

2 MÍGUEZ BONINO IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I have been variously tagged a conservative, a revolutionary, a Barthian, a liberal, a catholic, a “moderate,” and a liberationist. Probably there is truth in all of these. It is not for me to decide. However, when I do attempt to define myself in my inmost being, what “comes from within” is that I am an *Evangélico* (1997a:vii-viii).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Theology is never done in a vacuum. It is intimately related to the cultural, social, political and religious context in which it emerges. It is, therefore, also true that theology is related to biography (Klootwijk 1992:19). As a result, it is vitally important, to understand Míguez Bonino’s journey as a man as well as a theologian in order to comprehend his theological thought.

This chapter will not only recount the major events and activities of Míguez Bonino’s life¹, but also the important social, political and religious changes at the three levels of context, in which his theology has been worked out: Argentina, Latin America and the wider world. The meaning of these events will not be analysed in detail, rather they will be noted as the background of Míguez Bonino’s life and ministry.

The life of Míguez Bonino is divided into 9 periods. Each will receive its own section. A section is added on the impact of Barth on Míguez Bonino.

2.2 EARLY LIFE: SANTA FE AND ROSARIO (1924-1943)

Míguez Bonino was born on 5th March, 1924 in Santa Fe, Argentina, a town situated about 400 kilometres north of the capital city of Buenos Aires. He was the only child of a working class, Protestant family of first-generation European immigrants. His father, also José Míguez, was born in Galicia, Spain in 1884 and arrived in Argentina in 1900 at the age of sixteen. Míguez Bonino’s mother, Aurelia Agustina Bonino was from an Italian family from Piamonte, Northern Italy that arrived in Uruguay in the same year, 1884. She was born about two months after the family’s arrival and before they moved on to Argentina.

The country to which they had arrived was one that was beginning to experience considerable demographic and economic growth. This led to social and political instability. The majority of the poor immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe could not find work on the land and were forced to find employment in the developing light industry, services and growing bureaucracy in cities such as Buenos

¹ For much of this information I am indebted to Míguez Bonino himself, for spending time talking about his life and experience, being honest and open and for clarifying and correcting the text.

Aires, Rosario and Santa Fe.² This new working class had no ties of loyalty to the ‘powerful lords of the Pampas’ (Williamson 1992:460), and created a restless urban proletariat, with socialist and anarchist ideas brought from Europe (Luna 1997:137-138). Electoral reform in 1912 led it to gain political power. The economic power, however, remained among the rural elites.

In 1931, due to Míguez Bonino’s father’s work, the family moved to Rosario; a city 160 kilometres south of Santa Fe. They lived in a lower-middle class area where most of the families were of the administrative workers at the docks. ‘Although his family did not suffer from poverty, Míguez Bonino saw and experienced at first-hand the life of the poor dock workers, went to school with the workers’ children and drank “mate”³ with them in their tenement houses’ (Ferm 1988:130).

Míguez Bonino’s parents, both converts to Protestantism from Roman Catholicism, were members of the Methodist Church in Rosario. His father was the church treasurer and his mother was involved in the Women’s Society. The church was mainly made up of working class dockworkers’ families, although there were some middle class immigrant families; mainly Dutch and German. He describes this church as “mildly charismatic”. It was not unusual to hear a “hallelujah” or an “amen” in the services, nor to hear several people praying aloud at the same time (Interview 1997). Preaching and evangelism was important to the church. The appeal to conversion was not a stereotyped formula to salvation but rather a call to discipleship that contained an element of social concern. The Pietist heritage of the Second Great Awakening in the United States, therefore, was clear in the preaching (Interview 1997). The church was also active in education (Monti 1976:201).

Unusually for a Methodist, Míguez Bonino was not baptised as an infant. He assumes that his parents wanted him to make a decision for himself. A hymn written by his lifelong friend and colleague, Federico Pagura expresses concisely his feelings about his early spiritual experience:

Mi entire life vibrates with joy
My cup overflows with gratitude
Towards Him who put in my existence
Meaning and company from my youth.⁴

When Míguez Bonino was about fourteen years of age, he came to a point where he wanted to be more integrated into the church. He believed that to be a Christian one had to take communion and to do that one had to be baptised as a public declaration of one’s faith. In 1938 he took this step. Thereafter, he was active in the Methodist

² There were exceptions to this with some British investment, especially in the south of Argentina where a type of ‘modern hacienda’ operated. Also some of the Italian immigrants established small nurseries (Spanish: chacras) in parts of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe provinces. A number of these immigrants later became the backbone of many Methodist and Baptist churches in this area.

