

Article

# Introducing Cardinal Cardijn's See–Judge–Act as an Interdisciplinary Method to Move Theory into Practice

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**Abstract:** Interdisciplinary dialogues find researchers seeking better understandings of theories and concepts, such as colonialism and capitalism, and the means through which these concepts impact both local and global cultures. The results of explorations such as these raise the question of how to translate the theories that are created by these dialogues into practice. Moreover, they ask where we can take these conversations, how can we focus them toward specific aims, and how can we effectively enact them as one collective group. This article introduces and proposes Joseph Cardinal Cardijn's See–Judge–Act method as a possible framework to better enable these discussions to move from theory to praxis. It proposes that such a theory may also allow the theoretical portions of these interdisciplinary dialogues to happen without any discipline ceding or 'shaving away' the core principles that respectively identify each discipline. The article begins by exploring Cardinal Cardijn's original articulation of the method. Then, it describes how the liberation theologians Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff employed the method in their development of a theological framework. Finally, this article explores how the See–Judge–Act method might be useful for other disciplines, such as African thought and philosophy, and critical theory.

**Keywords:** Joseph Cardinal Cardijn; liberation theology; African Philosophy; Critical Theory; methodology; Leonardo Boff; Clodovis Boff; Young Christian Workers

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The issues of economic, social, and political inequality clearly span across writing genres and academic discourses. This is seen throughout this special issue, and especially in its subtitle: 'African Thought, Critical Theory, and Liberation Theology in Dialogue'. Indeed, each of these disciplines approach the concept of inequality from specific and important angles: African thought/philosophy employs a critical deconstruction that decolonizes prevailing socio-economic systems that persist in controlling how Africans should think and live. Critical theory's socio-economic analysis likewise attempts to uncover the presumed structures of society that promote and legitimize the hegemonies targeted by African thought's decolonizing efforts. Liberation theology, in turn, takes these critiques and analyses, and employs them through a praxis-based theology in pursuit of not just material liberation, but a spiritual one as well.

The scope of this special issue is to bring these disciplines together to create an encounter from which future discussions may arise. This encounter was premised by the notion that each discipline focuses upon oppression and possible liberation: oppression resulting from a myriad of events that become conceptualized through colonialism, capitalism, and social hegemony. Furthermore, it was also premised by the idea that we need to bring together these disciplines because these issues cannot be solved by a lone theory or discourse; we need to band together ideas and concepts from various discourses to address these mammoth problems.

Yet this banding together, as it were, raises a new problem: how should we proceed as an interdisciplinary group without talking past each other? Where can we take these conversations, how

can we focus them toward specific aims, and how can we effectively enact them as one? There is a range between the academic and the activist within all three disciplines, which can sometimes become muddled when theory evolves into practice—in other words, when the description of the problem at hand transitions toward alleviating that problem. This is multiplied, I find, when various methods become entangled and possibly compete. In short, there needs to be a basic framework to structure these sorts of conversations, especially when theory transitions into practice.

What I propose in the following is a possible schema or method for structuring this conversation, and future interdisciplinary discussions, in order to produce effective dialogue and social change. What I will propose is Joseph Cardinal Cardijn's See–Judge–Act method of liberation theology. Although prominent in liberation theology circles, particularly in Latin America, the See–Judge–Act method is not as widely known in Southern Africa outside of having an instrumental influence in the development of the 1985 *Kairos Document*. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the activist connections between Cardinal Cardijn's organization, the Young Christian Workers (or JOC), and South African politics, but it is important to note that the JOC did have an impact in South Africa as an activist movement, despite the lack of intellectual engagement with Cardinal Cardijn's method. Nelson Mandela, for example, gave a speech at the opening ceremony of the Young Christian Workers World Council in 1995, praising their efforts and activism during apartheid ([Mandela 1995](#)). In regard to Cardinal Cardijn's method, the only mention I could find within a South African context is tangential and relational; it was stemming from discussions around the 1985 *Kairos Document*, which is a joint theological proclamation against the struggle of apartheid in South Africa. In "Tracing the Kairos Trajectory from South Africa to Palestine," Gerald West argued that "while the European *Kairos Document* follows *The [Original, South African] Kairos Document* in its basic See–Judge–Act process of production and documentary format, as do most of the 'kairos' documents, the 'Judge' moment is fairly thin theologically" ([West 2012](#), p. 11). West later went on to detail Cardinal Cardijn's influence on the European document. In my research, I have not found substantial evidence that Cardinal Cardijn's thinking was influential from an intellectual perspective in South African theological circles—at least in comparison to its great influence in Latin and South America—yet West did show us that his thinking was closely aligned with certain aspects of African Christian theology.<sup>1</sup> Although a historical account of the JOC activities in South Africa is an endeavor well worth undertaking, my aim in this article is to present Cardinal Cardijn's method as a means to bring the interdisciplinary dialogue to fruition through praxis. Hence, I will leave the historical account aside to maintain clarity in my argument.

