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Theology Goes Public: Richard Shaull's Dialogue with Public Issues, Social Sciences, and Ecumenism in "The New Revolutionary Mood in Latin America" (1962)

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Abstract: Since the arrival of Protestants in Brazil, the presence of Protestant educational institutions became a reality. Seminaries were founded at the end of the 19th century, focusing on the training of clergy without much concern for dialogue with other churches or with society at large. Public issues, ecumenism—through dialogue and cooperation between Protestants and Catholics—and interdisciplinary theological approaches only became current concerns in the mid-twentieth century, especially with liberation theologies—both Protestant and Catholic. Before that, however, one of the authors who was able to grasp these dimensions in his theological endeavour was Richard Shaull, who, through his theological method, opened a dialogue with the social sciences in order to interpret the reality in which he placed Christian action and mission. Through bibliographical research and document analysis, focusing on the reading of "The New Revolutionary Mood in Latin America", a report on Latin America presented by Shaull to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Missionary Board, the article aims to show Shaull's theology, institutionally located, as one that thinks about public issues in dialogue with social sciences and considers its implications for and within Christian churches. In the light of studies on public theology, this paper presents Richard Shaull's writings as a theological approach to the church, considering its ecumenical stance; to society, considering its most pressing issues of the time; and to academia, through the interdisciplinary dialogue he undertakes with the social sciences.

Keywords: public theology; theology of revolution; Richard Shaull; Protestantism; Brazil

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1. Introduction

The history of theology in Brazil can be told as the history of the struggles to which theologians—priests, pastors, and academics—were committed. They bore certainly specific ecclesiastical concerns but were also seriously concerned about issues from public life. Their histories still need to be fully discovered and reflected upon, especially from a decolonial perspective (see Panotto and Andrade 2023)[1]. It is helpful to remember the histories of already famous bulwarks of the defence of the people living south of the equator in different periods, such as the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas (see Gutiérrez 1995) in the colonial period and bishops Helder Câmara (see Cabral 2021) and Pedro Casaldáliga (see Zeferino et al. 2020) in more recent times, but it is also a task for public theology to read history through fresh lenses that can uncover the histories that once were made and kept invisible.

To try to trace, even in a panoramic way, all these relevant actors, known and unknown, would be an undertaking that would go beyond the space and the genre of an article. Aware of our limitations, we establish a delimitation that focuses attention on the history of

theology in Brazil in the twentieth century, and more specifically on the work and trajectory of an exponent of a theoretical turn that opens theology to dialogue with the social sciences and embraces a more worldly, concrete perspective on Christian faith, the Presbyterian missionary Millard Richard Shaull (1919–2002). The article argues that he responded to the challenges of his time by producing a contextual theology in dialogue with the world and with different fields of knowledge, marking the beginning of a new theological trend that was not confined within the walls of the church, nor clinging to the historical disputes between Catholics and Protestants, but opening up the possibility of ecumenical dialogue even beyond Protestant initiatives, as well as engaging with studies on Brazilian and Latin American social and economic structures that enlightened this theological approach.

This paper situates Richard Shaull as a key figure in twentieth-century US and Latin American Protestantism in the history of public theology. Richard Shaull's propositional theology of revolution, which sought to formulate a responsible ecclesial response to the public issues of his time, namely the bold urge for revolution, makes him part of the history of other similar public theological initiatives. In addition, the image of a public theologian in dialogue with church, society, and academia, as portrayed by David Tracy (1981), also helps to understand the breadth of Shaull's work and life. This argument is developed on the basis of one private document, a report by Shaull to a missionary committee, but places it in the context of Shaull's other writings and in the light of the dynamic that the ecumenical movement was developing at the time, especially in the Brazilian context.

In order to engage with the development of this kind of theological work concerned with the issues of public life, the article presents a brief background on the history of Protestant theological formation in Brazil; the influence Shaull had on a generation of theologians and religious leaders through his writing, teaching, and ecumenical activism; and finally, it turns its attention to "The New Revolutionary Mood in Latin America," a report Shaull wrote to the Committee for Cooperation in Latin America, Department for Foreign Missions, of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. In this text it is possible to observe how public life drives Shaull's theological thinking, leading him to open dialogue with social sciences and economics, illustrating the social and ecumenical turn in Protestant theology in Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s.

2. Notes on Theological Education and Ecclesiastical Background in Brazil

Catholic congregations had been responsible for theological education since the 16th century. Protestant education only became a reality with the arrival of Protestant missionaries. The Lutherans, associated with what is now the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, although they had been arriving in Brazil from as early as 1824, immigrating from German-speaking areas in Europe, did not begin their own theological pre-training in Brazil until 1921, and a proper Faculty of Theology was established only in 1946. Before that, theologians were trained in Germany. The Presbyterians, who started their presence in Brazil in 1859, founded the first Protestant theological seminary in Rio de Janeiro in 1867, which was moved to Campinas in 1907 to become the Southern Presbyterian Seminary, where Shaull taught for several years. The Methodist seminary was founded in Juiz de Fora in 1890, later moving to São Paulo and finally to São Bernardo do Campo in 1970. The Baptist seminaries of the North (Recife) and South (Rio de Janeiro) were founded in the first decade of the twentieth century. During the first half of the last century, other seminaries were created by different Protestant denominations (Villas Boas 2018, pp. 262–65).

