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(Editor)

**Religion, Human Dignity
and Liberation**



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Justice, Knowledge, and Gratitude for Liberation: Embracing the World Forum on Theology and Liberation

María Pilar Aquino¹

The World Forum on Theology and Liberation (WFTL) develops concept and understanding from the critically reflected practices of the social and religious actors that inhabit the World Social Forum (WSF). Informed by the theoretical frameworks of liberation theology, the WFTL seeks to both support in theological terms the processes of the contemporary global justice movement² and contribute to the values, goals, and vision of the WSF. The WFTL was born at the core of the WSF as a space for theological reflection on the transformative practices of the global justice movement that provides the social base of the WSF. A shared premise among liberation theologians is that production of theological knowledge aims at supporting practices of constructive transformation for advancing just social systems and relationships. Critically aware of the demands of social justice inherent to faith-based visions of humanity and world, practitioners of this theology seek to both provide a religious response and add a contribution to social processes that intend a radical change of social injustice and dehumanization through constructive transformation. The intervention of religious actors in those processes bring to light how one's resolve to build a world fashioned by justice

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² For a definition of the term "global justice movement," see Valentine M. Moghadam, *Globalization and Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism, and the Global Justice Movement*, Second edition (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 171.

and peace, properly emulates the very being of God as a God of life, justice, freedom, and liberation. Theological reflection grounded on the practices of the global justice movement, within which religious actors actively participate, produces ways of understanding infused by a deep hope in humanity and a deep trust in God's promises. Despair, powerlessness, hopelessness, futility, or even cynicism are human emotions no longer substantiated as motives for doing nothing regarding the demands of transformation in the interest of actualizing a desired, just and joyful fate of the world and humanity. Intervention for the advancement of human dignity, human rights, sustainable communities, social justice, and solidarity undertaken by a pluralism of social and religious actors is taking place around the world, and this is a powerful reason for hope.

The very existence of the WSF in a context where unjust societal systems obliterate the hopes of the excluded humanity for dignity and justice is, in itself a statement of hope. In this context, where the global capitalist markets have configured "a society that admits no alternatives,"³ or "a society that, in the name of the totalizing market, declares that no alternatives exist,"⁴ as described by Franz Hinkelammert, hope becomes more important than ever. Manifestations of solidarity for constructive transformation produce hope as they disclose a deeper meaning of human existence. When a myriad of social and religious actors declares by thought and action that "another world is possible," this declaration becomes the organizing platform of lived experiences open to meet the novelties that the world delivers in the form of hopeful alternatives. It also reveals that hope is not a chimera produced by deceived minds but the certainty that historical realities have still more to give of themselves, and that humanity has still to unfold fully its potentialities. The collective search for alternatives, as embodied by the WSF, generates a different mode of thinking and acting as one that consciously enacts liberty of choice about the best routes conducive to one's human flourishing in environments where the community and creation also flourish. For involved actors motivated by religious faith, hope displays credibility precisely in the very process of shaping alternatives for better conditions of life for all. By the historical determination of God's revelation, that process becomes the revelatory site of God's living presence in the world.

From the Christian tradition, hope in a renewed humanity and creation, as inaugurated by life, death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, is a religious

³ Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Cultura de la esperanza y sociedad sin exclusión* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1995), 7, 199.

⁴ Franz J. Hinkelammert, "¿Capitalismo sin Alternativas? Sobre la sociedad que sostiene que no hay alternativa para ella," Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, *Revista Pasos* 37 (1991): 15. My translation from Spanish.

conviction that motivates work for social change, sustains solidarity in the struggles for justice, and provides fortitude in the face of adversity. As condensed in the motto "Another world is possible," the commitment of social and religious actors to building just social systems and relationships, communicates to the world that the current circumstances of global social injustice are incompatible with God's purpose for the world and humanity. In their search for alternatives to the current unjust societal setting created by neoliberal capitalist globalization, the intervention of social and religious actors for constructive transformation is today the most proper way to show concern for the fate of the world. The purpose of this writing is to acknowledge and honor the contribution of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation to those initiatives encompassed by the WSF. In the first section, I address a theological approach to justice, taking work for justice as the primary way to disclose faithfulness to God. In the second section, I discuss the contribution of the WFTL to the processes taking place in the WSF in terms of a theological epistemology, and suggest some of its features within a conceptual framework of liberation. In the third and last part, by presenting an understanding of gratitude, I simply wish to show deep appreciation for the mere existence of the WFTL, which makes possible a space for the contribution of diverse theologies to the fashioning of alternatives for justice and liberation in a world context that denies alternatives.

On Justice

From a theological perspective, because justice belongs to the very being of God, it emanates from God to fashion both human relationships and the morality of the social order. Palestinian liberation theologian Naim Stifan Ateek speaks about justice as the most basic cornerstone for life in one's community, nation, and the world: "Justice remains foundational to faith not only for Judaism and Christianity, but equally in Islam. It is foundational for every religion because just relationships among people are the fruit of one's faith in God. Theologically speaking, no god is worthy of the name if justice is not emphasized as basic for that faith tradition."⁵ More than an individual option, an illusory virtue, or an abstract notion, justice is understood theologically as a life giving reality, as an envisioned and desired world that both sustains the flourishing of humans and creation, and actualizes the very being of God as a God of life and liberation. The practice of justice belongs to the core of religions as a way of being in the

⁵ Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, Third printing (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010), 16.

world to enable the wholeness and well-being of all. In the words of his Holiness the Dalai Lama, “religions have the potential to strengthen human values and to develop general harmony”⁶ as they foster compassion, forgiveness, self-discipline, solidarity, generosity, and peace. While the Jewish tradition asserts that justice belongs to the nature of God and provides the grounds of creation, the Christian tradition affirms justice as constitutive of the Gospel’s message. For Christians, according to Third World theologies, participation in God’s creative plan entails commitment to “the struggle of the poor and oppressed against all forms of injustice and domination.” It also includes “to denounce the causes of the dehumanization of our people and to fight against the systems that shorten and extinguish the lives of so many.”⁷ From the Islamic tradition, justice comes from Allah the Creator of Life to embrace all dimensions of life and all aspects of human activity, and provides the grounds of both mercy and shared responsibility among humans for creation. Liberation scholar Asghar Ali Engineer has asserted that Qur’anic sacred texts and traditions stress justice in comprehensive and rigorous ways as a stable foundation for peace to ensure human progress.⁸ In the Hindu tradition, as explained by S. Baltazar, the cause of justice runs across sacred texts telling of “the powerful intervention of God whenever dharma (social justice) declines and adharma (social injustice) reigns,” “God is part of peoples struggle for establishing a just social order as is evident in the Bhagavad Gita of Mahabharata.”⁹ Also, as exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi, social justice is both a truthful cause and a societal program to be pursued by means of the transformative power of *satyagraha* (truth force) and *ahimsa* (a definite resolve not to hurt a living being).¹⁰ A religious understanding of justice supports people’s mobilization against social injustice because unjust societal structures are incompatible with God’s purpose for humanity and creation.

