

## CHAPTER XII

### THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF EVENTS SINCE 1962

We conclude this part with the following watchword from the gospel: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead" (Matt. 8:22). For ten years the Church has followed Jesus, and many have been occupied only with burying the dead. But as Antonio Machado says, "Traveler, there is no road, therefore make a road and walk," and little by little you will be able to follow the road that has been made. The evangelical watchword appears now to have been changed. We almost hear the Lord saying to us, "Stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand" (Luke 12:28). Now it is not like it was a decade ago when the future advent was completely unforeseeable. Now the way is at least outlined, and we must *think* theologically if we are to specify thematically its *meaning*. Theologically, Latin America is being born at the time it is achieving its autonomy.

#### I. DIFFERENT DIALECTICAL MOMENTS AND THEIR CORRECT RELATION

In 1964 when I began writing about Latin American Catholicism from Germany, the interpretation at that time was limited. It has now been surpassed but not entirely negated, for many of the conclusions have been verified. Belonging, without knowing it, to a cultural, theological, or Europeanized Christian elite, my first interpretation contained a certain degree of alienation that now must be modified. Recognizing ourselves as part of a *dominated culture* (within a dialectic of domination) forces the theologian to examine critically his own situation and discover the level of his participation in the process of domination. In effect, the cultural elites (the same can be said of the political, economic, and religious elites) play a subordinate role of domination internally in the colonial countries, namely, that of domestication. They are unconsciously responsible for making their respective peoples a willing mass, resigned, passive in regard to the oppression, the injustice, and the hunger. The oligarchies benefit in part from the advantages of the North Atlantic powers—benefit economically, politically, and culturally. This class (even theologically) in the colonial countries is the noncritical intern of oppression. They "accommodate to the oppressor"<sup>1</sup> and are themselves the "sub-oppressors."<sup>2</sup> In the majority of cases they are the liberal-progressives or developmentalists. The alternative at all levels for them is the following: In order to achieve development (the ideal model) of the North Atlantic communities it is necessary to learn from them to overcome our political, economic, cultural, and Christian underdevelopment. Others, in contrast, fall into an equally false dialectic in which the colonies raise themselves by armed revolution in order to crush the empires and thereby take their place. This is the "infinite evil" about which Hegel spoke: the

slave is now the master, the only master, the master who now has his own slave. Nothing has really changed. The situation is simply repeated.

The proper dialectic, however, is trinitarian, and the third moment is different. It is absolutely creatively new, unforeseen, and never a given. It is not the repetition or the inversion of “the Same,” but rather the historical humanity.<sup>3</sup> The oppressor is not annihilated by the oppressed, but rather is humanized by the destruction of oppression itself and in the opening to the third liberating moment.

### *1. The Dominator-dominated Dialectic*

The European-modern relation of domination began in the fifteenth century when the Portuguese conquered certain areas of North Africa. It is the colonial system upon which rests the European and North American culture in whose structure there is included the colony or the neocolony. The developed countries need as a part of their system the colonies that will continually be underdeveloped structurally if the relation between dominator and dominated is to continue. The suppression of the relation of domination makes the oppressed a new person and humanizes the dominator. It transforms one from an aspiring to “have more” into a “being more” person. Opulent society can never produce this type of humanism, which will necessarily be achieved when the oppressed peoples are able to suppress the relation of domination. The “new historical person” is not a slave who has become a master, rather the slave and the master become *brothers*. In this sense the process of liberation does not have as its correlative the “dependence” of the oppressed, but rather the “conversion” of the oppressed within the affluent society—which historically has only been achieved by the rebellion of the oppressed. For never will one who eats too much by his own decision begin to eat less while the one who has nothing to eat begins to move toward procuring his own food.

### *2. The Prophecy-people Dialectic*

In the same way the prophetic-people dialectic within our “dependent” countries has produced many false alternatives, whereas the viable alternatives should be trinitarian. If Christianity is *elitist*,<sup>4</sup> it gives to the minorities the essential function of the process of development<sup>5</sup> or of progress<sup>6</sup> or of the integral conservation of the tradition—of the right-wing or traditionalist groups. Against this Europeanized elitism there has arisen recently a populism that, as seen in limited examples, appears to be inclined toward taking the Latin American masses spontaneously as the only authentic reality in a noncritical attitude that transforms the people into a myth. That is, *populism as a vice* “speaks much of the people, proposes symbols (in general people) who pretend to be representative in search of eliminating the elite-mass dialectic, because the populist leader or the common representative of *the people* assumes both representations.”<sup>7</sup> Overcoming this false contradiction of elitism-populism can occur when the dialectical functions of the two moments of prophet-people correlation is fulfilled. On the one hand, the prophet—as did Jesus, the prophet of Galilee—should understand critically his own function for the people, and in view of his historical-popular role should discover his meaning. On the other hand, the people—Jesus was identified with the poor<sup>8</sup>—the oppressed people have interiorized in themselves the oppressor; and without a pedagogy of liberation which needs teachers, namely, the prophet, is not able to exorcise the culture of domination that maintains him as a slave. The people are not uncritically, purely authentic, nor is the prophet totally useless. The elite-mass dialectic comes now to constitute a new completeness that mutually overlaps: the

