

# VU Research Portal

## Hacia una hermenéutica Anabautista Latinoamericana

Moya Acuña, C.A.

2019

### **document version**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

Moya Acuña, C. A. (2019). *Hacia una hermenéutica Anabautista Latinoamericana: Un análisis comparativo de las hermenéuticas bíblicas de John Howard Yoder y Jon Sobrino*. [, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

### **E-mail address:**

[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to develop a Latin American Anabaptist hermeneutic based on a comparative analysis between the biblical hermeneutics of John Howard Yoder and Jon Sobrino.

We began this journey by testing the thesis that the Latin American Anabaptist hermeneutic—as a reading practice—carried out by ordinary people has fundamentalist, evangelical, and conservative features. Such traits stem from the same origin and historical development of the tradition in the lands of Latin America (*Abya Yala*), which has fostered the image of a Christ that is distant from reality. In this research, we critically analyzed this hermeneutic and image of Christ. The analysis was done by examining the *Shared Convictions* and some materials used by the Anabaptist congregations in Latin America for adult Sunday school, children's Sunday school, and some of the materials from the Movement of Women Theologians from Latin America (MTAL, for its acronym in Spanish), as well as official statements from conference leaders.

The verification of our initial suspicion led us to ask how to renew the Latin American Anabaptist hermeneutic. Our proposal then consisted in resorting to two different trusted sources, namely the ways in which John H. Yoder and Jon Sobrino read and interpret the texts about Jesus of Nazareth and upon which they built their Christologies: *The Politics of Jesus* and *Christology from Latin America*, respectively. The first one uses a hermeneutic that emphasizes obedience to the Word, while the second one uses a hermeneutic based on following Christ as an interpretive key and as a connecting thread. In resorting to these texts, we moved between two emphases on the figure of Jesus, the historical non-violent Jesus and the historical Jesus who was in permanent conflict with reality.

The main question with which we oriented this research was: How can a critical comparison between the hermeneutics of the Anabaptist tradition, represented by Yoder, and the liberationist hermeneutics, represented by Sobrino, provide the foundations for a new Latin American Anabaptist hermeneutic?

In this research we employed a bibliographical methodology. We observed the way in which both authors analyzed the biblical texts; we also conducted a virtual dialogue between

the two theologians who were subjects of the research. For the analysis of the underlying hermeneutics in the Christologies of Sobrino and Yoder we took into account the hermeneutic arc proposed by Paul Ricoeur, especially the second phase—the phase of scientific explanation—and the third phase, the phase of understanding.

In the first phase, the phase of pre-understanding, we analyzed the biography of the two authors, which were significant life experiences and commitments of each of them. In this way we identified the reading keys they used, and the role their context played when analyzing the text. In the second phase, we used a system of codes to analyze how both of them approached and read/explained/interpreted the biblical texts. We used the principles and methods of *Grounded Theory*. This allowed us to inductively build a theory, to go from the particular to the general. In the third phase, the phase of appropriation, we analyzed the way in which the authors applied and actualized what they found in the texts they chose in their own existential and social realities. This last phase is the result of the two previous ones; the analysis of the details (how they approached the texts individually) led us to formulate in a more general manner how each of them built their own Christologies.

In the second part of the research we analyzed how Yoder read the biblical texts and how he actualized them. We considered the context in which he lived, the hermeneutic and exegetic features, his way of actualizing the text and the underlying Anabaptist hermeneutic in his Christology. We carried out this same procedure in the third part with Sobrino, while considering the underlying liberationist hermeneutic in his Christology. This allowed us to conclude that the underlying hermeneutics in both Christologies responded to the situations of realities they believed had to be transformed as an expression of the commitment to, and the following of Jesus Christ. Likewise, we concluded that their hermeneutics have continuities and discontinuities with those of their Anabaptist and Liberationist traditions. We also concluded that in their respective works there was a hermeneutic circle comparable with the one Juan Luis Segundo formulated.

In the fourth part of the research, we presented a proposal aimed at renewing the Anabaptist hermeneutic. To do this we compared the hermeneutic readings of Yoder and Sobrino. This allowed us to identify convergences, divergences, gaps, and complementarities, which became the base for developing a new Latin American Anabaptist hermeneutic. The proposal contemplated three moments. In the first moment, we considered three aspects *sine qua non* to carry out a Latin American Anabaptist hermeneutic: interculturality; non-violent resistance; and equality, focusing the latter on gender equity. In the second moment, we

affirmed the classical principles of the Anabaptist hermeneutic and complemented them: 1) Jesus Christ is still an interpretive key for reading the Bible, but now as someone who identifies with those who do not have power; 2) the Bible “interprets itself”, but in the twenty-first century and in light of the growing proliferation of fundamentalist movements, exegesis is necessary; 3) hermeneutics are a community task within a community that is broader than the local community, relates to “others”, and is inclusive; 4) the Holy Spirit is vigilant and advocates for inclusivity and, especially, feminist perspectives in processes of interpretation; and 5) the high cost discipleship, the one that follows the path of the cross, has social and political ramifications and consequences in terms of the historical moment. In the third moment we contemplated the missiological implications summarized in a *Missio Dei* without conquest and not expansionist.

### ***The regulatory axes of hermeneutics***

The work summarized above allows us to conclude that the regulatory axes of the praxis followed by the Anabaptist hermeneutics of Yoder and by the liberationist hermeneutics of Sobrino are the same as those followed by this proposal. We appropriate the image of a historical Jesus that practices an active non-violent ethic. This means that, on one hand, we encounter a Jesus who is closely connected to the contextual reality and who is in permanent conflict with it, committed to the transformation of such reality through non-violent actions in a certain historical moment that calls for them. On the other hand, we encounter a Jesus who not only often chose *non-resistance* but also used *non-violent resistance* before oppressors and violent people. He not only confronted them, however, but also challenged them to change their ways of thinking and of acting.

