are a group of women known as *Mujeres de Negro* or Women in Black.⁹⁸ *Mujeres de Negro* is comprised of women who participate in marches and activism that combats gender-based violence. Researcher Melissa W. Wright says,

The leaders of *Mujeres de Negro* are primarily middle-class women with experience in activist organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and its members include anyone who is willing to put on a black tunic and pink

⁹⁶ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 126.

⁹⁷ “Misión, Visión y Objetivos,” *Casa Amiga*: Esther Chávez Cano, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://www.casa-amiga.org.mx/index.php/Contenido/mision-vision-y-objetivos.html>.

⁹⁸ Wright, “Paradoxes, Protests and the *Mujeres de Negro* of Northern Mexico,” 312.

hat and carry a sign as a *Mujer de Negro* in protest over the crimes against women and the political incompetence surrounding them.⁹⁹

They engage in a variety of activities that are meant to disrupt society and ensure that those in positions of power know what they are doing. This includes protesting and closing down city streets.¹⁰⁰ Public protests involve dressing in black, wearing a pink hat and carrying a cross with the name of a victim of violence on it. These crosses can be seen across Mexico, and they represent both the religious nature of the protest and memory of the woman who has been killed.

The *Mujeres de Negro* are not received well by political leaders in Northern Mexico, and they are generally seen as a nuisance and accused of being “bad mothers.”¹⁰¹ They are all passionate about the cause of ending gender-based violence and seeking justice on behalf of those who have been killed. They know that the impunity in Mexico is what allows these murders to continue so they put pressure on government officials and encourage them to enforce the laws that are in place. The *Mujeres de Negro* recognize the fact that “Mexican authorities have made promises to prioritize cases like these for years, and in the wake of international pressure, prosecutors now argue that more of the killings are being solved. But arrests and convictions are exceedingly rare.”¹⁰² Communities like *Mujeres de Negro* continue to work for justice on behalf of those they have lost despite the fact that the legal procedures have failed in the past.

Another grassroots organization, organized by women in Ciudad Juárez is a group called *Comité de Madres de Jóvenes Desaparecidas* or Mother’s Committee of Missing

⁹⁹ Wright, “Paradoxes, Protests and the Mujeres,” 315.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 323.

¹⁰² Cave, “Wave of Violence Swallows More Women in Juárez.”

Young Women. This group also participates in activist events and it is also committed to honoring the memory of the women who have died. Rafael Luévano talks about attending a meeting of this group where he witnessed practices of lament and memory. The group's purpose, however, was not only to mourn those who had been killed. Luévano remembers spending an evening with members of this group who placed photographs of the missing women on a table. He says, "I listened to four mothers, one father, and a number of siblings lament long into the night. ...The group gathered not only to recall the memory of their daughters and sisters but also to seek justice for their murders."¹⁰³ Members of this group provide solace for one another in private settings, but they also go to government audiences and demand information about the status of their daughters' cases from the local political and police forces. Organizations like *Comité de Madres de Jóvenes Desaparecidas* have helped make the issue of femicide and gender-based violence an international issue by consistently drawing attention to the fact that these murders have gone unsolved and any suspects have failed to be prosecuted. They have put pressure on the local government to answer their pleas for information by writing public letters to the government officials in Chihuahua and organizing public protests and petitions.

Comité de Madres de Jóvenes Desaparecidas in 2013, helped organize a major event called "The Walk for Life and Justice" (*Caminata por la vida y justicia*) to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8. This weeklong march went from Ciudad Juárez to Chihuahua City and included hundreds of participants carrying signs and crosses bearing the names and pictures of women who have been killed without

¹⁰³ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 131.

consequence.¹⁰⁴ The Walk for Life and Justice brought many different groups together to call attention to this critical issue and to put pressure on the government and police forces.

Another organization that helped coordinate this event was *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* or May Our Daughters Return Home. This grassroots organization is also working tirelessly to fight for justice in the face of the impunity that has allowed these murders to go unprosecuted. May Our Daughters Return Home was founded by Norma Esther Andrade and her friend Marisela Ortiz after Andrade's daughter Lilia was abducted in February, 2001 and discovered days later brutally beaten and murdered.¹⁰⁵ Andrade herself has been threatened, shot and stabbed for her continued activism but she refuses to give up her fight.¹⁰⁶ Organizations like *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* or *Comité de Madres de Jóvenes Desaparecidas* have had an impact on how gender-based violence is being discussed in Mexico and they have ensured that femicide is an issue that is impossible to ignore.

The murders of young women in Mexico need to be recognized and those who performed the killing need to be held accountable for their actions if there is to be any true sense of justice for these mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends. Although the

¹⁰⁴ Clayton Conn, "International Women's Day in Mexico: Time for Mourning not Celebration," *Upside Down World*, March 12, 2013, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/mexico-archives-79/4179-international-womens-day-in-mexico-time-for-mourning-not-celebration>.

¹⁰⁵ Olivia Kirkpatrick, "Femicide in Mexico: The Cotton Field Case and its Sequels," *Latin America Bureau*, March 27, 2013, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://lab.org.uk/femicide-in-mexico-the-cotton-field-case-and-its-sequels>.

¹⁰⁶ Nobel Women's Initiative, "Norma Andrade Attacked Again," February 2, 2012, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://nobelwomensinitiative.org/2012/02/urgent-action-for-mexican-human-rights-activist/>.

activist organizers have been threatened many times, they refuse to give up their crusade because the numbers of women who are killed continue to climb.

The motivating factors behind this activism are particularly interesting. It is our assertion that this activism is informed by a Christian identity and worldview. The Christian culture of Latin America has helped communities find ways to identify with one another and to ground their activism in their beliefs and worldview. Organizations that have their roots in the Christian tradition have a mission and a vocation that gives them a greater sense of purpose. The practices that these women engage in are often derived from their Christian identity which includes the ways that they have learned how to memorialize and remember their loved ones. We will continue to look at how religion impacts the political activism of organizations and communities working to end gender-based violence.

Religion in Latin America

Religion has always played a prominent role in the lives of Latin Americans. The history of Catholicism in Latin America dates back to the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Since the 16th century, Catholicism has been experienced in a variety of ways throughout Latin America. The Catholic Church continues to be a powerful institutional force in many countries throughout Latin America. Although the hierarchical Catholic Church is not always in sync with some of the more liberal activism, the overwhelming religious culture in Latin America plays a powerful role in the lives of many activists.

Catholicism and Protestantism both contribute to community organizing in Guatemala. In looking at how Guatemalan Mayan women are organizing themselves, researcher Nathan Checketts examines the ways religion provides a certain framework

for development projects and grassroots organizations. He says, “[R]eligion play[s] an important role in the founding of projects and continue[s] to play a role in people’s participation in them.”¹⁰⁷ Since the majority of the population identifies as Catholic, many of the organizations are also self-identified as Catholic. Despite the fact that these organizations do not refuse services or membership to someone who is not Catholic, research has shown that generally, women participate more actively in organizations that share their own personal religious affiliation.¹⁰⁸ Researcher Kristyn Roser Nuttall quotes a Mayan woman who said, “The majority of women involved in development groups are Catholic because they like to participate, and they have more liberty because the majority of the groups and institutions are Catholic based.”¹⁰⁹ She also notes that “[m]ost of the development groups in the town [where she lived] had a Catholic origin.”¹¹⁰ Nuttall mentions how, even when a grassroots organization does not have any institutional or overt religious affiliation, it still appears to be a Catholic organization because of the identification of most of its members. Many of the leaders of these organizations and communities are Catholic and they are therefore “perceived...as having an inherent Catholic religious affiliation, even though most projects remained open to people of any faith.”¹¹¹ The religious nature of grassroots organizations is therefore often present even

¹⁰⁷ Nathan Checketts, “By the Sweat of Our Brow: Development, Religion and Culture in Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán,” in *Roads to Change in Maya Guatemala: A Field School Approach to Understanding the K’iché*, eds. John P. Hawkins and Walter Randolph Adams (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press: 2005), 183.

¹⁰⁸ Kristyn Roser Nuttall, “We Are Very Capable: Women and Development in Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán,” in *Roads to Change in Maya Guatemala: A Field School Approach to Understanding the K’iché*, eds. John P. Hawkins and Walter Randolph Adams (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press: 2005), 196.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Nuttall, “We Are Very Capable,” 197.

when it is not mentioned in the mission of the organization. This is true of communities of women across Latin America.

The activist participation of women who are fighting gender-based violence is seen as subtly religious in the way it is engaging in “moral” activities that are trying to make the world a better place. Nuttall says of grassroots women’s organizations in Guatemala, “Not only did the institutions and groups tend to have a Catholic identity, but project participation correlated with the Catholic emphasis on trying to improve the present world.”¹¹² She discusses the difference between Catholic women who are engaging in activism and Evangelical Protestant women who are more active in prayer groups and in developing their spirituality for the imminent coming of Christ.¹¹³ Many Catholics, says Nuttall, “found sisterhood, support and companionship in the development organizations” in Mayan Guatemala.¹¹⁴ Nuttall found that personal affiliation and identification significantly impacted women’s participation in organizations, whether or not these organizations and communities were overtly religious. These findings are consistent with the claim that women are often motivated and engaged in activism based on the religious culture and nature of Latin America. Nuttall also discovered that the leaders of an organization “also influenced whether women participated [or not]... The more a woman culturally identified with the leader of the group, the more likely she was to participate.”¹¹⁵ Since mothers and sisters of women who have been killed founded many of the organizations that are combatting gender-based violence in Latin America, other mothers and sisters feel compelled to join in the

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 198.

struggle. Many of those women identify themselves as Catholic, and they share a common cultural background and history that makes them more likely to work for the same causes.

Rigoberta Menchú (b. 1959) is an activist in Guatemala who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her tireless advocacy regarding the plight of the indigenous Mayan community during the Guatemalan civil war (1960-1996). Menchú has discussed the role that religion in the region played and the ways it impacted how people were called to participate in activism. She says that, “as a Christian,” she realized that it was her “duty to work with the people.”¹¹⁶ Menchú’s activism was largely motivated by her Christian identity. She says, “Through all of my experiences, through everything I’d seen, through so much pain and suffering, I learned what the role of a Christian in the struggle is, and what the role of a Christian on this Earth is.”¹¹⁷ Menchú clearly understands her activism as a kind of vocation, and she feels called to act on behalf of others as a way of living her Christian identity. She says that “[t]he work of revolutionary Christians is above all to condemn and denounce the injustices committed against the people.”¹¹⁸ Condemning the injustices committed against women and

¹¹⁶ Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (London: Verso, 1984), 241. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* has a controversial history. The book was published in 1984, but in 1999, anthropologist David Stoll published a book refuting pieces of Menchú’s story. He said that she changed important elements of her story in order to garner support for the guerilla movement in Guatemala. Stoll’s book is titled *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. Historian Greg Grandin has said that Stoll’s reporting is inaccurate and anthropologist Victoria Sanford also defends Menchú and says that Stoll used questionable research methods and sources. Stoll, however, also has many supporters who claim that Menchú is a communist.

¹¹⁷ Menchú and Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, 241.

¹¹⁸ Menchú and Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, 241.

working for these injustices to be corrected are the goals of faith-based organizations that are trying to combat gender-based violence throughout Latin America.

Since the end of the civil war, the Catholic Church in Guatemala has played an important role both in assisting the healing process and in developing activist communities. Guatemala is the only country that has had two different institutions participate in creating truth accords after a conflict. After the civil war ended in 1996, the United Nations conducted a state-sponsored investigation into the allegations of genocide and inhumane actions by the military forces. This project, the Commission for Historical Clarification (*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico*, or CEH) was conducted from 1997-1999. Upon completion of their research, CEH produced the historical text *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, which recounts thousands of human rights violations conducted by the military against civilians. CEH was “established through the Accord of Oslo on 23 June 1994, in order to clarify with objectivity, equity and impartiality, the human rights violations and acts of violence connected with armed confrontation.”¹¹⁹ The findings from CEH illustrate the ways in which the military was responsible for the overwhelming majority of human rights violations during the war.

The Catholic Church in Guatemala also conducted an extensive investigation into the human rights violations committed during the war as a way to support CEH and because, due to the overwhelming Catholic culture in Guatemala, citizens were willing to participate in an ecclesial project. The Church felt that healing was needed within the spiritual community in addition to the political community because of the ways the

¹¹⁹ Commission for Historical Clarification (*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico*, or CEH). *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, Prologue, 11, accessed October 3, 2014, http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf.

country had been divided. Since the Catholic Church has been one of the largest institutions in Guatemala, it made sense for the Church to sponsor this project. This investigation was called the Inter-diocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (*Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*) or REMHI, and the resulting report was called *Guatemala: Nunca Más* or Guatemala: Never Again! REMHI, unlike CEH, was sponsored by the archdiocese of Guatemala, and the report collected 5,465 testimonies from victims of violence and human rights abuses. We highlight the REMHI project, not as a way comparing the work of REMHI to the work of activists today (twenty years later), but as evidence that there is a historical precedent, which has been set by religious institutions participating in activist communities and defending human rights. The Catholic culture of Guatemala and of Latin America in general, exists on several different levels and REMHI serves as an example of the ways activism and religion work collaboratively.

Communities of women across Latin America, combatting gender-based violence, are participating in a unique type of activism that has its foundation in Christianity. Christian symbols and traditions help shape the activities in which these organizations engage and the ways in which they make meaning out of their activism. For example, the practice of planting and carrying crosses with the names of victims written on them illustrates the prominent role Christianity plays in these practices of remembering. Journalist Robert Powell talks about the way the crosses have a significant presence in Ciudad Juárez. He says:

I still see the religious iconography around town. Painted pink crosses, a little faded by now, cling to telephone poles along Avenida Colegio Militar, in view of

the border between Texas and beyond. A large wooden cross framed in pink and studded with the kind of spikes that crucified Jesus Christ guards the Santa Fe bridge, the last thing a tourist sees before walking back to El Paso. ... There are still eight small pink wooden crosses huddled in [a] cotton field ... the site where the decaying bodies of eight young women were found.¹²⁰

These crosses, painted pink to make sure observers know that a woman was killed, serve as both makeshift memorials and theological symbols, connecting the life of the woman who was killed to her religious identity. The act of making the crosses helps family members of those who have been killed by giving them a way to memorialize their loved one and also to participate in a public protest.

Activist communities have been responsible for planting pink crosses in the ground or taping them to buildings or signs near the site where a woman's body was found since 1993. Mothers and friends of victims talk about how this practice is just as important as the other advocacy work in which they participate. Rafael Luévano illustrates this point through the story of Bonilla Flores a mother whose daughter was a victim of femicide. He writes:

In May 2007, prompted by the numerous irregularities in the murder investigation of her daughter, Bonilla Flores filed a complaint against the Mexican government with the Washington, D.C.-based Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the official human rights agency of the Organization of American States. Closer to home, Bonilla Flores and other relatives of femicide victims recently painted emblematic pink-background crosses along Ciudad Juárez's new Camino Real

¹²⁰ Powell, *This Love is Not for Cowards*, 178-179.

highway and, inspired by the Argentine mothers of the disappeared,¹²¹ began holding regular protests on the first Thursday of every month outside the offices of the Office of the Chihuahua State Attorney.”¹²²

The practice of planting pink crosses for Flores and women with whom she works is an important part of protesting the disappearance of her daughter, in addition to filing official human rights claims and engaging in political protests.

In the epilogue of his book, Luévano notes the date (June 15, 2011) and says that “[t]he pink crosses are long gone from the intersection of *Ejército Nacional* and *Paseo de la Victoria*, taken down in 2007 by authorities who want this matter forgotten.”¹²³ Yet, he sees protesters arriving to meet with him and discuss the feminicides in Juárez. He describes watching these protesters “move slowly to the crossing and then, doing their best in the hot sun and desert wind, begin to erect the fallen crosses. A single cross stands, then another, now two more. Soon all of the fallen crosses will be made upright.”¹²⁴ This commentary serves as a reflection about how those who are willing to protest these murders refuse to give up. They want the memory of their daughters or their sisters kept alive and they are willing to go out into the desert many times to replant the crosses that represent the memory of their loved ones.

¹²¹ This is a reference to the organization “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” (or *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*), which is a group of women in Argentina whose children were “disappeared” during the Argentine “Dirty War” (1976-1983). The group met every Thursday to protest outside of government offices in Buenos Aires, demanding to know what happened to their children. This practice has become emblematic for Latin American women who are fighting for information about their loved ones.

¹²² Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 64-65.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

Religion, as it is understood in Latin America, plays a prominent role in motivating and animating the activism in which these communities engage.

Organizations fighting gender-based violence, even if they do not have an overt religious identity, are often associated with religious ideas and symbols because of the nature of their work and the ways community building is often achieved in Latin America.

Women who are mourning the loss of a loved one feel called to participate in these organizations as a way to seek justice on behalf of their daughters, sisters, or friends.

Grassroots organizations become spaces where women can engage in ritualized activities that help them make sense of their suffering.

Practices of lament and remembering, which are done in a religious framework, offer consolation for those who are struggling against the evils of femicide. Luévano notes the ways lament brings people together to address suffering collectively. He says, “There are the cries of lament, the language of making sense of suffering not by logic but often by the process of affective expression.”¹²⁵ These cries of lament, he says, “give rise to solidarity.”¹²⁶ The solidarity Luévano refers to will be examined further on, but it is important to note that women find solidarity within these communities and that the strength they gain from one another helps empower them. He says that “[t]he suffering communicated is a pain shared and that in itself empowers. Such solidarity also dignifies the survivors, whose human integrity...has been violated.”¹²⁷ Luévano knows that in the face of such devastating suffering, most people believe that they are incapable of making a difference on their own. Despite this stark truth, he says, “When considering...

¹²⁵ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 130.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 133-134.

femicides, one must stand at the crossroads of a crucial decision: choose despair and hate and be overwhelmed by the crushing and toxic forces of globalization, poverty, corruption, and drug trafficking, or choose hope.”¹²⁸ Communities of women have used their faith to be empowered, build community and continue to hope.

Many Latin American women cling ardently to faith. In the face of great tragedy and suffering, faith still plays an important role in helping them get through daily challenges. Powell recounts stories of residents of Ciudad Juárez who believe that the only reason they are still alive is because of their faith in God. Violence is seen as one of the most powerful forces in society, yet God is understood to be one of the only forces that is stronger even than the violence. Many family members of victims do question why this suffering is happening to them or to their loved ones, but they do not lose their faith. Luévano tells the story of Paula whose daughter Sagrario was killed in Juárez and says:

Paula wonders, for example, how [her daughter] Sagrario could be kidnapped and murdered while wearing the medal of Our Lady of Guadalupe, as she always did. Paula always assumed that the medal would keep her daughter under divine protection. ‘Where was God when Sagrario needed him?’ she asks. Despite her questions, Paula remains a Roman Catholic. ‘The only faith I have left is in God,’ she says. ‘He is going to help us.’¹²⁹

In the face of such suffering, it is difficult to comprehend what we are able to accomplish without faith in our communities or in one another. Luévano reminds us of

¹²⁸ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 134.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

the work of Esther Chávez Cano who was able to single-handedly make femicide a greater reality for those who did not understand what was happening. Luévano says: Coming to understand that our actions bring results is a necessary lesson because when confronted with suffering on the scale of the Juárez-Chihuahua feminicides, most of us tend to believe that we are incapable of effecting the same level of change as a social reformer such as [Esther] Chávez.¹³⁰

Chávez serves as an excellent example of one individual who was able to make a significant difference in the fight against gender-based violence. Chávez managed to reach out to hundreds of people across the US-Mexico border and tell them about what was going on in Juárez. Her work is therefore a sign of hope that we can accomplish real change within our lifetimes. The work of Esther Chávez continues to be carried out in the organization that she created and among those who work for the mission that she helped to build.

Conclusion

In Ciudad Juárez, Guatemala, and Honduras, femicide is an all too common occurrence. These deaths occur regularly and, outside of an individual's friends and family, no one does anything about it. Hilda Morales Trujillo has noted the danger that comes with this complacency. She says, "The wave of misogynist violence has yet to provoke outright indignation among civil society. Beyond the organized women's movement and a few other exceptions, civil society remains unperturbed by these acts."¹³¹ Women's communities are necessary because they highlight the only places in society where these women are not disappearing into obscurity completely. Women need

¹³⁰ Luévano, *Woman-Killing in Juárez*, 141.

¹³¹ Trujillo, "Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala," 135.

to be valued as full members of society and not just replaceable parts of an economic system. The human dignity of all women needs to be honored in order for anything to really change in Latin America. Organizations whose roots have their foundation in Christianity believe in valuing women and making sure they are not merely victims of senseless crimes.

Religion plays an important role in helping these organizations collaborate and work together. Communities of women like the Mercy Dreamweavers, who have emerged from their association with the Sisters of Mercy, came together because of their shared religious tradition. It was this tradition that helped them identify with one another and build a community of support and solidarity for one another. Religion is the motivating force behind what many of these communities and grassroots organizations are doing. The ideas of wanting to do something to make the world a better place and to seek justice for those who have not received it are not inherently religious ideas, but for many women in Latin America, religious identity has led them to these themes. The hope for something greater and the belief that a brighter future is possible are both ideas that stem from religious themes. These themes will be examined in subsequent chapters.

Throughout this chapter, we have looked at the cases of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, Guatemala, and Honduras, and what is particular to each context. We have also looked at how femicide is uniform across these three locations and how impunity plays a role in making femicide a dominant social problem. A culture of machismo has created an environment throughout Latin America where women's voices are not welcome and where women's lives are not valued as highly as men's lives are. Women are seen as less than equal members of society and they are viewed as being easily

disposed of and easily replaced. Economic conditions have led to drug trafficking and gang violence in all three countries, which has contributed to the high numbers of women who have become victims of violence. However, each of the three locations has its own particular circumstances that contribute to femicide. In Mexico, NAFTA has played a large role in creating an economy where women's labor is necessary but less valuable. In Guatemala, the history of the Guatemalan civil war is still very present for those who were trained to be violent. In Honduras, the coup d'état in 2009 has led to an unstable government run by the military. Each of these circumstances, among others, has played a role in making women less safe.

We also examined communities and grassroots organizations in each of these three locations to see what communities of women are doing to combat this evil. In each country, women are leading the way in terms of demanding social change and political action. Women have effectively been staging protests and lobbying to have new laws put in place. They have also been creating new spaces where women who have lost family members or friends can gather to find solace, strength and solidarity. These women are seeking justice for those who have been killed and working to make femicide a greater priority for those in power. These communities often have their foundation in Christianity and use resources from the Christian tradition to empower and motivate them. Christian organizations engage in activities like protesting and memorializing that generate hope, and their hope in a brighter future is what allows them to keep doing this work in the face of such sadness. We can look at the ways grassroots organizations that are involved in activism are also engaging in religious activism.

The religious practices of ritual, lament, and prayer illustrate ways that communities of women are bringing their understandings of religion into their political activity. The performative aspects of protest and public engagement blend with the ritual aspects of prayer and hope to create a type of activism unique to Latin America. Gender-based violence and especially femicide need to be eradicated and theology can contribute to this work.

Looking Ahead

Going forward, we will look at how grassroots organizations, fighting to eradicate gender-based violence, can use theology to aid them in their struggle and how theology can contribute to ending gender-based violence more effectively. In order to do this, we will first look at what we mean by “theology” and how theology is different from religion. We will look at the work of one specific theologian, Jon Sobrino, who has spent much of his life talking about how Jesus is among the poor and with the “crucified people.” Sobrino’s theology of resurrection will illuminate how these communities of women can use this theology to aid them in their struggle. A theology of resurrection looks to the resurrection of Jesus as a sign of God’s love and devotion, especially for those who are victimized. Reflecting on Sobrino’s theology of resurrection in light of these communities who are working for justice will help us see how they can further utilize a theology of resurrection in their own work.

Despite Sobrino’s attention to the crucified people and those who have been victimized, Sobrino does not take the specific situation of women into consideration. This is inadequate, especially considering the precarious and vulnerable situation in which women in Latin America live, as we have just observed. Sobrino’s theology of

resurrection can be helpful for women participating in activism who are already using resources from their Christian traditions, but Sobrino also needs to hear from Latina theologians who can speak to the lived reality of being a woman in Latin America. We will, therefore, call upon Latina theologians to respond to Sobrino and highlight the daily life of Latin American women. Sobrino's theology of resurrection and Latina theology, through a variety of voices, will be placed in conversation with one another in order to further examine the relationship between activism and theology. Through a reflection on Sobrino's theology of resurrection, we will see where theology and activism have common goals and how communities can use both to combat gender-based violence in Latin America.

Chapter 2: Jon Sobrino's Contribution

Introduction

This chapter will examine important aspects of Jon Sobrino's Christology in order to investigate the theological themes present in the activism of women who are fighting a culture of violence in Latin America. Sobrino's Christology highlights theological concepts that are present throughout Latin American liberation theology. Through an examination of Sobrino, this chapter will explicate Sobrino's Christology of resurrection as it resonates with the needs and aspirations of Latin American women. Using Sobrino in this way will help us demonstrate that important theological themes are present within the activism of women struggling for liberation. Sobrino's understanding of the resurrection highlights the way theological ideas present themselves through the actions and experiences of those living on the margins, especially women. Looking at communities of women through the lens of Sobrino's Christology lets us see theological themes present within the activism of women who are fighting gender-based violence.

This chapter will proceed through several steps. Firstly, we will discuss three levels of theology, which will help us locate Sobrino's Christology as well as the theological engagement of activists along the spectrum of theological reflection. Secondly, we will look at Sobrino in context, which will explain why he was chosen as the major liberation theologian to support this project. Thirdly, Sobrino's Christology of the resurrection of Christ will be examined. Sobrino's understanding of the resurrection offers five important concepts which we can also see present in the activism of women fighting against the prevalence of gender-based violence in Latin America. Because Sobrino's theology of the resurrection begins with our human ability to "live as risen

beings,” his understanding of the resurrection aligns with the work of women who are fighting for liberation. We will also highlight the way that Sobrino’s concepts of orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy help to shape his Christology and reflect the values and actions of women fighting against the horrors of femicide. Finally, a brief critique of Sobrino will be offered in order to locate the limits of Sobrino in this conversation. Although there are definitely limits to what Sobrino contributes to the issue of gender-based violence, his Christology helps us to determine that theology is a relevant and helpful aspect of women’s activism in Latin America.

Three Levels of Theology

Before we look at the Christology of Sobrino, it is necessary to explain what we mean when we say that activism and theology can be related to one another. This will be done through an examination of three different levels of theology in relation to which activism in the face of gender-based violence can be understood. We should note that there are a number of ways to talk about “theology.” By itself, “theology” is a complicated term. We could say that the history of theology as a scientific discipline does not matter much to women who are protesting gender-based violence, but their activism and their communities are inspired by theological themes.

The first level of theology can be described as the academic and scholarly work of trained theologians. This type of theology is understood within the context of a long history that dates back to medieval scholarship. Saint Anselm (1033-1109) is often credited with “defining” theology as “faith seeking understanding.”¹ This definition has

¹ Ralph Norman, in an article written for the Australian eJournal of Theology in 2007 says that Anselm never actually used the word “theology.” Norman claims, “It was Abelard that introduced the word to the Latin west and gave it a professional and

been widely accepted within the academy as one way to talk about what theology is. Theology can also be discussed in a scientific sense as “the study of the nature of God and religious belief.”² This understanding of theology reflects its academic and pedagogical history. On a primary level, theology is an academic discipline, which is researched, taught, and discussed among scholars and students. The tradition of theology as “faith seeking understanding” has continued for centuries and has created the context within which contemporary theologians formulate new ideas and theological systems.

This first level of theology, the academic level, includes scholars and students of theology. Anselm’s definition of theology as “faith seeking understanding” suggests that for hundreds of years, people have sought answers about the nature of God and God’s relationship to humans. Theologians within the academy have written about these larger questions and taught others how to engage with the history of theology in meaningful ways. Trained theologians are often seen as the authoritative voices when it comes to discussing questions of God because of their dedication to this scientific study. There are, however, also alternative ways of talking about theology. Although a more typical understanding of theology exists within the academy, the theology that helps to inspire Latin American communities of women is practiced outside of the definitions and traditions of scholars and classrooms.

technical meaning: reasoning about faith that proceeds in accordance with principles of methodological doubt.” Nevertheless, Norman acknowledges that Anselm has generally been accepted as the person to offer a classic definition of theology. Ralph Norman, “Abelard’s Legacy: Why Theology is not Faith Seeking Understanding.” *Australian eJournal of Theology* 10, (May, 2007): 1, accessed November 11, 2014, http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/378074/AEJT_10.3_Norman_Abelard.pdf.
² “Theology,” Def. 1. *Oxford Dictionaries*, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Oxford UP (2015), accessed November 11, 2014, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/theology.

In addition to serving as a basic definition of theology, “faith seeking understanding” also illustrates the way humans try to understand many different aspects of life. This definition of theology calls to mind some of the great mysteries of human existence. It asks people to reflect on the relationships they have to their communities of faith, how they understand life and death, and how they understand God’s role in helping them find meaning in their lives. It is therefore possible to differentiate between formal, academic theology and more general theological reflection. Although they look very different from one another, the theological practices and reflections of marginalized, Latin American women and the theological developments of academic scholars are connected to one another along a spectrum of theological reflection.

In contrast to academic theology, for example, Argentinian scholar Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952-2009) has talked about “popular theology” as the theology done within ordinary life and local communities. Popular theology presents a second level of theology, and it begins from praxis and experience, not theological theories of scholarship. As an example of popular theology, Althaus-Reid states that stories shared by Salvadoran women about the pain and suffering they endured during the Salvadoran civil war (1979-1992) “are about the essentially collective act of doing theology.”³ Shared story telling is an example of one of the practices of popular theology or theology being done among the people, not by hierarchical figures, instructors, or clergy.

Popular theology, like formal, academic theology also appears in different forms. Althaus-Reid posits, “There are two kinds of ‘popular theology.’ Both are pertinent to

³ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 114.

the lives and needs of the poor, but the theological subject differs.”⁴ She says that the first type of “popular theology” refers to theology done by educated, professional theologians who choose to work with the poor and “rescue key issues from [their lives] as a basis for a theological reflection related to their everyday experience of deprivation and suffering.”⁵ This type of popular theology exists in the experiences of individuals who have studied theology in an academic setting but who have dedicated their lives to working in solidarity with the marginalized. The decision to live in solidarity with the poor can lead to transformative experiences for both the trained theologian and the communities with whom she or he works. This type of popular theology is practiced and developed among those who live alongside Latin American women and who stand with them in their protests. Academics and practitioners who opt to leave the confines of an academic setting and experience life with communities of women who are fighting gender-based violence are engaging in this first type of popular theology. This type of work also places those who are most vulnerable at the center of the “theologizing” that is done by professional theologians. When theologians put those who have traditionally been marginalized and overlooked at the heart of their theologies, classic hierarchical structures are disrupted and new communities of solidarity are created.

There is also a second type of popular theology according to Althaus-Reid. The second type of popular theology “is also transformative...but it is not developed by professional theologians choosing poverty as an evangelical option. Instead, it is worked out by the poor themselves.”⁶ People in Latin America who do not necessarily have

⁴ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 115.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 116.

formal theological training, but are nevertheless doing theology, are engaging in this type of popular theology. The poor and marginalized in Latin America who gather together and share stories with one another or memorialize their loved ones are participating in this second kind of popular theology. Althaus-Reid says that popular theology gives individuals an opportunity to “blossom” because it “restores the principle of the authority of the believers, and respects their right to express their particular experience of God in their lives, according to their cultures, traditions and political circumstances.”⁷ Popular theology allows people to have some authority within their faith traditions in ways that are meaningful for them. Communities of women in Latin America and grassroots organizations embody this type popular theology when they participate in activism and protest activities because their faith inspires them to do so. Popular theology is therefore separate from the academic, scientific experience of theology because it involves the lived experiences of faith communities. However, both academic theology and popular theology differ from a more basic phenomenon, which can serve as the inspiration of both academic and popular theology. This phenomenon is popular religion.

Popular religion, the third level of theology, is not quite theology (“faith seeking understanding”), but it is the expression of a particular experience of God and of faith in God. Popular religion can be understood through the experiences of activists who are participating in protests and activities that are grounded in their experience of faith. The rituals and traditions in which grassroots communities of women often engage exemplify popular religion. Latina scholar Nancy Pineda-Madrid quotes Orlando Espín and Sixto García who say:

⁷ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 116.

In general terms, popular religiosity can be defined as the set of experiences, beliefs, and rituals which more-or-less peripheral human groups create, assume and develop (within concrete socio-cultural and historical contexts...)...to find an access to God and salvations which they feel they cannot find in what the church and society present as normative.⁸

Pineda-Madrid, referring to communities of women in Mexico, mentions the ways that these groups are engaging in “popular religion” and drawing on the common experiences that unite them. Pineda-Madrid talks about the importance of popular religion in protest activities across Latin America. She has noted the ways that practices of resistance in Latin America are seen as both religious rituals and political protests. Latin American women engage in practices of resistance in order to both challenge the authorities that have allowed the widespread killing of women to take place and to participate in a religious practice that gives them a greater sense of hope. Communities of women across Latin America are participating in practices of popular religion that are meaningful for them in a variety of ways.

Academic theology, popular theology, and popular religion can all inspire scholars and activists in different ways. These three levels of theology are all variously interrelated, and they are all active within different areas of society. They relate to one another and inform one another based on their histories. For example, academic theology has, more recently, been called upon to connect traditional biblical images to problems of social ethics. Here we see academic theology and practices that can be reflected in popular religion working together. Social justice work and political activism, similarly,

⁸ Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Salvation and Suffering in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 206.

can offer new interpretations to teachings within traditional Christian theology. Theology and social ethics are both at work in communities of women struggling for justice in the face of gender-based violence in Latin America.

One theologian who has worked as both an academic theologian and an advocate for those on the margins is Jon Sobrino. Looking at the political activism of women through the lens of Sobrino's theology, we can see how theological themes are present in their practices and rituals. One major theme that especially resonates with this activism is Sobrino's theology of the resurrection. Sobrino's theology of the resurrection will therefore be considered in light of grassroots organizations working to eradicate femicide in Latin America. While Sobrino's understanding of the resurrection can elucidate the faith, practices, and theology of women's activism, Sobrino must also consider the gender-specific concerns of these communities. Sobrino's lack of attention to women's issues in particular has resulted in a surge of Latina writing about the experiences of women.

Overview of Sobrino's Christology

The Christology of Jon Sobrino includes an analysis of the life and ministry, crucifixion and death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁹ Sobrino has written about what the resurrection of Christ means to those who are living in terrible poverty throughout Latin America. His interpretation of the resurrection helps to explain why marginalized activists feel called to continue their fight, even while they are experiencing oppression.

⁹ Sobrino has an extensive Christology, which is made up of many components. In addition to looking at the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Sobrino's Christology also looks at the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ. This aspect of Sobrino's Christology will contribute to this project, but the two natures of Christ are not the focus of this dissertation.

Specifically, Sobrino's theology of the risen Christ, which asserts that living a resurrected life in history is possible, can illuminate Christian resistance to femicide.