people who, thanks to those who demonstrate the state of oppression, are constituted into a people moving toward authenticity (the Church of the poor). One should not think that the prophet (the consciously Christian group) realizes his destiny in contemplation or in solitary action, nor should one assume that the people have already within themselves alone the pure future authenticity. In Egypt, oppressed Israel was not in the Promised Land, and Moses was not a prophet while out in the desert guarding sheep. Moses became a prophet when he committed himself to the liberation of the oppressed people. The people became authentic when they left Egypt and moved into the Promised Land. The prophet demonstrated authenticity from within, not by imposing foreign “models,” but by discovering historically the *already-given*, but germinally, the not-totally-yet given. Without prophets the people will sleep indefinitely in their oppression, their dependence, their inauthenticity mixed with a popular authenticity. Without a people the prophet is sectarianized, clearly mentally deranged — a person who is transformed into a suboppressor who solidifies the status quo, an antihuman relation of domination.

The question is not, therefore, whether the prophet will become the mass, or whether the opulent society will begin a process of nondevelopment —as some hippy groups pretend —or that the prophet will silence his voice and become nothing more than a poor individual— as certain contemplative European movements have become. Nor will all the people become prophets —which is the conscious ideal of liberal Christian progressivism, which points toward a “new Christendom” —or that the underdeveloped society will develop (developmentalism), or that a “learned” Jesus will cease to identify with the people as have certain professors of German theology. The question is whether the prophet will be a prophet in order to liberate the people. It is whether the relation of domination will cease in order that a new type of human being will be born. It is whether Jesus the prophet, the poor Church and the Church of the poor will signify the surpassing of the contradictions that are falsely absolutized and that immobilize the movement of sacred history, especially in Latin America.

### 3. *The Past-present-future Dialectic*

If in the oppressor-oppressed dialectic of the prophet-people that we studied at the level of temporality (with its three instances: past, present, and future) we could also see the gamut of attitudes, it could help us to interpret the Latin American actuality. In the first case, the oligarchic-elite of the right, integrist, defends the *past* of Christianity as an abstract ideal model. They have no critical awareness with respect to the relation of the empire-colony, and for this reason, without knowing it, their integrants are the suboppressors who desire by force, frequently military force, to impose the ideal model of Western Christian civilization on the people, but they fail to take into consideration the international dominator-oppressed structure, that of the “bourgeois North Atlantic” civilization. The integrist is a part of the inauthentic past.

The integrist of the static right has an ideology in the light of faith: the “theology of Christendom” —which we cannot analyze here although it would be of great benefit to do so. In the second case, the opposite of that just indicated is encountered in the attitude of the European liberal, the progressive developmentalist, and the orthodox Marxist. What is important for them is the future, but a *future* uprooted from an authentic past and lost in the many abstract types of utopia of liberalism, progressivism, orthodox Marxism, positivism, and reactionaryism. If integrism is a poor understanding of the “Father,” this second position is also an inadequate presentation of the “incarnation,” for it always falls into a dualism that separates it from the historical-people

reality. The integrist accepts in part the Christian faith that rapidly degenerates into Docetism and humanism, which is not well grounded (positivism, liberalism, bourgeois or Marxist orthodoxy). All are “saving” elites of the masses, which in very little or in no way can be utilized. In fact they are noncritical with respect to the dominator-dominated dialectic. Even the orthodox Marxists do not understand the position of a developed country such as Russia. In the third case, the centrists, the majority of the people, are lost in an abstract present in that the popular “memory” is unable to discover a meaning that would permit the creation of a new future. The centrist is oppressed but does not know it because he has internalized the oppressor. His is an inadequate understanding of the “Holy Spirit,” which although we all feel ourselves to be brothers, some are really slaves laboring next to free brothers. This oppressed people, people of Jesus and of the poor mystical Church, are the not-yet-altogether because they lack not only being awakened to their oppressed state, but also someone to stimulate them with what is exterior (the Other) in order to create a new historical stage.

The correct setting forth of the dialectic of the instances of temporality within those of domination and the elite-mass is that of the prophet-people: Moses-Israel and Jesus-Church; for Israel was not only a slave in Egypt but was already on the road to liberation through the desert, and remembering the past of servitude was understood by the future of the Promised Land. The prophet is one who understands *explicitly* (not necessarily thematically, because that would be theology) the meaning of the present open not abstractly but concretely to the historical past and future. None of the three is denied, and all of them are assumed synergically and simultaneously. The prophet has not received his understanding for his own perfection (Moses was a shepherd in the desert) but in order that his word—the creating *dabar* of Yahweh—might awaken the oppressed people, knowing that it could result in his death, for the prophet can be assassinated by the oppressing class that lives off of the slaves. Being a prophet is not child’s play. It is violent work; it is subversive work; it is pedagogy; it is the language that explains the hidden meaning of history and that denounces, as a point of departure, the dialectic of domination. The enslaved masses, enslaved perpetually if they are without a prophet, are fertilized by the prophetic word (as the egg is fertilized by the sperm), move out of the abstract present, and understand, as a people now being born, the historic, the present, the concrete meaning of their state of oppression. The foresight of the prophet breaks first the opposition of domination. This is the moment not of reform nor of development, but of violence as the baby struggles to leave the womb. These are the birth-pangs, or, in sociopolitical language of today, it is revolution. The prophet then guides the people to their own future project. The prophet does not invent or construct a project: it is discovered in what is already authentic for the people, and it completely negates the inauthentic. It cultivates the not-yet but what will be for the oppressed. When this explicit existential understanding of the prophet is considered thematically we have the “theology of liberation.” Both the “theology of Christendom,” the past model, and European and utopian “progressive theology” are abstractions. The “theology of liberation” is *paschal*, historical, concrete, having in mind the fact of oppression. Faith, the popular existential mistaken understanding in which the authentic and inauthentic are mixed, fixes on an abstract present, that of “folk Catholicism,” and is the point of departure in the Christian liberating process in Latin America. “Progressive theology,” in contrast, joins or arranges in its “thematization” the existential faith of the progressive—which was a simple Latin American not yet alienated by his instruction. The “theology of Chris-

