

*THE SITUATION OF THE CHRISTIAN THINKER IN LATIN AMERICA :  
EPISTEMOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE ONTOLOGICAL LEVEL*

I will try to point out some aspects of the attitude that anyone ought to adopt who thinks as a Christian in Latin America. It is impossible to describe thoroughly that situation because it is like indescribable totality. The situation, because of its concreteness, is hard to talk about. Therefore, I will attempt to draw only along general lines the structure of the situation and the attitude called for, for purposes of dialogue and future discussions.

In view of the preceding chapters, I hope we can agree that we are going through something like the pangs of apocalyptic birth; and it's like this not only on the Latin American continent but throughout the world.

For the first time there exists one humanity. Until now there had existed closed-off empires. The Chinese thought they were a world unto themselves; so also did the Hindus and, for their part, the Europeans. Suddenly, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the European

colonial epoch began and, with it, the discovery of other worlds. Thus humanity appears for the first time. Not humanity as a biological fact—we are all part of the one human species—but as a historical fact through which the individual has awareness and knowledge of other people. This in the beginning was disconcerting; the only thing we could think to do was to inflict on other people the vision we had of ourselves in our respective empires. Consider the Spaniards who came to America. They reported back to the king their doubts about the rationality of the Indians. They commented that the Indians seemed rational but had "thick skulls," which made communication with them impossible. Thus the Spaniards were unable to understand the depth of Indian culture. They thought they saw a man being "murdered" on the altar of the sun and failed to realize that theologically they were sacrificing him to the gods so that, because of the shedding of the victim's blood, the sun would go on shining. If Spaniards had understood this, they could have sunk the roots of evangelization much deeper. One thing certain is that today Latin Americans are feeling the consequences of humanity's appearance and, with it, the breakdown of colonial Christendom, and are being exposed to a new reality. It is at this point I begin this treatise.

What is the situation in which we find ourselves as Christians who want to look now to the future and put Christendom behind us?

## THE MEANING OF THINKING

In the first place a thinker must know how to think. But thinking is a rarity in our times. Even under the best of circumstances what you frequently have is study. *Studium* is to go to work with a will on something. We can

study, we can memorize, we can cope with a book, record it in our minds, synthesize it, explain it. Unfortunately this is what is done frequently in Argentina, even under ideal conditions. Our study is bookish and unrealistic because we are not accustomed to penetrating deeply into what we live and what we are surrounded by; but " rather, from childhood on we study about the Nile and the Mississippi Rivers without knowing a thing about the brook that runs nearby. How, then, can we get an idea of what a river is? In order to know the history of our people, we must first learn what it means to have a father, an aunt, a grandparent in time and to become acquainted with what goes on in our district and in the city, and then go on to universal history. Instead, we begin with the cave dweller. So, the child from the start sees history as a myth, geography as a fairy tale, and the nation as an ethereal, volatile, unreal entity. It is the general belief that study is the study only of what others have thought and written. All that the student has to do is accumulate content.

The Argentinian in general is not rooted in real thinking but, rather, leans to the study of the unreal, the abstract, the alienating. Thinking, then, is not a question of studying, calculating, planning. In any given school of philosophy you can count on your fingers those who think, and you will have fingers left over to count those who study; the great majority do neither .

We understand the things around us within a framework of existential comprehension, within the world's horizon. This is day-to-day comprehension. Everyone has this—the baker, the butcher, the teacher , the scientist. We understand things because we are human beings. But this is not the kind of comprehension we are talking about here. Thinking is not day-to-day comprehension, nor is it, as I have said, a form of study.

Thinking is the thinking that meditates, muses, turns things around in the mind. The sophist cannot think and does not know how to think. The memory expert or the person who has to read the latest best seller is not a thinker either. The one is a memory bank, the other a cherisher of the trivial. People in a big city feel that they have to keep up on the latest in everything. "While a dish is still being cooked," said Alfonso Reyes, "we take it away for a new dish." They end up with mental indigestion. We must learn to read slowly and to view what we are reading in terms of reality. If not, we simply keep ourselves informed with a daily ration of junk.

#### CRUIS AS A CONDITION FOR THINKING

To think is to turn over in our minds our "day-to-dayness," but above all it is to emerge from a crisis. But crisis is something we tend to put aside. Those who attempt to think about the where and how of their being without starting from a crisis point will not be able to think. Many perhaps have lived their whole lives without any crisis. Yet crisis is a *sine qua non* for thinking, and the more radical and abysmal the crisis, the greater the possibility for real thought. "Crisis" comes from the Greek verb *krinein*, meaning "to judge," but with the added note of "distancing oneself." Thus it is necessary to get away from ordinary day-to-day comprehension in order to see things "from outside."