Cardinal Cardijn's method is a movement from engagement and solidarity, then to reflection and understanding, and finally to cooperative involvement and action. I think that it is a strong basis from which we can take ideas generated by discussions, such as the one we are having in this special issue, and employ them in an effective manner. Likewise, it gives us another possible methodological avenue through which academics and activists can explore issues of inequality in such a way that they do not become either too abstract or too personal to be persuasive or effective. I will begin with a brief summary of Cardinal Cardijn's See–Judge–Act method, and then will expand upon it by showing how it may be used to connect the various strands between our three dialoguing disciplines. I will conclude with an analysis of how I think that this method could be further developed to intellectually and actively address the issues of economic, social, and political inequality.

## 1. Cardinal Cardijn's See–Judge–Act as Practical Engagement

Born in Belgium in 1882, Joseph Cardijn was ordained as a priest in 1906, and actively worked in underground movements during World War I, which led to him being imprisoned for espionage in the latter stages of the war. After the Great War, he began unionizing local workers while appointed

<sup>1</sup> For more on liberation theology from a Catholic perspective, which hints at Cardijn's influence but does not directly cite/engage him, see the work of Albert Nolan, particularly: [Nolan \(1986, 1988\)](#).

as a parish priest, beginning with the creation an organization called The Young Trade Unionists (*Jeunesse Syndicaliste*).<sup>2</sup> In 1924, the Young Trade Unionists expanded and became an international network called the *Jeunes Ouvrières Chrétiennes*, or the Young Christian Workers (as mentioned above, often referred to as the JOC). This organization first attempted to mobilize the laborers for worker's rights, and later mobilized young persons according to a broad range of social justice causes.<sup>3</sup> It is during this early period of the JOC that he developed his See–Judge–Act method of addressing inequality, employing it with the JOC to engage communities in an effective and transparent manner. Coinciding with the success of the JOC and the growing admiration for his work, Pope Paul VI consecrated Joseph Cardijn as a bishop and a Cardinal of the Catholic Church in 1965. Cardinal Cardijn would die two years later, in 1967, with his legacy cemented as a pivotal figure in liberation theology, and with the JOC carrying on their mission to this day through various local Young Christian Workers groups and an international governing board, the International Coordination of Young Christian Workers (ICYCW).<sup>4</sup> Importantly, Cardinal Cardijn did not create his method just for social activism, nor did he create the JOC as just a worker's party movement. Rather, he saw both as means toward life formation. Although See–Judge–Act can be used as a teleological method, as I will show below, it is not merely a tool that is employed to achieve a particular end; Cardinal Cardijn originally thought of it as a way to fundamentally reorient one's life toward social justice and solidarity.<sup>5</sup>

What makes Cardinal Cardijn's method particularly fruitful is how it first seeks to understand the communities in which it is employed—particularly by those outside who enter into a particular community—to safeguard that what one does for social justice actively reflects the wills and wants of said community. In order to present the See–Judge–Act method, I will begin by first describing how Cardijn envisioned this for social activism so that we can gather its original uses. From there, I will show how liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff took this practical method of social justice and employed it as a theoretical framework for their theology. This latter part is crucial for our investigation, since it shows how See–Judge–Act is not just a practical operation, but also a groundwork for engagements of all kinds, especially the ones engendered by this special issue's ongoing discussions.