Religious systems, while diverse in origin, symbolism, and world-view, they all share the assertion of justice as a universal value. According to S. Baltazar, “religion in its founding experience has been the seed-bed of justice. The emergence

⁶ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, “Non-Violence: The Appropriate and Effective Response to Human Conflicts,” in *Reconciliation in a World of Conflicts*, ed. Luiz Carlos Susin and Maria Pilar Aquino (London: SCM Press, 2003), 53.

⁷ Final Statement, “The Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology. Final Statement of the Fifth EATWOT Conference, New Delhi, August 17-29, 1981,” in *Irruption of the Third World. Challenge to Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 199, 203.

⁸ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam in Contemporary World* (New Delhi: New Dawn Press, 2007), 3.

⁹ Stella Baltazar, “Justice: Impetus of the New Social Order,” in *Third World Theologies in Dialogue. Essays in Memory of D.M. Amalorpavadass*, ed. J. Russell Chandran (Bangalore, India: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, 1991), 97, 107.

¹⁰ Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence. The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, New Revised Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 17, 111, 190.

of justice has its roots deeply embedded in religious experience. God has been the champion of justice. Invariably this has been the founding experience of all religions.”¹¹ For faith-based actors, conduct and behavior are the primary way to disclose justice as manifestation of faithfulness to God. Within a religious worldview, people of all cultures must develop and thrive in consistency with their intrinsic dignity as created in God’s image and likeness. The presence and action of God are tangible there where humanity and the world flourish in justice and peace. According to Lisa Schirch, an expert in peacebuilding from the Mennonite tradition, “justice exists when people are able to participate in shaping their environment so that they can meet their needs. Justice exists when people respect human rights of others, and when there are processes in place for holding people who violate the rights of others accountable to their victims and to that wider community.”¹² Religious actors committed to justice understand that, from one’s context and social location, the principles of cooperation, solidarity, and interdependence must characterize our common initiatives. The uniting factor of such initiatives is the pursuit of justice because, as noted by Baltazar, “justice is a creative calling to be accomplished by people as a community in their desire to become human.”¹³ Today’s global context of struggle for human dignity and social justice exposes that, as an ethical and religious imperative, work for justice appeals to all people, religious and nonreligious who both commit themselves to social change and embrace shared convictions in the process of building a different world. This type of work, both accepts religious pluralism within a multiplicity of actors and asserts a shared articulation of visions, values, goals for transformative thought and practice.

While the social movements and organizations display pluralism, they all share the pursuit of justice and peace in the interest of enhancing our living together in this world. Certainly, the involvement of religious actors in this pursuit is a powerful reason for hope. Possibly, the best illustration of such pluralism and involvement is provided by the impressive booklet for the WSF activities, titled “World Social Forum. Program FSM (Foro Social Mundial) 2015. Rights-Dignity. Another World is Possible,”¹⁴ which is published in four languages (Arabic, French, English, and Spanish). Every registered participant at the Forum receives this booklet as a guide to the more than 350 activities that take place during the

¹¹ Baltazar, “Justice: Impetus of the New Social Order,” 97.

¹² Lisa Schirch, *Strategic Peacebuilding. A Vision and Framework for Peace with Justice*, The Little Books of Justice & Peacebuilding (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), 16.

¹³ Baltazar, “Justice: Impetus of the New Social Order,” 107.

¹⁴ World Social Forum, *Program FSM (Foro Social Mundial) 2015. Rights-Dignity. Another World is Possible*, Booklet on the World Social Forum, Campus Farhat Hached El Manar, Tunis, 24-28 March 2015. Parenthesis in this title are mine.

Forum, offered collectively by approximately 5000 organizations from 170 countries.¹⁵ Having in common the aspiration and struggle for justice, a pluralism of social and religious actors mobilize at different levels of society; for example, internationally (The Global Campaign to Return to Palestine), regionally (European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine ECCP), nationally (U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation), and locally (Annajadh Palestinian Women's Development Society). The activities and work of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation takes place in this context. The global justice movement gathered at the WSF becomes the space and source for theological work committed to transformative praxis for liberation. From this perspective, members of the WFTL share theological reflection on the challenges and developments of the WSF striving at encouraging the wider society and religion to continue reconstruction of unjust relationships and societal systems. For the WFTL, this activity demands a critical appreciation of past insight and experience, systemic analysis of the present, and a creative course of action into the future. It also demands a different spirituality.

L.C. Susin, a co-founder and General Secretary of the WFTL, asserts that the current times of transformation demand an “ardent spirituality” that “can only be revolutionary: the mystic and the prophet require each other.”¹⁶ The WFTL encourages one to understand that ultimately, thought and practice for liberation are more than a moral imperative or a strategy. They are the expression of a spirituality lived with a prophetic sense as a way to correspond to God's gift of grace and hope. In today's world, a spirituality that sustains action for constructive change is necessarily prophetic. From the Christian perspective, clearly and directly, one can speak of a revolutionary spirituality because it seeks to effect the radical conversion of peoples' consciences, values, hearts, and behaviors. This type of spirituality is relevant particularly in contexts where society and religion attempt to close the space for prophecy, hide the martyrs, bury the struggles of people for justice and human rights, and deny the claims of radical transformation for the flourishing of all humans and creation. Cultivating a revolutionary spirituality is necessary for the continual vitalization of one's prophetic commitment to transformative praxis for justice and liberation. Lived within ever changing historical realities, a revolutionary spirituality keeps one focused on the process of historicizing theological concepts and religious

¹⁵ For these numbers see, World Social Forum, *Program FSM 2015*, 1-2.

