

# A Latin American Perspective for Theopoetics and Pastoral Counseling<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Based on a 1977 article written by Rubem Alves about Pastoral Care under the perspective of theology of liberation and on the use of Magic Realism in literature and religion, I suggest that theopoetry can be a truly Latin American proposal for Pastoral Care, particularly Pastoral Counseling, a practice already done by Rubem Alves.

## The Approach of Rubem Alves' Theology of Liberation to Pastoral Care

In 1977, the *Journal of Pastoral Psychology* asked the Brazilian theologian Rubem Azevedo Alves (1933-2014), one of the forefathers of the theology of liberation,<sup>2</sup> to write an article “dealing with the ‘theological foundations of

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<sup>1</sup> Part of this article was originally published as “Theopoetic and Pastoral Counseling Using Magic Realism and Reframing: A Latin American Perspective” by *Reflexus* 7, no. 9 (maio 2013): 9-41. ISSN: 1982-0828.

<sup>2</sup> In 1968 Rubem Alves defended his Ph. D. dissertation: “Towards a Theology of Liberation: An Exploration of the Encounter Between the Languages of Humanistic Messianism and Messianic Humanism” at Princeton Theological Seminary. It was later published as *A Theolo-*

pastoral care' from the perspective of the theology of liberation."<sup>3</sup> Even though in this phase of his research pastoral care *per se* was not a subject of Alves' immediate interest, the article does give important clues as to how he would apply his research on the theology of liberation to pastoral care, in particular in addressing the question of "how theology of liberation would both correct and transform the understanding of particular ministerial responsibilities."<sup>4</sup> Alves' approach is not purely theoretical because he had been a minister for the Presbyterian Church of Brazil for six years. On the other hand, one can sense in the tone of the article some resentment toward the Church as an institution that persecuted and even betrayed him and some of his colleagues during the Brazilian military regime.<sup>5</sup>

Alves starts the article by taking a critical approach to the proposition of the journal editor. In searching for the hidden presuppositions in a demand for concrete guidance in the field of pastoral care, he is able to point to two aspects: pastoral care is seen as a function at the service of institutional needs, and theology is a tool to give practical advice, also at the service of an institutional function. However, as a theologian of liberation, Alves is more interested in asking if it is possible "to take the institutional, ecclesiastical, and ecclesiological context as the starting point of pastoral care."<sup>6</sup> He begins to answer this question with two premises. The first is that "the struggle for human liberation is social, economic and political and these are not processes

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*gy of Human Hope* (Washington: Corpus, 1969). Alves' dissertation was the first to use the term "theology of liberation" and provided some basic impetus for the late 20<sup>th</sup> century flourishing of Latin American theology. Shortly after he was followed by Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino, who worked on a similar project first published in Peru as *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas* (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Rubem Alves, "Personal Wholeness and Political Creativity: The Theology of Liberation and Pastoral Care," *Pastoral Theology* 26, no. 2 (1977): 124.

<sup>4</sup> Alves, "Personal Wholeness and Political Creativity," 124. Editor's request cited by Alves.

<sup>5</sup> For a full historical account of this period see: João Dias de Araújo, *Inquisição sem fogueiras: vinte anos de história da Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil: 1954-1974* (São Paulo: Instituto Superior de Estudos da Religião, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Alves, "Personal Wholeness and Political Creativity," 126.

inside the boundaries of the individual but are rather symptoms of the individual's relationships with the world."<sup>7</sup> The second is that the relationship between Christian communities and sociopolitical reality has been ambiguous, and often Christian theology has been at the service of the maintenance of an oppressive *status quo*. Taking these premises into account, Alves concludes:

Any function which contributes to the perpetuation of such an ecclesiastical body contributes also to the perpetuation of the unliberated conditions of the society to which it is functionally related. This is the reason why theology of liberation cannot accept the institutional setting of pastoral care as the starting point for this discussion.<sup>8</sup>

Alves then states his hypothesis, namely, that "pastoral care is determined by its institutional setting, and not by any theologies of which it can eventually make use."<sup>9</sup> This hypothesis is based on his opinion that any theology (theologies of liberation and pastoral theologies included) is a confession of certain intentions upon which some individual or community attempted to build a rational theory. Thus pastoral care, being institutionally located, "can only exist within a specific social organization that has certain problems to be solved."<sup>10</sup> In other words, whereas a pastoral theologian does not, in principle, need to worry about a collective body, a pastoral counselor, being at the service of an ecclesiastical body, almost invariably does.

Within the frame of an ecclesiastical body, Alves sees three interlocking and interdependent functions of the care-giver: mediation of grace, provision of interpretation, and moral guidance.<sup>11</sup> In mediation of grace, the religious

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Alves, "Personal Wholeness and Political Creativity," 127.

experience is filled with a dimension of the sense of power; there is a sense of established communication with the divine and the realization of the need of power to overcome a situation. Alves is careful, though, to distinguish between magic and pastoral care. Whereas the former is a “manipulation of power in order to force objective reality to adjust to one’s aspirations,” the latter is a search “for power as courage, as inner strength to survive a world that cannot be changed.”<sup>12</sup> In the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Sacraments, those two aspects – that of the power of transubstantiation (magic) and of confession (pastoral care) – are combined. Protestantism on the other hand, and in particular Calvinism, sought to eliminate the so-called magic portion, by regarding the Eucharist as the symbolic presence of Christ, and developing counseling *in lieu* of confession. “Instead of magic, it fostered the rational manipulation of reality.”<sup>13</sup> However, as time went by, the rational manipulation of reality ceased to be the function of clergy and was taken over by politicians and scientists. Clergy were left to mediate only inner power in the cure of souls, and even that with increasing restrictions with the advent of the practice of Psychotherapy.