³ “Mate” is a herbal infusion common in Paraguay, Uruguay, Southern Brazil and Argentina. In Argentina “taking Mate” is a communal activity where everybody drinks from the same cup and the same straw.

⁴Original: Mi vida entra vibra de alegría
mi copa rebosa gratitud
hacia el que puso en mi existencia
sentido y compañía
desde mi juventud.

F.J. Pagura (*Cancionero Abierto*) Vol 5, No. 2.

church up to the time he went to seminary (cf. 1952c:5). His main activities were teaching in the Sunday school and leading the youth work.

Míguez Bonino's secondary education took place in a pedagogically orientated school (*escuela normal*). These schools had been instituted by Argentinean President Domingo F. Sarmiento (1811-1888)⁵ to produce primary school teachers and thereby develop literacy throughout the country. Prior to this period, James Diego Thompson, the British Baptist had brought the Lancastrian System of education to Latin America with great success. Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838) led a movement to establish schools that used what he called the Monitorial System, sometimes called the "Lancasterian" or "Lancastrian" System, in which more advanced students taught less advanced ones, enabling a small number of adult masters to educate large numbers of students at low cost in basic and often advanced skills. The motto of this movement was *Qui docet, discit*. (The one who teaches, learns). Although Sarmiento had brought several Methodist women missionaries from the United States to initiate the project, by the time Míguez Bonino was studying, 'the teachers of this strictly "secular" school were mostly of a socialist and "positivist" orientation' (1991d:198). He graduated from secondary school in December 1940 and in the March of 1941, largely under the influence of his father, entered the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Rosario.

The Methodist Church was always socially minded, having discussions on social and even political issues in the church, both in the young people's group and also at church level. This awoke Míguez Bonino's social interest. It was during his time studying medicine that he came into contact with the *Movimiento Socialista de Juventud* (MSJ)⁶ and became a member. In those days the MSJ had no thought of violent revolution. Militant activity took the form of supporting workers' strikes; writing articles and graffiti; and holding discussions in the 'peoples libraries' (*bibliotecas populares*).

The realization of Míguez Bonino's call to Christian work came slowly. Writing later in his ministry (1952), he recalls the following:

Through the process of studying the first classes in medicine, I felt more intensely that there was a different type of work that God was calling me to. With pleasure I stole a couple of hours from study in order to dedicate to the church. This feeling became dominant, especially when in the middle of that year [1942] I read the letters to the Philippians and Ephesians and especially the first chapters of that second letter (1952c:5).

After two-and a half years of studying medicine he left Rosario to study theology in Buenos Aires.

Summing up this period of his life, Míguez Bonino comments: 'I think this strange mixture of working class conditions, strong piety and social awareness have remained with me—mixed and organized or disorganized in different ways at different moments—throughout all my life' (Ferm 1998:130).

⁵ The major influences upon Sarmiento were Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), the Swiss educational reformer, Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the French philosopher; and John Dewey (1859-1952), the American educationalist.

⁶ Socialist Youth Movement.

2.3 THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: BUENOS AIRES (1943-1948)

The only way to become an ordained minister in the Argentinean Methodist church in the nineteen forties, was to study at *Facultad Evangélica de Teología* (FET).⁷ Míguez Bonino arrived in Buenos Aires in late June 1943 to begin his theological studies for a licentiate (*Licenciatura*) in theology.

