
Church-State Relations in Peripheral Latin American Formations

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The aim of this paper is to discuss relations between Church and State in Latin America. Paradoxical as it may seem, this will lead to a much wider field, however, because what happens in our socio-cultural region is determined by and is a reflection of world events at certain recent periods in western history. Even without leaving the confines of our subject, we shall have to touch on many others.

Some preliminary definitions

In the first place, we must clarify certain basic concepts if we are to understand one another. I do not think we are all in agreement about the nature of the State, although I assume that we are in agreement about the historico-prophetic function of the Church on the national and international political levels.

It is well-known that there are various concepts of the State: the city state (*polis*) of the Greeks, the *regnum* of the mediaevals or, in modern Europe, the *Staat* of Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* and Marx's critique of it, and the more recent descriptions by Weber or Parsons on one side, by Poulantzas in the centre, or by Samir Amin on the periphery. Without going into detail, I would like to point out a few aspects that may help us to understand the nature of the present relations between Church and State in Latin America.

We believe that the State is the institutionalization of political power which gives cohesion to the various constitutive levels of an historical social formation. It is the principle of the order and organization of that concrete

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system. On the other hand, the State mirrors the mode of production prevailing in a society and controlled by the subject class at any historical moment, a structuring of the exercise of power over the practical activity of the other classes. In other words, the State has a global function over the economic, political and ideological sub-system. It gives cohesion to everything: to the classes, to the modes of production, and to the hegemony of the dominant mode.

The State, therefore, is not a "complete society" (*societas perfecta*), for if it were, it would be more or less equivalent to the social whole (a concrete social formation). Nor is it an organism or institution which directs this whole towards the common good (which omits the element of conflict or domination inherent in that State). Neither is it merely a bureaucracy that governs the destinies of a nation. The State, as we have said, is only the institutionalization or structuring of the political power of a social class, of the class which, because of the function it exercises in the prevailing mode of production of that particular social formation, is able to achieve its own specific interests.

Consequently, when speaking of the relations between Church and State, it is indispensable to analyse what type of state is in question. In other words, what is its historical social form, what are its dominant modes of production and social classes, and — this is essential — what type of solidarity those who hold decision-making powers in the Church have established with all these elements?

Finally, it should be noted that the universal Church establishes its relations with the national states. Consequently, its "universality" must be understood in the light of the corresponding national situation — sometimes a contradictory one — not forgetting that national situations (for example, that of Italy for Catholics and that of the USA for the churches or denominations of that nation) do in fact influence certain decisions, doctrines or traditions. The national transplantation of the Church, under the power of the State (whether imperial, capitalist, transitional, central or peripheral, socialist, etc.), must also be given due importance in our dialogue.

Prior to the discovery of America (before 1492)

Ignacio Ellacuría has shown how Christ exercised a prophetic critical function in regard to the State of his time. His criticism was directed against the colonial state of Palestine of that age (a monarchy exercised by Herod), dependent on imperial Rome (a military slave state, but at the same time a mercantile state, as Darcy Ribiero has shown). In his work on St Mark's Gospel, Belo has indicated in an introductory way the socially critical and subversive character of the Gospel. Christ's discourse was dysfunctional in relation to the economic, political and ideological structures of his country with its Asiatic mode of production.

Similarly, in the Roman Empire, which was based on slave labour, the early Christians exercised prophetic criticism on the political level. The political crime of refusing to worship the emperor is a well-known example. Subversive in regard to the State, the early Church earned the persecution and repression of a state fully conscious of the dangers inherent in the preaching

of the Christian eschatological utopia. Yet military imperialism based on slave labour was only a primitive and naive precursor of the imperial State of our own days.

Since the fourth century, first in the Armenian kingdom, then through Constantine in the Byzantine Empire (Constantinople was founded in 330 A.D.), and subsequently in Germanic-Latin Christendom, the Church has been gradually compromising with the State. In feudal Europe, from the birth of the Holy Roman Empire in the early ninth century, the Church once again almost came to be identified with the organs of political power, and gave an almost sacred character to the feudal mode of production. Consider, for example, how in the *Summa theologiae* IIa IIae, q. 57, art. 4, the feudal lord alone is truly part of political society, and exercises over the serf a *iustum dominativum*. Thus in its theologico-religious domain (and it was the deciding court of appeal in mediaeval society), the Church often came to fulfil the function of an ideological justification of the dominant mode of production. As the instrument of the power of the nobility, the State existed (as a class State) under the tutelage of the Church, without real conflict, until the feudal order experienced the crisis of the 14th century.