Related to the function of mediation of grace, interpretation provides questions and tentative answers to life problems, meanings, and purposes. In this sense the pastoral caregiver “is a mediator between personal suffering and global systems of religious meaning.”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, also related to the mediation of grace, is the provision of moral guidance, in particular in relation to questions that have ambiguous values within society. The function of the pastoral caregiver in this situation is one of clarification, pointing to alternatives, helping the person to weigh the pros and cons. Those ambiguous values are found particularly in questions where traditional answers are no longer relevant or are collapsing.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 129.

In relation to the crossroads between pastoral care and liberation theology, Alves starts by stressing that “one of the most central theological and methodological decisions [of theology of liberation] is to recognize the ideological, sacralizing, and therefore conservative function of religion.”<sup>15</sup> Pastoral care therefore will face pressures to respond to the demands that are put on it by its institutional setting. After a long attempt in trying to resolve the tension, Alves summarizes his position by saying that “pastoral care must be politically understood,” that is, it must be engaged in “the communal creative activity which aims at the transfiguration of the world.”<sup>16</sup> Alves does not give any specific insights, however, into how this could be done. His only consolation is the hope that somehow, in the future, this would be done.

From the privileged perspective of a reader more than thirty-seven years later, and taking into account the political, philosophical, technological and continuous transformations of the world, particularly the advent of post-modernity, the momentary and apparent suspension of political bipolarity, and Information Revolution, Alves’ article on pastoral care can serve as an appropriate starting point: it ends with a question that I attempt to address in this article.

I suggest that the third phase of Alves’ work,<sup>17</sup> one of post-theology of liberation particularly clear after 1987, derived from theology of liberation but distinctive from it and its universalizing tendencies, offers a clue to answer his

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<sup>15</sup> Alves, “Personal Wholeness and Political Creativity,” 133.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>17</sup> An extensive research on the theology of Rubem Alves has been made by Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz and published as *Serie de sueños: La teología ludo-erótico-poética de Rubem Alves* (Quito: Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias, 2003). In this book Cervantes-Ortiz suggests a periodization of Alves’ work. As early as 1975 Alves started exploring the role of science and education in cultural formation, the enigmas of religion and religious expression, and the use of symbolic and poetic elements. The change of his approach of his research from theology of liberation to theopoetics, which marks the beginning of his third phase, can be clearly noted in the text “Sobre deuses e caquis” published in 1987, as a preface to the Portuguese translation of his book *A Theology of Human Hope* as found in Rubem Alves, *Da esperança*. trans. João Francisco Duarte Jr. (Campinas: Papirus, 1987), 9-44.

question on how pastoral care, and in particular pastoral counseling, can transfigure a community and the world. This clue could also be used outside the boundaries of ecclesiastical institutions. Inspired by theopoetry and Magic Realism, in a process of understanding and reframing stories told by counselees, a contribution to a freer and more open pastoral theology can be sought, one that could be relevant to contemporary society and human need, and one that can positively use religious elements.

### **The Use of Magic Realism in Literature and Religion**

The use of Magic Realism with mythical inspiration to understand life is by no means a new idea: Heraclitus of Ephesus, six centuries before Christ, had already de-concretized time and reality by relativizing it, when he placed it in secondary importance as it relates to atemporal categories such as wisdom, truth, and the universe. In his fragment 88 (Diels) or 78B (Bywater), Heraclitus says:

And as the same thing there exists in us living and dead and the waking and the sleeping and young and old: for these things having changed round are those, and those things having changed round again are these ones.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Heraclitus of Ephesus, *The Cosmic Fragments*. Ed., intro. and commentary G. S. Kirk. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1954), 135. This text is mentioned by Plutarch in *Consolatio ad Appolonium* 10, 106E. Kirk explains that “some opposites are ‘the same’ (that is, essentially connected as extremes of a single process) because they invariably succeed each other,” such as day-night, human cycles, and by extension life-death. The main intention of Heraclitus “may have been the assertion of a truth about human conditions,” 134. T. M. Robinson proposes a slightly different translation of the fragment: “And, (?) as <one and> the same thing, there is present <in us?> living and dead and the waking and the sleeping and young and old. For the latter, having changed around, are the former, and the former, having changed around, are <back> again <to being> the latter. Heraclitus, *Fragments: A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1987), 53. Robinson adds that “Heraclitus is referring to an entity’s self-identity rather than to the supposed

The living and the dead, the awake the sleeping, the young and old are all within every human being, and we live in a cycle in which opposites are just different expressions or conditions of the same reality.