Sobrino's Christology addresses the questions of who Jesus is and how humans can relate to God through the person of Jesus.¹⁰ Sobrino says that "by revealing himself [to us], God changes (or can change) our lives. This is the basic presupposition for understanding the first Christians' concern to *know who* this Jesus whom God raised was and what his relationship to God was like."¹¹ In *Christ the Liberator*, Sobrino links the emergence of Christology to different titles used to describe Jesus in various ways in the New Testament.¹² According to Sobrino, these titles offer different perspectives on Jesus. They suggest Jesus' humanity and divinity, show his relationship to the victims of history, and communicate that in Christ, God already intervenes in history. For example, Sobrino notes that the title "Messiah" expresses the hope of the poor for liberation.¹³ Another title, "Son of God" is used "in relation to the central fact of the *sending, handing over, and death* of Jesus on the cross,"¹⁴ which enables Sobrino to link cross and resurrection. The use of the title "Lord," on the other hand, leads to reflection on current, oppressive political situations. In light of these oppressive structures, we are left to discern how we can more effectively seek liberation from the "lords" of the political world.¹⁵ It is beyond the scope of this project to engage with each of these Christological titles; in particular the two natures of Christ will not be discussed in depth. Instead, this

¹⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 114.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹² This is a project of the second part of *Christ the Liberator*, 124-208.

¹³ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

dissertation focuses on how the resurrection of the crucified Jesus functions in Sobrino's Christology to explain and enable the possibility of Christian ethical and political action.

Through a brief examination of Sobrino's Christology, we can determine five specific concepts that contribute to Sobrino's theology of the resurrection and illustrate Sobrino's relevance as a theological resource. These five are: "living as risen beings," "the reality principle," "the crucified of history," "hope of the victims," and "the reign of God." Each of these concepts represents Sobrino's contributions to a greater understanding of the resurrection. Through Sobrino, we can see the theological activism of faith-based grassroots organizations.

In addition to highlighting the centrality of the resurrection in Sobrino's theology, we will investigate Sobrino's insistence that right belief and doctrine, right action and practice, and right affections and imagination are necessarily interconnected. His terms orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy are hallmarks of his theology.¹⁶ Orthodoxy or "right belief" refers to one's relationship with the teachings and beliefs of the tradition. Orthopraxis or "right practice" refers to the practices one carries out which are inspired by and reinforce right beliefs. Orthopathy refers to "right feeling" or allowing oneself to be affected by the reality of Jesus within Christianity community. Orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy are concepts that describe and are validated by the aims and methods of Christian resistance to gender-based violence.

In many ways, as we have already seen, women are already utilizing theological images and symbols to give meaning to their activism. There is theological richness in the ways women memorialize their loved ones and ritualize their funerary processions

¹⁶ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 210. In *Christ the Liberator*, Sobrino introduces the concepts of *orthopathy* to orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

and marches. The symbol of the cross is utilized across Latin America to represent the unjust killing of women. Women's faith-based organizations have grown out of church groups and ecclesial communities, which means that informal theological reflection is an important dimension of their work. Faith-based women's groups, such as those that emerged during the ecclesial base community movement, use the Bible as well as scriptural interpretations to reflect on their own lives and their lived realities. Women gather together and build intentional communities and use theological resources to support their work.

Communities of women in Latin America, fighting gender-based violence, are engaging in a unique type of activism that has its foundation in Christianity. By looking at these communities through the lens of Jon Sobrino's theology of the resurrection we can recognize how activism in the face of gender-based violence can be understood theologically. The relationship between theology and activism can help us develop new theological insights, which women combating gender-based violence can use to advance their goals.

Through his writing about the crucified people of Latin America, Sobrino illuminates comparisons between the suffering of Jesus on the cross and the suffering of the poor. He believes that it is impossible to separate the agony of the cross from the hope of the resurrection, and he criticizes those who attempt to gloss over the pain of the resurrection. For example, Sobrino says that German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg¹⁷ overemphasizes the glory of the resurrection without paying enough attention to the

¹⁷ Wolfhart Panenberg (1928-2014) was a German systematic theologian who focused his theology on the resurrection of Christ.

suffering of the crucifixion.¹⁸ The triumphant imagery of the resurrection of Jesus must only be seen in light of the pain and anguish that Jesus endured. The cross and the resurrection are necessarily united in Sobrino's theology. The pain of the cross and the hope of the resurrection must co-exist. Sobrino asserts that the experience of the cross and resurrection together is the only way to truly know God by saying, "The revelation of God and the demands this places on us come about through both cross and resurrection."¹⁹ The cross and the resurrection rely on one another.

Sobrino's scholarship illustrates the relationship between theology and social ethics because, in addition to being an academic scholar, he also writes about the need to stand in solidarity with the poor. His interpretation of the resurrection therefore coheres well with the activism of women combating gender-based violence who have a religious hope that their activism can lead to greater justice for women. O. Ernesto Valiente notes that Sobrino's Christology speaks directly to those who are actively participating in the search for justice. He describes this Christology as "one that empowers the human person to engage the challenges of a conflicted reality with honesty, hope and faith in God's reconciling promises."²⁰ Through this description, we can see how Sobrino's Christology is especially relevant for women combatting femicide. Sobrino always starts his Christology with the experience of the poor in Latin America, and his theology

¹⁸ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 28. Sobrino says that for Pannenberg, "[t]here is...a relationship between resurrection and Jesus' life, but the cross is fundamentally absent from this relationship. ...Pannenberg's explanation of the meaning of Christ's resurrection lacked the cross as a consistent feature"(28.)

¹⁹ Ibid., 29. Sobrino here supports the work of Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner who, he says, makes the "understanding of the resurrection depend on the understanding of the cross"(29).

²⁰ O. Ernesto Valiente, "From Conflict to Reconciliation: Discipleship in the Theology of Jon Sobrino," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 657.

develops from the lived reality of those suffering. Valiente notes that this is a useful way to establish a Christology, because, “[w]hile prioritizing the contribution of the victims in the process of overcoming enmity, Sobrino’s approach also envisions a Christian praxis that upholds the need for both personal forgiveness and the social restoration of justice.”²¹ Sobrino places the experiences of victims first, but also highlights practices within the faith that are geared toward alleviating suffering and offering liberation. Communities of women are working to do just that.

As we continue to explore Sobrino’s Christology, we note that there are a number of ways to interpret the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection plays a critically important role in Sobrino’s Christology and we will examine it through five important concepts that relate Sobrino’s Christology of the resurrection to the work of activist women in Latin America. These five key concepts (“living as risen beings,” “the reality principle,” “the crucified of history,” “hope of the victims,” and “the reign of God”) will be examined in greater depth in this chapter.

Sobrino in Context

Jon Sobrino (b. 1938) is a Spanish Jesuit who has lived in El Salvador for most of his adult life. Sobrino, writing from the position of a liberation theologian, is concerned with the plight of “the poor,” and he believes that the story of Jesus can offer hope and inspiration to those living in poverty. Sobrino’s experience in El Salvador has significantly shaped his theological writing. Sobrino joined the Jesuits at age 18, and was sent to El Salvador in 1958. He has left El Salvador only to pursue degrees at St. Louis University in the United States (M.S. in Engineering, 1965) and Sankt Georgen Graduate

²¹ Valiente, “From Conflict to Reconciliation,” 657.

School of Philosophy and Theology or *Hochschule Sankt Georgen* in Frankfurt, Germany (Doctorate in Theology, 1975).²² He was ordained as a priest in El Salvador in 1969, and he has taught at the Jesuit University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador throughout of his professional life. Sobrino's arrival in El Salvador coincided with the worldwide emergence of liberation theology and also the growing divide between the poor and the wealthy throughout Latin America.

Guatemala and Nicaragua were both experiencing civil unrest before El Salvador's civil war officially began in 1979, and the entire region was suffering from dictatorships and harsh military rule. The disparity between a few wealthy families and the vast majority of the population was (and continues to be) extremely stark. The Catholic Church, like civil society, was also divided during this time. The Jesuits had a significant presence throughout Latin America and they were known for standing in solidarity with the poor and against the military. In El Salvador, priests and catechists who were working with *campesinos*²³ in rural parts of the country or with the poor in the capital city of San Salvador started to be labeled as communists and were subsequently targeted for being "subversive."

These were the circumstances under which liberation theology emerged. Liberation theology is a type of theology that developed out of post-Vatican II meetings of scholars and theologians from the Central and South America who gathered to discuss the role of the Catholic Church in combatting the extensive and oppressive poverty in that part of the world. Meetings in Medellín, Colombia in 1968 and Puebla, Mexico in 1979

²² Don Schweitzer, *Contemporary Christologies: A Fortress Introduction*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 62.

²³ "*Campesinos*" refers to those who live in the countryside and are typically of a lower economic class. *Campesinos* are rural farmers and peasants who live off of the land.

helped shape the goals and methodology of liberation theology, which is focused on empowering the poor as well as those on the margins of society. Liberation theology is characterized by placing a priority on praxis over orthodoxy, which includes joining in solidarity with the poor. The notion of a preferential option for the poor is relevant to liberation theology since the theological position of a preferential option says that God stands with those who are poor and in need.

During the Salvadoran civil war, military forces began to target and kill members of religious communities. One the most famous assassinations during the war was that of Archbishop Oscar Romero who had called for the military to stop murdering Salvadoran citizens. Romero, a friend of Sobrino's, was killed on March 24, 1980 while saying mass. A few months later on December 2, 1980, four American churchwomen²⁴ were stopped while driving on the road, taken to a remote location, raped and killed. The murders of civilians continued while Sobrino and his fellow Jesuits at the University of Central America taught classes and promoted an ethic of peace and justice. The Jesuits spoke out against these murders and called for the poor to be liberated from the oppression of the military and the poverty that was being imposed upon them by the government. Sobrino's theology was influenced by all of these factors.

On November 16, 1989, Jon Sobrino was teaching a course in Thailand. That evening, a Salvadoran military battalion entered the house he shared with six other Jesuits in San Salvador, brought the six Jesuits outside and killed them. The soldiers also killed their housekeeper who was there and her teenage daughter. The Jesuits had been considered dangerous by the dictatorial government because of their promotion of

²⁴ Ursuline sister Dorothy Kazel, Maryknoll sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, and Maryknoll lay missionary Jean Donovan were killed on December 2, 1980.

liberation theology and because of the way they encouraged the poor in El Salvador to hope for a better future. The Salvadoran government considered the Jesuits “subversives” who were especially sympathetic to the causes of the *campesino* guerilla movement. If Sobrino had been home on November 16 rather than traveling abroad, he most certainly would have suffered the same fate as his friends and brothers. Sobrino has lived with this fact for the last twenty-five years, and he has refused to be silent in the wake of the tragedies he has suffered. Sobrino has been a major figure in liberation theology since its emergence in the theological world in the 1960s and 70s. As a liberation theologian, Sobrino is concerned with the plight of “the poor” in Latin America, and believes the story of Jesus can offer hope and inspiration to those living in poverty. He stresses the importance of the relationship between theology and justice.

Sobrino’s position as a theologian at the UCA in El Salvador has given him the opportunity to participate in the wider community and advocate on behalf of the poor and the marginalized. Sobrino places faith, the Church, and theology in relation to social activism that advances the ideals of the gospel. Although he is primarily a scholar, he has also supported the work of activists and spoken out on behalf of the poor and marginalized. Sobrino’s theology of resurrection reflects his commitment to social change in the name of Jesus Christ, and it serves as a powerful resource for communities that are working to combat evil.

Sobrino’s Christology: Important Concepts Relating to the Resurrection

There are a number of important themes that resonate throughout Sobrino’s Christology which is theology done from the perspective of the poor. Five important concepts, (“living as risen beings,” “the reality principle,” “the crucified of history,”

“hope of the victims,” and “the reign of God”) advance this perspective for Sobrino, and they will be examined in greater depth in this chapter.

1. Living as Risen Beings: Jon Sobrino is concerned with understanding the resurrection of Jesus from the perspective of the poor. Though a scholar, he has also lived among the poor and joined with them in solidarity. For Sobrino, theology begins by identifying ourselves with those who live in poverty and trying to understand their needs. Sobrino’s analysis of the resurrection of Christ is predicated on his belief in standing with the poor and adequately understanding their realities. His theology of Jesus aligns Jesus directly with the poor in Latin America. Sobrino wants to analyze the “reality of Jesus Christ, doing so from specific viewpoints and with a definite aim.”²⁵ This reality of Jesus Christ includes his life, death, and resurrection, which each offer different ways for victims of poverty to enter into and connect with Jesus’ reality. Sobrino finds that joining his theology of Christ with the needs of the poor, he is able to approach the resurrection “from *the hope of victims*... and from the possibility of *living already as risen beings* in the conditions of historical existence.”²⁶ We can understand an “already risen being” as one who lives in the hope of the resurrection. “Living as risen beings” means living with the knowledge of Christ’s resurrection and therefore, living in a way that proclaims that the resurrection can be experienced in the present. But to live as an “already risen being” in the midst of devastating poverty is a difficult task. Sobrino recognizes that the poor need to be able to envision themselves as being loved by God, and that the resurrection of Christ is proof of this. An already risen being is one who has been touched by God’s

²⁵ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

love and who knows that there is more to God's love than we can understand during our lives on earth.

“Living as risen beings,” refers to the idea that “the resurrection of Jesus, in its own reality, can be lived in the present, and within this present, in following Jesus.”²⁷ The resurrection of Christ empowers the actions and the choices of Christians who live in the light of the resurrection every day. Sobrino says that “the continuity between the resurrection of Jesus and our present time lies not only in the *meaning* of our present life...but in living now in such a way as to make this life ‘for truth and justice.’”²⁸ We can live as already risen beings when we embrace the message of Jesus and work for liberation and freedom from oppression. Living as risen beings means that we can recognize the resurrection as something powerful and life changing, and we can bring this message of renewal and hope into our own work. This is how communities of women in Latin America are living. This is how the resurrection is relevant to communities of women striving to end gender-based violence.

For women in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras who are struggling to make femicide a higher priority for government authorities, the concept of living as already risen beings speaks to their experience of continuing their fight. Women engaging in this type of activism are fighting for justice and refusing to give up. They continue to protest in order that the truth of what is happening around them does not go unrecognized. They live as already risen beings in the way they actively participate in trying to undo injustice and in the way they fight for victims.

²⁷ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

Sobrino emphasizes this concept because he wants to acknowledge that it is possible to live in the resurrection of Christ, now, presently. Grassroots communities of women and faith-based organizations are actively participating in the resurrection of Christ by continuing to fight for justice and to defend victims of history. Living as risen beings means that women live in the knowledge of a better future, and they are willing to fight for it. They demand the respect that has been denied to them in the past, and they seek ways to affirm their human dignity. Living into the role of an already risen being offers women an even more powerful position than that of protester and activist. It provides women with a richer sense of purpose and vocation, which is important in continuing the work of activism. The practices of women using Christian symbols in their activism indicate that women are engaging in not only a political protest, but also a theological protest.

2. The Reality Principle: Sobrino says that he writes “from the *reality of faith*, set in motion by the event of Jesus Christ, and from the *situation of victims* at the present time.”²⁹ Although he writes from the perspective of victims in Latin America, Sobrino does not address the specific concerns of women who are victims of gender-based violence and femicide. He does, however, write about the struggle that those living as victims of poverty face on a daily basis. He says, “Poverty, *first and foremost*, is the situation in which by far the greatest part of the human race lives, bowed under the weight of life.”³⁰ Sobrino wants to elucidate the reality of poverty, which oppresses millions of people around the world and he focuses specifically on Latin America. He says that poverty is “the most lasting form of violence and the violence that is committed

²⁹ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

with the greatest impunity,”³¹ but he insists that poverty can be eradicated if we come to understand reality from the perspective of the poor. The violence of poverty contributes to the violence that is often perpetrated against women, and although Sobrino does not address the situation of women directly, he is correct in saying that the violence of poverty is the most lasting form of violence because of all the different ways poverty affects families in Latin America. Poverty increases one’s vulnerability and makes one much more likely to suffer severely.

Faith in Jesus requires believers to be aware of situations of poverty and suffering in the world. The reality principle asks us to not only understand the reality of Jesus’ life, but also to focus on gaining a better understanding of the larger realities of the world. Sobrino says, “The texts that speak of Jesus Christ speak of his reality, but at the same time, this reality of his places us in relationship with a host of realities.”³² By this, he means that it is impossible to understand the reality of Jesus without also acknowledging the realities of the world. Believers can look to Jesus for guidance and inspiration, and when they accept the teachings of Jesus’ ministry, they also commit to seeing injustice and poverty in the world. Sobrino says that believers “accept that Christ has to be recognized as Lord in the liturgy, but they add that in history, his work of service, abasement, crucifixion has to be reproduced.”³³ Sobrino, therefore, asserts that living in the example of Christ requires that we make dramatic sacrifices and live for others. Accepting Jesus’ reality also means accepting the reality of a world of paradoxes.

³¹ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

The reality principle that Sobrino articulates is one that fellow Salvadoran theologian Ignacio Ellacuría (1930-1989) helped to formulate. Sobrino says that Ellacuría developed the notion that God has provided us with reason and intelligence as a way of “grasping and facing reality.”³⁴ In this way, those of us who are capable of “bearing the burden of reality”³⁵ are tasked with doing so. If we are in a position to understand the realities of the world, including poverty and injustice, we therefore need to take responsibility for trying to undo some of these realities. Sobrino says that we “cannot fully grasp reality without bearing it at its worst,”³⁶ which is difficult for most of us. The reality principle, however, calls us to account for the realities to which we contribute and which we can work to undo.

The resurrection of Jesus is a trans-historical moment of God’s presence in the world. Sobrino believes that the resurrection illustrates God’s relationship with the world, and he claims that the resurrection of Jesus “is not presented... as the return of a dead body to everyday life...but as the action of God by which the eschatological irrupts into history and in which the true reality of Jesus begins to be made plain.”³⁷ Through the resurrection of Christ, God interacts with the world in a way that has never been seen before. But those working for justice can continue to know God through their ability to live in the hope of the resurrection. The reality of Jesus Christ can be compared to the reality of those who are striving for justice and who are currently working for change. God’s relationship with the world is illuminated by Jesus’ resurrection because it

³⁴ Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 2.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 17.

highlights God's love, and the effects of that love exist in historical communities of believers today.

As Sobrino writes, he is very conscious of his particular position as a trained theologian in El Salvador and of the position of his educated readers. He writes from the perspective of victims, but he also says, "The present writer and readers are not victims in the sense that the vast majorities of the poor and oppressed of history are."³⁸ Sobrino is aware of his place of privilege and he knows that most of his audience also includes people of privilege. Privilege does not mean that it is impossible for his readers to put themselves in the position of solidarity with the poor, but it does mean that they will never fully comprehend the reality of living in poverty every day. This poses a problem within theological circles, says Sobrino, because God is "a God of poor and victims."³⁹ For those in positions of privilege, their understandings of God and the resurrection are based on their experiences of God, and their experiences of God are different from the experiences of the poor. Despite this, Sobrino believes that it is critically important for those in positions of privilege to acknowledge the realities the poor face.

For Sobrino, the resurrection illustrates not merely Jesus' death back to life, but justice proclaimed in the midst of an unjust situation. He says:

Not just anyone was resurrected, but Jesus of Nazareth, who proclaimed the kingdom of God to the poor and defended them, who denounced and unmasked oppressors, and who was persecuted by them, condemned to death and executed, and who throughout all this kept his trust in a God who is Father and his openness

³⁸ Jon Sobrino, "The Resurrection of One Crucified: Hope and a Way of Living," *Concillium*, 2006/5: *The Resurrection of the Dead*, eds. Andrés Torres Queiruga, Luiz Carlos Susin and Jon Sobrino (London: SCM Press, 2006), 101.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

to the will of a Father who always showed himself as God, ineffable, beyond manipulation.⁴⁰

Sobrino understands the resurrection of Christ as more than just a miraculous event. He says, “*Resurrection...means first and foremost doing justice to a victim, not merely giving new life to a corpse.*”⁴¹ With the resurrection of Jesus, resurrection takes on a very specific meaning, which includes seeking justice for victims. Through Jesus, we can see that the resurrection highlights God the Father’s commitment to justice. But for women engaged in faith-based activism, resurrection is about rising from the reality of their own situations and becoming agents of their own histories. They too are seeking justice for victims as well as freedom from oppression.

The reality principle can help elucidate the relationship between theology and the activism of women who are striving to end gender-based violence because these women are constantly faced with the harsh reality of poverty and oppression. The reality principle calls on believers to share the burden of reality with those who experience the most difficult realities. The reality of Jesus’ life and resurrection elucidates the lives of other victims of oppression and injustice. Faith-based communities of women are also working to illuminate victims of injustice. The reality of the resurrection offers evidence of God’s presence in the world and his love for those who have been unjustly crucified.

Grassroots organizations can call on more privileged believers to understand the reality principle as a way to gain support for their work. Women need more resources so that they can continue to be heard. When they ask others to help bear the burden of their realities, they continue to build stronger networks and alliances. Those of us who have

⁴⁰ Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor*, 101.

⁴¹ Sobrino, “The Resurrection of One Crucified,” 102.

chosen to stand with women in solidarity need to do more in terms of taking responsibility for the reality of gender-based violence and femicide. The reality principle reminds us that the resurrection does not end with Jesus, but extends to all victims.

3. **The Crucified of History:** Another important concept that contributes to Sobrino's theology of resurrection is the idea of the poor in Latin America as the "crucified of history." Sobrino often refers to the poor in Latin America as "the crucified peoples," which is another term he says he borrowed from Ellacuría. Sobrino specifically uses the term "crucified peoples" instead of talking about the people of Latin America as members of the "Third World," "Global South," or "Developing Countries."⁴² He believes that "crucified peoples" is a more accurate way to talk about those who are suffering in Latin America because, although terms like "Third World" and "Global South" attempt to convey that something is wrong, "such language does not communicate [just] how wrong."⁴³ By using the term "the crucified peoples," we can more appropriately convey "the historical enormity of the disaster"⁴⁴ of Latin American poverty and oppression.

The crucified of history are victims of oppression and injustice in ways that can easily be compared to the victimhood of Jesus. Sobrino notes, "*Crucified peoples* is useful and necessary language at the real level of fact, because *cross* means death, and death is what the Latin American peoples are subjected to in thousands of ways."⁴⁵ The

⁴² Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 50.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

realities of death in Latin America have been intensified since Sobrino first made this claim in 1994. Since then, Latin America has seen a significant increase in violence, which can be marked through the number of lives claimed by femicide and gang violence. Institutional structures have let violence become a part of the dominant culture in many Latin American cities, which has led to more suffering and death. These deaths are often “caused by the poverty generated by unjust structures,”⁴⁶ but they have also been caused by waves of rampant violence. Sobrino feels that the term “crucified peoples” is an accurate way to describe the intensified suffering in Latin America. Sobrino, does not however, comment on the fact that women are far more likely to be victims of poverty and violence in his explanation of the term “crucified peoples.” Although Sobrino likely intends the term “crucified peoples” to refer to both women and men, he fails to recognize that women, due to their status in society, are far more vulnerable than men in Latin America. This very important difference will be examined later in this chapter.

“The crucified of history” serves as an accurate way to describe the poor in Latin America for a number of reasons. Sobrino correctly points out that the term “crucified” refers to a certain type of death. He says, “To die crucified does not mean simply to die, but to be put to death; it means that there are victims and there are executioners.”⁴⁷ The poor in Latin America are dying at higher rates because of conditions that are beyond their control. They are dying at the hands of those who have power and are not taking sufficient precautions to prevent these deaths. Sobrino says that the cross of the Latin American people “has been inflicted on them by the various empires that have taken

⁴⁶ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 50.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

power over the continent: the Spanish and Portuguese yesterday, the U.S. and its allies today.”⁴⁸ The cross that has been foisted upon them unfairly burdens Latin Americans, and those who are responsible for their unjust suffering have not resolved the problems that they have caused.

The term “crucified peoples” is also an accurate portrayal of the Latin American peoples because it conjures the image of the cross, which has specific connotations in Latin America. Sobrino says that on the level of religion, the cross “evokes sin and grace, condemnation and salvation, human action and God’s action.”⁴⁹ As we have seen, crosses mean something very specific in Latin America. They are reminiscent of Jesus’ crucifixion. Calling the poor “the crucified peoples” reminds us of the cross of Jesus and God’s presence at Jesus’ crucifixion. God was close to the cross of Christ at his crucifixion. We can infer from this that God is also present at the crucifixions of the poor. God’s presence can be felt among the crucified of history. Sobrino quotes Ellacuría who has said, “This sign [of God’s presence in our world] is always the historically crucified people.”⁵⁰ Sobrino has called for us to reimagine the poor of Latin America as the crucified peoples because of the reality of their situation. The ethical response that is required of us becomes more immediate and we are called to respond to them more directly.

Even though Sobrino does not address the reality of gender-based violence or femicide in his writing, his metaphor of the “crucified peoples” can extend to those who are victims of this type of violence specifically. The economic and governmental

⁴⁸ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 50.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

structures that currently exist in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras have allowed the rates of femicide to rise, and have resulted in the deaths of more women. These women have been memorialized with small crosses, signaling the connections that their loved ones are making between their crucifixions and the crucifixion of Christ. Although the empirical forces that Sobrino blames for causing large numbers of “crucifixions” in Latin America contribute to the institutional violence in these countries, the oppression of women through a culture of machismo and marianismo is also greatly to blame. Women have been excluded from the political choices that shape some of the major institutions in Latin America, and as a result of their exclusion, social structures have been built in such a way that women continue to be victimized and oppressed. Women need to be included at all levels of politics in order to ensure that women’s safety and human dignity is recognized and respected. The term “crucified of history” therefore refers to women in a unique and definite way. Women have been crucified by the same structures that have crucified all Latin Americans, but the cross of oppression, inflicted on them by their fellow countrymen, has also significantly burdened them. Sobrino’s language of crucifixion forces us respond to this urgent issue with greater immediacy.

4. Hope of the Victims: The resurrection offers hope in the midst of suffering. Sobrino’s understanding of the resurrection relates to the way he keeps victims at the center of his theology because he sees the resurrection as a symbol of “hope, directly for the victims.”⁵¹ He says that we need to understand “the resurrection in its essential relationship to the victims, so that the hope it unleashes should, above all, be hope for

⁵¹ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 12.

these victims.”⁵² Victims of poverty, as well as the families of femicide victims, are in need of the hope that is generated by the power of the resurrection. Knowledge of the resurrection can inspire others to participate in actions that create movements. These movements create waves of hope, which can contribute to changing society. Looking at Jesus’ death on the cross, the poor in Latin America, also known as the crucified people of history, can align themselves with the Christ who was raised from death and triumphed over evil.

For Sobrino, the most startling reality about the resurrection is that the Jesus who was victimized and crucified is the same Jesus who was resurrected. As he says, “The central affirmation is that ‘the risen one is the crucified one.’”⁵³ The narrative of Jesus as a victim gets transformed when we understand that Jesus was raised from the dead as the fulfillment of justice for all victims of history. Jesus was not chosen arbitrarily by God to be resurrected. Instead, his “resurrection is presented as God’s response to the unjust, criminal action of human beings.”⁵⁴ The resurrection of Jesus shows the power of God as well as God’s commitment to justice for victims.

Death is understood a variety of ways in different cultures, but the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus have shaped how practitioners within Christianity understand death. Sobrino says, “In the Christian tradition the fate of human beings is understood in the light of the fate of Jesus.”⁵⁵ He says that “Jesus did not end his life ‘in the fullness of days’ but as a ‘victim,’ and that his resurrection did not consist in giving life back to a

⁵² Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 12.

⁵³ Sobrino, “The Resurrection of One Crucified,” 101.

⁵⁴ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), 149.

⁵⁵ Sobrino, “The Resurrection of One Crucified,” 101.

corpse but in giving justice back to a victim.”⁵⁶ For women who are mourning their deceased mothers and daughters, this understanding of the resurrection is a helpful way to think about reclaiming justice. The resurrection of Christ highlights Jesus as a victim of injustice the same way women who are being murdered throughout Latin America are victims of unjust systems.

The resurrection is a symbol of hope for those who have been oppressed. The resurrection of Christ, says Sobrino, “introduces *hope* into history, into human beings, into the collaborative consciousness, as a sort of historical life-experience capable of giving shape to everything.”⁵⁷ He stresses, however, that the hope offered through the resurrection is especially important for the poor and the crucified of history – those who have regularly been victims of oppression and injustice.⁵⁸ Hope in something better is available through the promise of the resurrection for women who are working for social change and an end to violence. Sobrino makes the point that the resurrection should not be offered as mere doctrine, but should be accompanied by a loving presence and solidarity. When the resurrection is preached as the “good news” of Christ, and when that good news is offered to the poor by members of the non-poor, like Archbishop Romero, then victims of history can cultivate a sense of hope from the reality of the resurrection.⁵⁹ Sobrino says, “There is...an essential relationship between poor (victims, crucified peoples) and hope of good news.”⁶⁰ Hope in the resurrection can be generated

⁵⁶ Sobrino, “The Resurrection of One Crucified,” 101.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶⁰ Jon Sobrino, “A Total Jubilee: Giving Hope to the Poor and Receiving it from Them,” *Concillium*, 1999/5: 2000: *Reality and Hope*, eds. Virgil Elizondo and Jon Sobrino (London: SCM Press, 1999), 111.

through an understanding of Jesus' position as a victim and in his rising from the dead as the fulfillment of God's promise of justice. Sobrino makes an important distinction when he claims that this hope is possible within history, and not only eschatologically.

Catholics in El Salvador had long felt that hope was an important virtue, but their hope for peace was often outside of history, in heaven with God. Sobrino has said that the realization of hope is actually possible in this life, and we should continue to strive for it.

Sobrino raises important questions about what we can practically expect of the resurrection. He asks, "What hope – and how realistic a hope – has a crucified people of becoming a risen people? How much truth is there in faith that God is a God of life, that God did justice to an innocent victim by raising him from the dead?"⁶¹ We know that questions about God and about justice surround situations where suffering is grave.

Sobrino says that struggling with these questions "is a matter of the human problem of hope, though not of any hope, but the hope of victims."⁶² Victims especially are in a position to question God's presence when they are in the midst of suffering. But rather than questioning God's love, Sobrino wants the poor in Latin America "to live as risen people...and to have the victims' hope that God will triumph over injustice."⁶³ Sobrino wants those who are suffering to be especially secure in their knowledge of God's love. Those in positions of privilege need to acknowledge the harsh realities of daily life in Latin America while at the same time encouraging victims to hope for something greater.

The resurrection reminds us to support those who have been marginalized and oppressed. Sobrino posits that the primary recipients of the hope of the resurrection

⁶¹ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 15.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

should be those who have been crucified in history – victims of violence and oppression. Sobrino says we can view the resurrection as a source of inspiration and motivation if we recognize that “God raised a crucified man, and since then there is hope for the crucified.”⁶⁴ The crucified of history are those who have been crushed by the pressure of violence and poverty. But Sobrino wants to claim that victims of historic violence can know that Jesus was raised from the dead, which, he says, “gives them the courage to hope in their own resurrection, and they can now take heart to live in history.”⁶⁵ To consider one’s own resurrection in relation to the resurrection of Christ will allow individuals and communities to believe in a greater future. Victims of oppression can see their own story in the story of Jesus and their own opportunities for new life through Jesus’ resurrection. There is therefore, a significant relationship between the resurrection of Christ and the victims of Latin America.

Sobrino outlines what the resurrection of Jesus means for humanity today. He wants to know, “What is it that Jesus’ resurrection reveals?”⁶⁶ The resurrection can dictate how humans see themselves in relation to God and to the work of the Kingdom of God. The promise of the resurrection motivates us to participate in advocacy and activism that can accomplish meaningful goals. The eradication of femicide is possible through the work of women who are striving to be seen and heard by figures of authority. Sobrino’s theology of the resurrection can be used as a resource for communities who are doing this work and trying to make sense of the deaths of their loved ones.

⁶⁴ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 43.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

The resurrection of Christ reveals to us something about our own humanity. Those who are fighting gender-based violence can embrace the shared embodiment of being with one another and with Christ. Sobrino says that his “purpose is...to understand humanity from the God who is revealed in Jesus’ pasch.”⁶⁷ The relationship between God and humanity is highlighted through the lens of the resurrection because of the presence of God’s love and the “creatureliness” of Jesus as a resurrected being. Looking at this human-divine relationship Sobrino says, “Starting from the resurrection, we can say that God is the *liberator of victims*, in whom we can trust, but this liberator is still God, to whom we must surrender.”⁶⁸ Through the resurrection, we can see that God is both the one who frees and the one who guides. We are free in one sense and even more tightly bound to God in another, which, paradoxically, is the ultimate freedom.

The resurrection illustrates the way that God is on the side of the oppressed. God sides with the victim and that realization inspires hope. We can see this today through the life of Romero and the martyrs of El Salvador. Sobrino says that the view of the resurrection from the perspective of victims can “open our eyes to the relationship between God and what is small. ... This means God taking on, and respecting, humanity not only as distinct from himself but as small, weak, limited and mortal.”⁶⁹ God’s love for humans is illuminated by the fact that Jesus, a human victim, was raised from the dead.

The concept of the resurrection providing hope for victims fits perfectly into the conversation about the relationship between activism and theology. Women participating

⁶⁷ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 93.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

in activism that opposes gender-based violence need hope in order to continue their work. Hope and activism have a unique, cyclical relationship because, as we have seen, participation in this type of activism generates hope, but hope is also necessary to commit to this type of activism and continue in this struggle. We can see how hope and activism are therefore interrelated and how they are both necessary to make significant changes.

The resurrection can be seen as providing hope for victims and for women in Latin America who have been burdened in a number of ways. Women in Latin America are being oppressed by unjust structures and by a culture that values male experience more highly than women's. Those in positions of authority have not acknowledged women's voices and women remain powerless. They are victims of cultures of violence and machismo as well as institutions that have oppressed them by simply ignoring them. Women have also been literal victims of femicide. The families and friends of those women have suffered unjust losses and grieve for lives that have been cut short. A greater sense of hope needs to be infused into this situation.

The activism in which many women partake helps generate hope through participation. The act of doing something, like participating in a funerary procession or protest, creates community and provides women with a sense of meaning and purpose. To hope in a greater future is a risk that women in Latin America are willing to take. Women need to be able to hope for a future that will be safer for themselves and their daughters.

5. The Reign of God: The reign of God is another important concept that relates to Sobrino's Christology of resurrection. The reign of God for Sobrino refers to a notion of utopia and liberation. Liberation is about constructing positive ways that the Kingdom

of God can be a more realistic presence in the lives of all individuals, but especially the poor. Sobrino appropriately says that “God’s ‘Kingdom’ is what comes to pass in this world when God truly reigns: a history, a society, a people transformed according to the will of God...The Kingdom of God is...a highly positive reality, good news but also a reality highly critical of the bad and unjust present.”⁷⁰ The bad and unjust present is not to be tolerated, but Sobrino recognizes that evil persists in the world. The reign of God can be understood through the resurrection of Jesus since Jesus’ resurrection signifies the liberation of victims over unjust structures, and the reign of God seeks liberation for the oppressed.

The reign of God has more recently been retrieved as the central message of Jesus’ ministry, which offers the poor a place of priority within Christianity. Sobrino says, “The most fundamental thing about the Kingdom of God...is that it is ‘*only* for the poor.’”⁷¹ The preferential option for the poor is apparent here through Sobrino’s assertion that the poor are the central focus of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God refers to the final fulfillment of God’s reign, but it also includes systems of justice and peace that may be historically realized. For those who are not suffering from oppression or being victimized, the Kingdom of God is less of an immediate necessity. The Kingdom of God is then, primarily for the poor. When Sobrino says, “the poor,” he means “those for whom the minimum of life is a heavy burden and who are marginalized and despised.”⁷² This definition encompasses a significant group of people, but it does

⁷⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 71.

⁷¹ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 335.