In one of his early works Hegel refers to this fact. He also shows how the mind manifests itself progressively; it goes from consciousness to self-consciousness, and this leap is brought on by crisis. He describes that crisis in the person of Abraham. Abraham was in Ur, among the Chaldeans, and for no reason at all broke with his own and went off. He headed for the desert and was con-

verted in a strange land. The words *Entfremdung*, *Entzweiung*, *Entiuserung* are already part of young Hegel's vocabulary. Abraham is a foreigner. It is paradoxical, but the one who approaches genuine thought approaches an inhospitable (*unheimlich*) place. In that sense we part company with Hegel because he thought that it was *zu Hause* that Abraham came to knowing, whereas we believe that people can know when they are not "at home," when they are in inhospitable surroundings.

If we believe that thinking calls for a comfortable situation where we are perfectly at home, we are mistaken. On the contrary, thinking will make strangers of us in our "day-to-dayness"; it will lay down conditions that will guarantee our "foreignness." Like Abraham we must remain beyond a mentality that gets lost in the thingness of things; we must see everything "from outside" – outside the obvious, the taken-for-granted, the traditional. The Greek philosophers called this *thaumazo*, that is, admire, to look *at* in an undistracted way. This comes about when everything surprises us. Chesterton, who was neither a theologian nor a philosopher but a thinker nonetheless, said, "The thing to be wondered at is not that some day the sun does not rise but that it rises every day." This is what is meant by being surprised. We are not amazed at prodigies all about us until something goes awry. One gets accustomed to one's surroundings, and that which would be the object of greatest admiration if one lived in the inhospitable country of thought is not admired. The attitude of thought is like being in the desert. Nietzsche wrote some of his letters with the return address "From the Desert." Obviously, he did not mean a geophysical desert.

Thus the situation of Christians in Argentina who wish to be thinkers is uncomfortable: first, because they are thinkers and, second because they are Christians. If

thinking in itself is critical, it becomes ever more so from the standpoint of Christian faith. Faith, instead of giving us security, leaves us exposed to the elements. We should not ask security of Christianity but, rather, a scope of absolute comprehension that is constantly thrusting us forward. We said before that faith is a new "world." To think from the new world of faith is even more abysmal than thinking from the daily world. Thinking is to refer to the foundation of things, to what is hidden beneath the obvious corruption, to what is covered up by the dust of the day, namely, being. And when we think about being from the viewpoint of faith, the abyss becomes deeper. Its distance from us is even greater; we realize that thinking will never embrace all we set out to think about. There will never be an identification of theory with praxis. The dream at the end of *Hegel's Logic* is impossible because of its finitude.

This kind of thinking arises from crisis, the crisis that means our whole rhythm of life is changing. That is why Zubiri says that Socrates not only thought but made thought his life; to think became his *ethos*. Anyone, then, who thinks and makes thinking a way of life lives in crisis. It can be said that such a person lives in constant estrangement from day-to-dayness and can no longer eat, dress, sleep, or do anything as before. Thinking is the fruit of conversion, the culmination of existential conversion. One's life is changed. If not, one is not thinking. We have so often overlooked this in philosophy as well as theology. The leap we spoke of must become mature. And the leap, paradoxically, that comes about in the one who begins to think is allowed by the one who is already thinking, or should be allowed-but not in a theoretical way or on the strength of a theological, epistemological, or philosophical argument, because the beginner is still at the nonphilosophical stage. This is the question of the

introduction to philosophy or theology. The beginner must be exhorted to conversion and death. *Death?* Yes, death to day-to-dayness, because to be ensconced and comfortable in day-to-dayness makes real thinking impossible; this death should roil our guts. Where there is no hurt there is no thought. If one does not live this to the hilt, thought will be sophistic, unrealistic.

The person in the street does not think. The average person calculates, weighs things deliberately but does not think, never goes to the root of things, to their ultimate dialectical horizon. For example, I always ask my philosophy students, "What is a watch?" After pondering the question, they eventually arrive at saying that a watch is an instrument for keeping time. From that point on I devote two or three classes demonstrating what is "beneath" the watch. If there is such a thing as a watch, it is because persons need to know what time it is. If they need to know the hour, it's because time is a value for them. Is it not said that time is money? So, what is of value then is not time, but money. And for whom is money of value? For the person who wants to "be-in-the-money," the bourgeois. It is not surprising, then, that the modern bourgeois would wear a watch close to his or her person like a bracelet. Whether I like it or not, my thinking arises from my ethos, from the ethos of the person of Moscow, Paris, or New York. As Pier Pasolini would say, "The bourgeoisie is found in modern society, whether it be capitalist or socialist." It can be said that the bourgeois ethos is so rooted in our culture, that, without a crisis, there can be no thinking. The Hindu monk has no use for a watch because he is not interested in saving time; it is not money to him. The same would be true of St. Francis of Assisi.