This was a time of social and political instability caused by a *coup d'état* earlier that month. This coup brought the military junta that led to Juan Domingo Perón coming to power. Perón's presidency (1946-1955) was characterised by a strange mixture of social justice and political repression that defies simple characterisation. Programmes to introduce social justice included pension schemes; protection against layoffs; a working day of statutory defined length; paid vacations and a new rigorously enforced Sunday rest law; improved working conditions for factory workers; accident compensation; regulated apprenticeships; control on female and child labour; compulsory conciliation and arbitration procedures; subsidized housing; legal services; and annual bonuses (*aguinaldos*). The price of these policies, however, was the ruthless suppression of any opposition to Perón and his government; dismissal of any political opponents; impeachment of opposition Supreme Court judges; limitation of the freedom of the press; the closure or assumption of any union not under Perón's control; and favouritism towards of any pro-Perón publication. Perón's government was deposed by the military in 1955.

The FET was an ecumenical institute from its establishment. By the time Míguez Bonino began his studies, it was a collaborative venture that included the Waldensian Church, the Division of World Missions of the Methodist Church, the Disciples of Christ, and the Presbyterian Church of America (Division of World Missions of the Methodist Church 1956:56). The Lutheran Church joined the FET when it became ISEDET (1969). The aim of the FET was to provide university level education for the Churches and to provide reflection upon theological questions relevant to the churches (WCC 1962:97-98).

The faculty was mainly made up of foreign missionaries drawn from the participating denominations and other Historic Churches present in Argentina.⁸ Carlos Gattinoni was the only Argentinean professor at the time. Most of the professors were influenced by the liberal theology of scholars such as William Newton Clarke (1841-1912) (Clarke 1898; cf. Douglas 1995:102-103) and Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) (Rauschenbusch 1917). Others were Reformed theologians such as Rudolph Obermüller who joined the faculty in 1948. He had studied under Karl Barth (1886-1968) but his main theological influence was the Swiss Reformed theologian Adolf Schlatter (1852-1939). Schlatter was a biblical theologian who stressed 'faith rather than speculative thought, and he maintained a life-long concern of Christian social action' (cf. Douglas 1995:336-337).

The licentiate degree (*Licenciatura*) in theology at the FET was a five-year course. This included three years of academic study, a year's practical experience, a final year of classes, and the preparation of a thesis. The first two years' study

⁷ Evangelical Faculty of Theology.

⁸ In Latin America 'Historical' or 'Historic' Churches (*iglesias históricas*) refers to denominations such as the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. They are some of the first Protestant denominations to be planted in Latin America and today are generally those associated with the Latin American Council of Churches.

included Old Testament and New Testament, Systematic Theology, History of the Church, Christian Education, Psychology and Pastoral Theology.

Míguez Bonino enjoyed the studies, finding them easier than medicine. He also benefited from the small community of about fifteen to twenty students who lived on campus. Among the other students was Mortimer Arias, who served on the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC; Julio de Santa Ana, later a member of the WCC group with responsibility of relations with the Roman Catholic Church; and Emilio Castro, a member of many ecumenical bodies including the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) and later General Secretary of the WCC.

Míguez Bonino's party political activity came to an end at this point. Apart from the fact that he was concentrating on his studies, it was believed that a 'minister's political activities were not carried out through the membership in a specific political party' (1991d:201).

For Míguez Bonino, the practical year took place after his second year. The Bolivian Methodist Church was in need of a pastor, two missionaries having returned to the United States on furlough. Therefore, he spent just under a year (1945-46) in Cochabamba, Bolivia. He divided his time between teaching religion and ethics at the 'American Institute,' which was the largest school in Bolivia at the time and ministering in the young Methodist congregation, which was in only its third year of existence. Preaching, teaching Sunday school and visiting were his major responsibilities at the church.