⁷² *Ibid.*

not highlight the extraordinarily heavy burden that women in Latin America are forced to bear.

The ministerial life of Jesus, for Sobrino, is as important as the reality of Jesus' resurrection. In the gospels, Jesus preaches the reign of God and ministers to the poor and marginalized. Sobrino infers from Jesus that the kingdom is for those who are outcasts in society. He says that, "Jesus proclaimed the kingdom as good news to the poor (Luke 4:18, cf. 7:22; Matt. 11:5) and declared that it was made up of the poor (Luke 6:20; cf. Matt. 5:3)."⁷³ It is possible then for Sobrino to compare the relationship of Jesus and the poor in the gospels to Jesus and the poor in Latin America. The reign of God, it is determined, is therefore, for the poor in Latin America. Historically, Sobrino says that "the Christology of the New Testament developed out of two things: (1) the experience of Jesus' *resurrection*, and (2) the memory of what was fundamental in his *earthly life*."⁷⁴ He argues that what is important about Jesus' earthly life is the commitment Jesus shows to the reign of God and to standing with those who have been oppressed.

Jesus' work for the reign of God is mirrored in the work of grassroots organizations that are striving to end gender-based violence. The social justice that Jesus tried to establish during his time on earth was as important to his overall message as the reality of his resurrection. Jesus' quest for social justice involved the inclusion of those on the margins and those who were generally considered outcasts. Jesus wanted to see structures created that provided for every individual's needs. He did not want people to be left out of society and treated as less-than citizens. The ministry of Jesus and the

⁷³ Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, 142.

⁷⁴ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 334.

resurrection of Christ are both indicative of God's love for those who are in the midst of suffering.

Sobrino says, "The kingdom of God, that which is to be built, is therefore the antithesis of the situation of those who are most deprived of life."⁷⁵ The reality of the reign of God is the opposite of the suffering and oppression that the poor in Latin America face, but in order to understand the reign of God, it is important to "adopt the viewpoint of those who lack life, power and dignity, and not pretend there can be another and better viewpoint than theirs."⁷⁶ Adopting the viewpoint of those on the margins is critically important for Sobrino since he sees this perspective as the most valuable one. We can identify the reign of God by understanding the reality of the poor and by viewing the ways in which Jesus related to them in the gospels. The viewpoint of those who have been oppressed is therefore the most valid and illustrative. Jesus' actions, words and ministry illustrate the reign of God on earth.

The reign of God is an important concept for women who are fighting gender-based violence because it gives them something toward which they can strive when they are working to rectify unjust structures in society. The reign of God serves as a notion of utopia where there is freedom from injustice, especially for the poor and victims of history. Grassroots organizations like those in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras can use the reign of God as a point on the horizon for which they keep reaching. Sobrino and other liberation theologians believe that the reign of God is attainable in this life, and women can look to this theology as a motivational resource that offers them an idea of what is possible in the future.

⁷⁵ Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, 143.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Jesus preaches the coming of the reign of God throughout the gospels. Women engaging in grassroots activism can identify what they are doing with the coming of the reign of God, when justice and love will reign supreme. The reign of God is a utopia that will be difficult to attain, but we should continue to embrace the idea that it is possible despite whatever limitations we are facing. The resurrection of Christ is related to the reign of God because we can see the perfection of God's love in the resurrection, just like we can see the perfection of God's love through untainted structures of justice. Women can continue to hope for the coming reign of God by embracing love, justice, and truth.

All of these concepts – “living as risen beings,” “the reality principle,” “the crucified of history,” “hope of victims,” and “the reign of God” – contribute to Sobrino's Christology of resurrection. Looking at communities of women fighting gender-based violence through the lens of this theology allows us to see how the activism of these communities and a theology of resurrection are deeply intertwined. Women participating in protest activities can use Sobrino's theology of resurrection as a resource when they are in need of hope or motivation. Women are also changing the ways that we understand these important concepts through their activism and engagement.

Gender-based violence needs to be stopped completely, and only people and organizations with an eye towards creating a utopia through the reign of God, inspired by hope will be able to achieve this goal. Women can see themselves through the concepts of living as risen beings and also the crucified of history. The resurrection, however, shows us that God's love for us is unending, especially if “the crucified” identify their lives with the life of Jesus, and with his past and future.

Sobrino's Christology: Orthodoxy, Orthopraxis, Orthopathy

The ideas of orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy also serve as hallmarks of Sobrino's theology.⁷⁷ As we will see, communities of women exemplify orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy through their activism. These three ideas further link Sobrino's Christology to the work of activist women.

Sobrino asserts that orthodoxy refers to the theories and doctrines that help us "formulate faith correctly."⁷⁸ Orthodoxy is taught through the doctrines of the faith. When looking at the life and ministry of Jesus, however, Sobrino highlights the importance of orthopraxis, which refers to right actions and practices from within the tradition. He says, "Jesus' life is known to demonstrate the priority accorded to orthopraxis over orthodoxy."⁷⁹ Although orthopraxis is a critical component of Sobrino's Christology, orthodoxy and orthopraxis are linked together, and "they are realities that respond each to different aspects of the reality of human beings."⁸⁰ Orthopraxis teaches us to engage with others and to be in solidarity with those who are poor and marginalized. Sobrino says, "The basic foundation of orthopraxis is extremely simple: it is good that God should be a God for the victims of this world, and it good that we should be the same."⁸¹ As Jesus has indicated in the New Testament,⁸² orthopraxis has

⁷⁷ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 210. In *Christ the Liberator*, Sobrino introduces the concept of *orthopathy* to orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

⁷⁸ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 157.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 189. *Jesus the Liberator* precedes *Christ the Liberator* by seven years but illustrates part of Sobrino's Christology through the life of Jesus.

⁸¹ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 190.

⁸² The Parable of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) and The Parable of the Last Judgment (Matt 25: 31-46) are both offered as examples of times when orthopraxis was prioritized over orthodoxy in *Jesus the Liberator* (190-191). Throughout the New Testament, Jesus values the practices of those on the margins more highly than those who

“theological supremacy”⁸³ over orthodoxy, but both orthodoxy and orthopraxis illustrate lived Christianity.

The Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) has criticized Sobrino, as well as other liberation theologians, for prioritizing orthopraxis over orthodoxy within Christianity. In 1984, the CDF, headed by Prefect Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) issued a document called *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation.”* This document included ten points that the CDF felt needed further clarification within liberation theology, as well as a warning for those writing and teaching liberation theology. Point Ten, “A New Hermeneutic,” raises the issue of “praxis.” The document says that the dependence by some liberation theologians on “revolutionary praxis” reveals not theology, but “reflections of class interests.”⁸⁴ It goes on to say, “Because of this classist presupposition, it becomes very difficult, not to say impossible to engage in a real dialogue with some ‘theologians of liberation.’”⁸⁵ The CDF says that liberation theologians “start out with the idea, more or less consciously, that the viewpoint of the oppressed and revolutionary class, which is their own, is the single true point of view.”⁸⁶ Sobrino does take the viewpoint of the oppressed class as the single true point of view because he believes that drawing attention to the plight of the poor is a critical part of his vocation as a minister, and that it is

are following the letter of the law. He prefers the widow’s meager offering (Mark 12:41-44) more highly than the larger offerings of wealthier temple patrons and he is not concerned when his disciples have not washed their hands before eating (Mark 7:1-23).

⁸³ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 191.

⁸⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation,”* August 6, 1984, X.3, accessed January 6, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

necessary to bring the reign of God into the present. The CDF does not agree with this position. The CDF has also been critical of the fact that from the perspective of liberation theology, “‘orthodoxy’ or the right rule of faith is substituted by the notion of ‘orthopraxy’ as the criterion of the truth.”⁸⁷ The CDF felt that this de-centralization of orthodoxy was inappropriate, but according to Sobrino, as well as other liberation theologians, orthopraxis does need to be at the heart of theological discernment.⁸⁸ Sobrino’s understanding of how orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy fit together is an important part of his Christology, and it requires further investigation. These three concepts also apply to women engaging in faith-based activism. Looking at these concepts through Sobrino’s understanding of them illuminates how women protesting and engaging in practices of resistance are utilizing them.

Juan Alfaro, in the Foreword of Sobrino’s *Jesus in Latin America* says about the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxis:

The confessional, decisional, and praxis aspects of faith are united with one another, and only their unity constitutes the fullness of faith. The same is true regarding the connection between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Accordingly, although the theological understanding of faith has need of distinguishing these

⁸⁷ CDF, *Instruction on Certain Aspects*.

⁸⁸ Sobrino was later issued an official notification by the CDF in 2006 for his writing about the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ - Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification on the works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ: Jesucristo liberador. Lectura histórico-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret* (Madrid, 1991) and *La fe en Jesucristo, Ensayo desde las víctimas* (San Salvador, 1999), November 26, 2006, accessed January 6, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20061126_notification-sobrino_en.html.

aspects, the ‘indispensability’ precisely of each of them and of their unity must be set in relief in order to have an authentic and fully Christian faith.⁸⁹

In looking at the significance of orthodoxy and orthopraxis in Sobrino’s Christology, it is clear that orthodoxy and orthopraxis necessarily rely on one another. Sobrino looks at the Gospel of Matthew, 8:20-22, saying that, when Jesus is gathering disciples and one man says, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father,” and Jesus replies, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead,” this shows how radical following Jesus is meant to be.⁹⁰ Sobrino says that this also illustrates the way that the “synoptics, then, warn against the danger of separating orthodoxy and orthopraxis and of the uselessness of the former without the latter.”⁹¹ Orthodoxy and orthopraxis are inextricably related to one another, and relate to both proclaiming faith in Jesus and following him radically.

In *Christ the Liberator*, Sobrino says that what is most important about Christian life is that “God should be served in truth.”⁹² He asserts that this truth is served not through a verbally orthodox response, but through orthopraxis. His evidence for this comes from the gospel passage that reads, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven”(Matthew 7:21). Instead, Sobrino says, “The response has to be one of praxis: “[doing] the will of my Father”(Matthew 7:21).⁹³ Again, however, Sobrino notes the importance of keeping orthodoxy and orthopraxis connected to one another rather than ranking one as more important than another. He stresses the fact that orthodoxy and orthopraxis cannot be separated from one another. He says that

⁸⁹ Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, Foreword by Juan Alfaro. Xii.

⁹⁰ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 157.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 189.

⁹³ Ibid.

his theological insights are not meant “to oppose orthodoxy and orthopraxis, nor can they be opposed, since they are realities that respond each to different aspects of the reality of human beings. What has to be clarified is what is at the service of what.”⁹⁴ Orthodoxy and orthopraxis play uniquely important roles in shaping Christian life.

Orthopraxis, according to Sobrino, allows us to enter into right relationship with God. “If God is word, voice,” says Sobrino, “then we must necessarily listen and answer, and in this we achieve our right relationship with God.”⁹⁵ Our response to God’s word and the actions that we take as a result of listening to God are illustrations of orthopraxis. The choices that we make in response to understanding God’s word help develop our relationship with God. According to Sobrino, “We have to put the word we have heard into action.”⁹⁶ In the Christian tradition, our actions correspond to what we believe God wants for us, which allows us to deepen our relationships with God. This, Sobrino says, affirms “the irreplaceable and essential nature of orthopraxis, since without it we simply do not enter into a right relationship with the God of the Bible.”⁹⁷ Orthopraxis serves as a decision to respond to God’s call, and it becomes a means through which we draw closer to God.

The idea of orthodoxy and orthopraxis working together helps us develop a robust theology, supported by both a strong faith and practices that enrich our lives as well as the lives of others. Sobrino says that even though orthodoxy is important, “we express our humanity more in doing than in saying.”⁹⁸ This is especially true of actions that lead

⁹⁴ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 189.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 190.

to a greater sense of justice. “The specific doing of justice,” notes Sobrino, “remakes the reality of God in history.”⁹⁹ Orthopraxis offers us the opportunity to seek justice in concrete ways, and to engage in actions that make justice a greater possibility. Sobrino says that “orthopraxis is, then, response to God, corresponding to God’s reality.”¹⁰⁰ God wants greater justice on earth and freedom from oppression for those who have been victims. Orthopraxis relates to our ability to participate in the reign of God by working to create a more just and loving world. God’s desire for a more just world can be seen through the fact that God is on the side of those who have been victims. Orthopraxis is what we do to aid those victims and draw closer to God.

Theologian David Tracy has said, “The ultimate test of orthodox Christianity is the test of a genuinely Christian way of life.”¹⁰¹ Here, he refers to the relationship between orthodox belief and the choices we make about how we will live a Christian life, or orthopraxis. Tracy posits, “Right belief is an important aspect of Christian consciousness. But right beliefs...have always been assumed to be directly related to right actions (*ortho-praxis*).”¹⁰² In this way, we can see that Tracy agrees with Sobrino’s claim that orthodoxy and orthopraxis are linked. Orthodoxy inspires good orthopraxis and orthopraxis is less valuable unless it is coupled with orthodoxy. “Christian doctrines,” Tracy asserts, “were basically constituted by constant fidelity to distinctive spiritual

⁹⁹ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 190.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ David Tracy, “Hermeneutics of Orthodoxy,” *Concillium 2014/2: Christian Orthodoxy 2014/2*, eds. Felix Wilfred and Daniel Pilario (London: SCM Press, 2014), 71.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

practices, both communal...and individual.”¹⁰³ The relationship of orthodoxy and orthopraxis is important throughout Christian history.

Orthodoxy and orthopraxis, Sobrino asserts, contribute to our understanding of Jesus as “good news.” “Orthodoxy,” he says in a 2014 article, “must be accompanied by right behavior in following Jesus, by *orthopraxis*, and has to be affected by Jesus of Nazareth in the right way.”¹⁰⁴ The way to orthodoxy is through understanding and accepting Jesus. Sobrino says that “it is right and helpful to let ourselves be affected by the beginning of John’s prologue...But it won’t do us much good if...we don’t grasp the real Jesus who pitched his tent among us, allowing ourselves to be affected by him and deciding to follow him.”¹⁰⁵ We need to understand Jesus in a real, historic, concrete way in order to be inspired to believe the orthodox teachings about him and reach a point where we are moved to call ourselves his disciples. The orthodox belief in Jesus as “good news” also “demands orthopraxis.”¹⁰⁶ Jesus as good news also illustrates Jesus’ loving relationships with humans. This relationality that Jesus has with human beings as well as with God the Father is what Sobrino calls “orthopathy, right affection.”¹⁰⁷

Sobrino notes that Jesus’s relationality is evident from the fact that “he was a trusting man who rested in a God who was Father, ‘Abba’, and a man of solitude in the face of a Father who goes on being God and does not let him rest.”¹⁰⁸ This relationality, implies Sobrino, is what allows us to understand Jesus as good news. This is how we can

¹⁰³ Tracy, “Hermeneutics of Orthodoxy,” 72.

¹⁰⁴ Jon Sobrino, “Orthodoxy when the Christ is Jesus.” *Concillium 2014/2: Christian Orthodoxy*, eds. Felix Wilfred and Daniel Pilario (London: SCM Press, 2014), 92.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

understand orthopathy. Sobrino's understanding of orthopathy is influenced by his Jesuit charism. The Ignatian idea of "Finding God in all things"¹⁰⁹ resonates with the orthopathy that Sobrino describes and relates to the presence of God in our imaginations and relationships.

The concept of *orthopathy* is introduced in Sobrino's *Christ the Liberator*. Orthopathy is "the correct way of letting ourselves be affected by the reality of Christ."¹¹⁰ Christian life includes allowing oneself to be moved spiritually, imaginatively and responsively by Christ. Sobrino says that Christians are able to witness orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy within the experience of Jesus in the New Testament. He says that Jesus "proclaims and initiates the *Kingdom of God*...to which we respond substantially in orthopraxis." Christians are called to respond to the reign of God by serving the kingdom through acts of love, truth, and justice, especially for those on the margins. Sobrino says, "Jesus' *pasch*, his death and resurrection...is gospel, to which we respond substantially in orthodoxy."¹¹¹ The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus compose significant teachings within the Christian tradition. Sobrino also says, "*Jesus' manner of being* in his service to the Kingdom of God, and in his relationship to the Father, is gospel, to which we respond substantially in *orthopathy*."¹¹² This response from believers is more emotional, and it pertains to the spiritual lives of Christians. Orthopathy therefore has to do with our human ability to feel and to be moved by reality.

¹⁰⁹ The idea of "finding God in all things" is at the heart of the Jesuit charism. Since St. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Jesuits, we can say that this idea is an important part of Ignatian spirituality.

¹¹⁰ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 210.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

The orthopathic manner of Jesus illustrates his relationship with both God the Father and the reign of God. Sobrino says that “Jesus’ *manner of being*... goes beyond his message, his activity and his praxis.”¹¹³ He raises important questions about the affections and spirit of Jesus. “Jesus was in fact confessed as mediator of the Kingdom of God,” notes Sobrino, “but this does not yet say *how* he was a mediator, what spirit he brought to carrying out his mission if and how he won the love and trust of the weak, what credibility he had for them.”¹¹⁴ Jesus, while he was on earth, was able to serve as the mediator of the Kingdom of God because his general manner allowed him to relate to people and translate the love of God to the masses. Sobrino introduces the orthopathy of Jesus as a way to investigate what kind of person Jesus is. Jesus is a man “who, by his manner of being, brings joy and is, therefore, good news.”¹¹⁵ Jesus’ manner is noted several times in the Bible in small ways. For example, Acts of the Apostles states that Jesus “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil”(Acts 10:38).¹¹⁶ Passages such as these illustrate Jesus’ right feeling and his manner of being.

Sobrino explains orthopathy by examining what it was about Jesus that made others interpret him as good news (or eu-aggelion). Jesus’ persona was unique. Sobrino says:

What made such an impression was undoubtedly Jesus’s *message* of hope, his *liberating* deeds – miracles, casting out demons, welcoming outcasts – and his work of denouncing and unmasking the powerful; that is to say, his service to the Kingdom of God was what attracted their attention. But his *manner of being* and

¹¹³ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 210.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 211.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

making the Kingdom also had a great impact. In Jesus they saw someone who spoke with authority, convinced of what he said, not like those unreasonable fanatics or salaried officials.¹¹⁷

Jesus' manner of being and his ability to care about other people meant that he was understood as good news for those around him. We can look at Jesus' general way of being in the world as a way to measure our own right feeling and our relationships. We can see the "positive impact Jesus made through his actual manner of being."¹¹⁸

Sobrinó's incorporation of Jesus' orthopathy makes his Christology unique, but also offers us the opportunity to reflect on how this Christology affects the wider world.

Scholar Lisa Cahill interprets orthopathy as an important part of doing theological ethics. She says, "To be practically effective, theological and ethical ideals must grip people and communities at more than an intellectual or theoretical level,"¹¹⁹ and she mentions the way orthopathy gets paired with orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Orthopathy allows us to engage with ethical ideals beyond the theoretical level. Cahill says, "To do what is right requires an attraction to the good, commitment to its reality, and the imagination to see possibilities of goodness that stretch beyond present conditions."¹²⁰ In this way, orthopathy helps us to engage in ethical behavior because it allows us to imagine circumstances that are better than the present, and it helps motivate us to do what is right. We can trust our feelings and respond to that which encourages us toward the good.

¹¹⁷ Sobrinó, *Christ the Liberator*, 211.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Lisa Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), 6.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

The notions of orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy, as Sobrino has outlined them, directly relate to the work of grassroots organizations that are actively fighting gender-based violence. We can see how the activism of women who are working in faith-based grassroots organizations includes orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy. These three concepts are present in the faith-based activism of women in Latin America. Orthodoxy is present in the work of women because, in Latin America, communities of faith are engaging with scriptural texts in new ways that allow them to see how the Bible can be liberating. Orthopraxis is present in the way these communities participate in practices and protests that generate hope and solidarity. Orthopathy is present in this activism through the way women see themselves as a result of participating in these activities. They come to understand that they have the capacity to make a difference in the world. Through a better understanding of orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy, we can recognize the fact that women's faith-based activism includes all three of these theological concepts. We are able to see how these aspects of Sobrino's Christology are aligned with the activism of these women. We will further highlight the ways faith-based organizations are utilizing Christian orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy as resources to aid them in their struggle in Chapter 3.

Limits of Sobrino

Although Sobrino serves as an extremely helpful theological resource for women struggling against the realities of gender-based violence, he could be an even stronger advocate for women if he recognized the unique circumstances of women more completely. In this way, there are limits to what Sobrino's theology is able to accomplish, and it becomes necessary to introduce a gender lens to Sobrino's theology.

Sobrino asserts his theological position from the perspective of victims, which is a helpful way of calling attention to the plight of the poor in Latin America. Latina theologians, however, have criticized Sobrino for not speaking adequately about their unique position as victims of oppression. When Sobrino talks about “the poor” in Latin America, he does not differentiate between the struggles of men and the challenges that women face on a daily basis. The realities of life for men in Latin America differ significantly from the realities of life for women, which Sobrino does not address. Although Sobrino is sensitive to the needs of “the poor” and even “the crucified of history,” these terms do not recognize the differences that exist among communities and situations.

Sobrino has acknowledged the fact that his theology does not necessarily speak to the concerns of women. At one point in *Christ the Liberator*, he recognizes that his theology does not account for specific gender issues. At the beginning of this book, in indicating where the limits of his work lie, Sobrino says that his goal is not to analyze present-day systematic Christologies, and he continues saying, “Nor do I examine the new christological essays now issuing from indigenous and African-American contexts, from gender and ecological concerns, and from interfaith dialogue.”¹²¹ He says that “these essays strike [him] as both necessary and positive,” but he only makes “brief allusions” to them.¹²² Latina scholars have replied by saying that if Sobrino is going to talk about the poor in Latin America, he needs to address the concerns raised by gender-based violence and women’s oppression.

¹²¹ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 2.

¹²² *Ibid.*

Although many scholars consider Sobrino to be one of the strongest voices within liberation theology, Sobrino has been criticized by Latina scholars for not considering the specific situation of women in Latin America. What is at stake here is misunderstanding “the poor” and seeing this term as merely an abstraction rather than a multitude of realities that need to be addressed. In Latin America (and indeed in most of the world), the majority of “the poor” are women and children. If we want to talk about the liberation of the poor, we need to address the issues that are of particular concern to women who are living in poverty.

Unlike Sobrino, there are several Latina theologians who claim that it is impossible to talk about the needs of the poor without talking about the specific needs of women. María Pilar Aquino is an example of one such scholar. Aquino, as a fellow liberation theologian, has expressed gratitude for the work of Sobrino, but also thinks that his work needs to go further. Aquino works to illustrate the unique perspective of Latina women in her theology, and she has been disappointed by Sobrino’s lack of attention to women’s issues. In an address given in 1995 at the CTSA,¹²³ Aquino responded to Sobrino’s discussion of theology and reality. While she agreed with an outline of Sobrino’s proposed relationship between theology and reality, she also said, “The most pervasive reality, and therefore the most scandalous and most in need of salvation, is violence against women.”¹²⁴ She wanted to highlight the fact that women’s realities need to be more fully acknowledged.

¹²³ CTSA stands for “The Catholic Theological Society of America.”

¹²⁴ María Pilar Aquino, “Evil and Hope: A Response to Jon Sobrino,” *CTSA Proceedings*, 50, 1995, 89, accessed November 11, 2014, <https://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ctsa/article/viewFile/4047/3615>.

In her work, Aquino makes a point of saying that women's realities require special attention, and she says, "[Women's] reality of suffering is most harmful because it is the most concealed, the most ignored, and the most present in the daily lives of most Latin American women."¹²⁵ Aquino uses theology to address the reality of suffering in Latin America but she is careful to say that "theological language can be deceptive if it does not address the evil of violence against women and children, or if it ignores our hopes and our actions of survival, resistance and transformation."¹²⁶ Aquino wants to make the suffering of women the focal point for her understanding of reality and she has criticized Sobrino for not considering women's perspectives.

Theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid also feels that Sobrino does not adequately respond to the unique needs of women in Latin America. She has written about her own experience of being present at a conference at Newman College when she and Sobrino were the only two Latin American speakers. Sobrino, she says, "refused to enter into any dialogue with [her] reflections" and "ignored every issue of gender."¹²⁷ Acknowledging the work that Sobrino has accomplished in his field, Althaus-Reid says, "It is not easy for a Latin American woman theologian to find companions in the struggle even among those who have otherwise done so much for the cause of God's Kingdom in the continent."¹²⁸ Here, Althaus-Reid articulates the importance of finding allies in the struggle to bring marginalized voices into places of prominence. Those in positions of power need to be more open to the idea of learning from women's experiences and listening to what women contribute.

¹²⁵ Aquino, "Evil and Hope," 89.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 6-7.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 7.

Sobrino clearly serves as a major voice within liberation theology, and he has gained respect for the way he has pushed boundaries and acted as a visionary within the Latin American Church. He deserves the accolades he has received, and he has drawn worldwide attention to the poor of Latin America. His argument, however, is limited in the way he does not consider the unique issues of women and in how women become merely members of “the poor.” Statistically, women make up the majority of the poor in the world, especially in Latin America. Therefore, their concerns and struggles should be given priority. Women in Latin America are forced to live under the burdens of gender-based violence and femicide. In addition to living in a culture of violence, they also are also oppressed by machismo and marianismo that create unrealistic expectations.

Through the Christology of Jon Sobrino, we can see the way important theological themes, like resurrection, are present in the activism of Latin American women’s grassroots organizations. Sobrino’s Christology highlights the way activism and practices of theological reflection are related to one another. By identifying the limits of Sobrino, however, we are able to create a point of entry for Latina theologians who have acknowledged the specific struggles of women in Latin America. Latina theologians can provide the gender lens that is lacking in Sobrino’s Christology. This gender lens helps us broaden the conversation about how theological themes are related to the activism of women. Women in Latin America make up not only the majority of the poor, but also the majority of the Church. The Church plays an important role in their lives and they use theological resources that make sense to them and which speak to them.

Conclusion

Jon Sobrino's Christology highlights the ways that activism and theology are related to one another. Within his Christology, Sobrino writes about the importance of understanding the resurrection of Christ. His Christology is based on the Bible and Christian tradition, as well as the lived reality of individuals living in poverty in Latin America. This Christology illustrates the resonance between theological themes and communities of women who are fighting gender-based violence in Latin America today. Sobrino calls the poor of Latin America a "crucified people," "Yahweh's Suffering Servant," and "the presence of the crucified Christ in history," which he says, "is the most important theological statement we can make about them."¹²⁹ Sobrino is also mindful of the fact that "Latin America is the continent where, since Vatican II, more Christians have suffered violent death than any other."¹³⁰ Despite this acknowledgement, Sobrino does not talk about the differences in male and female deaths in Latin America. For Sobrino, the "crucified people" are all living the same reality. Feminist theologians disagree with this position, as we will see in the next chapter. But Sobrino's position regarding the resurrection asserts that the resurrection serves as eschatological evidence of God's unending love for the victims of history, and especially for those who have suffered grave injustices. It is possible for us to look at communities of women participating in faith-based activism through the lens of Sobrino's theology of the resurrection.

Sobrino's scholarship illustrates the relationship between theology and social ethics. His interpretation of the resurrection coheres well with the activism of women

¹²⁹ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 265.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

combatting gender-based violence who have a religious hope that their activism can lead to greater justice for women.

The ideas of living as already risen beings, the reality principle, the crucified of history, hope for the victims, and the reign of God are all important concepts that come from Sobrino's Christological view of the resurrection. Each of these ideas coheres with work that women fighting against gender-based violence are accomplishing. They are living as already risen beings, in the light of the resurrection, because they refuse to let their "crucifixions" stop them. Women are living as already risen beings when they allow the resurrection to inspire them to continue. Jesus' resurrection signals that it is possible to live in the midst of struggle and pain. The resurrection highlights this reality for women. Latin America, Sobrino says, "is a place of crosses. That is not masochism or exaggeration."¹³¹ The crosses born by women take a variety of forms. They have faith in the resurrection of Christ though, which allows them to live in the glory of the resurrection, as already risen beings. Living as already risen beings is a hopeful position to take and women continue in their struggle unceasingly.

The reality principle illuminates the way that the reality under which the poor live is not one that can be ignored. The reality principle calls to attention those who can stand in communion and solidarity with those who live on the margins. Women who are fighting against gender-based violence know that it is impossible to ignore the burden of reality, but those who are not engaged in political activism every day need to be reminded of these realities from time to time. The reality principle illustrates the way women can

¹³¹ Sobrino, "Orthodoxy when the Christ is Jesus," 100.

gain further support for their work and Sobrino offers important articulation of this concept.

The notion of the crucified of history is both literal and figurative in the case of women in Latin America. Women are being killed at astonishing rates throughout Latin America. They are literal victims, and they and their families suffer from the injustices of the systemic oppression of the poor. The poor are the crucified of history, but women are being crucified at rates that need to be recognized and acknowledged internationally. Sobrino's concept of the crucified of history illuminates how the resurrection of Christ can pertain to all of those who are crucified throughout history. In this way, the resurrection can speak to those who are fighting for justice on behalf of their mothers, daughters, and friends.

Hope of the victims is perhaps the strongest claim that Sobrino's understanding of the resurrection makes. Sobrino says that the resurrection provides hope not for everyone, but for victims. Women who are engaging in faith-based activism certainly qualify as victims who are in need of the hope of the resurrection. For Sobrino, the most scandalous fact of the resurrection is that fact that the same Christ who was crucified is the Christ who was resurrected three days later. This fact also results in hope for all those who have been victims of injustice and oppression. Hope of the victims is also generated through the activism of women standing in solidarity with one another and building communion. Hope of the victims is a critical part of what allows women to continue in their struggle in spite of the uphill battle they face. Sobrino's understanding of hope of the victims highlights why women continue their quest to eradicate gender-based violence in Latin America.

The reign of God is a theologically rich concept that helps us strive for justice and freedom from oppression. The reign of God is a sign of communion with God and the presence of right relationships here on earth. The resurrection of Christ signals God's involvement in human history and the possibility of the reign of God. We can work to construct the reign of God here on earth through our search for justice and our attempts to build community.

Sobrinó's work as a professional theologian allows his audience to reflect on the eschatological reality of the resurrection, but communities that are working to end gender-based violence are more concerned with Sobrinó's position as a scholar who writes from the perspective of victims of history. Sobrinó says that "Jesus' resurrection inaugurates a liberative future,"¹³² which is relevant for the work of grassroots organizations because a liberative future will include freedom from the oppression of political forces that do not consider gender-based violence important enough to combat. Sobrinó's theology of resurrection includes in-depth analyses into the life of Jesus as well as the relationships between Jesus and his disciples, but Jesus' historical position as a victim of history is what proves most important for understanding the relationship between Christ's resurrection and "the crucified of history," the poor of Latin America.

In addition to his understanding of the resurrection, Sobrinó also offers an important analysis of three concepts that relate to women's activism in Latin America. Orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy are all aligned with the work that women in faith-based organizations are doing in Latin America. These three concepts will be examined in greater depth in the next chapter, but we can see how the notions of right doctrine,

¹³² Jon Sobrinó, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 263.

right practice, and right feeling would be extremely relevant to the women who are engaging in the kind of work we are examining. Women participating in faith-based activism develop stronger communities through working together in orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy. These concepts, which have been developed by Sobrino, apply to the activism of women and the ways that women understand their work in ending gender-based violence. They build solidarity and grow together in community.

Although Sobrino has offered important concepts and frameworks for communities of women fighting gender-based violence, we also saw that Sobrino's Christology is not entirely adequate for addressing the concerns of women. We need to add a gender lens to the work of Sobrino in order to hear from women themselves about the struggles they face. We will do this by adding a variety of Latina theologians to this conversation and looking at how women's issues also contribute to the discussion about the relationship between theology and activism. Faith-based groups of women in Latin America can use Jon Sobrino's work on the resurrection of Christ to help frame their own activism and inspire their continued work. Yet Sobrino's Christology can also be productively expanded in conversation with the work of Latina theologians, as we will see going forward.

Looking Ahead

In the next chapter, we will look at how the limits of Sobrino have inspired other Latina theologians to talk about the plight of women throughout Latin America. Latina theologians who are concerned with the harsh realities of life for women have written extensively about what it means to be a woman in Latin America. Bringing this gender lens to this conversation lets us see how feminist theology can also contribute to the body

of theological resources that women who are fighting gender-based violence can utilize. We will use the writing of major Latina theologians to emphasize the fact that life for women is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. In order to achieve this, we will look at how intersectionality, as a multi-disciplinary framework fits into this conversation. Intersectionality is a framework used to examine an issue from a variety of perspectives. Intersectionality takes into account the different ways that people identify themselves and recognizes that individuals never belong to only one category or group. Class, gender, sexuality, race and age all play different roles in determining how social factors impact different people. This framework will be used to demonstrate that women should never be seen as merely “the poor.”

We will look at Latina theologians who have also identified themselves as liberation theologians and we will investigate the notion of being a feminist liberation theologian. Adding this layer to the conversation about activism and theology will highlight the work of women in faith-based communities fighting for liberation. The struggle against machismo has inspired women to become feminist theologians in the same way that the struggle against femicide has inspired women to use theological resources in their activism.

Chapter 3: Including Latina Voices

Introduction

Although he serves as an important theological resource for communities struggling against gender-based violence, Jon Sobrino's Christology lacks the attention to gender that is needed to address the specific intersecting types of oppression suffered by women. Thus, in this chapter, we will turn to Latina scholars to introduce a gender lens to the problems of poverty and gender-based violence in Latin America. This chapter will examine the contributions of several Latina theologians whose work helps bring a gender lens to the relationship between activism and theology in Latin America. Through an examination of Latina scholars, we will see that there are in fact significant contextual differences between the daily lives of women and men in Latin America, and we will see how female scholars speak to that reality. A second important contribution of Latina scholars includes stronger movements not only to encourage the powerful to "bring victims down from the cross," but to empower women themselves to be agents of change in their own communities. Women recognize the ways in which they have been victimized, like the victims Jon Sobrino discusses, but through their activism they remain in control of their own lives. They are empowered to fight injustice.

On the first point, the need for a more significant gender lens, Latina scholars note a lack of commitment from liberation theologians like Sobrino to the lived realities of women. In so doing, Latina scholars align themselves with a larger group of scholars who have called attention to the "intersectionality"¹ of oppressions suffered by

¹ "Intersectionality" is a term that was first coined by African American scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in a 1989 article in the University of Chicago Legal Forum called

individuals who belong to more than one oppressed group. The strengths and limitations of an intersectional framework will be explored further. Argentinian theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952-2009) has been one of a number of Latina scholars who have attempted to create space within liberation theology for the voices and experiences of women. Althaus-Reid has noted the ways Sobrino ignores issues of gender in his writing,² and says that different methodologies are required when doing liberation theology from the perspective of women.³ She maintains that poor Latin American women actually suffer a “triple oppression,”⁴ due to their race, class, and gender. In order to address this triple oppression, Althaus-Reid believes that there first needs to be a “theological recognition of the women’s *caminata*,⁵ taking account of the fact that... women [are] doing this walking.”⁶ Althaus-Reid believes that the classic patterns of liberation theology limit the voices of Latina theologians, which in turn marginalizes the

“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” Since Crenshaw titled this framework intersectionality, it has been used in a variety of academic fields and discourses. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *Chicago Legal Forum: Feminism in the Law: Theory, Practice and Criticism* 140 (1989): 139-167.

² Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 6-7.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵ *Caminata* translates to a long walk or hike. Althaus-Reid says, “*Caminata* is the Spanish work for ‘walk.’ It is traditionally used in Latin American liberation theology to indicate a style of ‘doing’ theology in a community process or ‘walk.’” Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*. 12. Althaus-Reid here is referring to the road that women walk in their daily lives. Every day, they walk within the struggle of oppression. There has been a lot of discussion among Latina theologians about the power of the *caminata* as well as *lo cotidiano* which will be explained further. These ideas refer in part to the spiritual and the sacred that exist in the everyday lives of Latinas, but they also include a much larger discourse about Latina women’s lives.

⁶ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 12.

issues that women are raising.⁷ This concern has been illustrated in the writing of other Latina scholars as well. The critiques of prominent female theologians highlight the fact that lived experiences of Latina women need to be more fully accounted for in the mainstream context of liberation theology.

On the second point of contribution by Latina theologians, the empowerment of women, Latina women's advocacy for women and their efforts to instigate real social change, demonstrate that "living as risen beings" can be a real possibility even for victims. Through her research on activist organizations on the U.S.-Mexico border, scholar Milagros Peña discusses the connections between faith-based groups and community activism. Peña chronicles how the emergence of liberation theology and a greater awareness of Catholic Social Teaching have led to a stronger network of feminist organizations across Latin America and especially on the El Paso/ Ciudad Juárez border. Peña highlights the fact that the activism in which women are engaged along the border has developed from their religious commitments and their faith.⁸ Peña sees faith-based activism as demonstrating how Latina women live out their ideas of spirituality. Participating in the work of faith-based organizations provides individuals an opportunity to be agents of change within their communities. Through their actions, these groups illustrate the relevance of the resurrection in their activism, moving past the relative passivity of being "taken down from the cross," as Sobrino says, to "living as risen beings" through their resistance. Although women themselves do not use Sobrino's

⁷ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 75.

⁸ Milagros Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders: Women's Grassroots Organizing in Mexico and Texas* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 133.

terms, we are applying Sobrino's language to the situation of activists as a useful way to understand their aims.

This chapter will explore the writing of Latina scholars who have written about the realities of life for women in Latin America. Specifically, it will highlight the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid,⁹ Ada María Isasi-Díaz,¹⁰ Ivone Gebara,¹¹ María Pilar Aquino,¹² and Nancy Pineda-Madrid.¹³ These scholars will contribute a much-needed gender lens to the conversation about the relationship between women's activism and liberation theology. This gender lens will reveal the ways in which Latina women are disproportionately the victims of poverty, but also include the fact that, despite their burdens, they have been empowered to seek justice through their activism and their faith.

⁹ Works to be examined include: *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2004), *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), and "¿Bién Sonados? The Future of Mystical Connections in Liberation Theology," *Political Theology* 3 (2000): 44-63.

¹⁰ Works to be examined include: *En la Lucha: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), and "Defining our 'Proyecto Histórico': 'Mujerista' Strategies for Liberation" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9.1-2 (Spring-Fall, 1993): 17-28.

¹¹ Works to be examined include: *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) and *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.)

¹² Works to be considered include: *Our Cry For Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), "Latina Feminist Theology: Central Features." *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*, ed by María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado and Jeanette Rodríguez (Austin, U of Texas: 2002), 133-160, "Evil and Hope: A Response to Jon Sobrino," *CTSA Proceedings*, 50, (1995), 85-92, and *Feminist intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, ed. by María Pilar Aquino and María José Rosado Nuñez (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007.)

¹³ Works to be considered include: *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), and "Latina Feminist Theology: Charting Future Discourse," in *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*, ed. by Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2010), 21-29.

Intersectionality

Although Jon Sobrino is sensitive to the suffering of “the poor” in general, the realities of life for women in Latin America are much harsher than the realities of life for men. Modern social science asserts that it is not sufficient to talk about issues of class without also taking into consideration issues of gender, thus engaging directly with intersectionality.¹⁴ Intersectionality has developed as an important framework that exists within feminist and womanist theology¹⁵ as well as within human rights discourses, sociology, anthropology, and public policy. The term intersectionality “denotes various ways in which race, class, and gender interact to shape multiple dimensions of...women’s experiences.”¹⁶ Intersectionality refers to “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power.”¹⁷ This framework holds particular relevance for this discussion because the gendered perspective of Latina scholars offers a more substantial way to highlight the

¹⁴ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *Chicago Legal Forum Issue*, “Feminism in the Law: Theory, Practice and Criticism,” Vol. 140, 139-167.

¹⁵ “Womanist theology” refers to feminist theology being done by African American women who want to differentiate their perspectives from those of white women doing feminist theology. Womanist theology grew out of the work of African American novelist Alice Walker, but has been adopted by theologians like Delores Williams (*Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993) and Katie Geneva Cannon (*Black Womanist Ethics*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). Womanist theology looks at the unique perspective of African American women and the struggles unique to them.

¹⁶ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (July 1991): 1244.

¹⁷ Kathy Davis, “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful,” *Feminist Theory* 9 (2008): 68.

lived reality of women participating in activism in Latin America. Interlocking oppressions create contextual realities for Latinas fighting gender-based violence.

This strategy of introducing intersectionality into Latin American liberation theology illuminates the suffering of women in a specifically Latin American context. Feminist philosopher Ann Garry says that intersectionality provides “a framework or strategy for thinking about issues, a set of reminders to look at a wider range of oppressions and privileges to consider their mutual construction.”¹⁸ This framework allows us to talk about the various ways that Latin American women have been marginalized, and how these multiple oppressions continue to burden them. Adding an intersectional framework to this discussion also illuminates the ways in which “classic” liberation theology, as written by men like Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, has left women’s perspectives and experiences out of liberation theology.

Feminist and womanist theologians assert that male liberation theologians rarely consider women’s perspectives. Male liberation theologians need to be aware of the realities of life for women living under multiple layers of oppression. Feminist theologian Elina Vuola, affirming this trend, says that “[l]iberation theological language remains sexist and exclusive.”¹⁹ Feminist theologians are criticizing male liberation theologians in a way that is similar to the way in which womanist theologian Delores Williams has criticized black liberation theologian James Cone for “positing the unambiguous character of the Bible as a liberating text, for advocating the doctrine of redemptive suffering, and for interpreting the death of Jesus Christ according to

¹⁸ Ann Garry, “Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender,” *Hypatia*, 26.2, (Fall 2011): 844.

¹⁹ Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 101.

traditional atonement theory.”²⁰ Williams asserts that Cone’s interpretation of the Bible does not take the suffering of women fully into consideration. She believes that Cones’ claims continue to oppress women by excluding women’s perspectives. Vuola highlights this same problem for feminist liberationists. She says that “feminist theologians [try to] ask liberation theologians to take their methodological presuppositions more seriously.”²¹ Vuola cites Jon Sobrino and says that he claims that “[t]he key question for establishing comparisons for different theologies is to ask what the interests are that, factually and not intentionally, direct different ways of theological knowledge.”²² Vuola’s response to this is that “gender *is* one of the ‘factual interests’” that direct the work of feminist theologians, and should not be ignored.²³ Although there is evidence of dissatisfaction with the way Sobrino has excluded women’s particular concerns from his Christology,²⁴ this criticism of Sobrino has not been advanced in any kind of systematic way. Intersectionality is used to highlight the way Sobrino needs to recognize additional aspects of identity when discussing issues of liberation and oppression.

Although intersectionality creates a helpful framework for moving forward, it does have limitations. Intersectionality can be mis-used by theorists and philosophers to

²⁰ Kurt Buhring, *Conceptions of God, Freedom, and Ethics in African America and Jewish Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 72.

²¹ Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 101.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. Italics mine

²⁴ As previously discussed, in an address given at the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) in 1995 Latina scholar María Pilar Aquino responded directly to Sobrino and wrote that “The most pervasive reality, and therefore the most scandalous and most in need of salvation, is violence against women.” (“Evil and Hope: A Response to Jon Sobrino.” CTSA Proceedings, 50, (1995), 85-92. 89. Accessed November 11, 2014. <https://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ctsa/article/viewFile/4047/3615>.) Sobrino had not mentioned women in his presentation. Argentinian scholar Marcella Althaus-Reid has also voiced her displeasure over the way Sobrino “ignore[s] every issue of gender” in his writing (*From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 6-7.)

defend claims and make general assertions that are not universally true. Scholar Ann Garry asserts that intersectionality by itself “provides neither any structural analysis of oppressions and privileges nor any particular analysis of anyone’s complex identity or experiences. Instead it points out what kinds of analyses might be useful.”²⁵

Intersectionality is not an answer to oppression by itself, but it does offer a way to talk about layered forces of oppression. An intersectional framework has helped us determine that Latina women have been oppressed in a variety of ways and that further analysis of liberation theology is needed in order to liberate their voices.

Going forward, we will explore how the theologies of Latina scholars compare to Jon Sobrino’s and how these theologies are especially helpful for women engaging in activism throughout Latin America. Sobrino’s Christology is often more expansive than the Christologies of the scholars considered here, but each of these theologians has also made important contributions to the conversation about activism and theology.

Marcella Althaus-Reid on Communities of Latin American Women

Marcella Althaus-Reid, as an Argentinian Latina scholar, has observed women’s oppression in her own context. As a feminist liberation theologian, she has witnessed the ways liberation theology can empower women and where the limits of liberation theology lie. Her theology is especially relevant for women fighting gender-based violence who are seeking resources from within their traditions to support them. Althaus-Reid, as a scholar of religion, has been engaged with women at the grassroots level, which aligns with the second type of theology, popular theology, outlined in chapter 2. In chapter two we determined that popular theology exists on two levels; one includes theology being

²⁵ Garry, “Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender,” 830.

done by trained scholars of religion alongside those who have been marginalized. The second level of popular theology is the theology being developed by communities themselves. Althaus-Reid, like the other scholars to be examined in this chapter, is a trained theologian who has worked in solidarity with grassroots communities. This type of popular theology offers women who do not have academic training an opportunity to learn from women who identify with the struggles of *campesinas* and who have suffered oppression. Most of the scholars we will engage in this chapter have worked within this first level of popular theology, but they are also familiar with classic, academic theology as well as the second level of popular theology and popular religion.

We can see that Althaus-Reid is dissatisfied with the lack of women's voices within liberation theology. She acknowledges the work of scholars like Sobrino and she believes that liberation theology can be a powerful tool, but she wants women's experiences to contribute to liberation theology in a more significant way. Althaus-Reid, like Sobrino, talks about "the non-neutrality of theology when it comes to power relationships."²⁶ She says that liberation theology uses "the concept of ideological formation in order to unveil class [and] economic interests embedded in theology."²⁷ Latin American women realized through the emergence of liberation theology, that they were suffering from the aforementioned "triple oppression" based on the perception that their gender, class and race were inferior in status.²⁸ In order to address these multiple oppressions and the specific needs of women, "a different methodology was required."²⁹

²⁶ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 11.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 12.

This new methodology includes using an intersectional framework to acknowledge the intersecting ways women's experiences are burdening them.

Despite her skepticism of liberation theology, Althaus-Reid wants women to participate in theology and for their ideas to be considered more relevant. She criticizes liberation theologians like Sobrino for creating their own norms regarding what is important in theology and whose opinions matter more. She says that "any attempt to produce a liberating theology needs to consider how knowledge is invented, and why and how certain ideas become authoritative paradigms, while others do not."³⁰ Through this statement, she implies that a hierarchy of ideas has emerged even within liberation theology, and women's voices are often devalued. Despite the fact that women's contributions have not been as highly regarded, Althaus-Reid believes that women's voices are critically important to the forward progress of liberation theology. She says, "Latin American women are the third world of the third world, and a theology with a bias towards the poor can only find its most radical option when it focuses on women."³¹ By offering this critique of liberation theology, Althaus-Reid brings women's experience into the spotlight and illuminates the value of their theological engagement. She concludes that it is inconsistent to look at the poor of the world without looking at the experiences of poor women.

The tradition of liberation theology, as Althaus-Reid and others have argued, must be more inclusive regarding the experiences of women. She says that when liberation theology emerged, it was understood as a "modern theology and although it evolved mainly through the influence of postcolonial theory, it is still a nostalgic theology. The

³⁰ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 16.

³¹ Ibid.

nostalgia is for the utopian Kingdom,” which she describes as “the consummation of the Christian agency in processes of social transformation.”³² The reign of God, as we have seen through Sobrino’s Christology, is an important concept relating to the hope of the resurrection, and gives women something to strive towards. But Althaus-Reid also says that women, “as a traditionally marginalized sector of the church, have little if anything to look back on with nostalgia when it comes to Christian theology.”³³ Because liberation theology has never included women, the reign of God needs to be a forward-looking concept, not one that looks back towards something that never existed.

Theology, as we have seen, can be understood on a number of levels, and Althaus-Reid wants communities of women to be able to talk about theology in ways that empower them. “Theology,” she says, “is a praxis of action and reflection but it is also a genre.” In this way, we see that Althaus-Reid agrees with Sobrino’s decision to put praxis in a place of priority within theology. She says, “That theological genre – that is, the way that theology is written, its style of argumentation and the boundaries it creates for readers – is what in the end carries subversive elements in our praxis.” Theology and praxis have become deeply enmeshed. We can see how the practices of women participating in activism can be understood theologically through a process of action and reflection. Althaus-Reid says, “Theology may or may not reflect society, but it forms it.”³⁴ Theology impacts our actions and the ways we become involved with issues we care about.

³² Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 61.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

We can see through Althaus-Reid an important critique of the ways liberation theology has continued to oppress women. Due to its complicity with the patriarchal structures of the Catholic Church, liberation theology has historically left women's voices out of the conversation. Althaus-Reid mentions that Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs)³⁵ have been alternative spaces where women can participate in theology. BECs are communities of faith, focused on inclusion, which emerged in Latin America as liberation theology was developing. They have served as spaces where women have been able to gain some authority, although Althaus-Reid cautions full acceptance of BECs as they are. She says, "It is very romantic to say that 'BECs are the church,' [but] if that was really the case, nobody would have recognized any power or authority outside the BECs."³⁶ BECs, like liberation theology, operate within the framework of the hierarchical Church so, although they have been radical in important ways, they have not been entirely liberating. Althaus-Reid notes, "In the case of women's historical struggle for liberation, liberation theology has become dangerous because it is more of an obstacle than a help in such a struggle."³⁷ Even though BECs have been communities that allow for spiritual growth and solidarity, they still only allow us to take a few steps forward toward liberation.

BEC communities teach members about liberation theology, but even liberation theology in BECs is limited by what male liberation theologians are writing. Criticizing

³⁵ BEC stands for Basic Ecclesial Communities or *Comunidad Eclesial de Base* in Spanish. Christian Basic Communities or Basic Ecclesial Communities grew out of the widespread effects of liberation theology in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. In BECs women were often given positions of ministerial authority and there was a general sense of equality.

³⁶ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*. 80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

liberationists, Althaus-Reid says, “No male liberation theologian can write the books that women liberationists do, based on reflecting dialogue among women in community, respecting others’ opinions and almost disappearing themselves as theologians in order to allow other voices to come through clear and strong.”³⁸ She believes that the prevalence of male liberation theologians limits the voices of Latina theologians and thus, marginalizes the issues that these women are raising. She says that there has been “no attempt to incorporate [women’s] voices into [traditional] Systematic Theology.”³⁹ Althaus-Reid wants women’s voices to be recognized as part of the larger canon of liberation theology.

The primary argument within liberation theology is that “the Christ of the poor is the Christ of the poor communities, and that includes marginalized women.”⁴⁰ However, Althaus-Reid, as well as many others, maintains that liberation theology is “still patriarchal and as such notoriously unsuspecting of given sexual structures of thought and Christian spirituality. At best, liberation theology’s discourse is one of equality but not of difference.”⁴¹ Liberation theology offers a variety of resources for women who are participating in activism, but it also creates its own boundaries and limits for how women are able to engage. “The problem with liberation theology,” according to Althaus-Reid, “has been that it represents a theology which has never had hermeneutical suspicions about its own colonial identity.”⁴² Without investigating its own history, liberation

³⁸ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 75.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 104.

theology has continued to practice oppressive tactics by the way it has been used to create norms that are exclusive and judgmental.

Liberation theologians Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, in their 1987 work *Introducing Liberation Theology*, say that popular theology has its roots with the poor, but that “theological reflection is carried on at three levels – the professional, the pastoral and the popular.”⁴³ These three levels are interrelated and intersecting at various points, but the Boff brothers are clear when they say that the “popular theologian should not be confused with the trained academic, who used... ‘the logic of erudition’ [instead of] ‘the logic of life,’” which is used by popular theologians.⁴⁴ Popular theologians have continued to explore theology within BECs throughout Latin America. The “popular theologian,” according to Althaus-Reid is:

[T]he interpreter of the Bible in Latin America from a diasporic perspective, questioning the construction of his or her identity outside the colonial North Atlantic discourse of theological expectations. The popular theologian is not a person in diaspora but rather the conceptual product of Liberation Theology in the diaspora of the theological markets of Europe and the United States.⁴⁵

The questions of whether or not the “popular theologian” can be considered a theologian at all should not, according to Althaus-Reid, fall on whether or not she is educated. She posits:

Educated or not, the key point is that [these women] all start to ‘read’ the Bible first of all ‘outside the Bible’, that is, from their *realidad*. (Realidad translates to

⁴³ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 137.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125.

reality but goes beyond this translation to include the notion of the present situation and also the historical developments which have contributed to it.) Their lives become a living text where God manifests Godself, and, from there, the events of liberation in the scripture are rescued and reflected upon in a circle of *'realidad-Bible-realidad.'*⁴⁶

Althaus-Reid fervently supports the idea of women as participating in theology through their activism and participation. She is suspicious of institutional theology, both systematic theology and liberation theology, but she also notes the ways theology can be used to help build community. She notes that women's activism has created space for women to engage in a variety of theological activities. Her reflections on resurrection support the idea of women using resurrection as a theological resource. For example, Althaus-Reid observes, "Nobody resurrects alone: we all resurrect in community."⁴⁷ Community becomes an important theme throughout Althaus-Reid's writing, and community-building deeply relates to the resurrection. She reflects, "Latin American art and poetry are full of images of resurrection. ...The fact is that Jesus' resurrection was also a community event: women and men witnessed how he came back from death, walked among them and continued the dialogue which existed before his crucifixion."⁴⁸ Women engaged in activism understand themselves as living in the light of the resurrection and also value the importance of community.

Althaus-Reid compares women who have lost loved ones to those who knew Jesus and witnessed his death. She makes this connection saying, "Every death changes

⁴⁶ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 117.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

the life of the survivors, because some humanity is removed from them, so it is legitimate to think that, starting with Jesus' resurrection, a whole community of people who suffered his loss when he was crucified came back to life again. ... The resurrection became the paradigm showing us the durability and indestructability of life and justice."⁴⁹ This paradigm gets used throughout Latin America to talk about the importance of social justice movements and activism.

We must recognize the unique role that women play within liberation theology, and Althaus-Reid believes that women's experiences need to be more completely validated. People like Sobrino who talk about the importance of the poor need to recognize that women make up the majority of the poor. Althaus-Reid observes, "Women in theology are the androcentric ontological representation of poverty: poverty of reason; poverty of spirituality; poverty of independence; poverty of divine gender representation."⁵⁰ Despite the ways theology damages women, theology has helped bring communities of women together. Althaus-Reid helps illuminate the ways in which a gender lens is critically important when looking at Latin American theology and women's activism. Her theology is constructed from her experiences rather than a systematic understanding of doctrines like Sobrino's theology, but her voice is needed.

For Althaus-Reid, the resurrection of Christ is not as important as Christ's presence with those on the margins, like women in Latin America. She appreciates the communal aspect of resurrection and the way it highlights Jesus' relationships, but she says, "The resurrection of Christ can only be understood as part of Christ's unsettledness, this 'wonderlust' which cannot be confined to a tomb, not even to the tombs/tomes of

⁴⁹ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 113.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

heterosexual Systematic Theology.”⁵¹ Althaus-Reid’s understanding of Christ’s resurrection depends on the humanity of Jesus and his experience of life as a human being. She helps to speak for those who Sobrino calls “the crucified of history.”

Althaus-Reid offers a significant contribution to this project through her articulation of the limits of liberation theology. She highlights the ways in which male liberation theologians have not spoken to women and have in fact left women out of the conversation. Althaus-Reid writes about women’s participation in theology in ways that make sense for them. BECs offer spaces where women can grow and become important leaders in their communities, but they include structures that are also complicit in the traditions of liberation theology that have been harmful for women. Although liberation theology began as a methodology that gives those on the margins a voice, it has continued to marginalize women. Althaus-Reid notes the layered ways in which women have suffered and the way these experiences have largely been overlooked by male liberation theologians. This articulation highlights the need for a stronger gender analysis within liberation theology.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz and *Lo Cotidiano*

Latina scholar Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1943-2012), a Cuban-born theologian, has also worked to include the experiences of women within larger understandings of liberation theology. Isasi-Díaz writes from her experience as someone who has known the suffering of women throughout Latin America. She uses her position as a scholar to bridge the gap between the academy and those doing theology in the streets. She says about Latina scholarship, “By using our lived experience as the source of *mujerista*

⁵¹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), 123.

theology [which will be examined below], we are trying to validate our world, our reality, our values.”⁵² As an activist scholar, engaging in the first level of popular theology, Isasi-Díaz makes urgent calls for practices of justice and liberation. She recognizes the urgency of fighting against gender-based violence, and she wants women’s experiences to contribute to broader understandings of liberation theology. Isasi-Díaz acknowledges the different experiences women in Latin America have, and her theology is drawn from her own context. Like Althaus-Reid, Isasi-Díaz has worked alongside women who have been fighting against oppressive forces, and these practices have informed her theology.

Isasi-Díaz introduced the term “*mujerista* theology” into the academy and continues to develop *mujerista* theology throughout her substantial body of work. “A *mujerista*,” says Isasi-Díaz, “is someone who makes a preferential option for Latina women, for our struggle and liberation.”⁵³ Therefore, doing *mujerista* theology is about seeking the ways theology can be liberating and empowering for women in the Latina community as well as those suffering marginalization and oppression. She explains that “*mujeristas* believe that in Latinas, though not exclusively so, God chooses once again to lay claim to the divine image and likeness made visible from the very beginning in women.”⁵⁴ We should note that not all Latina scholars identify with the label “*mujerista* theologian” Isasi-Díaz posits, but her work has helped create more space for women to do theology in various settings throughout Latin America.⁵⁵

⁵² Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 91.

⁵³ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 61.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁵ There has been considerable debate about the term “*mujerista*” within theological circles. Latina scholar María Pilar Aquino, for example, does not identify as a “*mujerista*

Isasi-Díaz like many liberation theologians, including Sobrino, has developed a theology of praxis. Her call for praxis is different from Sobrino's however because she identifies a praxis-based theology specifically for women. "As a liberative praxis," says Isasi-Díaz, "*mujerista* theology is a process of enablement for Latina women which insists on the development of a strong sense of moral agency and clarifies the importance and value of who we are, what we think, and what we do."⁵⁶ Women are called to participate in communities where this kind of theology can be developed so that liberative processes can take shape. The power of praxis comes from participation within a community. For Isasi-Díaz, God is experienced within the space of a community and within a spirit of solidarity with others. She says, "*Mujerista* theology helps Latinas discover and affirm the presence of God in the midst of our communities and the revelation of God in our daily lives."⁵⁷ In the same way that Sobrino's focus on praxis shapes his Christology, we can see that Isasi-Díaz's understanding of praxis impacts how she constructs her theology. She wants *mujerista* theology to help establish a greater sense of solidarity with others.

theologian" because she says "there are no *mujerista* sociopolitical and ecclesial subjects or movements in the United States or in Latin America. Puerto Rican feminist R. Rodríguez notes that '*mujerismo* has negative connotations for the Latin American feminist movement.'" Aquino also refers to M. Lamas who has implied that the development of the *mujerista* project has created " 'discursive dislocations and false oppositions' that weaken the political force of feminism." María Pilar Aquino, "Latina Feminist Theology: Central Features." *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*. Edited by María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado and Jeanette Rodríguez. Austin, U of Texas: 2002. 133-160. 138. Aquino believes that using the term "Latina feminist theology" includes history of feminism and the need for systemic analysis and change, whereas Isasi-Díaz believes that the term "Latina" lacks specific particularity.

⁵⁶ Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*. 62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

Solidarity asks those who may not understand the impact of social sin to enter into relationships that allow each person to truly “encounter the other.” By “social sin,” we mean structures that have been created by human sinfulness that work to oppress others. Social sin impacts all corners of society and can only be undone through awareness and solidarity. Isasi-Díaz places a high priority on solidarity and argues that solidarity is connected to both liberation and salvation. “The goal of solidarity,” she says, “is to participate in the ongoing process of liberation...[and] salvation and liberation are interconnected.”⁵⁸ Women in Latin America who participate in activism stand with one another in solidarity through their community-building. Shared protest activities not only draw on theological themes, but also generate solidarity. Faith-based communities of women and the scholars who work alongside them share a similar mission to look towards the reign of God.

The Christology of Isasi-Díaz positions Jesus as the person of God who shows us that loving one another can be liberating. Although she writes from a Christian perspective, she acknowledges that *mujerista* theology can speak to members of all traditions. She says that in “*mujerista* theology, we will not dismiss the ‘normative, graced, and even universal dimension of the salvific manifestations of non-Christian religions’... We are suspicious of an imperialistic approach that refuses to recognize and accept” the variety of traditions that play a role in shaping the lives of women.⁵⁹ Her experience as a Christian woman has taught her to affirm the relevance of other traditions and liturgical practices. Practices of active engagement across traditions can transform society and provide stronger examples of structures of justice for women.

⁵⁸ Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*. 89.

⁵⁹ Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 64.

We can observe the important contribution Isasi-Díaz has made to feminist liberation theology through her engagement through the idea of *lo cotidiano*. *Lo cotidiano* roughly translates to “the everyday” or “the daily,” and for Isasi-Díaz, this concept refers to the lived reality of everyday struggles for women in Latin America. She posits, “*Lo cotidiano* constitutes the immediate space of our lives, the first horizon in which we have our experiences, experiences that in turn are constitutive elements of our reality.”⁶⁰ Isasi-Díaz, like other Latina scholars, wants to illuminate the unique experiences of suffering of Latin American women. “*Lo cotidiano*,” she continues, “is what we face everyday; it includes also how we face it. ...It extends to our experience with authority and to our central religious beliefs and celebrations.”⁶¹ Isasi-Díaz’s explanation of *lo cotidiano* highlights the lived reality women in Latin America face on a daily basis which is not addressed by Jon Sobrino. Sobrino wants to look at the meaning of the resurrection for all people, especially the poor. But Latina feminists want to make sure that the particularities experienced by Latina women are not ignored, especially because the majority of the poor are actually women.

The theology of Isasi-Díaz gives priority to communities of Latina women, and she dedicates her projects to the women who are “doing theology” on the ground within these communities. She says that her essays are “an attempt to give back to the Hispanas/Latinas and to our communities what [she has] heard and learned from them.”⁶² Isasi-Díaz identifies with Latina women but also recognizes that as an educated, professional theologian, she plays a different role. She notes the important experiential

⁶⁰ Isasi-Díaz, Ada María. *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 95.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.

knowledge that these activist women have gained, and she generally believes that their pedagogical methods are as important as anything professional theologians can teach. Her writing asserts that theology and ethics need to transcend whatever artificial boundaries have been created to separate them and they both need to respond directly to the needs of people.⁶³ *Mujerista* theology invites women to use their voices as tools of protest and to continue learning. The theology of Isasi-Díaz grounds itself in the lived reality of women and attempts to radically transform society so that it may be less oppressive and more inclusive.

We can see that Isasi-Díaz also suggests the importance of understanding intersectionality when she discusses the various levels of oppression women face. She says that she remembers the day when she “realized that sexism was a category of oppression and that it did not exist apart from poverty but compounded” it.⁶⁴ Isasi-Díaz would go on from this day to create workshops that explained the “interconnectedness of sexism, racism/ethnic prejudice, and classism.”⁶⁵ Here, we can see how Isasi-Díaz is engaging the same type of questions that intersectionality tries to address. Intersectionality can help Latina theologians explain the complicated forces of oppression within communities. Because women in Latin America have been oppressed in a variety of ways, understanding all of these forces plays a critical role in helping to empower them. By paying attention to these realities Isasi-Díaz has determined that “grassroot Hispanas/Latinas are organic theologians for they are admirably capable of explaining

⁶³ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

their religious understandings and the role religion plays in their daily struggles.”⁶⁶ Isasi-Díaz has recognized and affirmed the important ways that grassroots organizations are using theological resources to aid them in their struggle.

Christian faith is an important feature in the lives of many Latinas. Isasi-Díaz affirms this by saying, “Religion has always been a central part of my life. Religion, in particular Roman Catholicism, is a key element of Latina culture.”⁶⁷ Isasi-Díaz discusses her relationship with the hierarchical body of the Church, which has not always been positive, but her religious beliefs continue to be strengthened through her active engagement with causes that mean something to her. Isasi-Díaz as a theologian who lives in solidarity with the poor, says that even though she was engaged in the academic work of learning theology, she “had to deal with the fact that it is the work [she does] with grassroot Hispanas/Latinas that is most life-giving.”⁶⁸ Isasi-Díaz has seen how popular religion can play a role in shaping the practices of activism. She speaks of the “liberative value of the religious understandings and practices of Hispanas/Latinas”⁶⁹ and she has accompanied communities of women who are struggling “for survival and ‘un poquito de justicia’ – a little bit of justice.”⁷⁰ Isasi-Díaz has witnessed the ways that women in Latin America are incorporating their spirituality into their activism, which fuels their political engagement.

Introducing the theology of Ada María Isasi-Díaz into the conversation about gender-based violence illustrates the necessary way we need to include the experiences of

⁶⁶ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

Latinas when we talk about Latin American religion. Women participating in grassroots activism are both utilizing important tools from their Christian traditions, but also have much to teach those in the academy about how to incorporate religion into their daily lives. Isasi-Díaz notes that her greatest lessons have come from working with grassroots women who refuse to give up their struggle. They have developed a strong sense of hope drawn from their theological beliefs and a hope in what the future can hold.

Comparing the theology of Isasi-Díaz to Jon Sobrino, we can see where similarities lie in terms of orthopraxis and orthopathy. Isasi-Díaz, like Sobrino, highlights the importance of emotional connections within theology. Sobrino says that orthopathy is about “right-feeling” and understanding how our feelings can inform our theology. Isasi-Díaz, similarly, says that “[e]motions are a type of cognition, a way of knowing, for they are linked to the receiving and processing of information.”⁷¹ Emotions are a way of knowing, and they also help us develop a sense of ethical engagement with the world. Isasi-Díaz suggests that we can “school our emotions [in order to] shape them in a moral way, in a way that will serve our process of decision-making.”⁷² Our emotions, therefore, contribute to the actions we take and the practices in which we participate. Isasi-Díaz and Sobrino both establish that the emotional side of human life serves an important ethical and religious function. For women who are participating in activism, emotional responses have helped propel them forward. Our greater understanding of the interrelation between orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy helps us develop a stronger theological vision.

⁷¹ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 206.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 208.

In addition to looking at how orthopraxis contributes to grassroots activism, Isasi-Díaz also identifies the prominent place of orthopraxis in *mujerista* theology. She says that there is a “*mujerista* understanding that theology is a praxis – that is, reflection-action that in a spiraling motion integrates the faith of Hispanas/Latinas with the struggle for liberation-fullness of life in which we are engaged in our daily living.”⁷³ Actions can therefore be a direct result of religious understandings and beliefs. The activism in which women engage comes from their search for justice and their hope in a greater future. “Our religious beliefs,” indicates Isasi-Díaz, “direct and support action on behalf of liberation for ourselves and our people. Our actions, in turn, lead us to clarify what we believe.”⁷⁴ Praxis therefore helps to define the theological understandings of Latina women. Sobrino illustrates the importance of orthopraxis in his Christology, and Isasi-Díaz also states that her “Christology is a praxis: what we believe about Christ comes out of our reality as marginalized Hispanas/Latinas, which is one of struggle for fullness of life.”⁷⁵ The Christology of Isasi-Díaz as well as other Latina activists is grounded in the practices of resistance in which they have participated and in their fight for liberation and justice.

Orthodoxy, in addition to orthopraxis, can also be expressed through the actions of the faithful. Isasi-Díaz highlights the practices of faith and prayer in which women with whom she has worked participate. We can see Latinas’ dedication to orthodoxy through practices of leading prayer groups and conducting scriptural studies. Latina women often teach catechism classes or pray the Rosary with other members of their

⁷³ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 240-241.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

communities. They serve as Eucharistic ministers and facilitate retreats. All of these practices illustrate their beliefs and their faith in the traditions of the Church. Latina women try to promote the teachings of the Church in ways that are helpful and useful for them while continuing to be aware of the ways the Church has been patriarchal and harmful.

Isasi-Díaz maintains that working for justice is part of serving as a mediator of the reign of God. She posits, “All who commit themselves to proclaim with their lives and deeds the kingdom of God are mediators of the kingdom.”⁷⁶ The reign of God is not brought to fruition through Jesus only, but through those who are willing to work for a better world. Isasi-Díaz also says, “Our mediation of the kingdom of God is related to the fact that understanding reality always includes dealing with reality.”⁷⁷ The reality of *lo cotidiano* for Latina women directly relates to understandings of the reign of God. The experiences of women contribute to how they experience God, and religion contributes to their activism. Through the theology of Isasi-Díaz, we can see how women’s experiences have become an integral part of how Latina women understand religion.

Sobrinó’s concepts, which help comprise his Christology of resurrection, resonate throughout the work of Isasi-Díaz despite the fact that she does not use his language. The ideas of “hope for the victims” and “the reign of God” resonate with the way Isasi-Díaz wants to highlight the hope women need to maintain in order to build a greater future. She focuses her writing on “the reality principle” in order to explain *la lucha*, or struggle, women endure. The themes that Sobrinó uses to explain his Christology of the resurrection are also themes Isasi-Díaz engages through her use of narrative. Sobrinó’s

⁷⁶ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 246.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

systematic style helps us understand the salvific nature of Christ, but Isasi-Díaz highlights the importance of context in approaching the resurrection. Her focus on women's experiences adds specificity to Sobrino's Christology.

The contribution of Ada María Isasi-Díaz to this project is her theological analysis of women's struggle. Isasi-Díaz writes of women's daily lives and how their experiences matter to a wider understanding of liberation. The idea of *lo cotidiano* resonates for women in ways that men like Sobrino cannot articulate. These struggles, unique to women, offer new ways of looking at liberation. Isasi-Díaz helps to articulate these struggles and calls for them to be included in broader interpretations of theology. Her development of *mujerista* theology gives preference to women but does not exclude others who are suffering on the margins. *Mujerista* theology speaks to those who are engaged in actively fighting against gender-based violence and asks women to share their experiences with others.

Ivone Gebara on the Value of Women

Another Latina scholar who has written about the contextual realities of life in Latin America is Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara. Gebara (b. 1944) highlights the ways in which women's experiences in Latin American prove that they suffer in unique ways. She uses her own experience to talk about the systematic oppression of women. Gebara serves as a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame, which complicates her contextual position. As someone who is part of an established religious order, Gebara is at risk of being censored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) for voicing controversial views. In 1995, after giving an interview where she asserted that a more complex understanding of the circumstances around which women choose to have

abortions in the slums of Brazil is needed, she received a notice from the CDF that said she was to be silenced for two years, and she was required to strengthen her theological background. She had made the statement about abortions after witnessing first-hand the conditions women face when they are living with unchosen pregnancies, which are often the result of unchosen relationships or sexual violence. She asserts, “We cannot reduce the abortion question to a liberal understanding of reproductive choice. For many Brazilian women it is concretely a life-and-death issue.”⁷⁸ In compliance with the CDF’s request, Gebara spent two years in France furthering her theological education. After completing her studies, Gebara returned to Brazil to be with those she felt were in greatest need. Although her theology and her practices have grown out of her Christian faith, her Christology problematizes models of Jesus that embrace suffering as valuable and redeeming. She says that the “main trait highlighted in the imitation of Jesus has often been his ability to endure pain and to welcome his destiny as decreed by the Father.”⁷⁹ Gebara wants to engage in practices that reevaluate this position and call into question the focus on the suffering of Jesus as liberating.

