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## Special Education in Catholic Schools Viewed from a Liberatory Hermeneutic

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*This study explores anew the issue of providing special education in Catholic schools by viewing the ethical implications from a liberatory hermeneutic. By utilizing an interdisciplinary perspective, the research draws upon liberation theology, liberation psychology, liberation pedagogy, and liberation ethics to support the moral mandate for providing education for all God's children, including those persons with disabilities. The study challenges Catholic educational leaders to reimagine their positions on how schools might promote a more inclusive, liberatory approach to serving the special needs of children with disabilities. Finally, this research provides a Catholic, liberatory, ethical framework for inclusive Catholic education to assist school leaders in the development of appropriate pedagogy and programming to address the issue of inclusion of students with disabilities.*

### Keywords

special education, liberation theology, liberation psychology, liberation pedagogy, liberation ethics, liberatory hermeneutics

What should be the Church's ethical response to the issue of serving children with disabilities? In the current era of political and ideological polarization, this question carries the additional moral implication of advocating for the marginalized in U.S. society, including those who have experienced discrimination or harassment based on nationality, gender, or race. The case has already been made as a matter of traditional Catholic Social Teaching, based upon the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, that Catholic schools should offer special education services (Carlson, 2014). However, most Catholic schools still do not admit children with disabilities, nor has there been a systematic national debate regarding inclusion (Carlson, 2014). Furthermore, while the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 1978, 1998) has listened justly to the cries of people with disabilities and their families, the USCCB's calls for offering special educational services for children have gone largely unheeded. In this article, we propose a liberatory

hermeneutic to critically examine this issue, to help rouse U.S. Catholics from our slumber, to foster that debate, and to take a conscious, ethical stance to either serve or not to serve students with disabilities.

Little, if any, literature exists regarding the conjunction of a Christian, liberatory pedagogy and special education (Carlson, 2016). While there is a growing body of literature, in fact, until the last few years, very little literature was making the case for special education in Catholic Schools (Bello, 2006; Carlson, 2014; Durrow, 2007, Frabutt, 2013; Scanlan, 2009). In investigating this conjunction, one would typically begin with a critical (liberation) pedagogy. Liberation psychology would be a logical addition since it has practical, therapeutic, and theoretical applications to special education. However, to ground our liberatory hermeneutical analysis of special education in Catholic schools, we begin with a review of liberation theology. Because liberation theology's application to the marginalized, including children with disabilities, is such a large part of the moral mandate for offering special education, we will attempt to synthesize liberation theology with liberation psychology, liberation ethics, and liberation pedagogy. Although each liberation theory can stand on its own merits, the disciplines all have their grounding in the tenets of liberation theology. In fact, the theorists cited here drew upon each other's work and that of other liberation theologians. In essence, liberation theology represents the heart and soul of our analysis.

This paper springs, in part, from the Subversive Orthopraxy Project at Marquette University. The Subversive Orthopraxy Project investigates the motivation of compassion, a virtue central to human dignity, worth and well-being, within the self in those whom society considers others. Our project is subversive in that it spotlights the peripheral, actualizes social justice, and empowers the marginalized. It is orthopraxis in that it uses our disciplines for just practice and the common good, as well as personal and social transformation. Our academically diverse team conducted this study through the conceptual framework of liberation theories across disciplines, specifically, pedagogy (Freire, 1970); theology (Gutierrez, 1971); psychology (Martín-Baró, 1996; Shulman & Watson, 2010); ethics (Dussel, 2013); philosophy (Lee, 2013), and history (Dussel, 2013).

After a brief description of liberation theology, based mainly on the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez (2011), we introduce the liberation psychology of Ignacio Martín-Baró, S.J., (1991) who was murdered for his work with the poor in El Salvador in 1989. The third section will be a brief treatment of the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970), using his concepts of annunciation,

denunciation, and conscientization. Gutiérrez (2011), Enrique Dussel (2003), and Martín-Baró (1991) reference Freire in their writings and Catholic higher education uses his work widely. The fourth section will discuss basic elements of the philosophical ethics of Enrique Dussel. Finally, we examine the shared elements of these theories to determine how they can lead to a pedagogy more successful in helping children with disabilities reach their full human potential and due recognition as full members of the Church.

### The Basic Tenets of Gutiérrez's Liberation Theology

The tenets of liberation theology are radically inclusive and rooted in sacred scripture. Liberation theologians place a great deal of emphasis on the Book of Exodus and Jesus' teachings regarding the Kingdom of Heaven, including the Sermon-on-the-Mount and Beatitudes (Mt. 5-7), and the Judgment of the Nations (Mt. 25).

In 1968, the bishops of South America (CELAM) met in Medellín, Colombia, and produced a revolutionary document that named poverty as sin, preached liberation rather than macro-economic development of the peoples, and created small base ecclesial communities, or Christian Base Communities, in which the main voices heard would be those of the peoples. Following Medellín, in response to the oppression of the poor and the repression of the indigenous peoples and their culture, Gustavo Gutiérrez published *The Theology of Liberation* (2011). Gutiérrez was born in 1928 in Peru and currently teaches at the University of Notre Dame.

The book was partly a prophetic call to dismantle unjust socio-economic structures, partly a denunciation of structural and personal sin, partly a contemporary narrative of the poor and the clergy who were joining in their struggle, and, wholly theological. The first liberation theology work widely read outside of Latin America, *The Theology of Liberation* demanded that theology be looked at from the "underside" of history, from the vantage point of the marginalized. His theology, aside from being inspired by the "irruption" of the poor peoples of Latin America and their example of hope, was also greatly influenced by Vatican II, which he attended. Additionally, Gutierrez's theology shows evidence of his training with Karl Rahner, and Rahner's reliance on the teachings of Aquinas regarding our orientation towards God and the common good (Clark, 1972; Gutierrez, 2011; Rahner, 1978; Sobrino, 2004).