This ecclesiastical work in Bolivia was his first experience outside Argentina. It had a significant effect on him in two ways. Firstly, the enthusiasm and commitment of the Bolivian Evangelicals (*Evangélicos*) made an impact on him. He encountered mainly Methodist and Baptist churches, and was able to visit twenty-three different churches and preaching points. He describes various situations where the Bolivian church was working hard in preaching and serving others in spite of being persecuted themselves. This led him to question, 'has this not got something to say to our comfortable Christianity?' (1946c:22). Secondly, living in Santa Fe, Rosario and Buenos Aires, Míguez Bonino had encountered many different languages, cultures and nationalities but this was his first encounter with indigenous Latin American culture. One just had to go out of the city a short way and to meet Quechua speakers who did not understand Spanish. Although most of the students at the American School were from the middle classes in Bolivian society, all the workers—gardeners, cleaners and cooks—were Quechua speaking. He described it as 'A whole other world, totally different' (Weishein 2001:281). His assessment of the indigenous culture, however, was not positive as he refers to the 'chaos of superstition, ignorance and vice of the indigenous race' as well as, the youth who are 'prisoners to extremist tendencies'; additionally he called attention to 'apathy of the official church before these burning questions' (1946c:21). This statement reveals a conservative assessment of both popular and official religion as well as the political tendencies of the young people (cf. 1961k:98).

In 1946, Míguez Bonino returned from Bolivia to continue his studies in Buenos Aires. In this post-Bolivian period, the main subjects of study included History of Religion, Philosophy, History of Protestantism, Systematic Theology and Music. Moreover, he continued studying Pastoral Theology as well beginning work on his thesis.

It was during this period that Míguez Bonino became involved with the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)⁹. Various other theologians, including Richard Shaull, Julio de Santa Ana, Híber Conteris and Rubém Alves were also involved (Weishein 2001:296). These, along with Míguez Bonino, were instrumental in the formation of *Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina* (ISAL),¹⁰ an important body in the development of liberation theology in Protestantism. The WSCF was led at that time by Valdo Galland, who had studied under the French theologian Pierre Maury. Maury had introduced Galland to the theology of Barth and consequently Míguez Bonino and other young Protestant theologians began to study Barth's theology.

On 8th February, 1947 Míguez Bonino was married to Noemí Francisca Angela Nieuwenhuize. Her family attended the Plymouth Brethren church and they met when she attended the Methodist Church Sunday School (Pagura 1985:32). The next year, their first son, Nestor, was born. Also in 1947, he became pastor to a small local church in Ramos Mejia, a working class suburb just outside the city limits of Buenos Aires (Pagura 1985:32). He worked under the supervision of Dr. Sante U. Barbieri, former Executive Secretary of the Methodist Church in Argentina, whose social concern, evangelistic zeal and powerful preaching had an impact upon him.

At the same time Míguez Bonino was working on his licentiate thesis, which was entitled 'Hombre y Dios en el siglo XVI, Estudio e interpretación de las relaciones entre Renacimiento y Reforma en la persona, obra y pensamiento de Lutero y Erasmo de Rotterdam; su influencia y su actualidad' (1948b).¹¹ This thesis demonstrates clearly his developing Barthianism which has been maintained throughout his life. He was reading Luther in the light of the theology of Barth, and the theology of Desiderius Erasmus in the light of the Liberal Theologians who were the teachers of his professors. He asserts that Barth was more faithful to the Reformation tradition than the liberal theologians. The thesis also shows how he was struggling with the tension between classical pietism and the liberal social gospel. In Luther he attempted to uncover a solution. He says of Luther's relationship between doctrine and ethics: 'it is the religious factor not the legal that wakens ethical life' (1948b:130). The basis for ethical life is the gospel and not law. Finally, the thesis reveals a contextual reading of Luther's theology. He did not attempt a simple historical investigation but a dialogue between the present context and the historical one. Having completed his thesis he received his licentiate in Theology and was ordained as presbyter in the Methodist Church of Argentina.

2.4 PASTORAL MINISTRY: SAN RAFAEL (1948-1952)

After graduation from seminary, Míguez Bonino was sent as pastor to a small church in San Rafael, in the prosperous wine producing area near Mendoza, Argentina. As in Cochabamba and Ramos Mejía, this was a small church at its very beginning of its life. It was made up of mainly French and Swiss Protestants who

⁹ In Latin America this is known as La Federación de Movimiento Estudiantil Cristiano (FUMEC or sometimes it is simply called MEC).

¹⁰ Church and Society in Latin America.

¹¹ Humanity and God in the 16th century: Study and Interpretation of the relationship between the Renaissance and Reformation in the person, work and thought of Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam.

had settled in San Rafael. His job was to help this small group grow both spiritually and numerically. He saw his role as teaching and training the congregation in their life and work as Christians. He organized two or three concentrated study weeks each year. These mainly consisted of biblical and ethical teaching. In addition, evangelistic youth events would also take place in cooperation with the Baptist church.