The formation of Hispanic society followed another path. It reached central European feudalism late, and, in addition, benefited from new modes of production contributed by the Arab caliphates, the Jewish communities and the growing trade of Catalonia (with an eye on Renaissance Italy), coming by way of the Mediterranean and Africa north of the Sahara. The Reconquest struggle against the Moors (which began as early as 718 A.D.), the power of the nobles who waged war against the infidels, the *fueros* (traditional rights) of the cities, all meant that the monarchical State was never the expression either of feudalism or of the new bourgeoisie. In fact, the marriage of the Catholic monarchs Isabella of Castille and Ferdinand of Aragon made the unification of the peninsula possible but did not remove the contradictions. It was only with Emperor Charles V and through the gold and silver of America that the monarchical State became absolute, overcoming the first bourgeois revolution in Europe in Villalar, on 23 April 1521 (when the *comuneros* defended the customary rights of the cities), and then subduing the nobles by buying them off (and turning them into courtiers) or sending them into the struggles of the conquest of America.

Throughout, the Church, which had been extremely strong during the Reconquest as the chief landowner of the kingdom, with castles and armies (like those of the Archbishop of Toledo), declined in power more and more in the face of the monarchical State. The reforms of Cisneros, the great Archbishop of Toledo at the time of the discovery of America, ended in the dismantling of the political significance of the Church. The *patronato* (crown right to nominate bishops) eventually subdued the Church and turned it into an institution dominated by the absolute monarchical State. The Crown would not tolerate prophetic political criticism from the Church. The head of Spanish Christendom was the King. The monarchy, the first modern European nation State, semi-feudal and semi-mercantile and, after the discovery of America, predominantly commercial, was to be the source, nucleus and centre of the State which organized the Christendom of the Indies.

Colonial Christendom (1492-1808)

The Christendom of the Indies was the first peripheral and dependent social formation of modern Europe, before Africa and Asia. It was organized right from the conquest, and fell apart under the growing power of the new empire of England, the first capitalist State.

Latin American colonial society sprang from the impact of the Spanish nation on the social formations of the original inhabitants of America. Both in the north (the present United States and the north of Mexico) and in the south (the southern cone) the primitive modes of production (not yet either agriculture or animal husbandry) made the establishment of colonial life impossible. It was in these regions, from the 18th century onwards, that the first capitalist formations developed (the small independent traders of New England, or the landowners who would exploit the land for exports, as in the River Plate area).

On the other hand, in so-called "nuclear America" (extending from the Aztecs to the Incas, via the Mayas, Chiochas and other neolithic peoples), it was found possible to introduce a unique mode of production, which originated in the political intimidation and violence of the conquest. This was the *encomienda* (with its derivative types), a system of tribute with a monetary economy, which apportioned the Indians to masters, and established a social relation of production between master (patron) and Indian (client). The distinctive feature of the system was that the surplus left America for the European metropolitan country or was diverted into the market. Gold and silver were the most sought after products. These social formations, the vice-regal territories of Mexico, Peru and the River Plate (whose political capital was Buenos Aires, but whose real centre was the Potosí mountains), had a very complex bureaucratic structure. In all respects, however, they were simply an extension of the mercantilist monarchical Spanish State which, through its Council of the Indies (in Spain from 1524 onwards), its viceroys, *Audiencias*, *Cabildos* (town councils, in America), exercised power for the benefit of the metropolitan country and of the Creole *encomenderos* and commercial classes.

After a short period at the beginning of colonial society when the Church took a critical stance during the conquest (from 1492 to 1620 approximately), with Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (1474-1566) as its chief example, the Church was subjugated by the *patronato* of the Indies, whose juridical instrument was the *Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias* (Laws of the Realms of the Indies — codified in 1681). In other words, the Church, constituted by the Spanish bureaucracy and by a clergy recruited from the *encomendero* and commercial classes, never rebelled against the colonial system as such, as the Inca Tupac Amaru did in the 18th century, for example. The whole first book of the *Laws of the Indies* was, in fact, canon law, but subject to the authority of the King and through the intermediary of the Council of the Indies.