Gutiérrez named the problem as daunting structural injustice, which robbed the marginalized of both their dignity and their full status as members of humanity and of the Church. He presented the case for a new kind of

theology, Liberation Theology, as the Church's necessary response. Liberation theology would be "...a *new way* to do theology. Theology as critical reflection on historical praxis is a liberating theology, a theology of the liberating transformation of the history of humankind..." (Gutiérrez, 2011, p. 12, author's emphases).

Gutiérrez moved from theory to praxis in outlining the various aspects of liberation, or the struggle for a new creation. He yoked liberation to salvation and to the ways that aspects of liberation reflect the role of the Church as sacrament. The sacramental role is both sacramental in the usual sense of our full communion with one another—in, as, and of the body of Christ in the Eucharist—and as an eschatological promise of the already-but-not-yet Kingdom of Heaven. When Jesus announced, "The time has come; the Kingdom of God is upon you" (Mark 1:15), he was declaring the beginning of the end of the exploitation that prevented marginalized peoples from being fully human. Jesus pronounced that: "a Kingdom of justice which goes even beyond what they could have hoped for has begun... They are blessed because the Messiah will open the eyes of the blind and give bread to the hungry" (Gutiérrez, 2011, p. 171).

Because we have encountered God in specific moments of history, Gutiérrez said we must read the signs of the times and write the corresponding theology of the times in response to that categorical moment. This theology of our times tells us that without liberation from sin, social, economic, or political liberation do not exist; without historical liberating events, there can be no growth of God's Kingdom (Gutiérrez, 2011, p. 104).

Gutiérrez used Freire's (1970) ideas of annunciation, denunciation, and conscientization to explain the process of liberation. For the marginalized to denounce and reject the current unjust and dehumanizing situation, the Church must announce the Word of God, the coming of the Kingdom. "This means that the people who hear the message and live in these conditions by the mere fact of hearing it should perceive themselves as oppressed and feel impelled to seek their own liberation" (Gutiérrez, 2011, p. 153). This conscientization, or the process of developing a critical awareness of one's own social reality through reflection and action, will produce a will toward revolution in the poor. It should also produce that same will in the Church as it accompanies the poor. Faith, hope, and charity (love) must enlighten the struggle. Gutiérrez said that only at that point can we apply the social sciences to our historical human praxis to build a just society and new humanity.

Much development has occurred in Liberation Theology since Gutiérrez's work, both in terms of Latin America and in terms of broadening liberation

theologies to embrace other marginalized groups (e.g., see Copeland, 2010; Eiesland, 1994; Lee, 2013; Massingale, 2010; Phan, 2001; and Sobrino, 1994), including the disabled. Many models of liberation theology employ some form of a look-judge-act model emphasizing a cycle that begins by looking through the lens of our faith, judging what action needs to take place, and then acting. Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961) outlines a three-stage method to implement social principles, "First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles" (no. 236). In addition, *Mater et Magistra* emphasizes, "It is important for our young people to grasp this method and to practice it. Knowledge acquired in this way does not remain merely abstract but is seen as something that must be translated into action" (no. 237).

Many liberation theologians use what they call the hermeneutical circle. Gutiérrez (2011) describes this as "Revelation and history, faith in Christ and the life of a people, eschatology and praxis: these are the factors that, when set in motion, give rise to what is called the hermeneutical circle" (p. xxxiii). In fact, Gutiérrez sees the hermeneutical circle as a very important stage in theological work, although he recognizes that it is a second (not secondary) stage "...because faith comes first and is the source of theology; in the formula of St. Anselm, we believe in order that we may understand (*credo ut intelligam*)" (p. xxxiii).

After we act, we turn to theology to contemplate whether we are acting in a manner we believe is compatible with building the Kingdom of God (orthopraxis, or right practice). Fueled by our belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus (orthodoxy, or right thinking), we must try to judge our actions in light of the example of the compassionate way that Jesus lived (orthopathy, sometimes translated as right loving or right feeling). So, according to this liberatory theological approach, in excluding children with disabilities from Catholic schools, we would have to think that exclusion was Christian orthopraxis, based on orthodoxy and reflecting orthopathy.

### **The Life and Liberation Psychology of Ignacio Martín-Baró**

Ignacio Martín-Baró, S.J., taught psychology at the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, or UCA, from 1967 until 1989. At the time, he was the only person to hold a Ph.D. in psychology in El Salvador. UCA was founded by the Jesuits in the belief that other Central American uni-

versities were perpetuating oppression of the poor. The Jesuits believed that liberation of the peoples should be the underlying theological, philosophical, and intellectual underpinning of the university. Martín-Baró wrote widely on traditional psychological topics; however, as time went on, his work became more closely linked to liberation theology. He lived at the UCA with two prominent liberation theologians and fellow Jesuits, Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, whom he quoted in his works. Martín-Baró, Ellacuría, four other Jesuits, and their housekeeper and her daughter, were murdered by an American-trained, Salvadoran-government-sanctioned military squad on November 16, 1989. The work that most probably brought about Martín-Baró's death was conducted between 1985 and 1989, when he founded and ran the National Institute for Public Research. He dared to speak truth to power, allowing the Salvadoran poor to do the same, and to finally have their voices heard through his opinion polls. Martín-Baró's only "crime" was his solidarity with the people of El Salvador in their efforts to work against oppression and strive for peace and justice. As Elliot G. Mishler noted in the forward to *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, "He had embraced the 'preferential option for the poor,' a central tenet of Liberation Theology. This was his stance as a Jesuit, parish priest and theologian. It was also the centerpoint of his work as a psychologist" (Aron & Corne, 1994, p. vii).