tendom” determines all of the process and is very much on the defensive, saving the human being by baptism, by a sacramentalism that is much akin to magic. The prophet understands *explicitly* what is implicitly the authentic part of the people’s faith, that is, the prophet manifests an *existential* far-sightedness, indivisibly confounded with praxis, from that part which is constitutive. The “theology of liberation” —which derives from the “theology of revolution” its point of departure, from “political theology” its conditioning, from the “theology of hope” its future, and from the “theology of questioning” an outlook —attempts simply to arrange scientifically in a *thematic* fashion the concrete structure that is fulfilled in the prophet-people dialectic in its totality. Or, putting it another way, *it is all the traditional theology committed to a paschal movement from the perspective of the oppressed*. Paschal (*pesach*) is the “passage,” the way through the desert of all human history, from the ontological sinfulness of man without salvation (original sin) to the irreversible salvation in Christ in the Kingdom (eschatological). The passage is achieved in every person, in every people, in every era, in all of human history. But the passage is fulfilled in a privileged way in certain *outstanding moments* of history: one of these could be the time through which Latin America is now passing, one when the complete eschatological liberation can be indicated, testified to, or manifested by the prophets to the people in the historical-concrete commitment to the political, economic, and cultural liberation of Latin America. Theology can never consider everything possible. It considers historically in each era those questions that are more easily clarified by concrete events. For this reason the Patristics revealed certain aspects, medieval and colonial Christendom others, and the new theology still others. In Latin America we should consider certain elements of Christian existence more thoroughly in order to explain the era that is about to begin. If this plateau is to be that of the liberation of Latin America, it is evident that an historical, concrete theology more adapted to reality should be forthcoming.

## II. ON THE BIRTH OF LATIN AMERICAN THEOLOGY

The “birth” of Latin American theology occurred very recently. It resulted from the study in Europe by many Latin American seminary professors and theological teachers. Thus this first stage had the disadvantage of the relationship with continental thinkers, which led the Latin Americans to “repeat” as theology what they had studied in Europe, namely, an abstract theology. The second stage began when courses of study were organized under the unifying and universalizing direction of CELAM, which required the Latin American professors at least to be aware of all of their own continent. What began to appear was not a Latin American theology, but rather a Europeanized abstract theology that began its transition to the concrete by discovering the real level of what is Latin American. This transition was not primarily theological but sociological, at times even sociographical, one which at first could only take rudimentary steps. The importance of these sociological investigations, however, became increasingly evident: those of FERES under the direction of Houtart, of DESAL (The Center for Economic and Social Development of Latin America, 1961), and somewhat later of ILADES (Latin American Institute of Doctrine and Social Studies, 1961), these latter two in Santiago. The discovery of history indicated a new step — as this work also attempts the first synthetic steps. Immediately the pastoral began to demand a more comprehensive and profound attitude: ICLA (in the South in 1961 and in the North in 1966) opened new ways for the Latin American catechesis. The Latin American Institute of Pastoral Liturgy (1965) launched a series of studies and concrete investigation. OSLAM (Latin American Seminary Organization) organized

courses for seminary professors, and finally ISPLA, the Institute which since 1968 has been known as IPLA ( the Pastoral Institute of Latin America ), had its first meeting January 10-15, 1964, in Puerto Rico, a second meeting in Uruguay, July 6-8, 1964, and a third meeting September 5-8, 1964, in Ecuador. Then in 1965 courses of study were held in São Paulo directed by professors Segundo Galilea, José Comblin, and Alfonso Gregory. In 1966 an itinerant team composed of J. L. Segundo, Ivan Illich, Henri Bouillard, and Casiano Floristán was teaching in Riobamba, Ecuador, under the direction of Monseñor Proaño. In 1968 these courses were begun in Quito on a semestral basis. The average attendance in these studies has been between fifty and sixty persons. At the same time many other initiatives have been taken in this regard. For example, in Porto Alegre a theological seminar was held July 13-29, 1964, led by professors Daniélou, Colombo, and Roguet with more than seventy leaders attending from all over Latin America. Then in April 1967 plans were made to have a continental congress in Mexico City on the theme "Faith and Development." By July 1968 the preparation was complete, and the congress was held on September 24-28, 1969, with 24 bishops, 324 priests and religious, and 186 laypersons present. The methodology was very open and encouraged the participation of everyone. Along the same line but with a theological-scientific objective, a group of theologians and a few bishops met in Córdoba, Argentina, in November 1970. From the meeting emerged the idea, as also occurred in Mexico, of founding an Argentine association of theologians. By 1971 the association had more than 100 members. Yet all of these developments can be seen as no more than the second stage.