¹⁶ Luiz Carlos Susin, “Introductory Remarks and Welcome,” in *Spirituality for Another Possible World*, ed. Mary N. Getui, Luiz Carlos Susin, and Beatrice W. Churu (Nairobi: Twaweza Communications Ltd and World Forum on Theology and Liberation, 2008), 14.

meanings. That is why this is a spirituality that remains deeply prophetic in the sense that propheticism is, as understood here along with I. Ellacuría, a “critical contrasting of the proclamation of the fullness of the Reign of God with a specific historical situation.”¹⁷ Action for justice that operates by the impulse of a revolutionary spirituality becomes a prophetic response to historical realities that inhibit the actualization of God’s purpose for the world. Propheticism, in this light, belongs to a religious understanding of justice as the practice that enables the connection of historical reality and a faith-based vision of a just world, which Christians recognize as the Reign of God.¹⁸ The highly interreligious arena configured by the WSF, provides the WFTL with opportunities to develop prophetic theologies and spiritualities that affirm the commonality of justice, while religious actors actively seek mediations for historization according to the demands of one’s own context.

On the WFTL: A Framework of Theological Epistemology

Theologians associated to the dynamics of the WSF infuse one’s practice with the shared hope that “another world is possible.” This is a hope sustained by the struggles of the global social movements for justice and liberation where, as we believe, the presence and action of God is present today. The interaction of the WFTL with those movements is experientially lived and analytically processed with a deliberate openness to dialogue for mutual understanding and the enrichment of all in the midst of pluralism and diversity. As affirmed decades ago by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), “dialogue is both a source and a method of theology.”¹⁹ Predisposition to dialogue allows the WFTL not only to reach out to liberation movements and organizations but also to participate with them in lively deliberations about our common tasks, challenges, and concerns. The profile of the WFTL is clear about its focus on dialogue for the production of theological reflection that motivates and fosters transformative practices in society for building in solidarity a new world.²⁰ The

¹⁷ Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., “Utopia and Propheticism from Latin America. A Concrete Essay in Historical Soteriology,” in *A Grammar of Justice. The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. J. Matthew Ashley, Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 11.

¹⁸ On this issue, see the powerful work by Kevin F. Burke, S.J., *The Ground Beneath the Cross. The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 132.

¹⁹ Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, “Final Document. Commonalities, Divergences, and Cross-fertilization Among Third World Theologies,” in *Third World Theologies. Commonalities & Divergences*, ed. K.C. Abraham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 199.

²⁰ See on this, “Quem Somos. Perfil do FMTL (About Us. Profile of the WFTL),” *World Forum on Theology and Liberation*, accessed August 6, 2015, <http://wftlofficial.org/quem-somos.html>.

proactive intervention of the WFTL within the WSF represents an invaluable opportunity for theologians to expand contacts and strengthen relationships with the social and religious actors who populate the global justice movement, so that we can learn from them while also contribute to them our values, analyses, and commitment. Lasting friendships linked by compatibility of ethical-political interests and goals have been forged in this process.²¹ This intervention also discloses features of the theological epistemology supported by the WFTL.

As a social and intellectual site of cosmopolitan scope, the WSF brings together a multitude of actors and their plural epistemologies which, confronting the challenges of fragmentation and relativism, they seek coordination with other epistemologies for the purpose of shifting from a position of systemic *subordination* to another of socio-political intervention focused on the construction of *alternatives* for social transformation. In his influential work *Epistemologies of the South*,²² B. de Sousa Santos, a sociologist of liberation and a long-time participant in the WSF, coined the term “ecologies of knowledges”²³ to name this concurrence of epistemological pluralism in the WSF. In his critical theorizing of the nature and processes of the WSF, Sousa Santos proposes that “intercultural translation”²⁴ is necessary for enabling the ecologies of knowledges to reach mutual intelligibility, cultural understanding, and intercommunication, in such a way that one departs from the illusory pretension of one’s cultural privilege or superiority. It also allows one to depart from the endless—and ultimately useless in socio-political terms—debates about identity politics and the politics of cultural representation. For him, intercultural translation entails a collective and a political work aimed at clarifying “what unites and separates different social groups or movements and practices so as to ascertain the possibilities and limits of articulation and aggregation among them.” This is a work that involves linguistic, nonlinguistic, and paralinguistic forms of communication enacted by social actors interested in strengthening alliances for fighting together “in different cultural contexts, against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy and for social justice, human dignity, or human decency.”²⁵ In the work of Sousa Santos, while *intercultural translation* is at

²¹ Personally, sustained interaction with Muslim friends from Tunisia who have strongly supported the activities of the WFTL has enriched significantly my social and religious concerns. They have broadened my sensitivity to Islamic culture and religion by exposing me to both their daily life and constructive activism in civil society. I want to acknowledge Mrs. Layla Ayari for her contribution to the logistics of the WFTL in Tunis, as well as Eryj Ben Sassy, Inès El Hassoumi, and Iness Ben Ali, for their friendship and solidarity. They all have shown themselves to be magnificent ambassadors of Tunisian hospitality.

²² Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

²³ Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 188-211.

²⁴ Sousa Santos, 212-235.

²⁵ Souza Santos, 222, 212.

the roots of the *ecologies of knowledges*, both constitute the basis of the *Epistemologies of the South*.²⁶

In the context of the WSF, knowledge production occurs from the ground of social practices that intersect with one another on diverse sites of struggle against systemic violence and dehumanization. Critical analysis and theoretical approaches take place in a setting of attentive listening and reflective speech, where the actors involved in the dialogue disclose through constructive engagement the commitment to overcome prejudices, along with the expectation of increasing knowledge about our lived realities around the globe. The desire of articulating together proposals for building an alternative political culture and religion from the perspective of liberation runs across the different exchanges. In the actual event of the WSF, members of the WFTL constantly meet a great diversity of people from many nationalities, languages, cultures and religions, during both the working sessions of the WFTL and the many interactions that take place on the streets, tents, and open camps.²⁷ This environment, even taking into account the dilemmas noted by J.M. Conway regarding the WSF as a “conflictual work in progress” and its unresolved “epistemic hierarchies,”²⁸ facilitates for theologians new ways of thinking and knowing that arise from the action of constructive intervention.