This scenario gave a decisive impulse to an apologetic, largely anti-Protestant theological education among Catholics and an apologetic, largely anti-Catholic theological education among Protestants. The traditionally antagonistic relations between Catholics and Protestants began to change substantially only after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), when the Roman Catholic Church opened up to dialogue with the world and with other Christian confessions. At that time, an ecumenical perspective, already present in some Protestant circles, began to reverberate in Catholicism. In the Latin American context,

a continent of scandalous inequalities, theological thought began to advance through a growing contextual concern of both Protestants and Catholics, which would lead to a theological production concerned with the issue of poverty as a challenge to faith and theology. This sensitivity was already evident in the thought of M. Richard Shaull (1919–2002), an U.S.-American missionary, who reflected on the involvement of churches and theology in the transformation of society and in the engagement with the concrete life of people in their daily struggles. Shaull had already begun in the mid-1960s to reflect critically on the reality of his time in dialogue with the social sciences (cf. Huff Junior 2020, pp. 34–35). Rubem Alves (1933–2014), a student of Shaull's (Barreto 2021), in his doctoral thesis on "Towards A Theology of Liberation: An exploration of the encounter between the languages of Humanistic Messianism and Messianic Humanism" (Alves 1968; published as "A Theology of Human Hope", Alves 1971), welcomed the criticism of a political humanism of the Christian faith and considered the real problems of concrete human beings, drawing on the Christian tradition to find resources to promote human liberation (Alves 2020, p. 79). Around the same time, Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973) began to teach and write about what he would also call a theology of liberation. In the course of the 1970s and 1980s, such a contextual perspective, sensitive to the pains of the continent, was affirmed in the Latin American context.

The Seminary of Campinas occupies an important place in the history of theological education in Brazil. Invited to teach church history there, Shaull entered a well-known institution that had once been the home of an ecumenical enthusiast like Erasmo Braga (1877–1932) but had subsequently been run by fiercely orthodox (Neo-)Calvinists. When Shaull joined the seminary, it was remarkably conservative. Shaull's dissonance and appeal to students found a dire puritan and conservative soil in which his revolutionary thinking would nevertheless flourish and pollinate (see Santiago-Vendrell 2010). The Brazilian Presbyterian Church, at that time, was formed and led by very conservative leaders. Indeed, the seminary in Campinas was shaped by conservative faculty and students. Presbyterian theology was therefore deeply intertwined with conservative thinking and refused to develop any kind of relationship with liberal theological ideas (Pierson 1974, p. 202). It was, at the same time, in a politically and socially effervescent context that M. Richard Shaull arrived in Brazil and participated in the struggles of the youth and the ecumenical movements. Naturally, his theology clashed with that of the institutional Church, but it served well the aspirations of the youth, inspiring them to reflect theologically on contemporary issues and engaging thoroughly against social injustice and orthodox-fundamentalist theology, which Alves would call "Right-Doctrine Protestantism" (Alves 2007). Shaull's departure from Brazil came at a time when the youth movement within the Presbyterian Church was becoming disarticulated. Church leaders were unable to address the needs of the youth, hiding behind authoritarianism and strict orthodoxy (Pierson 1974, pp. 219–24).

Until the 1970s, theological studies were limited to the ecclesiastical sphere, especially with regard to the formation of clergy, whether Catholic or Protestant. In the Brazilian university, the predominance of positivism, averse to the possibility of treating religion as something that could be considered scientific, even created obstacles to the scientific study of religion (cf. Pieper 2018; von Sinner 2012, pp. 336–42). For a long time, theology in Brazil remained in a more private sphere. It fulfilled a function of academic support and formation for faith communities (Gross 2012, p. 13). It was liberation theology, with its new perspective on the Christian tradition, its revolutionary commitment, and its zeal for an interpretation of reality mediated by the social sciences, that would sediment an opening for theology in the academic sphere and win the sympathy of intellectuals with close concerns. An influx of theologians, well trained also in other fields of knowledge, into the universities took place during this period. This happened not least because of their dissatisfaction with religious institutions and the lack of space within them. It partly explains the academic resistance to theology in Brazil, especially when it was seen as dogmatic and ecclesiastical. This generation of intellectuals would be important for the

beginnings of religious studies departments in Brazilian universities (Gross 2012, pp. 13–16; Gmainer-Pranzl and Jacobsen 2015).

