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## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA SINCE 1930\*

### INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church dominated the religious and cultural life and was a major influence in the political and economic life of Latin America during 300 years of colonial rule. In the nineteenth century, following independence from Spain and Portugal, freemasons, liberals and positivists in the new states challenged the Church's exclusive ideological claims and forced it on to the defensive. The secularization of the State and its absorption of liberal and anti-clerical influences, together with the confiscation of Church properties and the introduction of lay education, civil marriage and burial weakened the power of the Catholic Church, economically and socially as well as politically. As the State shed much of its conservative and Catholic past, so the Church was compelled to diminish its hitherto heavy reliance on the State and to look to its own resources and institutions. New challenges were posed in the first decades of the twentieth century by explicitly atheistic versions of anarchism and socialism. Free-thinking was a powerful force among urban intelligentsias; and the process of urbanization was frequently accompanied by a growth of religious indifference among all social classes.

During the papacies of Pius XI (1922-39) and Pius XII (1939-58) – and it is important always to remember that the Catholic Church is an international institution organized from Rome – the Church began to establish connections with new socio-political forces – industrial, bureaucratic, nationalist and popular – which, for lack of power, themselves needed allies. The Church, for the most part antiliberal and also now fiercely anti-communist, abandoned the defensive posture acquired during

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the liberal ascendancy, and placed its relationships with the state and civil society on a new basis. Thus after 1930 the Church again became a major actor in Latin American politics, whether governments were conservative and authoritarian, populist and developmental, liberal, or even revolutionary socialist.

At the same time, twentieth-century Roman Catholicism inherited traditions of popular religiosity that were strong among peasants, rural-urban migrants, and urban workers – native Americans, Blacks, people of mixed blood or poor immigrants from Mediterranean countries. The official Church was frequently divided over whether it should confront and try to eliminate religious syncretisms that ran contrary to the official theology proclaimed at the First Vatican Council (1870–1) and embodied in papal encyclicals, or whether it should accommodate them. If the bishops tried to purge popular religious practices and impose a uniform theology, they risked the defection of genuine believers at a time when religious disbelief was growing; if, however, they accommodated 'folk' variants, the bishops were open to accusations of diluting and betraying the mission of the Church and even of appeasing paganism. The result of these debates was usually an uneasy compromise. Numerous syncretic religious beliefs survived, often in conjunction with syncretisms in curing and healing practices; native Americans in the Andean republics and Central America blended Catholic and Amerindian beliefs; people of African descent, especially in Brazil and Cuba, worshipped at the shrines of Catholic virgins and saints who, in their eyes, were simultaneously African deities; poor Spanish immigrants in major cities conserved Hispanic folk beliefs. Important as an element of resistance to liberalism, popular religion co-existed uneasily with official Catholicism. In the second half of the twentieth century and especially from the 1960s, however, popular religion was increasingly acknowledged as having a place within the Church's pastoral mission. Yet the institutional adoption of popular religion was ambiguous: in some hands it was manipulative, in others a justification for revolution.

Improved communications made it possible for the Vatican to impose some limits upon the autonomy that distance had hitherto availed to the Latin American bishops. Yet the Catholic Church of the 1930s and 1940s has frequently been misrepresented by conservative and radical theologians alike as uniform and monolithic. It was neither. The victory of General Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War encouraged the authoritarian elements in the Church who identified with the ultra-montanism associated

with the First Vatican Council to press for an intransigent rejection of all manifestations of 'modernism' and liberalism; and, in particular, to interpret and denounce all worker organizations, even those sponsored by the Church, as containing a potential for communism and subversion. At the same time, more conciliatory elements, influenced by the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimi Anno* (1931) assumed the more flexible posture of Pius XI and XII, who argued that in a world where communism, fascism and Nazism endangered the Catholic faith, cautious concessions should be made to liberal and populist governments, so long as they abandoned anti-clerical policies, especially in education, refrained from further assaults upon property ownership by the Church, and undertook welfare measures that promoted class harmony in the cities. The cumulative impact of minor changes in the Church between the 1920s and 1950s, for the most part ignored by historians, was considerable.

Belatedly recognizing that Latin America was the largest constituency of the Roman Catholic Church (and, as the population of Latin America entered a period of rapid expansion, that with most growth potential – in 1960 Latin America already had 35 per cent of the world's Catholic population compared with Europe's 33 per cent) Pius XII designated Latin America as a region urgently requiring re-evangelization. There followed a large influx of missionaries – priests, monks and nuns – from western and southern Europe, the United States and Canada, who were assigned to areas identified as suffering a serious scarcity of clergy, notably the burgeoning shanty-towns of large cities like Rio de Janeiro and Santiago de Chile. The presence of foreign-born clergy had a significant impact. Shocked by the conditions of the poor in the Latin American cities, they and their Latin American peers pressed vigorously for ecclesiastical resources to be allocated both to welfare programmes and to sociological analyses of poverty and welfare conditions. At the same time, a small number of young clergy, carefully selected as potential bishops, was sent by its superiors on scholarships to study at such institutions as the University of Louvain in Belgium. Here they were introduced to the social sciences in an environment shaped by usually cordial relationships between Catholics and laymen including socialist intelligentsias and activists, that were established in moments of trade union solidarity and consolidated in the Resistance to the Nazi occupation during the Second World War.

At the same time there was a shift from control by the Church hierarchy to greater lay participation. Between the 1920s and 1950s the Catholic

bishops and their allies in the religious orders, answered lay, free-thinking and atheistic challenges by over-hauling the networks of Catholic primary and secondary schools, expanding their range of publications, and by opening Catholic universities. Pious groups of Catholic youth, women, artisans and students were co-ordinated under the umbrella of Catholic Action (Acción Católica). Furthermore, the official Church both sponsored Catholic trade unions which in Colombia, for example, were to merge after the Second World War in the Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia (UTC), and gave its blessing and encouragement to the formation by Catholic lay intellectuals of Christian Democratic parties which propagated a non-violent 'revolution in liberty' that was rooted in the social doctrines of the Church and in assumptions of class collaboration. Promising businessmen and the middle classes sustained development, and wooing urban workers and peasants with policies of redistribution and income growth, the Christian Democrats came to power in the 1960s in freely held elections in both Chile and Venezuela. Through class collaboration they aimed to achieve a peaceful 'middle way' that simultaneously limited the impact of an atheistic, materialistic communism that preached class warfare and of an unbridled, egoistic capitalism that exploited labour and upon which communism flourished.

By institutionalizing its lay movements, the Church, it could be argued, strengthened and reaffirmed pre-existing patterns of authority. In the late 1960s, however, the emergence of Christian Base Communities in Brazil and some parts of Hispanic America signified a return to much earlier traditions of active Christian believers, whose commitments and priorities were not defined exclusively by the Catholic hierarchy. Many of these Base Communities were connected with popular religious movements that had antecedents in the sixteenth century. They were also responses to the processes of reform during the papacies of John XXIII (1958-63) and Paul VI (1963-78) that were catalysed by the Second Vatican Council in Rome (1962-5), the encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963) stressing the social obligations of the Church to the poor, and the adoption by Pope John XXIII at the Vatican Council of the phrase *Iglesia de los pobres*.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the Council's decisions and recommendations that were considered particularly appropriate to Latin American conditions were clarified at the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, held ironi-

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesia Christi Lumen Gentium* (Collection of Encyclicals) (Madrid, 1967), I, 2493.



cally at the Catholic conservative citadel of Medellín in 1968. Several changes stood out. The Catholic Church declared its 'preferential option for the poor'. The vernacular was adopted in the mass; the liturgy was revised and made more accessible to the poorly educated, and the schedule of services was overhauled; the clergy was encouraged to identify more closely with the everyday tribulations of their poor parishioners; and the laity, male and, later and more cautiously, female, was encouraged to take a more active role in the ceremonies and daily life of the Church. Furthermore, the Medellín meeting redefined the concept of sinfulness. Whereas, conventionally, 'sin' was regarded as an individual matter, a direct consequence of the Fall, which might be absolved by the priest in the confessional when the sinner repented sincerely, now sin was reinterpreted as a collective matter. Structures of power and wealth that exploited the oppressed and dispossessed and that prevented them from enjoying the fullness of God's riches and the opportunity to prepare in dignity for the afterlife were defined by a new generation as sin-laden. The redemption of the poor would be achieved only when society itself achieved redemption.

The scene was set for the advocates of a prophetic, scripture-centred Church to denounce the alleged inadequacies of tradition-centred orthodoxies. Most controversially, Catholic radicals argued the need to adopt non-violent techniques of protest and resistance and to enter into pragmatic alliances with agnostics and atheists that were committed to radical social change; a minority contended that Catholics had a right to resort to violence to overthrow tyranny and that violent revolution could be successful in combatting the violence that shored up inequalities of power and wealth. Theologians of liberation proclaimed confidently that the Church had a duty to break its over-identification with entrenched interests, and had an obligation both to propagate social justice and to abandon the practices of preaching a saintly obedience and an unthinking fatalism to the poor. The poor were indeed to inherit the earth; and it was incumbent upon the Church as an institution to empower the poor so that oppressive structures might be destroyed.