For the WFTL, knowledge production in this environment is attentive to three issues. First, as a major contributor to the conceptualization of the WFTL’s theoretical body, L.C. Susin calls everyone to keep critical thought regarding one’s interpretation of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices. According to him, religion continues to be a two-edge sword because in today’s world “characterized by the global village and religious pluralism, religious traditions can become a starting point for peace or war, for dialog and acceptance or intolerance and hostility.” Therefore, it would be incorrect *per-se* to presume that “every religion, every religious practice is good, fair and holy.”²⁹ Second, the action of critical reflection and analytical conceptualization on religious practices—or, on any human practice for that matter—goes beyond mere theoretical reasoning to involve emotions. For the WFTL, awareness of emotions enhances one’s capacity for overcoming indifference to the aspirations and grievances of others, and for

²⁶ Souza Santos, 188.

²⁷ The daily reports of the WFTL activities at the WSF expose the richness of these interactions. See, for example, “Atividades do Fórum Mundial de Teologia e Libertação no Fórum Social Mundial, Março 24-28, 2015 - Túnis, Tunísia: Relatório,” *World Forum on Theology and Liberation*, accessed 11 August 2015, <http://www.wftlofficial.org/>.

²⁸ See more on this, in Janet M. Conway, *Edges of Global Justice. The World Social Forum and its 'Others'* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 21, 31.

²⁹ Susin, “Introductory Remarks and Welcome,” 12.

devising means to access more effectively intelligibility and understanding in communication. As a form of intervention within a site of epistemic and activist pluralism, accomplishing a meaningful theological contribution to shared alternatives is demanding. V.M. Moghadam notes that “constituting, sustaining, or participating in global social movements is a difficult enterprise” as it involves navigating grievances and identities, “and creating meaning, forging alliances, building coalitions, and maintaining institutions.”³⁰ This is not easy. On his part, Sousa Santos also notes the importance of emotions for creating nonhierarchical communication and achieving shared meanings, as “sharing meanings involves also sharing passions, feelings, and emotions.”³¹ For a theological epistemology committed to liberation, this sensitivity to emotions and feelings finds enrichment in the religious traditions of the world that have provided meaning to terms that connect the act of knowing to praxis and emotions, such as solidarity, compassion, mercy, hospitality, gratefulness, and related terms. Third, as localized in time and space within the WSF, the criteria to assess the credibility and effectiveness of the WFTL’s theological contribution derives from the interests and goals it seeks to serve, as presented in The Charter of Principles of the WFTL. A criterion indicative of this reads: “The WFTL stimulates knowledge and mutual recognition among the plurality of knowledges, which collaborate and promote the capacity of non-violent resistance to the dehumanizing processes afflicting the world and to institutionalized violence. It strengthens initiatives and practices of liberation developing around the world today.”³²

This criterion takes into consideration the capacity and strategies of WFTL to influence the world of the *epistemologies of the South* in terms of strengthening shared objectives of epistemic and social emancipation. For meaningful connections and interactions with the WSF, the contribution of the WFTL includes infusing its knowledge production with the emancipatory traditions of the religions of the world. A theological contribution of value to the WSF is that of collaboration with the global justice movement in terms of advancing critical thought on *alternatives* for actualizing the vision of another possible world. In convergence with the WSF, this criterion for assessment gives primacy to intervention – a religiously informed, ethical-political intervention – to motivate in religious terms personal and systemic change. Consideration of the function of religions in the processes associated to the WSF is crucial because religions,

³⁰ Moghadam, *Globalization and Social Movements*, 207.

³¹ Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 216.

³² World Forum on Theology and Liberation, “Charter of Principles of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation,” n. 8, but see also n. 10, Accessed August 8, 2015, <http://wftlofficial.org/quem-somos.html>.

whether one likes it or not, belong to the set of social forces that move historical processes in a given direction.

Religions and theologies that serve the interests of the global justice movement operate within an epistemological framework of liberation. In my perception, the framework of theological epistemology supported by the WFTL displays at least seven interdependent features. This is a theological epistemology self-aware of its ethical-political dimensions as it affirms the *no-neutrality* of theological construction, the interaction of theory and practice (praxis), and the imperative of intervention in the modeling of *alternatives* to an unjust world with faith-based commitments, critical reflection, and theological elaboration in the interest of justice, human dignity, and solidarity. In my approach, a brief description of that theological epistemological framework includes:

Liberation

The Charter of Principles of the WFTL is the formal document that describes the clauses consciously adopted by its members as the directive code of thought and action. This Charter constitutes an explicit agreement regarding the identity, purpose, functions, and organization of the Forum. As a shared point of departure for the diverse theologies that come together in the WFTL, is the relationship of “theology” and “liberation,” which refers to theological approaches influenced by Liberation Theology.³³ As explained by L.C. Susin, the WFTL does not propose to be a “thematic congress,”³⁴ or an organization representing “Liberation Theology” in any contextual modality. The purpose of the WFTL is not the creation of a totalizing theoretical system, as is so common in the context of hegemonic Western European academy. Rather, in connection to the WSE, the WFTL is an open space for the concurrence of contemporary theologies from diverse religious traditions that commit themselves to “theological reflection on alternatives and possibilities in the world.”³⁵ This theological reflection engages in analysis of systems of domination, violence, and dehumanization in light of religious resources in view of clarifying ways for transformative practices. The WFTL affirms commitment to justice and the option for poor and the marginalized as base principles of its theological epistemology. The diverse theological approaches present at the WFTL share these principles

³³ World Forum on Theology and Liberation, “Charter of Principles,” n. 1.

³⁴ Luiz Carlos Susin, “FTML: O desafio do pluralismo religioso. Entrevista especial com Luiz Carlos Susin,” by Instituto Humanitas Unisinos On-line, *Revista do Instituto Humanitas Unisinos*, IHU On-line, accessed 8 August 2015, <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/entrevistas/40562-ftml>. My translation from Portuguese to English.