Through tithes, legacies or gifts, the Church became an economic power with immense possessions in lands and capital goods. Conflicts with the *patronato*, such as those instigated by Toribio de Mogrovejo, archbishop of Lima, in the 16th century, became rare and finally disappeared. The Church thus led a submissive coexistence in relation to the metropolitan State and its colonial delegates and representatives.

In the regions where the American Indians were cultivators (the Caribe and Tupi-guarani), from the Caribbean Islands to Brazil and Paraguay, as well as among the peoples to the north of the Aztec empire as far as California, either *reducciones* (Indian settlements) were organized (i.e. a communal mode of production), or else slavery emerged in the plantation economy of tropical products. These regions were either under Portuguese rule (Brazil), where the *Padroado* prevailed (domination over the Church similar to that in Spain, although there were sporadic protests from the Jesuits at first and then from Vieira), or under English rule (as in the Caribbean or the south of the United States). The Church did not criticize the system of slavery, although certain saints like Pedro Claver devoted their lives to the service of the Negroes.

The Church and the peripheral national liberal State (1850-1930)

The national emancipation of the Latin American colonies came about through the Napoleonic occupation of Spain; it began in 1808 and ended in Mexico in 1821 (though in the Caribbean the struggle continued until 1899). Independence from Spain in fact became dependence on England (with the exception of Brazil which the King of Portugal cleverly constituted as the "Empire of Brazil"). A capitalist State since 1688 thanks to the industrial revolution, England became the new metropolitan country.

Socially, this signified the expulsion of the Spanish bureaucracy and the taking over of power in a still inchoate State by the Creole landowning and commercial oligarchy. From 1850 the new State took shape as a liberal, dependent neo-colonial State. England (and, gradually, the United States with its Monroe Doctrine of 1826: "America for the Americans" of the north) brought about a new pact: she sold her manufactured industrial products and bought raw materials which the new nations produced in their territories. The conservative class of large-scale landowners exported exotic produce or goods needed by industry; the new liberal class imported and commercialized the products of the centre. The ideology of liberty in the new State consisted in the "freedom" to sell the products of the new empire which had replaced the old.

A struggle thus developed between those groups which saw themselves as intermediaries for English and North American industrial capitalism (such as the "American party" in Mexico, or the "Europeanism" of a Sarmiento or Mitre in Argentina), and those groups which wanted to unite the country (though in a federal system) by closing its frontiers, so that by setting its centre within the country itself, the nation might benefit from its own resources. As Hinkelammert has shown, the habits of exploitation and trade of the colonial era prevented the Latin American oligarchies from following the narrow path of capitalism centred in their own countries. Since this was not done by the beginning of the 20th century, it became impossible to achieve at all. Latin America will never have a central, independent, creative capitalism.

The liberal State (the best examples of which are the rule of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico, or that of Mitre in Argentina) is a "blind" state (to use Hegelian terminology); it is not aware of its aims, and by its very nature is vulnerable to the succeeding empire; it is dependent. It is organized to exploit the people, the oppressed classes. Its dominant mode of production is capitalist: not actually industrial, but only colonial mercantile capitalism.

The Church established accommodating relations. Accepted by the conservatives, because it too was a landowner until well into the 19th century, it was in open conflict with liberalism. Paradoxically, it supported the aims of self-reliance and liberation from the power of England and North America. Because it was conservative and Hispanic in outlook, it was in accord with what would have been the best for Latin America: an inward-looking revolution like the one accomplished by Francia in Paraguay, the only Latin American country which accumulated national capital, which installed the first railways and which was destroyed by England in the famous Paraguay War of 1870.

Being nationalist and Catholic, therefore, the Church supported opposition to imperialism; nevertheless, because it was conservative, it would not favour industrialization. What is certain is that it lost influence in the liberal State and was violently persecuted and plundered.

We can see that it was in these circumstances, from 1850 onwards, that Protestantism first made its appearance (especially that of North American origin, but also English Anglicanism). If Spanish and Portuguese imperialism imposed Catholicism, it was English and North American imperialism which imposed Protestantism. What deserves study is the fact that Christianity spread to the periphery (and not in the Mediterranean), accompanying the processes of military and commercial expansion.

Relations between Church and State were either bad because the Church was in solidarity with an *encomendero* or slave-owning form of society, or else good because it was in solidarity with the emerging Anglo-Saxon empires. As always, both situations were ambiguous. At all events, the neo-colonial liberal State led to the *cul-de-sac* of the subsequent periods, in which we still find ourselves. The Church did not achieve a satisfactory solution in either case.