The third stage, that is, the "birth" of theology not "in" Latin America nor "with" sociographical Latin American themes, but a "Latin American" theology, will come only when the ontological moment, until now hidden, is realized—that is, when the political relations of human being to human being are seen in some of their possibilities as father-son, man-woman, brother-brother, or master-slave (the relation of dominator-dominated): the *political* relationship. The awareness of theology as pertaining to an *oppressed culture* was not immediate. *Before* theology there are the prophets who existentially begin the transition; theology comes later or *afterward*. Thus in Brazil a prophetic line is visible since 1964 against the bourgeois militarist State. Another prophetic line is seen in the transition from open condemnation to coexistence with and even the defense of socialism as a movement. This tends toward the rupture and the surpassing of the dialectic of domination, and also opposition to the question of violence which, rather than a total condemnation, becomes a just understanding. The same can be said in regard to agrarian reform, that is, the Church has been discovering critically the impossibility of ignoring this dialectic of dominator-oppressed, and little by little is beginning to see more clearly—as the Conservative was transformed into the Liberal in the Second Vatican Council, becoming first a developmentalist and afterward opening himself to a posture of liberation.<sup>9</sup> The relationship between the Church and the world was in part thought of from the perspective of the relation of man with nature (any man before nature as such—an abstract, economic relation). The discovery that came after Vatican II of the relation of person-to-person according to one's multiple possibilities is "the political," and, in our case, the dominator-dominated relationship. Latin America is in the position of the Third World: dominated and oppressed. The dialectical suppression of this opposition is the beginning of liberation.

The theme of liberation is biblical (for example, Exod. 3:7- 8: *lehatsiló*, and Luke 21 :28: *apolytroxis*) throughout all Christian tradition. In the Tübingen School it was

a preferred theme,<sup>10</sup> and for this reason is an essential moment in the Hegelian gnosis: *Befreiung* is the dialectical movement that denies all negations of the Being-here as the first determinant until concluding in the Absolute as the result (*Enciclopedia*, sec. 36). The Marxist inversion gives meaning to the “liberation of the proletariat.” The FLN (National Liberation Front) in Algeria provided national anti-imperialistic meaning for “liberation,” which was explicitly described by Frantz Fanon in his work *The Wretched of the Earth*. Herbert Marcuse, among others, deals with the question philosophically.<sup>11</sup> The term began to be used in 1964 but without an awareness of its political implications. Paulo Freire and his Brazilian MEB (Basic Educational Movement) utilized the method of liberation as a basic component: the conscientization as a correlative of liberation, that is, pedagogically it was a “liberating education” or an “education as the practice of freedom.” When the “Message of the Bishops for the Third World” (1966) and Medellín (1968) employed the idea and term “liberation” in its political sense, that is, as liberation from the structures of neocolonial domination, the question was definitively set forth. A short time later the term began to appear in the Chilean episcopal documents and thereafter has been generally used.

Theology or *thematical thinking* developed later from the prophetic commitment, that is, from *existential praxis*. In October 1968, Gustavo Gutiérrez published his *La pastoral de la Iglesia en América latina (The Church Pastoral in Latin America)* in Montevideo in which, although it represented the fourth type of pastoral (not that of Christendom. “New Christendom,” or even of the maturity of the faith, but “a prophetic pastoral”), he pointed out that “personal faith attempts to state clearly the situation of the masses in a salvific dialogue, and attempts to avoid ignoring the masses” (p. 28). There was not an explicit reference to the political, for this came a short time later when Gutiérrez wrote his “Hacia una teología de la liberación” (“Toward a Theology of Liberation”) in 1969 for the “Documentation Service” of the JECI in Montevideo.<sup>12</sup> In this essay Gutiérrez severely criticized the “idea of development” and demonstrated the coexistence of the theological and political idea of “liberation.” He cited the works of Falleto, Dos Santos, Sunkel, Arroyo, and Salazar Bondy who also had demonstrated the domination-dependency structure at various levels. Also, it was Gutiérrez who applied this idea to theology. One should not overlook, however, the team of the journal *Vispera* of Montevideo in which Héctor Borrat and Methol Ferré began to write in regard to this question in 1969 (cf., for example, No.7) in which there was a political interpretation of the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. The paradigmatic, theological essay of Methol Ferré entitled “Iglesia y sociedad opulenta. Una crítica a Suenens desde América latina” (“The Church and Opulent Society: A Critique of Suenens from Latin America”) appeared in the December 1969 issue of *Vispera* (pp. 1-24), together with a programmatic introduction on “the struggle between two theologies,” in which it was said “all theology implies in one way or another a politic,” in fact, in the Catholic Church there is the “domination of the poor churches by the rich ones.”

All of this led, still very timidly, to the “Symposium on the Theology of Liberation,” which was held in Bogotá, March 6-7, 1970, with nearly five hundred participants. The real question, however, was still not concretized. But in a later meeting in the same city on July 24 the matter became more specific.<sup>13</sup> Then in a meeting of Latin American theologians in Buenos Aires, August 3-6, 1970, the “theology of liberation” was discussed in detail.<sup>14</sup>

Monseñor Pironio, Secretary General of CELAM, published two exegetical articles on the “theology of liberation,”<sup>15</sup> and in the declarations of the Maryknoll Fathers in

January 1971, the central text of Isaiah 61 was cited: “Our mission, as that of Christ, consists in giving the good news to the poor, proclaiming liberation to the oppressed.” The question, therefore, was legitimized and would have to be dealt with.