This is the basic underlying idea of the literature produced in Latin America roughly between the decades of the 1950s and the 1980s. It made extensive use of the concept of relativism and even absurdity to address the very real human condition. This literary movement was baptized *Realismo Mágico*, or Magic Realism. According to Enrique Anderson Imbert, this term was first used by the German critic Franz Roh in 1925 as *magischer Realismus*, applying it to a group of German painters.<sup>19</sup>

Using Hegelian reasoning, he presented a hypothesis for the development of the process that led to the birth of Magic Realism. The process started with the impressionist movement, in which artists such as Camille Pissarro depicted natural objects according to the chromatic sensations that these caused in them. The process continued as a reaction, or antithesis, with expressionist painters, such as Marc Chagall and Franz Marc (my favorite), who rebel against nature, painting non-existent objects or objects so distorted in their form that they seem to belong to a different world. Closing the process, as the synthesis, one finds post-expressionist painters mentioned by Roh such as Max Beckmann, Georges Grosz, and Otto Dix. They painted ordinary objects but with “*ojos maravillados porque, más que regresar a la realidad, contemplaban el mundo como si acabara de resurgir de la nada, en una mágica re-creación.*”<sup>20</sup> When Mag-

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‘identity’ of sequential and apparently ‘opposite’ characteristics it enjoys. In this case the entity could be either ourselves or attributes of ourselves,” 137. Thus, an entity continuously changes poles in the course of a lifetime and, in Heraclitus, an adherent to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, even beyond. I conclude that in us, humans, all the mentioned elements are present and they interact with each other, such as in Magic Realism as expressed, for instance, by the Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez.

<sup>19</sup> Franz Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus: magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925). Translated into Spanish as *Realismo Mágico: Post-expressionismo* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1927).

<sup>20</sup> “eyes in awe because, more than coming back to reality, they contemplated the world as if it re-emerged from nothing, in a magical recreation.” Enrique Anderson Imbert, “El ‘realis-

ic Realism left the domain of art criticism – that is, the domain of space – and immigrated to the domain of literary criticism – that is, the domain of time and words<sup>21</sup> – a similar Hegelian trajectory was followed, though with necessary adaptations. As thesis we have Realism, which attempts to depict reality, or the natural. The antithesis is the Fantastic Literature depicting the supernatural. The synthesis occurs in Magic Realism with a preternatural approach.<sup>22</sup> As such, a writer of Magic Realism will create an illusion of something unreal. The writer pretends to escape from nature and recounts a story that, as explainable as it may seem, disturbs the reader as rather strange, preternatural but not exactly supernatural. Because of this emphasis, images and, in particular, symbols, are a common means of approaching these intangible aspects of the world.

The exposed Hegelian line of argument is enhanced by an interesting view proposed by Graciella Ricci della Grisa. For Ricci della Grisa this synthesis is an attempt to balance the rational, objective, measurable, analytical, “attentive-to-details” characteristics of the left cerebral hemisphere with the irrational, fantastic, immensurable, imaginative, wordless and global approach of the right cerebral hemisphere.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, literature mirrors personal as well as continental and cultural struggles in the quest for meaning and identity.

Magic Realism distorts time, sometimes to the level of atemporality, and space, with generous usage of paradoxes and inversions; causes become ef-

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mo mágico’ en la ficción hispanoamericana,” in *El realismo mágico y otros ensayos* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1976), 7-9.

<sup>21</sup> According to Arturo Fox, Angel Flores was the first to use, in 1955, the term as applied to a Latin American school of literature, although there are prior allusions to the term. Angel Flores, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction,” *Hispania* 38 (May, 1955): 187-192; quoted in Arturo Fox, “Realismo mágico: algunas consideraciones formales sobre su concepto,” in *Otros Mundos Otros Fuegos: Fantasía y realismo mágico en Iberoamérica*, ed. Donald A. Yates ([East Lansing]: Michigan State University, 1973), 53.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson Imbert, “El ‘realismo mágico’ en la ficción hispanoamericana,” 9.

<sup>23</sup> Graciela N. Ricci della Grisa, *Realismo Mágico y Consciencia Mítica en América Latina: Textos y Contextos* (Buenos Aires: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1985), 13.

fects, and effects are seen as causes; magic is real, and reality is magic. Real life and dreams are in the same entwined level, and fictitious characters appear side by side with historic figures. Furthermore, legends and folklore are an endless source of material, presenting multiple perspectives of believers and unbelievers, of colonizers and colonized. It is a complex cultural mix where the present mirrors the past, as much as astral dimensions mirror the physical. The author thus suggests a quasi-supernatural ambiance but does not break with reality; the author's approach is to deform reality and to hide behind neurotic characters.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, and of interest to pastoral theologians, since in Magic Realism the barrier between the living and the dead does not exist, especially in relationships that carry emotional content, Murray Bowen's family systems theory, particularly its emphasis on the multigenerational transmission of symptoms, finds interesting possible interpretative applications.<sup>25</sup> Because this theory places great emphasis on ties and binds, stories, secrets, losses, and family histories that remain alive much longer than their characters, it is not a strange idea to find memories ruling the present and the dead remaining alive in the minds of the living. Bowen's theory in conjunction with Magic Realism suggests one possible path of dialogue, just as culture and religion are kept alive in myths. Such a dialogue might prove fruitful not only in personal but also in communal terms.

Perhaps the popularity of this movement in Latin America is derived from the fact that it uses elements familiar to everyday life and because the supernatural has always been approached in a rather nonchalant fashion, in dialogue with rational explanations for anything. The supernatural is accepted

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson Imbert, "El 'realismo mágico' en la ficción hispanoamericana," 19.

<sup>25</sup> Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978); Peter Titelman (ed.), *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory* (New York: Haworth Press, 1998); Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation: The Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985).

as a possibility in nature, and therefore the preternatural approach embraces all possible views. The same *mélange* is found in the deeply syncretic religions and in a tendency toward *mestizaje* among the Latin-American population. The real importance lies, therefore, in the meaning conveyed by a story and how this story is appropriated by the reader. Reality and fantasy, religious and mundane aspects of life, become two sides of the same coin.