Conflict with groups within the Church favourable to the status quo was inescapable. Fears of endemic generational conflict were widespread in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Catholic conservatives expressed concern that the Catholic Church would lose adherents (and funding) from the upper and middle classes, among whom religious indifference was already widespread, if ecclesiastical personnel and resources were redistributed to the ministry for the poor and to the building and maintenance of Church

buildings and schools and the management of welfare campaigns in poor parishes, urban and rural. But there was a broader anxiety and anger too: a view most eloquently expressed by Archbishop (and later Cardinal) of Medellín, Alfonso López Trujillo, who later became General Secretary of the Latin American Episcopal Council, that radical theologians were influenced by Marxist thinking, were belittling four centuries of self-abnegating Catholic evangelism and placing at risk the carefully nurtured relationships of the Church with the state and the ruling groups which brought numerous benefits to the Church as an institution and to Catholics of all social classes.

Some elements in the Catholic Right went several steps further. Catholic lay groups of *Tradición, Familia, Propiedad* in Chile, Brazil, Argentina and elsewhere, whose secrecy reminded their critics of the freemasonry which they condemned, appealed to the spirit of the Reconquista and recalled Francoist authoritarianism with a nostalgic reverence. Exponents of National Security doctrines in Argentina, Brazil and Chile won considerable episcopal and some lay support for the position that right-wing brutality and the abrogation of human rights were valid in the defence of Catholic civilization against Communist tyranny. The doctrine of National Security acquired a distinctly Catholic colouring. Some cardinals and archbishops of considerable reputation even contended that 'disappearances' and torture could be justified when they obstructed the subversion of terrorists and guerrillas. The duty of right-thinking Catholics was, they asserted, unambiguously clear: the defence of a traditional Catholic order and its values against its enemies.

This identification of one faction of the Catholic Church with authoritarian regimes of the right was seen by many non-Catholics as evidence of the decadence and decline of the Church as an institution, and was regarded with horror and, at times, anger by Catholic centrists, among them Christian Democrats, and especially by the Catholic left. And it should be noted that in Brazil, for example, while the military coup of 1964 was officially endorsed by the Catholic Church, the Church became, especially after the 'coup within the coup' of December 1968, the one institution that could voice opposition to economic policies that discriminated systematically against the poor and security policies that equated dissent with subversion – and be heard. Dom Helder Câmara, the archbishop of Recife, won world-wide acclaim for his courageous opposition to the military regime – as well as denunciations from the extreme right as a heretic and a 'Castro in a cassock'. Similarly, in Chile

after the military coup of 1973, which was also officially endorsed by the Catholic hierarchy, the Church became the focal point for the defence of human rights during the dictatorship of General Pinochet. And in Central America in the 1970s the Church played a prominent role in movements for social change and became the victim of unrelenting oppression and targeted campaigns of assassination perpetrated by the extreme right. Finally, the Catholic Left featured significantly among the Sandinistas in the Nicaraguan Revolution.

Organizations of Catholic human rights activists maintained pressure upon right-wing authoritarian regimes domestically by publicizing and denouncing their violations of human rights and, encouraged by the decisions of Presidents Jimmy Carter and François Mitterrand to upgrade the human rights components of their foreign policies, made effective use of the international networks of the Catholic Church in order to diffuse information and to raise international consciousness and condemnation of state terrorism and official brutality in Latin America. That they enjoyed some considerable success in internationalizing the human rights crusade was due in part to trends towards co-operation with non-Catholic groups, both secular and Protestant, and also to the increasing professionalism and efficacy of international human rights agencies like Amnesty International and Americas Watch, whose influence and prestige in Europe, North America and Latin America were rapidly growing. At the same time, Catholic non-governmental organizations played an invaluable role in supplying basic welfare provision to the poor, setting up training programmes for the young unemployed and providing assistance with modest grass-roots projects, all of which had been brutally terminated by the military regimes. As the austerity policies applied in response to the debt crisis of the 1980s undercut social policy provision further, so the various Catholic non-governmental organizations came to acknowledge that their activities were not as they had hoped merely transitional.

From around 1973, and especially under Pope John Paul II (1978–), circumstances were propitious for a reassertion of the Catholic right against the Catholic liberals and radicals. Conservative bishops took advantage of the changing international climate to undertake concerted action: to ordain like-minded clergy, to consecrate non-radical bishops, and to oppose the diffusion of liberation theology. Through careful preparation of the agenda, the theologians of liberation were excluded at the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla, Mexico, in 1979; and thereafter the main objective was to render the position of a

faction of conservative bishops, especially strong in Argentina and Colombia, impregnable. A campaign directed against liberation theologians was evident in the mid-1980s. A movement of 'new evangelism' that seemed to indicate the 'restoration' of the Church of the 1930s and 1940s crystallized in the years of preparation for the Fourth General Conference of Latin American bishops held at Santo Domingo in 1992.

#### THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

The first General Conference of the Catholic Church's Latin American bishops (*Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano*) was held in Rio de Janeiro in July–August 1955. The Conference founded the Latin American Council of Bishops (*Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*, CELAM), which was to play an important role of leadership and coordination during the following decades.<sup>2</sup> Also created, and lending at least a veneer of continental co-ordination to most areas of Church activity in Latin America were the following entities: the Latin American Confederation of Religious Orders, the Regional Conference of Catholic Youth, the Latin American branch of Catholic Working Youth, the Latin American Union of the Catholic Press, the Latin American Confederation of Christian Unions, the Confederation of Catholic Education, Catholic University Youth and the Organization of Catholic Universities of Latin America.

It was not, however, until January 1959, with the announcement of the Second Vatican Council, that the Episcopate began a profound reform. The Vatican Council met from October 1962 to December 1965. During those three years the 601 participating bishops from Latin America (22 per cent of the total)<sup>3</sup> gained new knowledge of church life in Africa, Asia, Europe, Canada and the United States, as well as other Latin American countries. The numerous meetings, contacts and lectures allowed them to confront the problems of how to accommodate the Church to the modern world.<sup>4</sup>

On their return to Latin America the bishops addressed the question of how to apply the deliberations and recommendations of the Council at the national level. Brazil launched an 'overall pastoral plan' that ran from

<sup>2</sup> *Ad Ecclesiam Christi* (apostolic letter), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1955), pp. 539–44; *Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano*, Conclusiones (Rome, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> E. Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 5th edn, (Mexico, D. F., 1984), p. 221.

<sup>4</sup> There has still been no historical study of the participation of the Latin American bishops in the Second Vatican Council. This is work that needs to be done.

January 1966 until 1970. In Argentina in May 1966 the episcopate met to study the recommendations of the Council, and then published a 'Declaration' to put them into practice. In Uruguay the bishops held a synod in Montevideo with the same objectives. In July–August 1966, 418 delegates (bishops, priests, monks and laymen) in Ecuador studied a plan of Council application. In August 1966 priests and laymen in Peru held a meeting to apply the recommendations of the Council. In Bolivia a liturgical reform was begun in 1966, and in 1968 an evaluation was made of the changes brought about. Similarly, a synod in Santiago, Chile, held in September 1968, evinced the fruits of the reform achieved.

At a regional level a meeting of Latin American bishops at Baños (Ecuador), in June 1966, attended by representatives of the commissions on education, the secular apostolate, social action and the priesthood as a whole, laid the foundations for church reform. This was immediately followed by the Tenth Annual Assembly of CELAM in Mar del Plata, on 'The role of the church in development and integration in Latin America', which shaped subsequent activity in the broader social and economic order. At the University Clergy Meeting in Buga (Colombia) in 1967, a reform of the Catholic universities was proposed that included student representation on the councils and facilitated some modernization of higher education. In Chile and elsewhere this meant strikes, boycotts and demonstrations. The Latin American Meeting on pastoral vocations in Lima (1967) undertook the groundwork for changes in theological education in the seminaries. The First Pastoral Meeting of Indigenous Missions in Melgar (Colombia) in 1968 substantially modified the Church's position with regard to the indigenous peoples. Finally, at the Meeting of Social Clergy (all from Latin America) in Itapoan (Bahia, Brazil) in 1968, basic steps were taken towards the meeting of the Second General Conference of Latin American bishops to be held in Medellín in August 1968. The theme of the Second Conference was to be 'The Presence of the Church in the Current Transformation of Latin America'.

On hundred and forty-six cardinals, archbishops, and bishops met in Medellín, together with fourteen monks, six nuns, fifteen lay-persons (including four women) and numerous consultants. Despite a warning from Pope Paul VI inaugurating the Second Conference that participants should not 'create in a field of faith a spirit of subversive criticism',<sup>5</sup> the

<sup>5</sup> *Iglesia y liberación humana*. Final documents from Medellín, edited by José Camps (Barcelona, 1969) (hereinafter cited as *Medellín*), p. 259.

'Basic Document' of the Conference was highly criticized by the right for its supposed leftist leanings. Sixteen documents emanated from the various working committees on such themes as Justice, Peace and Education. New approaches were outlined with regard to such priorities as neighbourhood pastoral activity, the liturgy, the training of clergymen and the role and functions of the priesthood. Patterns of political and economic dependency of poor countries and systems of class domination were clearly described. A demand for apostolic poverty in all Church institutions was made. The bishops assembled in Medellín came to the following conclusions: 'It is still apparent that Latin America finds itself – in many areas – in a situation of injustice that might be called institutionalized violence. We ought not, therefore, to be surprised that the temptation to act in violence arises in Latin America. We must not take advantage of the patience of people who for years have suffered under conditions that persons who have greater knowledge of human rights find difficult to accept.'<sup>6</sup> The 'Final Document' of the Medellín Conference came to be a manifesto for many priests, monks and lay-persons committed to the struggle for justice and to political, and in some cases revolutionary, action. It crystallized divisions in the Latin American Church, polarizing the conservative and radical factions for a generation.<sup>7</sup>

Between 1968 and 1972, the Latin American Church, through the various departments of CELAM, implemented the most important resolutions made since the Vatican Council began work in 1962. The Meetings of Episcopal Reform produced a profound change in the attitudes of many bishops. Among the participants in the July 1971 meeting in Medellín were Adalberto Almeida, archbishop of Chihuahua (Mexico), Jorge Manrique, archbishop of La Paz (Bolivia) and Oscar A. Romero, auxiliary bishop of El Salvador. For four years the progressive elements in the Church, those advocating for the poor, encountered little opposition within CELAM. Some disenchanted with reformism and developmentalism radicalized their positions: in 1972, for example, a group of young Christians, similar to many such groups in the continent, joined the Sandinista Front of National Liberation (FSLN) in Nicaragua. The official Church was converging again with popular religion, with marginal movements, with workers, peasants, indigenous peoples and Blacks. Slowly,

<sup>6</sup> *Medellín*, pp. 76–7.