According to Cardinal Cardijn, the first movement of any engagement with another person or community should be to 'see': to observe and immerse oneself in the lives of that community. This goes doubly so when engaging those being oppressed, to be in solidarity with the poor or oppressed, to become more than just a bystander or outsider to injustice. By doing so, assuming that one is an outsider to the community,<sup>6</sup> one does not take one's own perspective as normative to the other, and thus can begin to attempt to see the world through the other's eyes—as close as one can do so. At the very least, one can develop a sympathy that moves toward understanding the situation(s) of the other, their community, and perhaps create a bridge between communities to further this solidarity. With regards to adequately 'seeing' the issue at hand, Cardinal Cardijn explicitly argues that one cannot "rely upon book knowledge or *a priori* ideas: They must, however, have accurate and current information available concerning living realities. [We] must learn to see through personal and collective investigations that are well-ordered and verified". Moreover, he continues to state that for one's investigation into a situation to be really "fruitful and instructive, it must be adapted with care to the mentality and to the

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to the help of Stefan Gigacz, the editor of the new journal, *Cardijn Studies*, for his advice and expertise on Cardinal Cardijn's life and work.

<sup>3</sup> For a broader overview of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn's work and thinking, see: [Cardijn \(1982\)](#); for an overview of his methodology, see pp. 72–106, especially pp. 72–76, 84–90.

<sup>4</sup> For more, see the Young Christian Workers' website: [www.ycwimpact.com](http://www.ycwimpact.com), accessed on 9 February 2018; and the International Coordination of Young Christian Workers website: [www.cijoc.org](http://www.cijoc.org), accessed on 9 February 2018. For a list of YCW/JOC organizations in African nations, see: <http://www.cijoc.org/region/africa>, accessed on 9 February 2018.

<sup>5</sup> [Cardijn \(1982\)](#), *La Pensée de Joseph Cardijn*, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> This is not necessarily always the case, obviously, and one can utilize this same methodology in one's own community as a practice of self-reflection, evaluation, and discernment. Also, some of those who use See–Judge–Act within liberation theology prefer the term, 'listen' over 'see' to emphasize how one should open oneself to the other and the other's community.

ways of living and talking amongst the people in each locality. On this condition, we obtain through inquiry an accurate picture of [the other's state] and the exact knowledge of their religious, moral, intellectual, and/or economic situation".<sup>7</sup> What this seeks to prevent is the mentality held by many (usually) well-meaning activists that seem to know what is best for a community without actually understanding that community own its own terms. For example, there are several instances of aid given to African communities where those giving the aid have rarely set foot into the communities that they wish to help, nor do they actively engage them in solidarity.<sup>8</sup> Aid of this type is often given asymmetrically, where a chauvinistic imbalance between the giver and the receiver is maintained, and rarely does the giver truly instantiate a relationship with the receiver. Ultimately, the receiver loses agency in this exchange.

From an embedded understanding of the other, one can begin to adequately 'judge' the specific problems of the community that oppress the other, and in the process of that judging, look toward actual remedies to alleviate this suffering or otherwise move the other toward a sense of self-empowerment that helps the other take steps to alleviate it themselves. Here, 'judge' is a moment of discernment, and it is done in solidarity with those one seeks to help; it is therefore a community that works together toward this goal, rather than a particular person or group working on behalf of others. Once the proper judgments and/or discernments have been made, then and only then can one 'act' in solidarity with the community toward alleviating suffering—or, better still, act toward empowering the those who suffer to alleviate their own suffering.<sup>9</sup> As Cardinal Cardijn argues: "This judgment, finally, does not remain a dead letter, it leads to action: to solving problems, it turns to reality to change it and make use of it, to make daily life vast and beautiful".<sup>10</sup> Effectively, one acts to alleviate the suffering of others and this comes from a comprehensive and thorough discernment of their situation, thus preventing scenarios where aid appeals more to the concerns of the so-called 'liberator' than to those who need help. "See, judge, act..." Cardinal Cardijn summarizes, "this method of education is suited equally well to the masses as to the elites. It takes place in life and through life".<sup>11</sup> What Cardinal Cardijn envisioned was a movement rooted in community, where outsiders become a part of that community, and where this solidarity also informs and changes other global communities; a 'bottom-up' solidarity where local communities and the global world meet for social and spiritual liberation.