Perhaps the origin of such a magical approach to cosmology in Latin America is rooted in the fact that when Iberian colonizers arrived on the continent in 1492, they found profoundly religious autochthonous communities which made use of highly developed symbolic approaches both in oral and written forms. With all propriety, we can talk about myths not only because they are applicable to personal life, but because they also convey a vision beyond the bounds of normal thought. Because of those myths, and their mythemes (immutable and common element to several mythologies) related to the creation, the hero, and the transformation, of which the K'iché-Mayan Popol Wuj<sup>26</sup> is one of the best but by no means sole surviving example, the magical and fantastic was more readily accepted.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, Christian missionaries saw those myths only as superstitions that needed to be replaced by the “true faith,” that is, Roman Catholicism. They did so by translating the Roman Catholic faith into the local vernacular. Ironically, this act was exactly what in turn allowed the living myths of autochthonous populations to remain alive in a disguised form within the local languages. Those myths were further transformed by the influence of Iberian medieval beliefs (which in turn was already a mix of European, North African, and Middle Eastern be-

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<sup>26</sup> For a discussion about the Popol Wuj, including its theology, see Carlos M. López, *Los Popol Wuj y sus epistemologías: las diferencias, el conocimiento y los ciclos del infinito* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 1999). For an interesting discussion about the interface between the myths of the Bible and the Popol Wuj, see: Angel Morán Combarros, *Interpretación Teológica contextual del Popol Vuh: Una lectura de las diversas dadas hasta hoy* (El Salvador: Ricaldone, 2000), in particular its third part *Evaluación teológica de temas axiales religiosos del Popol Vuh y su rescate cristiano*.

<sup>27</sup> Ricci della Grisa, *Realismo mágico y consciencia mítica en América Latina*, 40.

liefs) and African cultural expressions. Magic Realism thus appeared as a strong and conscious expression of the Latin-American cultural development, which also involves very particular forms of spiritual development.

### **Rubem Alves and Theopoetry Using Magic Realism**

The change of Alves towards a theopoetic approach to theology can be considered as an answer to a decades-old call proposed by a John Alexander Mackay, a former President of Princeton Theological Seminary (1936-1959) to engage theology in a dialogue with literature. Alves does so in a rare marriage of theologian, novelist, and poet within the same person. Furthermore, and more important to this article, in the ninth and tenth chapters of Mackay's book *The Other Spanish Christ*,<sup>28</sup> the author focuses on new spiritual currents in South America, and in the quest of a "new way." This "new way" is represented not only by religious movements but also by religious thinkers, all of whom expressed their views through literature, such as in the work of the 1945 Chilean Literature Nobel Prize laureate Gabriela Mistral. However, it was only thirty years later that Latin American literature, and in particular its religious interpretation, was awarded its due prestige.

Luis Rivera-Pagán comments:

Mackay [went] a step further and [called] Protestant theologians to initiate a meaningful dialogue with the Latin American literary culture. It would be a dialogue in which theologians should give serious consideration to the human tragedies, sorrows, pains, dreams, and hopes as these find artistic expression in our literature; one in which they are to perceive that sphere of human creativity as part and parcel of their intellectual inquiry

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<sup>28</sup> John A. Mackay, *The Other Spanish Christ: A Study in the Spiritual History of Spain and South America* (New York: MacMillan, 1933), 159-230.

and concern. It would also be a dialogue in which literature might open itself to the hiddenness of God in the labyrinths of history, to the quest for the sacred in the midst of human existence. This dialogue would lead to the mutual enrichment and transformation of faith and culture.<sup>29</sup>

Even though Mackay did not engage himself in this proposal, he certainly planted the seeds that three decades later would bear fruit. One can easily see his inspiration in the rise of international acclaim for Latin American literature side by side with the development of theology of liberation in the late 1960s.

By leaving traditional theological language and engaging himself in a theopoetic approach, Alves did not attempt an analytical construction of this dialogue nor offer any formulaic paths. He simply engages himself in this dialogue while leaving any interpretations open to the reader. In this sense, “the hermeneutical orientations to the construction of a new theological method”<sup>30</sup> are left to the reader as an exercise of free imagination and, in the case of pastoral theology, to the counselee with the help of the counselor. The reasons for doing so are given by Alves himself. In an article written in 1993, Alves proposes to the church that it “[move] from ethics to aesthetics, from doing to beauty, because it is only by the power of beauty that we are able to resurrect the dead.”<sup>31</sup> The “dead” in this context are persons whom the church has been unable to transform through its message. If in the midst of their suffering, the church, by giving physical or psychological and spiritual advice, is “unable to provoke a transformation, we are after the resurrection

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<sup>29</sup> Luis Rivera-Pagán, “Theology and Literature in Latin America: John A. Mackay and *The Other Spanish Christ*,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 7, no. 4 (May 2000): 13.

<sup>30</sup> Antonio Magalhães, *Deus no espelho das palavras: Teologia e literatura em diálogo* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2000), 93.