<sup>7</sup> See *Los Obispos Latinoamericanos entre Medellín y Puebla. Documentos Episcopales 1968–1978* (San Salvador, 1978); and José Marins (ed.), *Praxis de los Padres de América Latina* (Bogotá, 1978), an excellent and complete anthology of episcopal texts.

structures of communication were being rebuilt with the Catholic masses who had drifted away from a Church more committed in the 1940s and 1950s to working with conservative elites and residents of the suburbs of the large cities.

The conservative and traditional sectors held their fire. They continued to be supported by elements in the Vatican, like, for example, Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, powerful at the Congregation of bishops and at the Commission for Latin America. Divisions within the senior ranks of the Vatican bureaucracy were of crucial importance to CELAM, now managed by a new, conservative executive secretary, Mons. Alfonso López Trujillo, auxiliary bishop of Bogotá before becoming archbishop of Medellín. And at its fourteenth regular meeting in 1972 in Sucre (Bolivia), CELAM underwent a change in its orientation and leadership. Conservative and traditional groups led by López Trujillo were strongly critical of the stances adopted by CELAM during the period since Medellín, and liberation theology became the target of their systematic opposition.

There is no doubt that during the final years of Pope Paul VI and the first years of Pope John Paul II, there was an internal movement in the Latin American Church that was highly repressive. The Roman Synods no longer had the prophetic presence of the Latin American bishops, and gave voice to those who lambasted the political choices of radical priests and laymen. Yet the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) demonstrated that a progressive voice was not yet silenced. Finally, another General Conference was called to define a new inspiration for the work of CELAM. This Third Conference had been due to take place five years after that at Medellín, that is to say, in 1973, but for ostensibly organizational reasons it was not held until 1979, in Puebla, Mexico. The group now in control of CELAM – conservatives, traditionalists and progressive developmentalists – aimed to exclude all those who had advocated for the poor since Medellín. Not one liberation theologian was invited to attend, although forty-two of the excluded Latin American theologians attended on the invitation of individual bishops and participated from outside the Conference. The episcopate was polarized; leadership was provided by on the one hand the Brazilian bishops, who had extensive pastoral experience and had taken a brave stand against military dictatorship in their country, and on the other by their more conservative Colombian and Argentine counterparts.

Pope John Paul II travelled from Rome via Santo Domingo to Mexico to inaugurate the Third General Conference of Latin American bishops at Puebla on 27 January 1979. From the beginning there were serious ten-



sions. For example, an agenda of topics presented by the Brazilian bishop Luciano Mendez was approved by a vote of 140 to 30, and the agenda proposed by CELAM officials was rejected. Twenty-three committees were formed. When the third version of the document was distributed to members of the Conference it was clear that the text had become extremely ambiguous, since it contained numerous contradictory positions which arose from the system that had been devised to propose corrections. On 11 February the definitive text was published – a text that was still to be amended later, which aroused much suspicion. Although the final text represented in many ways an advance over the accomplishments of the Medellín Conference, for example with its clear ‘preferential advocacy for the poor’, in other respects it displayed a withdrawal from a firm stand in favour of the oppressed.

After the Puebla Conference tensions within the Church increased. On the one hand, CELAM took a hard line, provoking a confrontation with the FSLN and its Catholic allies in Nicaragua, and precipitating the decision of Pope John Paul II to rebuke publicly bishops, clergy and members of the religious orders whom he asserted were placing temporal and political priorities before spiritual ones. On the other hand, the National Conference of Bishops in Brazil, attended by its nearly 400 bishops, projected a model of the Church committed to the Christian Base Communities, which constituted an important source of opposition to the military and enjoyed great spiritual authority among the poor. The systematic appointment by the Congregation of Bishops in Rome of mostly conservative prelates indicated, however, that the institutional Church was approaching the 1990s in a spirit of restoration that was contrary to the spirit that had prevailed at Medellín. The generation of bishops who took part in the Second Vatican Council and the Second General Conference at Medellín were retiring from their dioceses; some had died. A phase of profound episcopal renovation was thus coming to an end.

John Paul II played an active part in the life of the Latin American Church both through personal visits and a series of published documents. His presence in Mexico in 1979, his encyclical *Laborem exercens* (1981) – which made labour the key element in the social doctrine of the Church – and his critique of the Sandinista revolution (1983), during his visit to Managua, the ‘Instruction on some aspects of liberation theology’ (1984), and the second ‘Instruction’ (1986), all indicate a degree of interest in the region unknown among his predecessors. This was a consequence of the fact that the conflicts occurring within the Church in Latin America had

taken on world dimensions, having repercussions in particular in Africa and Asia.

#### FROM CATHOLIC ACTION TO CHRISTIAN BASE COMMUNITIES

During the 1920s and 1930s Pope Pius XI had taken advantage of the fragility of many old lay organizations to replace them with Catholic Action, the official institution whose mandate came from the episcopate. Catholic Action was created first in Italy in October 1923, and then in Poland in 1925, in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia in 1927 and in Austria in 1928. In Latin America, the Argentine Popular Catholic Union (UPCA), founded in 1919, became Argentina's Catholic Action (Acción Católica) in September 1928. In 1929 Mexico's Catholic Action was formed under the auspices of the Mexican Social Secretariat, directed by Father Miguel Darío Miranda who was later to become a cardinal. In Brazil Cardinal Dom Sebastião Leme sent the statute establishing Brazil's Catholic Action (Ação Católica) to Rome in 1934, and it took effect in 1935. In Chile, by way of a pastoral letter from the episcopate in 1931, Chile's Catholic Action was born. Catholic Action was founded in Colombia in 1933, in Uruguay in 1934, in Peru and Costa Rica in 1935, in Bolivia (in Cochabamba) in 1938.

The Church also attempted to provide leadership for the urban and marginal masses through a series of Eucharistic and Marian Congresses. Here again these Congresses had European precedents. The First International Eucharistic Congress held in 1881 took as its theme, 'The Social Reign of Christ'. The figure of 'Christ the King' played a double role: to create a new consensus in both the state and also the society at large. In 1924 the first Mexican Eucharistic Congress was held, and was severely repressed by the revolutionary government. A Eucharistic Congress was held in La Paz (Bolivia) in 1926, in Managua (Nicaragua) in 1928, and in Guayaquil (Ecuador) in 1929. Cardinal Leme, immediately following the triumph of Getúlio Vargas in the Brazilian revolution of 1930, organized large demonstrations in honour of Our Lady of the Apparition and Christ the Redeemer of Corcovado (1931). In 1934, the 32nd International Eucharistic Congress was held in Buenos Aires, attended by Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII. In Lima the first Congress was held in 1935, in Medellín in 1935, and in Santiago de Chile in 1941. These massive popular manifestations of support for the Church made a

great impact on governments throughout Latin America, especially populist regimes. Negotiations with governments were more fruitful for the Church than during the Liberal ascendancy, except in Mexico; and even there a permanent accommodation with the officially atheist state was reached by 1940.

During the 1950s another type of spiritual experience was organized. Large missions at city or national level, which undertook mass conversions and baptisms, from Tegucigalpa to Buenos Aires, had a more spiritual orientation than the Eucharistic Congresses and drew the participation of many Spanish missionaries. The Catholic pilgrimages to the Cristo de Cubiliente in Mexico and to the Cristo de Esquipulas in Guatemala had conservative political overtones. In Guatemala, for example, in 1953-4 the reformist president Jacobo Arbenz was weakened by the capacity of the Catholic Church to mobilize mass congregations in a conservative cause. The first Central American Eucharistic Congress in 1954 and an International Congress of Catholic Culture in 1956, attended by Cardinal Spellman of New York, underlined the strident anti-communism of the official Church in much of Latin America at the height of the Cold War. Thus the Church, during the decade or so following the Second World War, managed once again to become firmly entrenched in civil society through its lay organizations.

In the late fifties and early sixties the ecclesiastical model of Church presence in civil society changed. Father Joseph Comblin wrote a book entitled *El fracaso de la Acción Católica* (1959). This failure was not intrinsic to Catholic Action, but was the consequence of the crisis of the populist political model itself. When the latter disappeared, Catholic Action was no longer a useful institution. These new historical circumstances gave rise to specialized Catholic Action groups: Catholic University Youth (Juventud Universitaria Católica, JUC), Catholic Workers' Youth (Juventud Obrera Católica, JOC) and the Christian Democracy project which had been so successful in Italy under de Gasperi and in Germany under Adenauer.