Martín-Baró's work could not be separated from his faith or his life. Through his work, he sent forth an urgent call to develop a new praxis for psychology, one in which theory and research could be brought to their full, liberatory potential. By placing himself with the marginalized, Martín-Baró had a privileged view of psychology from the underside. Enmeshed with the people's struggles, with primacy given to their needs and lived experience, he wanted to reframe some of psychology's standard concepts. He critiqued the scientific view of "attitude, ideology, identity and community" as being too ahistorical, too centered on the individual rather than community, and too universalistic to be relevant to the Salvadoran people.

While Martín-Baró worked from within the field of psychology, he became more critical of how it was practiced, feeling that it comforted the more comfortable rather than the afflicted. He saw both his pastoral and clinical work as opportunities to work toward the Kingdom of God. His weekend pastoral work in Jayaque was close to his heart and kept him mindful of the everyday joys and struggles of those for whom he was writing. The children of Jayaque were of special concern to him. He reportedly greeted them with sweets and was fondly known by them as "Padre Nacho." He was especially

conscious of the psychosocial trauma that was inflicted upon them in situations of poverty and war and encouraged the community to come together to reestablish trusting social relationships for children in order to aid in their healthy identity development. Despite having death threats made against him and having his office bombed, Martín-Baró remained, until the end of his life, hopeful and committed to transforming his theological and psychological practices into a liberatory psychology, one in service of the peoples of El Salvador in their struggle for justice (Aron & Corne, 1994). Although he later elaborated upon and expanded his theory, Martín-Baró laid out the basics of his liberation psychology in *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Aron & Corne, 1994) in which he proposed three essential elements for the building of a liberation psychology:

### A New Horizon

Martín-Baró criticized Latin American psychology for being more interested in gaining scientific and social status in European and North American eyes than in seeing and treating the needs before their own eyes. Rather than a more universal horizon of gaining control over one's existence, if the horizon was more local in praxis, the needs of the majority of the population could be served. Martín-Baró recognized that "...the most important problem faced by the vast majority of Latin Americans is their situation of oppressive misery, their condition of marginalized dependency...forcing upon them an inhuman existence and snatching away their ability to define their own lives...." (Aron & Corne, 1994, p. 26). He also realized that unfortunately psychology itself has frequently added to "...obscuring the relationship between personal estrangement and social oppression, presenting the pathology of persons as if it were something removed from history and society, and behavioral disorders as if they played themselves out entirely in the individual plane" (pp. 26-27).

Because Martín-Baró was a Catholic Jesuit priest and pastor who pitched his tent among the poor, liberation theology was as necessary a foundation for liberation psychology as psychology itself. Imposing Freire's structure here, as Gutiérrez did in liberation theology, we might call this the *annunciation of a new horizon* for psychology and for the peoples. This new local horizon would mean that the practice of psychology could help people break the chains of oppression and throw off an existential fatalism which frequently occurs in what he and Ellacuría referred to as "limit situations." The concept of limit situations (Aron & Corne, 1994, pp. 25-26), adapted from



German philosopher Karl Jaspers, refers to being at the limits, or boundaries of normal human endurance. These same situations that may produce despair and fatalism, however, are also incubators for being. This is not being as in existential “being,” but being as in “being more” (*magis*). This new horizon, produced by the limit situation, may actually be a horizon of hope.

### **A New Epistemology**

The point of a liberation psychology would be to not just understand the world, but to change it. To do that, one of liberation psychology’s first tasks would be to help the peoples to critically revise the image of the world that was so carefully presented to them by oppressive governments and materialistic media conglomerates. In Freire’s framework, we might say that this entails a *denunciation of the world view* presented by those in power.

Psychology would need to help the peoples find new ways to build knowledge that were not dependent on the government or on an overly materialistic world. “The truth of the popular majority is not to be found, but made” (Aron & Corne, 1994, p. 27). Martín-Baró published polls in which the opinions of the peoples, rather than of the government, were heard. Part of the new epistemology comes from academics or practitioners attempting to view psycho-social processes and educational psychology from the vantage point of the marginalized or illiterate. For Martín-Baró this was not about resolving their issues or difficulties for them, but “...it has to do with thinking and theorizing with them. Here, too, the pioneering insight of Paulo Freire asserts itself. He put forth a pedagogy ‘of’ the oppressed, not ‘for’ the oppressed” (Aron & Corne, 1994, p. 28). Martín-Baró’s liberation psychology would share this vantage point with the pedagogy of the oppressed and with liberation theology and ethics in helping to discover and build an existential truth of Latin American peoples, a process that other marginalized groups could use as well.

### **A New Praxis**

Only by acting on reality and transforming it can human beings begin to know what reality is. It is easier in theory than in practice to place ourselves politically and professionally among the marginalized. For example, Martín-Baró (1994) cautioned against false presuppositions when he observed, “There is an assumption that taking a stand represents an abdication of scientific objectivity, but this assumption confuses bias with objectivity” (Aron & Corne, p. 29). In a similar light, one cannot wait for perfect objectivity when

the situation is extreme. Martín-Baró poses the example that if we wait and try to remain objective or neutral, "...we might easily condemn as murder a death caused by a guerrilla, but condone, and even exalt as heroism a death produced by a soldier or the police" (p. 30).

To use our training while located in that place, and to allow our training *to be used* rather than "wielding" it as power is challenging. As an element of Freire's framework, participatory psychology and research must lead to people becoming the protagonists of not only their history, but their future, which is *conscientization*.

Based upon these three essential elements (a New Horizon, a New Epistemology, and a New Praxis) Martín-Baró laid out three urgent tasks. *First*, he said there must be a *recovery of historical memory*. Desperation forces individuals to focus on the present (to stay alive, housed, and fed) without the luxury of past or future. Recovering historical memory means "...to discover selectively, through collective memory, those elements of the past which have proved useful in the defense of the interests of exploited classes and which may be applied to the present struggles to increase [*conscientization*]" (Aron & Corne, 1994. p. 30). This allows people to rely on their traditions and culture to assist in their own liberation. In applying this to children with disabilities, some research has indicated strong creative thought processes and problem-solving ability, especially in children with learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorder (Eide & Eide, 2011).