The Church and the populist State (1930-1964)

The neo-colonial liberal State, which can be considered as continuing up to the neo-capitalist experiments of Christian democracy in Chile or present-day Venezuelan social democracy, tried to set up an executive and a Congress (with senators and deputies). In reality, that democracy was purely formal because power was always exercised by oligarchies (exporters or landowners, importers or merchants). But, faced with the export crisis of the centre during the first world war, and in particular the 1929 crisis, the traditional oligarchies could no longer continue to exercise power. Furthermore, the replacement of imports required a process of industrialization (which had already begun by the end of the 19th century in what had been the poorest zones during the colonial era, for instance the southern cone), and this gave rise to an industrial bourgeoisie — “internal” rather than “national”, as Poulantzas would say.

The phenomenon of populism from the 'thirties onwards, with Cárdenas in Mexico, Vargas in Brazil, Perón in Argentina, can therefore be explained by the alliance of the industrial bourgeoisie of the peripheral country (as the emergent class) with the growing proletarian class and the peasantry (thus weakening its enemies, the landowning oligarchy and the importer bourgeoisie). In the 'thirties, there was a mobilization of the “people”, but now (thanks to the works of Octavio Ianni and many others) we can see that

ultimately it was for the benefit of the internal industrial bourgeoisie, who inevitably always favour transnational companies. Populism, another possible form of dependent capitalism, reveals its limits, however, and in the end betrays the popular cause.

From the start the Church looked with favour on the populist State (led by the executive power which, although freely elected by the people, no longer drew its inspiration from formal democracy, which in any case lacked substance). The liquidation of liberalism gave the Church greater liberty (except in Mexico, where the legacy of the Revolution continued to foment disharmony between Church and State). Generally speaking, if we include Pérez Giménez in Venezuela, Rojas Pinilla in Colombia, Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador, and the first theoretician of alliance between the classes, Haya de la Torre in Peru, the populist states were on good terms with the Church. That was the time when Catholic Action was founded, and the Church came out from the cloisters.

At all events, populism, with its policy of demobilizing the people on the one hand, and apparent popular advancement on the other, could in the end achieve nothing more, and faced a crisis. It was to be replaced by a sort of liberal State of a new type, favourable to development and open to North American investment. This State, born from the ruins of the populist "dictatorships", soon showed its inability to overcome the economic stagnation of the 'fifties. So there were two possibilities: the socialist State or the fascist State. In some countries, however (such as Costa Rica, Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico), the situation continued as before owing to particular national factors.

The Church and the socialist State (1959-)

In the small island of Cuba, a national movement rose against the last corrupt stage of one of the Latin American populist leaders, Batista. Fidel Castro, supported tactically and strategically by "Che" Guevara, began the epic of the liberation against a decadent government, and in January 1959 they entered Havana.

Cuba was one of the Latin American countries characterized by its pre-industrial, mercantile capitalist production, wholly dependent on the United States, an exporter of exotic tropical products. As a result of the attitude of the USA and through the inspiration of those most active in the revolutionary movement, with Fidel Castro as leader, the nation organized a new State, the first socialist State in America. The socialist system of production was rapidly introduced, although the nation is dependent on Russia, to which it sells its agricultural products. This new social formation no longer had either the equivocal features of populism or the ambiguities of dependent and underdeveloped liberalism. A new situation had arisen.

At first the Church reacted against it violently: "Yes to Christ, no to anyone else!" was the cry in the 1960 demonstrations. Neither Catholics nor Protestants were prepared, either economically or ideologically, for life in a socialist society. Nevertheless, the passage of time and the departure of many ecclesiastics, for whom the new mode of life was impossible, led the Church slowly to adopt a new attitude. The presence of Monsignor Zacchi, the new

inspiration given by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and especially Medellín (1968), made it possible for the Catholic Church in 1969, in two important documents, to criticize the blockade which had caused so much suffering, and to advise Christians to collaborate even with atheists in the task of building a juster and more fraternal society. In the same way, the Protestant churches and denominations, theologically more open, were able to reach a greater understanding of socialism, and many of them supported the revolutionary process.