Father Chardijn founded Catholic Workers' Youth in Belgium in 1913. It was officially launched in 1925, in opposition to class-based positions and as a counterbalance to the socialist influence among workers. It expanded slowly to reach Latin America in the 1930s; but it exerted its greatest influence between the late 1950s and mid-1960s. Its importance extended far beyond the young workers it served. Its method of 'see, judge and act' was adopted by the ecclesiastical counsellors, and became the

method of working theoretically in seminars, meetings, theological studies, and so forth. The future Liberation Theology owed a great deal to its analytical method. It also had an effect on the manner of reflection in Paulo Freire's highly influential *Pedagogia del oprimido* [Pedagogy of the oppressed] (1970). But as soon as JOC opted for a 'class conflict' position – the struggle in favour of the working class – it came into conflict with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, first in Brazil, and then in Spanish America. This conflict marked the beginning of its decline, and paved the way for the Christian Base Communities (CEBs) of later decades.

Although class-based Christian commitments were manifest in Latin America from the second half of the nineteenth century in groups of Catholic artisans, for example, confessional unionism and Christian democracy did not appear until later. The Latin American Confederation of Christian Unions (Confederación Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Cristianos – CLASC) was born at the end of the fifties. From the beginning it espoused a combative position, and in a letter to Pope Paul VI after Medellín the leadership of the Confederation stated, 'When a few Christian union leaders went to ask that they be invited as representatives of popular organizations, representatives of workers and peasants, your own ecclesiastical princes replied that they did not want conflictive elements at this meeting in Medellín. And you know, they were right. We are conflictive. Profoundly conflictive, because for a long time we have represented the action farthest from words: the militant and revolutionary commitment farthest from talk.'<sup>8</sup> With time, however, it changed its name from CLASC to CLAS – apparently de-confessionalizing itself – but now clearly serving the ends of a European-style Christian Democracy and adopting a clearly anti-class-based position opposed to any socialist solution, even social democracy.

In a parallel development on the university scene JUC, the Catholic Action group specializing in student affairs, began to move in a radical direction in the late 1950s. In Brazil, Colombia and Peru, as in Argentina with the 'Humanist' movement, JUC sought out a relation between 'faith and politics'. A revolutionary option was possible – witness the triumph of the movement in Cuba – and even an espousal of socialism. In 1962 Ação Popular emerged in Brazil, as a political movement. Because the Brazilian episcopate as a whole did not approve of JUC's radical realignment, a crisis was triggered that led to the separation of the movement from the church hierarchy.

<sup>8</sup> *Iglesia latinoamericana: protesta o profecía?* (Buenos Aires, 1969), pp. 88–9.

From the early 1960s both JOC and JUC, and later the Mexican Social Secretariat and other organizations which connected the Church and the popular sectors, were weakened and in some instances destroyed because the hierarchy of bishops never achieved an absolute control over them. Thus emerged a vacuum between the official Church and the class-based popular movements, which was only filled (in cases where the Church adopted the model of pastoral work) by the Christian Base Communities. Frequently, the Church hierarchy remained isolated and disconnected from the organized popular masses, and its only hope was an alliance with the dominant groups in power. In such cases the Church adopted the model of the 'New Christianity' (alliance with the dominant classes, military groups and so forth). These two distinct options – 'New Christianity' and the 'Church of the poor' (as defined by John XXIII) – have defined the poles of the conflict ever since.

The Christian political commitment that was built around Christian Democracy was different. Eduardo Frei, with a group of young professionals and businessmen from the Chilean Conservative Party, formed the Falange in 1939, which later became the Christian Democrat Party (PDC). Christian Democrat parties were formed in Venezuela in 1946 (COPEI); in Bolivia and in Argentina in 1954; in Peru and Guatemala in 1956; in El Salvador, Paraguay and Panama in 1960; in the Dominican Republic in 1961; in Uruguay in 1962; and in Costa Rica in 1963. In September 1964, Eduardo Frei won the presidential elections in Chile with the slogan, 'Revolution in liberty', and in 1968 Rafael Caldera was elected the first Christian Democratic president of Venezuela. In 1969, however, the Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitario (MAPU), a dissident Christian Democrat faction that broke with the mainstream party in Chile, entered the Popular Unity coalition led by Salvador Allende in the 1970 election. It was a key moment: the Christian Left, defecting from Christian Democracy, opted for socialism.

In the 1960s and 1970s the 'crisis of development' and the emergence of national security states (Brazil, 1964; Argentina, 1966; Chile, 1973; Uruguay, 1973) spawned a movement of enormous importance within the Church: the Christian Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base, CEBs). These were created spontaneously by the Christian people themselves, without prior action by the Church hierarchy. As we have seen, the popular masses, whose Catholic religiosity embraced a fundamental feature of resistance to the ruling groups, had not found a place for themselves within ecclesiastical institutions since the nineteenth century.

Catholic Action itself was directed more towards the petty bourgeoisie, JOC and JUC towards progressive, radical minorities (students and young workers), Christian Democracy towards the urban middle class and independent small farmers. The people themselves were the passive 'faithful masses' of the Eucharistic Congresses, liturgical rites incomprehensible to them, since they were conducted in Latin. Principally in Brazil, through the Movimento de Educação de Base (MEB) of the northeast that began in the sixties, and in the context of the merciless repression exerted by the military dictatorship, the Christian communities sought out new ways to worship. They held small meetings in private houses, conducted bible readings and commentary and changed their daily life in the light of their religious faith. Thus arose a historic movement that linked the institutional Church and the Christian people themselves on the level of their day-to-day suffering for the first time since the end of the colonial period. The tens of thousands of CEBs existing in Brazil, the thousands in Mexico and their presence in most countries of Latin America soon indicated the viability of a different ecclesiastical model: the 'Church of the Poor'. A large part of ecclesiastical policy debate of the 1970s and 1980s revolved around their organization, articulation and control, not only in individual countries and at the level of the episcopate, but even in the Roman Congregations.<sup>9</sup>

The CEB was a place where simple, ordinary people could speak out in their own voice, where they could learn to think prophetically, where they could criticize issues of religion, politics and the economy. As organisms which act in a Christian manner in civil society, the CEBs are the presence of the Church in the social fabric on the immediate level. The institutional impact of these CEBs in the contemporary history of Latin America cannot be exaggerated.

On the other hand, the distance between the official 'Romanized' Church as it had existed since the second half of the nineteenth century and popular religion was still profound. The Church, however, was able to rediscover this popular religion through the Christian Base Communities – a popular religion which had always existed but was previously disdained due to a negative value judgement that had its roots in a Europeanized theology and the 'enlightened' Catholic bourgeoisie.

The religion of the people was validated by the 'popular pastoral

<sup>9</sup> At the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Puebla (1979), four of the cardinals present from Rome signed up for Committee X, which dealt with the question of the Christian Base Communities.

programme – Document 6 of the Second Conference of 1968 in Medellín – a pastoral programme of sanctuaries, festivals and celebrations. Popular religion was now respected as a form of popular resistance, an area of creativity, religious and cultural. Under this programme Afro-American religions like Voodoo (Haiti) and Macumba (Brazil) were rehabilitated and the vitality of native American religions rediscovered. Through CELAM a department of indigenous priesthood and education was established, along with training centres, such as CENAMI in Mexico; and several priests including Mons. Leonidas Proaño in Ricbamba, Mons. Samuel Ruíz in Chiapas and Mons. Llaguno among the Tarahumaras, spoke and struggled on behalf of the indigenous peoples. The renaissance of the Amerindian peoples beginning in the 1960s was in part a major success for the Church. This new world of marginal, oppressed and poor groups linked to the Church justified the positions adopted at Medellín and Puebla. A 'Church of the poor' was born in creative tension with members of the ecclesiastical institution who tended to adopt a conservative alliance with established power groups, and sought the strengthening of the hierarchy's control over the ecclesiastical apparatus, in response to firm leadership from Rome. This tension increased during the 1980s and culminated in a period of 'restoration' of middle-class ecclesiastical movements, including charismatic Catholic groups like 'Communion and Liberation' and Opus Dei, which placed the figure of the Pope at the centre of the Church.

#### THE PRIESTHOOD

After 1930, according to the Church model of 'New Christianity', that is, a Church ready to recapture its hegemony through the laity, the figure of the priest changed social function and was transformed into the animating force (the 'advisor') behind Catholic Action. Later, the priest played this role in relation to Christian unionism and Christian Democracy. Finally, he even assumed the figure of direct commitment to political action, as in the cases of Camilo Torres in Colombia and Ernesto Cardenal in Nicaragua – each in his own way reminding us that the figure of the martyr, like Rutilio Grande in El Salvador, also demonstrated a position that was prophetic and properly speaking priestly. Since Catholic Action had an implicit theology in which lay action was restricted principally to the political sphere while priestly action had to be reserved exclusively to the spiritual realm – a dualism that was criticized by Liberation Theology – the theology of Catholic Action was superseded at the end of the sixties by



another theology which redefined the action of the priest, that is, the social role of those ordained by the Church. It can be argued that the history of the Church in Latin America developed not only around the way the 'people of God' behaved (from being passive lay-persons, they came to 'participate in the apostolate of the hierarchy of the Church' – a definition of Catholic Action – and from there because members of the Christian Base Communities), but also, and principally, around its manner of defining the temporal and political function assumed by ordained and consecrated pastoral groups – the bishops, clergy and members of religious orders.