*Second*, he called for the *de-ideologizing of everyday experience*. From many viewpoints, including the pragmatic, critical/historical, and cognitive/constructivist schools, knowledge is a social construct. That construct is generally the "common sense," which is the projection of the consumerist mass media and the government, neither of which represented the everyday experience of most Latin Americans. What Martín-Baró called common sense would probably be translated as what we call in English, "common knowledge" or "what everyone knows." To remove the ideology means to question what "everyone knows" and to retrieve the original experience of groups and persons, and to return it to them as objective data (inasmuch as that is possible). They can then articulate a consciousness of their own reality. So, for instance, one might want to be thought of as differently-abled rather than dis-abled.

*Third*, he called for the *utilization of the peoples' virtues*. Rather than looking outside for remedies, liberation psychologists should look to the peoples. Many virtues live in popular traditions, in popular religious practices and in social structures that have allowed people to survive in untenable condi-

tions and to keep hope alive for a future. A psychology of liberation requires, *a priori*, the liberation of psychology, and that liberation must come from a praxis that is rooted in, and committed to, the hopes and sufferings of marginalized peoples.

His urgent tasks are related to a specific task of psychology, which is understanding the processes of human consciousness. In accomplishing these tasks, Martín-Baró outlined a particular role for psychologists. To him, consciousness, rather than representing our subjective knowledge and feelings, represents the confines within which each person encounters the impact of his or her being and actions in society (Aron & Corne, 1994, p. 38). Therefore, the psychologist must assist people in taking in and working through knowledge about the self and about reality that permits people to have a personal and social identity of their own. By including children with special needs among others, we help *all* children to form a more complete idea of humanity. This knowledge of reality would ostensibly contribute to the humanization of individuals and help the peoples to take command of their own existence.

### **Elements of Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian, Catholic, Marxist philosopher whose work was influential not only in Brazil and other Latin American countries but around the world. While his writings were not those of a theologian, and he sometimes had harsh criticism for the hierarchy of the Catholic Church (see Freire, 1985), the themes of Liberation Theology were clear and present throughout his work. Freire praised those priests, nuns, and bishops who took up a prophetic life and cast their lot with the poor under the Brazilian dictatorship (Freire, 1989). Not only was he frequently quoted by liberation theologians, he was also asked by the bishops as an outside expert to co-author the education section of the Medellín document of CELAM (1968).

Like many liberation theologians, Freire was jailed, and exiled, more than once, for standing with the marginalized and critiquing government policies, especially regarding education. Like many liberation theologians, his viewpoint was that of the "wretched of the earth" (Freire, 1998, p. 22) of the rag-pickers, of the excluded. His work centered on helping the peoples to be treated as dignified persons, to be allowed to achieve their full human flourishing, and to have control over their own destinies. Freire (1989) grounded his work in a universal human ethic, when he elaborated that such work implies: "...humanity's ontological vocation, which calls us out of and beyond ourselves...our being as something constructed socially and historically and

not just simply a priori” (p. 25) He goes on to envision being as “...born in the womb of history, but in the process of coming to be...far more than just ‘being.’ It is a ‘presence’, a ‘presence’ that is relational to the world and others” (p. 25).

For Freire (2000), using dialogue was a central means to discover our relationship with others, a dialogue which is grounded in respect and in love. He quite clearly asserted, “Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself...Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment to others” (p. 89). This same love serves to counteract the effects of oppression as a commitment to the “...cause of liberation. And, this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical” (Freire, 2000, p. 89)

Freire’s work was that of an educational philosopher who was critical of the ivory tower and who demanded a connection between research and dialogue, theory and praxis. He insisted that “right thinking” meant “right doing,” diminishing the distance between what teachers said and what they did. He called this the virtue of coherence. Freire believed that teacher education must go beyond technical preparation and be rooted in ethical formation, both of the teachers themselves and of their view of history. “The ethic of which I speak is that which feels itself betrayed and neglected by the hypocritical perversion of an elitist purity, an ethic affronted by racial, sexual and class discrimination” (Freire, 1998, pp. 23-24). This ethic had a beginning point of a recognition of the equality and dignity of all. This recognition was not a “favor” to be done, out of charity, but a demand of justice.

Aside from espousing a mix of Christian, socialist, democratic, and utopian ideals, Freire’s pedagogy demanded that teachers recognize themselves and their students as unfinished people, thereby casting the world in a hopeful light. This awareness of being unfinished is what makes us all educable and reminds us that while we have been *conditioned* by our history, we are not *determined* by it. He urged solidarity among the classes, a ‘being with’ others, a love of others, which liberates not only the oppressed but the oppressors as well. This solidarity “is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis” (Freire, 1970, p. 50).

Several main principles or practices were championed by Freire. In his advocacy of adult literacy, Freire introduced his idea of *conscientization*, as a process through which teachers and students first decoded the *world* through critical pedagogy (in literacy circles much like Christian Base Communities) and only then decoded the *word*. Experience in the world was recognized as an asset. In both the education of children and adults, he eschewed

the “banking system” of education in which teachers “deposited” knowledge into disengaged students, who were later asked to produce the deposit upon demand. Rather, he encouraged an authentic education, in which curiosity about the real world leads to an examination of real problems to be solved through education. Students are “subjects” rather than objects, and they name the world and its problems to achieve transformation. This kind of education would make children with disabilities “subjects” who, through education, name and solve problems, both societal and their own, and thus achieve transformation. This kind of education, Freire believed, would be a denunciation of dehumanization and an annunciation of the dream of a new society.

### **A Brief Exploration of the Philosophical Ethics of Enrique Dussel**

Born 1934 in Argentina, Enrique Dussel has studied, taught, and written widely, with his main focus being liberation philosophy, especially in the areas of politics and ethics. Because he wrote under the pressure of socio-political events as they unfolded, much like the other theorists in this study, Dussel has endured threats, had his home bombed, and was exiled from his home country. He currently teaches in Mexico.