³⁵ World Forum on Theology and Liberation, “Charter of Principles,” n. 8.

as constitutive of their process of knowing. The most characteristic hermeneutical principle of the WFTL, which provides theoretical coherence, methodological focus, and thematic consistency, is *liberation*.

Hospitality

For the development of theological knowledge from the perspective of liberation, hospitality appears to be central particularly in contexts of social, cultural, and religious pluralism. An emotional predisposition to, and a cognitive sense of hospitality are necessary components for theological practices guided by a “dialogical principle,”³⁶ as proposed by the WFTL. Although understandings of hospitality may include taking it as a virtue, or as a quality of the human, its relevance for theology is that hospitality has to do primarily with relationships characterized by friendship, care, graciousness, compassion, and welcoming of neighbors or strangers. The religions of the world value and promote this type of relationships, as opposed to relationships characterized by dominance, arrogance, and violence. Hospitality is relevant for theological construction because its enactment emulates the relationship of God to the human, receiving everyone into God’s own company for the fullness of life. According to J.J. Tamayo, “hospitality, which is a principle of humanism and a fundamental rule of humanization, becomes an ethical principle of religions.”³⁷ The WFTL has made an explicit commitment to fostering hospitality in its interaction with theological pluralism and with the societies and cultures in which the WSF takes place. This is crucial not only for strengthening relationships of care but also for overcoming together relationships of hostility, resentment, violence, and hate.

Pluralism

The variety and complexity of the *ecologies of knowledges* that converge within the space of the WSF have configured a new intellectual terrain marked by pluralism. In this setting, the theological epistemology adopted by the WFTL clearly rejects modes of knowing that serve the interests of ideological totalitarianism and cognitive imperialism. This feature is, in fact, consistent with the political culture of inclusiveness generated by the WSF by which, in the words of Sousa Santos, interaction “privileges

³⁶ World Forum on Theology and Liberation, n. 5.

³⁷ Juan José Tamayo, “Los bienes de la Tierra y de la Humanidad en la Perspectiva de las Religiones,” in *Towards a Work Agenda for Planetary Theology/Hacia una Agenda de Trabajo para una Teología Planetaria*, ed. International Theological Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians and World Forum on Theology and Liberation, Multilingual Issue, *New Series of Voices*, vol. XXXV, n. 2012/3-4 (2012): 73. My translation from Spanish to English.

³⁸ Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 43.

commonalities to the detriment of differences and fosters common action even in the presence of deep ideological differences, once the objectives are limited, well defined, and adopted by consensus."³⁸ Such an approach to pluralism does not mean the absence of conflict. What it simply means is that conflict, understood as a dynamic constitutive of life and creation, presents opportunities of intervention for transformation. As such, rather than denial, pluralism challenges everyone to embrace conflict creatively. According to experts in the field of conflict transformation studies,³⁹ conflict has the potential of becoming destructive when two or more individuals or groups act on the belief that their values, interests, or goals are incompatible. They see each other as adversaries, or as competing actors who may resort to violent means to reach one's own ends. Presumably, the global social movements that gather within the space of the WSF reject such type of interaction.

The undisputed realities of social, cultural, and religious pluralism have presented opportunities for constructive theological reflection. Working together with the WFTL, the Theological Commission of EATWOT has made significant developments in this regard by sponsoring a project named "Along the Many Paths of God." Coordinated by José María Vigil, Luiza Tomita, and Marcelo Barros, this Commission has produced a series of books⁴⁰ focused on the intersection and cross-fertilization of liberation theology and a theology of religious pluralism. This initiative, in the words of J.M. Vigil, has resulted in the emergence of a "theology of liberating religious pluralism,"⁴¹ which is a new theological paradigm that opens new paths for the future of theology. Speaking about the context of the WSF/WFTL, Vigil considers that, because oppressed peoples belong to many religions, the liberating spiritual traditions of religions may contribute more effectively to the transformative struggles of the oppressed when religions work in integrated and coordinated ways.⁴² Interreligious dialogue

³⁹ See, for example, John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1997); Louis Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts. From Escalation to Resolution*, Second edition (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

⁴⁰ For interested readers, the five books that compose the Series "Along the Many Paths of God" were published in various languages, including Spanish, English, Portuguese, German, and Italian. Some of these books are available to download from the "Tiempo Axial" web site, at <http://tiempoaxial.org/AlongTheManyPaths/>.

⁴¹ José María Vigil, "Epilogue. Pluralistic Theology: Data, Tasks, Spirituality," in *Intercontinental Liberation Theology of Religious Pluralism*, ed., José María Vigil, Luiza Tomita, and Marcelo Barros (Digital edition: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, 2010), 240, 241, accessed 10 August 2015, <http://tiempoaxial.org/AlongTheManyPaths/>.

⁴² José María Vigil, "Many Poor People, Many Religions. Option for the Poor, a Privileged Place for Dialogue Among Religions," in *Along the Many Paths of God*, ed. Jose María Vigil, Luiza Tomita, and Marcelo Barros (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2008), 107.

for the constructive transformation of the world is the best service that religions can offer today.

Interreligious Dialogue

In response to violent conflict situations that have emerged in the contemporary world, diplomats and policy makers – largely based in the U.S. – have promoted interreligious dialogue as a strategy to manage, reduce, dissolve, or prevent those conflicts, particularly when religious beliefs appear to motivate or instigate them. They have been supported by both, scholars of the social and political sciences and religious leaders of affected communities, in the conceptual development and strategic application of interreligious or interfaith dialogue.⁴³ Although I am reluctant to include a long quotation, this time it is worth doing it because D. Johnston eloquently illustrates the centrality of religion for the U.S. foreign policy. In his view, religion is a “defining element of national security,” and explains that:

In all likelihood, religion’s importance will only continue to increase in response to the perceived threat to traditional values posed by economic globalization and the uncertainties stemming from rapid technological change. To undervalue these realities in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy is to tempt the gods, so to speak. Past reluctance to consider religious factors has not been without its costs. The U.S. failures in Iran, Lebanon, and even Vietnam were due, at least in part, to the fact that policymakers simply did not fully understand or respond effectively to the religious dynamics of the situation...