The history of theological studies in Brazil, as briefly outlined above, helps to understand the different moments of the emergence of Protestant seminaries in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, a period that also marks a history of tensions between Catholics and Protestants. Although these tensions have not been completely overcome, dialogue and cooperation have taken root in many theological institutions, following the opening signalled by the Second Vatican Council, but also in the turn towards a more contextual theology. In this perspective, M. Richard Shaull emerges as a figure who anticipated many of these changes. His translation of his theology of the North to the needs of local congregations in Latin America found fertile ground and would, in time, even help him to criticise and overcome some of his own theological backgrounds.

3. Richard Shaull: Biographical and Theological Highlights[2]

In the way of becoming public, theology deals with social issues. This is well seen in Shaull's trajectory and theological work. In order to sketch contours of his thought and the type of theological endeavour he pursued, we present some aspects of Shaull's life and work, and later on, we shall concentrate on the dialogue he entailed with ecumenism, public issues, and social sciences.[3]

Shaull occupies a prominent place in the memory of Brazilian Protestants, especially those who have focused on the construction of theological perspectives concerned with the social dimension of the Christian faith. Born in Felton, Pennsylvania, on 24 November 1919, Millard Richard Shaull, the son of farmers of German descent, was introduced to the Presbyterian faith at an early age. His family, like many others at the time, suffered the effects of the economic crisis of 1929. In order to pursue higher education, he had to apply for a scholarship that allowed him to study humanities and sociology at Elizabethtown College, a religious institution with an Anabaptist and Pietist profile, where he spent almost all of his teenage years. In 1938, interested in becoming a pastor, he began his theological studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he was deeply influenced by Swiss theologian Emil Brunner (1889–1966), "who put the active and compassionate presence of God at the centre of human existence" (Barreto 2021, p. 7), John Mackay (1889–1983), a former missionary to Peru propagating a concretely active faith rather than just looking on, and the Czech theologian Josef Hromadka (1889–1969), who was in dialogue with Marxism. In this period of initial theological training, which ended in 1941, Shaull had access to the great theological discussions of the time, such as those arising from dialectical theology, the main exponent of which was Karl Barth (1886–1968) (see Zeferino and von Sinner 2022). Other relevant theologians during his formative years were Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), and Paul Tillich (1886–1965) (Huff Junior 2020; Shaull 2003; Barreto 2021).

After completing his undergraduate studies at Princeton, in 1941, Shaull worked as a pastor and soon began his career as a missionary. The period in Colombia (1942–1950), first in Barranquilla and then in Bogotá, was marked by missionary activity in poorer regions, concern for social issues, and work with young people. He and his wife Mildred lived in working-class neighbourhoods and were involved in educational initiatives, in contrast to the traditional approach of missionaries who either concentrated on schools with a more elite profile or on conversionist and individualist practises (Huff Junior 2020, pp. 45–98). Richard Shaull's missiology was characterised by the public presence of churches in the improvement of living conditions and the promotion of human rights. This was evident in his work with the working class in Colombia and Brazil, as well as in the literacy campaign he helped develop in Colombia, which aimed to give poor people the opportunity not only to learn to read and write, but also to become more self-confident (see Santiago-Vendrell 2010).

When Shaull left Colombia for a period of studies in the U.S., the time was not right to return there because of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants.[4] So Shaull used his

sabbatical to study with Reinhold Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he was one of a select group of fifteen missionaries assigned to study the impact of communism on the nations of the so-called Third World. Another professor he met at Union would become a great partner in his academic journey, Paul Lehmann (1906–1994), with whom he would develop studies focused on a more contextual theological ethics. Shaull would later return to Princeton, where Lehmann taught, to begin his doctoral studies with him, which he would not complete until 1959. Moved by the experience in Colombia, by the period of study at Union, and by the relationship with Lehmann, the theme of "revolution" already resonated as a concern of his in view of the challenge of thinking the Christian faith in relation to the contexts he faced (Huff Junior 2020, pp. 98–105; da Rosa 2020, pp. 106–8).

In 1952, already assigned to work as a missionary in Chile, he was first sent to Brazil to attend a course organised by the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). It was there that Shaull's involvement in the international ecumenical movement began. Inspired mainly by Bonhoeffer, Shaull made a significant impact on the young people at the event and was seen by them as someone with an innovative perspective on the church. He was then invited to work with the WSCF in Brazil and soon after received an invitation to join the faculty of the Southern Presbyterian Seminary (SPS) in Campinas, in the state of São Paulo. Shaull accepted both because of the opportunity to be involved in the training of religious leaders of the Presbyterian Church and because of the opportunity to reconcile his agenda for cooperation with the Christian Student Union of Brazil (Huff Junior 2020, pp. 107–21; da Rosa 2020, pp. 108–11).