Great importance attached to the election of the candidate of the Chilean Unidad Popular, Salvador Allende, in 1970. The Latin American socialist movement appeared to have found a wide and democratic road (no longer that of armed rebellion, whether at "focal points" — Guevara — or by guerilla warfare). And so the "Christians for Socialism" movement took shape in Chile in 1972. The hierarchical Church, however, preponderantly Christian democratic in inspiration, was increasingly reserved, until criticism became openly hostile.

At all events, the economic analysis of society had been adopted by the minorities which create theology, and they now employed socialist categories in their thinking, as a matter of strategy.

It was at this moment, when the idea was gaining ground that socialism might be the Latin American solution, that the Chilean Unidad Popular encountered grave internal problems in dealing with its economic conditions (without open support from the Russians). At the same time the US State Department was getting ready for the *coup d'état* and for setting up with Pinochet the type of State operating in Brazil: the dependent fascist State.

The Church, US imperialism and the dependent fascist State (1964-)

The theorist of the new State, in Latin America, was General Golbery do Couto e Silva. In his book *Geopolítica do Brasil*, he shows that the civilization of the "Christian West" is today harassed by Russian materialist atheism. The leader of the Christian world is the United States. Brazil's function is to accomplish hegemony in the south Atlantic. The war is a "total war", on four levels: the level of political power (the State), the economic level (dependent capitalism), the psychological and social level (which in fact led not only to propaganda, but even to torture and the most frightful repressions suffered by numerous Christians and other martyrs such as Antonio Pereira Neto, murdered in 1969), as well as the actual military level. The dependent fascist State is very different from that of autonomous fascism, such as Hitler's or Mussolini's. The essential difference is that it is inspired and organized in Latin America by the imperial US State. It is well-known that since the Second World War, as Comblin shows, a National Security Council has existed in the United States, which coordinates the activities of the State Department, the Pentagon, the CIA and the transnational companies. It is this imperial State, in downright opposition to the national American State (which is manifested for example in Congress), that organized the establishment in Latin America of the fascist or military States in Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, and supports the dictatorships of Paraguay, Nicaragua, Haiti, and so on. It is true that there are certain military governments

(such as those of Panama or Peru, and to some extent of Ecuador) whose reformist intention distinguishes them clearly from the fascist States. But at all events Latin America is in the presence of an unhealthy phenomenon: the dependent fascist State.

The aim of this State is the political control through repressive force of a people which still has a certain nostalgia for populism, so that the trans-national companies can invest with security and the exporting and industrial bourgeoisie may benefit to some extent from this type of dependent capitalist development.

The Church has not reacted with the clarity one would have hoped for. In Brazil, with the exception of some distinguished bishops (among whom should be mentioned Helder Camara, Fragozo, Padim, Lortscheider, etc.), the Church reacted only tardily and timidly in the face of repressive measures against the people. The same can be said of Chile. In Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, the Church on occasion made a critical appearance. In Argentina a photograph of the members of the military junta talking to the chairman of the 1976 Bishops' Conference, Monsignor Tórtolo, has been seen. It is well-known that the Chilean Pentecostal Church has offered public prayers for Pinochet. All this shows us the Church has no clear direction, or rather, that it is leaning towards this type of State. Recently, the Cardinal Primate of Colombia, Monsignor Muñoz Duque, was appointed honorary general of the Colombian army at the same time as he was severely punishing priests and nuns who acted in favour of a group of workmen on strike. In Protestantism the same attitude can be found in its majority groups (middle class or traditionalists who are fundamentalists).