As we have seen, suffering for women throughout Latin America is caused by unjust economic systems which oppress the masses and keep the majority of the wealth within a small number of families. But in addition to economic suffering, the experience of female suffering is unique. Gebara says, “Male suffering – public suffering in the name of a group – seems to be the criterion for all suffering...[It] has a redemptive role for the country, the nation, the people. Women’s suffering, in contrast, has no such

⁷⁸ Ivone Gebara, “The Abortion Debate in Brazil: A Report from an Ecofeminist Philosopher Under Siege,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11.2 (1995): 130.

⁷⁹ Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women’s Experience of Evil and Salvation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 107.

role.”⁸⁰ Gebara talks about the ways in which women’s suffering gets largely disregarded and overlooked. Women are implicitly asked to remain silent about their suffering. This tradition of silence resonates with women throughout Latin America and echoes throughout the machismo culture that dominates women and oppresses them. This culture, in addition to restraining women and keeping them from being seen as full members of society, also often leads to a life of fear. Gebara does not imply that women’s suffering would end if it became more public, but rather, she wants to say that women should be allowed to voice their experiences of suffering and share them with the wider community. Women’s experiences hold great value, and when women are able to share their experiences with one another, they are able to create community.

Gebara’s own experience of suffering has contributed to the development of her Christology and has helped her problematize the traditional understanding of Jesus’ suffering. In her work, Gebara examines the role of the cross as an instrument of torture and she reflects on the experience of growing up in a culture that praises the idea of “taking up one’s cross.” This concept, she believes, can be extremely harmful for women. Specifically in Latin America, the cross conveys ideas not about “salvation but rather of domination.”⁸¹ Due to the colonial history of the Catholic Church in Latin America, the cross represents not only the kind of torture that Jesus endured, but also the pain and suffering that the indigenous peoples of Latin America experienced through their forced conversion.

Rather than the expression of the cross, the life of Jesus remains the most important part of Gebara’s Christology. She says that the “symbol of the life of Jesus is

⁸⁰ Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 111.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

most telling for women. His cross does not stand alone... Women stand around his cross as his friends, caring for his lifeless body so that life will not be further violated.”⁸² The life Jesus led and the way that he was able to cultivate a community of friends, which included women who were willing to stand with him, serves as the most important part of the story for Gebara. “The cross,” she says, “is always a scandal – unhappiness, sickness, desertion, objective and subjective suffering – and we fight against it.”⁸³ The harsh reality of the experience Jesus faced on the cross is not liberating for Latina feminists. Jesus, rather, offers redemption not through his suffering, but through his love and through the grace of God. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians says that “God...made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him” (Ephesians 2:4-7 NRSV). This focus on being alive with Christ, rather than suffering alongside Christ is hopeful for women suffering from oppressive forces. Gebara calls on Latina scholars to embrace the relationships that Jesus has developed instead of his pain and suffering. This idea about the role of the cross, however, differs from Sobrino’s understanding of the resurrection of Christ.

We can see Jesus as a redemptive force in the way Sobrino talks about the possibility of living as risen beings. Sobrino says that it is possible to live in the hope of the resurrection but that the resurrection is not possible without Jesus’ crucifixion and death. Gebara’s focus on the life of Jesus ignores the significance of Jesus’ death, but highlights the relationships Jesus developed throughout his life. Sobrino’s Christology does include Jesus’ death and finds that we are only able to live in the light of the resurrection because of Jesus’ experience on the cross. Gebara agrees with Sobrino’s

⁸² Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 115.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 114.

idea of hope for the victims and she would say that women are the crucified of history, but she wants to fight against the reality of the cross rather than embrace it and develop a Christology that extends from it. Gebara does not appreciate the way that “the message of Jesus on the cross leads us to believe that suffering that comes from injustice will lead us to redemption,”⁸⁴ and she believes that women need to be able to engage more completely with new sources and new hermeneutical lenses. She believes that the symbol of the cross has been tainted by hierarchical institutions and used to manipulate those who are the most vulnerable.

In Latin America, the mere reality of being born female, rather than male dictates what kinds of opportunities are available to an individual as well as what kind of treatment a person can expect to receive throughout his or her life. Gebara tells her own story about being born female even though her parents were expecting to have a boy. She indicates that her birth was seen as a failure on her part and mentions that, throughout her life, her family has talked about how life would have been better if she had been a boy. Even though Gebara’s parents were not from Latin America,⁸⁵ she can relate to the kind of cultural importance that is placed on giving birth to boys rather than girls. She says, “The fate of being female is often considered a misfortune” in Latin America.⁸⁶ Doing Latina Christological work in the midst of these issues gives Gebara a chance to reclaim what it means to be a Latina. She and other women can identify with the cross in new ways, even though it has often been a source of oppression and aggression towards them. Gebara says that “the issue is to recognize that the salvation

⁸⁴ Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 107.

⁸⁵ Gebara’s parents had immigrated to Brazil from Syria and Lebanon before she was born.

⁸⁶ Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 113.

experienced by Jesus, as well as our own salvation, does not occur automatically through the cross imposed by an imperial power but through relationships of justice, respect and tenderness among human beings.”⁸⁷ The practices of community and solidarity are therefore more powerful than the torture and suffering imposed upon poor. The symbol of the cross, although it represents significant violence for Gebara also provides a way of orienting her theology and grounding her theory.

Gebara believes that the “crosses of women” should not be set over or against the crosses of men, but that the suffering of women has been uniquely hidden within Latin American society. She wants others to understand “the importance of making women’s crosses visible, or to change the language, a bit, to disclose the sufferings of women so as to denounce...the violence practiced against them.”⁸⁸ Gebara does not want to throw out the imagery of the cross altogether, because she finds that it is a helpful tool when talking about the issues of social sin and the communal harm that social sin has caused. Instead, Gebara wants to use Latina feminist theology to situate the life of Jesus among those who are suffering, especially women, and respond to their most immediate needs. This is similar to Sobrino’s focus on Jesus as a member of the poor and a victim who was killed on the cross. Gebara and Sobrino both believe that suffering for its own sake is not redemptive, but Jesus’ suffering does place him in solidarity with the victims of history. Jesus humanity plays an important role in the Christologies of both Gebara and Sobrino.

Gebara stresses the importance of writing from her own contextual position as a Brazilian woman who has witnessed the oppression of all Brazilians, but especially women. She outlines different ways of “doing” theology, and says, “There is a way of

⁸⁷ Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 113.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

doing theology that starts with shared experience from oral transmission, from the simple fact of sharing life.” She believes that “this way of doing theology is what is most representative of the popular milieus.”⁸⁹ Gebara also writes about how she sees women as being “especially gifted with a deep intuition about human life,”⁹⁰ which allows them to speak to other women on a deeper level. She makes note of the fact that many women participating in practices of theology are illiterate, which would limit their ability to do more classic, academic theology, but Gebara says, “it does not hinder the exercise of this ministry. This activity is sapiential; it springs from life, and life is its reference point. It is received as a gift from God and handed on as a gift.”⁹¹ Instead of being able to read and write, women are often able to reflect in meaningful ways on their own experiences and know themselves more deeply. They have the ability to grow even in the midst of their suffering.

Gebara’s own theology is aligned with the first level of popular theology which highlights academic theologians who work with communities and activists, but here we can see that she values the second level of popular theology as well. This is the type of popular theology that includes theology developed from grassroots communities themselves. Gebara believes that the life of God is pertinent to all humans, and if we can talk about God and our experiences of God with one another, we are doing theology. Her claims therefore support the notion that women participating in grassroots activism are drawing on the Christian tradition and “doing theology.”

⁸⁹ Ivone Gebara, “Women Doing Theology in Latin America,” in *Through Her Eyes: Women’s Theology from Latin America*, ed. by Elsa Tamez (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 39.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

In 1989, Gebara wrote about women's changing conception of theology and how women's experiences of theology are different from men's. She said then, "The expression 'women doing theology' is new, as is the explication of what the expression means. Previously, there was never any mention of sexual difference with regard to those who wrote theology, since it was obvious that the task was something proper to men."⁹² Despite the overwhelming trend of male theologians in the academy, Gebara, like other Latina theologians, wanted to highlight the importance of women's voices. The experiences of women differ starkly from those of men and one's gender has a powerful impact on how he or she is understood in the world. Gebara notes that "[g]ender is understood not only as a biological difference prior even to birth, but especially as a cultural dimension, that is, as a stance or an aspect that affects the production of other cultural values, of other kinds of human interrelationship and other ways of thinking."⁹³ All aspects of one's identity play a role in how one is perceived and treated in the world. Latinas experience the world in different ways based on their race, class, and gender. Looking at the activism of women participating in grassroots communities, we can see how these various experiences can lead to important theological reflection.

We can see that Gebara feels strongly about the need to speak from her own context and bring that reality into the academy. She says, "My theological experience is the product of my relationship with people, of mutual influences, of my philosophical and ideological stance, situated in time and space."⁹⁴ In the same way, we can see theological

⁹² Gebara, "Women Doing Theology," 37.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 42.

richness in the work of women participating in grassroots activism. The work of “doing theology” consists of creating relationships and engaging in religious practices.

Gebara agrees with Sobrino’s distinctions about orthopraxis and orthopathy as hallmarks of theological thinking, and she believes praxis happens within a contextual framework. “Feminist theological expression,” she says, “always starts from what has been lived, from what is experienced in the present. ...Living realities are the takeoff point for theological elaboration; they are rational symbols that arise in a particular period.”⁹⁵ These living realities shape theology.

Women drawing on resources from theology are also shaping different ways to understand theological reflection and engagement. Through their engagement with praxis and reflection, they are doing theology. Gebara says, “The theological work of women reflects an ability to view life as the locus of the simultaneous experience of oppression and liberation, of grace and lack of grace.”⁹⁶ For communities of women struggling against the reality of gender-based violence, this tension is very tangible. Women have revealed their capacity to survive in the face of great hardship. They live in a world of contrasts, where beauty and despair intertwine and surround them. Gebara reflects:

The persistence of women in the struggle for life and the restoration of justice have been linked together and lived out as expressions of faith, as the presence of God in the struggles of history. Many women see in these developments the

⁹⁵ Gebara, “Women Doing Theology,” 45.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

expression of their desire to struggle for a more human world...where life may triumph over the powers of death.⁹⁷

Women continue to work for justice and to hope for a future that is more secure. This hope highlights the theological richness of the rituals and traditions that they have developed.

Women's voices need to be included in the discussion about how gender-based violence has impacted life in Latin America. The experiences of men and women differ from one another in stark ways so the contribution of women needs to be more fully integrated into modern society. Gebara states, "By examining women's experience of evil, by listening to women about what makes their experience different, we can come to understand the specificity of evil as women live it."⁹⁸ She claims that "[t]he voices of women ...remind various institutions, including the churches, of the urgency of establishing respect and equality between the sexes."⁹⁹ The activism of women illuminates women's concerns and illustrates how priorities within society need to shift.

Gebara's Christology focuses on the life of Jesus rather than on the resurrection of Jesus as Sobrino's does. She believes that women can gain more from examining Jesus' life and his relationships than from his death and crucifixion. Although both Gebara and Sobrino are liberation theologians, their theologies are drawn from different sources which influences how they are constructed. Gebara wants women to be able to use their contextual experiences to add to their own theologies as she does.

⁹⁷ Gebara, "Women Doing Theology," 47.

⁹⁸ Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

Ivone Gebara contributes to this overall project by offering her unique voice as well as her experience with women who have suffered simply because they are women. Her perspective includes theories about gender construction in Latin America and how men and women experience reality differently because of their genders. Women have largely been left out of liberation theology so Gebara wants to elevate women in order for them to be recognized as full members of society and not as disposable pieces of a larger whole. Gebara's theological perspective provides evidence of the immediacy with which women's voices need to be acknowledged. Women experiencing violence in society need to be able to access hope in order to live as risen beings. Gebara writes of the lived reality for Latina women and how it needs change.

María Pilar Aquino and the Importance of Context

Like Gebara, Latina scholar María Pilar Aquino (b. 1956) also writes from her own particular context. Aquino's experience as a Mexican American woman has significantly contributed to her theological grounding. Although she was born in Mexico, Aquino has lived in the United States and worked with both Mexican and U.S. citizens for most of her life. She has written about the realities with which Latina women struggle on a daily basis, and she believes that these experiences help shape one's understanding of theology. Like others we have examined throughout this chapter, Aquino is a scholar who accompanies those who are working for justice. She posits, "Latin American women's Christology is based on our own experience of historical reality, and this means our Christology is *contextual*."¹⁰⁰ This contextual Christology draws on the practices and rituals in which women engage. Women who participate in

¹⁰⁰ María Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry For Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 139.

activism against gender-based violence in Latin America are working to construct their own Christologies through their practices.

Aquino notes the way that Jesus factors into these lived Christologies. If we want to understand how the life of Jesus relates to the lives of Latin American women, we need to obtain a richer understanding of the daily lives of Latina women. “Knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ,” says Aquino, “has to do with the historical experience of the struggle against oppression and for liberation.”¹⁰¹ Women in Latin America can relate to the experience of Jesus because of the way they have been struggling against oppression for centuries. This shared experience provides them with both a richer understanding of Jesus and deeper relationships among one another.

Aquino’s Christology examines the scriptural portrayal of Jesus. Latina women in faith-based organizations use the Bible to help orient their faith-based practices. In the New Testament, the illustration of Jesus offering solace and comfort to women who are suffering serves as an important example of Jesus’ ministry. Aquino says that the interpretive work done by Latina feminist theologians regarding the Bible “stresses Jesus’ liberating mission in its historical, structural, personal and eschatological dimensions.”¹⁰² Aquino recognizes the ways that more traditional Christologies have isolated Latinas. For example, Jesus’ maleness has been used to oppress women by figures of authority who are anti-women.¹⁰³ In response to harmful traditions like these, Latinas are “trying to reencounter the Jesus of the gospels in order to return to his relation with women and

¹⁰¹ Aquino, *Our Cry For Life*. 139-140.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁰³ Aquino, *Our Cry For Life*. 142. Here, Aquino quotes Maria Clara Bingemer, “Mujer y Cristologia: Jesucristo y la salvacion de la mujer,” 82-85.

women's active participation in his movement."¹⁰⁴ Women are working to reclaim a new interpretation of Jesus as a male figure who offers liberation rather than oppression. Doing this work gives women the opportunity to understand themselves in ways that are liberating and helpful within the Christian tradition.

Through engaging in scriptural interpretation exercises, women in Latin America can reinterpret the ways that Jesus surrounded himself with women in the New Testament. Aquino notes that Jesus became friends with "women because of his special way of understanding the reign of God and his experience of God."¹⁰⁵ Women who have been significantly marginalized can participate in a new system of power that recognizes their humanity. Jesus offered an example of a new way of being in the world which included the reign of God and therefore women's liberation. "Characteristically," Aquino says, "Jesus likes to express God's reign as restoring power in a common meal, shared by the most disconcerting groups of people: the poor, sinners, prostitutes, the impure, women."¹⁰⁶ Aquino's understanding of the reign of God is similar to Sobrino's in that it focuses on Jesus' ability to offer a liberating and hopeful alternative to a temporal present marked by suffering and oppression. By looking at the activities and practices of Latina women through an understanding of the reign of God, we can see how all women, but especially Latina women, have an opportunity read the tradition in more liberating ways.

The experience of women as recipients of and participants in Jesus' ministry serves as an example of how Jesus can impact a major group of people. Looking at the

¹⁰⁴ Aquino, *Our Cry For Life*. 142.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

scriptures, Aquino says that there has been a “rediscovery of Jesus’ relation with women and women’s activities within the new community.”¹⁰⁷ Latina women can relate to the women in the gospels who find comfort in the healing ministries of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark, for example, Aquino notes Peter’s mother in law, the woman bleeding, the daughter of Jairus, the Syro-Phoenician woman, the poor widow, and the woman who anoints Jesus’ head with oil as examples of women who play a prominent role in the ministry of Jesus.¹⁰⁸ Women are also present throughout the passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. These characters are fully embodied figures whose relationships with Jesus help shape his ministry. Learning about the important roles that these women play in Jesus’ ministry liberates Latina women who feel oppressed by the tradition of silence that so many are forced to endure. The process of recognizing these figures creates new possibilities for women.

Latina women who are participating in faith-based activism ground their Christology in the loving compassion of Jesus and his search for justice. Aquino says, “The principle feature in a Christology from the perspective of women is Jesus’ compassion and solidarity with those who have least.”¹⁰⁹ This Christology resonates with Sobrino’s except that it has a deeper focus on the gender of those who have the least. The crucified of history are uniquely women rather than Sobrino’s general understanding of the crucified of history. Jesus’s participation in the lives of those who are considered crucified highlights the compassionate care of God and the priority God gives to those who have been treated unjustly. “Jesus,” Aquino says, “proclaims the good news of a

¹⁰⁷ Aquino, *Our Cry For Life*, 145.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 145-147.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

God who embraces in love and mercy those who according to the dominant religious system are out of favor with divinity.”¹¹⁰ This preference that God offers to those who have been left out of society’s dominant narrative shows us how God’s love can be liberating. The practices that result from this love can be powerful enough to restructure society and make it more inclusive. Jesus’ message of love for all individuals, especially those who are considered to be “the least,” inspires action and solidarity.

Jesus’ challenge to the religious leaders of his day becomes an explicit call for justice. The message of Jesus does not always coincide with the teachings of the Sanhedrin in his day, but he preaches the immanence of the reign of God. Aquino shows that by upsetting traditional norms and establishing new systems of justice, Jesus tries to ensure that everyone has access to faith. Aquino says that “many women laden with burdens that even the religious leaders cannot bear experience the true God’s compassion and liberation.”¹¹¹ This is possible because of the way Jesus works to make sure that everyone has access to the “true God” and hence, access to liberation. This work of making God’s love available also ensures that women recognize their full humanity. Jesus’ ministry of upending traditional social norms allows us to see the power that lies in creating new norms for today.

In Latin America, the struggle for women to be seen as equal members of society continues. Through the life and ministry of Jesus, we can see how God would like the world to be. But until male leaders in society show the same respect and compassion for women that Jesus did, God’s vision will not be our reality. Latina feminist theologians can illuminate the work of Jesus in ways that allow other women around the world to

¹¹⁰ Aquino, *Our Cry For Life*, 147.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

understand their struggles. Even though Latina feminist theologians speak from their very specific experiences, the human experience of suffering is universal and so we can identify with one another on the level of human beings.

Aquino reflects Sobrino's concept of "living as risen beings" when she says that the spirituality of women in Latin America is marked by "an ongoing movement of women to live and incarnate their faith in a way that is consistent with what we are experiencing."¹¹² Women live in the light of the resurrection as they continue their struggle for justice. Aquino's understanding of living as risen beings focuses on the experience of women living as women and acknowledging their particular place in history.

As we can see, Aquino also writes about the ways that Latina women incorporate their faith lives and their spirituality into their activism and their quest for liberation. She says, "Many of us Christian women, Roman Catholic and Protestant alike, have nurtured our faith experience and spirituality within the space created by contemporary feminist liberation theologians. Many of us Catholic women of Latin American roots grew up influenced by these theologies."¹¹³ Aquino notes the ways that many Latinas have been raised within the Christian tradition but long for greater participation than the churches can offer them. She highlights the distinctions of Latina theology and says, "Latina feminist theology expresses, in religious language, our commitment and vision 'of a new model of society and of civilization free of systemic injustice and violence due to

¹¹² Aquino, *Our Cry For Life*, 149.

¹¹³ María Pilar Aquino, "Latina Feminist Theology: Central Features," in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*, ed by María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado and Jeanette Rodríguez (Austin, U of Texas: 2002), 137.

patriarchal domination.”¹¹⁴ Reflection on the work for justice contributes to the construction of a Latina theology.

Latina feminist theologians have looked at the ways that theology is “lived” within the context of women’s quest for liberation. Aquino observes, “The faith of [those] in popular religion is evident in the religious imagination that permeates the everyday life of the Latino/a community. ... There is no doubt that religious faith is a major dimension of the grassroots Latina.”¹¹⁵ She illuminates the oppression Latinas have faced and she believes that spirituality often becomes a source of strength for women. She says, “Grassroot women are both the majority and the primary carriers or subjects of popular religion, and their various movements speak of their articulation of a religious faith aimed at the transformation of kyriarchal domination.”¹¹⁶ Latina feminist theologians support the notion that communities of women are using theological ideas to ground their activism.

Aquino agrees with the other Latina scholars we have examined in this chapter by stating that Latina women need to continue building their contributions to theology. She says Latina women need to continue to “claim [their] right to theological intellectual construction.”¹¹⁷ Theology, according to Aquino, always includes a political dimension where participants are working to create important changes. Women who participate in grassroots activism are engaging in theological and political work through their activism. Scholars and practitioners inside the academy need to consider how their reflections on this work are part of the theological intellectual tradition. Right now, this theology is

¹¹⁴ Aquino, “Latina Feminist Theology,” 139.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

being marginalized and those in power have ignored women's contributions. Women are engaging in protests in order to ensure that their voices are heard by figures of authority. Scholars and theologians can contribute to this movement by incorporating the ideas of grassroots women's organizations into broader interpretations of theological discourse. For Aquino, the task of continuing to build a wider theological framework helps "to empower the socio-ecclesial popular forces committed to bringing about new realities in which equality, true democracy, and justice prevail."¹¹⁸ These popular forces include women working to combat gender-based violence throughout Latin America.

The relationship between theology and spirituality exists in unique ways among Latina women. Aquino observes the way doctrinal theology and practices of spirituality collaborate with one another, and she believes that Latina scholars need to "more deeply [connect] theology and spirituality in feminist terms."¹¹⁹ Scholars within the academy can learn from the spiritual practices of women and the ways they interact with theological ideas. The spirituality of women often gets overlooked in the midst of political tasks and larger theological frameworks. Aquino and others, however, want to embrace feminist understandings of spirituality and highlight the ways spirituality contributes to theological engagement. Aquino says, "Feminist spirituality provides creative spaces and conceptual frameworks for a critical interpretation and celebration of our faith experiences in tune with our liberating traditions."¹²⁰ The spirituality of women should therefore be accepted as a more important aspect of theology and theological traditions. Scholars are starting to appreciate this argument, and they have recently been

¹¹⁸ Aquino, "Latina Feminist Theology," 153.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

doing more to integrate spiritual practices into their research and theological insights. Latina scholars who work with Latina activists can learn from one another and work together towards justice and liberation. Aquino says:

In the final analysis, as faith seeking understanding, our theological activity is nothing more than our critical appropriation of the possibilities opened by God's revelation in our lives and our faith response to it seeking to actualize historically the possibilities of salvation.¹²¹

Women engaged in the protests against the prevalence of gender-based violence participate in their own kind of theological activity by responding to their lived experience in ways that they feel called by God, and in ways that support the promotion of justice and liberation.

Aquino highlights the importance of the relationship between liberation theologians and activists within the women's movement. She says, "In the last three decades, a creative dialogue between theologians and women's movements has been growing...because both share critical theories that are compatible with the relational, inclusive and realistic understanding of the gospel message and of the faith."¹²² Latina scholars like Aquino recognize the ways these two social movements share values as well as an ultimate goal. Human dignity and substantial human rights serve as two important objectives for both the women's movement and liberation theology. Women engage in protest activities in the pursuit of justice, but they are also seeking a guarantee that their dignity and their rights will be preserved.

¹²¹ Aquino, "Latina Feminist Theology," 154.

¹²² María Pilar Aquino, "Latin American Feminist Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14.1 (Spring, 1998): 90.

As we have seen, women's oppression is the result of several factors in Latin America – the Latin America culture of machismo, male-dominated, patriarchal structures of authority, a drug-focused culture of violence, the economic disadvantages women face in the workplace, the lack of opportunities for women to be involved in major decisions at all levels of government. We have examined the way these forces of oppression intersect with one another to create multiple layers of oppression for women. Aquino, like Marcella Althaus-Reid, also notes the “double oppression” women in Latin America face as women participating in a substandard economy and as “second class citizens” by the mere fact that they are women. Aquino says that women “suffer a double oppression, as workers and as women.”¹²³ Women are forced to work for little pay in factories in order to contribute monetarily to their families, and they also bear the burden of domestic responsibilities in the home. Aquino refers to this as “women's double working day,” and says that the problem here is that women are expected to do all of the family and domestic work by themselves without help from men.¹²⁴ This double oppression highlights the multiple ways women are burdened. The theology written by Latin American women therefore also reflects these burdens and challenges. Latina women's theology highlights the forces against which they are seeking liberation, which differ from those of Latino men. Aquino says that “the importance of women as a social sector [is being] recognized within the broad process of the liberation of the oppressed,”¹²⁵ but there is still so much more to do in order for women's voices to be fully recognized.

¹²³ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 22.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

María Pilar Aquino's contributes to this project through her theological analysis of the role of women in Latin America. Aquino highlights the importance of contextual realities for women constructing theology. She notes the political implications involved in doing theology, and she focuses on the ways that women engage in acts of resistance using ideas from the Christian tradition that they can reencounter through new hermeneutical lenses. Aquino's groundbreaking work on reinterpreting the scriptures in liberating ways illustrates one practice that Latinas have used in order to locate theological themes that are helpful for them. Aquino has helped situate Latinas within the theological conversation inside the academy and she advocates for women to play a greater role in theology.

Nancy Pineda-Madrid on Popular Religion

Mexican-American scholar Nancy Pineda-Madrid, in her book, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad-Juárez*, writes about the importance of protest movements and displays of resistance by communities of women. She says that activists "have resisted the alarming violence against women"¹²⁶ throughout Latin America. As a way of demanding accountability from officials, she says, "protesters have increasingly turned to 'performance activism,' namely, to marches, rituals, and dramas scheduled on seasonal days. ...During these marches and protests, activists have frequently used large crosses painted either black or pink to honor girls and who have been murdered."¹²⁷ In protest and as a way to pressure authorities to investigate the murders of women they have known, one group of women called *Voces sin Eco* (Voices without Echo), started to

¹²⁶ Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 99.

¹²⁷ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 99.

construct “black crosses painted against a large pink background.”¹²⁸ One woman, says Pineda-Madrid, “explained that black stood for death and pink for the promise of life and youth.”¹²⁹ The construction of these crosses has been an important way for women to engage in a practice that has deeper meaning. The crosses link the deaths of women to the death and resurrection of Jesus in addition to creating a memorial.

Pineda-Madrid has written about the development of Latina theology as well as the role of Latina theology within a larger theological framework. She posits, “Latina feminist theologians assume that theological work needs to reflect critically on the lived experience of Christian faith for the sake of liberation. ...[T]heology must be relevant and emancipatory.”¹³⁰ The lived experience of Latin women, as previous scholars have noted, becomes the starting place for doing Latina feminist theology. Pineda-Madrid agrees with this position by asserting that Latina theologians “write *from within* the experience of Latinas, that is, this work begins with the questions, concerns, and issues of Latinas today.”¹³¹ Latina theologians write from their own contextual locations, which often include standing alongside activists and grassroots organizers who are also using theological resources to help them in their struggle. This marks the first level of popular theology which we have explored. Latina theologians examine “how God is speaking in the midst of Latinas’ lived experience and how this particular experience of God might suggest a fresh approach to the insights and wisdom of the Christian tradition.”¹³²

¹²⁸ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 100.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Nancy Pineda-Madrid, “Latina Feminist Theology: Charting Future Discourse,” in *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*, ed. by Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2010), 22.

¹³¹ Pineda-Madrid, “Latina Feminist Theology,” 22.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Theology therefore has a great deal to offer in terms of creating new paradigms of hope and a new vision of the reign of God.

Because Latina theology is built on Latin American liberation theology, Latina scholars look to those who have been most marginalized and oppressed most unjustly in order to seek wisdom. Pineda-Madrid says that Latina theologians “privilege the experience of those who know poverty and oppression most acutely, which means that the injustices of the world are to be understood first from the vantage point of the most vulnerable among us.”¹³³ Since, as we have discussed, women in Latin America are “doubly oppressed” and experience multiple layers of oppression, we can say that poor women are the most vulnerable, and therefore their experience becomes critically important in order to understand how God is working in the world. The “theological task,” therefore, becomes “an intellectual endeavor in service of bringing about a more just, transformed, God-filled world not only for Latinas/os but for all humanity and creation.”¹³⁴ Theological reflection contributes to the ways we can work for justice in the world and seek liberation.

While femicide has been examined from a variety of perspectives, few theologians have examined the theological connections to the horrors of femicide. Pineda-Madrid has been one of these few and, in her book *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, she discusses the impact femicide in Ciudad Juárez has had on theological reflection among women. She highlights the reality of femicide which has driven communities of women to practices of resistance. These practices of resistance illustrate how women understand themselves in relation to society. Pineda-Madrid says,

¹³³ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 23.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

“Those who have lost loved ones [to femicide] have created religious practices of resistance that are richly suggestive of how salvation emerges in history and of its *social* character.”¹³⁵ By highlighting the social character of these practices, Pineda-Madrid affirms that practices of resistance might begin with individuals, but they are most powerful when they engage groups of people who can create greater change. She says, “These practices indicate that *community* is necessary for the realization of salvation.”¹³⁶ Communities of women who stand in solidarity with one another have a much better chance of enacting real change throughout Latin America.

Latina activists draw on their spirituality in order to develop practices that help them both grieve those they have lost and also gain the attention of those in power. These practices are related to the Christian identities of many of these women. Pineda-Madrid says:

[T]hrough these practices [of resistance], Latinas connect Christian religious symbols (for example, the cross and exodus) to symbols that affirm female humanity (for example, days honoring women and their courage, the color pink). This connection manifests itself in public actions that not only validate female humanity but also subvert the destructive political interests and damaging cultural-symbolic representations that idealize female suffering.¹³⁷

These connections developed by Latinas illustrate the complex relationship between theology and activism in Latin America. Activists both use the religious traditions that have been meaningful for them, but also protest against the ways religion has oppressed

¹³⁵ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 4.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

them. Pineda-Madrid says, “Not only do the practices of resistance inherently stand against all that undermines the humanity of women – they likewise stand against all that renders religion banal and domesticated. They stand in solidarity with the women who have suffered feminicide, both those directly affected and all female humanity.”¹³⁸ The protests of communities of women are therefore rich with meaning.

Pineda-Madrid, in examination of Latina practices of resistance, highlights the fact that these practices reveal theological insights. She says that Latina’s religious practices have been identified as “a *locus theologicus* – in other words, as a preeminent source or font for the development of theological discourse.”¹³⁹ Women who participate in practices of resistance are creating spaces for themselves which allow them to live their theologies in ways that lead to change. The theological insights that come out of religious practices, however, often become conflated with “popular religion.” Pineda-Madrid quotes Orlando Espín and Sixto García who state that:

Popular religiosity can be defined as the set of experiences, beliefs, and rituals which more-or-less peripheral human groups create, assume and develop (within concrete socio-cultural and historical contexts...)...to find an access to God and salvations which they feel they cannot find in what the church and society present as normative.¹⁴⁰

Popular religion refers to practices and devotions that help mediate a relationship with the divine. “For centuries,” Pineda-Madrid says, “popular religious practices have remained

¹³⁸ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 6.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁴⁰ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*. 105-106. Orlando O. Espín and Sixto J. García offer this definition of popular religion in “Hispanic-America Theology,” which appears in *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 42 (1987): 115.

a primary way Latina/o believers take on and sustain their Catholic identity, the way they appropriate their Christian beliefs.”¹⁴¹ Popular religion differs from popular theology because within popular theology, communities are self-consciously doing theology and creating new ways of understanding it. Popular religion, on the other hand, includes deriving meaning from ordinary daily activities, but the practitioners are less intentionally engaging with religion. Pineda-Madrid says, “Popular religious practices are one way Latinos/as come to terms with life’s struggles.”¹⁴² We can see this in the way Latina activists channel their grief into practices of protest, lament, and marching.

Pineda-Madrid highlights ways in which the Latina activist movement is unique. For example, while the goal of other popular religious practices has been to sustain Christian faith, “the primary aim of the practices of resistance has been to use religious symbols to come to grips with horrific tragedy and extreme loss.”¹⁴³ Latina activists have faced the extremely harsh reality of femicide and are now using resources from Christianity in order to process some of what they have experienced. In addition to this difference, Pineda-Madrid also says that popular religious movements are not usually intended to be subversive, but the practices of Latina activists are “explicitly and overtly [intended] to be subversive, politically as well as religiously.”¹⁴⁴ Women who are protesting femicide want to be noticed by those in power and want to have a significant impact on society. Their quest for liberation includes a desire to change what has long been considered the status quo throughout Latin America.

¹⁴¹ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 106.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

In addition to these unique aspects of Latina activism, Pineda-Madrid highlights the way Latina practices of resistance “reflect a sharp critique of the complexity and interlocking character of oppressive systems of domination.”¹⁴⁵ These interlocking systems reflect the need for an intersectional framework in order to analyze the layers of oppression women have suffered throughout Latin America. For example, although women are accessing theological themes in their activism, they also know that the Church has been one of the forces that has continued to oppress them. Because of this, many women chose to both embrace the religious symbolism present in their activism while also rejecting the institutional Church that has contributed to their oppression.

In these ways and others, we can see that the practices of Latina activism are considered popular religion, but they are their own distinctive type of popular religion. There is a subversive dimension to these practices. “The creators of these practices of resistance,” asserts Pineda-Madrid, “offer a distinctive angle of vision on popular religious practices by their endeavor to process publicly the pain brought about by the horrific tragedy of the femicide.”¹⁴⁶ Latina activists are engaging in something new and empowering through their practices of resistance, and they are drawing on Christian resources in important ways. There are transformative properties operative within these practices.

The practices of resistance that activist women engage in take a variety of forms. Marches, protests, and public performances enable women to create spaces where they demonstrate their political rights while also drawing strength from the religious symbols they are employing. Women have been empowered to take the situation of femicide in

¹⁴⁵ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 109.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

Latin America into their own hands, since no one else seems to be doing anything about it. Women have discovered that if want society to change or if they want to demand that women's human rights be respected, they need to create these changes themselves.

Pineda-Madrid remarks, "[W]omen practitioners exemplify radical courage by publicly drawing connections among the young women being crucified today, the crucifixion of Jesus, and God's presence with them in their processing of pain."¹⁴⁷ These connections prove the importance of theological reflection within the realm of activism in Latin America. They also illuminate the fact that neither activism nor theological reflection can be performed in isolation. Women work together in community and solidarity with one another through their protests. Pineda-Madrid says that these practices "reveal to us that...[w]e are made to be in relationship with others, with creation, with ourselves and with God."¹⁴⁸ The practices of resistance in which Latina women engage are only effective when they are performed with strong numbers and when women are motivated to participate. Women make important connections between the faith they are living and the values for which they are fighting.