## 2. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff: See–Judge–Act as a Theological Framework

For a more systematic formulation of this methodology, and to better fashion it for our task of exploring the how See–Judge–Act might work as a foundation for dialogue between academic discourses, we turn to the liberation theologians Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, who expand these concepts to develop a liberation theology. While they do not exclusively receive their theological method from Cardinal Cardijn, it becomes abundantly clear that these three men approach the liberation of the oppressed from the same perspective, and one can immediately sense traces of

<sup>7</sup> My translation. See: [Cardijn \(1982\)](#), *La Pensée de Joseph Cardijn*, p. 85. The expanded French quotations are: "On ne peut, en effet, en ces matières, se baser sur des connaissances livresques ou sur des idées *a priori*: il faut, au contraire, disposer de renseignements exacts et actuels sur les réalités vivantes. Les jeunes travailleurs doivent apprendre à voir par des enquêtes personnelles ou collectives bien dirigées et bien contrôlées." ... "Mais pour que le travail des enquêtes soit fructueux et vraiment éducatif, il doit être adapté avec soin à la mentalité, à la manière d'être et de parler des jeunes gens de chaque localité. A cette condition, on obtiendra par l'enquête une image exacte de l'adolescence salariée de l'endroit et une connaissance exacte de sa situation religieuse, morale, intellectuelle, économique. À cette condition, on obtiendra par l'enquête une image exacte de l'adolescence salariée de l'endroit et une connaissance exacte de sa situation religieuse, morale, intellectuelle, économique".

<sup>8</sup> The work of journalists and academics, such as Nobel Prize-winning economist Angus Deaton, has moved from questioning the effectiveness of such aid to outwardly opposing it. For a brief overview and example, see: [Swanson \(2015\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> For a historical overview of how this methodology worked in Chile and Brazil, see: [Mackin \(2012\)](#), especially pp. 337–39.

<sup>10</sup> [Cardijn \(1982\)](#), *La Pensée de Joseph Cardijn*, p. 87. "Ce jugement, enfin, ne reste pas lettre morte ; il conduit à l'action: aux problèmes pour les résoudre, au réel pour le changer et s'en servir, à la vie quotidienne pour la faire grande et belle".

<sup>11</sup> [Cardijn \(1982\)](#), *La Pensée de Joseph Cardijn*, p. 88. "Voir, juger, agir ... Cette méthode d'éducation s'adapte aussi bien à la masse qu'à l'élite. Elle se réalise dans la vie et par la vie".

Cardinal Cardijn in the work of Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff.<sup>12</sup> From the outset, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff echo the concerns of Cardinal Cardijn by explaining that “faced with the oppressed, the theologian’s first question can only be: Why is there oppression and what are its causes”? From this seemingly simple question, a dialogue begins to form by ‘looking at’, or observing, the fundamental reasons for the oppression (Boff and Boff 1987, pp. 25–28). This effectively eschews two faulty explanations of oppression: the so-called ‘empirical’ explanation that the poor are poor because they are lazy, ignorant, or simply deserve their situation (that they are being punished or cursed by God, for example); and the ‘functional’ explanation according to which the impoverished/oppressed are simply backward-thinking people that need to be led to the right ways of living and doing (which often turn out to be Western or First-World ways of living and doing). Additionally, it alleviates the stereotype that the oppressed are always a minority culture or gender. Removing these assumptions, one sees the oppressed as *people first*, rather than lesser selves or ‘poor little things’ in need of help and pity. It allows them to be seen as people rather than as ‘the oppressed’, thus fashioning their relief from oppression as a dialogical, cooperative effort that is focused on community building instead of the lone actions of a person or group.