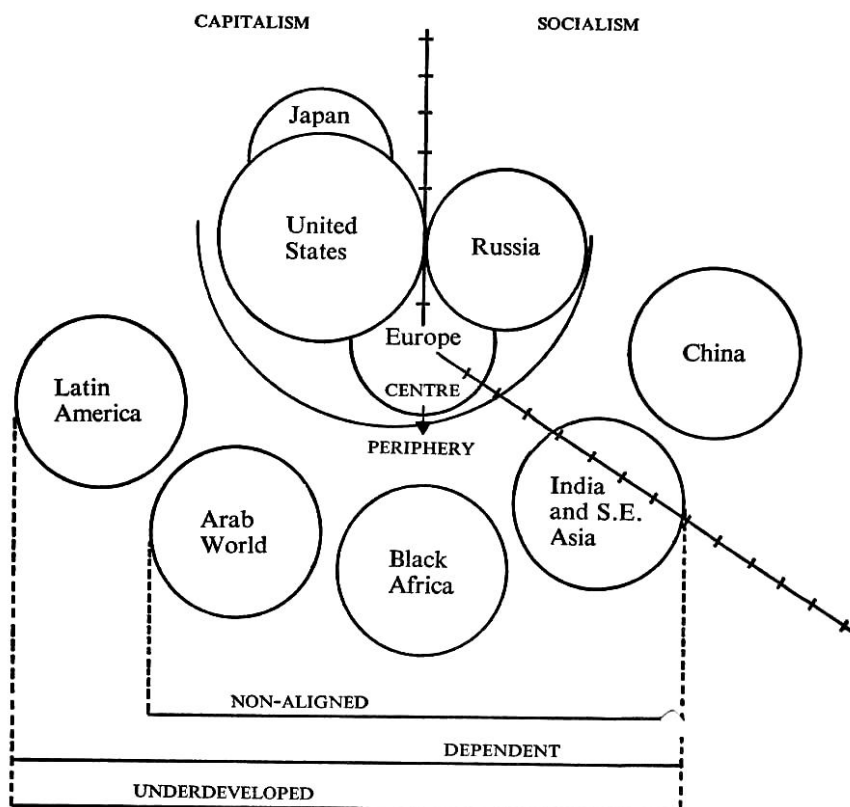
Conclusions

The Church is a prophetic institution, that is to say, a structure of which man in history is the bearer, and whose purpose is criticism of sin (economic, sexual, ideological, political) from the eschatological point of view, and practical action liberating man from the systems of domination resulting from sin. This Church, inevitably though regrettably, yet again appears to the world to be closely associated with a mode of production which in the last century proved to be just as opposed to Christianity as socialism is considered to be at present. In fact, in opposition to the bourgeois revolution in France, the Church adopted a monarchical and feudal position. Now, in the name of the principles of formal liberal democracy and of the capitalist mode of production (although this is criticized in a reformist way it is fundamentally accepted, for example, that private property is a natural right), it supports the peripheral fascist State and the imperial system of the centre.

We Christians of the periphery, who desire the liberation of our poor peoples, the oppressed classes, cannot but be critical, in a constructive ecclesial spirit, of the centrist churches which accept as a fact the domination which their societies exercise over the peripheral societies. The theme is not so much that of the relation between national State and universal Church, as between the states of the centre (the North American imperial state, the developed European states, the Russian bureaucratic and dominating socialist state, etc.) and those of the periphery (from the free ones, e.g. the Chinese,

Vietnamese, Cuban, etc., to the dependent and underdeveloped ones, e.g. the Brazilian, Indian, Iranian, etc.), and the position of the Church in that context. Because, paradoxically enough, many Christians of the centre support with their religion and their faith the domination which their own states exercise over states and churches of the periphery. The great theme, as in the time of Christ, is that of the divinization of the imperial State or making a fetish of a culture which, to increase the confusion, considers itself Christian, namely, the European and North American culture.

Contemporary Christian theology still does not have adequate categories in which to think out the theme of the State in its true dimension in the world, with the conflicts that characterize it. It is vassal to a long European process of ideologization, and its real situation has been plain to see in the periphery, in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Against this ideological conversion of the centre, we Christians among the oppressed peoples of the earth are rising. An Italian political solution (though it is still to be seen whether it is the best for Italy) or a North American solution cannot be imposed by the churches of the centre on those of the periphery. What is needed is a more real sense of the universality of the Church, a universality which is analogical, not univocal, which must promote and not merely permit the responsibility of the churches which are set in very diverse national realities, because their States differ widely.



The world geopolitical situation is approximately as shown on page 37. If this is the present world as it really is, the churches should understand that their prophetic role varies very much according to the outlook of the national State, its mode of production, its ideology and its history. In any case, if the Church is prophetic, it will criticize injustice wherever it is found, but for this the Church will have to get used to carrying out worldwide socio-political analyses, and be watchful of the authentic meaning of its action. It is so easy, unfortunately, to act in good faith in a project, organization or action ideologically justified by a State which, although it claims identification with Christianity, in fact exercises unjust domination over other nations. How many Christians defending their country, as the Americans in Vietnam, are in fact serving the interests of the Beast of the Apocalypse rather than those of the Lamb?

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