<sup>31</sup> Rubem Alves, “From Liberation Theologian to Poet: A Plea that the Church Move from Ethics to Aesthetics, from Doing to Beauty,” *Church & Society* 53, no. 5 (May/June 1993): 24.

of the dead.”<sup>32</sup> According to Alves, such a resurrection can be achieved only by the power of beauty, not by actions or arguments. He critiques pure theology: “I cannot talk about God’s vision because I am not God. Only God can talk about God’s vision. I can only talk about my vision of God’s vision. So I am not talking about God, I am talking about myself.”<sup>33</sup> Because vision, for Alves, is an inner quality “for one to see better with the soul, [then] maybe one needs to see less with the eyes.” Alves here plays with the physical and metaphorical meanings of eyes, a play also found in Matthew 6:22: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.” He adds that this is God’s vision of dreaming: “Dreaming is seeing that which does not exist.”<sup>34</sup>

In this rather radical article Alves considers it useless to develop ways of “analyzing to have precise knowledge of reality,” because it does not help us in the process of obtaining vision, or inner vision. In my opinion, Alves overstates the case here. Intuition and analysis can work together for the better understanding and reframing of reality. One does not dismiss the other. The problem lies in the fact that too often analysis kills intuition. Alves is correct, however, in saying that “if we want to move people, we need to discover their dreams,”<sup>35</sup> precisely one of the roles of counselors and which the freedom of theopoetic language allows. In claiming and internalizing stories, even of mythical sort, one can modify, in dreaming, a desired outcome. Alves does so by using an accessible language that calls to consciousness each person’s myths, faiths, utopias, dreams, stories, and tragedies. It is thus that he attempts to fulfill the project that has been his intention since the beginning of his career as a theologian and writer.

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<sup>32</sup> Alves, “From Liberation Theologian to Poet,” 24.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

In a similar tone, Ernesto Sabato explains through one of his characters in the fascinating novel *Abaddón, el exterminador*<sup>36</sup> the process that happened with Alves, one common in Latin American cultures:

Expulsado por el pensamiento, el mito se refugió en el arte, que así resultó una profanación del mito, pero al mismo tiempo una reivindicación. Lo que prueba dos cosas: primero, que es imbatible, que es una necesidad profunda del hombre. Segundo, que el arte nos salvará de la alienación total, de esa segregación brutal del pensamiento mágico y del pensamiento lógico. El hombre es todo a la vez. Por eso la novela, que tiene un pie en cada lado, es quizá la actividad que mejor puede expresar al ser total. Los latinoamericanos [tienen] grandes novelistas pero no grandes filósofos, porque nos salvamos, por suerte, de la gran escisión racionalista. Como se salvaran los rusos, los escandinavos, los españoles, los periféricos. Si quiere nuestra *Weltanschauung*, búsquela en nuestras novelas, no en nuestro pensamiento puro.<sup>37</sup>

According to Sabato, it is in and through artistic expressions such as novels, music, and paintings and not in analytical treatises that the philosophy and theology of the peoples of Latin-America are developed. Sabato argues against the predominance of one type of language (in this case that of German philosophy) over others, especially among cultures where myths are

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<sup>36</sup> Ernesto Sabato, *Abaddón el exterminador* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1974).

<sup>37</sup> “Expelled by thought, myth took refuge in art, which turned out to be a profanation of myth, but at the same time a claim. This proves two things to you: first, that myth is unconquerable, that it is a deep necessity of humankind. And second, that art will save us from total alienation, from this brutal segregation of magical thinking from logical thinking. The human being is all things at the same time. This is why the novel, which has one foot in each side, is perhaps the activity which best expresses the total being. Latin-Americans [have] great novelists but no great philosophers because we are saved, fortunately, from the great rationalist schism. Just like the Russians, the Scandinavians, and the Spaniards, the ones on the periphery have saved themselves. If you want our *Weltanschauung*, look to our novels, not to our pure thought.” Sabato, *Abaddón el exterminador*, 220. No italics in original.

cherished as living stories. In this sense, Alves' later work confirms Sabato's understanding.

In the text "Theopoetics: Longing for Liberation,"<sup>38</sup> in a somewhat syllogistic line of thought relating his ideas to the spiritual re-enactment of the Eucharist, Alves gives significant tools to understand his language:

Communion is a child of love.

It seems that love shuns too much light.

Therefore communion, it seems, shuns too much light.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, as much as an explanation can be attempted, the Eucharist remains a mystery to be enjoyed rather than explained. It holds an aura of mystery, shadows, and secrets of its own, and those characteristics allowed it to survive and continue to make sense throughout the centuries. In the Eucharist, all words are realistically and symbolically related to a meal and therefore should be enjoyed as if an exquisite meal. "The body and the blood of Christ are given, not as objects of thought to be transformed in clear and distinct concepts. They are given to be eaten."<sup>40</sup> It is as if the Eucharist was an anthropological event, in which communion is achieved in the form of food and drink.

Through this sequence of thoughts, Alves is able to move "from the classroom [academic language, seeking full explanation of any given issue], where there is light, to the kitchen, [where] the alchemic transformations of the raw are prepared for the delight of the body of the other."<sup>41</sup> He con-

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<sup>38</sup> Rubem Alves, "Theopoetics: Longing for Liberation," in *Struggles for Solidarity: Liberation Theologies in Tension*. Eds. Lorine M. Getz, and Ruy O. Costa (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 159-171.