After performing this “mediation”, as Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff describe it, a second, hermeneutical mediation must follow in which oppression and liberation are seen “in the light of faith”, which is rooted in a theological reflection upon Scripture (Boff and Boff 1987, p. 32). In *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff explained that this hermeneutic follows a model of scriptural interpretation where the *use* of Scripture is given primacy:

It is a hermeneutics that favors *application* rather than explanation. In this the theology of liberation takes up the kind of probing that has been the perennial pursuit of all true biblical reading, as can be seen, for example, in the church fathers—a pursuit that was neglected for a long time in favor of a rationalistic exegesis concerned with dragging out the meaning-in-itself. Liberative hermeneutics reads the Bible as a book of life, not as a book of strange stories. The textual meaning is indeed sought, but only as a function of the *practical* meaning: the important thing is not so much interpreting the text of the scriptures as interpreting life ‘according to the scriptures’. Ultimately, this old/new reading aims to find contemporary actualization (practicality) for the textual meaning. (Boff and Boff 1987, p. 34)

Therefore, a theology of liberation, while it takes exegesis into account, heavily emphasizes the application of the biblical text in the lives of believers rather than a strict scriptural analysis.

Expanding upon this hermeneutical movement of faith in *Theology and Praxis*, Clodovis Boff emphasizes the nature of theological reflection and its relation to faith. After noting that we must be watchful that theology does not begin to fall into “speculative” or “empiricist” idealisms, he begins to highlight the “precise, operational sense” of faith, its need for works and acts, and how this can serve as an opening to theological reflection. Clodovis Boff explains: “we perceive that [faith] receives its semantic determination partly from the concept of salvation, and partly from the concept of theology [...] Faith, then, is a bridge. Or better, it stands at the intersection of theology and salvation” (Boff 1987, p. 118). Continuing, Clodovis Boff explains that faith embodies an experience of salvation (*fides qua*) and a deepening sense of understanding of theology (*fides quae*). From here, he summarizes that:

- *Salvation is the real apprehension of (the reality of) God in and through the practice of agape;*
- *Faith is the conscious apprehension of (the experience of) God in and through religion;*

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<sup>12</sup> What is clear is that Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff were involved in the JOC (*Juventude Operária Católica*) and the JUC (*Jeunesse universitaire chrétienne*), both employed the See-Judge-Act method, and were a part of the *Ação Católica* (Catholic Action), an umbrella organization linked to the Young Catholic Worker’s movement. It was within movements such as these that Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff first began their theological formation. See: Löwy (2007).

- *Theology is the theoretical apprehension of (the idea of) God in and through a conceptual system.*<sup>13</sup>

For our purposes, these sentiments are significant, because they show that this second mediation involves a theological reflection on the operative aspects of faith in and beyond Scripture. They are applicable to theology as a whole as it reflects the operational aspects of faith; faith, as the conscious apprehension of salvation, bridges theology to salvation. Therefore, any ‘judging’ aspect of a hermeneutics that involves itself in liberation theology must involve a critical, theological evaluation of the self’s experiences, i.e., what one has seen (through the ‘eyes of faith’) in light of the tradition of the church and Scripture.