In another area, there slowly arose many Catholic universities, notably, the Xaverian University of Bogotá (1937), Lima (1942), Medellín (1945), Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (1947), Porto Alegre (1950), Campinas (1956), Quito (1956), Buenos Aires and Córdoba (1960), Valparaíso (1961), and the Universidad Centroamericana in Guatemala (1961). Along with this intellectual renewal came the new presence of contemplative movements composed of monks who had never before set foot on Latin American soil. The Benedictines settled in Argentina and Chile, the Cistercians in Brazil, the Trappists in Argentina. From 1960 the Brothers of Charles de Foucauld organized communities in Buenos Aires, Santiago, Lima, Caracas, Mexico, and elsewhere. The quality of theological studies improved in seminaries in every important city on the continent. Magazines like *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* (Petropolis), *Teología y Vida* (Santiago), *Stromata* (Buenos Aires), *Revista Javeriana* (Bogotá) and *Christus* (Mexico) appeared, which circulated information about the theological and biblical movements and the liturgical movement, especially on the pastoral plane – a level that was primarily activated after the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín Conference in 1968. There were also important advances made in catechism, following the foundation of the Latin American Institute of Catechism in Manizales (Colombia).

All this, together with a commitment by the Church to be closer to the people through Catholic Action produced a new kind of priest, many of whom emerged through JUC and JOC better prepared for their difficult role.<sup>10</sup> From the 1960s the Church became involved in profound social and political movements.

It was in this context that the beliefs and attitudes of priests like

<sup>10</sup> In 'Presbyterorum Ordinis' of the Second Vatican Council the word 'difficult' calls attention to itself: 'more difficult ever day'; 'difficult'; 'the difficulties in the presbyters find themselves' and so on.

Antonio Henrique Pereira Neto (assassinated in 1969 in Recife, Brazil), Camilo Torres (killed in guerrilla warfare in Colombia in 1966) and Rutilio Grande (martyred in El Salvador in 1977) were shaped. To them we must add Bishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero (assassinated as he celebrated mass in San Salvador in 1980) and Enrique Angelelli (bishop of La Rioja, Argentina, assassinated in 1976). Priests began to perform a labour of leadership which had been suppressed since the period of Latin American emancipation in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when Miguel Hidalgo, parish priest in Dolores in Mexico, for example, became a political leader and popular hero, although he was subjected to excommunication by the bishops and was publicly condemned for heresy.

Special mention must be made of the important Movement of Clergy for the Third World, which began in Argentina when eighty priests met in 1965 in Buenos Aires under the leadership of bishop Podestá of Avellaneda and Bishop Querracino of 9 de Julio, both dioceses in the Province of Buenos Aires. The meetings at Chapadmalal in 1966 and 1967 were preparatory to the first national meeting, which was held in Córdoba in May, 1968, where it was declared: 'Every day we are more aware that the cause of the great problems from which the Latin American continent is suffering is rooted fundamentally in the political, economic and social system prevailing in nearly every one of our countries.'<sup>11</sup> The priests' movement continue to grow in Argentina, with several hundred members and a widely disseminated magazine *Enlace*, and played a fundamental role of civic opposition against the dictatorship of General Onganía. In August 1970 the Argentine episcopate declared itself against the movement. Public confrontation between priests and bishops caused scandal among the conservative faithful.

In Brazil, likewise, the renewal of the priesthood had been going on since the Second Vatican Council. Dom Helder Câmara gave a speech in May 1965 on 'Priests for development', in which he said that 'this seminary prepares priests to evangelize, but one does not evangelize abstract, atemporal beings. To try to act on a level of purely spiritual evangelicism would be to give the idea that religion is a theory separate from life. It would seem to support those who say that religion is the opiate of the people. We, the bishops of the Northeast, realize that we have to stimulate rural unions.'<sup>12</sup> In fact the Brazilian priests began to

<sup>11</sup> *Iglesia Latinoamericana: Protesta o profecía?*, p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> José de Broucker, *Dom Helder Câmara* (Bilbao, 1970), pp. 89-90.

organize themselves, and on 24 October 1967, there appeared a 'letter from Brazilian priests to their bishops'. After analysing the miserable situation in which the masses of the poor found themselves, they asked 'Does not the prophetic gesture of Christ, of fidelity to the truth, assume an inevitable political implication?'<sup>13</sup>

Institutional Act Number 5 of December 1968, issued by the military regime, triggered a brutal repression under which the clergy suffered in particular. We have already mentioned Father Antonio Henrique Pereira Neto, who in 1969 was tortured and then killed. In 1975 Father João Bosco Burnier and Father Rodolfo Lunkembein were also murdered because of their commitment to the poor. Nevertheless, in Brazil, it should be said, the leadership of the defence of the 'oppressed masses' against the dictatorship remained in the hands of the episcopate itself. This was not so in Argentina, where the bishops were aligned with the repression carried out by the military after 1976.

In Colombia the so-called 'Golconda group' – a group of fifty priests – met in July 1965 to study the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. The second meeting took place in San. Buenaventura – a town comparable in poverty to those in the Brazilian Northeast – with Mons. Gerardo Valencia as president, and culminated with the well-known 'Buenaventura Document'.<sup>14</sup> This analysed the socio-economic situation in Colombia in the light of the recent Vatican Council and Medellín Conference. The persecution of the Golconda Group began in 1969; and by 1970 it had for all practical purposes been disbanded, partly because of the death of Mons. Valencia in an air accident. The Priests for Latin America movement (SAL) was later organized with more than 300 members. At the same time, in Peru the National Office of Social Research (ONIS) had been bringing priests together since 1968. In 1969, a letter by 330 priests sent to the Episcopal Conference stated in part, 'we would like to present to you our concerns and our desires in a spirit of dialogue and collaboration'.<sup>15</sup> It outlined a clear picture of the sociopolitical situation in Peru and urged struggle against the injustices described.

In Chile the priests' movement gained much more importance, beginning in 1968 as an organ of dialogue between priests and bishops. Young priests demanded church reform that would be more in line with the recommendations made at the Second Vatican Council and Medellín. They

<sup>13</sup> *Iglesia latinoamericana: protesta o profecía?*, pp. 178, 190.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225–35.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

undertook occupations of churches and some went on hunger strikes. The secular press spoke of a 'New Church' and a 'Clandestine Church'. During the Allende presidency a movement of Christians for Socialism was born (1972), composed of eighty priests who were committed to service to the poorest and most oppressed groups, especially in the city of Santiago. In Mexico, meanwhile, Father Gregorio Lemercier (who, contrary to the express proscription of the Roman Curia, introduced psychoanalysis at his Benedictine convent in Cuernavaca), and Ivan Illich (with his important Centre of Documentation – CIDOC) deserve mention. Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo was an exemplary presbyter, organizing in his diocese a programme of liturgical and pastoral renewal, supported and invigorated by the Christian Base Communities.

As important as the vanguard movement in the priesthood, but perhaps with a better chance of stability and survival, was the reform movement that began around 1965 in the congregations and communities of monks and nuns in Latin America. The Latin American Confederation of Religious Orders (of both sexes) (*La Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosas*, CLAR) was founded in 1958; its first General Assembly was held in Lima in 1960. At that time there were 113,000 nuns and 21,000 monks on the continent as a whole. Because it enjoyed a remarkable autonomy from the bishops, CLAR was able to perform important reformist functions. As the Catholic conservatives launched their counter-offensive in the 1970s, CLAR was an advocate of the model of the Church for the poor, of Liberation Theology and of the defence of a preference for the oppressed masses. In Rome the orders' superiors had stubbornly to defend certain progressive choices made by their members before the Roman Curia. The history has yet to be written of this phase of profound conversion and commitment to the poor in conformity with the spirit of the founders of the religious communities. Their confrontations with CELAM, especially in the years before and after the Third Conference at Puebla in 1979, made CLAR a key institution.

#### LIBERATION THEOLOGY

In this context of ecclesiastical reform, of the existence of prophetic and progressive groups committed to the poor, of social convulsions on the continent (and even in Cuba in 1958–9 of revolution), and keeping in mind the advance in the academic social sciences of the so-called 'theory of dependence', which offered analyses of the structural causes of poverty in

Latin America, a Christian theological response arose in the form of 'liberation theology'. It was one of the major developments in the history of the Catholic Church in Latin America.

The history of Latin American theology remains to be written.<sup>16</sup> From 1930, an implicit theology of Catholic Action defined a vision of the 'two kingdoms' (the temporal, or the State, and the spiritual, or the Church, and both institutions as 'perfect societies'). From about 1955 theologians began to reflect on the problems of development and from this arose a 'development theology'.<sup>17</sup> It was as a critique of development theology and as a consequence of the deepening of the 'theology of revolution'<sup>18</sup> that liberation theology began. All this was defined by the historic discovery of the 'poor', of the 'people', as a social bloc of the oppressed, in the history and life of the Church as a prophetic institution of evangelization and installation of the 'Kingdom of God'. Liberation theology has gone through four stages. The years from 1959 to 1968 constituted the incubation period; 1968 to 1972 (until the fourteenth regular assembly of CELAM in Sucre) represented a period of creativity and hegemony; 1972 to 1984 was a time of confrontation throughout Latin America; and since 1984 liberation theology has been exported and, indeed, universalized.