Dussel’s (2003) ethical philosophy, or philosophy of ethics, goes beyond accepted philosophy to “reach back or down into the core of the philosophical which is the ethical relation (p. 2)” which considers the whole earth and its common fate. In the preface of *Beyond Philosophy* (2003), Dussel tells us that his work will explore theological, economic/political, historical, and ethical themes, with no mention of philosophy itself—hence, the title. He puts forth liberation theology as the foundation on which the other liberation theories are built. Dussel’s locus is the horizon of world history, “not a mere chapter in empirical-historical science; instead it is a critical ‘location’ or ‘point of departure’” (Dussel, 2003, p. x). This locus from the periphery allows him to reject Euro-centric philosophy as being inadequate to interpret historical conditions in other parts of the world, especially in the southern hemisphere, or for other marginalized groups. What he characterizes as the “central” world view habituated the North, “through the centuries, to see them [the subjugated peoples] as a part of the landscape, and not as human beings” (Dussel, 2003, p. xi).

He compares the road traveled by the peoples (including many exiles and emigres) to the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt. He finds his theological bases in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, in Isaiah and Exodus from the Old Testament, and in the Last Judgment (Matt 25) from the New Testament.

Dussel calls his method, which attempts to recover Latin American symbolics and hermeneutics, the analectical or anadialectical method. The analectical rejects the dialectical method which has been predicated on exclusion of “a vilified, despised, exploited, annihilated other” (Dussel, 2003, p. 5). Dussel prioritizes ethics as the “first” philosophy—we cannot imagine a just philosophy without ethics to establish “the other” as a dignified person with whom to dialogue. But to enter that ethical relationship, we must first affirm that “the other” is our equal. Hence, for Dussel (2003), “To say ‘yes’ to my neighbor, the system must first be broken into, opened up... The analectic (what is outside the system), the absolute ‘Other’ the Word... breaks into the closed system and becomes flesh...” (pp. 27–28). Next, Dussel frames this ethical relationship in terms of a calling or vocation. Affirming the other as equal means claiming one’s rightful role: “The servant, the prophet or the poor in spirit, acting from the ranks of and together with the oppressed, carry out the praxis of liberation” (pp. 27–28).

Dussel calls this a subversive orthopraxis. He says that the starting point for liberation theology, upon which he bases his ethics and philosophy, is always the situation at hand. Since the in-breaking of Jesus, and the announcement of the Kingdom of Heaven, we are called to break down the barriers at hand, “to move a system which acts oppressively towards becoming a new system which acts to liberate” (Dussel, 2003, pp. 29–30).

Therefore, liberation theology is situational, in that it must be based on the experience of real people in a categorical, historical moment, whether in a society, a church, or a school. However, its principles are universal and timeless, as Dussel (2003) insists, citing Matthew 25, “...the theology of liberation...is based on the praxis of liberation, on moving from sin as dominating influence exerted by various systems (political, sexual and educational) to irreversible salvation in Christ and His Kingdom (the *eschaton*)” (pp. 33–34). Dussel views this as a movement for “...all people and every age—in short, by the whole of human history” (p. 34).

Dussel looks at the history of oppression by examining groups that have been conquered physically, politically, economically, and psychologically. He begins by quoting Jesus, Isaiah, and Hammurabi regarding the moral imperative against oppression in the *political* aspect (what he calls brother-to-brother) in which men who are perceived as weak, poor, or “other” are oppressed; the *sexual* aspect (man-woman) in which women are oppressed; and the *educational* aspect (father-son) in which children are oppressed. (The androcentric and heterocentric terms throughout are Dussel’s).

Here we focus our attention on the *educational* starting point, which goes back thousands of years. Dussel writes that political and sexual domination are completed through education. Self-replication and/or preserving our privilege is a cultural conquest, or expansion of the self, who is often white, fully-abled, male, and middle-to-upper class. Through the dialectical process, the ideas of the “father” are shot through the “son” so that the son is subservient to and praises the father. So, schools’ admission policies are a means of maintaining the status quo.

The pain of oppression allows the materially poor (and others who are marginalized, such as the disabled) to be poor in spirit—to have the divinity of God revealed to and through them because they are not blinded by the false divinity, the “perfection” of the ruling system. Dussel (2003) lays out the elements of a Christology from below when he asserts, “The Kingdom of Heaven demands an adequate integration of the historical project of popular liberation with the eschatological dimension. Anti-Utopian Christianity criticizes the historical project as irrational and obstructionist” (p. 95). When viewing the effects of evil, sin, and oppression from this perspective, Dussel (2003) asserts, “If the essence of sin is oppression of the poor and alienation of the fruits of their work, then the essence of religion is ‘service’ of the poor as liberation and as restitution of the fruits of their work” (p. 98). For Dussel (2003), this new type of evangelization seeks to help people free themselves, “...and be transformed into the people of God and subjects of his Kingdom” (p. 98).

Dussel draws the lines quite starkly. It is impossible for those of the empire to be poor in spirit because it is only the materially poor, or those who are in misery, who are spiritually available to God. Dialectically, the poor are defined by the rich, the oppressed by the oppressor—and, by extension, the disabled by the (temporarily) abled. Poverty is the result of sin: there is no poverty without someone else’s wealth; so, the wealthy cannot call themselves poor in spirit. “The poor are the sign, the bleeding wound of the deep, structural sickness of the system” (Dussel, 2003, p. 98). The poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, the nobodies, provide both the origin of the call to the Kingdom and mediation of salvation (Dussel, 2003). In the act of the liturgy both the Word and the Eucharist should also bring to the fore others who hold privileged positions in the Kingdom, other marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities.