The years in Brazil were intense and fruitful. He worked with Presbyterian and ecumenical youth, with the Brazilian Evangelical Confederation, participated in the World Council of Churches Assembly in Evanston in 1954, and participated in the creation of a sector of the Brazilian Evangelical Confederation focused on social responsibility, which was responsible for the organisation of four conferences, the most famous of which was held in Recife in 1962 under the title "Christ and the Brazilian Revolutionary Process" (see Matos and Vieira-Souza 2022; da Rosa and Adriano Filho 2012). He completed his Ph.D. at Princeton in 1959, taught church history at Campinas Seminary (1952–1959), even took on the position of vice-president of the Mackenzie Institute (today University) in São Paulo, and co-founded and served in Church and Society in Latin America (ISAL), among other activities (Faria 2002; Huff Junior 2020).

Shall's theological perspective was resisted to the point where he underwent a process culminating in his departure from Campinas in 1959. When he returned from a sabbatical to complete his doctorate at Princeton, he taught again for a time at Campinas but soon left the institution. The more dialogical initiatives in which Shaull was involved led to dissatisfaction on the part of the Brazilian Presbyterian Church, which eventually led to the dissolution of the Confederation of Presbyterian Youth. The conservative resurgence of the Presbyterian Church was similar to the repression the country would experience at the government level a few years later. Between 1963 and 1965, Shaull returned to Brazil at certain times but was soon banned from entering the country by the military regime. He began an exile that would last twenty years (Huff Junior 2020, pp. 188–200).

John Mackay then took Shaull to Princeton, where he taught ecumenics from 1962 to 1980. During this period, he also worked at ISAL and participated with interventions in important events of the international ecumenical movement. Of particular importance were his lecture at the Church and Society Conference of the World Council of Churches in 1966; the continuation of his work with youth and student movements; his engagement with issues from Latin American countries; and a series of publications that continued his reflections on Christianity and revolution (Huff Junior 2020, pp. 201–12, 27–44; see Faria 2002).

After retiring from Princeton in 1980, he continued his educational activities at various institutions in the United States and Latin America, including Brazil, where he worked with the Methodist University of São Paulo and other seminaries in 1993. Pentecostalism became a topic for Shaull in a study he conducted with the sociologist Waldo Csar (Shaull

and Cesar 2000). This encounter with the Pentecostal faith, according to Barreto (2003), marks a third conversion in Shaull's trajectory, in which the voice of the impoverished people who make up the Pentecostal movement should also be listened to with attention by the historic churches. He was also a pastor in Ardmore (USA) until his death on 25 October 2002 (Faria 2002; Huff Junior 2020).

Having presented this panoramic view of Shaull's life and work, it is worth noting that the struggles in which he participated were deeply connected to his theological work. The effervescence of the Latin American context since the 1940s, when Shaull worked as a missionary in Colombia, was crucial to his understanding of the need for theology to open up to social issues and the social sciences. However, this new way of thinking clashed with a more institutionalised theology, "Right-Doctrine Protestantism". Shaull's missiology, however, as Santiago-Vendrell (2010) shows, yearned for incarnation in the world, starting from the understanding that God is active in history and that Christians should therefore act accordingly. Rather than "Christian presence", a missiological category that emerged in the U.S. at the time to contemplate the rising secularisation and technological revolution, Shaull opted for "revolution", as the latter seemed too passive for what was needed in Latin America. This perspective can be seen in his observations of the revolutionary mood in Latin America in the early 1960s.

4. Theology in Conversation: Ecumenism, Public Issues, and the Dialogue with Social Sciences

In the history of the Latin American churches, the opening of theological reflection to dialogue with different fields of knowledge, apart from philosophy, is something that gained importance in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, with approaches that recognised the reality of the suffering of a large part of the Latin American population as a task to be thought of in the light of its social causes and implications. The mediation of the social sciences, as Clodovis Boff (2009) would systematise in his doctoral thesis defended in Louvain in 1976, became crucial for theology in its attempt to become more relevant in real contexts. "How are we to be Christians in a world of destitution?" is the initial provocation that Boff and Boff (1987, p. 7) launched in their famous "Introducing Liberation Theology", where they also assert the need for a "public and prophetic theology" (Boff and Boff 1987, pp. 85–87). The conclusions that have been the starting point for generations of Latin American theologians have been that it is not possible to think theologically about the world by not engaging with the concrete reality of the misery and suffering in which people live daily. The personal stories that open this chapter are heartbreaking. A woman who participates in the Lord's Supper without confessing first because she is too hungry, the mother who cannot feed her baby because she is so weak and in dire need of care and nourishment, the local church where people are too hungry to join and participate. So, it is not difficult to understand why hunger and poverty are vivid themes for this first generation of liberation theologians.