The Cuban revolution demonstrated how poorly adapted Latin American Christian thought was to the processes of revolutionary change. The opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962 called forth theological reform. A small Christian community in Nazareth (Israel) posed the problem of the 'poor' from a perspective that was both social (in a co-operative of Arab manual labourers) and biblical (rereading the text of Isaiah 61, 1 and Luke 4, 18 that Jesus read in Nazareth: 'The spirit of the Lord has

<sup>16</sup> For a brief survey, see Enrique Dussel, *Hipótesis para una historia de la teología en América Latina* (Bogotá, 1986). See also CEHILA, *Historia de la Teología en América Latina* (San José, 1981) and Pablo Richard (ed.), *Raíces de la Teología Latinoamericana* (San José, 1985). On liberation theology, see Samuel Silva Gotay, *El pensamiento cristiano revolucionario en América Latina* (Salamanca, 1981); Roberto Oliveros Maqueo, *Liberación y teología. Génesis y crecimiento de una reflexión* (1966-1976) (Mexico, D.F., 1977); Deane William Fenn, *Profiles in Liberation. 36 Portraits of Third World Theologians* (Mystic, Conn., 1988), pp. 114-193, and *Third World Liberation Theologies. An Introductory Survey*, (New York, 1986), pp. 3-58; and as a general introduction Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (New York, 1987). For a critical view, and with an excellent bibliography, see Roger Vekemans, *Teología de la liberación y Cristianos por el socialismo* (Bogotá, 1976). And see bibliographical essay by Christopher Abel in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> See V. Cosmao, *Signification et théologie du développement* (Paris, 1967); Rubem Alves, 'Apuntes para una teología del desarrollo', in *Cristianismo y Sociedad*, 21 (1969); F. Houtart and O. Vertran, *Hacia una teología del desarrollo* (Buenos Aires, 1970).

<sup>18</sup> See Hugo Assmann, 'Die Situation der unterentwickelten Länder als Ort einer Theologie der Revolution', in *Diskussion Sur Theologie der Revolution* (Munster, 1969).

consecrated me to preach to the poor').<sup>19</sup> This movement came to the attention of Pope John XXIII, who spoke in 1963 of a 'Church of the poor'. At the same time, as we have seen, the Catholic youth movements (JUC in Brazil, Argentina and Peru) became radicalized and increasingly influenced by and identified with socialism. Thus a crisis arose in which it was necessary to clarify the question of 'faith and politics'. Simultaneously, and in various Latin American countries, Catholic theologians (and an occasional Protestant) took moves towards what was soon to be called liberation theology.

Richard Shaull in his articles 'Consideraciones teológicas sobre la liberación del hombre' and 'La liberación humana desde una perspectiva teológica' (1968),<sup>20</sup> Rubem Alves in his book *Towards a theology of liberation* (1968),<sup>21</sup> and Gustavo Gutiérrez in *Hacia una teología de la liberación* (1969)<sup>22</sup> explicitly initiated the movement. It would be necessary, however, to wait for the epistemological clarifications of Hugo Assmann in *Teología de la liberación* (1970)<sup>23</sup> for liberation theology to be distinguished clearly from the theology of revolution, the political theology of J. B. Metz and the theology of hope of J. Moltmann. At meetings, congresses and symposia liberation theology expanded and spread all over Latin America. Especially important were a Mexican meeting held in November 1969 on 'Faith and development', which ended as 'Faith and liberation theology'; and meetings in Bogotá (March 1970), in Buenos Aires (August 1970) and in Oruro, Bolivia (December 1970). The Meeting at the Escorial in Spain (July 1972) had special relevance, because the movement was introduced to Europe with more than 500 participants from numerous European countries.<sup>24</sup> Magazines like *Víspera* (Montevideo), *Pastoral Popular* (Santiago de Chile), *Diálogo* (Panama), *Servir*

<sup>19</sup> See Paul Gauthier, *Jésus, l'Eglise et les pauvres* (Tournai, 1963). It was at Nazareth that Enrique Dussel (the author of this chapter) conceived of writing *Hipótesis para una historia de la Iglesia en América Latina* (Barcelona, 1967). See also Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La Pastoral de la Iglesia en América Latina* (Montevideo, 1968).

<sup>20</sup> IDOC (Bogotá), 43 (1968), 242-8; *Mensaje*, 168 (1968), 175-9.

<sup>21</sup> Rubem Alves, *Toward a Theology of Liberation* (Princeton, N.J., 1968).

<sup>22</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Hacia una teología de la liberación* (Montevideo, 1969); published in English as *Notes for a Theology of Liberation* (1970). See also his influential *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics, Salvation* (Sp. orig. 1971; Maryknoll, N.Y. 1973).

<sup>23</sup> See Hugo Assmann, *Teología de la Liberación* (Montevideo, 1970). See also his *Theology for a Nomad Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1976).

<sup>24</sup> See *Fe cristiana y cambio social en América Latina*, Instituto de Fe y Secularidad (Salamanca, 1973); this meeting produced a special issue of the international journal of theology, *Concilium*, on Liberation Theology, 96 (1974).

(Mexico), *Sic* (Caracas), and later *Páginas* (Lima) and *Puebla* (Petrópolis) became the organs of the theological movement.

For a time liberation theology was something like the official reflection of CELAM, of its meetings and the institutes of the hegemonic groups of the Latin American Church. Criticism of liberation theology began, however, at the CELAM meeting in Sucre in 1972, at which Mons. López Trujillo was a powerful presence. It was elaborated at meetings such as those held in Bogotá in 1973<sup>25</sup> and Toledo in 1974.<sup>26</sup> Liberation theologians were now excluded from CELAM institutes by policy clearly emanating from certain groups in the Roman Curia. This period culminated in 1984 with the judgement of Leonardo Boff before the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, the decision of Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, and the publication of the 'Instruction on several aspects of liberation theology'.

During the years 1972–84, Liberation Theology grew steadily: the number of its exponents and of their publications expanded, together with its influence. It was an intellectual movement rooted in the poor masses, suffering under the persecution of the national security dictatorships and the ire of many conservative clergymen. Liberation theology, moreover, made a strong impact in the United States at the Detroit Meetings (1975); it spread through the Third World with the founding of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in Dar es Salaam (1976). There followed a period of profound maturation in which Liberation Theology developed in many directions; for example, on the question of Afro-American culture and problems of racial discrimination; on the condition of the indigenous peoples of Latin America; on feminism; on the problem of popular religion; and on the writing of Church history – an area developed by both the Commission on Historical Studies of the Latin American Church (Comisión de Estudios de Historia de la Iglesia, CEHILA)<sup>27</sup> and the newly founded Working Commission of Church His-

<sup>25</sup> See CELAM, *Liberación: diálogos en el CELAM* (Bogotá, 1974), which contains the following chapters of special interest: B. Kloppenburg, 'Las tentaciones de la teología de la liberación' (pp. 401–515), J. Mejía, 'La liberación, aspectos bíblicos' (pp. 271–307) and Mons. Alfonso López Trujillo, 'Las teologías de la liberación' (pp. 27–67).

<sup>26</sup> Papers published under the title *Teología de la liberación. Conversaciones de Toledo* (Burgos, 1974).

<sup>27</sup> The Commission, founded in Quito in 1973, has held annual symposia and published numerous books on the history of the Church in Latin America. In addition to the *Historia General de la Iglesia en América Latina (HGIAL)*, it publishes material on the history of theology in Latin America, the religious orders and communities, a *Historia Mínima* of the Church by country (this collection includes the work by Jean-Pierre Bastian on Protestantism), history of the Church at the popular level (supplemented by audiovisual material on the history of the Church published in Bogotá), and monthly and quarterly studies published in São Paulo, Mexico City and elsewhere in Latin America.



tory of the Third World. But perhaps the most strategic aspect was the redefinition of the function of religion in the process of social change. However, even after the appearance of the 'Documento de consulta' in 1978, in advance of the Second Conference at Puebla, which started a theological polemic of a kind never seen on the continent in all its history,<sup>28</sup> Liberation Theology had still not reached the level of headlines in the international press. Only the Roman 'Instruction' of 1984 and the confrontation with the theologian Leonardo Boff brought Latin American liberation theology to the attention of the public at large. The 'Instruction' of 1986 and Pope John Paul II's letter to the Brazilian episcopate (9 April 1986), in which he stated that 'liberation theology is not only timely, but useful and necessary', signified an important climacteric.

#### THE CHURCH IN POLITICS

##### *Mexico*

In Mexico following the Revolution of 1910, the church was left 'outside the law' in the violently anti-clerical Constitution of 1917, without any rights even to own its own church buildings; indeed the law went so far as to declare that 'the ministers of a sect [sic] are not legally allowed to inherit from ministers of the same sect'. In 1926, in response to sectarian measures, the episcopate decreed the suspension of the 'religious cult' throughout the republic, a measure that lasted until 1929. This precipitated the Cristero revolt in the provinces of Jalisco, Colima, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Michoacán and Durango, which revolved around the figure of Mons. Francisco Orozco y Jimenez. The Cristero revolt was a popular, regional rebellion against centralized anti-clerical government which never won the expressed support of the Vatican and the archbishop of Mexico, D.F. Through the intervention of the U.S. Ambassador Dwight Morrow, the Apostolic Delegate and bishops Pascual Díaz and Leopoldo Ruiz, the 'Cristeros' were finally persuaded to lay down their arms; many were later massacred.