The Methodist church was able to erect its own building during those years (cf. The Division of World Missions of the Methodist Church 1951:57). It almost doubled its membership from twenty-five to forty-five. However, Míguez Bonino is remembered in San Rafael 'above all for the building up of his congregation. They were affirmed solidly in the Word and trained for their integral service to the community' (Pagura 1985:32). It was during this period that his second son, Eduardo was born.

2.5 FURTHER STUDIES AND YOUTH SECRETARY: ATLANTA AND BUENOS AIRES (1952-1958)

1952 was a turbulent time in Argentina. Eva Perón died causing almost fanatical grief among Peronist supporters. Her husband, Juan Domingo Peron was re-elected president after a violent campaign. In this context, a new stage began in Míguez Bonino's life. He left the church in San Rafael, and after giving an intensive course on Wesleyan theology at the FET, he went to Europe and the USA for a period of one and a half years of travel and study (cf. 1954a:7-9).

Among other activities in Europe, Míguez Bonino attended the meetings of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Willingen, Germany (1952) and those of the Faith and Order Movement in Lund, Sweden (cf. Tomkins 1953). He then, travelled to the United States to study for a Master of Arts in teaching at Candler School, Emory University, Georgia, where he was joined by his wife, Noemí and his two sons. His studies mainly took place in the area of historical theology. He took several courses in the history of American and Wesleyan theology and also studied widely in the area of contemporary theology. He was able to read a great deal of the theology of Oscar Cullmann and Rudolf Bultmann. This gave him an enhanced foundation in contemporary European theology.

The family returned to Argentina early in 1954 and Míguez Bonino took the role of youth secretary for the Argentine Methodist Church. The Methodist church was working very hard on the biblical and theological formation of its young people at the time. He organised youth camps in the summer (January—March) and regular Bible study weeks, held in various cities around the country. In this role, he maintained close relationships with the regional representation of the WFCS and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)¹².

Míguez Bonino's involvement in theological education arose from his work among young people. In 1955 he commenced teaching part time at the FET, with an evening lay-course for youth. This course was popular and so in the following year

¹² In Latin America the YMCA is called the *Unión Latinoamericana de Juventudes Evangélicas* (ULAJE).

he was asked to teach the history of modern theology to the main student body. A year later, he was asked to work full-time, mainly teaching Historical Theology.

2.6 DOCTORAL STUDIES: NEW YORK (1958-1960)

In 1958, Míguez Bonino received a scholarship to study for a ThD at Union Seminary, New York. Through a series of lectures given at the FET, he became interested in modern Roman Catholic theology. He travelled with his young family to the United States, where they spent almost three years. His thesis was entitled: 'A Study of Some Recent Roman Catholic and Protestant Thought on the Relation of Scripture and Tradition' (1960). This thesis treats developments by mainly French and German Theologians in the Catholic tradition in this area. He traces how these theologians have abandoned the post-Tridentine comprehension of Scripture and tradition for a more dynamic understanding; seeing Scripture and tradition as 'two channels' through which the truth of the Gospel is known. 'Tradition is, therefore, primarily the exercise by which the Church, through the proper channels given in its God-appointed structure of the commission given by Christ, to proclaim and explain authoritatively the apostolic doctrine' (1960e:406). However, he is still critical of the Roman Catholic Church:

Protestant Theology still feels that the RC understanding of the relation of Scripture and tradition, and behind it, of Christ and the Church, is theologically unacceptable. It dissolves the objectivity of the original apostolic witness by equating the authority of Scripture and interpretation and it thereby tends to destroy the confrontation of Christ and the Church, failing to recognise the full meaning of Christ's Lordship over the church in grace and judgement (1960e:406).

Having completed his ThD thesis in February 1960, Míguez Bonino returned with the family to Argentina, where he took up the role of Rector of the FET.