Without the earlier bipolar confrontation of the Cold War to suppress historic religious antagonisms, religion has become too critical to vital Western interests to permit its continued marginalization in the policymaker’s calculus. In an age of economic interdependency, high-tech weaponry, and international terrorism, foreign policy practitioners can no longer afford to treat the religious dimension as a geopolitical orphan. The consequences of the West’s longstanding inability to deal with religious differences and demagogues who manipulate religion for their own purposes will only grow more serious with the passage of time.”⁴⁴

I am bringing this issue to the attention theologians who embrace the epistemology and hermeneutics of liberation because, in my perception, initiatives

⁴³ See, for example, Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, ed., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); David R. Smock, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ Douglas Johnston, “Introduction. Realpolitik Expanded,” in *Faith-Based Diplomacy Trumping Realpolitik*, ed. Douglas Johnston (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4-5.

for the development of interreligious dialogue from our context often miss the fact that conceptualizations and practices of interreligious dialogue from the stand-point of hegemonic politics, have been around for many years. In my opinion, these approaches lack of critical systemic analysis, fail to address the underlying causes of conflict such as systemic social injustice and exclusion, silence the gains and role of the weapons industry in the global conflicts, and mere appeasement in the interest of protecting the geopolitical interests of the dominant powers has been the outcome of their intervention. Apparently, hegemonic actors have devised and applied interfaith dialogue at the expense of global social justice and human dignity for all.

From the perspective of the *epistemologies of the South* as adhered by the WFTL, an emancipatory epistemology understood as solidarity becomes the most appropriate conceptual frame for any approach to interreligious dialogue. Exposing the ambivalence of interreligious dialogue today, the work of theologians in interreligious dialogue must also emphasize the practical implications of solidarity in terms of contributing together to practices of resistance, transformation, and liberation among the many religious traditions. A useful interreligious dialogue for sustaining the struggles of the global justice movement must assert a clear purpose, along the lines stated by the legendary Brazilian bishop Pedro Casaldáliga. Rather than serving the national security interests of the militaristic hegemonic powers, Casaldáliga affirms that: “Both as content and as objective, true dialogue among religions should focus on the interests of God which are those of humanity itself and nature. In the case of humanity, the priority is the large mass of those who are impoverished and excluded. In nature, the earth, water and the air are polluted. There is the question of justice and ecology, freedom and peace. Life!”⁴⁵

Intercultural Dialogue

The space created by the WFTL is a conceptual platform for increasing a transformative theological and political imagination through intercultural dialogue. The embracement of liberation, hospitality, pluralism, and interreligious dialogue presuppose a way of thinking that, in the name of *alternatives* for justice and solidarity has moved away from an epistemology of totalizing singularity as represented by the current neoliberal globalization ideological model. From the perspective of a critical intercultural analysis, R. Fornet-Betancourt explains that,

⁴⁵ Pedro Casaldáliga, “Foreword,” in *Along the Many Paths of God*, ed. Jose María Vigil, Luiza Tomita, and Marcelo Barros (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2008), 8.

in its pursuit of homogenizing and synchronizing the world and humanity according to the capitalist neoliberal markets, this model pretends to have the “exclusive key for the future of humanity.”⁴⁶ A desired future of justice together, as *alternative* expressive of common vision and purpose from the complex social and cultural diversity of the world ceases to exist. Facing this totalitarian ideological model, intercultural epistemology and hermeneutics reject, on the one hand, the self-appropriated monopoly of neoliberalism to configure cultural environments; and affirm, on the other, an ethical option for restructuring cultures and human relationships according to justice, freedom, respect, and solidarity. **As a pioneer of intercultural philosophy and theology of liberation, Fornet-Betancourt points out that “liberation and interculturality show themselves to be two paradigms complementing each other.”**⁴⁷ The WSF generates conditions of possibility for intercultural dialogue by making possible a social reality in which a multiplicity of actors from a pluralism of cultural environments and worldviews mobilize in the name of “another world is possible,” seeking ways to actualize it. In this sense, different from the paralyzing ideology of neoliberal globalization, an intercultural epistemology increases not only the capacity of persons and communities for interconnection and solidarity, but also their determination for revitalizing together cultural and social emancipation. Intercultural thought and practice, ultimately, keep fostering in its practitioners an “option for hope” because, in the words of Fornet-Betancourt, intercultural dialogue proposes to be “an alternative to articulate the concrete hopes of everyone who dare to *imagine* and to rehearse today, another possible worlds.”⁴⁸

Convivencia⁴⁹

The interplay of features that I present here as components of the epistemological framework distinctive of the WFTL has the purpose of contributing to build societies, cultures, and religions based on *convivencia*. In the context of the WFTL, *convivencia* points out to both, an intellectual process lived across pluralism and diversity that compels one to appreciate an ethically oriented thought pattern for human flourishing, and a set of relationships lived across societal systems for positive interactions based on commonly accepted values, such as human dignity, community, hospitality, collaboration, gratitude, and

⁴⁶ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación Intercultural de la Filosofía: Ejercicios Teóricos y Prácticos de la Filosofía Intercultural desde Latinoamérica en el Contexto de la Globalización* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), 372. My translation from Spanish.

⁴⁷ Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación Intercultural de la Filosofía*, 188. My translation from Spanish.

⁴⁸ Fornet-Betancourt, *Ibid.*, 209. My translation from Spanish.

⁴⁹ From the Spanish language, “convivencia” means in English “living-together.”

solidarity. While ethical values derive from human consciousness and wisdom, faith practitioners inform them with the symbols and contents of one's own religious tradition. The spiritual path for faith practitioners to do that is also diverse and it may involve drawing knowledge and wisdom from one or more religious traditions because not one single tradition possesses the entire key to *convivencia*. Using a poetic-spiritual language, M. Barros expresses a similar idea by saying that every spiritual path entails a "journey of love" that invites persons to relativize one's exclusivities; "no one is the owner of life and of the sacred. We can simply be lovers that place ourselves at its service. There is no property title for the divine; access is free for every search that bears fruit in the heart. No mortal can put a stop to the strong winds. The mystery is our Peace and the religious paths are our parables of love."⁵⁰ From a theological point of view, however, such a spiritual path demands from everyone thought and practice of peace and justice due to the social dimensions of religious faith, which has ethical ramifications for *convivencia*. For faith practitioners, the processes of building *convivencia* also demand commitment to educational endeavors by which everyone gains skills and capacities to address conflict situations constructively. In the present times, conscious intervention in the struggles for peace, justice, human dignity, and sustainable communities are necessary for actualizing a world of *convivencia*.