The reason we do not think on a daily basis is that everything is covered with the patina of the obvious. We

have to overcome the bourgeois streak that is in all of us and put ourselves in a state of crisis. We must encamp outside the security of the fortress and know how to penetrate and dwell in an inhospitable land; from there we discover that a condition necessary for Christian thinking is to come out from behind the walls of Christendom. Its feeling of security is more deeply rooted in us than we imagine. The stamp of Christendom's security is on all our institutions; it is to be found in our theology and even in our Thomistic philosophy (not in the philosophy of Thomas-his thought did not enjoy the security of being Thomistic and he ran the usual risk of creative inhospitality by being an original thinker). This security is so deeply ingrained in us that it is possible that we will arrive at death before we can uproot it. Maybe those who are born after us will be free of it, but for us of this transitional generation it is too much a part of us. There are those for whom it is psychologically impossible to do without this security. If we take away from them their cultural scaffolding, it would be like taking away the skeletal structure of the body-there would be left a mass of blubber .

This is why many people in the church who are adults-we would not want to call them old-are incapable of a new point of view; supposedly the change would be too much for them. One of the cardinals at Vatican Council II said, "Our faith is coming to an end." What was coming to an end was the cultural support for his faith-Christendom. Any thinker who wants to be a Christian today in Argentina will have to abandon the false security of Christendom and be content again with poverty: a total poverty, the poverty of the remnant, of the "poor of Yahweh." The poor that Jesus talks about are not necessarily the economically poor but the "poor of Yahweh." They are individuals who radically under-



stand their finiteness before the Absolute. They know that they are definitively open-ended, that they will never be a totalized totality. It is no trouble for them to bow low in adoration because they recognize their finiteness. This poverty must go very deep so that, like Moses in the desert, we can remain absolutely silent and then return with open ears and alert eyes in order to discover the real, the historic signs of the Lord's presence.

I don't know if anyone has ever had the experience of what this would be like. For example, suppose we left America and its European culture and journeyed to a country where we would have to speak a foreign tongue; suppose we left a Latin liturgy for a Byzantine liturgy, our own traditions for the traditions of others; suppose we left our customary work for a totally different work. Only then would we have the existential experience of being totally "without support." Because the language we spoke would be badly spoken, our work would be badly done, the social prestige we had enjoyed would be gone. We would then feel in our guts what it is like to be poor. Only later on would we become somewhat comfortable with the language, the traditions, the theology. We would get to the substance of what it was like before Christendom.

A concrete example: A theologian asks, "What is a parish?" The word "parish" in the Byzantine empire was the name given a municipality; it comes from the political and administrative terminology of Christendom. But what today in substance is a parish? The parish archives? A brick building? The parish is nothing more than the Eucharist in its communitarian celebration. All other elements in a parish can be changed around but as long as the Eucharist is celebrated by a living community, the parish goes on being a parish; anything else is added baggage. If we apply this kind of philosophical Christian

thinking to something like the sacraments, we would at long last understand that the substance of things is very simple and that everything else is an unsubstantial encumbrance. We must strip ourselves of everything to arrive at absolute poverty. It is in absolute poverty that real thinking begins, especially if the individual has faith and, better still, if the person has philosophical skills that will carry into theology. Whoever goes deep down in the substance of things will be a true reformer, one capable of authentic *revolution*.

Really, thought, "revolution" is not a good word. *Revolvere* means "to turn back." But no revolutionary would accept that meaning. The better word we are looking for is *subvertere*-to put on top that which was hidden below. That which is hidden must be brought to light. Much more than being revolutionary, we must be subversive, like the prophets, not in the ordinary sense of the word but in mind for humankind is the same thing that they, without realizing it, are opposed to. There is a bourgeois soul inside many who claim to be revolutionaries and the cannot be counted on to resolve the present state of affairs.

Thinking has become in this epoch of crisis much more necessary. I had been trying to tell a group of Mexican students this very thing. But one student in philosophy said to me, "Professor, why do we need philosophy if we are to engage in a revolution?" After much discussion the student came to admit that, precisely because we are going to bring about reforms, we have to know what these reforms should be and why they should come about. The choice of revolution is clear to the revolutionary but this clarity itself must be put to the test of crisis if is to be authentic.

## SCHOLASTICISM AND THE MODEM PERIOD

One of the aspects of Catholic thinking is the unified structure of our philosophy and theology. This presents us with a problem. All thinking needs mediation. Thinking is reflecting. It demands a method, a way of getting to the heart of things. In the church almost until the present day the instrument for thought has been Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy. It is a method of philosophizing that has become a system. Aristotle did not build a system, nor did Thomas, but others came along and systematized them.

In Latin America, and especially in Argentina, Scholasticism has been the church's philosophy. It has had two constitutive poles. In the first place, Scholasticism (Thomistic, Suarezian, Augustinian, Scotist) was the formative influence here; it was taught officially in the seminaries. But in the second place, along came neo-Thomism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The bishops studied it as seminarians and, in Rome or Spain, made a special study of canon law. The professors in Argentinian seminaries, until recently, taught only Scholasticism. The more outstanding thinkers among the laity, at the beginning of the century, studied only Thomism. It was a question, like it or not, of a Scholasticism that ignored, without realizing it, most of the fundamental theses of modern thought. With its essentialistic categories it "thingified" the world and people; being became mere existence opposed to essence; people were cognizant subjects in opposition to thingified objects. From that standpoint it is difficult to accept the "world," history, new existential conceptualizations. Scholasticism-not medieval Scholasticism, which for its time was quite revolutionary-must be

abandoned. It has been no more than the scaffolding for the kind of thinking produced by Christendom.