2.7 RECTOR OF THE *FACULTAD EVANGÉLICA DE TEOLOGÍA*: BUENOS AIRES (1960-70)

The decade of the nineteen sixties was a period of political and social upheaval, not only for Latin America but also for the whole world. In Argentina, two civilian governments (1958-1962 and 1963-1966) were hampered by a policy of strikes and civil strife by the Peronist party. This twice led to military takeovers (1962 and 1966). In 1966, inspired by the economic establishment, the military suspended democracy and instituted a new dictatorship under General Onganía. Modelling itself on Franco's regime in Spain and the military *coup* in Brazil (1964), the regime relied upon the armed forces to maintain social order while economic technocrats dealt with the massive social and economic problems. The social order was as short-lived as it was superficial. 1968 and 1969 brought violent protests from students, intellectuals and car-workers, especially in the city of Cordoba. These protests costs many lives and has come to be known as the 'Cordobazo.' A student was killed by the police in Rosario, Míguez Bonino's home town. In 1970, in the light of the

constant strikes, civil strife, and growth of activity by insurgent groups such as the Montoneros, the military itself deposed Onganía.

Continentially, Latin America was in ferment. The Cuban Revolution (1959); the Alliance for Progress (1961); and the Bay of Pigs fiasco (1961) inaugurated a volatile decade for Latin America. The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) exacerbated an already volatile situation and put Latin America at the centre of world politics. The activity of insurgent groups and the fear of communism led to military coups in various countries in Latin America: Honduras, Ecuador and Peru (1963), Bolivia and Brazil (1964), and Argentina (1966). These coups led to a subsequent increase in guerrilla violence. The *Montoneros* and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP)¹³ were active in Argentina at this time.

Towards the end of the decade, the civil rights movement, and the student strikes; the Paris riots (1968); and the Prague Spring (1968) were seen in Latin America as an eruption of the people, a popular uprising against the 'politics of power' of the United States and the European powers (cf. 1968g:10-12). These social and political events in Latin America and in the North were seen by many as the dawning of a new day for the 'Third World.' Events during this period had a profound effect upon the theological thought of Míguez Bonino and his contemporaries.

B. Foster Stockwell, the long term rector of the FET, retired in December 1959. The six participating churches of the FET proposed that Míguez Bonino should replace him: Stockwell probably influenced this decision. Míguez Bonino made it clear to the authorities at the FET that he would do this job for only ten years. He continued to teach historical theology but also was involved in administration. Part of his responsibilities was also to travel to North America and Europe to raise funds for the FET. During these years, this role took him to the United States, Canada, Britain, France and Germany.

Míguez Bonino's plans for the FET were not specific. He did, however, want to strengthen the relationship between the local churches and the FET. He organised visits and student placements in local churches. He also wanted to make the FET more accessible to church members via short courses for laity. These things had already been started before he became rector but now they were given priority. On the other hand, he also wanted to develop serious theological reflection rather than the simple reproduction of foreign theology. In order to do this he employed recognised scholars in their field who were committed to serious study. Among the more daring appointments was Severino Croatto, the first Roman Catholic to teach at the FET.

One of the most important of Míguez Bonino's other activities during the nineteen sixties was his attendance at the Second Vatican Council. When Pope John XXIII announced in January 1959 that the council would take place, there was much excitement and rejoicing in Latin America. Coming soon after the final success of the Cuban Revolution, a sense of expectation was forming in intellectual circles. Míguez Bonino was part of the delegation of the World Methodist Council and the United Methodist Church of America and thereby became the only Latin American Protestant observer at the council. Between 1962 and 1965, he attended three of the four sessions, missing only the third session. This required him to be absent from his

¹³ Revolutionary Army of the People.

family (his third son, Daniel was born in 1963) and from the FET in the second half of the second semester during these years. His most thorough treatment of the Council is to be found in *Concilio Abierto*¹⁴ (1967c). The bibliography reveals the extent of his publication on this subject between the years 1963-1967.

The theme of Míguez Bonino's doctoral studies, along with his attendance of the Council, presented him with many opportunities for dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. It also led to many requests for articles, reflecting on ecumenical relationships between Protestants and Catholics; especially in Latin America.