The liturgy of our Church is meant to give life. It is the work of human hands, done by all of us together, each in the way that we can contribute, each

recognized as being *able* to contribute, equally worthy to contribute, but with some having a more preferential place at the table. Dussel reminds us, as does the tradition and teaching of our faith, that the Eucharist is but a foretaste of what is to come, a sort of premonition and enactment of the Kingdom. We cannot truly do this work of God without recognizing the dignity of the marginalized, the preferred. If we did not have those preferred among us, we would have no epiphany of the face of God, no entrée into the Kingdom of Heaven. To share at table with everyone, to have our lives (our society, our Church, our schools) mirror the Eucharist table and to reflect the Word, to recognize the dignity common to us all is the first step on the road to the Kingdom.

Dussel questions the critical function of ethics in situations needing profound social change. He answers that state, national, and international organizations, whether seemingly neutral or even benevolent, present ideas that are based upon *reform of existing systems* that have established norms, values, and virtues. So, the task of liberation ethics is to *destroy the old system*. Only when the old systems of ideological domination are quashed can a transcendent basis for just living be established with new norms, values and virtues (Dussel, 2003, p. 138).

Ethics must clarify "...the fact and reality of the continual presence of the other 'beyond' any totality" (Dussel, 2003, p. 139). He calls "the other" the "analectical exteriority" (Dussel, 2003, p. 139). The other appears as an epiphany, as the locus of God's manifestation, and as the one who demands justice. It is only because the poor or marginalized person is outside the system that he or she can serve as the locus of God's epiphany to us. God, the "other absolute," is revealed in a historical, categorical way only by what is outside the mainstream of history, whether it be through Jesus or through the marginalized.

The question from the periphery is "What is the ethical basis of the praxis of heroes when they rise against laws, rules, alleged virtues and values, against the ends of an unjust system" (Dussel, 2003, p. 141)? Dussel portrays the struggle that must be undertaken to eradicate sin from the system as a journey, as he has alluded to in comparisons to the Exodus and the flight into Egypt. He frames the journey with four questions: "From what position am I asking? ...What are the practical and historical conditions? ...Is it possible to believe? ...What is the eschatological reality" (Dussel, 2003, p. 140)?

If we ask from what position or under what historical conditions we begin, we acknowledge that there is a *departure from somewhere specific*. This



“somewhere,” which we must be liberated from, is the lived experience of those who are part of the system (with established values, laws, virtues, and norms), or of those who are the other, the alienated, who are outside of the system.

If we ask if it is possible to believe, we need a *journey* in which we seek to believe, not by way of our historical/categorical norms, but by way of the stories of hero-saints who act on ethics which lie outside of time. The eschatological reality is that, through salvation, *an arrival, a somewhere* exists, which is in a new order, not yet in force. For Dussel (2003), then, central to the ethics of liberation is reviewing or reimagining “...moral problems from the point of view and the demands of ‘responsibility’ for the poor, for a historical reality which *allows struggle*...a journey through the desert in the time of transition and the building of the promised land” (p. 142).

Hence, the journey for the marginalized begins with an impulse that they already have, within their culture, their virtue, their wisdom, and their resilience, which enables them to realize their position as being oppressed. But what of the journey of those of us within the system? Much as Aquinas gave criteria for loving our neighbor as ourselves (Carlson, 2014), Dussel lays out three criteria for the achievement of ethical validity of those within the system:

### **Respecting the Dignity of the Ethical Subject**

This recognition (*re-conocimiento*) of dignity begins with the acknowledgment of the oppressed as a person. That assumes that the one in power is aware of: the existence of the oppressed (as one would notice a thing); that the oppressed is a human being (a living part of the political/economic system); and then that the oppressed is more than just a cog in the machine and is worthy of respect (Dussel, 2003).

### **Fulfilling the Requirements for the Reproduction of Life**

Once we recognize the other as a person who is owed dignity, we must then accord him/her the necessities of a dignified life. People have universal, corporeal needs which are “a criterion of ethical validity” (Dussel, 2003, p. 173), such as decent housing, clothing, food, water, education, and health care.

### **Communal Solidarity**

To exemplify solidarity, Dussel (2003) quotes the language of the communiqués used by the Mayan Zapatistas in the uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, in

1994. The language, stunning in its beauty, depicts an idea of a utopian community, in which

It is reasonable and the will of good men and women to seek and find the best way to govern and be governed. What is good for the many is good for us all. But, the voices of the few may not be silenced, rather, let them be in their place, hoping that the thought and the heart might become shared within the will of the many and in the view of the few (Dussel, 2003, p. 174).

The method at the heart of this investigation, the hermeneutics of liberation, is a recognized method in the field of theology (Ellacuría & Sobrino, 1993; Phan, 2000). This liberationist lens will be used to view these questions through what Gustavo Gutierrez calls the “backside” or “underside” of Church history. This methodology is similar to that used in critical race theory, which looks at “facts” from different vantage points to try to find the truth behind the “facts” and to look at what we think we know with a fresh, yet wary, set of eyes. It is often thought of as a hermeneutic of suspicion. Liberation theologians are aided in investigation by support from the social sciences, such as anthropology and psychology. Liberationist theologians prize the lives of the marginalized and compare those lives with the life and death of Jesus.

The peoples have cried “enough!” and we must respond in solidarity: “These are ethical situations that demand a solidarious co-responsibility with the oppressed, the poor, and the excluded” (Dussel, 2003, p. 177). It is important to remember, although this theology was developed with the poor in Latin America, it can be applied to any marginalized community, from immigrants to the LGBT community to children with disabilities.