Peacebuilding

For the WFTL, theological approaches must constantly intersect with the theory and practice of peacebuilding because peace belongs to the core values of religions, as well as to the theological frameworks of liberation. The WFTL affirms commitment to peacebuilding in both, its thematic axes and its action strategy.⁵¹ In its work, the WFTL understands that alternatives for a just world entail strategic responses to overcome destructive conflict, to reinforce links of solidarity against hateful interaction, and to overcome religious intolerance. Envisioning a sustainable future of dignity and justice for all demands that religions

⁵⁰ Marcelo Barros, "Multiple Belonging: A Pluralism for the Future," in *Intercontinental Liberation Theology of Religious Pluralism*, ed. José María Vigil, Luiza Tomita, and Marcelo Barros (Digital edition: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, 2010), 43, accessed 10 August 2015, <http://tiempoaxial.org/AlongTheManyPaths/>.

⁵¹ Luiz Carlos Susin and Gerald Boodoo, "Proposed Framework and Procedure," Text in preparation for the gathering of the WFTL in Tunis, March 2015, in e-mail message to author, July 7, 2014. On approaches to religious peacebuilding, with extensive bibliography, see Katrien Hertog, *The Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding: Conceptual Contributions and Critical Analysis* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); María Pilar Aquino, "Religious Peacebuilding," in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, ed. Andrew R. Murphy (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 568-593.

give an account of why religious interventions for peace are necessary and useful in processes of conflict transformation. Approaches to peacebuilding allow one to identify new opportunities for contributing, from plural religious environments, to mutually shared goals. Social and religious dynamics of collaboration not only reject struggles for dominance and control as a way of life, but also affirm useful theories and creative practices that support the actualization of religious visions, values, and goals based on justice and peace. In its action strategy for “peacebuilding and religious solidarity,” the WFTL acknowledges that, “peace among peoples also depends on peace among religions and their capacity to fertilize and bear fruits of peace with an attitude of respect and collaboration. Thence results the sign of the times that appeals to all people who profess different religious traditions, interreligious dialogue.”⁵² Focused on transformation for constructive change, a religious peacebuilding framework accepts the premise that peacebuilding is not a task conducive to pacification within the parameters of the status quo, but rather a dynamic process at multiple levels of intervention. Religious institutions cannot alone provide the necessary responses to broken communities, but together we may find opportunities to sustain a peaceful world.

On Gratitude

During my many years of teaching practice at university level, many times, I find myself fighting in the classroom against the monster of hopelessness, and sometimes I fight against the monster of cynicism. These monsters inhabit the minds of many young students obstructing their capacity of imagination, in such a way that they appear to be incapable of envisioning a world different from what they have known, particularly if they have been raised with the privileges of affluent neoliberal capitalism. While some of my students recognize that they have developed sensitivity to the plight of the poor and the marginalized thanks to the teaching and testimony they have received from religious teachers of ministers, others express a sense of solidarity through their involvement in programs or actions for social justice. Every semester, many of my young students appear to have absorbed the ideology of historical determinism, by which every effort to change the current neoliberal societal system is futile and condemned to fail. I have learned from F. Hinkelammert about the necessity of breaking the pervasive theoretical approach that prevents imagination and suffocates hope by claiming the victorious path of neoliberal capitalist globalization that, by the

⁵² Susin and Boodoo, “Proposed Framework.”

“compulsive forces of facts,”⁵³ determine that no alternatives exist, other than the global markets. Faced with this picture of things, the classroom becomes for me a site of struggle in the name of social justice. The minds of my students begin to question deeply such a dominant ideology when they engage in exploring the teaching of the religious traditions of the world about peace and justice. Many of them reach understanding that “another world is possible,” and that resignation or powerlessness are unsustainable. When they embrace the core teaching of religions about peace and justice, and when they become aware of its social implications, the students seek to increase learning about the myriad of contemporary social movements that are, in fact, fashioning alternatives for a different world. In this teaching-learning process, the intervention and contributions of the WFTL are a strong source of inspiration for me, as they also become a motivation for my students to seek practical ways to show their concern for the world. As I have experienced it, involvement with the religious traditions that provide motivation and support to the struggles of the global justice movement, functions as a deterrent of paralyzing monsters.

On this concern for the world, the legendary Bishop of liberation from the Olinda y Recife Diocese in Brazil, Dom Hélder Câmara, writes the following: “I know that we have all a world in common, even if you disagree with me and consider me a dreamer and a fool.”⁵⁴ Precisely, while some people would dismiss imagination and work for alternatives for today’s world or consider foolish any effort at transformation, global practices for justice and solidarity are showing that the “status-quo” no-longer stands undisputed. The many religions of the world are contributing to make possible thought and action for transformation today. The concern for the present and future of the world belongs to everyone, just as nobody has the permission to neglect work for justice and peace in the name of religion. Even if remotely considered as a “dreamer and a fool,” through his concern for the world, with a focus on justice for the impoverished and oppressed humanity, Dom Hélder has become an icon of hope, an artificer of justice, and an architect of liberation. Honoring the fact that the WSF/WFTL originated in Brazil, I could not avoid the thought that his dream of a world of justice and peace continues to be alive today through the Forums. Participants in the Forums, myself included, continue to believe that *another world is possible*, whether the presumption of one as being a dreamer and a fool holds. In my view,

⁵³ Franz J. Hinkelammert, “Determinismo y autoconstitución del sujeto: Las leyes que se imponen a espaldas de los actores y el orden por el desorden,” Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, *Revista Pasos* 64 (March-April 1996): 20.

⁵⁴ Dom Hélder Câmara, *Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1971), 81.

the intersectional dynamics taking place between the WSF, the WFTL, and one's own context, elicit sentiments of gratitude for allowing the continual renewal of religiously informed visions of justice, as well as a theologically motivated commitment to justice for liberation.