In the same manner, in our hermeneutical proposal the way of the cross is unavoidable. This path is understood not as a pre-determined divine purpose, but as a consequence of confronting the systems and powers of this world that are engrained in discriminatory social structures and in political, economic, religious, and ideological oppressive systems. Because of this, the understanding of the cross cannot be based on the theory of expiatory satisfaction. This is why we have followed the *narrative of the victorious Christ*, which has to do with a way of life that has, as a consequence, sacrifice and fidelity even unto death.

Lastly, as the third regulatory axis, our proposal highlights non-violence and reconciliation as an expression of the resurrection and the triumph over the powers on the

cross. This means an active non-violence, coherent with the testimony of Jesus Christ; and the implication is to work for a reconciliation that has demands for the present, especially in contexts of impunity, yet also invites to see the future with hope.

### ***Life and Bible interwoven***

We propose that Latin American Anabaptists integrate anew Life and Bible. In congregations, it is common to appreciate a high commitment to service and social work, including the work for the conscientious objection to military service. In the Anabaptist world, we always find work being done with children of impoverished communities, work with women victims of violence, and accompaniment to displaced or refugee communities, among others ministries. However, the sermons and biblical teachings seem to be disconnected from these realities; this contradiction breaks the hermeneutic circle. It is as if the historic Christ who is incarnated in the realities of the poor and who challenges us to transform these realities walked outside the Bible; and as if the Christ of the Bible was a “fundamentalist”. Our proposal offers a response to this problem.

### ***A hermeneutic of political discipleship***

The proposed hermeneutic follows the “historical Jesus” (Christ) and is consistent with the ethic of active non-violence. It is about a practical hermeneutic that stems from the reality of negativity, recognizes its unrest with it, and seeks to transform it through the creation of alternative communities where the values of the kingdom of God are realized. In the same manner, it carries out political actions that confront the systems and powers while respecting the life and dignity of others (of both victims and perpetrators), and recognizes the humanity of the other, including the enemy. It is a hermeneutic that invites to suffer the costs (the cross), and not the pre-determined divine purpose, of following Christ. However, it is a hermeneutic that does not dwell in suffering and hopelessness; rather, it points the way to a better future in which reconciliation and peace result from justice on earth and not the hereafter.

### ***Limitations***

In this research we find two main limitations. One has been the scarce bibliography related to the Anabaptist hermeneutic from *Abya Yala*. However, we recognize the recent efforts carried out by a few Latin American Anabaptist academics, men and women, as well as the projects that have emerged as praxeological effects from some reflections in different

spaces. The other limitation is that we resorted to two authors of non-Latin American origins. We chose Sobrino for being the best representative of Latin American liberationist Christology and for his embodied experience of the cost of following Christ in contexts of violence. We chose Yoder mainly because his work, *The Politics of Jesus*, significantly influenced a large number of Latin American Anabaptists.

### ***Issues for the future***

In this work, we have emphasized the issues we consider to be a priority for Anabaptist churches whose hermeneutic and Christology are disconnected from the social and political reality. However, the work for short- and medium-term must be to address other issues related to the hermeneutic, some of which we have mentioned without going deeply into them, and others that have not been discussed. Some of these issues have to do with the environment, sexual identity and gender, dialogue with native religions, the food crisis, reconsideration of the apocryphal or deuterocanonic texts, and globalization and capitalist economy, among others. We also recognize the need for Anabaptist readings from the perspective of children, women, the LGBTQ community, and people with disabilities, among others.

### ***Anabaptism and liberationism as walking companions***

The results of the analysis of the hermeneutics that have determined the readings of the biblical texts, and which were foundational for the construction of the respective Christologies of Yoder and Sobrino, are not fundamentally contradicting or distancing in their essence; rather, such readings are complementary. Each one helps to correct and/or fill the gaps of the other. The synergy between the two allows for a new Latin American Anabaptist hermeneutic that, we consider, is already among us in practical ways and is beginning to be systematized through this research.

Anabaptism and liberationism can be viewed as walking companions that complement and strengthen the image of a historical Jesus. The Jesus who resisted vengeance and the use of weapons, who chose and side with the poor and non-violence, and who accepted unrest with the reality around him; yet sought to transform it through the creation of a community that was willing to sacrifice itself in order to confront the systems. This was demonstrated by the Anabaptist martyrs of the sixteenth century in Europe and the Jesuit martyrs of the twentieth century in El Salvador.

In addition, the hermeneutics of Yoder and Sobrino are prophetic answers to the historical moment of their contexts: violence, displacements, and injustice, on the one hand; and the gospel of cheap grace and the alliance of evangelical and catholic churches in various parts of the world with dictatorial states, on the other. This is the case because Yoder and Sobrino found in the Bible a way to evaluate and correct the prevalent teachings of the church.

In conclusion, the Anabaptist hermeneutic represented by Yoder and the liberationist hermeneutic represented by Sobrino have been essential to elaborate our hermeneutical proposal. The new proposed Latin American Anabaptist hermeneutic entails self-criticism, the recognition of alterity or otherness, awareness of the historical unrest of Latin America, and the reassessment of the pacifist tradition of the sixteenth century. This hermeneutic is the result of re-encountering the non-violent Jesus Christ in the midst of our historical reality.