It should be pointed out that the “theology of liberation” emphasizes *the political* in a way distinct from that of European “political theology.”<sup>16</sup> In Europe the political in theology is essentially the consideration of the social aspects of dogma (following to a degree the line of *Catolicisme* of De Lubac) together with the critical-liberating dialectic on a *national* plane of the Church-world. “Political theology,” nevertheless, has not perceived the meaning of the political as the dialectic of oppressor-oppressed at the *international* level nor the prophetic-critical-liberating function of theology with respect to the oppressed masses who are oppressed not only by the State but also by institutions. Furthermore, European “political theology” is abstract and not applicable to all peoples because “the political” is not concretized for any person. For this reason “political theology” becomes in practice the instrument whereby the oppressor continues his domination (*ouk-topos*: utopian) and never senses the kind of criticism that would motivate him to attempt to eliminate the dialectic of world domination. The “theology of liberation,” however, radicalizes *the political* ontologically and becomes a theology of concrete, critical, subversive, real thinking.

### III. THE DIALECTIC OF THE “INSIDE.OUTSIDE” OF THE CHURCH

The fundamental question, therefore, is how to develop an adequate ecclesiological formulation, because it is in history as in the Church that the economy of the Trinity is realized. In order to understand all the inadequate contradictions that develop with respect to the Church, it would be wise to add to the already indicated dialectical moments a new moment: the “inside-outside” of the Church. It may be said that one is *outside* the dining room and yet is still within the house itself—if inside the house is the scope of reference. In relation to the house as a whole, therefore, being in the bedroom is being inside and not outside the house. Between the inside and the outside there is a “frontier,” but it fluctuates and depends on the limits of the field or “world” that is being considered. At any rate, the “outside” is a dialectical correlative of the “inside,” and both are reconciled in an historical totality (finally eschatological), which explains what is included. The relationship between the “Church (within) — world (without)” is fluid, relative, and dialectical, and there will be the moment when the relation is identified: the “Church of the poor” as the scope where the mysterious and Christ-like grace “reigns” and saves all men of good will. In this case the “inside” is the totality of humanity in an historic era, and the “outside” is the future. There is always an “outside,” an exteriority, an eschatological remainder, for never will mankind in history be a complete totality.<sup>17</sup> And it is this “outside,” not only as future, but also as the incomprehensible mystery of the “Other” as liberty that is expressed in the demanding word “justice.”<sup>18</sup> The implication of this is that all of the “inside” is transparent. But it is an “outside” in another respect. And even in the limited case of the most intimate personal structure, the human being is an “outside” in regard to the creative liberty that has been put within his being.

There is no level, therefore, in which the Church can say, “At last we are ‘inside,’ ” because this “inside,” as has been said, acts dialectically as an “outside” for a more intimate “inside.” Besides, to understand this specialized dialectic in relation to the prophet-people (socio-temporal), we must have adequate hermeneutical tools.

The Church as a totality functions “prophetically” in respect to the world, that is, the people. One does not exist without the other; that is, there is no “inside” the



Church nor prophecy without an “outside” world, that is, without the people. If the world ceases being outside, the Church cannot be prophetic. Obviously, in this case we are speaking of the Church as a visible institution to which its members consciously belong. Every “inside” has, therefore, a means of “belonging.” Every “outside” has a dialectical means of being “before,” or “in the presence of.” The visible Church itself acts as a people with respect to the bishops and presbyters. For the bishop (whose prophetic “inside” is the episcopal body into which he is incorporated), his prophetic function is realized on various levels of the people outside: in the priesthood, in the community of Christians, and in the world not belonging visibly to the Church as an institution but belonging to the universal Christian Church. The priesthood (the prophetic “inside” is the presbytery) fulfills its eschatological function in regard to the community of the faithful and to the world. The Christian (whose “inside” is the visible Church) fulfills his function with respect to the world. The world (whose “inside” is the totality of humanity mysteriously and secretly saved by Christ: “All men have sufficient grace to be saved”) has its “outside,” also: all that is lacking and growing in future history, the internal contradictions as negativity frustrating the actual possibilities, the mythical absolutization of that which is considered relative allowing for a continuation or further progress. The function of the Church with respect to the world as such is to open it continually to the “outside” in which it may move toward the Parousia. The world tends to be closed as a complete totality, and to deify its absolutized myths unduly. The political functions of faith and theology are simply to produce a critique that will liberate the world toward the “outside” of itself, which is always a new future historical human being. Europe, the United States, and Russia all tend to absolutize as universal and unique the state of things in the opulent, developed societies. Exteriority is thereby denied and the historical, eschatological dialectical process is halted. From the Third World, especially from Latin America, a fissure is seen, a new “outside”: beyond the metaphysics of the subject—which Descartes inaugurated with his *cogito* and which culminated with Nietzsche in his *Will to Power*—as the basis of the dominator-dominated dialectic that opens the possibility of a human being to whom being-as-Other is self-imposed, not fixed as a dominator but demanding justice and calling others “Brother.”