This leads us to a final consideration of this methodology that focuses on the issues of practicality and action after one completes, as best as one can, the hermeneutical inquiry of judging. Following Cardinal Cardijn, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff wrote that at the end of the day, “liberation theology leads to action: action for justice, the work of love, conversion, renewal of the church, transformation of society” (Boff and Boff 1987, p. 39). In this mediation, liberation theology focuses on building a blueprint for action, based on the prior mediations, attempting to apply them to the sociological, economic, and historical situations of the oppressed. This process, by virtue of being decisive and active in the lives of others, is extremely complex and focuses more on experience than theory. “On this level”, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff explain (again, echoing the sentiments of Cardinal Cardijn’s methodology), “wisdom and prudence are more useful than analytic reasoning. And in this, ordinary persons are often way ahead of the learned”.<sup>14</sup> This is important to remember, since often “the learned” here are the ‘liberators’, and the “ordinary persons” fulfill the roles of ‘the oppressed’. This form of doing theology is aware of the communal aspect of theological mediation and acting in accordance with the Gospel, and it is aware that the “ordinary person” is just as important and necessary to the process as the doctoral candidate, the professor, or the pastor.

Epistemic humility is foundational to this methodology, i.e., knowing the limitations of one’s own perspective and attempting to see what best helps *the other*, not what seems like the best option for one’s own self. Moreover, it also helps in evaluating a given situation or community, as it adds powerful moments of reflection in which the self acknowledges that its own role in the process of overcoming suffering should be secondary, or perhaps tertiary, to the overall task at hand. It removes the self from the center of the issue, shattering the illusion that the self is some sort of messiah or Superman, setting off to save the whole world (and remaking it in one’s own image in the process). Rather, it embeds the self into the situation, where one recognizes their solidarity with the oppressed and realizes their situation as one’s own, or as best as one can. Helping the other through solidarity with the other, then, brings the other closer to oneself, diminishing his or her ‘otherness’. Thus, in solidarity, both work to eliminate oppression, not as a giver and receiver of aid, but through cooperation and in the spirit of community.

### 3. With and Beyond Theology: See–Judge–Act in Interdisciplinary Discourses

At first blush, one may be suspicious of whether See–Judge–Act, as a theological method rooted in the Christian tradition, could form the basis of a conversation between disciplines that do not adhere to the same foundations. This suspicion is valid, since one should not dissolve the differences between disciplines simply to enact dialogue between them. However, one could likewise be suspicious that the non-Christian-centric sentiments of African thought and the secular discipline of critical theory may bleed out the ‘theology’ within liberation theology, leaving only the ‘liberation’. In other words, the dangers of interdisciplinary dialogue, broadly, is that either one or the other disciplines may need to concede or set aside certain founding principles for such a dialogue to work.

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<sup>13</sup> Clodovis Boff (1987, p. 119). Emphasis is Clodovis Boff’s and he separates them from the rest of the text, which I replicate here.

<sup>14</sup> Boff and Boff (1987, p. 41).

Surprisingly, this is why I think See–Judge–Act might function as a basis for such conversations. Although it is theological in origin, it is also a teleological method that is aimed at alleviating a particular concern or issue within the community and it does so by explicitly taking that community's socio-cultural context into account, and not just the context of the person entering into that community. In other words, while one brings one's context into the situation, one readily recognizes that the other's context is primary, and one's own is secondary. Therefore, if the community is Christian, it takes this into account when addressing that community's oppression. When that community is something other than Christian, it likewise takes this into account. As a teleological method that is aimed at alleviating oppression, its spiritual concerns are for those who are oppressed, not for its theological motives of alleviating that oppression on behalf of Christian doctrine or belief. Rather, the See–Judge–Act method begins with a particular community and its present issue and it ends by addressing those issues as best as it can. Although Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff see an intertwining between the issues of materialism and spiritual well-being (as well as salvation), their judgment and subsequent action do not privilege one over the other.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, following what was mentioned in the first section, although Gerald West finds the 'judge' portion of See–Judge–Act theologically thin, this is where this method shines brightest as an interdisciplinary method that is focused on a teleological goal. With this, See–Judge–Act can robustly function as a method of engagement outside (or better said, alongside) its spiritual and Christian concerns. Just because it stems from a theological orientation does not necessarily mean that it is wholly limited to theological matters.