In the Christian tradition, the term "gratitude" occupies a minimal or no place at all in dictionaries of theology. Compared with extensive studies on the term "grace," gratitude appears minimized as an emotion or as a simple attitude inherent in human existence. Often, the term gratitude appears relegated to, or positioned within the arena of spirituality. In this arena, traditional theological interpretation has presented gratitude as a particular virtue characteristic of the relationship between the individual believer and God.⁵⁵ This term has a wide semantic field, commonly linked to the attitude of gratefulness and to the action of giving thanks. As a term, gratitude has its roots in the Latin "gratus" and "gratitude" which serve to name appreciation. In biblical Greek, "gratitude" belongs to the family of terms associated with the term "χάρις" which serves to name kindness, benevolence, a gift, good will, but it also applies to a favorable attitude towards something or someone, to grant a grace, or to express goodwill. This term also relates to other terms used for expressing thankfulness for blessings or benefits received (ἐχαριστέω), or for expressing appreciation or being thankful (ἐχάριστος), or to name a gift given freely and generously (χάρισμα). The term gratitude is also related to "ἐχαριστία" (eucharist), which means a ritual action of thanksgiving.⁵⁶

Possibly the ritualistic emphasis that Christian theology has given to the terms "grace" and "eucharist" has led to decreased attention to the term "gratitude" and to a limited interpretation of its meaning. In the Christian theological tradition, God is the source of all life and from whom all grace emanates. In its fragile and contingent existence, the human person recognizes God's gift and answers to it through thankfulness. This is the response expected by God, so that the person is able to remain within the sphere of God's favor. Thus, God functions as the object of human gratitude and as the originating subject of a relationship based on attitudes of gratitude and appreciation, a relationship that is renewed through participation in eucharistic ritual. This type of understanding gives a disproportionate cultic meaning to gratitude, to the

⁵⁵ See, Benjamin Baynham, "Gratitude," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 464-465.

⁵⁶ This paragraph is based on Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, vol 1, Second edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 229-301, 428-429, 569-570, 749-750; Xavier León-Dufour, *Diccionario del Nuevo Testamento* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1975), 82, 232.

detriment of a dynamic and relational understanding of the communication between the person and God. In a ritualistic or cultic understanding, gratitude appears to be a commercial transaction of give and receive by which God and the faithful establish utilitarian relationships. While the conceptualization of God is that of a powerful giver of favors in exchange of gratitude and obedience, the human appears as the deliverer of gratitude in exchange for divine favors. The terms of this relationship not only seem to be unbalanced but also driven by instrumentalism because they demand performance of actions or attitudes to achieve an end. A cultic confinement of gratitude, together with its association to obedience and submission, and its instrumental use expose major limitations of this theological approach.

As embodied by the WFLL, the global development of theological perspectives for liberation as a religious response to the global justice movement, and as a call to embrace together work for just social systems and relationships, offer possibilities for new interpretations. Gratitude, as I understand it here, adopts an estimative sense rather than a liturgical sense. In its estimative sense, gratitude refers to the appreciation and benevolent value in itself that a person confers to situations, people, events, or things. As a tangible expression in act, gratitude is primarily an attitude of appreciation that the person attributes to something or someone in recognition of the importance and meaning found for one's life. In this sense, the understanding of gratitude is not in instrumental or utilitarian ways. Gratitude may be motivated by experiences of joy, or also by experiences of victory over adversity and misfortune. Contemporary approaches in the field of psychological studies⁵⁷ indicate definitions of gratitude as a positive emotional reaction in response to a good or benefit received, as well as its understanding as a moral virtue, an attitude, an emotion, a habit, a personality trait, a dispositional property, and as a mechanism of response to lived experiences. Gratitude emerges in the person – or in a group of persons – as affirmative reaction to that, which one has accomplished, or to that which one has received, or to that which the person appreciates per se, and it is communicated through gratefulness. Those studies also indicate that gratitude often helps to strengthen one's sense of appreciation, one's sense of self esteem, one's orientation towards relatedness, greater awareness of interdependence,

⁵⁷ On scientific studies of gratitude as a positive human emotion, see Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough, ed., *The Psychology of Gratitude* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Randy A. Sansone, MD, and Lori A. Sansone, MD, "The Interface Gratitude and Well Being: The Benefits of Appreciation," *Psychiatry (Edgemont)* 7/11 (2010): 18–22; Robert A. Emmons and Teresa T. Kneezel, "Giving Thanks: Spiritual and Religious Correlates of Gratitude," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24/2 (2005): 140-148.

and a greater willingness to have an intervention for transformation of adverse personal and social circumstances.

In light of this estimative meaning of gratitude, I wish to close my reflections by expressing deep gratitude to the WFTL for its decisive and meaningful commitment to the theological practices of liberation today. Being motivated by a faith-based vision of a world where justice and peace flourish, the Forum remains focused on promoting constructive intervention by everyone, clearly refusing cultic singularity, submissive thought, and instrumental or utilitarian relationships. Its affirmation of liberating religious traditions as immersed in civil society to promote human dignity, and to provide support to the struggles for freedom, human rights, social justice, and solidarity, highlights the relevance of the WFTL in the contemporary processes of social and religious change. The Forum enriches the *epistemologies of the South*, and receives life from them. This fact, in itself, deserves immense gratitude. The affirmation of gratitude implies at least three things. First, as noted by L.C. Susin, keeping in focus and giving continual attention to “the connection of theology with the contexts of liberation that emerge around the planet in its diverse regions.”⁵⁸ Second, the necessity of strengthening a prophetic attitude of public denunciation of any societal practice, including those of religion, that maintains a world of divided communities, destructive conflict, and violent human interaction. Third, the recognition that gratitude as a human quality, as a dispositional human characteristic, as a moral virtue, or as a positive emotional response, runs across the full spectrum of religious traditions and communities. Within the pluralism of religious traditions, gratitude grows there where men and women of all cultures share solidarity together. Because the WFTL with its Charter of Principles, its epistemological framework of liberation, its thematic axes, and its tangible solidarity, promotes theological intervention in the WSF to strengthen vision and work for an alternative world of justice, the WFTL in itself generates gratefulness and gratitude.

⁵⁸ Luiz Carlos Susin, “Por quê um Fórum Mundial de Teologia e Libertação?”, Conference Paper presented at the World Forum on Theology and Liberation, Dakar, Senegal, 2011. My translation from Portuguese to English.