From this ontological structure we are now able to judge the historical attitudes adopted by the bishops, priests, and Christians in present-day Latin America. And what is more important, we are now able to know how to discern our own attitude in order that it will harmonize with the meaning and the *making* of history.

Thus the dialectic of the “visible Church-world” is established, but the perfect identity will never be realized until the Kingdom of God comes. In history the “Church-world” will be two moments, not contrary, but correlative.<sup>19</sup> The attempt to identify the “Church-world” is that of Christendom. And since there is no world, no “outside” of the Church, there is no prophecy, no mission, and the Church thereby loses its historical function. In effect, the historical function of the institutional or visible Church to which one consciously, voluntarily, and corporally belongs is the prophetic-world. The institutional Church does not have as its essential finality something basically “internal” the static salvation of its members, for example, who are merely a “part” of the Church. We know that “by the Church, mysteriously, all persons of good will are saved.” No spiritual gift is received privately. Baptism, truthfully, is not received; rather it is by baptism that we are received into the Church in order to fulfill the prophetic mission of saving the world. The dialectic of the “outside-inside” can be

seen, but we are never permitted to fix or finalize the “inside” by defining it as a mere closed “interiority.” The visible Church as a community prophetically leads the people and the culture in which it is ministering toward the Parousia by criticizing, and by opening the doors that are closed, that alienate and frustrate people, cultures, and nations. Criticism is made at all levels: political, economic, cultural, spiritual, and religious. Without the visible Church, the historico-social catalyst, humanity proceeds without any bearings and is lost in fatal dead-end streets where the accumulation of sin makes impossible the maturation of history. By the visible and prophetic Church, humanity moves, even without knowing it, toward the Parousia. The visible prophetic community, the Church, has the essential function of saving humanity as an historical concrete totality. We have seen the Church fulfilling this function in Latin America. To the degree that the Church prophetically critiques the world —be it the bourgeois or socialistic state, be it a social class or any institution —it will fulfill its role or function. To the degree that it accepts the status quo for human reasons of false prudence, which is nothing more than immobility, astuteness, or cowardice, it will sin. It is the obligation of the historian-theologian to unmask this evil in the Church. In this critique of the visible Church before Latin American humanity as a whole, it is necessary to speak, to preach in season and out of season in regard to what is first and fundamental: the Latin American *world* is oppressed. And while the relations of domination-dominated on the part of the developed world continue, the liberation of the Latin American people will be declamatory but never real. This prophetic critique is violent because the oligarchy does not want to hear it. It is subversive in regard to the established unjust order. And it places the visible Church in the position of being prophet, the servant of Yahweh, martyred, jailed, and tortured as the propitiatory victim. All the persecutions, therefore, manifest that the institutional Church in Latin America has taken the authentic path that leads to the cross: of the preaching in Galilee to the city of Jerusalem, which kills the prophets.

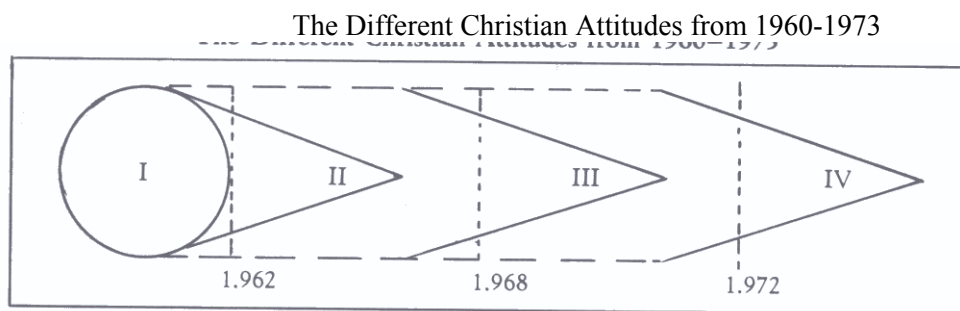
In the same way we can judge the attitude of the bishops. The bishop is a prophet to his priests, his community, and to his world. This dialectic, as far as I know, has never been more powerfully expressed than the day when Dom Hélder Câmara took possession of the Archbishopric of Recife. As he put it, he was “a native of the Northeast speaking to other natives of the Northeast [the first dialectical sphere], with his eyes on Brazil [the second sphere], on Latin America [the third sphere], and on the world [the fourth sphere]. A human creature ...a Christian ...a bishop.” And he added, “My door and my heart will be open to everyone.” To the degree that Bishop Câmara has been able to realize an existential identification with the community of the poor (the world), given the difficulty in which his parishioners and priests live (it is supposed that he is the “first missionary” of his diocese and not a cloistered administrator in his palace), his prophetic function, his critical-liberating function, has been that of the Servant of Yahweh. He has of course been the object of great persecution on the part of the oligarchy that dominates (as the national suboppressor) the people unjustly. A bishop should not, however, be only a father to his priests; rather, he should also be their prophet going before them and saying, as Jesus said to his disciples, “Follow me.” The “episcopal body” (the “inside” of the episcopacy) should become transparent, avoiding all forms of professional secrecy and unnecessary and unproductive authoritarianism in order to open itself and allow the “outside” to occupy the interior. The “pastor-flock” dialectic has its weaknesses, namely, when the pastors form a closed body it inevitably becomes mercenary.