When used outside of the Christian tradition and its praxis, this method thus begins with the notion that alleviating oppression is a form of salvation. Clodovis Boff's definition of salvation, as argued in the prior section, is a practical salvation. It takes into account that the apprehension of God comes through the experience of God through religion, and the theoretical reflections upon these experiences through theology. The importance of Clodovis Boff's argument for non-theological audiences is the connection between theory and praxis: how the former necessitates the latter, and how the latter may guide the former. In African thought, especially in decolonization, scholars often find themselves recovering beliefs, ideas, and practices that were long suppressed and covered over by Western, colonialist, and eventually capitalist encroachment. Therefore, they often rely upon personal and communal experiences of Western hegemony and work backward, archeologically peeling away Western thought to arrive at a nebula of memories and experiences to better understand African contributions to Western thought, pre-colonial African culture, and current expressions of African ideals and concepts.<sup>16</sup> Here, one sees clearly a link between praxis and theory, where the rediscovery of African praxis informs our notions of the 'thought' within African thought and philosophy. It also raises the question of who can 'practice' African thought and philosophy, and whether or not it can be performed by non-Africans (or at least those not directly related to the African diaspora): since praxis is fundamental to the rediscovery and contemporary re-articulation of these ideas and philosophies, can one rightly do so without experiencing this praxis themselves?

The See–Judge–Act model acknowledges this question through solidarity and 'seeing': solidarity only entails a communion or co-equal affiliation between the self and the other, rather than a dissolution between them. It maintains a difference through solidarity. Moreover, 'seeing' does not require one to become what one sees, but only that one sympathetically observes and finds understanding in league with the other. In this way, 'seeing' has much in common with Paul Ricoeur's concept of the sympathetic imagination. Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology employs this concept in

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, [Boff \(2008\)](#). Here, Leonardo Boff examines various mythologies on care, showing how these myths reveal a cosmic and material sense of care where "the human being is both utopian and historical-temporal. . . . It is through care that the human being keeps these powers united and makes use of them to construct his or her existence in the world and history. It is because of this that care is essential care" (p. 41).

<sup>16</sup> From a methodological point of view, see: [Smith \(2008\)](#). For a specific example of this in operation, see the work of [Mbembe \(2001\)](#), particularly ch. 6: "God's Phallus" pp. 212–34.

the sense that the phenomenologist reimagines another's perspective, but not in a sense that one 'feels' the motivations and intentions of the other in a sense that they are one's own, "in their first naïveté" (Ricoeur 1972, p. 19). Rather, the phenomenologist "'re-feels' them in their neutralized mode, in the mode of 'as-if'. It is in this sense that phenomenology is a re-enactment in sympathetic imagination" (Ricoeur 1972, p. 19). Importantly, sympathy, as a second naïveté, acknowledges a separation between the self's imagination of the other's experience, and the actual experience of the other as he or she perceives it; it is a separation that the self cannot breach, the self cannot claim the other's experience as their own. They can only sympathetically appreciate it. Returning back to the question of African thought and praxis, it then becomes possible for those outside of these African communities and contextualities to have a solidarity with those within them without taking over, or 're-colonizing' to an effect, their experiences. By becoming in solidarity with the other, what is important is that both outsiders and insiders form a community that appreciates the difference of each person's experiences. All the while, by crafting this solidarity, they are also creating shared beliefs and appreciations. Solidarity, then, becomes a mutual, communal enactment toward a specific goal. In See–Judge–Act, that solidarity functions toward mutual understanding of the injustice in question, then deciding ('judging') how to best relieve this injustice, then moves toward action in pursuit of this relief.