Years earlier, however, the call for human liberation and social transformation had already been addressed by theologians such as Richard Shaull and Rubem Alves. The U.S. missionary believed that it was important to approach the social sciences in order to better understand the world in relation to which one was trying to make theology. The period of the 1950s was well perceived in his "Encounter with Revolution" (Shaull 1955), where, before developing theological accounts, Shaull drew attention to the social context to which his homeland should pay more attention. The geopolitical context was particularly significant, as the Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and thus between capitalism and communism, directly influenced and challenged theology. Crisis, revolution, and communism are at the centre of Shaull's attention throughout the first part of his book. Only after this contextualisation does he go on to present a specific Christian perspective on revolution. In later writings, Shaull opens a dialogue with the Brazilian context and scholars from politics, sociology, and economics (Huff Junior 2020, pp. 155–56).

In order to better understand Shaull's public theological commitment and method, attention is now given to a text in which social aspects play a central role. Published in 1962, it is the result of a paper presented by Shaull, then Professor of Ecumenics at Princeton, to the Study Conference of the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America. "The New Revolutionary Mood in Latin America" dealt with sensitive issues such as social injustice, Marxism, and the role of Christian churches in the task of revolution.[5]

The "revolutionary mood" to which Richard Shaull drew attention was spreading across the continent and highlighted the differences between older and younger generations, between left and right political positions, and between Latin American and US interests.[6] Since the audience for his presentation was the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and more specifically the Latin America Cooperation Committee of the Foreign Missions Division, it is important to bear in mind that his reading of the Latin American context is informed by a strong commitment to an active, transformative Christian faith. The aim was to offer subsidies to the US churches in their understanding and action in relation to the ecumenical movement and, especially, their understanding of mission (Santiago-Vendrell 2010). Shaull (1962, p. 1), at that moment, understood that there was hope for the future; however, history was to dash these expectations with the military coups in countries such as Brazil (1964), Argentina (1966), and Chile (1973). Shaull himself was prevented from returning to Brazil for some twenty years.

The text's structure, after an introductory paragraph, follows eleven topics: 1. "Peasants and Industrial Workers Worse Off Than Before"; 2. "New Nationalism Demands Change in U.S. Relationship"; 3. "Christian Involvement in Revolution"; 4. "Little Hope of Painless Transition"; 5. "The Role of Marxism"; 6. "Marxist Ideals Likely to be Important"; 7. "The First Error"; 8. 'The Second Error"; 9. "The Dilemmas of the Latin American Christian Community"; 10. "Dilemmas of the Mission Boards"; 11. "U.S. Policy in Latin America".

On the reality of peasants and industrial workers, Shaull (1962) points to the great inequalities and injustices they faced, with gradual change becoming something difficult to wait for, sparking interest in revolution. Two factors contributed to this: the realisation that economic growth did not mean a less unequal or unjust society and a growing sense of nationalism in an anti-colonial perspective. The discrepancy between economic growth and improved living conditions sounds strange to an American, especially after the New Deal, who would expect the countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America to become more prosperous with rapid economic development. Because of Brazil's economic organisation, economic growth was not felt by the masses, as political and economic power was concentrated in a few families (see Schwarcz and Starling 2018). Shaull quotes Celso Furtado, a Brazilian economist who acted as Minister of Development and was one of the speakers at the Northeast Conference promoted by the Brazilian Church and Society Department associated with the Brazilian Evangelical Confederation (see Furtado 1962), to inform his audience that peasants and industrial workers could be considered in a worse position than before, compared to other social classes. In addition, industrial development in Brazil brought a significant number of people to the cities, where they often lived in precarious conditions but also longed for greater participation in public life. Both peasants and industrial workers became aware of the injustice that was being imposed on them and of the need to do something to change this reality. Making society better for the people would also mean changing the social structures towards more just policies on land, taxation, housing, and education, for example. According to Shaull (1962, pp. 1–3), the little hope of changing the reality under the ruling classes greatly increased the revolutionary mood.

Nationalism, despite its risks—and Shaull mentions them—was seen in this context as a creative force capable of uniting people around common causes, as there was a growing sense of national self-consciousness. This nationalism was also perceived in its anti-colonial perspective against North American and European domination and exploitation. This awareness was translated into action and participation in social groups such as peasant leagues. Young people, even from the more privileged classes, could no longer ignore

social injustice and suffering. Some became fiercely committed to revolution. The focus of Shaull's argument here is the spread of a revolutionary hope that sparked concrete initiatives and demanded a new approach from the US in its relations with these countries (Shaull 1962, pp. 3–7).

Regarding the involvement of Christians in the process of revolution, according to Shaull, both Catholics and Protestants were not intensively committed to the issues of public life; however, that started to change as they became more closely exposed to people's concerns and struggles. It became visible, for instance, in the Catholic Action from the Catholic side and in the preoccupation of Protestants, Pentecostals included, laypeople, pastors, workers, and, especially, young people, with public issues. Shaull quotes Brazilian students who, struck by the reality of the vulnerability of their people, issued a statement in 1962 in which they understood that their role was either to participate in the revolutionary struggle or to support this state of oppression, and that as Christians they should choose the former. Shaull understands that this position makes clear an understanding that siding with the gospel meant siding with the struggle for revolution and entering into dialogue with Marxists. However, Shaull notes that there were people who did not want to be part of the Marxist endeavour and were unaware of any other alternative, and that Christians were then challenged to meet these expectations (Shaull 1962, pp. 7–9).