<sup>39</sup> Syllogism built based on Alves' own sentences in Alves, "Theopoetics: Longing and Liberation," 159.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Alves, "Theopoetics: Longing and Liberation," 159.

cludes: “This is the secret of communion: when my body, transformed in words, is given to the other, to be eaten.”<sup>42</sup> He thus encourages the reader to eat him, to eat and enjoy his words and ideas, and particularly the idea of God, this being the means to establish communion with him, with oneself, and with the personal idea of God. It is by establishing a personal meaning of a given myth, or by knowing the benefits of this myth for oneself, that a myth and particular personal myths (such as memories) are kept alive. And being alive they will be able to give meaning and help in the transformation of one’s life. Alves adds: “When the other eats eucharistically a piece of my body, we become “companions” in the original sense of the word: those who eat the same bread,” that is *cum panis*.<sup>43</sup>

It is this understanding of companionship that Alves claims to have understood only with the wisdom of age; in his youth he preferred “the power of clear and distinct ideas.”<sup>44</sup>

Alves goes further in his explanation, with an analogy that has proven to be very useful in psychoanalysis, and particularly for pastoral theology.

To speak about my body is to speak about the stories that make up its soul. The secret of my flesh is a hidden, forgotten text, which is written in it. We are palimpsests. In bygone times, when writing was done on leather, old texts were scraped off and on top of the apparently clean surface, new ones were written, text upon text...But the marks of the old stories could never be erased. They remained invisible, inside...Today, thanks to science, it is possible to recover them. [This is] a good metaphor for what our bodies are...., stories that are written, scraped off, forgotten, one after

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> The Latin expression *cum panis* literally means “with bread.” The expression gave origin to the term *compania* in Vulgar Latin, meaning a group of people that eat bread together and later it came to refer to people that do something together.

<sup>44</sup> Alves, “Theopoetics: Longing and Liberation,” 159.

the other. But even the old ones we believe dead remain alive, and once in a while they puncture the smooth surface of our official stories, as dreams, art, as incomprehensible signs/sighs in the flesh, as madness.<sup>45</sup>

Whereas Alves encourages the readers to understand meaning through awe, the pastoral theologian may likely attempt to press beyond the awe in an effort to understand the meaning and consequences of the story for a person. The goal is not to dissect the story but, in the same way that a myth gives meaning to a person or to a culture, to navigate through its waters to discover how it helps an individual's or community's quest for meaning in life.

We have seen so far how one of the leading Latin American theologians choose to change his purely theological language to one influenced by Magic Realism in theo poetic approach. This is a possible way to approach pastoral care and pastoral counseling since it allows a way into stories and myths of a person's life and related cultures.

### **Theopoetic Pastoral Counseling: A Latin American Perspective**

The dialogue between theology, particularly pastoral counseling and more broadly religion, and literature and poetry has larger possibilities than initially may be apparent, especially in Latin American contexts, where Magic Realism can inspire theo poetry in a very natural way, through the use of reframing of life stories. Virgilio Elizondo recalls that Hispanics or Latin Americans “are [generally] deeply religious people. Religious expressions are interlaced throughout our language and culture; religious themes appear throughout our novels, songs, and art work; religious imagery is the most common and per-

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<sup>45</sup> Alves, “Theopoetics: Longing and Liberation,” 161.

sistent element of our Hispanic [and Latin American] language.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, religion, particularly in its syncretic expressions, is believed to have a power that goes beyond the reenactment of rituals. It is an element of identity, and it is the “task and challenge of the religious thinker of the group”<sup>47</sup> to name and direct the power that religion contains. This can be done in various ways, such as incorporating native languages, art, and music in liturgy, in celebrating heritage, and particularly in making “the anxieties and hopes of our people those of the church, and to develop our own spiritualities and theologies based upon the Word of God in dialogue with the wisdom and philosophy of the local people.”<sup>48</sup> Theology thus becomes a “collective biography,”<sup>49</sup> which theology is just one form of recounting and of addressing.

Supporting Elizondo, Karl-Josef Kuschel also affirms the necessity for literature (and I add oral or written) and religion to be engaged in dialogue.<sup>50</sup> Since the Renaissance, explains Kuschel, literature and religion have been slowly drifting apart, even though often addressing the same issues. It is as if their drifting apart was also related to the conflict between myth and logos. However, the idea of a dialogue is very natural since not only the Abrahamic faiths but also to Hinduism and Buddhism, among others, since they are religions based on a book bearing divine revelation with mythical overtones. A literary reading of those books is not an inconceivable idea. It provides a way to avoid inflexible and static interpretations of ideas and dogmas. It is dogmatic rigidity that often blocks a continual renovation of religious ideas and

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<sup>46</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, “Theology’s Contribution to Society: The Ministry of the Theologian,” in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Díaz (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 49.

<sup>47</sup> Elizondo, “Theology’s Contribution to Society,” 49.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>50</sup> Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Vielleicht hält Gott sich einige Dichter...: Literarisch-theologische Porträts* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1991). Kuschel’s inquiry is related to European authors such as Heinrich Heine, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Herman Hesse, Heinrich Böll, among others, and based on the work of these authors Kuschel proposes particularly on the chapter entitled *Auf dem Weg zu einer Theopoetik* an approach to Theopoetics.

ultimately suffocates the very religion they want to preserve. Religions and their underlying theologies become stagnant and senseless unless their meaning is constantly renewed and explained, a dynamic well-known in mythology. New meanings, though, can only rise within the scope of free thinking, and it is in this that literature, with its great fluidity and flexibility, can seek out interpretations that orthodox theology is less likely to allow. It is in this milieu that theopoetics was born and it is also from this milieu that pastoral care can take a necessary inspiration. This is nothing but the reframing process put into action in real life.