Scholasticism as such came about as a creation, especially in the thirteenth century; it arose as risk and adventure. Think of the real, concrete, historic Thomas—the Thomas who was able to be a professor because his order had broken a professors' strike at the university in Paris. The Franciscans and Dominicans came to Paris and betrayed the striking professors. Their own men took over because the others were on strike. Nothing is ever black and white in human history.

Thomas taught and rethought Aristotle. He translated some of the texts. (This makes us wonder if there is not an Aristotle of our day.) He wrote commentaries on the texts, that is, until Bishop Tempier got wind of what he was doing and condemned his theses. Thomas was not born a "doctor" of the church but became a venturesome professor in proposing new theses to supplant old theses. For his time he evidenced a very coherent, mature, and contemporary teaching. Scholasticism, on the other hand, is only a repetition.

Today our task is to do what Abelard, Bonaventure, and Thomas did. We must confront our times, determine what methods are best adapted to understanding contemporary reality, and use them.

Modern Scholasticism is unaware of how deeply it is influenced by modern thought. Take, for example, a text as simple as the translation of Thomas's *Summa Theologica*, published by B.A.C. (It is not for me to say whether it is a good or bad translation.) At times we run across a sentence that says, "The *thing [res]* is understood" but it is translated, "The *object* is understood." The translator doesn't realize that he is employing modern categories about being that were foreign to Thomas; they would also be foreign to a post-modern person. Neo-

Thomism to a great extent is confined within modern realism. (I distinguish between modern and medieval realism.) Reading a book as important as Jacques Maritain's *Degrees of Knowledge*, we discover that there is continual talk of object and transobject, subject, etc. Without being aware of it, Scholastic thought reflects the thought of its time.

#### BEYOND SCHOLASTICISM AND MODERNITY; THE HERMENEUTIC QUESTION

The Christian thinker must go beyond Christendom to its foundation: Christianity. There must be a return to the de facto experience of Christians before Christendom came to be. We have to rethink the original experience of *being* Christian. What is the horizon of comprehension in which things take on a Christian meaning? We have to make a hermeneutic description of what a "Christian world" would be.

Concretely, in my treatise *El humanismo semita* I wanted to go deeply into this matter—a task that proved harder than it might appear. What is the horizon of comprehension of the Christian apart from Christendom and before it? That "comprehension of being" is different from that of the Greeks. It is different also from that of modern thinkers, although the latter begin with a "comprehension of being" proper to Christians rather than to the Hellenists. The "subject" on whom it devolves to transform substantiality into subjectivity had to undergo the experience of being as a person, something the Greeks lacked. Thus in order to get to a Descartes, it would have been out of the question to go directly from the Stoics and Aristotle—skipping over Ockham and Thomas and the anthropological and christological councils that spoke of Jesus Christ as a *person*. At the heart of every

anthropological question is the "Adamic myth," as an expression of the "Adamic experience" of responsible freedom in the face of temptation. Heidegger forgets this, because the line he develops from the pre-Socratics up to and beyond modern thought skips over the Christian experience of being. For Heidegger Christianity seems never to have existed. Perhaps it should be the function of post-modern and post-Christian thought to reformulate the original experience of being in Judeo-Christian thought where Christian philosophy, if there is such, begins. Go back beyond modern Scholasticism to its foundation. The foundation of Scholasticism needs a new conceptualization. In this task we are in the stage of childhood.

In 1919, Heidegger, according to Richardson, conducted a seminar on the Hermeneutic of the De Facto, that is, on the interpretation of the de facto event. He had at hand one of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians and a few verses from Second Corinthians. It was a philosophical seminar organized by a thinker who had done four semesters of theology between 1909 and 1911. The problematic put forth by Heidegger was this: It was necessary to determine how the primitive Christian community -the Thessalonian letter was well chosen because of its emphasis on the Second Coming-faced up de facto to the future, the paradigmatic experience of life. In the letter the Lord is about to come and the Parousia is passionately awaited by those first Christians. That coming of the Lord as Parousia is what Heidegger in *his Being and Time* came to see as the parousia or manifestation of being. With the vantage point of knowing what the future would bring, he situates, from the merely human view, the de facto experience of life among the early Christians.