The priests and the consecrated are the prophets of the Christian community and of the religious world. The priestly function is correlative to the community and to the world. When the world is ignored, the community becomes a useless ghetto. If, on the other hand, the community is ignored, the priest loses the support of his people and his prophetic efforts become nothing more than activism, social or political militancy. The priest fulfills his prophetic function in the community by guiding it toward the Parousia. He fulfills his function in the world by being a believer and a Christian. It is not surprising that when bishops fail to fulfill their prophetic role God stirs up the priests, and conflict is inevitable. If all were the visible Church as in Christendom, the priest would function only “inside.” But in view of the fact that the “outside” is immense, the prophetic function in the world is more necessary than ever.

The same can be said of Christians in general, whose prophetic function “outside” presupposes a real, historical, human “inside” (the basic Christian communities) and not abstract, impersonal, traditional parochial communities. But apart from this insistence on the prophetic role in the world, in the oppressed Latin American world, the “inside” becomes, as we have already said, nothing more than a ghetto. The Christian does not need to present himself confessionally as a Christian in order to guide humanity toward the Parousia. Rather, the Christian must know effectively how to function critically, liberatingly, concretely, and historically, and without appearing to be Christian (working as a counter-witness, because to call oneself a Christian does not mean that one’s praxis is really Christian) he fulfills his salvific function.

#### IV. A SOCIOPOLITICAL DIAGNOSIS OF THE PRESENT CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

At a concrete level one may observe in the Latin American Catholic Church—and also in the Protestant churches—a phenomenon that indicates that the situation is changing and that a new process is beginning. The process has different moments, and in order to clarify our exposition we are including the following diagram as a point of reference.



Level I is composed of those Christian groups who maintain an attitude that can be generalized as “preconciliar.” These groups are composed of the simple people ancestrally committed to “folk Catholicism,” or the extreme rightists who defend even yet the use of Latin in the liturgy or their prerogatives as the dominating class. There are Christian people, there are oligarchies, and there are ecclesiastical hierarchies in these groups. Christendom, or at least the “new Christendom,” has survived with them. The present order is not questioned. Everything is as it was prior to 1962.

Level II is composed of Christians committed to development, who were referred to above as “progressives,” a type now conciliar (since 1962, but principally since

1965), who were enthusiastically committed during the internal reform of the Church liturgically, biblically, theologically, and catechetically.

After Medellín, however, Church reform is seen as insufficient, and because of Medellín there has emerged since 1968 a third level composed of those who are committed to liberation, not only eschatologically, but also politically, economically and culturally, because of their insight into the reality of dependence. A result of Christian reflection on this level is the “theology of liberation.” This is an advanced prophetic Christianity. The Latin American Bishops’ Conference (CELAM) and the Protestant churches who are members of UNELAM all move along this line in an attempt at prophetic renewal.

Since the end of the decade of the 1960s, two new facts have become evident. On the one hand, among advanced prophetic groups, some have decidedly adopted new methods such as Marxism at the level of theoretical interpretation or the tactics of urban guerrillas as a practical revolutionary method. In this sense Cuba— and for a while Chile —provided arenas in which certain Catholic groups, among them organizations such as “Christians for Socialism” or the Protestant group ISAL (Church and Society in Latin America) succumbed to this temptation. These positions were generated as a reaction to the reorganization of traditionalists or right-wing groups that have been disorganized since the end of the Second Vatican Council— groups such as the “Short Courses in Christianity” —or by the presence of communities of *Opus Dei*. One must add that on the political level, the military takeovers of the governments in Uruguay, Bolivia, and Chile, along with the intensification of the work of the CIA, provide a clear indication of a return to the right in many Latin American countries.

All this produced *the return* of many groups —especially of CELAM since November 1972 in Sucre and of UNELAM the same year in Montevideo —toward the position prior to that of Medellín, that is, to Level II. This “step backward” lacks the inspiration of the “theology of liberation,” which is regarded by many as “dangerous,” and the self-censure and the open persecution at all levels of the Church against those committed to the third level, for those committed to this prophetic level (Level III) are said to be the extreme left (Level IV). This clearly orchestrated confusion permits the spread of a European type of progressivism, certainly superior to 1965 but reactionary in regard to 1973, well aware of its power, for it recognizes that it has the support of everyone on the first level, that is, of the right-wing traditionalists and the greater part of the leadership of the Christian institutions. The pastoral theological “modernization” of the progressive group, which does not criticize the status quo, serves traditionalism in defending its interest and has a certain amount of ideological structure which permits it to oppose strenuously the “theology of liberation.”

Unfortunately, history sometimes seems to repeat itself. The extreme left, which disengages itself from the process or “drops out,” as the political jargon puts it, plays into the hands of the extreme rightists, and the two extremes unite. This prompts us to raise the following questions: will European progressivism gain sufficient ecclesiastical power to make a pact with the extreme Catholic right, or can progressivism reconcile itself, at least as a negotiation tactic, to a popular, political, and Christian commitment for liberation? If Levels I and II unite, the immediate future will be extremely difficult for the prophet. If Levels II and III unite without losing contact with popular or “folk Catholicism,” “the step backward” could be nothing more than a time lag and means of maturing whereby soon “two steps forward” can be made. This last hypothesis appears to be extremely unlikely, but not impossible. One should not be optimistic, but neither should one lose objectivity and hope.