During the radical administration of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), relations between Church and State improved somewhat after the Church

<sup>28</sup> See Enrique Dussel, *De Medellín a Puebla: una década de sangre y esperanza* (Mexico D.F., 1979), pp. 477-97. See also Leonardo Boff, *Iglesia: carisma o poder* (Petrópolis, 1981); and an epoch-making work, *La lucha de los dioses*, ed. P. Richard and S. Croatto, et al. (San José, 1980). Franz Hinkelammert, *La crítica de la razón utópica* (San José, 1984) pointed to a new stage in liberation theology.

supported oil nationalization (1938). But it was not until 1968 that the institutional Church in Mexico came to life – in response to the Mexican state's brutal repression of the student demonstration at Tlatelolco in Mexico City. The First National Congress of Theology ('Faith and Development') in 1969, with more than 800 participants and which ended in an exposition and declaration of support for Liberation Theology, marked the beginning of a new epoch. In 1971 the document presented by the episcopal commission on 'Justice in the World' was the most advanced social statement the Church in Mexico had thus far produced.<sup>29</sup>

It was clear that the Church was now co-existing somewhat uneasily with a state that had shifted from an explicit anti-clerical stance to one in which reconciliation was possible. In 1976, when a new basilica for the Virgin of Guadalupe was built, the position became evident. Mexico too had its roll of martyrs. Thousands of Christian Base Communities were organized throughout the country. At the Tenth National Encounter in Tehuantepec held in October 1981, Bishop Arturo Lona asserted: 'Everywhere there are threats and suffering, as this road is not taken without conflict: repression, suspicion, torture, jail and death. There are many thousands of peasants, indigenous people and workers in Latin America who had been put in jail for their commitment to the Christian Base Communities.'<sup>30</sup>

The power of popular religiosity in Mexico was made evident in the demonstrations of welcome to Pope John Paul II in 1983. Finally, in the early 1990s, after over seven decades of official estrangement, and five or so of informal cordiality, steps were taken towards a formal reconciliation between the Mexican state and the Vatican.

### *Brazil*

In Brazil, following the Revolution of 1930, the Church under Dom Sebastião Leme accommodated to the dictatorship and later the authoritarian populism of President Getúlio Vargas (1930–45). Mons. João Becker, the archbishop of Porto Alegre, where the movement of 1930 had been incubated, supported the insurgents from the beginning, and in 1930 wrote a pastoral letter on 'Russian communism and Christian civilization' in which he defended populism as a barrier to the advance of communism. Cardinal Leme organized the Liga Eleitoral Católica (LEC) in order to

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jesús García, 'La Iglesia mexicana desde 1962', in *HGIAL*, vol. V, pp. 361ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Servir*, 21 (Mexico, D. F., 1981), p. 4.

impose the demands of the Church upon the programmes of the political forces, and in most respects he achieved his goals. The collective pastoral letter of the episcopate against communism (1937) marked the end of this phase of the Church's involvement in politics. Ironically, the authoritarian Estado Novo (1937-45) destroyed many of the earlier prerogatives of the Church. At the same time throughout this period a sense of autonomy from Rome was developing in the Brazilian church, and Cardinal Leme opposed the negotiations for a concordat with Rome.

With the death of Dom Leme in 1942, the Church was left without leadership. But during the period of restricted democracy after 1945 Dom Helder Câmara began to play a dominant role in the affairs of the Church. Between 1946 and 1950, he revitalized LEC, and in 1952 founded the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB). Dom Helder, who was also national advisor to Catholic Action from 1947 was largely responsible, together with the papal nuncio Armando Lombardi, for the selection of a group of young bishops, especially in the Northeast (where forty-three new dioceses and eleven new archdioceses were founded), whose influence would be decisive after 1968. The Church confronted the question of education, bringing pressure to bear on successive governments for improved primary and secondary education, essential to both individual self-realization and national development. Declarations in support of the peasantry of the northeast in the late 1950s distanced the Church from the agrarian oligarchy. Rural unions were encouraged. The Movimento de Educação de Base (MEB) emerged under the inspiration of Paulo Freire. In July 1962 at the height of the political and economic crisis of the early 1960s the Central Committee of the CNBB declared that 'no one can ignore the outcry of the masses who are being martyred by hunger'. The Church had begun to find a voice that allowed it to make its presence felt in civil society.

The military coup of 1964 presented the Church in Brazil with its first experience of a government of National Security. The leaders of Ação Católica (AC), Juventude Universitária Católica (JVC), Juventude Operária Católica (JOC) and Ação Popular (AP) were persecuted; MEB was disbanded. Dom Helder Câmara left the secretariat of the CNBB which had endorsed the 'anti-communist' coup (to become archbishop of Olinda-Recife) and was replaced by Cardinal A. Rossi who offered neither strong leadership nor direction.

After 1968 as repression, including the persecution of Catholics, intensified, the CNBB shifted its orientation and adopted an opposition stance,

first under Mons. Aloísio Lorscheider and then under Mons. Ivo Lorscheider. The Christian Base Communities voiced popular criticism of the 'structural injustice' of the system. In May 1973, the bishops of the Northeast issued a document titled 'I have heard the cry of my people' On the labour front, Cardinal Evaristo Arns of São Paulo supported the metalworkers' strikes of the late 1970s. Meanwhile, Mons. Pedro Casaldaliga worked amidst the peasants of the poor backlands. Mons. Tomas Balduino, president of the CIMI (Indigenous Mission Advisory Council), encouraged and defended Brazil's Indians, and transformed the Church into the only force that put up effective resistance to policies of genocide. The Brazilian Church, as the major force of opposition to the regime, was able to adapt to the formal democracy that succeeded the dictatorship in 1985 with immense moral authority.

### *Chile*

The Church in Chile had never given unequivocal support to the Conservative party, as might have been expected. In 1939, led by Mons. José Mario Caro, the Church recognized as legitimate the authority of the Popular Front coalition of Radicals, Socialists and Communists elected the previous year. At the same time, after consulting with Rome, the young Catholics separated from the Conservative Party and founded the Falange, under the leadership of the young Eduardo Frei. Mons. Manuel Larraín, organizer of the Chilean Bishops' Conference in 1952 and of the First Latin American Episcopal Conference in Rio in 1955, founder of CELAM, and perhaps the most important figure in the Latin American Church in the twentieth century until his death in 1966, defended the Falange against conservative attacks. This pragmatism led the Chilean Church to a leadership position in the continent until it was replaced by the Brazilian Church in the late 1960s.

The triumph of Christian Democracy in 1964 was not entirely beneficial to the Church. In the late 1960s it had to divert its energies to the defence of a government that turned against peasants and rural workers. A choice of options emerged with the triumph of the Marxist Popular Unity coalition in 1970 in a three-cornered fight. The Christians for Socialism movement formed by priests and elements of the Catholic intelligentsia dissatisfied with the performance of the Frei administration, warmly endorsed the social policies of the Allende government. The overthrow of Allende in September 1973 left the Catholic Church in turmoil. Offi-

cially, the Catholic Church endorsed the brutal military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet and the regime it ushered in as a transitional measure before the restoration of a civilian, representative government that would establish democratic normalcy. The episcopate condemned Christians for Socialism in the document 'Christian Faith and Political Action', despite the fact that many of its activists were being forced into exile, one had died, and others had been tortured. However, the brutality of the Pinochet dictatorship, its determination to hold onto power at all costs and the extreme radicalism with which it applied neo-liberal economic policies caused the Church as an institution to alter its stand, although there were individual bishops who continued to support Pinochet. When other outlets of domestic protest were ruthlessly suppressed by the military regime, the Vicariate of Solidarity, founded by the archdiocese of Santiago, spoke up for the victims of human rights abuses – anti-clericals, communists and atheists as well as practising Catholics. Luis Corvalán, secretary of the Chilean Communist Party, wrote from exile in Moscow: 'Under these conditions, religion loses its character as an opiate of the people, and, on the contrary, insofar as the Church is committed to man, one might say that instead of being a force of alienation it is a factor of inspiration in the struggle for peace, liberty and justice.'<sup>31</sup>

The Church discovered new dimensions following this road, in particular, popular culture and the problems of indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, the repression continued, and as late as 1984 a conscientious parish priest, Father Andre Jarlan, was assassinated in a poor neighbourhood of Santiago. In 1984 Archbishop Juan F. Fresno called on the government to open the way to a democracy of national unity. The transition to democracy and the victory of an opposition coalition led by the Christian Democrat party in December 1989 allowed the Church to heal its past wounds and emerge from the crisis of the dictatorship more or less united.

### *Argentina*

In Argentina right-wing Catholicism had inspired the military backed conservative revolution of 1930. The conservative figure of Cardinal Santiago Copello led the Church during this period. During the populist governments of Juan D. Perón after 1946 the Church sought accommodation with the regime, and gained some favours (religious instruction in the

<sup>31</sup> *Excelsior* (Mexico, D. F.), 2 June, 3 June 1977.

schools, military chaplainships, and so on). But after 1953 anti-clerical policies adopted by the Perón regime precipitated conflict which continued till the fall of Perón in 1955. The Church then became divided over whether to form an alliance with the dominant classes (first developmentalist under Frondizi, then militaristic with Onganía), or to make a commitment to the popular classes. The best-known exponent of the latter position was the organization called Priests of the Third World. In opposition to the conservative hierarchy, which was carefully chosen by the papal nuncios (headed by Cardinal Antonio Caggiano, who was also bishop of the armed forces), the younger clergy bore the weight of the ecclesiastical reform that originated with the Medellín Council and were victims of repression under the Peronists who returned to power in 1973, then under the military after 1976.

Numerous priests and leading Catholic laymen figured among the victims of assassinations and disappearances before and during the 'dirty war' of 1976–83. Father Carlos Múgica was murdered at the door of his church in a poor neighbourhood in 1974. In 1976 the bishop of La Rioja, Mons. Enrique Angelelli was assassinated on his return from an examination of the situation surrounding the murder of two priests, Fathers Gabriel Longueville and Carlos Murías, in his diocese. The Church hierarchy as a whole formed an alliance with the military dictatorship and the dominant classes and deeply compromised itself. At the same time, however, the Human Rights movement, from the 'Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo' to 'Justice and Peace' led by the Nobel Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, continued to present the other face of the Church.

With the transition to democracy in 1983, which brought first the Radical Alfonsín and then the Peronist Menem to the presidency, the conservative episcopate was forced to face up to its role in apologizing for oppression during the period of military rule. The Catholic Church was bereft of authority and unable to exert leadership; it was still saddled with all its earlier contradictions; it could not find the courage to heal its wounds; and it continued deeply divided, and lacking a clear sense of pastoral mission. A purposeless Church had diminishing influence in Argentine society.