In 1920 Heidegger took up in another seminar the

question of Augustine and Neo-Platonism as a prototype of an inadequate conceptualization of de facto experience. De facto Christian experience was badly formulated from the beginning. Heidegger is in no way opposed to Christianity but, rather, to a Hellenized Christian theology because of its unsatisfactory way of formulating and conceptualizing. This theology and this philosophy are a constitutive part of Christendom. It can be said that Christendom managed to cover over the original fact of the de facto experience of Christian living and to conceptualize it in an unsatisfactory way. Although it may well have rejected certain unacceptable aspects of Hellenic thought, it neglects other Judeo-Christian facts because the conceptualization had no room for them. This is precisely the reason for our yearning to rethink and reconceptualize the de facto Christian experience today in Latin America. *Being and Time* expresses this critical attitude on another level. The question today rests with looking for new notions, concepts, and methods for explaining more in depth what is happening daily, existentially, de facto. We have just begun the task.

We have said that faith is a *habitus* (accident) of the *intellectus* (intellect). Furthermore it is said that it is a "belief," an "adherence to." At any rate the intellect, according to theoretical anthropology, has a very clear function. If, in contrast, we consider faith as a "supernatural mode of existential being," we will have to reformulate our definition of intellect as the ability to comprehend; it is no longer to be seen as the classic intellect but as something very different because it is an aspect of the being of the person as an existential "comprehender." Out of this reformation would come a whole new treatise. Be it said that such a treatise has not yet been undertaken but, when it is, it should respond to a

number of questions. First, how does one acquire faith? Then, how should it be taught? De facto, life is the teacher of faith; we don't learn faith mainly from the catechism or a long list of other theoretical expressions. Faith is something learned in living. Family life as it was lived before Christianity, before coming to faith, should change after becoming Christian. How do I learn to live a Christian family life? I learn from another Christian.

Everything in the world thus changes its meaning. *Every* thing, because the horizon of comprehension has begun to change and thus the question becomes: How can we learn the new meaning that things have taken on? I will never understand the horizon of comprehension as an "object." If the horizon were objectifiable, we could apprehend it theoretically and by this alone become Christians. But the horizon is, rather, projectifiable. What we do every day is become aware of the meaning of a particular object and we project this upon the horizon. The new meaning of that object, in the light of faith, we project equally on the horizon and that projection is like an organic accumulation of all de facto experiences. The horizon is the fruit of projection and the basis on which I understand everything. Thus faith is learned de facto in historic living. A child learns faith, not in the catechism but within the family, in the world, in the Christian community. A Christian learns faith not in a theoretical catechumenate but in the praxis of a Christian community. The theoretical catechumenate becomes an explicit statement of what the person is already living; if the person is not living it, the theoretical catechumenate is of no avail. Out of all this could come a whole new treatise of faith as not simply a *habitus*, but as a "supernatural mode of existential being."

Thus everything would need to be reformulated. Original sin would have to be totally reformulated. Here we



reformulate what Tresmontant, in a simple, ontological way, says about original sin: The person is in essence unfinished, and, therefore, by nature unsaved. That is, because of their ontological structure and because they are designed for the future, people can never reach totalized totality, to use a phrase of Sartre's. This means, first of all, to be in a state of peccability-the person can not-be-and, second, to be in a state of unsalvation – because what is saved cannot not-be. This thesis is metaphysical and not theological. It is what contemporary philosophers think about finitude. In the face of a clear and explicative formulation of original sin, Augustinian "biologism" and its own hidden Manichaeism are superseded, and, furthermore, baptism is given a much clearer statement: At the moment of creation, God had to plan human redemption as well; salvation, as totalized totality, is granted as a gratuitous gift in the grace of baptism.

But baptism *de facto* does not have as its only finality individual salvation because, as we have said, everyone is given this Christic grace in a mysterious manner. *De facto*, baptism is our entrance into the church. Baptism is not received; one is received by baptism into the church. Entrance into the church is not a matter only of individual salvation but principally the taking on of prophetic and historic responsibility to non-Christians. We have to reformulate baptism as being a matter of historic consecration.

After Christendom, we have to start anew to reformulate everything. I'm not saying we should forget about tradition. On the contrary. The one who destroys history for the sake of a needed conceptual reformulation is the real respecter of tradition. Whereas the traditionalist, in settling for the obvious, imposes what is false. If one

repeats a century-old formula today, it has to be false: What it meant a century ago is not what it means today, because the "world" has changed, matured. Human truth cannot be eternal, unchangeable. Finite truth is intrinsically historical and, therefore, it opens itself progressively to the Absolute. We can say that when we situate ourselves in a way that enables us to comprehend being as it manifests itself, we are then able to perceive what is manifested. The problem lies in knowing how to situate ourselves. But that manifestation is always historical and, in turn, dialectically gradual. We can see, then, how many false problems are derived from an inadequate conceptualization of what is truth. The Christian thinker will have to put aside Christendom rudely and, in philosophy, the essentialistic Scholasticism. We now have to rethink everything "outside" Christendom and Scholasticism.