Pineda-Madrid's contribution to understanding the impact of femicide, which is a conversation that has been dominated by anthropologist and sociologists, shows how important it is for theology to contribute to activism. Women use all kinds of tools from within the Christian tradition to make important connections between their activism and their lived faith. Pineda-Madrid says that for these women, "[t]heir songs, rituals, laments; their use of religious symbols; their anguished cries for justice; their marches

¹⁴⁷ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 117.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

demanding a more just world – all these bear theological wisdom.”¹⁴⁹ This theological wisdom provides women with the strength to continue their struggle and have hope. Women continue to empower one another in order to participate in a reign of God that includes dignity and the protection of human rights for all women. It helps women deepen their theological thinking.

Pineda-Madrid, like Sobrino, has done important work on the role that Jesus plays in animating activism. She explores Jesus’ participation in our salvation by looking at Saint Anselm’s historic treatment of Jesus. Anselm, in his famous work *Cur Deus Homo* (*CDH*), tries to determine what is salvific and redemptive about the crucifixion of Jesus. Pineda-Madrid says that while Anselm was writing, the death of Jesus rather than his life or resurrection, was the most important aspect of salvation. “Christ’s resurrection is never mentioned in *CDH*, further underscoring the centrality of Jesus’ death.”¹⁵⁰ Within monastic communities like Anselm’s however, an enthusiastic “christocentric” understanding of Jesus focused on his life and ministry as well as his suffering and resurrection.¹⁵¹ The idea of imitating Jesus’ life became more central and it was understood that the resurrection has determined our salvation. Pineda-Madrid says, “Monastic writers emphasized Christ’s teaching that through death we will rise again in the resurrection, the pinnacle of what we could aspire to.”¹⁵² Anselm’s writing, which took place in the midst of much debate about the salvific nature of Christ, highlights the notion that Jesus attains salvation for humans through his death and resurrection. Pineda-Madrid notes that for Anselm, “[i]t is the gratuitousness of Christ’s offer that secures

¹⁴⁹ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 98.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 76.

salvation for humankind, and not his obedient, sinless life.”¹⁵³ Christ’s role as redeemer continues to affect history. Pineda-Madrid says that understanding the teaching of Anselm requires locating our own “historical situatedness” and recognizing that we bring our own histories to the text.¹⁵⁴ Her Christology highlights Jesus’ role as redeemer and sees his resurrection as a necessary part of accessing salvation. In the same way, Sobrino focuses on the resurrection of Christ as a critical element in our salvation and talks about how we can live in the hope of the resurrection because of Jesus’ love for us. Pineda-Madrid and Sobrino both see the resurrection of Christ as a part of what connects praxis and theology.

Although Anselm’s theology highlights the importance of Jesus in our salvation, Pineda-Madrid notes that Anselm’s theology has often been misunderstood throughout history in ways that have been harmful, especially for women. Too often, *CDH* is interpreted to mean that salvation is secured for humans through the sacrifice of Jesus’ death. This, however, was never Anselm’s intention because this interpretation glorifies human suffering. This is a dangerous idea because Christianity has historically been manipulated by the idea that suffering is an important part of religious salvation. Salvation is not determined by suffering despite the fact that suffering is a necessary part of life. Practices of resistance provide us with strategies to combat the evils of suffering. These practices help us see that salvation, in part, can proleptically break into our present and promote hope. This hope encourages women to continue in their struggle and to seek justice.

¹⁵³ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 80.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

Nancy Pineda-Madrid contributes to this overall project through her analysis of women's practices of resistance in the face of femicide. She has spent time with women who have lost loved ones to femicide, and she has witnessed the reality of women's ability to "live as risen beings" in Latin America. Pineda-Madrid writes about women's capacity to "do theology" through their practices and rituals. She offers women who have participated in grassroots communities an opportunity share what they have experienced, and she gives voice to a community that has largely been overlooked.

Conclusion

The work of Latina theologians provides a greater understanding of the realities of life for women in Latin America. By looking at the situation of gender-based violence through the lens of Latina theologians, we can see how a gender lens is a necessary part of addressing violence against women. Each of the Latina scholars with whom we engaged brings a unique perspective, but they all agree that women in Latin America are oppressed by forces that men do not even consider. Life for women includes challenges that men are not affected by. At the beginning of this chapter, we said that it is necessary to include Latina voices in the conversation about theology and activism in order to broaden our theological insights. The theological canon tends to ignore women's voices, but as we have seen, women's experiences offer unique theological reflections and therefore need to be included in order to gain a richer theological understanding of faith-based activism.

Jon Sobrino serves as a helpful interlocutor for Latina feminist theologians because of his expansive writing on the theme of resurrection. Resurrection echoes throughout the work of activist women in Latin America, so we can see many of

Sobrino's concepts at work within women's engagement in protests and practices. In chapter two we looked at how Sobrino's understanding of important concepts such as the reality principle, the crucified of history, and the reign of God is aligned with the faith-based protest practices of women. Sobrino however does not look at the experiences of women from the perspective of women. He understands women to be part of "the poor" who need to be liberated and freed from oppression, but he has not differentiated women from men in any significant way throughout his writing. In order to understand women's experiences of protest theologically, it is necessary to bring Latina women's voices into this conversation. By looking at Latina theologians, we can bring a gendered lens to this conversation and talk about women's empowerment. Latina scholars do not necessarily explicitly engage with Sobrino, but the themes and concepts that Sobrino discusses throughout his Christology resonate throughout the Christologies of Latina authors as well. They have further developed important themes that emerged from Sobrino's work.

The five theologians we examined were chosen because of their varying viewpoints but also because of the way they prioritize women's experiences within theology. Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Ivone Gebara, María Pilar Aquino, and Nancy Pineda-Madrid each bring different foci to this conversation, but each one believes that looking at women's experiences helps us understand the reality of women's lives and women's relationship to the divine. These women have fought to legitimize women's voices within theology and beyond. Their work helps to empower others because they each serve as examples of women who demand to be heard. They have worked alongside grassroots activists and they have been part of important movements for social change.

Understanding the lived reality of Latina women is impossible without directly engaging with Latinas. Latina scholars bring perspectives that illuminate the ways Latina women see themselves and how they understand their roles in the world. Liberation theology has not done an adequate job incorporating voices like these into its canon. Marcella Althaus-Reid notes that “[t]he discourses of women theologians in Latin America, and therefore the communities who are supposed to be presented in such discourses, are present as marginal.”¹⁵⁵ Liberation theology needs a broader understanding of theological insight. It needs to include these marginalized voices. The women in this chapter have taken significant steps in this direction.

By placing these Latina scholars in conversation with Sobrino we can see where their theologies are aligned. The theological concepts of orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy are present in the work of each of these individuals, and we can see how these scholars live in the tension of seeking resources from within the Christian tradition and also feeling oppressed by its limitations. The themes that we outlined in Sobrino’s Christology of resurrection are present in explicit and implicit ways through the experiences scholars have shared of working with women on the margins. These Latina scholars help to provide a language and vocabulary for women who are already engaging in the work of the reign of God through their activism. An intersectional framework helps us see that multiple layers of patriarchy have oppressed Latina women and that women often suffer double or even triple oppressions. In the fight to end gender-based violence, we need to address all of these challenges in order to move forward.

Theologians and activists can work together to make sure women’s voices are heard.

¹⁵⁵ Marcella Althaus-Reid, “¿*Bién Sonados?* The Future of Mystical Connections in Liberation Theology,” *Political Theology* 3 (2000): 49.

Looking Ahead

This chapter has focused on bringing the voices of Latina theologians into the conversation about gender-based violence in Latin America in order to understand the complexities of the situation for women and also to grasp how theological themes are present in the work they are doing. Activism becomes, for many women, a manifestation of their faith. Protest practices are one way that women engage with their religious traditions and activism is one method by which religious practices and rituals are performed. These rituals and practices provide significant meaning for individuals and help them locate themselves in the larger world.

The next chapter will look at what can practically be done in order to make a difference in ending gender-based violence. It will examine how women are interacting with one another and with larger bodies that are working to make a difference. In order to do this, the next chapter will converse with social science literature and statistics generated from international bodies. The next chapter will also look at the role of the churches (both the Catholic Church and the growing Protestant Churches) in order to see how these powerful institutions can play a role in ending gender-based violence. Women understand their activism to be a kind of their theological engagement with the world. Significant religious bodies should therefore further support them in their work. The next chapter will consider what can practically be done now that we have established that faith-based groups of activist women are using theological resources to animate their activism. How does a theological understanding of this situation make solving the problem any easier? We will see what women have been able to accomplish and what is yet to be achieved.

Chapter 4: Moving Forward in the Struggle

Introduction

This chapter will examine practical ways that grassroots organizations, working alongside major institutions, can advance their goal of eradicating gender-based violence in Latin America. Faith-based organizations throughout Latin America are fighting for structural change, and those in positions of power need to be more aware of the enormous problem of femicide. Communities of women are in need of further support and clearer paths in order to make significant progress. The international human rights community supports the efforts of these smaller organizations, but much more is required in terms of developing national and international laws, enforcing laws through police and judiciary systems, and generating international recognition of femicide as a human rights violation. International bodies need to create stronger political strategies and proposals in order to assist local and faith-based communities of women as they continue in their struggle.

In this chapter, we will look at strategic ways that faith-based communities can more effectively work to eradicate gender-based violence. International organizations like the United Nations, Amnesty International, and the World Health Organization are concerned about the rising numbers of femicide in Latin America, and the problem of femicide has slowly been gaining more attention. Grassroots organizations can work with some of these major organizations to develop practical, achievable goals for moving forward. Policy, legislation, education, and information campaigns are four different approaches from which we can begin to address this problem. We will examine some of

the ways gender-based violence in Latin America has impacted wider understandings of women's rights, and we will look at how specific institutions can help implement practical solutions. We will examine the history of women's rights within the international community and look at how women's rights are understood in Latin America specifically. By considering how grassroots organizations and communities of women fit into the larger picture of activism against gender-based violence, we can determine important opportunities for moving forward.

We will proceed by examining specific international organizations and determining which of their practical strategies women's organizations can work towards. In addition to international organizations, major institutions like the Catholic and Protestant churches also have a significant role to play in supporting women. We will examine how these institutions have made some steps towards helping women in their struggle against gender-based violence, but we will also highlight where they have fallen short. There is still much more that Catholic and Protestant churches in Latin America can do to support women fighting against a culture of violence. Lastly, the chapter will highlight important theological responses to gender-based violence. A theological perspective understands that all individuals have been created in the image of God, and therefore possess human dignity which should not be violated. Theological responses to gender-based violence help answer the question of how theology relates to gender-based violence. We can see how theological themes like the promise of the resurrection can be especially meaningful for women who are struggling for liberation.

Understanding Women's Human Rights

Women's rights in Latin America are being significantly impaired due to the perpetuation of violence throughout the region. Gender-based violence in Latin America has become pervasive. Although violence against women is an issue throughout the world, recent studies and statistics show that Latin America has especially high incidences of gender-based violence.¹ Latin America is the region with the second highest rate of gender-based violence in the world (the first being Sub-Saharan Africa).² In order to examine the ways in which women's rights have been impacted by gender-based violence, we need to understand how human rights have been developed and understood as women's rights.

After the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, various members of the international community wrote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and in 1948 the UDHR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The UDHR was drafted in the aftermath of World War II because delegates at the UN had determined that it was necessary for human beings to find ways relate to one another based on fundamental conditions. The UDHR outlines inherent rights and freedoms that every person possesses by virtue of their humanity. However, despite the fact that women make up half of the human race, and the fact that women played a major role in

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Woman and Development Unit, "No More! The right of women to live a life free of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean," LC/L.2808/Rev.1 (March 2009).

² UNICEF study on Gender and Health, accessed November 17, 2015, http://www.unicef.org/esaro/7310_Gender_and_health.html. The United Nations Security General's Campaign to End Violence Against Women, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/>.

drafting the UDHR,³ issues concerning women were not especially taken into consideration while the UDHR was being written. Since the UDHR was written and ratified in 1948, women have worked to be seen as full humans within the international community. Several important events have occurred since then which have given women stronger status and greater protection under the UDHR.

One major event was the adoption of the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the United Nations in 1979. This convention put the interests of women and women's rights in the spotlight for the United Nations, and it highlighted how women around the world are suffering from historic inequalities and subordination. CEDAW "was set up as an international statute on women's rights and an authoritative reference on the matter of equality between men and women. This Convention is an essential framework for understanding the link between discrimination and violence."⁴ CEDAW requires countries to create circumstances whereby women can "have the full enjoyment of all their human rights and basic freedoms."⁵ It also requires countries to create a committee that becomes responsible for reviewing reports about eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. The adoption of CEDAW by the United Nations was a prominent accomplishment for women within the international community.

In 2000, an Optional Protocol was added to the Convention which allows women to bring complaints and reports of human rights violations before the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Optional Protocol put CEDAW on

³ Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) famously served as the chair of the UDHR drafting committee.

⁴ United Nations ECLAC, "No More!" 18.

⁵ Ibid.

par with other major human rights treaties. The Optional Protocol also took into account the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which was written in 1993 by the UN General Assembly. This Declaration recognizes that “violence against women constitutes a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, and that it is a violation of human rights and basic freedoms that totally or partially impedes women from enjoyment of their rights and freedoms.”⁶ The Declaration in 1993 reflected the growing international women’s movement and the focus on women’s rights. The Optional Protocol provided women with an opportunity to present grievances before their country’s committee on the protection of women. It also outlined a procedure used to investigate systematic violations of women’s rights. Although all of the countries of Latin America have adopted CEDAW, they have not all ratified the Optional Protocol. For the countries that have not ratified the Optional Protocol, “[t]his would indicate that [those in power] recognize the rights of women but are not willing to adopt the instruments necessary to make these effective.”⁷

In 1994, representatives from Latin and South American countries met to create the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Sanction, and Eradicate Violence Against Women, which is now referred to as Belém do Pará (since this is the name of the Brazilian city where the meeting took place). Belém do Pará was signed and ratified by all of the countries in Latin and South America, which made it a unique convention in its own particular region. Despite these conventions and committees that are dedicated to

⁶ United Nations ECLAC, “No More!” 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 20. Mexico and Guatemala have both signed and ratified the Optional Protocol, but Honduras has not. Notably, neither has the United States.

eradicating violence against women in Latin America, the number of women who are victims of gender-based violence continues to grow.

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995 and committee members developed an action plan that was focused on improving the conditions for women around the world. This plan was known as The Beijing Platform for Action. The Commission on the Status of Women⁸ was responsible for organizing these conferences and bringing women from all around the world together. The Beijing Platform for Action proposed concrete steps for countries to follow in order to achieve greater equality for women. Gender equality worldwide, however, has yet to be achieved. Some countries have been able to more effectively implement aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action, but around the world, women continue to be significantly under-represented in positions of authority and they continue to be oppressed.

This important history reflects how violence against women has been understood in the last forty years and how the international community has been working to reduce the number of women who are victims. Unfortunately, femicide in Latin America has become a more significant problem even as the international community has tried to protect women through conventions and policies. This history, however, illustrates the fact that there are legal procedures in place that try to keep women safe and raise awareness about the rights of women. The high rates of femicide in Latin America, on

⁸ The Commission on the Status of Women is a UN body that serves as “the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.” The Commission has an annual two-week session to discuss the current status of women’s rights. UN Women, “Commission on the Status of Women,” accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>.

the other hand, highlight the fact that many of the mandates in these agreements have been ignored.

United Nations Economic Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean

In Latin America especially, as we have seen, violence against women continues to be a major problem. One body responsible for reporting on the well being of women in Latin America is the United Nations Economic Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The ECLAC has examined why there has been so much violence against women, and they have developed certain strategies for moving forward. This committee has noted that throughout Latin America, the reality of gender-based violence is grounded in historic power inequalities and systemic injustices. The ECLAC says that it is important for violence against women to be understood primarily as a human rights issue and secondarily as an obstacle to development. Violence in Latin America presents itself in both interpersonal and institutional ways and therefore, needs to be addressed from a variety of perspectives. Social structures have grown in such a way that Latin America has been prevented from developing into a region where individuals can flourish. The realities of poverty, hunger, pollution, racism and economic underdevelopment have led to structural violence throughout Latin America. In order to overcome these social injustices, it is necessary to have reform at all levels of society.

The ECLAC has developed practical proposals which include strategies for addressing the problem of femicide more comprehensively. For example, the ECLAC has called for the creation of greater international structures that hold perpetrators more accountable. It hopes to develop new policies and legislation that does a better job protecting women. The ECLAC has also proposed the integration of femicide

education programs into all aspects of society to overcome the dominating world-view of machismo.⁹ Small communities of women can help reshape society through their activism by working with representatives from the United Nations to collect important data and integrate prevention programs into the community.

The ECLAC notes the ways that women’s grassroots organizations have played a significant role in changing local legislation. The committee says that “[w]omen have raised their voices for more than 30 years to bring this problem [of gender-based violence] out of the shadows...and bring it into the open as an issue for social debate. ...These voices have made an impact on legislators.”¹⁰ Women have been able to effect change in their communities, but these organizations need greater structural support to change the pervasive and harmful attitudes of Latin American society. The ECLAC recognizes that even when women are effectively lobbying for stronger laws to protect them, the laws are not always enforced with enough strength. One report states, “Even though many countries have adopted new laws in accordance with [Belém do Pará,] much remains to be achieved in terms of establishing an appropriate justice system.”¹¹ Practical suggestions from the ECLAC have been very helpful. The ECLAC says that

⁹ “Machismo” is a term used to describe cultural expectations of masculinity. Authors from the *Journal of International Women’s Studies* say that “the extreme form [of machismo] is manifested as hate and extreme physical and psychological violence against women and it has been reported in a number of Latin American countries to differing degrees by the United Nations’ specialists on violence against women.” Karen Englander, Carmen Yáñez and Xochitl Barney, “Doing Science within a Culture of Machismo and Marianismo,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 13.3 (August 2012): 68. United Nations Economic Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Women and Development Unit, “The Challenge of Gender Equity and Human Rights on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century,” *Mujer y Desarrollo* series, 27. United Nations ECLAC, “No More!” 105-107.

¹⁰ United Nations ECLAC, “No More!” 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

there must be greater agreement among ratified human rights conventions, the local legislation, and law enforcement teams. The committee also says that new investments in policies are needed “relating to sectors such as education, health, citizen security and employment.”¹² Impunity for those responsible for acts of gender-based violence continues to be a major problem in combatting violence against women because perpetrators know that they will be able to get away with their crime. The ECLAC has looked into major steps that countries in Latin America can take in order to keep women safe including the commitment to offer more comprehensive training for politicians, judges, and law enforcement officials so that they can be aware of the ways gender-based violence contributes to the destruction of all aspects of society.

Practical Proposals from International Bodies

Human rights organizations have helped to create larger frameworks within which smaller grassroots organizations can work. For example, international bodies interested in reducing the high rates of gender-based violence and femicide can commit to promoting the “ratification of international instruments [that] protect the rights of women, girls and adolescent women.”¹³ These larger bodies should also encourage individual countries to be more vigilant about gender-based violence, and they should work to keep the international community informed about particular regions where gender-based violence is especially high. They should more effectively monitor the situation of gender-based violence and disseminate information about the causes and effects of gender-based violence.

¹² United Nations ECLAC, “No More!” 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105.

The international community must establish stronger policies in order to prosecute perpetrators of gender-based violence. To this end, the United Nations has called on countries to “[d]efine plans and programs with positive action measures to approach the structural causes of violence against women.”¹⁴ Programs at the local level can invite smaller partners within communities to get involved. These programs will create greater access to information about the dangers of femicide, not only for women but also for all members of society. The United Nations has also called for countries to “broaden the availability of resources (human and financial) to ensure sufficient funding” that will enable programs to address gender-based violence more holistically.¹⁵ Policies that will create these programs need to be implemented at the local, national, and international levels in order to call attention to femicide and to ensure the safety of all women.

In addition to new policies, legislative bodies must develop necessary legal reforms in order to strengthen the laws and establish justice in communities where the rates of femicide are especially high. New laws have been put in place in Mexico and Guatemala since femicide developed into an epidemic,¹⁶ but these laws need further support, and the countries analyzed in our three case studies need more of them. The Council of Hemispheric Affairs reported in 2010 about these new femicide laws in Guatemala. The report states, “Despite the law’s symbolic innovations, it has done

¹⁴ United Nations ECLAC, “No More!” 105.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The General Law for Women’s Access to a Life Free from Violence was enacted in Mexico in 2007 and “In 2012, amendments were made to the law mandating the General Attorney’s Office to collect and maintain reliable and disaggregated data on the characteristics of violence against women.” The Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women was passed in Guatemala in April 2008. ELLA - Evidence and Lessons from Latin America, Policy Brief. “Building Frameworks To Address Femicide in Latin America,” October 23, 2013, accessed March 1, 2015, http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/ELLA/130918_GOV_GenVio_BRIEF3.pdf.

virtually nothing to stem Guatemala's rising femicide rates."¹⁷ The United Nations has therefore called for further legal provisions to be "more specific" in their language and for countries to "develop follow-up mechanisms for the application of legal frameworks that evaluate their effectiveness and identify their weaknesses."¹⁸ The vast majority of deaths by femicide in Latin America involve impunity for the perpetrators, and hardly any arrests get made in these circumstances. The legal systems in countries throughout Latin America need to be reinforced in order for true justice to be carried out, and for individuals as well as communities to heal.

Local and international groups need to strengthen their networks of alliances in order to erase gender-based violence in Latin America. "Multisectoral dialogue and alliances"¹⁹ can help smaller organizations participate in the larger structural change that needs to take place. "Inter-institutional strategic alliances in matters of technical advocacy, research and cooperation projects"²⁰ will also help organizations with different strengths contribute their resources to the greater cause in order to have an impact on the attempts to end femicide. Grassroots organizations in Latin America are in fact, already strengthening their networks and alliances. In chapter one, we looked at organizations throughout Latin America working together to strengthen their alliances. In Guatemala, the *Red de la No Violencia Contra las Mujeres* or Network of Non-violence against Women has developed into a network of ten women's organizations that are all working to make Guatemala safer for women. These alliances are especially important when trying to make legislative changes. The Law to Prevent, Sanction and

17 Council on Hemispheric Affairs. "The International Violence Against Women Act."

18 United Nations ECLAC, "No More!" 106.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

Eradicate Intrafamily Violence in Guatemala was only passed because these groups were able to work together successfully.²¹ Individuals and smaller organizations must create more networks and alliances like this in order to be effective at the national level. In addition to local networks, alliances across borders also need to be secured so that international cooperation can play a significant role in the work of ending gender-based violence.

The international community also needs to develop a greater body of statistics so that public health officials and legal teams can analyze femicide more comprehensively. United Nations teams and local organizations, with accurate data, will be able to construct “systems of statistical records on the incidence of violence against women, with data disaggregated not only by sex, but also by ethnic origin, age, and geographical location, among other relevant factors” so that these statistics are protected and used effectively. Local sources need to report all relevant information about gender-based violence and femicide so that international organizations can have precise numbers of women who have gone missing and whose remains have been recovered. Individual organizers have done this work in the past but we need to create a more systematic way of compiling this information. For example, in Ciudad Juárez, activist Esther Chávez Cano told other women in Juárez to pay closer attention to what was happening as the stories of femicide started to emerge in the early 1990’s. Chávez’s record keeping was useful, but it was not done as a scholarly endeavor. She worked as an activist and social justice advocate rather than as a scholar, and as a result of her early

²¹ Hilda Morales Trujillo, “Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala,” in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*, eds. Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano. (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 135.

work there is now a more rigorous scholarly approach to keeping clear and detailed records. Despite these efforts, the sociological data being collected about femicide in Juárez needs to be taken seriously.

In addition to systems of statistical analysis, local government bodies need to more effectively implement information and education campaigns at all levels of society. Awareness campaigns can be created for communities, schools, churches, and neighborhood centers so that the culture of machismo in Latin America begins to shift. The Honduran grassroots organization *Tejedoras de Sueños* or Dreamweavers works to educate those in their community about femicide. The Dreamweavers program focuses on “women’s political, economic, social and spiritual empowerment,”²² and it provides classes, workshops and projects that help women build community with one another as well as independence from their households. Comprehensive studies about the effects of gender-based violence on communities should be conducted and the results should be disseminated widely so that education about femicide is up to date. Countries should “promote studies on the social and economic costs of violence against women”²³ so that everyone is aware of the effects of gender-based violence and femicide.

Faith-based organizations can contribute to each of these goals. By working together and by joining larger institutions, small communities can make a greater difference and end violence against women. Grassroots organizations are already trying to do much of what the United Nations has suggested, but they need further support. They are joining together to create powerful networks and alliances, they are developing unique programs that are calling for social action, they are educating the local

²² United Nations ECLAC, “No More!” 106.

²³ *Ibid.*, 107.

communities about the impacts of femicide, and they are keeping track of local statistics about the rates of gender-based violence. Despite all of these efforts, gender-based violence persists. Faith-based communities in Latin America can also look to theological resources to further support them in their efforts. The Christology of Jon Sobrino as well as the Christologies of Latina scholars like Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Marcella Althaus-Reid serve as resources for women participating in political activism. Women can look to the scholarship of these individuals to find greater resources that will continue to help them with work they are already doing. Communities of women can feel empowered by their faith traditions, which also help them build community and continue to hope.

In chapter one, we looked at one Mexican grassroots organization, *Comité de Madres de Jóvenes Desaparecidas* or Mother's Committee of Missing Young Women. This organization serves as an example of a community that has helped educate others by participating in lobbying activities and awareness campaigns. March 8, International Women's Day, has been an important annual celebration of grassroots activists throughout Latin America. Through an event called "The Walk for Life and Justice" (*Caminata por la vida y justicia*), *Comité de Madres de Jóvenes Desaparecidas* organized a march through Northern Mexico to celebrate International Women's Day in 2013. The participants in this weeklong march started in Ciudad Juárez and walked to Chihuahua City. The march included hundreds of participants, all carrying signs and crosses bearing the names and pictures of women who have been killed without

consequence.²⁴ The Walk for Life and Justice successfully brings many different organizations together to call attention to the reality of femicide and to put pressure on the government and police forces.

This type of activism illustrates the hope that is present for communities of women, even in the midst of suffering and grief. The courage to march across the desert, where the bodies of women have been found for the last twenty years, is not easily summoned, but these women refuse to give up their cause. They represent hope in a future, not only for themselves but also for their daughters and granddaughters. Nancy Pineda-Madrid accurately notes:

The practices of resistance affirm the lives of Latinas in Juárez yet to be born. Through these practices, women are affirming and pursuing the creation of a city radically different from the one they inherited. They are saying that we know we can create a city more in keeping with God's reign, one that more fully respects its female citizens. The use of religious imagery and resources furthers a demand that the heinous sociocide transpiring gives way to a liberative and humanizing society. The practices affirm that a more humanizing society is possible. What the practitioners demonstrate for is not utopia but rather a society that is more democratic and more just than the current body politic of Juárez. By their practices, they are asserting that a more humane society is possible.²⁵

²⁴ Clayton Conn, "International Women's Day in Mexico: Time for Mourning not Celebration," *Upside Down World*, March 12, 2013, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/mexico-archives-79/4179-international-womens-day-in-mexico-time-for-mourning-not-celebration>.

²⁵ Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011): 137.

The World Health Organization

In addition to the United Nations, international bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO) also research the effects of gender-based violence in Latin America. The WHO, working with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), published a new report about violence against women and violence against children in November 2014. This report has been especially helpful because of its origins within the health sector. The international health sector is paying closer attention to gender-based violence, which is helping to make a difference for small grassroots organizations. The WHO/PAHO report states, “Violence contributes to high levels of mortality and morbidity in Latin America. . . .In addition to death and physical injury, violence has long term, and often under-recognized consequences for women’s and children’s health.”²⁶ The WHO acknowledges the importance of having the health sector recognize the realities of gender-based violence, and has worked to create proposals that organizations can adopt in order to eradicate this violence.

PAHO and WHO have developed four important areas where violence against women needs to be addressed more holistically. The first is a call for improving, disseminating, and using the data that is available about gender-based violence. This includes producing “estimates of prevalence, risk factors and health effects for countries” in Latin America, as well as “improving violence surveillance.”²⁷ PAHO/WHO suggests

²⁶ Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and World Health Organization (WHO), “Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children: PAHO/WHO’s Key Areas for Action,” November 7, 2014, accessed March 1, 2015, http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9998%3Aviolence-against-women-and-against-children-pahowhos-key-areas-for-action&catid=1505%3Aabout-us&Itemid=1519&lang=en.

²⁷ PAHO/WHO, “Violence Against Women.”

using the data collected in order to develop better policies and programs that will support women. The second proposal for preventing violence involves “[s]trengthening capacity for preventing violence against women.”²⁸ This step requires the development of capacity-building workshops for anyone involved in the process to keep women safe. This will both increase the numbers of professionals who are working to eradicate violence against women and help to create a cultural shift in terms of who is doing this work. The third important step in this proposal is to improve the health sector’s response to violence against women. The health sector has its own guidelines and policies, and these policies need to more holistically include ways that women can seek help and support. This step includes “developing training curricula for health providers on responding to cases of violence against women” so that health care professionals can more adequately prevent and respond to reports of violence.²⁹ The fourth area of improvement that the PAHO/WHO has proposed involves “supporting the development and revision of national policies and plans on violence prevention and response.”³⁰ These four proposals are specifically for the international health sector but they highlight the ways that small communities and organizations can work with larger bodies to make their proposals a reality. All of the steps proposed require people to be working together in all aspects of society.

On May 24 2014:

The 67th World Health Assembly adopted a historic resolution, co-sponsored by 24 governments, entitled ‘Strengthening the role of the health system in

²⁸ PAHO/WHO, “Violence Against Women.”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

addressing violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children.’

This resolution recognizes that violence persists in every country of the world as a major challenge to public health. It calls on the World Health Organization to prepare the first ever global plan of action on strengthening the role of the health system in addressing interpersonal violence, in particular violence against women, girls and children.³¹

The WHO has a major role to play in protecting women’s rights and ensuring that women can live a fulfilling life. The PAHO/WHO has created large-scale proposals that smaller grassroots organizations can tap into and work to develop.

In a 2013 report created by PAHO, in association with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), additional recommendations for moving forward are included in order to combat gender-based violence in Latin America and the Caribbean. These recommendations include ideas for further research as well as strategies for developing effective policies and programs. Regarding an increase in research opportunities, PAHO suggests that more surveys should be distributed and analyzed in order to determine the rates of gender-based violence throughout Latin America. These surveys, according to PAHO should determine whether a woman has been a victim of violence ever in her life and also within the last year. This will provide general and also specific statistics about the current rates of violence. PAHO also suggests a more rigorous way of standardizing the measures of violence, including sexual violence, in order to be more exact in the development of certain statistics. Thirdly, PAHO recognizes that “more research is needed to understand risk factors associated with

³¹ PAHO/WHO, “Violence Against Women.”

violence against women – not just individual background characteristics of victims but also those of partners and communities.”³² PAHO also wants to acknowledge that while surveys and data collection are important, the highest ethical standards need to be employed while collecting data. These ideas about further research offer opportunities for gathering more data in order to work harder to combat violence against women.

In terms of recommendations for policy makers, PAHO has specific proposals that can help public figures and community activists move forward as well. Generally, PAHO wants all policy makers in Latin America to address violence against women and acknowledge that this violence disrupts all aspects of society. The report that PAHO generated asserts that eradicating violence against women is possible because gender-based violence occurs more regularly in some specific locations than in others. This would indicate that this type of violence can be eliminated or at least significantly reduced. The report says that “work by WHO and others document examples of strategies that have shown potential for preventing violence against women.”³³ PAHO reports that across all institutions in Latin America, there needs to be a greater response to violence. The response to violence needs to address a variety of different sectors within society. The general norms and attitudes that exist within Latin America allow the continuation of violence against women, and greater steps need to be taken in order to shift attitudes.

³² Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Comparative Analysis of Population Data Based on 12 Countries, Summary Report” (2013), 11.

³³ PAHO/CDC, “A Comparative Analysis of Population Data,” 11.

The PAHO and CDC report on ending violence against women highlights the campaign launched by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in 2008 to eradicate gender-based violence. This campaign, titled UNiTE to End Violence Against Women, calls on “governments, civil society, women’s organizations, young people, the private sector, the media, and the entire UN system to support strategies to address violence against women and girls.”³⁴ UNiTE has been effective in the ways that it has called attention to the problem of gender-based violence, but it still has a long way to go in terms of ending violence against women. Reviews of the campaign have developed steps for continuing this work. For example, PAHO calls for the reform of both criminal and civil legislation regarding violence against women. The UNiTE campaign needs to “carry out media and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about existing legislation.”³⁵ It is also necessary to make sure women are supported through all stages of life in Latin America, which includes their access to good jobs and safe travel. The PAHO report notes the importance of building networks and alliances of government and civil society institutions so that different groups can work together. All aspects of society need to address this issue and “work to transform whole institutions in every sector using a gender perspective.”³⁶

Another critical part of the UNiTE campaign is the empowerment of women, which gives them a voice and an opportunity to participate in ending violence. It also seeks to “engage men and boys to promote nonviolence and gender equality,” which will educate men about the importance of treating women with respect while honoring their

³⁴ PAHO/CDC, “A Comparative Analysis of Population Data,” 12.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

human dignities.³⁷ PAHO, the CDC, and the UNiTE campaign can help make sure these concrete steps are actually taken in order to create a world where violence against women is no longer a major threat. Community activists can be involved in all of these processes at different levels and work for their communities to be examples of places where violence against women is no longer prevalent.

Amnesty International

In addition to WHO and PAHO, the global organization Amnesty International also works to promote human rights around the world and tackles a variety of important issues. One of Amnesty International's major projects has been protecting women's rights. Each year, Amnesty International publishes a report called the "State of the World," and by examining the data collected in this report, we can determine how well countries in Latin America are addressing violence against women. The "State of the World" report from 2014/2015, published on February 25, 2015, refers to the problems human rights defenders and activists alike are working to combat in countries like Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Amnesty International's report on the state of human rights in Latin American countries highlights the fact that violence against women continues to be a major problem. The report on Mexico says that society needs to continue to work harder to recognize women as full members of society with equal status. The report states, "Violence against women and girls remained endemic throughout the country [in 2014/2015], including rape, abductions and killings. Many authorities continued to fail

³⁷ PAHO/CDC, "A Comparative Analysis of Population Data," 12.

to implement legal and administrative measures to improve prevention, protection from and investigation of gender-based violence.”³⁸

In the report on Guatemala, we can see that “[l]ocal human rights organizations reported over 500 killings of women during the year.”³⁹ While this number is appalling, Amnesty International also reports that there was one important step forward in Guatemala last year. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that law officials in Guatemala had acted negligently regarding a case of femicide in 2001. Although this is not an uplifting ruling, the fact that Guatemalan authorities are being held accountable for not responding effectively to a woman’s disappearance means that perhaps things will change in the future. Amnesty International sees this ruling as a victory for the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the levels of impunity for human rights violations in Honduras. The report states that “Human rights violations and abuses against human rights defenders, journalists, women and girls, LGBTI people, Indigenous, Afro-descendant and *campesino* (peasant farmer) communities continued to be a serious concern.”⁴⁰ Violence against women in particular continued to be a major concern of human rights activists as well as grassroots organizers. The report says that in 2014-2015, “Violence against women and girls was rife. Civil society groups reported 636 femicides in 2014, the highest number since 2005.”⁴¹ It also states that in December 2013 and January 2014 “there was a wave of killings of women sex workers in San Pedro

³⁸ Amnesty International Report 2014/15, “The State of the World’s Human Rights,” 250, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/state-of-the-world-20142015-0>.