Vítor Westhelle and Hanna Betina Götz further enhance the analysis of the Latin American case by pointing out that the possibility of dialogue between contemporary theology and literature takes into account their common and “hybrid endeavor that results from two practices: the inscriptional practice of a European kind and the constant evasion of inscription as such.”<sup>51</sup> By “inscriptional practice of a European kind” Westhelle and Götz refer to the historical European, mostly Iberian, cultures, languages, ethics and practices imposed, accepted and practiced in the New World as a norm. By “evading the European inscription” they refer to cultural, linguistic, religious, ethical and practical elements of local autochthonous cultures, which were given lesser value and survived only in silence and dissimulation. Though perceived as chaotic by the colonizers, they remained alive entwined within the accepted norm, disguised in metaphor. Westhelle and Götz conclude that:

Latin American literature and theology are attempts to articulate this uncanny sense of invisibility and give voice to the dissembler, a voice still ruled by the grammar of the conqueror, but revolting against it, poetically

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<sup>51</sup> Vítor Westhelle, and Hanna Betina Götz, “Quest of a Myth: Latin American Literature and Theology,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 3, no. 1 (August 1995): 5.

breaking and transgressing it in search of a myth, of the story that tells where we come from, what we are, and what went wrong [or right].<sup>52</sup>

By attempting a synthesis or an integration of this mythical and fragmented reality, literature and theology in working together can provide liberation through understanding, transformation and acceptance.

A peculiar example of the dialogue between theology and literature on Latin American grounds is suggested by Luis Rivera-Pagán in the encounter and exchange of ideas between the theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and the writer José María Arguedas, from whom Gutiérrez accepted a “prophetic commission.”<sup>53</sup> The book of Gutiérrez, *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas*<sup>54</sup> is dedicated to Arguedas and the opening quote is an excerpt of Arguedas’ book *Todas las sangres*.<sup>55</sup> Gutiérrez, here and throughout his work, recognizes the influence of Arguedas in his life and thought. More important still is the fact that in Arguedas’ final novel, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*,<sup>56</sup> a regionalist novel that mixes an account of the life of indigenous Peruvian populations with his own life-diaries, Arguedas in a desperate and touching paragraph asks: “¿Es mucho menos lo que sabemos que la gran esperanza que sentimos, Gustavo? ¿Puedes decirlo tú, el teólogo del Dios liberador, donde estuvimos tan contentos a pesar de que yo en esos días ya no escribía nada?”<sup>57</sup> This question was posed roughly in July 1968 when both authors were in Chimbote, Peru. Gutiérrez was delivering a conference in the *Encuentro nacional del movimiento sacerdotal ONIS* which was

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>53</sup> Rivera-Pagán, “Theology and Literature in Latin America,” 13-17.

<sup>54</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1990 [1972]).

<sup>55</sup> José María Arguedas, *Todas las sangres* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1964).

<sup>56</sup> José María Arguedas, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1973 [1971]).

<sup>57</sup> “Is this much less than we know, but the great hope that we feel, Gustavo? Can you say, you the theologian of the liberating God, where were we so happy in spite of the fact that I in those days did not write anymore?” Ibid., 285.

published as *Hacia una teología de la liberación* and Arguedas was writing his final book, one clearly and openly preparatory for his suicide.

From the perspective of pastoral counseling, it is interesting to note that the writer Arguedas felt to be on a dead-end to which the only solution under his perspective was suicide. Though giving up hope, he urges the theologian Gutiérrez to address the question by a process of theological reframing and in a way use his life as some sort of legacy. From the perspective of theopoetry, we can recount the story by placing on the same level past, present and future, the living and the dead, reality and imagination. Re-interpretation can be approached not only through an analytical stand-point but also from the perspective of the meaning it conveys to a particular reader. Could the reframing suggested to Gutiérrez have given further hope to Arguedas, preventing his suicide?

Another interesting example of theopoetic reframing using literature and theology is the dialogue between Gabriel García Márquez and Rubem Alves around the story “*El abogado más hermoso del mundo.*”<sup>58</sup> The short story proposed by García Márquez in 1972 received a new treatment, wording, and interpretation and was enhanced including religious-theological questions by Alves in 1990 when he delivered the Edward Cadbury Lectures in Theology at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. Those eight lectures were published in the same year with the title *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet.*<sup>59</sup> Alves builds a connection between the original story based on the myth of resurrection, in particular the Christian imagery of Jesus’ resurrection (even though the character of the story is named Esteban). He suggests stories that

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<sup>58</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, “El ahogado más hermoso del mundo,” in *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada: siete cuentos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1972), 49-52. The English translation is found in Gabriel García Márquez, “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World,” in *Collected Stories*, trans. Gregory Rabassa and J. S. Bernstein (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 230-236.

<sup>59</sup> Rubem Alves, *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet: The Edward Cadbury Lectures* (London: SCM Press, 1990). An enhanced Portuguese translation was published as *Lições de Feitiçaria: Meditações sobre a poesia* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2003).

the villagers could have imagined but in a rather pessimistic move suggests that pure theology killed the dreams of villagers. However, just as Alves gave a new meaning to the story of García Márquez, anyone can also go further in the account, expressing a particular view or concern. This is the point where pastoral care can use its navigational tools to understand a person. An example of this pastoral use will be given later in this article based on the texts of García Márquez and Alves.

It is in understanding personal appropriations of religious and life myths and the way they are transformed into new life- and meaning-giving texts that pastoral care and ultimately pastoral theology can be formed and pastoral work can take place.