This demands a discovery of the new historic "situation." We are in a civilization that is profane, secularized, pluralistic, technical-but not technical in the modernistic sense. People are beginning to discover that there *are* limits to what they can achieve. People do not so much dominate things as they are dominated by them. We blast our way to the moon but in a very limited and careful way. We realize that we are not the masters of space but that space is our master and that we must humbly recognize our finitude. The moon has come closer but galactic and intergalactic space seems further away than ever. The moon was much nearer to the Greeks, circling around them in the celestial sphere. Furthermore there were only a few other spheres, no more. Now there are millions of galaxies millions of light years away. We are smaller than ever and the more our knowledge grows, the more insignificant we become. We discover that

everything around us imposes limitations on us. Contemporary people are closer to God because they are closer to their own smallness.

The atheism of the modern god-the god that, according to Heidegger's understanding of Nietzsche, has died-is the death of a value. But the death of a value is not the death of God. In European culture God had become a value useful to people. What is God in Kant's system? Or in that of Descartes? God is a kind of idol that people have made in their own image and likeness to meet the demands of a system. If that god dies, blessed be God! Once the fetish has died, the God of Israel may appear on the horizon. It can be said that the "death of god" is the preparatory state for God's authentic manifestation. We have to discover not only a new historic manifestation of being but, along with it, a new hermeneutic. And that is the real and present task of thought in the 1970s. Ricoeur has demonstrated that the hermeneutic crisis is the biggest problem of our time. Psychoanalysis is a hermeneutic, an interpretation, not the kind found in natural science, physics, chemistry, but in history; it is an interpretation of the "logic of desires" manifested in dreams. History is a hermeneutic. Biblical exegesis is a hermeneutic of faith; so are the human sciences in general (psychology, sociology). So that is the problem-we have to rethink the whole matter of methodology. We must go beyond the phenomenology of Husserl.

Heidegger tells us that phenomenology remains as a historical given which the history of philosophy will study as one of its currents; considerably beyond phenomenology is the question of fundamental hermeneutics. That is the kind of hermeneutics we must discover. We have to focus it on our daily experiences in Latin America. Armed with an adequate hermeneutic method, we must

get to a description of the meaning of daily experience, the comprehension of being and of things in Latin America. The task is enormous. Ernesto Mayz Vallenilla of Caracas, in his small book *El problema de America*, tells us that we must "let the meaning of the original being of America come to light through an existential analysis of our pre-ontological understanding of beings in a new world. This is the road we must follow all through time and history, the original history of America."

Here history is joined to ontology and the latter, in turn, is joined to theology. Anyone without these instruments is incapable of renewal. And this task of an existential analysis of the preontological understanding of being in America should be done generationally. What are the ultimate horizons of historico-transcendental comprehension which at the same time would be concrete and preconceptual? The answer to this question would be a description that would clarify for us what we are and how we as Latin Americans are radically different. We say "comprehension of being" or of the "historic world" because it is the comprehension of each epoch. Being reveals itself epochally. But in turn it is transcendental, in the sense that it is neither this nor that thing or genus; it is beyond everything, like a horizon. This transcendental horizon is not abstract but concrete because it is mine, ours, of our epoch. We must not confuse the abstract-universal of the concept with the concrete-transcendental of the horizon. The question is very simple; if I conceptualize a microphone in front of me, I interpret it when, for example, I say that a microphone is used for-. A horizon is intrinsically nonconceptualizable because if I want to have it "before my eyes" and I conceptualize it, I would be conceptualizing it from another horizon. It would then cease to be horizon. People conceptualize everything surrounding them as things

"within" the world in a universal manner, but always from a nonconceptualized horizon. In the realm of the supernatural, faith explains this horizon.

It is impossible to describe thoroughly a nonconceptualized horizon; nevertheless, we can make an attempt. We can take a look at some of the elements of differentiation with other cultural spheres and arrive at some kind of understanding as to where the differences lie. But I repeat that it is impossible to describe a nonconceptualized horizon; the existential comprehension of being never is complete because being manifests itself here and now and, later on, historically, in another situation, ...and still later on, in still another. Since the manifestation is historical, people will never understand being, absolute being, either in daily life or, even less, in their thinking. But the task, for its part, becomes more complicated when thought considers being as theme. It becomes much more difficult to describe that horizon of being's manifestation than to understand it in day-to-day living. This task, which is impossible to do adequately, can at least be attempted.

At any rate this task must be undertaken, however imperfectly, if we are to give an ontological foundation to every science of the spirit in Latin America. This is essential for theology, because theology also has the task of describing what it is to be a Christian in Latin America. A theology conceptually adequate for the de facto experience of Europe has only just begun; in fact, it has progressed much less than has been reported. There are great theologians who, with their "traditionalist" formation, are able to formulate the now, thanks to prescientific intuitions. Take Yves Congar, for example. He is stuck with a conceptualization from Christendom, yet he is able, with his considerable intuition, to formulate new realities, but his conceptualization is not really needed. If

in Europe they are just getting started, how about we in Latin America who haven't even started?