### *Cuba*

In Cuba the Church had not been a significant political force nor a major social actor in the first half of the twentieth century. Formally atheistic

and anti-clerical, the Cuban revolutionary government of Fidel Castro which came to power in January 1959 inherited a tradition of official atheism that had first been embodied in the Constitution of 1902. The Church entered what Raúl Gómez Treto has called a period of *desconcierto*, ('confusion') (1959–60).<sup>32</sup> Within a month of the seizure of power the Cuban episcopate had issued a critical circular entitled *Ante los fusilamientos* (Regarding the shootings). In subsequent months it spoke in defence of private education, now under threat, and on the danger of socialism in the Agrarian Reform law. In August 1960, a collective letter of the episcopate declared that 'the absolute majority of the Cuban people, which is Catholic, can only be guided to a communist regime by deceit'. Finally a National Catholic Congress was convened in November 1960. Mons. Enrique Pérez Serantes, who had defended Fidel Castro in 1953 at the time of the attack on the Moncada Barracks, saving his life, presided; and the Comandante himself attended. There were shouts of 'Cristo si, otro no!' and 'Cuba si, Rusia no!' In the same month the Fourth Assembly of CELAM at Fomeque condemned 'the deceptions of communism' and the 'incompatibility of communism and Christianity'.

A period of 'confrontation' (1960–62) had begun on 2 June 1960 when Castro declared: 'Whoever is an anti-communist is a counter-revolutionary.' All schools, including Church schools, were nationalized, cemeteries were confiscated, and the procession of the Virgin of Cobre was suppressed. Catholic lay leaders passed into the opposition, many of them emigrating to Miami. In September, 133 priests and one bishop were expelled. (Of the 745 priests who resided in Cuba in 1960 only 230 remained in 1969; of 2,225 nuns, only 200 remained in 1970.)

A third period of 'evasion' (1962–7), was characterized by a church that was silent and operated at a minimal level. Nevertheless, news from the Vatican Council reached Cuba, and the Church prepared itself to participate in the meetings at Medellín.

The fourth period, which Gómez Treto calls 'the re-encounter' (1968–79), was initiated by Castro himself at the Congress of Intellectuals of 1969. The Church began its renewal under the influence of broader trends in Latin America. In April the episcopate sent out a 'Communication' (read in all churches, although with resistance from some Catholics, including priests) condemning the economic and political blockade that the

<sup>32</sup> This section is based on Raúl Gómez Treto, 'Historia de la Iglesia en Cuba (1959–86)', in *HGIAL*, Vol. IV (forthcoming).



United States had imposed upon Cuba. In September another 'Communication' was circulated: 'We must approach the atheist with all respect and fraternal charity. In the interest of development, in the promotion of all men and in the whole man there is an enormous field of common commitment among all persons of good will, whether atheists or believers.'<sup>33</sup>

Fidel Castro was in Chile in November–December 1971, and held the well-known 'Dialogue' with the 'Eighty' priests who later, in February 1972, visited Cuba. An official Cuban church delegation attended the First Latin America Encounter of Christians for Socialism in Santiago de Chile. Although the crisis of the Church, both internally and with respect to the Revolution, had been resolved, nevertheless the Church in Cuba was isolated, lacking contact with the rest of the Latin American Church. The Vatican regarded it as separate from the mainland, and the 'spirit of Medellín' hardly reached Cuba.

A fifth period, that of 'dialogue' (1979–86) began with the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, which manifested a new way of articulating revolution and Christianity, and the Third Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla, both in 1979. There also took place in 1979 at Matanzas a historic meeting of seventy-seven theologians from socialist countries (of Europe, Asia and Africa, including the Soviet Union) and from Latin America, to discuss the prospects for liberation theology in their respective orbits. There was no quarrel between the Church and Cuba over most of its welfare policies, which by the criteria of the Second Vatican Council were exemplary in all areas except for the atheistic content of education policies. For its part the Cuban regime seemed to be warming towards the Church as a future possible ally as it observed the diffusion of Liberation Theology, the active backing of the clergy for the Nicaraguan revolution and the stern critiques of liberal capitalism contained intermittently in Church statements and documents.

### *Nicaragua*

In Nicaragua in the 1930s the Church had not opposed the rise of the dictator Somoza. And in 1957 his death was mourned by the Church hierarchy. The first signs of renovation came in January–February 1969, at the First Pastoral Encounter, under the direction of Mons. Julián Barni. There were 258 participants, including bishops, priests, monks, nuns and

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

lay leaders. Father Noel García declared that 'the Church of Nicaragua lacks the true spiritual leadership of its pastors'. The poet Father Ernesto Cardenal had already founded his peasant contemplative community, faithful to the directives of Thomas Merton. On 29 June 1971, the Nicaraguan bishops released a pastoral letter entitled 'On the duty of witness and of Christian Action in the political realm'. Mons. Obando y Bravo declared in March 1972 that 'socialism is making enormous advances in Latin America; socialization should be brought about on all levels and not unilaterally'.<sup>34</sup> The pastoral letter of the same month 'On the principles of political activity in the Church' was something like a declaration of independence from the Somoza regime. In those same months, after the earthquake of 1971, a group of young Christians (including Luis Carrión, Roberto Gutierrez, Joaquín Cuadra, Mónica Baltodano, and many others, some of whom became commanders of the Revolution, and others of whom died in it) left behind their Christian activities in the parish of Santa María de los Angeles whose priest was the Franciscan Uriel Molina, to join the Sandinista Front (FSLN), causing a major scandal in the Christian community. In the same year (1972), Ernesto Cardenal wrote *En Cuba* and *La santidad en la revolución*.

In the period immediately after the revolution of July 1979 the Church in general supported the Sandinista programme. In its pastoral letter of November 1979 entitled 'Christian Commitment to a New Nicaragua', the episcopate declared: 'We hear expressed, at times with anxiety and fear, that the current Nicaragua program is leading to socialism. We cannot accept a socialism which, extending beyond its limits, seeks to deprive people of the right to religious motivations in their lives. If, on the other hand, socialism means the preeminence of the interests of the majority of Nicaraguans, a programme which might guarantee the common destiny of the country's assets and resources, an increasing lessening of injustice, if it means the participation of the worker in the product of his work, there is nothing in Christianity that implies contradiction with this program.'<sup>35</sup>

From October 1980, however, the episcopate, encouraged by CELAM, now headed by Mons. López Trujillo, began to oppose the FSLN with increasing openness. In particular, pressure was applied to secure the resignation of government ministers who were priests. In June 1981, the

<sup>34</sup> *Informations Catholiques Internationales* (ICI), 406 (1972), p. 26. This was the time of *Octagesima Adveniens* and of the Roman synod of 'Justice in the world' (1971).

<sup>35</sup> *Compromiso cristiano para una nueva Nicaragua* (Managua, 1979), p. 2.

Vatican demanded that the Fernando Cardenal renounce his work as Director of the National Literacy Campaign and that his brother Ernesto Cardenal resign as Minister of Culture. But in reality the most important target was Father Miguel d'Escoto who as Minister of Foreign Relations was in charge of contacts with the Roman Curia. Pope John Paul II had written in March 1980, 'I formulate the best wishes for the beloved people of Nicaragua to live in a future of peace, concord, solidarity, and in accord with its ancient Christian tradition.' But in June 1982 he indicated to the Church the dangers of internal division and the need for laymen to obey bishops who were increasingly hostile to the revolutionary programme.

From late 1982 tensions between the Church and revolution mounted. The 'religious area' was openly politicized. Opposition to the revolution had no other space but the religious to combat the revolution, as had happened in Cuba after 1962. This phase ended with the papal visit to Nicaragua in March 1983. The Pope once again asked the Nicaraguan people to obey the bishops who opposed the revolutionary programme. From this moment until the defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections – and after – the Church in Nicaragua remained deeply divided.

#### CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church in the late 1980s and early 1990s realigned with the newly democratic regimes in the southern half of Latin America and identified itself with moves towards democratic consolidation in the northern half. But its position was ambiguous. In Argentina, for example, where a worker-priests movement had flourished in the 1960s to the alarm of a conservative episcopacy that had welcomed its demolition during the military regime, the restoration of liberal democracy was not accompanied by moves in the Catholic Church to establish popular Catholic movements that were not controlled by the bishops. Generally, had Catholic evangelism in practice been downgraded to a secondary component that was conducted at grass-roots level by committed parish clergy and members of the religious orders without sufficient guidance, leadership and co-ordination from their superiors, while elite theologians and Church administrators absorbed their energies in the power battles of ecclesiastical bureaucracies and squandered their intellects in theological wrangling? Did the mission of the Church toward native Americans, Blacks and people of mixed race constitute a central feature of its activity or only of its rhetoric? Had significant progress been made in recognizing the contribution made

by women to the life and vitality of the Catholic Church, or had a sluggish and unshakeably patriarchal institution accomplished nothing but tentative half-measures and palliatives that owed much to the need to accommodate the pressures of articulate lay-women and nuns and little to spiritual conviction? While one wing of the Church boasted of the innovatory power and the coverage and outreach of, for example, the Christian Base Communities in Brazil, the other pointed to the traditional institutional strength of the hierarchy in Colombia. Both overlooked the weakness of the Church in every respect in, say, Venezuela. Finally, in the early 1990s the question was raised whether since the 1960s a true and profound transformation of the Latin American Catholic Church had occurred at all.