Although Shaull was hopeful about the transformation of the social environment in Latin America at the time, he pointed out that the transition was unlikely to be painless because of the resistance of old structures and the inability of governments to respond adequately to the challenges of the time. In addition, ideologies and political parties imported from Europe and North America were unable to provide adequate solutions to local problems. Shaull also noted an anti-U.S. American sentiment and that the transitions he believed would soon happen would require new definitions of the relationship between the US and Latin America (Shaull 1962, pp. 9–11).

In writing his text, Shaull was confident of the revolutionary mood in Latin America to transform the realities of injustice and inequality. According to him, Marxism had a significant appeal because of its ability to interpret the structural situations in Latin America, to explain why injustice and suffering existed as they did. As a philosophy, it offered hope and means for a possible solution, which also acted as a critique of US positions (Shaull 1962, pp. 11–13). According to Shaull

> We North Americans talk of freedom where that word connotes the freedom of a privileged few to exploit the masses; we speak of democracy where democracy suggests the continuation of the intolerable status quo. We urge reforms but with apparently little recognition of how they can come about (Shaull 1962, p. 12).

On the other hand, Marxism, in its utopian dimension, pointed to a possible hope for the future that also appealed to the younger generations on spiritual and emotional grounds. However, Shaull understands that there were non-Marxist forces in the revolutionary process who were confronted with the whole Latin American scenario and were then forced to rethink their own responsibilities within it. In particular, Shaull reflects on the responses of the Christian faith to a context of inequality, and that, stemming from the critique of Marxism, it should be able to propose an alternative (Shaull 1962, pp. 14–15).

According to Shaull (1962, pp. 15–17), the attempt to understand the Latin American economic-political field as divided between conservative landowners and industrialists, a subservient communist left, and a democratic centre, with the latter being the one Christians should side with, was not a faithful representation of the context. Misreading social reality would lead to irresponsible action. Two errors should be considered: 1. given Latin American reality and needs, the political centre would not be able to deal with the uprising social situations as one would expect based on North American history; 2. the understanding that the left could be subsumed into international communism: The Left "[. . .] is now a spontaneous and dynamic movement of workers, peasants, students and others who have been caught in the struggle for national development and for greater justice in Latin American society" (Shaull 1962, p. 16). To define them generically as

communists would be a misrepresentation. Christians, however, were confronted with this reality, and Shaull tries to imagine the practical consequences of this social interpretation for Christian communities and mission boards. The weakness of the centre and a radical polarisation between left and right, according to Shaull (1963, p. 46), could leave space for military dictatorships to emerge to maintain the *status quo* and to implement their own reforms.

For Christians who wanted to take part in the revolutionary struggle, this context was full of tensions because churches were not used to equipping believers with the resources necessary to fight these battles. Shaull detected a need for orientation that institutional churches lacked. It was the organised Christian students' movement and the Latin American Commission of Church and Society that took part in these efforts of action and study. Older generations of religious leaders who did not know how to deal with the urge for change had lost their authority among younger generations and were then compelled to react and, as Shaull puts it, ended up fighting the wrong battles (Shaull 1962, pp. 17–18).

After all this social explanation and reflection, and considering the place of Christians in it, Shaull turns directly to the missionary committee for which he had provided the report and challenges them with the following provocation:

> As this is a meeting of mission board executives, I cannot resist the temptation to say that the dilemmas which you face in the light of these developments are even more acute. You dare not ignore the growing nationalism with the intense anti-American feeling which accompanies it. If you are interested in the American church finding the way to make any contribution in this crisis, then you must seriously concern yourselves with the question of how a progressive policy of disengagement can be carried out. By this I mean that the sooner mission organisations, programmes and institutions disappear, the better (Shaull 1962, pp. 18–19).

Shaull's understanding was that the missionary presence in Latin America should be that of people willing to sympathetically join the revolutionary struggle of the local churches. This would require a disposition to understand and creatively engage with the revolution, something that most missionaries would not even be able to relate to, given their standards of Christian faith (Shaull 1962, pp. 19–20). According to Shaull, this new type of missionary should be given

> [. . .] the freedom simply to share the life and concerns of the people and the church to which they go, and in this relationship discover how their efforts can be used in a meaningful way. Through the work of the Holy Spirit they may discover how their participation may be of service at this time; they will almost certainly learn much more than they contribute (Shaull 1962, p. 20).