A conceptual reformulation of dogma applied to Latin American existential reality with a strong and disciplined hermeneutic method is today very difficult. An Argentinian theologian told me that very often formulations are drawn up by the "sense of smell"; we have to make that sense of smell "transcendental." We have to stop talking in terms of "It seems to me," and start talking epistemologically. It is a matter of method. We have to discipline our sense of smell methodologically. Otherwise our theology will be put together sporadically. That is the way it has been here in Latin America. Nevertheless, the recent "theology of liberation" has opened up new paths.

#### THE NEED FOR CREATIVE, HISTORICAL, CONCRETE, COMMITTED, ASYSTEMATIC, PROPHETIC, ANGUISHED THOUGHT

We need *creative*, not imitative, thought. Many are carried away by easy solutions; many in Latin America, for example, call themselves Marxists. This is being imitative, not creative. They seem to be adopting a doctrine interpretative of a phase of European modernity. There is no awareness of the simple fact that the man named Marx was a philosopher and not some kind of god. He had his temporal, epochal limitations. What should be looked into are his historical *intentions*, taking on those that bear repeating. We should go beyond the conceptual formulation because we have gone beyond his epoch, the "ontology of the subject" which was the basis for his philosophy. All those imitative currents should be rethought from a much more creative position.

We need *historical* thought with Latin American roots, thought that begins with our concrete ontological

horizon of comprehension. It should be thought that would know how to interpret Martin Fierro, for example' and have him say things that he has not yet said. For this we need someone with an ontological and even theological vision who could extract what lies behind and beneath *Martin Fierro*. This work, which itself is historical, traditional, and therefore monumental, would take on a truly universal aspect. Look what Heidegger did for the poet Holderlein. Our culture would thus reach its proper horizons.

Our thought should be *concrete*, not abstract, able to bridge the gap between foundation and intraworldly praxis, cognizant of the restrictive situations in which we, as oppressed, find ourselves.

Our thought should be *committed*, and this is even more difficult. In general, thinkers are inhospitably isolated in thought but become quite comfortable there. In this isolation they disregard the demands of day-to-day living. In the *Critique de la raison dialectique* Sartre says that in the epoch of Marx it might well have been necessary to be revolutionary; but in our epoch the revolutionaries are so numerous that it would be well to cut down on them, and it was for this reason that people like Sartre dedicated themselves to thinking. Nevertheless, thinking can be the easy way out. The thinker ought to be committed in whatever way possible. We have no need for thought that is pure theory; theory must emerge from praxis. Thinkers who uproot themselves from the praxis that engages their thinking are also totally uprooted, without being aware of it, from their existence. They begin to be sophists, mere academicians; they adopt less risky but also less inciting attitudes; they fail to fulfill their historical function.

Theoretically such thinkers know that Socrates would go to the Athenian market place and risk asking the

politicians if they were politicians. When they answered Yes, Socrates would ask: What is politics? And right there in public he would figuratively strip naked the politicians because they did not know the meaning of politics, even though claiming to practice it. No wonder they hated him and finally did away with him. Once he was out of the way, things returned to "normal." But his death showed that he was truly a philosopher. Jesus, a theologian, also risked his standing and in this he is an example to the theologian. The death of Socrates is the very paradigm of a philosopher's death; the death of Jesus is the paradigm of the death of the Christian, of humankind as such, and of the theologian in particular. These deaths must serve us as examples of what committed thought is, thought that grows out of crisis, that deeply respects the truth, the historic truth which, therefore, is committed to the process of liberation.

Our thought should be *asystematic* and open. It should never lean toward system. On the contrary, it should know that "knowing" can never adapt itself completely to ordinary, everyday comprehension and that its fall begins with systematization. To systematize is to build a scaffolding that impedes the growth of life. But leaving the question open is never easy.

It should be thought that is in and from oppression, in poverty and in injustice. These are the conditions of possibility for authentic thinking among us. Anyone living in opulence is unable to think; in contrast, those living in poverty and insecurity will have the ethos that will enable them to communicate with the rich as to what they should be thinking about: namely their Latin American brothers and sisters. It is very possible-and it is already happening-that the opulent society would turn to our underdeveloped world to ask for a breath of life for their own cold, academic thinking. It would not



be utopian to imagine the time-and it is getting to this point-in which the people of tomorrow will look to our Third World, our underdeveloped world, because of its proximity to life and to poverty in which the spirit best shows forth its greatness.

Our thought should be *proPhetic* in the sense that it lives in anticipation, running ahead of events (*vorlaufen*) as though called by the future (*Zu-kunft*). Christian thought in Latin America should be able to tell the *meaning* of the present and to say how, in that present, being arrives. This by no means signifies being traditionalists or aristocrats; but neither does it signify being like an alienated progressivist in a utopian "can-be" that never averts to the past. The progressivists who hurl themselves toward the future for the sake of the future have an interesting psychological and mythical makeup. They in no way identify with the sins of the past; they are innocent of them and, therefore, they speak of a radical, agonizing beginning; history starts with them. It is an adamic, pre-sin innocence. By contrast, those who absorb, take upon themselves, the sin of their people, also comprehend the meaning of that people. Then the "can-be" will be adequately grasped and will mean progress, revolution, but not utopia. The *ou-topos* is nowhere. Many of those who leap into action without historical rootedness are utopians.