³⁹ Amnesty International Report 2014/15, “The State of the World’s Human Rights,” 166.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

Sula.”⁴² Violence against women in Honduras continues to be a major priority for human rights activists.

Although the Amnesty International annual report appears grim, it provides assistance reporting crimes that are often overlooked and ignored. It also provides important statistical information that can be used to develop new policies and programs aimed at the eradication of gender-based violence. The “State of the World” offers the human rights community up to date information about what is happening worldwide and what kinds of best practices can be developed. This document can be considered “essential reading for policymakers, activists and anyone with an interest in human rights.”⁴³ Amnesty International’s reputation as an international defender of human rights means that those who are engaged in activism against gender-based violence can look to organizations like these to provide some guidelines and structure in terms of making strides toward the eradication of violence against women.

Amnesty International also published a separate report in December 2014 looking at the state of human rights in Latin America. This report titled “Defending Human Rights in the Americas: Necessary, Legitimate, and Dangerous,” provides an overview of the major human rights challenges present in Latin America. Violence against women continues to be one of the most significant hurdles human rights activists need to address throughout Latin America. The December 2014 report states:

Violence, discrimination, and human rights violations against women and girls continue to be a source of great concern in the Americas. Although the human rights of women and girls are recognized in international human rights standards,

⁴² Amnesty International Report 2014/15, “The State of the World’s Human Rights,” 175.

⁴³ Ibid.

their reality is something very different, and it is of great concern that this continues to be a contentious issue in several sectors of society, frequently at the cost of their own lives, integrity or freedom.⁴⁴

Amnesty International's work of collecting evidence and statistics about violence against women provides activists with support and gives them a stronger framework in which to continue their activism. Amnesty International, as a large international organization, offers community activists an opportunity to share their stories with a larger audience and insist the rest of the world pay greater attention to the harsh realities of life in Latin America.

In addition to Amnesty International, other organizations with a worldwide audience are also focusing more heavily on violence against women in Latin America. On June 5, 2012, the international organization Nobel Women's Initiative, in conjunction with Just Associates (JASS), another international organization, released a report documenting the findings of a delegation of human rights activists visiting Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. This delegation, led by Nobel Peace Laureates Jody Williams and Rigoberta Menchú Tum, brought women from the United States and Canada to Latin America in January 2012 in order to gain a richer understanding of the precarious state of women's rights. They met with local communities and activists in each country, and they recorded their findings in addition to developing general recommendations for moving forward. They advanced a call to end gender-based violence in Latin America with strategic proposals.

⁴⁴ Amnesty International, "Defending Human Rights in the Americas: Necessary, Legitimate, and Dangerous," December 2014, 20, accessed March 15, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/AMR01/003/2014/ENGLISH.pdf>.

Their report titled “From Survivors to Defenders: Women Confronting Violence in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala,” highlights the rising rates of violence against women in Latin America, and explores the importance of bearing witness to the truths of women in Latin America. Priorities of the report include protecting human rights defenders and calling on the international community for greater support. General recommendations from the delegates state that there needs to be a greater acknowledgement of femicide in addition to “effective protection of women activists and human rights defenders, including adequate precautionary measures and effective implementation, full investigation and prosecution of cases of attacks on women, public declarations of support and immediate responses to threats.”⁴⁵ This report also states that there should be a more systematic way to investigate and prosecute crimes of gender-based violence in addition to having more stable and honest security forces.⁴⁶ In addition to a general call for the defense of women and women’s rights, the report also offers specific recommendations to the governments of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, the United States, and Canada. The report calls on the United States and Canada to provide greater support for human rights activists and women’s organizations. This call to action generated by the report has served as a powerful tool for the Nobel Women’s Initiative and JASS.

The 2012 report from Nobel Women’s Initiative and JASS was only the beginning of a larger campaign in which these organizations have continued to

⁴⁵ Nobel Women’s Initiative and Just Associates (JASS), “From Survivors to Defenders: Women Confronting Violence in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala,” June 5, 2012, 26, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://issuu.com/nobelwomen/docs/survivors-to-defenders/3?e=4187091/3100356>

⁴⁶ Nobel Women’s Initiative and Just Associates (JASS), “From Survivors to Defenders.”

participate. On November 29, 2014 the Nobel Women's Initiative and JASS published a series of short documentaries looking at the continuing activism of women in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. This documentary series, called "Women Crossing the Line" has three parts. Part one, titled "Defensoras⁴⁷ in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala," illustrates the bravery of women fighting to end gender-based violence. The second part, "Breaking the Silence on Violence Against Women in Honduras," focuses on the challenges Honduran activists face and the oppression they have endured since the 2009 coup d'etat. The third part, "Defending Mother Earth," highlights the risks that indigenous women in Guatemala take as they try to preserve their way of life in the face of growing industrialization that continues in rural Guatemala. This documentary series was published online in order to give a wider audience a glimpse into the work of women who are fighting to end violence in Latin America.⁴⁸ The series looks at how "women are on the frontlines of facing a crisis of violence in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala,"⁴⁹ and it follows the stories of women who have dedicated their lives to defending the rights of others.

The Nobel Women's Initiative and JASS serve as two important international organizations that highlight the work of community activists in Latin America. These organizations contribute to a general awareness of gender-based violence in Latin America, and their contributions help to keep the rest of the world informed about the risks women face. These organizations have provided strategic plans of action that

⁴⁷ "Defensoras" refers to women who are serving as defenders of human rights.

⁴⁸ Nobel Women's Initiative, "Meet the Fearless Women Activists of Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala," November 29, 2014, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://nobelwomensinitiative.org/2014/11/meet-the-fearless-women-activists-of-mexico-honduras-and-guatemala/>.

⁴⁹ Nobel Women's Initiative, "Meet the Fearless Women Activists."

community organizers in Latin America can adopt and implement. International organizations like these offer grassroots organizations important building blocks for moving forward and making significant strides. Community activists in Latin America can work with larger organizations in order to access important resources and share their stories with the wider world.

The Role of Churches in Latin America

In addition to looking at the role of large international organizations in providing support to grassroots activists, it is also necessary to look at the role that churches play in the face of gender-based violence. The churches in Latin America, both the Catholic Church and the growing number of Protestant churches, are powerful institutions in Latin America. Although these institutions could play a significant role in helping eradicate gender-based violence, they often fail to do so. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church wields formidable influence in Latin America, the Church has not done enough to support women who are victims of violence, and it has not done enough to advocate for an end to gender-based violence. There are many concrete steps that the churches should take in order to rectify this injustice. Gender-based violence needs to be a focus on the agendas of churches in Latin America. People from all parts of the community, from grassroots community organizers to bishops, need to understand how to play their parts in order to give women the support they need and work towards ending women's oppression.

The Catholic Church has an enormous responsibility in terms of their capacity to shape social structures in Latin America. Pew Research studies show that 39% of the world's Catholics, the largest percentage of a single region, live in Latin America and the

Caribbean.⁵⁰ Recent findings also show that Evangelical Protestantism is growing rapidly throughout Latin America.⁵¹ Despite the fact that a significant percentage of the population identifies as Catholic or Protestant, neither the Catholic Church nor Protestant churches have said very much about gender-based violence.

The Catholic Church needs to take a more proactive role in the struggle against gender-based violence. For example, this issue could be the focus of more church programs and events. In addition to more regular preaching about violence against women, the Catholic Church could work to end this violence by creating programs that give women greater authority in the community and educate young people about the importance of respecting all individuals. The Church, both at the level of the local Catholic churches and the episcopates in Latin America need to foster community-building programs and retreats that let people share their experiences addressing all of the effects of gender-based violence. The Church also needs to work more substantially with Protestant churches that are quickly growing throughout Latin America in order to build collaborative efforts to address this problem. The Church should use its powerful influence within society to have a stronger political impact and tell politicians about the importance of working with the United Nations to strengthen coalitions and international committees.

Even though the majority of people in Latin America identify as Catholic, evangelical Christian churches have also grown in popularity throughout the last thirty

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life, "The Global Catholic Population," February 13, 2013, accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/>.

⁵¹ Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region," November 13, 2014, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>.

years. In a recent *Commonweal* article, Julia Young talks about how “most of those who have left [the Catholic Church] converted to various strains of evangelical Protestantism.”⁵² Evangelical churches are starting to have a powerful influence within society, but they are not speaking out against the realities of gender-based violence any more than the Catholic Church is. Patriarchal structures and traditional gender roles are often encouraged in these evangelical churches, and women are expected to be submissive to their husbands.⁵³ These churches should also wield their power in order to educate people more holistically about the horrors of gender-based violence. Churches need to examine their complicity in problematic structures and gender roles in order to transform society. By allowing violence against women to persist, the churches are participating in forms of “symbolic violence,” which occurs when violence is practiced in subtle, almost subconscious ways.⁵⁴

⁵² Julia Young, “The Church in Latin America: Can Francis Meet the Challenge?” *Commonweal* 140.7 (April 12, 2013): 8.

⁵³ Octavio Javier Esqueda, “The Growth and Impact of Pentecostalism in Latin America,” *Christian Education Journal* 10.2 (Fall 2013): S-32-S-38.

⁵⁴ “Symbolic violence” is present within church structures in Latin America and is part of what allows the violence in Latin American societies to persist. “Symbolic violence” is an idea that was developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002.) It refers to “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, 167, italics in original). Steph Lawler, “Symbolic Violence” in *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*, ed by Dale Southerton, SAGE Knowledge, October 6, 2011, accessed November 6, 2015, <http://knowledge.sagepub.com/view/consumerculture/n534.xml>. “Symbolic violence is the unnoticed (partly unconscious) domination that people maintain in everyday living. Because symbolic violence is practiced and repeated in everyday life, people do not realize that certain acts or attitudes contain symbolic violence.” Wening Udasmoro, “Symbolic Violence in Everyday Narrations: Gender Construction in Indonesian Television,” *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2.3 (August 2013): 156. Participation in symbolic violence allows women to continue to be dominated across Latin America.

In Guatemala, the churches and communities of faith are noted for contributing to the problem of violence against women, especially indigenous women. Guatemalan scholar Carlos Aldana Mendoza has stated that in Guatemala, “[i]n the churches and communities of faith, the silence, the...denial of visions, the violent practices and attitudes towards women, just because they are women, are made more apparent.”⁵⁵ In 2014, Mendoza authored a report published by the international organization ACT Alliances⁵⁶ (or *Alianza ACT*) that examined the role of churches in the face of violence against women. This report investigated the ways different practices, biblical interpretations, and structures of church bodies have contributed to a lack of respect for women.⁵⁷ Mendoza has stated that communities of faith need to be more engaged with protecting the rights of indigenous and mestiza⁵⁸ women in Guatemala, rather than contributing to ways that women experience violence and oppression. He says, “The churches are not immune to this epidemic of violence against women, as it is defined in CEDAW.”⁵⁹ The Guatemalan churches, he asserts, have become intertwined in the same types of violence that are permeating the rest of Latin America. The positions of

⁵⁵ Carlos Aldana Mendoza, “Iglesias y comunidades de fe ante la opresión y violencia hacia las Mujeres indígenas y mestizas en Guatemala,” *Guatemala: ActAlianza*, trans. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald (2014), 32.

⁵⁶ “ACT Alliance is a coalition of more than 140 churches and faith-based organizations working together in over 140 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalized people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards.” ACT Alliance, “About,” July 10, 2015, accessed November 28, 2015, <http://actalliance.org/about/>.

⁵⁷ Red de Radios Mayas México-Guatemala, “El rol de las Iglesias frente a la violencia hacia las mujeres,” September 11, 2014, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://vocesmayas.aler.org/?p=1961>.

⁵⁸ Mestiza refers to mixed-race Latin American women or women whose lineage contains Indigenous as well as European ancestors.

⁵⁹ Mendoza, “Iglesias y comunidades de fe,” trans. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald, 33.

authority in these institutions belong to men, and women are left out of the leadership. Mendoza says that there are two types of violence against women in Guatemala – structural and cultural – and that in churches and communities of faith, “violence is a factor that contributes to maintaining these structures and patriarchal systems.”⁶⁰ The patriarchal structures of churches throughout Latin America limit women’s involvement and result in a lacking education about women’s rights.

Mendoza continues saying that there are two basic categories that have allowed violence against women to occur in the Latin American churches: power and control. Here, he broadens the idea of violence to be more than merely physical. He talks about violence as being not only physical but also structural and institutional. Mendoza says that the authority to make decisions in the churches has stayed within a small minority of men, and their plan for the churches has excluded women. Women’s rights have largely been overlooked. “In the legal, social and political field,” Mendoza says, “violence against women in the churches is considered a violation of human rights.”⁶¹ The ACT Alliance report highlights the ways that, although the churches in Guatemala should be supporting women’s rights, they are actually part of the problem and need to take steps towards ending violence against women.

There are three kinds of violence in which the churches in Guatemala are accused of participating. The first type of violence Mendoza calls “Active Violence.” This refers to practices of abuse – physical, sexual, and psychological – as well as general aggression towards women.⁶² The second type of violence is “Subjective Violence.” This type of

⁶⁰ Mendoza, “Iglesias y comunidades de fe,” trans. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald, 35.

⁶¹, Ibid., 35-36.

⁶² Ibid., 40.

violence is found in churches through harmful uses of the Bible, practices and rituals in which women are either left out or portrayed in harmful ways, and other occasions whereby women are subordinated and discriminated against in church environments.⁶³ This type of violence is less immediate, but no less harmful. In discussing this second type of violence, Mendoza looks at the “power of the sacred”⁶⁴ referencing the churches’ ability to abuse women by manipulating what is sacred to them or what is meaningful. The sacred therefore has the power to be used in harmful ways and Mendoza is concerned about the churches’ use of manipulating the power of the sacred in order to further subjugate women. He says, “The language, images, and symbols of the sacred refer to the idea of God as ‘man,’ ‘father,’ ‘king,’ ‘master.’ This metaphor attributes God’s divinity as masculine which becomes the cornerstone of the patriarchal order that prevails in society where women are considered ‘not divine.’”⁶⁵

The third type of violence that the ACT Alliance report documents is political violence. Churches contribute to political violence against women in the ways that the churches exhibit “values, attitudes, and practices of exclusion and denial of women from participating in the structures and decision processes of the churches.”⁶⁶ These practices include things like marginalization and subordination as well as the minimization of women’s work in the churches. Women are restricted from participating in important rites and sacraments in addition to being restricted from sacred spaces within the churches. This has led to fewer opportunities for women to hold positions of leadership and has restricted women’s growth in society. The three types of violence exhibited by

⁶³ Mendoza, “Iglesias y comunidades de fe,” trans. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald, 40.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

churches in the ACT Alliance report highlights the ways women need to be allowed to contribute more completely.

The report makes the important point that although people and organizations have encouraged churches to speak out about the reality of violence against women, the Catholic Church in Latin America has never mentioned this issue in any official way.⁶⁷ The Catholic Church, as well as Protestant churches and communities of faith, need to do more to support women who are victims of violence. The ACT Alliance document, in addition to offering critiques of these communities of faith, also provides proposals and strategies for moving forward. One institutional strategy for moving forward includes making “changes within the churches that allow for the transformation of violent practices, like providing women access to roles and positions that involve decision-making and active participation.”⁶⁸ Changes like these would allow women to be in the same types of positions of leadership that men currently occupy and would help change the perception of women throughout society. One pedagogical strategy involves “developing visions, attitudes, values, and behaviors in communities of faith” that highlight gender justice within ecclesial practices.⁶⁹ This strategy includes a restructuring of how pedagogies are shared within communities of faith and requires a commitment from churches to incorporating these types of behaviors and attitudes. An additional pastoral strategy requires creating conditions and processes within the churches that lead to a greater understanding of preventing violence towards women. These conditions and processes need to be reinforced by all members of the church communities. Theological

⁶⁷ Mendoza, “Iglesias y comunidades de fe,” trans. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald, 60.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

strategies include generating diverse uses of the Bible that support gender justice and the basic dignity of women and men.⁷⁰ All of these strategies are further explored and expanded in the ACT Alliance report in order to create comprehensive plans for churches throughout Latin America.

Both the Catholic Church and the evangelical churches in Latin America need to provide greater support for women who are protesting gender-based violence. This support could take a variety of forms. The churches could be more active supporting the work that faith-based organizations are doing by providing space for them to gather and by promoting their activities. The churches could develop more programs that support women's education and women's empowerment. They could offer human rights education workshops and talk actively about how human rights concepts are aligned with the ethical and social teachings of the churches. Leaders from the traditions should write and publish more articles about how women are full members of the Body of Christ and need to be acknowledged in light of their full humanity. Leaders in these communities need to look at the theological symbols present in their traditions and discern what kind of roles these symbols play in the lives of their members.

Although the churches have not done enough to support activists struggling against gender-based violence, it is possible to see how churches have impacted the framework of activism in Latin America. Feminist scholar and professor of feminist social ethics Monica Maher has discussed the ways that the Catholic Church has indirectly contributed to fighting gender-based violence through faith-based activist groups. Maher asserts that although "religion has often been used as a major tool in the

⁷⁰ Mendoza, "Iglesias y comunidades de fe," trans. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald, 114.

oppression of women for millennia, it is now being reinterpreted as a critical source of women's empowerment."⁷¹ The Catholic Church has oppressed women, but women within the Church are embracing various practices and traditions that they find particularly useful. "Women in growing numbers," Maher states, "are re-reading religious traditions from their collective experiences and perspectives."⁷² The religious traditions women are reclaiming serve as one way the Catholic Church can contribute to the necessary movement forward.

Maher acknowledges that although the Church can provide community for women, it also has been part of the problem of gender-based violence. She says that "[r]eligious justifications for violence against women and for denying women's rights are still common in many places around the world."⁷³ Religious institutions have historically been accused of being male-centered, misogynistic institutions that do not take women's concerns seriously.

At the same time, women are using their religious traditions to inspire and empower them. Maher notes that "feminist scholars have increasingly begun to address the role of religions as important transnational forces in the world and in the lives of many women, urging an approach to religion that recognizes its complexity and potential positive contribution to women's rights."⁷⁴ Although many churches continue to be part of the problem for women, there is also evidence that women are learning more about

71 Monica Maher, "The Truth Will Set Us Free: Religion, Violence, and Women's Empowerment in Latin America," in *Global Empowerment of Women: Responses to Globalization and Politicized Religions*, ed. Carolyn M. Elliott (New York: Routledge, 2008), 265.

72 Maher, "The Truth Will Set Us Free," 265.

73 Ibid., 265.

74 Ibid., 266.

their rights and their inherent dignity from their religious communities. Women in Latin America who identify with a religious tradition have been able to draw on the resources from the community and become empowered. Maher says, “Feminists are acknowledging religion as an internally contested and shifting cultural terrain like any other, a site of conflict in which many women struggle for increasing voice and authority.”⁷⁵ The Catholic Church both provides opportunities for women to be leaders and limits their leadership to very specific roles.

Maher has spent time with women’s faith-based organizations like the Dreamweavers program in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. She has described participating in retreats with the women of Dreamweavers and says that the women there “had expressed interest to explore in greater depth the concept of *poder desde* or ‘power from within.’”⁷⁶ Empowering women has been a central focus for this group which has its foundations in the Catholic tradition. The retreat continued, Maher explains, with women deciding that the meaning behind *poder desde* includes, “inner force, clarity, inner potential, strength, courage, decision-making capacity, the ability to achieve our goals.”⁷⁷ Women participate in these workshops which have been organized by a faith-based organization, and they explore themes relating to ways that they can achieve more and understand their rights as women.

Retreats organized by Dreamweavers also uncover some of the social ills that women are subjected to in Latin America. Maher relates that women are encouraged to

⁷⁵ Maher, “The Truth Will Set Us Free,” 266.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 273.

develop a list of words that highlight how women have been made to feel about themselves by men. She says:

Women come to believe that they are: useless, weak, incapable only for the house, crybabies, lazy, dependent, gossipers, spenders, quiet, deaf, obedient, submissive, without rights to study or play sports, unable to think, and virgins obliged to fidelity. This is the result of social conditioning in the family, school, church, and political system. Participants [in the retreats] compared these descriptions of women with their own everyday lives, realizing that they are in fact more responsible for the family, and are communicative, capable, strong, committed, intelligent, concerned, and sensitive.⁷⁸

This reflection highlights the ways that faith-based organizations are taking concrete steps towards empowering women and developing women's understandings of their rights.

Dreamweavers retreats in San Pedro Sula have yielded a greater sense of empowerment for women. Maher reports that women have completed these retreats and developed a new sense of themselves in the community. She says that "participants agreed that the time together gave them a renewed sense of energy and hope to work on their own behalf, struggling for their dignity within family, paid work, church and community situations."⁷⁹ This sense of hope and possibility allows women to speak up for themselves and slowly start to change society's perception of women.

Members of the Dreamweavers organization have also worked with a network of women's organizations in Northern Honduras called *El Foro de Mujeres por la Vida* or

⁷⁸ Maher, "The Truth Will Set Us Free," 274.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 276.

the Forum of Women for Life. The Forum consists of twelve women's organizations, including Dreamweavers, who come together for different events, retreats, lectures, and protest activities. The Forum has worked "to address the rising levels of femicide in northern Honduras. [This has] included a demonstration in front of the cathedral, a public panel and press conference, and an eighteen-month course for grassroots activists on women, gender, and human rights."⁸⁰ The Forum has an ongoing commitment to educating women and engaging them in activities that support social justice and freedom from oppression.

Although Dreamweavers is connected to the Catholic Church through the mission of the Sisters of Mercy, the Catholic Church has not supported the work of Dreamweavers in the ways organizers might have hoped. As the numbers of victims of femicide continue to rise, women who are involved in protesting have noted that victims of femicide are often accused of being prostitutes and sex workers, which might be one reason why the churches have stayed clear of the issue. Maher states, in a conversation about victims of femicide, "[Retreat] participants noted how many victims of femicide were also often called prostitutes and blamed for their crimes."⁸¹ She continues analyzing attitudes towards femicide saying, "In the face of rising violence in Honduras, there is increasing public support for social cleansing, clearing the streets and society of sex workers, prostitutes and homosexuals, those deemed immoral and easily scapegoated for general social disorder and demise."⁸² This is one reason the horrors of femicide have not led to a general public outcry. Victims of femicide are

⁸⁰ Maher, "The Truth Will Set Us Free," 277.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

often judged to be immoral and therefore unworthy of being mourned. This attitude also highlights the reason why many families who report the murders of their daughters do not receive the support of the police or investigation into the crime.

The Catholic Church should serve as an advocate for these families, but it frequently does not comment on such matters. Maher notes, “Official religious authorities, both evangelical and Roman Catholic, have ...been largely silent” in the face of rising numbers of victims of femicide.⁸³ The stance that the churches have taken is something of a departure from the support that clergy members generally offer when there have been violations of human rights. “The Catholic Church,” states Maher, “is known for its strong public stands against the death penalty, neoliberal globalization and rising levels of absolute poverty, human rights abuses against gang members and rising levels of violence generally.”⁸⁴ However, when it comes to the issue of femicide, the churches have not spoken out against the specific patterns of violence and the systematic toll violence takes on society. This could be, Maher believes, because of an historic “[r]eligious emphasis on women as guilty sinners, especially with respect to sexuality.”⁸⁵ The churches, as we have discussed, have historically kept women out of positions of leadership and authority. Through this exclusion it is implied that women are incapable of leading congregations despite their engagement in other aspects of society. Maher says that this lack of attention to women’s issues by the churches also leads women in Honduras to view their own lives “as part of an easily dispensable, ‘throw away’ culture. This ideology, supported by prevailing religious narratives and inaction, must be and is

⁸³ Maher, “The Truth Will Set Us Free,” 277.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

being questioned.”⁸⁶ Grassroots organizations like Dreamweavers have called for an extensive examination of these problematic societal trends.

In order to help women empower themselves and one another, churches need to develop practices that educate them about their rights. Women should have opportunities to share narratives that help them recognize themselves as full human beings with dignity that needs to be respected. This process also involves teaching women that questioning authority is often a good thing, even though they have been taught throughout their lives that there are certain people (priests, fathers, etc.) who have the absolute word on what is right. “Empowerment,” says Maher, “is more about taking away than adding; it involves stripping away false ideologies to unleash women’s creativity and wisdom, allowing women to be fully human, powerful and imperfect.”⁸⁷ This liberating view allows women the space to engage in protest activities and processes that call into question those whose authority has always been assumed. Maher notes, “This shift in perception, a spiritual empowerment, has resulted in action.”⁸⁸ The actions of women who are protesting femicide can have a profound effect on how society treats women. Dreamweavers, as an organization affiliated with the Catholic Church, looks at how this kind of spiritual empowerment can affect women, even while the hierarchical bodies are contributing to women’s lack of self-esteem.

The responses of the institutional churches in Latin America to the growing femicide have been severely inadequate. Maher has written about churches in both Mexico and Honduras. She talks about the churches as “the Roman Catholic hierarchy,

⁸⁶ Maher, “The Truth Will Set Us Free,” 278.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 279.

mainstream Protestant churches, and the growing number of evangelical and Pentecostal churches.”⁸⁹ These churches play an enormous role in Latin American society, but they have done virtually nothing to stop femicide which is destroying their communities. Maher says, “There has been a lethal silence on the part of churches, in the face of the horrifying violence toward women, reflecting a global religious trend.”⁹⁰ She also quotes a 2004 declaration of international peacemakers and women’s rights advocates which states, “[R]eligions have been silent when patriarchal systems have legitimated the violence, abuse and exploitation of women by men. This silence has been deafening in the face of atrocities.”⁹¹

In Mexico, where religion plays an enormous role in every aspect of society, the churches have not commented on the murders of women, nor have they participated in plans of action. In Honduras, when the presidential coup d’etat took place in 2009, “the official leadership of both the Catholic Church and most evangelical churches publicly supported [it].”⁹² The coup brought an increase in violence to the country as well as military rule that women’s organizations opposed. Maher says, “If ecclesial leaders did not speak out against femicide before the coup, they did not denounce increased violence post-coup and with few exceptions, were silent about vagrant human rights violations generally.”⁹³ She also quotes a “prayer of petition to church leaders” from the leaders of the Juárez women’s organization Justice for Our Daughters. In part the prayer

⁸⁹ Monica Maher, “Spiritualities of Social Engagement: Women Resisting Violence in Mexico and Honduras,” in *Religion and Politics in America’s Borderlands*, ed. by Sarah Azaransky (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 127.

⁹⁰ Maher, “Spiritualities of Social Engagement,” 127.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 127-128. Also, the International Committee on the Peace Council, “Chiang Mai Declaration,” January 2004.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

reads, “The mothers of the girls and women assassinated have cried justice and not heard the echo of their demands in the churches. ...Daily the system crucifies Jesus in the feminicides, your voices remain silent while the assassinations of women continue, you have disincarnated the gospel...you have abandoned us.”⁹⁴ This indictment of the church leaders is not unjustified since the silence of church leaders has led to more murders of women. “The churches,” says Maher, “like the state, are implicated in these crimes due to the institutional sins of silence, omission, negligence and complicity.”⁹⁵ The churches have a responsibility to encourage respect for all members of their community and to support those who are working to protect their rights.

There are several prevailing ideas about why the churches have not spoken out in defense of women in Latin America. Feminist theologian and one of the founders of Dreamweavers, Carmen Manuela Del Cid is quoted in Maher’s work saying that in Honduras, there is “a deeply ingrained ‘belief in the inferiority of women’ as ‘an innate fact of nature,’ in ‘the eternal guilt of Eve ... passed from generation to generation.’”⁹⁶ The sin of Eve has been passed down to women in Latin America and therefore, women are temptresses before they are anything else. Women are therefore the ones to blame if men attack them. Maher says that “*Mujer indecente* (indecent woman) is a common description of victims, a way to dismiss male violence, and reinforce a woman’s sense of worthlessness.”⁹⁷ The churches need to acknowledge the fact that they play a role in this historic perception of women and need to do more to help undo the ways that they have

⁹⁴ Maher, “Spiritualities of Social Engagement,” 128.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 129.

contributed to these stereotypes. Here we see another example of how, by allowing these harmful stereotypes to persist, churches are participating in “symbolic violence.”

The notion of women as being “disposable” has been pervasive throughout Latin America as the maquila industry has grown in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras.⁹⁸ Women are seen as being easily replaceable, like inanimate objects, in all aspects of society, but this sentiment has been exacerbated by the maquila industry. Maher notes the rapid growth of the maquila industry which has largely accompanied “the growth in non-mainline Protestant evangelical churches, many connected to international networks based in the United States.”⁹⁹ Findings highlight the fact that many women who work in maquilas are also joining these evangelical churches.¹⁰⁰ Both the churches and the maquilas often have strong male figures in positions of authority. In both the evangelical church and at the maquila, “women are taught to be obedient and passive according to their nature.”¹⁰¹ Women who work at maquilas have strict rules about the hours they work and the type of work they produce. At the same time, women’s awareness of the fact that they can be easily replaced contributes to their complacency and obedience.

Even though the maquilas have brought an influx of employment to countries in Latin America, the conditions in the factories are often unbearable. Despite the fact that

⁹⁸ Scholar Melissa W. Wright has written about idea of women being disposable in her book *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*. In it, she says, “Everyday, around the world, women who work in the third world factories of global firms face the fact that they are disposable”(New York: Routledge, 2006. 1). Women have come to be considered “disposable” outside of the maquilas as gender inequality has been exacerbated. Women are disposable throughout society which is why crimes against them are not sufficiently punished.

⁹⁹ Maher, “Spiritualities of Social Engagement,” 129.

¹⁰⁰ Adrienne Pine, *Working Hard, Drinking Hard: On Violence and Survival in Honduras*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 166. And Maher, “Spiritualities of Social Engagement,” 129.

¹⁰¹ Maher, “Spiritualities of Social Engagement,” 129.

women are often grateful to have any kind of employment, work at the maquilas is difficult and exhausting. It is the kind of work that does not allow women to use their natural gifts or talents and limits them to performing the same tasks over and over again. This type of labor stunts creativity and imaginative growth. In addition to dealing with the stresses of working at the maquila, women have also been accused of losing their “femininity” after working in the factories. Maher notes that this presents a challenge to the machismo culture of patriarchy embedded in both Latin American households and more evangelical churches. She says that “women face frequent criticism for ‘social demise’” for which their working lives are blamed.¹⁰² The “father figures” believe that women should be home taking better care of the children in order to make sure the children do not join gangs or get into drugs. If this does happen, the mother is often blamed. In patriarchal settings, women “are seen as responsible for rising crime, gang violence and widespread immorality. There is a sense of annoyance at women, often expressed by Church leaders, for not fulfilling what is perceived as their natural roles.”¹⁰³ Although church leaders condemn the violence in general, women have been the ones protesting the rising violence, not churches. Women have been taking the situation into their own hands.

Success for Women’s Organizations

Despite the fact that women’s organizations in Latin America have not received the support they deserve, women have had varying degrees of success working within the structures of international bodies and conferences. The actions of women’s organizations

¹⁰² Maher, “Spiritualities of Social Engagement,” 129.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 130. The “natural role” here refers to motherhood and serving one’s family after the example of Mary.

in Mexico have led to the development of a “National System to Prevent, Punish, Attend to and Eliminate Violence Against Women.” This plan was developed in April 2014 and hopes to serve as a comprehensive set of guidelines leading to the eradication of violence against women between 2014 and 2018 (Programa Integral Para Prevenir, Atender, Sancionar y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres 2014-2018). The goals of this program include promoting harmony between new laws and cultural attitudes, reducing major risk factors for women and children, guaranteeing access to services for women who have been victims of gender-based violence, guaranteeing access to a justice system that will effectively investigate and punish perpetrators of violence, and developing comprehensive instructional materials on how to prevent violence against women.¹⁰⁴ The pressure that women activists have placed on the Mexican government has directly led to national programs like these and others. These programs, however, will not succeed unless the government develops a plan for addressing the climate of impunity that endures.

Another important step forward for women’s organizations in Mexico has been the establishment of a nationally recognized memorial site, just outside of Ciudad Juárez. Sociologist Rosa-Linda Fregoso has written about the process of transforming the area where women’s bodies had been recovered into an established memorial site. The site where women’s bodies were recovered is known as “The Cottonwood Field” or *el Campo Algodonero*. In 2001, eight women’s bodies were recovered at this site, “across from the

¹⁰⁴ “Programa Integral Para Prevenir, Atender, Sancionar y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres 2014-2018,” April 30, 2014, accessed March 9, 2015, http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5343064&fecha=30/04/2014.

maquiladora industry's headquarters in Ciudad Juárez."¹⁰⁵ Fregoso says that the site had been treated as an "unofficial memorial" where the family and friends of victims had regularly gathered for "public art installations, performances, and protests denouncing the ongoing terror of femicide in the border region."¹⁰⁶ In 2012, the Mexican government created an "official memorial" because "an international court found Mexico guilty of negligence in the Ciudad Juárez femicides."¹⁰⁷ Women's community organizers and activists played a significant role attracting attention to this negligence and highlighting the fact that it was unacceptable.

The *Campo Algodonero* memorial includes a plaque which states that the site is dedicated "To the memory of the women and girl victims of gender violence in Ciudad Juárez."¹⁰⁸ The names of the women whose bodies were found in the Cottonwood Field are engraved on a wall along with the names of other victims of femicide. Fregoso comments on the presence of the names of victims and says that the practice of "Naming, as a common form of remembering and memorializing, also transforms the memorial site into a place for mourning the women's deaths, honoring their lives and reflecting on atrocities that profoundly affected the community."¹⁰⁹ The memorial also includes a large, permanent cross "painted in the iconic pink, a tribute to recognition of the mothers' cross campaign for justice."¹¹⁰ Although the memorial was created in response to a court order, the work of female activists contributed to putting this case before an international

¹⁰⁵ Rosa-Linda Fregoso, "For the Women of Ciudad Juárez," *The Feminist Wire*, December 2, 2012, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://thefeministwire.com/2012/12/for-the-women-of-ciudad-juarez/>.

¹⁰⁶ Fregoso, "For the Women of Ciudad Juárez."

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

court. In this case, an international court of human rights ruled that Mexico had violated the human rights of women by failing to meet obligations that they had agreed to in the 1994 Belém do Pará Convention.¹¹¹ This court case set a new precedent and established “femicide” as an internationally recognized legal term.

The memorial is not a solution to the problem of femicide in Mexico, but it does serve as an important example of what women can accomplish through their collective efforts. Despite the efforts of women, the Mexican government has still not been as supportive as it could be about projects such as this. The walls surrounding this memorial are too high, which make it seem like the government does not want people passing by to know that it exists. Although the memorial is there, which is an important step forward, the Mexican government needs to be more supportive of the efforts that have been made to build an important memorial and do more to make sure the memorial becomes a well-known site.

In Guatemala, activist communities of women have pushed for stronger legislative practices and policies. They, like the women in Mexico, have also achieved some success because Guatemala has developed a series of courts that hold trials specifically geared toward prosecuting perpetrators of violence against women. An April 2014 article highlights the October 2013 sentencing of a young man who was found guilty of femicide when he murdered his ex-girlfriend. He was sentenced to 50 years in prison.¹¹² These courts, called the Court for Crimes of Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women, were established in Guatemala after the Law Against

¹¹¹ Fregoso, “For the Women of Ciudad Juárez.”

¹¹² Louisa Reynolds, “Femicide Courts in Guatemala: A Beacon of Light in the Fight against Impunity,” *Latin American Press*, April 4, 2014, accessed March 7, 2015, <http://www.lapress.org/articles.asp?art=6998>.