After this report, Shaull makes some remarks on U.S. policy in Latin America, where he comments on public political relations. He lets his fellow countrymen know that not a few people in Latin America viewed Cold War issues from a different perspective than the United States, feeling more threatened by the North Americans than by other countries (Shaull 1962, p. 20). Among the elements that US policy should take into account in this context, Shaull mentions understanding the role of the US in the growing anti-American sentiment: "If our relationships with Latin America are to be strengthened in the future, we must be much more sensitive to their feelings and much more careful in our use of our political and economic power" (Shaull 1962, p. 21); recognising the need for social change in Latin America and working towards it; and the urge to make a distinction between the threat of international communism and Marxism as an appealing ideology of revolution.

5. Theology Goes Public: A Synthesis of Shaull's Thinking Under the Light of Public Theology

Once presented with the content of Richard Shaull's report for the aforementioned missionary committee, we now attempt to systematise it in the light of its historical and

ecclesiastical background, which helps us to understand Shaull's theology as innovative in terms of interdisciplinary dialogue, ecumenical engagement with society, and theological openness.

The argumentation developed by Shaull is inscribed in a Christian discursive regime and, as such, shares a common basis with the theologies he criticises. This becomes clear in his more diaconal, locally based take on mission, which marks a rupture with the European/North American-orientated paradigm of mission, preoccupied with proselytism. For him, the aim is not to plant American-shaped churches in Latin America but to become part of local churches and of assistance in their own struggles. In a reality of injustice, inequality, and social sufferings, this would mean taking part in the transformation of such realities. To be able to address such challenges properly, Shaull is aware of the need for dialogue with economics and social sciences[7]. In another paper, Shaull states that

> To reflect on history and on the human person is to reflect on a concrete and dynamic reality, which must be studied and known through the tools appropriate to this task, especially the social and historical sciences. The authentic context for theological reflection is therefore dialogue. It is through this medium that specialists in the knowledge of different aspects of reality seek to correlate their knowledge in the search for meaning and direction. The theologian is convinced that dialogue offers the best conditions for achieving this goal. What he brings to the dialogue is, in particular, an understanding of those issues which are present in the Bible and in the thought of those who, at different times, have sought to relate the biblical perspective to the historical situation in which they lived (Shaull [1965] 1985, pp. 101–2).

In dialogue with social sciences, Shaull presents a Latin American setting of injustice, inequality, and suffering, vividly felt by peasants and industrial workers who were aware of their condition and yearned for change and were spiritually moved by a strong national consciousness. Faced with this reality, young Christians understood that they had to side with the urge for revolutionary change. Because of the rigidity of Latin American social structures and the unwillingness of the ruling classes to change them, there was little hope of social transformation without pain. Marxism played two important roles: the ability to interpret social reality and its tensions and the utopian commitment that provided a philosophy of hope and change. Marxism should not be reduced to communism, and the emerging left should be considered in its legitimate claims for social transformation, including workers and students, Shaull argued. Christian faith and mission boards should take the revolutionary mood seriously and understand the need to equip young Christians to participate in the revolution creatively and on a Christian basis. But not in old-fashioned responses, but vibrantly embracing an innovative way of being Christian in the face of revolution. American churches and governments should understand the need for social transformation in Latin America.

Methodologically, Shaull's argument starts from an understanding of the social and ideological elements that shaped the Latin American context, a result of the two decades he spent as a missionary in Colombia and Brazil. In doing so, he not only relied on his own experience but also engaged in an interdisciplinary dialogue with social, historical, and economic experts. Only after explaining what he saw as the main themes of the Latin American situation—the challenges of the local churches, the struggles of the working classes, and the significant role of the student's movement in the revolution—does he reflect on the practical implications for Christian churches and mission boards. He does so by reaffirming the need for social transformation, emphasising the importance of local culture and struggles, and criticising the hegemonic North American approach to Latin America.

Shaull's agency must be read in the light of his ecclesial context, in which he worked as one of the leading protagonists of ecumenism in Brazil. Shaull questions ecclesiastical structures by pushing the borders and influencing students and pastors into a more responsible stance towards public issues. The ecumenical movement embraced social responsibility in the 1950s as an impulse from the World Council of Churches, which reverberated in

Brazil, especially considering the social reality of the country (see Zeferino 2024). The Department of Church and Society of the Brazilian Evangelical Confederation was a response to the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954. Thus, in 1955, with Benjamim Moraes and Waldo Cesar as its president and vice-president, respectively, the department had the task of promoting Christian witness in three areas: 1. preparing evangelicals for political participation and action; 2. understanding how to relate with Communism and with the Roman Catholic Church; and 3. generating Protestant social action among industrial and rural workers. The activities of the department represented a broadening of Brazilian Protestant ethics at that time (Pierson 1974, pp. 224–25).