Critical theory, as a Western discipline, would likewise need to employ such a practice of sympathetically 'seeing' the other. This is because critical theory's notions of mass culture need to be employed backwardly from colonization: in Africa, the proletariat had to be made first and before it could be exploited by the bourgeoisie. The conventional Marxist readings of mass culture and the expanse of capitalism thus need to be augmented with the African experience before, during, and after colonialism. This is something that African thought can provide to critical theory, and it can also become the reflection that comprises the 'judge' section of Cardijn's method. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff's reference to the practical application of biblical sources functions in the same way that one may utilize Western philosophies such as critical theory within African dialogues. Taking Marx's thinking as an example and *Das Kapital* especially, there is indeed great value in the rigorous studies of this text in and of itself. This deliberate reading of *Das Kapital* in its own context resembles an exegesis. However, what makes this work important for such reading is its timeliness, meaning its applicability to present concerns and concepts. It has a practical value. This latter value, particularly in the context of African thought, lies in the theoretical reflection (theological reflection in Clodovis Boff's schema) of where African societies have been, where they are, and where they are going. The inclination that *Das Kapital* can help us better understand how capitalism and colonialism fundamentally changed African societies is an acknowledgement that one's reading of the text informs their judgment of the community as they see it.<sup>17</sup>

This may seem obvious to the critical theorist, and to other academics of various disciplines, but it comes with one important difference: action. Recall that See–Judge–Act is teleological in orientation. By focusing on a particular issue or form of oppression, this theory allows for a conversation that adequately traverses theory and praxis. It avoids the question of whether the discussion is purely theoretical (and therefore descriptive) or purely practical (and therefore prescriptive) by emphasizing the interrelation between the two. By resolving from the outset that all reflections should coalesce toward some action, this theory transcends the academic boundaries between scientific investigation and political engagement.

This is also why the theological aspects of the method cannot be cast away. Liberation theology, as described above through Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, moves from theory and theological reflection to praxis. Its teleological aim is toward a goal that is shared by its dialogue partners, African thought and critical theory. Therefore, it can employ its theological foundations concerning the need to

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, one article in this special issue is doing just that, see: Lomola (2018).

satisfy both material and spiritual fulfillment for a sense of salvation, while also contributing insights to non-theological dialogue partners. It does not need to ‘shave away’, so to speak, its theological foundations to adequately help move theory toward praxis in this interdisciplinary dialogue; it merely needs to show how its theological foundations help inform the judgments and prescribed actions of its dialogue partners. This is especially seen in Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff’s emphasis on giving primacy to application over exegesis when using biblical sources to better understand the injustice or oppression in question: the concern is not whether revelation within the Bible exists, but rather how this might inform us of a better path toward liberating action. Through its teleological orientation fashioned through See–Judge–Act, this form of liberation theology gains an ecumenical thrust that makes it a strong interdisciplinary dialogue partner concerning the injustices that are afflicted upon others.

#### 4. Conclusions

As this special issue and the conference that instigated it has shown, all of the world’s issues cannot be solved exclusively by one discipline or one method, and an interdisciplinary dialogue addressing specific concerns from local and global communities is not only necessary, but essential. What I have proposed above is just one method for such an engagement. However, I also recognize that this method will have limitations regarding its effectiveness, as do all methods that try to move theory into practice. Those limitations will be made clear if or when it is employed by such dialogues. I anticipate that its reliance on theological presuppositions may rattle some, or that its solidarity might overwhelm communities and strip away their cultural uniqueness through such exchanges and openings. Yet still, I think that this method could bear some fruit within these discussions, and it is my hope that it may become a means of open engagement between academics of various disciplines and activists of various causes; a means that is aware of the differences between these groups and tries to not strip away what makes their focus and expertise special.

This also presents this method as provisional, as something to be further explored and contemplated. Cardinal Cardijn envisioned the method to be more than a process of social activism; he thought of it as a means of faith formation and, subsequently, life formation. Just as both faith and living are ever-evolving, ever-developing tasks, this method too must adapt and change to meet the challenges that are posed to persons and their communities. This is the strength, I find, of the See–Judge–Act method: it knows that it is not static, and that social change changes both the self and the other. This change, when wrongly enacted, can be asymmetric and chauvinistic. Or, when thoughtfully considered, it can be dynamic and performed in solidarity. Embedded into See–Judge–Act’s core is a thrust of liberation through community, of seeking understanding through solidarity and association, of knowing that one cannot force change, rather, one must change alongside others in communion. These are lessons that all interdisciplinary dialogues should learn before proceeding from theory to practice.

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