Our thought must come from *anguish* because it is the thinking of an errant people, "errant" in the sense that it is wandering in error. Its destiny and being are hidden, it does not know what it is. Our thought should clarify this. The people look for someone to point the way, but all it has are sophists, false prophets, idols; it does not know where it is. On the face of the best propaganda, or indeed any kind of propaganda it follows this or that trend; it lacks a formed, critical awareness.

## THE DANGEROUS SITUATION OF THOUGHT

This plan for a drastic overhaul in our thinking surely will be criticized by the Scholasticism of Christendom. conservative individuals lose their equilibrium when the earth as history starts to move and they feel they are falling. The manner of perceiving humankind in Christendom is static, like a monument on a pedestal. For the new vision of humankind hurled into history a better symbol is that of a jet. Speed itself prevents the plane from falling; when it loses speed it falls. History is somewhat like that-when the historical manifestations of being are lived and understood, history is in motion; its situation is "secure," but security comes from the very velocity of the thrust. When it is detained, its dynamic security disappears. When history causes the ground under us to move on, the people of Christendom have a sense of falling and are critical of anyone who demands that they get a move on, and so they fault the latter as subversive, as destroyers of the foundation.

Latin American Marxism will also criticize this approach to thought, because it believes that it has settled once and for all the interpretation of revolution. But it fails to realize that every recipe imported to Latin America in fact is impractical. I believe that prophetic thought should cut a path between the right and the left, not in order to occupy a centrist, "moderate" position but as a cutting edge, we will be situated among the left and the right and a traditionalism that holds that "everything in the past was better." It is a dangerous position to be in, open to attack from all sides. On one side we will be seen as reactionaries, on the others as Communist, Marxists, progressivists, or what have you. But one thinking is certain:

Both the left and the right, capitalism or Marxism (not, however, to be identified with socialism) must be superseded, and to this every Christian thinker ought to be deeply committed.

This prophetic function should always be a matter of "universalization," a "liberating critique." People absolutize the relative. The Christian has a transhistorical vision, and therefore in history can always criticize the relative as being relative from the point of view of the absolute. It can be said that there is a demythification of every absolutized relative and that this is the valuable and ultimate function of Christian thinkers: They set out to demythologize the insidiously absolutized finite horizons and thus hurl history forward. For Christians human history can never come to a full stop. If that ever comes about, it will be because God has decided the time has come to call a halt to human history. Even though millions of years go by, human history will never reach irreversible totality because the history of the finite is unfinished .

The Chinese empire closed in upon itself and for 2,500 years was able to live a kind of anticipated eternity; this was possible because "some thing" became absolutized and no one could any longer demythologize it from within. China lacked a prophet who, critical of the finite horizon, would have thrust it into the beyond. This should not be the case where there is a Christian capable of demythologizing the absolutized relative. But obviously this involves risk. Under the Roman empire, when the Christians said, "The sun is not a god nor is the moon a goddess," they were in effect atheists in respect to the empire's gods and for this they were dragged to the arena. They deserved to be because they were the subversives of the empire, so much so that in time they

conquered it. But there first had to be a dialectic process of transcendence, and the Christian presence assured that Rome would not be like the Chinese empire; out of Rome came another empire and out of the latter, the present-day nation-states. If a culture has no transcendent emergence, it becomes stabilized because it becomes intrinsically integrated. The prophet always blows apart this kind of synthesis, thrusting the absolutized relative toward the future.

This, then, is the prophetic, universalizing, de-mythologizing, "liberatingly critical" role that we must always undertake. It is an uncomfortable position. It is the position of the apologists of the second century. Prophets belong squarely in their own culture, today the post-Christendom, post-modern culture, and they belong equally well to the church. The prophets need to belong to both worlds. This double belonging puts them "out in front"; that is always a dangerous position because one is criticized from both sides. People who are purely of the church, the clerics, are in an organization that allows them to absent themselves from the world. By contrast, those who are totally in the world, who have absolutized its values, live without contradictions but are incapable of transcending the world. The person "out in front" seems strange to these two. The cleric feels that the person "out in front" is leaving the church whereas the person of the world thinks that the same person is not sufficiently committed to the world. That is the position of the Christian—a person of *double belonging*—in the world and yet in the church. I think they will live and die as people divided, as misunderstood, and as forever losing. They will never see the final triumph of what they began. Those who witness the triumph will see it as something that just "happened," which will not be true.

If all that I have said were to be recast within the dialectic of domination (that is, the "practical" culmination of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity), we would understand the oppressive situation that weighs heavily upon Latin America and the need for liberation.