Shaull is influenced by this turn and influences the local churches, but not without conflict. Consolidated power structures resisted and managed to disarticulate youth and ecumenical efforts within the Brazilian Presbyterian Church. Before that, however, the most important event in Brazilian Protestant ecumenism took place in the city of Recife in July 1962. The Conference of the Northeast launched a discussion of the same concerns outlined by Shaull in his text. Church leaders and scholars from social and economic sciences were invited to speak. The outcome was a strong material that reflected about Brazilian society in the beginning of the 1960s and set out a number of courses of action in relation to economic and cultural borders, highlighting the interaction with industrial and peasant workers, the youth, and the arts (see Cesar 1962).

6. Concluding Remarks

The relationship between theology and public life is alive in Richard Shaull's writings and life testimony. As a missionary in Colombia and Brazil, he did not conform to mainstream missionary standards but considered the lives of people on the margins of faith, education, dignity, and prosperity. In "The New Revolutionary Mood in Latin America", three aspects that in later decades would be central to the contextual theologies produced in the Global South are already present and play a significant role in his argumentative logic: the need to interpret the context in social and economic terms, the exigence for interdisciplinary dialogue, and the openness to ecumenical dialogue. As a matter of fact, these fronts are adherent to the publics of theology as described by David Tracy. In this sense, Richard Shaull could be understood as a public theologian who embraced dialogue as a central aspect of his life and work. As a professor, Shaull had an important impact in the academy, but he did not restrict his readings to the field of theology, becoming one of the first theologians to engage with social sciences in the Brazilian context, as we demonstrated. As a missionary, he wrought on the frontiers, opening ecumenical dialogue, getting involved in youth movements, and engaging in social responsibility. Social issues became central to all his concerns, which led him to be active in the public sphere, with particular attention to rural and urban workers.

From Shaull, one could learn that public issues move theological thinking but acknowledging that this does not happen isolated from the approaches that other fields of knowledge may have to them. Dialogue with other sciences and with other faiths is imperative. Even before the Second Vatican Council and liberation theologies, Richard Shaull echoed the call for openness to dialogue and for service to others. As a result, we can affirm that in Brazil, Protestant theology goes public with the influence of an American missionary that learnt how to participate in the struggles of local communities. This sense of concreteness, which is also present in some of Shaull's theological influences, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth, calls for a theological approach that embraces public issues not as fringe concerns but as central questions that put theological thinking in motion. In Shaull's context, this commitment would create tensions with ecclesiastical power but would also inspire generations of young theologians and church leaders.

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Notes

1 Up to this moment of the research we do not understand Shaull's heritage as decolonial; however, his struggle as an American that allowed himself to be self-critical and to criticise some of the U.S. policies regarding Latin America is worth of attention, considering that he developed this perspective already around the 1950s. His history, as this article aims to show, is worth telling from the perspective of a public theology.

2 A version in Portuguese of this topic was published in "O estudo crítico da história do protestantismo nas Ciências da Religião: reflexões a partir da trajetória de Richard Shaull no Brasil" (Zeferino 2024).

3 Shaull's social relevance to theology and his theological work have been focus of attention of a variety of authors in different countries. Some of the most relevant are the works of Santiago-Vendrell (2010), emphasising Shaull's misisology; Barreto's PhD dissertation (2006), published in Portuguese (Barreto 2019) and in English (Barreto 2023) with an emphasis on protestant responses to poverty in the Brazilian context, also his articles (Barreto 2003, 2021); Grenholm's work on Christian social ethics (Grenholm 1973); Huff Junior's work, in a historical perspective, that drew attention to Shaull's theology of revolution (Huff Junior 2020).

4 For more details on the period of Shaull in Colombia see Santiago-Vendrell (2010).

5 An edited, shorter, version, was published by Shaull (1963) in the Christian progressive magazine, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, "Christianity and Crisis" (see Hulsether 2001). Ideas are synthetized and reorganised, but it does not add much to what is already present in the text we take as primary source.

6 The context of revolutions that took place in Latin America was addressed by Shaull in the two versions of his text on the revolutionary mood he detected in Latin America: "Latin America has produced an unusual number of great revolutionaries. The first social revolution of modern times occurred not in Russia but in Mexico in 1910 and since that time revolutionary movements have appeared frequently on the southern continent. But now something new is happening" (Shaull 1962, p. 1); a revised version reads "Latin America has produced an unusual number of great revolutionaries—from Simon Bolivar to Haya de la Torre and Fidel Castro. The first social revolution of modern times occurred not in Russia but in Mexico in 1910, and since that time revolutionary movements have appeared frequently on the southern continent. But now something new is happening" (Shaull 1963, p. 44). In his reflection, Shaull gives attention to social and political context, so the Cuban revolution, for instance, impacted significantly the revolutionary mood he describes; however, his emphasis is in social movements as the ones headed by peasant and industrial workers, and the youth.

7 In "The New Revolutionary Mood in Latin America", Shaull engages, for instance, with the works of Celso Furtado, Egbert de Vries, Adolf Berle, among other references with more social and economic concerns that are not explicitly indicated.

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