#### **Common Elements of Liberation Theology, Psychology, Philosophy, and Pedagogy**

Table 1 shows the locus of each discipline, the elements that might be considered annunciation, denunciation, and conscientization, and the goal, or orientation. All share the starting point of the underside of history, or viewpoint of the marginalized; have central themes of love, liberation, communion/community/common good, and human dignity; and have common goals of people reaching their full human flourishing and bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Table 1  
*Common Elements: Liberation Theology, Psychology, Philosophy & Pedagogy*

	Liberation Theology	Liberation Psychology	Liberation Pedagogy	Liberation Ethics
Viewpoint/ Locus	The poor, the marginalized, the crucified peoples, the underside of history	The poor, the marginalized, those in “limit situations” the underside of history	The poor, the marginalized, the illiterate, the workers, the “wretched” of history	The poor, the alteriority/ exteriority of “the other”
Annunciation	Hope in the Kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus	A New Horizon: Hope for historical liberation leading to building of the Kingdom of God	Right to live as dignified, literate citizens with hope for a better life: call for common good	Recognition of “the other” as dignified and deserving of respect and the “requirements for the reproduction of life”
Denunciation	Structural and personal sin which is responsible for misery and oppression	(Through a New Epistemology) Structural and personal sin which puts people in limit situations	Oppression by the wealthy, the military, and the powerful; The “Banking System” of education	Alienation of the poor; machismo (in sexual realm), capitalism (in socio-political realm) and ideological domination (in educational realm)
Conscientization	Christian Base Communities study the Bible, and how biblical concepts can be applied to socio-economic realities	A New Praxis: Groups recover historical memory; deideologize experience; utilize virtues of the peoples	Widespread literacy circles tackle community problems and re-visit historical “reality” through critical pedagogy	Struggle/journey of the poor, accompanied by Church and academics, to follow the praxis of hero-saints; old systems cannot be fixed, but must be destroyed.
Goal	The Here-but-not-yet Kingdom of God	The Here-but-not-yet Kingdom of God	Utopian, egalitarian, democracy with (socialist elements); people reaching their full ontological vocation.	Communal solidarity in overthrowing un-just systems and building equitable socialist systems, compatible with Christianity and The Kingdom of God

### **Elements of an Ethical Christian Pedagogy for Children with Disabilities**

What is the ethical response of the Church, through its schools, to children with disabilities?

*To admit them.*

*And, once they are admitted, to include them as fully as is beneficial to them.*

It will not be easy, and there may be exceptions. But, in general, we must admit them---and at the head of the list. The scope of this paper precludes this from being a how-to manual, and the task may seem overwhelming to Catholic schools. However, there are a number of models of how Catholic schools could offer special education (Frabutt, 2013; Long, 2007; Scanlan, 2009), and there is a wealth of practitioner literature from special education in public schools (for instance, Fraterra & Capper, 2007; Gould & Vaughn 2000; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Vaughn Bos & Schumm, 2013). Some of the models proposed for Catholic schools include *consultant* models (i.e., Durow, 2007; Scanlan, 2009); *multi-school collaboration* models (i.e., DeFiore, 2006); *teacher's aide/tutor* models (i.e., Durow, 2007); *resource room* models (i.e., DeFiore, 2006; Durow, 2007); and *retraining* models (i.e., Gould & Vaughn 2006; Scanlan, 2009) that are based upon retraining staff to be radically inclusive through methods such as *Universal Design for Learning* (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

The kind of radical change in thinking called for here would require not only a change in thinking for parishes, school boards, principals and teachers, but a commitment of money to re-train staff. Many successful examples of this kind of sea change, and addressing the power structures that be, can be found on the website for the National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion ([www.fullinclusionforcatholicschools.org](http://www.fullinclusionforcatholicschools.org))

Dussel would have us destroy the old system that admits fully-abled children first, and only then considers, on a case-by-case basis, whether a place is available for children with disabilities. Not only would Dussel's ethics allow children with disabilities to become subjects of their own destiny in a Catholic setting, they would allow fully-abled children to practice compassion and to be beneficiaries of the gifts that children with special needs possess. Research has shown that not only is inclusion *not harmful* for children without special needs, but in most cases, it is actually *beneficial* to all (e.g., see Salend & Duhaney, 1999).

Pedagogy is considered the art and science of teaching. One's pedagogy is generally founded on his/her philosophy of teaching. Here we address the art of teaching rather than the science, such as instructional methods, and content, so it will not supplant an evidence-based pedagogy. We intend to pull together elements of the four disciplines explored here to form a Christian, ethical, philosophical basis from which one might form a liberatory praxis to add to scientific best practice.

Gutiérrez (2011) asserted that liberation is all-embracing and includes "...the struggle to construct a just and fraternal society, where persons can live with dignity and be the agents of their own destiny..." (p. xiv). In short, Gutiérrez is suggesting a new vision which reframes the ways in which human beings relate to one another. He further insists that "This viewpoint, therefore, permits us to consider *the unity, without confusion* of the various human dimensions, that is, one's relationships with other humans and with the Lord..." (p. xiv).

A school would certainly be a place where one should be treated as a person with dignity, and, through education, begin the struggle to become an agent of one's own destiny. So, to follow Gutiérrez, if we begin with the belief that the Kingdom of God is all inclusive, and that liberation is all embracing, then children, especially those diagnosed with disabilities, who are often among the marginalized (e.g., Eiesland, 1994; Scanlan, 2009), should be included and embraced in Catholic schools. Otherwise, a school's administration illogically would have to believe that denying children with disabilities a Catholic education was truly Christian orthopraxis, based on orthodoxy, and reflecting the orthopathy of Jesus.

The pedagogical practice would begin for Martín-Baró during the diagnostic and prescriptive stage, before the child enters the classroom. He says that educational psychologists spend much of their time doing diagnostic work with children with special needs which is meant to achieve "...an adjustment, a good fit, between each individual and the society, that would never for a moment put into question the basic schemata by which we live, nor, therefore, how social roles are determined for people..." (Aron & Corne, 1994, p. 44). However, if educational psychology includes conscientization, then it constructs "alternative social schemata: the critical and creative ability of students as opposed to what school and society offer them; a different style of confronting social and occupational life." (p. 44). Ultimately, such a radical conceptualization would entail "new methods of diagnosis and intervention" (p. 44).