Femicide was passed in Guatemala in 2008. Women's activists played a significant role in making sure this law got signed, and by extension, in the creation of these courts.

Although the numbers of victims of femicide in Guatemala have continued to rise, these courts have helped prosecute more perpetrators than other courts. Statistics show that “in ordinary courts less than 10 percent of femicides and other forms of violence against women result in conviction and sentencing, in the specialized courts it exceeds 30 percent.”¹¹³ These courts employ judges, most of whom are women, who have been specially trained in gender issues and are uniquely aware of gender stereotypes. These courts are also unique because they “employ a psychologist, and a social worker, and have daycare facilities to look after children while their mothers testify, so the difficulty of finding childcare does not hinder their participation in trials.”¹¹⁴ The establishment of courts like these means that women have made progress toward the eradication of gender-based violence, but there is still work to be done. These successes help to infuse women's organizations with hope and allow them to continue in their important work.

In Honduras, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) recently condemned the murders of three women, which took place in October 2014.¹¹⁵ The three women, Marlene Banegas, Olga Patricia Eufragio, and Iris Argueta – two prosecutors and a public defender – were murdered on October 10, 2014 in San Pedro Sula. Although this event marks a horrific incident, the fact that the IACHR made a public statement

¹¹³ Reynolds, “Femicide Courts in Guatemala.”

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “IAHRC Condemns Murder of Justice Operators in Honduras,” Organization of American States, November 24, 2014, accessed March 14, 2015, http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2014/139.asp. Also, Central American Women's Network (CAWN) Newsletter, Winter 2014-2015, January 16, 2015.

about these murders can be understood as a success for activist women who work to defend human rights. International attention to this incident proves that the work that women in Honduras have been doing has not been in vain. Internationally, people are paying more attention to what is happening in Honduras.

There have been small successes for women who are actively fighting against gender-based violence. Women's protesting and marching has begun to make a difference in Latin America, and local governments as well as major international bodies are paying more attention to the work that grassroots activists are doing. Even though the number of women who have been victims of femicide is reprehensible, activists can take comfort in the fact that their work has contributed to stronger legislation and a greater understanding of women's rights worldwide. There is still much to do however, and the situation for women in Latin America remains bleak despite growing awareness of femicide.

Theological Responses to Gender-Based Violence

In order to determine how theology can speak to the realities of gender-based violence, we need to look at how important theological themes relate to the work of women fighting for liberation. As theologians, we have a unique opportunity to highlight the parallels that exist in the activism of women in Latin America and the practices of "doing theology" that help individuals find meaning in their lives. Theologians must address the horrors of femicide in order to further illuminate femicide's root causes and work alongside active communities to combat this evil.

There are several ways gender-based violence relates to important theological themes. For example, the truth of *imago Dei*, which is a central theological teaching that

says humans have been created in the image of God, directly connects to gender-based violence. Women who have been created in the image of God should not have to suffer violence, humiliation, and degradation. *Imago Dei* endows women who have been victims of oppression with the knowledge of God's love and God's special relationship with humans. This relationship means that humans are worthy of the inherent dignity with which they were born. The dignity of women is violated through gender-based violence and it is becoming far too prevalent. *Imago Dei* teaches that gender-based violence and femicide are unacceptable.

We can see another example of how theology speaks to gender-based violence not through the violence itself, but through the sacramental nature of the responses to this violence. Sacramentality refers to the visible signs of God's invisible grace in the world. Women working together toward justice and liberation, and against forces that perpetuate femicide, illuminate a real image of God's invisible grace. Scholar Susan A. Ross has also noticed the sacramentality of women's activism. She has said that "women's actions, while not explicitly or officially sacramental, nevertheless have a powerful sacramental quality that could and should inform our thinking and practice of sacraments."¹¹⁶ Theologically, we can look at the activism and community-building, which occurs in response to gender-based violence, as sacramental. Women who work collaboratively are engaging in a sacramental type of theology.

A third way of looking at how gender-based violence relates to theology is through the lens of the resurrection of Christ. The promise of the resurrection offers a powerful theological response to gender-based violence because it boldly claims that,

¹¹⁶ Susan A. Ross, *For the Beauty of the Earth: Women, Sacrament, and Justice* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2006), 1.

even in the midst of pain and suffering, there is hope. The resurrection of Christ provides an important theological example of God's loving presence in the world. For women who are working for a more just world, the resurrection is an example of triumph and hope. It is about God's presence in the midst of suffering and God's accompaniment into something better. As we have seen in earlier chapters, theologians like Jon Sobrino can illuminate what the promise of the resurrection means for victims of violence.

The promise of the resurrection illustrates the possibility of rising above victimhood. For women who have been marginalized and oppressed by a society that does not value their human dignity, the resurrection of Christ means that there is hope for a greater future. Sobrino talks about the people of Latin America as a crucified people which illustrates the way that Latin Americans have been oppressed. In earlier chapters, we have asserted that for women in Latin America, this is even more distinctly the case. Women have been doubly oppressed by their gender and the way Latin American society has viewed them as less valuable than men. Sobrino's claim that Latin Americans are a crucified people is therefore magnified for Latin American women. Women have been crucified by the systemic violence that has gone unchecked throughout Latin America in addition to the conditions of poverty that have made women's lives so difficult. Victims of femicide can be seen as crucified people in even more dramatic ways because their lives have been unjustly taken from them under cruel and inhuman circumstances. Sobrino is very careful to use the language he chooses, and he talks about people in Latin America as the "crucified of history" because no other term accurately conveys just how dire the situation for those living in poverty in Latin America is. Women who have been femicide victims are the crucified of history.

Despite the fact that women are being killed at alarming rates throughout Latin America, communities of women are still working to combat the realities of femicide. A theological understanding of this perseverance gets illustrated as work that is performed in the light of the resurrection. The resurrection is the moment of triumph that comes in the midst of the bleak darkness of suffering. Even though women who are working as activists are still suffering, there is the belief that the resurrection is possible in the present. The activism in which women are engaged generates a hope for a resurrection and illustrates women's ability to live in the light of the resurrection presently. Sobrino talks about the possibility of "living as already risen beings" for those who continue to live in the knowledge of Jesus' resurrection. Living as already risen beings means living and acting with the certainty that the resurrection of Jesus can be experienced in the present. Women who continue to serve their communities and seek a greater present are indeed living as risen beings. They refuse to let the crucifixion of their loved ones stop their fight. They align their own work with the work of God and they derive a sense of meaning and purpose from their activism. Women who fight against femicide are living as risen beings because they continue to let the resurrection of Christ inform their work and shape how they approach every day. A theological understanding of gender-based violence acknowledges that the resurrection serves as a central event that helps shape the activism that responds to violence.

The promise of the resurrection for women is grounded in what Sobrino calls "the reality principle." The reality principle asks the larger worldwide community to acknowledge the harsh realities of life and poverty for those living on the margins. This principle asserts that poverty and violence are directly related to one another. The global

community cannot ignore the fact that a majority of the human race lives in poverty. Women are even more directly affected by this reality since women are victims of both poverty and violence more often than men. Inasmuch as these horrors are a reality, so is the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ illustrates the power of God and the theological mystery of God's saving grace. Women living in the reality of an epidemic that is killing their friends and family members can also live in the reality of a resurrection that signifies hope for something better. The reality principle connects the horrors of poverty and violence to the truth of God's love and presence in the world. If we acknowledge God's love through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, we also need to act in ways that are in accordance with what Jesus teaches. This includes fighting for justice. If we are in a position to recognize the reality of unjust violence, especially violence against women, we need to be engaged in practices to end it. The reality principle invites us to live a paradox that recognizes the extremes of evil and good. Women in Latin America who participate in activism to end gender-based violence recognize the reality of violence and are working to end it. They are committed to living as risen beings which represents an extraordinary witness to the resurrection.

The realities of violence and poverty in Latin America are overwhelming, but Sobrino talks about the importance of the resurrection as offering hope for the victims. Women are victims of this poverty in acute ways because of the particular vulnerabilities that women face and the challenges that are unique to women. Gender-based violence and femicide serve as examples of how women's suffering is different from men's. Despite these horrors, however, women continue to access hope. Sobrino writes about the resurrection of Christ as God's response to unjust crucifixion and victimization.

Therefore, we can draw a connection between the resurrection of Christ and others who have also been unjustly victimized. The resurrection offers an example of how God's power can overcome the evils of the present world. The activism in which women participate generates hope and this hope is enough to encourage them to continue in this critically important work.

Sobrino talks about the crucified of history as needing to be brought down from their crosses. This implies that the crucified peoples in Latin America need to rely on outside help in order to overcome their burdens. In doing this, Sobrino is calling on the developed world to act in solidarity with those who are living in poverty in Latin America. This is an admirable call and we should be seeking greater communion with those who are in a position to help, but it also puts Latin American victims in a position of waiting for help from the global North. The truth is that women have organized themselves, largely on their own. They have been responsible for taking one another down from their crosses and working together collaboratively. Women have not waited for others to take them down from the cross. They have risen up and inspired hope in one another. Sobrino talks about the crucified people as a way to draw greater attention to the plight of the poor in Latin America, but women are not waiting for help. The larger world does need to understand the realities of femicide and it would help women enormously if they could receive protection and support from the international community, but they are working to bring themselves and one another down from their crosses immediately.

The promise of the resurrection helps us create direct links between the activism of women protesting femicide and the work of theologians. Theology has an important

role to play in commenting on the cruelty of femicide. A world where women are killed with impunity is not the kind of world God desires for us, and women need to be able to walk safely in their environments. Femicide violates the dignity of the human person and reduces women to easily disposable objects. Theology emphatically asserts that this is not acceptable and that God wants more for all of us. Rafael Luévano has said of the theological community, we have a “responsibility to reflect upon these murders and to advance ethical religious responses that address their complex, interrelated causes.”¹¹⁷ Theologians have to respond to femicide in ways that support the work of grassroots, activist women and also increase attention to the problem in order to try to find ways to stop it. A theological response to gender-based violence acknowledges the human dignity of all victims, the sacramental nature of those working to end the violence, and the resurrection as a source of hope. The ethical mandate of those who respond to this issue includes trying to understand how this problem developed in order to effectively enter into ways of working with those who are on the ground to end it.

Conclusion

There are many resources around the world for activists who participate in the work of ending gender-based violence. International organizations and major institutions can offer practical strategies for moving forward, and provide frameworks within which community activists can work. The United Nations has developed committees and reports that contain concrete steps for working toward the eradication of gender-based violence, and it has reported that this goal is in fact a reality. The Economic Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean is one example of a United Nations committee that

¹¹⁷ Rafael Luévano, “A Living Call: The Theological Challenge of the Juárez-Chihuahua Femicides” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24.2 (2008): 76.

has generated important statistics about the prevalence of gender-based violence. The ECLAC, in addition to offering a helpful report about the situation, has developed strategic plans for moving forward. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has also looked at the state of women in Latin America and has tried to illustrate the need for international support in ending gender-based violence. These international bodies have contributed to the number of practical proposals that play a role in eradicating gender-based violence in Latin America. International organizations like these provide smaller grassroots organizations support and structure in their work. Activists in Latin America can work with these larger groups on the ground and implement their strategies for moving forward.

Organizations like the World Health Organization, Pan American Health Organization, Amnesty International, and the Nobel Women's Initiative have also provided important statistical analysis as well as greater awareness of women's struggle for liberation in Latin America. These organizations, through reports and campaigns, have highlighted the work of activists and have supported their efforts. They have illustrated the larger impact of gender-based violence on communities and they have reported on the ways that all levels of society are affected by this kind of violence. Organizations like these have tried to support Latin American women's organizations by writing about the work they have done and also by offering strategies for how to work towards an eradication of gender-based violence.

The overall problem of gender-based violence in Latin America continues to be an issue that many different sources are considering right now. Although Latina theologians have discussed the reality of gender-based violence, the churches in Latin

America have largely been silent about this issue. The hierarchical figures of the Catholic Church in Latin America, despite the fact that they wield significant power in Latin America, have not spoken out about the dangers of gender-based violence. They could be much more actively engaged in working to end this violence, especially because many of those who are doing this work identify as Catholic. Many of the women's organizations have their roots in religious communities so the Church should be a more prominent voice in this discussion. The fast-growing evangelical churches are also not doing as much to help this situation as they could. Many of these churches have strong patriarchal structures, and because women who have been victims of femicide are characterized as immoral, their deaths are not discussed or protested from the pulpit. The evangelical churches in Latin America need to look at the ways gender-based violence is contributing to the demise of society and play a more active role in changing societal attitudes.

Theological responses to gender-based violence illustrate ways that ethicists and theologians can participate in the work of ending violence. There are a variety of ways theological insights can contribute to the conversation about activism and gender-based violence. For example, the theological teaching of humans as *imago Dei* reflects the notion that humans are made in the image and likeness of God, which means that they are worthy of respect and love. As created beings, all humans have inherent dignity and should be treated with care. Theological responses also include accessing important teachings like the sacramentality of human beings, and the value of community. The promise of the resurrection offers theologians a way to talk about the activism in which women are engaged. Women are living as risen beings when they live in the hope of

resurrection presently. This hope generates more activism and can lead to social change. By thinking about activism through these theological lenses, we can see how theological resources have played an important role in supporting women who are fighting gender-based violence.

Such activists can work within larger frameworks to develop strategic proposals for moving forward. Organizations and institutions have provided grassroots organizers with opportunities to continue to work for change. These women have made important strides in ending gender-based violence, but they need further support in order to achieve their goals. The international community needs to do more to provide community activists with resources and practical strategies. The members of women's organizations in Latin America have worked tirelessly to make sure the future is safer for their daughters. These communities of women can find support and resources through theological engagement with the issue of gender-based violence.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, we have examined the activism of women in Latin America as it exists along the spectrum of theological reflection. We have asserted that women's activism in Latin America uniquely illustrates important theological themes and demonstrates their application. The theological themes of love, hope, solidarity, and resurrection help animate the activism of women who are struggling for liberation.

In order to support this assertion, we examined the patterns of gender-based violence in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras as well as the activism that has developed in response to this violence. Violence in Latin America has been present in a variety of ways, but violence against women has, within the last few decades, become a major issue. Small, grassroots organizations have grown out of faith-based communities in order to protest this violence and draw attention to the rising number of victims. Looking at the activism of these organizations, we can see how theology plays a significant role in shaping the participation of women in the struggle for liberation.

Our first chapter contained reports and statistics about the reality of violence against women in Latin America. These reports highlight the problem of gender-based violence and femicide, and they illustrate reasons why women have felt the need to organize themselves in response to this epidemic. This chapter also discussed the development of grassroots organizations in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as the role of religion in Latin American society. The statistics about women's activism in the face of femicide indicate that women feel passionate about their participation, enabled by their religious convictions and theological reflections.

Our second chapter examined the relevance of the resurrection for women engaging in faith-based activism. We looked to theologian Jon Sobrino in order to gain a clearer understanding of how the resurrection relates to women's protests. We asserted that five important concepts help comprise Sobrino's Christology of resurrection. They are the idea of "living as risen beings," "the reality principle," "the crucified of history," "hope for victims," and "the reign of God." The resurrection makes sense for activist women who are primarily living as risen beings. They are living in the hope of the resurrection and in the assertion that the resurrection is possible in the present. Through their activism, women have been responding to the violence around them in ways that can transform society. Although the poor in Latin America are, as Sobrino asserts, "the crucified of history," women are finding ways to take themselves down from their crosses and embody resurrection life.

Sobrino's Christology presents the reality principle as a guide to build community and to join with others in solidarity. After recognizing the harsh reality of poverty and violence in Latin America, we in the developed world, as well as the poor in Latin America, understand the urgent need to change society. Acknowledging the reality of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection requires the Christian community to recognize the reality of the crucifixion of the poor as well. The reality principle asks the community of believers to make choices that reflect their solidarity with the poor.

The crucified of history, for Sobrino, are the poor of Latin America who have lived under the oppression of poverty. Latin American women who suffer doubly, from both the oppression of poverty and sexism, are even more easily understood to be the crucified of history. Yet they become agents in their own liberation. Social engagement

for change generates hope, and women are more than victims of history; they are creators of hope. The reign of God, as we have seen, highlights the possibilities for liberation. For Latin American women, their activism cooperates with the reign of God in the way that it works for something greater. Sobrino's understanding of the reign of God indicates that liberation is possible in this world and activists can continue to work for it.

Sobrino's work on the resurrection of Christ highlights the way resurrection is present in the activism of women in Latin America. In addition to the five concepts we have identified, Sobrino also presents orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy in relation to the lived realities of the poor in Latin America. We can see these themes present in the work of women fighting gender-based violence. Orthodoxy is present in the work of women's organizations that have developed out of faith-based organizations and Christian Base communities. For many of these organizations, their engagement with the scriptures and their faith brings women together and binds them. Orthopraxis is present in the active participation of women who engage in marches, parades, memorial services, and cross-planting. Active work builds community and generates solidarity. The orthopathy Sobrino discusses highlights the emotional and sensory aspects of fighting for a cause. Orthopathy pertains to the senses generated by engaging in these activities and how emotions can continue to motivate. Sobrino engages with each of these concepts, and we can clearly see how each one is present in Latina activism. Orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy therefore relate Sobrino's theology to the political practices of women who are fighting gender-based violence.

Yet, although Sobrino's work can highlight the way resurrection is present in women's activism, Sobrino himself does not consider the unique situation of women in

Latin America. He discusses the poor in general terms. Feminist Latina theologians, however, have a unique perspective to share on the sources, goals, and theological significance of their activism. In order to bring these voices forward and add a gender lens to the conversation about activism and theology, in chapter three, we turned to five Latina theologians who have been both involved in activism and in the academy. These five theologians each bring a woman's perspective into this conversation and highlight the unique experiences of women. Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Ivone Gebara, María Pilar Aquino, and Nancy Pineda-Madrid contribute important insights about Latin American activism and the role theological themes play in this work. These five women stress the reality of what it means to live life as a woman in Latin America and the importance of including women's voices in important decisions. They have argued that the traditional canon of theology should be broadened in order to include more women's work and to understand theology in diverse ways.

These scholars have all been active within the academy, which, as we recall is the first level of theology, but they have also been active in the second level of theology, popular theology. Popular theology exists in two types. The first type illustrates theology that is done when trained scholars work with those on the margins. The second type highlights theology that those on the margins do themselves. The scholars whose work appeared in chapter three are women who have both participated in formal, academic theology, and who have also worked with women to help them seek liberation. Based on this spectrum of theological engagement, we can see that women in Latin America are "doing theology" in their everyday lives and in their experiences with the divine. Although the scholars we examined do not explicitly engage with Sobrino's

Christology of resurrection, they write in a way that responds to Sobrino's theology and they hope to broaden his general ideas to include the specific experiences of women.

Maria Pilar Aquino has said that "Liberation theology has a fundamental lack: the absence of reflection on the historical and spiritual experience of women and their efforts to transform the system destroying their lives and humanity."¹ These scholars make up for this lack and include an important gender lens in this dissertation.

This project concluded in chapter four with a review of opportunities for small, grassroots organizations to have an even greater impact on the current reality of gender-based violence. Through working collaboratively with larger international organizations, women's communities can help develop change from the ground up. Because theological themes play such an important role in the active engagement of women, we could assume that the churches in Latin America support their work, but in fact, the Latin American churches have been silent about the work of faith-based women's organizations. There are many opportunities for the Catholic Church as well as the Protestant churches to participate in faith-based activism and to support women in their work. In addition to the Latin American churches, there are many international organizations that can work with grassroots activists in order to create change. Organizations like Amnesty International, the United Nations, and The Pan American Health Organization can collaborate with communities of women to develop stronger networks and advance better systems of data collection. Cooperating with some of these programs can amplify the goals of women's organizations and change their current reality.

¹ María Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, Orbis: 1993), 64.

This final chapter also highlighted important ways to think about the work of these organizations theologically. Theological themes are present within the activism of Latin American women, and by thinking about their practices theologically, we can invite a different audience to consider the importance of fighting gender-based violence. Historically, anthropologists, sociologists and historians have examined the wider impact of femicide in Latin America. Bringing a theological lens to this issue allows us to see how femicide is a significant theological issue as well. The problem of femicide includes questions about the human person, human dignity, community-building, and solidarity. These same questions pertain to the redemption of human suffering in Christ and the gift of new life. These questions also include major ethical mandates and allow us to think about the socio-political-ethical problem of femicide as an epidemic in Latin America.

Support from Milagros Peña

We have asserted that activism in Latin America is uniquely related to theological themes, and this claim has been supported by a variety of voices. One important scholar who has looked at women's activism on the U.S.-Mexico border is Milagros Peña. Peña's research supports our assertion and highlights the importance of understanding how unique women's activism is. She discusses the natural connection between faith-based groups and community activism. Peña chronicles the emergence of liberation theology, which has led to a greater awareness of Catholic Social Teaching. A renewed understanding of social encyclicals has led to the growth of more feminist organizations across Latin America, especially on the El Paso/ Ciudad-Juárez border. Peña says, "Here border women's activism shows that the Latina community work engages women

religious and faith communities in general.”² Peña discusses faith-based activism as an important part of how many Latina women live their faith, and how being a member of an organization like this inspires individuals to be agents of change. For women who are fighting against gender-based violence, activism and faith often go hand in hand.

In addition to documenting the partnerships of grassroots organizations, Peña also looks at the connections between activists and religious communities. Peña has traced the emergence of feminist liberation theology since Vatican II and has noted the way theology plays an important role in shaping activism. She says, “By 1990, discussion and debate on the role of women in church institutions was important enough that support for workshops at larger feminists conferences continued.”³ Today, we can see Latina scholars at major conferences talking about the importance of women’s inclusion and the addition of Latina women’s voices within the academy.

Activist communities benefit from the teachings of the Catholic Church, but conversely are also limited by the Catholic hierarchical structure imposed. Peña discusses the life-giving vitality of base Christian communities, but also notes the fact that BEC’s were seen as “inappropriate for churches” in certain communities in Mexico.⁴ At the same time, however, we can see that “feminists who...come from the teachings of...liberation theology believe that the Catholic Church’s ‘preferential option’ for the poor...indicates that its hierarchy can be transformed.”⁶ The social teachings of the

² Milagros Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders: Women’s Grassroots Organizing in Mexico and Texas* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007): 133.

³ Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders*, 115.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 119. Peña references Michoacán as a conservative Catholic community where BEC’s are viewed as “taboo.”

⁵ “Preferential Option of the Poor” refers to the major teaching within liberation theology, which says that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. A preferential option for

Catholic Church offer a helpful way for activists to engage with the Catholic tradition and to participate in praxis that supports their orthodoxy. The church, however, also retains a strict conformity to rules about hierarchy and gender roles, which make it difficult for some feminists to embrace the tradition completely.

Despite the fact that liberation theology teaches that a preferential option for the poor should provide comfort and hope for the poor, Peña notes that “[f]or many feminists working for change in their churches, liberation theology has proven to be of little consequence.”⁷ Liberation theology has not contributed significantly enough to the activism of women because liberation theologians are usually male theologians who have not considered the realities of women’s issues and the daily challenges women face. Women participate in faith-based activism as a way to illuminate these challenges and ensure that their voices are heard. Women are empowered to contribute their own story to the canon of liberation theology and refuse to be silenced. Peña says, “Women continue their faith-based community work, challenging their communities to think critically not only about issues that affect them as poor communities, but also about how poor women are twice marginalized.”⁸ Women encourage one another to continue their work.

the poor says that preferential treatment is given to certain groups of people to even out the radical injustice that has been systemically established. Stephen Pope says that the “preferential option advances moral inclusiveness by insisting on the full participation of all people within the political, social, and economic life of local communities.” Stephen J. Pope, “Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option for the Poor,” *Theological Studies*, 54 (1993): 266.

⁶ Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders*, 119-120.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

Activists participate in faith-based organizations because of the way these organizations share their sense of responsibility and obligation both in moral terms and in terms of the coming kingdom of God. Activists are encouraged to be involved based on a variety of factors. Peña says, “[T]he social forces that impacted feminists in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America also shaped their thinking and mobilization.”⁹ Women are involved because of the economic, religious, and cultural forces that combine to encourage them to seek justice. Peña also says, “Women’s NGOs¹⁰ on the U.S.-Mexico border are linked by their local and transnational concern for women’s rights and human rights broadly defined.”¹¹ Women’s religious motivations are combined with their efforts to make the world a more just place.

Peña’s work included interviewing many women who participate in faith-based activism. She interviewed Adrian Dominican Sisters Eleanor Stetch and Donna Kustusich who helped establish a faith-based organization in Ciudad Juárez focused on women’s empowerment. Stetch says, “We made as a congregation a deliberate choice to work for justice and peace that was really based on what happening, especially in our consciousness on women’s position – the injustice with which they are treated in our country and worldwide.”¹² This organization serves as an important example of a community whose religious framework has helped shape the mission and work of those involved. The religious nature of this organization (*Centro Mujeres de Fe y Esperanza* or Center for Women of Faith and Hope) provides women with an opportunity to engage in practices that reflect their faith life. The mission of the Adrian Dominican Sister is “to

⁹ Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders*, 125.

¹⁰ NGOs are non-governmental organizations.

¹¹ Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders*, 128.

¹² Ibid.

discover and identify themselves as women called to share faith and life with one another, and sent into the world to be with others in promoting peace and justice.”¹³ This mission statement helps combine the activist priority of seeking justice with the religious organization’s priority of keeping faith at the heart of the organization. There are a variety of NGO’s who are able to accomplish this duality and at the same time, provide women with their own opportunities to use their own voices. Religious organizations such as the Adrian Dominican Sisters, the Sisters of Mercy, and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word¹⁴ help empower women to speak their own truths.

Interviews with Catholic sisters from various religious organizations illustrate the ways religious organizations and grassroots organizations share similar values. Peña interviewed Sister María de Jesús Gringas Aguirre, a Catholic Sister of the Incarnate Word. Sister María says that “the most oppressed people, the most needy, are women, especially among the poor, the marginal, the mistreated, the humiliated.”¹⁵ We get the sense that Sister María feels that this work is more than just a collection of practices. For her, it is a vocation. This idea echoes what other religious women have said about working with activists. Sister María also says, “I feel a great calling to work with women. We are working to recover our dignity, our place in society, families and churches.”¹⁶ Women from religious orders work alongside women from grassroots organizations. Together, they are fighting gender-based violence and trying to protect the

¹³ Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders*, 129.

¹⁴ These three religious orders are committed to supporting women in Latin America and working with NGOs that empower women. These three are referred to in Peña’s *Latina Activists Across Borders*, 129-130.

¹⁵ Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders*. 130.

¹⁶ Ibid.

rights of women. Grassroots organizations are open to the solidarity and friendship expressed by certain religious orders.

Collaboration allows women to share their experiences with one another despite their different backgrounds. Peña asserts, “[T]he focus women’s NGOs have on poverty, racism, classism, and other ways women’s oppression takes shape creates opportunities for reaching across ethnic, racial, and class boundaries.”¹⁷ The intersectionality of women’s oppression becomes a consideration for Peña’s analysis because she highlights the various way women in Latin America experience oppression. When women from religious orders and grassroots organizations collaborate they share their narratives with one another and join together in a common mission. This cooperation is helping “to make global feminist consciousness a powerful force in the world.”¹⁸ Peña interviews another activist who claims, “We are each contributing to this process of change, each like a grain of sand.”¹⁹ Women view their contributions to this cause as both individual practices that enrich their lives and also as actions that make a difference to the larger systemic problem of gender-based violence in Latin America.

Peña indicates that the NGOs she has examined all strive to empower women to activism. This has “led women’s NGOs to form coalitions and alliances with other groups and movements as part of their organizing strategies. Women crossed any number of class, race, and geographical boundaries to do women-centered community work.”²⁰ Women empower one another by organizing and engaging in protests and activities that help them claim their own voices. Networks of women connect various

¹⁷ Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders*, 131.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

women's organizations to share resources and to build a greater awareness of the magnitude of gender-based violence. Peña highlights the ways "women's NGOs have shown that rallying around issues of violence against women as a violation of human rights helps to bring women from different parts of the women's movement together."²¹ Women are able to share their experiences with one another in ways that help them identify with one another and create stronger networks. They encourage one another and help keep the movement going forward. "Latina's grassroots communities," says Peña, "are breaking new ground for feminist and women-centered activism and are showing us how we can envision and work toward new feminist futures."²² These new feminist futures include a world where gender-based violence and femicide are no longer imminent threats. Women work to empower one another towards this future.

Peña's study of Latina's women activism has revealed that Latina women shape their sense of religiosity through their participation in protest. She says (along with co-author Lisa M. Frehill) that "Latinas, embedded within their culture, are actively engaged in responding to and shaping their cultural reality that have produced religious practices often missed in conventional measures of religiosity."²³ Women engaged in protest are often illustrating their understanding of religion and their anticipation of the reign of God. Peña's research supports this claim because she says that Latina women participating in cultural practices are shaping their religious beliefs. She says that her research explores "more deeply the ways in which religious cultural practices and beliefs may be

²¹ Peña, *Latina Activists Across Borders*, 149.

²² *Ibid.*, 152.

²³ Milagros Peña and Lisa M. Frehill, "Latina Religious Practice: Analyzing Cultural Dimensions in Measures of Religiosity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37.4 (December 1998): 620-621.

incorporated into measures of religiosity and the ways in which Latinas are actively involved in religious cultural production.”²⁴ Women who are responding to their environment by protesting the prevalence of gender-based violence are therefore helping to shape the religious landscape of Latin America. Despite this reality, women’s voices continue to be left out of conversations about liberation theology. The lived experiences of women bring a gender lens to the teachings of liberation theology in ways that are illuminating for liberation theologians. Peña’s study of Latina women’s activism highlights the ways that activists experience some of their practices and rituals as religious expressions of their faith. She has also catalogued the way religious organizations and grassroots organizations have worked together to share their experiences with one another and create common goals. The religious expression of grassroots activism illustrates the way women are using resources to animate their activism. Peña’s research supports the assertions that we have made throughout this project and highlights the relationship between women’s activism and important theological themes.

Going Forward

As we move forward, it remains clear that the work of ending gender-based violence in Latin America must continue. There is still much to do and there are many opportunities for individuals and organizations to become part of the process. The Catholic Church in Latin America should and can play a more significant role supporting faith-based organizers. The leaders of the Catholic community in Latin America - bishops and priests as well as community leaders – can start by talking more about the

²⁴ Peña and Frehill, “Latina Religious Practice.” 633.

reality of gender-based violence and drawing more attention to the fact that women's safety is in jeopardy. Leaders of the community need to do more to combat the prevalent culture of machismo. They can do this by creating programs that educate the community about gender-based violence and by offering opportunities for young men and women to work together collaboratively on projects. Priests can reach out to women's organizations and offer to support them in their endeavors. They could also accompany women who participate in marches and protests. They could write editorials and journal articles for local newspapers and magazines. They could look for greater support from Vatican officials to make violence against women a more immediate issue for the wider Catholic community.

Pope Francis has actually briefly discussed the dangers of violence against women,²⁵ but the Vatican should make this issue a larger agenda issue. Pope Francis, as a Latin American man, is in a unique position to draw attention to the problem of femicide. His popularity among Catholics in Latin America means that he would have a captive audience if he chose to denounce violence against women. Pope Francis has proven that he is a champion of the poor and marginalized. Therefore, he could easily offer encouragement and support for women who are seeking justice. He could also reshape the conversation about faith-based organizations and activism by supporting the work of women on the ground. Pope Francis, like Sobrino, needs to acknowledge the unique challenges women face as the majority of "the poor." Women are creating change

²⁵ For example, in February 2015, at the Vatican, Pope Francis discussed domestic abuse and violence against women. These comments did not focus on Latin American women specifically, but did discuss the need to protect women in general. Philip Pullella, "Pope condemns female mutilation, domestic violence against women," *Reuters*, February 7, 2015, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/07/us-pope-mutilation-idUSKBN0LB0JM20150207>.

from the ground up, but the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches in Latin America could be doing more to support their efforts. Because religious and theological commitments are present in the activism of Latin American women, religious institutions should be accompanying women and helping build stronger communities.

In addition to the ecclesial institutions, the international community also needs to do more to support women's organizations. The United Nations needs to send more delegates to work with communities of women in Latin America and report on the realities that women are experiencing. These delegates can report back to the wider international community in order to draw attention to this issue and make sure the women in Latin America are not suffering alone. Organizations also need to develop better systems of statistical analysis to accurately report on what is happening in Latin America. International corporations can donate resources for the express purpose of developing new technologies to keep women safe. Many new applications are being developed with the idea of keeping women safe around the world,²⁶ but this technology needs to be implemented successfully in Latin America. Unfortunately, many of these new technologies depend on the user to have other technology (like a smartphone or

²⁶ Many articles have featured new apps and new technology designed to keep women safe or to more quickly transmit the location of a woman in distress. Examples of these recent articles include: Esha Chhabra, "Can Apps Keep Women Safe in India?" *Forbes*, December 31, 2014, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/eshachhabra/2014/12/31/can-apps-keep-women-safe-in-india/>. Rebecca Hiscott, "Are wearables the answer to women's safety?" *The Daily Dot*, July 17, 2014, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.dailydot.com/technology/wearables-keep-women-safe/>. Helen Batte, "Technology to keep women safe," *Women's Views on News*, February 8, 2013, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.womensviewsonnews.org/2013/02/technology-to-keep-women-safe/>. Alexander Sommer, "A New Wearable Tech Engineered to keep women safe – "Roar" (Yes, after the hit song.)" *WT VOX*, May 8, 2014, accessed July 14, 2015, <https://wtvox.com/2014/08/new-wearable-tech-engineered-keep-women-safe-roar-yes-hit-song/>.

computer) available, and many poor women do not have access to these technologies, although some of them do. The development of this technology is a step in the right direction.

It is perhaps more important to dismantle the machismo that dominates society and leads men to believe that women are less important and deserving of abuse. The culture of machismo in Latin America allows the cycle of violence to continue. The activism of women continues to draw attention to this problem and is slowly helping to transform attitudes and policies. Legal systems in Latin America now take femicide more seriously than they once did and politicians know that femicide cannot be condoned. Leaders from the international community as well as local organizations need to ensure that this issue gets the attention it deserves.

Activists in Latin America have utilized important resources from their faith traditions to animate their activism and continue to struggle for liberation. These women have also taught the wider community about transforming society from the ground up and the power of persistence. The laws in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras are starting to reflect the efforts of community activists and there is hope for the future. Grassroots organizers have made their presence known through their marches, protests, and cross-planting rituals. These women continue to serve as an important example of what is possible when they empower one another.

The theological concerns present in the activism of these women reflect the ways they utilize their faith in empowering ways. The themes of love, hope, community, solidarity, and resurrection illustrate the fact that women's participation in this activism includes theology. Women are "doing theology," when they are engaging in the popular

theology practices of activism and building community with one another. Women's voices need to be included in the conversation about the relationship between activism and theology. This dissertation has highlighted the reality of femicide in Latin America, the activism that protests against this reality, and the theological dimensions of activism. It has focused on one liberation theologian whose theology illustrates the relationship between activism and faith, but it has also introduced other important voices. It has used an intersectional framework in order to discuss the importance of women's experiences, and offered suggestions for how international organizations can work together alongside small communities. We have demonstrated that theology and the activism of women in Latin America share a unique relationship. This relationship leads to greater numbers of women who continue to work towards the eradication of gender-based violence, a socio-ethical reality that needs to be addressed by the theological ethical community. These women continue to motivate and inspire.

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