## V. THE TRINITARIAN UNITY OF CHRISTIAN LIBERATION

Two objections may be raised in regard to the exposition given here. In the first place, it would appear that an ecclesial attitude would invalidate all the others. For example, prophetism would invalidate progressivism or integrist traditionalism, prophetic violence would eliminate nonviolence, and to be a Christian would presuppose one —and only one —attitude. In the second place, it would seem that all the dialectical reciprocals or correlates appear to be bipolar, that is, with two terminals, which tends to simplify reality and above all to demand an infinite repetition without change. To these two objections, which in substance are really the same objection, we would respond as we began this chapter, presenting a tridimensional or trinitarian dialectic, and insisting that only the unity of the various moments in an ecclesial whole will prevent the historical movement from either closing or terminating.<sup>20</sup>

The dialectic between the developed countries, the oppressors, and the underdeveloped countries, the oppressed, has a third moment: the transformation into a fraternal, historical human being. The dialectic between prophet and people has as a third moment a “new people moving toward liberation,” toward a new historical type of humanity, and eschatologically toward the Kingdom of God. The dialectic between the “traditional integrist,” the “progressive,” and the “extreme populist” will not be surpassed by a fourth position. Rather, it will be surpassed by the synergic unity and mutually constituted dialectic of prophet-people, which assumes the totality of the past and is open to the coming future in order to understand the meaning of the present. In the unity of the Church, the Father is not a father only (as in traditional paternalism). The Son has a real unity (not dualistic as in Progressivism) as a people who are indwelt by the fraternal Spirit (not the spirit of slavery or alienation). Historically and concretely these three human interecclesial groups can survive. Moreover, their continuation will produce a permanent correlation that will move everything. This will not prevent some from approximating more than others in their concrete experiences and through their attitudes the manifestation of the different dialectical moments which only in Christ are fulfilled in perfect unity and which heroically the saints approximated. And no one can say, “My position is adequate,” although some positions will be more adequate than others to the degree that one approaches the limited, perfect, and historical case, namely, Jesus Christ. But one can, in contrast, sin against the dialogical unity by absolutizing a position or closing it to others, which impedes the realization of the effort or movement of *pericoresis* (the circumincession or interior movement of a totality in which the moments are mutually constituted in a unity).<sup>21</sup> All of this is well expressed in the prophet-people dialectic, both in the crossing of the desert and in the movement toward the liberation of *one* Church.

This brings us to the point of the last question. The *one* Church has one —and only one —tradition. This tradition is nothing more than the historical identity of the Church with itself through the centuries and the cultures. We use the phrase “historical Identity” and not the immobile identity. For the traditionalist, tradition is a repository, integral, whose totality belongs to the past and which is necessary to preserve. Tradition is the impartial, eternal, absolute truth. For the progressive (the Europeanized or Marxist liberal) tradition serves only as it relates to a future situation, and truth tends to be converted into historical truth quite apart from the closed situation. Truth has a relation to an era, but it is hard to integrate it with the real, national, Latin American past. For the extreme populist, tradition is a “memory” of the people themselves, the customs of “folk Catholicism” that the people have maintained in their

symbols and in their real *caudillos*. It is a present truth, theoretically indiscernible, and captured only in existential solidarity. The populist, in order to avoid the explicit *conciencialismo*<sup>22</sup> seen in the progressive, loses all sense of ecclesial revelation, because for him the truth should be mediated by the “popular conscience.” Again the unitary overcoming of these different moments is explained by the prophetic understanding of truth as one historical and divine (and for this reason eternal) truth, but communicated by the divine economy always in specific situations. The truth, the manifestation of what something is (and it is revelation when it is the divine expression of the hidden being), always comes in the encounter of human personality with the historical world, with the actual situation. No one, not even God, is able to communicate absolutely without a remainder, without leaving an exteriority or a future for revelation and encounter. The living, ecclesial, historical tradition is not a static deposit. It is the historical revelation of the eternal God, the eternal truth to mankind in this world. This progressive revelation grows and becomes explicit in history. But the revelation cannot be completed in history; it would negate its very essence. The prophet understands the eternal in the historical-concrete revelation as a sign of God. He discovers the relation of the present with the past and the future. Because the truth or the revelation is historical, it is manifested as eternal eschatological Truth. If in Christ the manifestation was complete, then the total comprehension of this manifestation will be fulfilled only at the end of history and by the maturation realized by humanity in history and indicated by its prophets. The eternal Truth follows, therefore, manifesting itself historically in Latin America. To know how to discern the signs is essential so that we can know how to follow in the way that has just opened.

In the trinitarian unity of the Church each person should sincerely open himself or herself to dialogue and fraternal love illuminated by a prophetic understanding of the faith in the hope of the advent of a new person. A new historical human being beyond that of the relation of domination that oppresses all the underdeveloped peoples, beyond all historical humankind, is the final Kingdom of God. The struggle for liberation, the leaving behind the land of colonial servitude, is the hope of salvation. It signifies a new era. As a sign of God’s grace it falls to us to be living at this time, and we are part of the adventure of seeing the dawn.