Even so, Antonio Magalhães claims that in spite of a few exceptions,<sup>60</sup> to this day there has been no real dialogue between theology and literature in Latin America. The main reason, according to Magalhães, lies in theological methods that fail to allow for literary interpretations, despite profound theological and religious incursions from the side of literature, particularly Christian, as demonstrated by Wolf Lustig.<sup>61</sup> In Magalhães' own words:

Os temas escolhidos pela teologia não lançam mão de suas associações e interpretações na literatura, apesar de com certeza não haver nenhum [sic] tema relevante para a teologia que não tenha sido objeto de interpretação explícita na literatura do nosso contexto [latino-americano].<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Exceptions mentioned by Magalhães are Pedro Trigo, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Antonio Manzatto, and Luis Rivera-Pagán. Antonio Magalhães, *Deus no espelho das palavras: Teologia e literatura em diálogo* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2000), 73-93. Luis Rivera-Pagán, in turn, calls our attention also to the works of Reinerio Arce Valentín, Vitor Westhelle, Hanna Betina Götz, María de las Nieves Pinillos, Pedro Sandín-Fremaint, and Alejo Carpentier, among others. Luis Rivera-Pagán, *Mito, exílio y demonios: Literatura y teología en América Latina*. (Hato Rey: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 1996), 2-8.

<sup>61</sup> Wolf Lustig, *Christliche Symbolik und Christentum im spanischamerikanischen Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989).

<sup>62</sup> "Themes chosen by theology do not reclaim associations and interpretations in literature, in spite of the fact that certainly there is no theme relevant to theology that has not been the

Theology may have failed to remain relevant to people. However, Rivera-Pagán gives another three reasons why this lack of dialogue between Latin American theology and literature is indefensible:

[Por] la simultaneidad de su auge y renombre internacionales; por la pertinencia, para las preocupaciones religiosas y eclesíásticas, de sus temas y asuntos y; finalmente, por la audacia de la literatura latinoamericana moderna en hacer afirmaciones desafiantemente heterodoxas y teológicamente transgresoras.<sup>63</sup>

Based on these reasons, and drawing from Rivera-Pagán, Magalhães sets forth four conclusions.<sup>64</sup> The first is that since the vision of Latin America presented by literature has won worldwide acclaim, disregarding it means to ignore or even to refuse to take into account one of the best known Latin American means of dialogue with and about Latin-American cultural realities. Such a dialogue could have been very fruitful. The second conclusion is that by writing about ecclesiastical and religious questions, literature makes clear that those questions need to be better understood and that they have a deep relationship with Latin American society. Literature seems to be interpreting questions of faith in a freer way than is normally done by most known theologians.<sup>65</sup> Thirdly, the audacity of literature is seldom mirrored in theology,

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object of explicit interpretation of literature in our [Latin American] context.” Magalhães, *Deus no espelho das palavras*, 74.

<sup>63</sup> “[Because of] the simultaneity of peak of production and international acclaim; because of the relevance of its themes and issues in relation to religious and ecclesiastical concerns; and finally because of the audacity in which modern Latin American literature makes heterodoxically defying and theologically transgressing affirmations.” Luis Rivera-Pagán, *Mito, exílio y demonios*, 8-9.

<sup>64</sup> Magalhães, *Deus no espelho das palavras*, 90-91.

<sup>65</sup> Rivera-Pagán, in courses about the “Dialogue Between Contemporary Latin American Theology and Literature” offered at Princeton Theological Seminary discussed works of Juan Rulfo, Mario Benedetti, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, Alejo

though audacity may certainly be one of theology's sources. After all, how can theology assess questions of liberation, for instance, without taking into account the audacity and heterodoxy of many biblical and ecclesiastical figures in the history of the church? Both theology and literature share a common interest in "mythical memory and utopian hopes." This common interest can be a language that helps humankind to understand in a creative way its place in a world marked by insecurity and liberty. Magalhães explains:

Insegurança por termos sido formados de vários mitos, alguns, inclusive, contrapostos, e a liberdade pela forma como reinventamo-los continuamente a partir de nossas experiências históricas, projetando-nos para além de nossas contingências sociais e das ideologias que construímos como cativo de nosso espírito.<sup>66</sup>

In this sense, rather than literature distancing itself from religious and symbolic elements, as proposed by the Enlightenment canons, in Latin America the path was the exact reverse, one of proximity. Theology and literature, as much as religion and art, aesthetics and ethics, are together engaged in a dialogue to give meaning to transcendental human needs.

Counseling can learn from theopoetry, a marriage between theology and poetic/literary language, how to provide a free setting to reframe a world and life visions. In this sense, Magic Realism is particularly useful because of the

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Carpentier, Senel Paz, Fernando Vallejo, among others. Furthermore, in lectures he cites José María Arguedas, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar, Wolf Lustig, and José Lezama Lima. I would add to this list, João Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, José Saramago and Mia Couto. The work Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz, (ed.), *El salmo fugitivo: una antología de poesía religiosa latinoamericana del siglo XX* (México: Aldus, 2004) provides a comprehensive introduction of Latin American religious poetry in the 20th century.

<sup>66</sup> "Insecurity for being made from various myths, some even mixed up with others, and freedom in the way we continuously re-create them from our historical experiences, projecting ourselves beyond our social settings and the ideologies that we build as bondage of our spirit." Magalhães, *Deus no espelho das palavras*, 91.

imaginative freedom it provides while maintaining a vision on reality through a reframed new perspective. The use of the products born from this marriage can be an interesting way to exercise pastoral counseling and more broadly pastoral care.

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