Thus, a Christian liberatory pedagogy would begin with the diagnostic process—seeing the child as a child of God, as a human being with dignity, as one with legitimate hopes and gifts, and as one who should be embraced and included in the school and the community. Table 2 fits these elements into the earlier framework of Table 1 to situate factors to consider in developing an Ethical Christian Pedagogy for Children with Disabilities.

Table 2  
*A Catholic, Liberatory, Ethical Framework for Inclusive Catholic Education*

Viewpoint/Locus	Annunciation	Denunciation	Conscientization	Goal
Children of God	Recognition of dignity of all	Exclusion	Destruction of old system	Inclusion
Children who have disabilities, are marginalized, or considered “other”	Education in academics, social skills, political-economic theory and Catholic faith as a birth-right	Ableist, classist, racist, sexist or other inauthentic education	Recognition, celebration and utilization of virtues, gifts and strengths found in various cultures, communities, and marginalized groups and individuals	Universal Design in curriculum and instruction to help each child succeed
Children in Limit Situations	Hope for building the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth	Structural sin that leads to limit situations		Authentic Education for common good
Those who will accompany them in community and communion, working for the common good		Ideal of fully-abled people w/ conventional minds and appearance		Unconditional love to mirror the love of God, bring each child to full flourishing, and hasten the coming of the Kingdom

Being diagnosed with a disability, in Martín-Baró's schema, would place the child in a "limit situation." However, while a limit situation is often traumatic, it is also often the place of resilience, hope, and creative solutions to problems. Therefore, an important part of the diagnostic process would be an emphasis on the child's strengths and aspirations. Martín-Baró viewed the dialectical nature of trauma in that it exhibits a relationship between persons and the society at large. Accordingly, it is important "...to underscore the possibility that exceptional circumstances, just as they may lead to deterioration or injury, may also lead to people's growth and development" (Aron & Corne, 1994, p. 124).

Freire, who believed that education is not done *for* students, or *to* them, but *with* them, would agree (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 34). "The starting point for a political-pedagogical project must be precisely at the level of the people's aspirations and dreams, their understanding of reality and their forms of action and struggle" (p. 27). The goal of education is... "a critical understanding, of the real world which, instead of being simply described, has to be changed" (p. 6). Just as Freire spoke of the starting point for Latin American peoples as being their aspirations and dreams, so must the beginning point for the disabled community be their own aspiration and dreams. The situation cannot be changed, there cannot be a project or a struggle without hope and vision to provide direction.

Each of the four models empowers marginalized peoples to view reality in a way that takes a skeptical look at history and at their social, economic, and political situation (*conscientization*). This empowerment, in a Christian liberation pedagogy, would begin with the announcement of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus, followed by a practice of critical pedagogy that would help those with disabilities to denounce a system that excludes and marginalizes them. While persons with mild to moderate disabilities are capable of that conscientization and making their desires or demands known, that may not be true of those with more severe or profound disabilities. In most liberation theologies, we would lead with the voice of those seeking liberation. However, in the case of the very small number of persons who cannot lead with their own voices, a sort of liberation guardian or advocate may be needed, most likely the parent or teacher—one who interprets the child's needs, using scripture, through love, who fights on their behalf.

This dichotomy was demonstrated in the late 1800s by Annie Sullivan and her student Helen Keller. Annie, a legally blind orphan, was living in a "poor house" which offered no schooling. She heard that a state superintendent was

coming, so she threw herself in front of him and said, “Mr. Sanborn, I want to go to school!” Her “irruption” paid off—he sent her to Perkins School for the Blind. Helen Keller, her student, who was blind and deaf, could not make her needs known, so Annie and Helen’s parents assumed, on Helen’s behalf, that she wanted to learn. Years later, Helen was able to confirm this herself. (American Foundation for the Blind, 2018).

The community dimension of both education and therapy is sometimes neglected. One of the greatest strengths of all four models is the use of groups—whether labeled as base groups, support groups, or literacy circles. In these models, the child would never be alone, or seen as one who “doesn’t fit” in a world that fetishizes a conventional intellect, physical perfection, and self-sufficiency. Rather, journeying along the road to the Kingdom in a group provides a collective identity: “A source of collective identity opposes pedagogical norms based on competitiveness and individualism, which reinforce the most anti-social tendencies in people, fomenting in them a selfish perception of reality” (Martín-Baró, 1991, p. 237). These children would be defined not as *disabled children* of a lesser god but as *beloved children* of God *with disabilities*. The person-centered language has more than just semantic significance. It allows for a disability to be just one part of who a person is, rather than the defining element. Dignity is enhanced, and a more holistic identity is formed.

Freire often uses the term communion to describe the intimate relationship between people who work together for the common good, to bring about a Utopian society. No learning or growth or revolution can be put upon people—it can only be arrived at together with others. So, an ethical, liberatory pedagogy of disabled persons would raise the consciousness of the rest of us to their marginalization, and would, in company with them, seek remedies and accommodations. An “irruption” of those with disabilities into our consciousness affords us as teachers, principals, priests, or therapists a privileged position to accompany persons with disabilities. Gutiérrez (2011) envisioned, “This irruption is the source of a collective or communitarian journey toward God” (p. 114). Gutiérrez (2011) goes on to recollect Bernard of Clairvaux’s spiritual image of drinking from our own wells, that is, “...from our own experience, not only as individuals, but also as members of a community... through which a people becomes conscious of its human dignity and its value as sons and daughters of God” (p. 114).

If the individual with disabilities is viewed as a full member of the community, both those with disabilities and rest of the community must be part



of the solution. And, a community seeking the common good, and oriented toward God, cannot help but find ways to help the “blind to see and the lame to walk,” but *also* accept those with disabilities as equal in their present states. Perhaps as a part of the community, the academy could begin a discussion of such a pedagogy and see what other theologians, psychologists, educators, philosophers, and those who are differently-abled might add to it.

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