Míguez Bonino also continued his involvement in the ecumenical movement attending various important international conferences. Among the more important of these was the Joint Assembly of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches in New Delhi, India (1961); and the Second Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala, Sweden (1968). Both these brought him new responsibilities.

At the New Delhi Assembly, Míguez Bonino became a member of the Commission on Faith and Order Commission (FO). His official involvement ended in 1977. His work with this commission was mainly confined that of reading and commenting on papers and memoranda produced by the executive committee as well as some correspondence and preparation of materials for meetings. He was therefore involved in studies that led to the BEM document and various other important studies related to hermeneutics, ecclesiology and relations to the Roman Catholic Church. The importance of his work in FO will become clear in subsequent chapters. He comments, however: 'Faith and Order never really took root in Latin America...unity as a predominantly doctrinal or ecclesiastical project does not evoke interest or response' (1997a:131).

At the Uppsala Assembly (1968), Míguez Bonino was voted onto the Central Committee of the WCC. This was, again as representative of the United Methodist Church of America. His involvement added a great deal of work to his already busy schedule. He understood his role as follows: 'to represent in your area the concerns and the programmes of the World Council of Churches and on the other hand to take back to the Central Committee the concerns of the Churches' (Interview 14.8.2001). This involved a lot of travelling and meeting with local church leaders to listen to their concerns and to report to the Central Committee. In this way Míguez Bonino obtained a wide knowledge and experience of Latin American church life.

In the academic year 1967-1968, Míguez Bonino was visiting professor at Union Seminary, New York. Although he was there for the whole year, he only officially taught the first semester because the spring semester (1968) was the time of the student strikes in the United States. The student body of Union Seminary came out in support of the Columbia University students. The faculty of the Seminary, which was generally in sympathy with the students, also supported the strike. Míguez Bonino continued giving classes informally in his apartment. He taught a course on *Dei Verbum*: 'The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,' 'Christianity in Latin America,' and 'Missionary concepts in Latin America.' It is interesting to note that some of the students felt that he was too conservative because

¹⁴ Open Council.

they were interested in spontaneous political uprisings, whereas he was far more concerned with “organized political and social life” (Interview 14.8.2001).

The decade of the nineteen sixties saw various important developments in ecumenical life in Latin America. Míguez Bonino was one of the important leaders during this period. The *Conferencias Evangélicas de Latinoamérica* (CELAs)¹⁵ had begun in Buenos Aires (1949) and were designed to help the Latin American Protestant Churches to advance in their mission in Latin America. The second conference in Lima, Peru (1961), entitled ‘Christ the Hope of Latin America’ (CELA 1962) was a catalyst for various important projects. The conference recognised the need for continuity in the search for the unity within Latin American Protestantism. This led to the formation of the *Movimiento Pro-Unidad Evangélica de Latinoamérica* (UNELAM) (1963).¹⁶ Another organisation that proceeded from this conference was *Asociación de Institutos Teológicos* (ASIT),¹⁷ a body set up to accredit seminaries and Bible institutes in Latin America. A final CELA was held in Buenos Aires (1969). Míguez Bonino was involved in the Conferences and also in the bodies that emerged from them.

Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina (ISAL)¹⁸ was another influential body, in Latin American Protestantism during the nineteen sixties; and one in which Míguez Bonino was influential. He had been involved in the discussions in the late nineteen fifties (1957) that had led to the first consultation, which took place at the same time as the Second CELA (July, 1961). This consultation was entitled ‘Encounter and Challenge: Evangelical Latin American Christian Action in the Changing Social, Political and Economic Situation’ (ISAL 1961). The prevailing feeling that emerged from this consultation was one of perplexity. The participants felt the need for a more thorough investigation of the social dynamics between church and society. The periodical that emerged from this consultation, *Cristianismo y Sociedad*¹⁹, was a forum for creative and radical theology in the Latin American Protestant church for decades afterwards. This body organised other consultations through the nineteen sixties until the early seventies (El Tabo, Chile (1966); Piriápolis, Uruguay (1967); Ñaña, Peru (1971)). During this period, ISAL moved, inexorably from the concept of development, towards participation in revolution, as the answer to the church’s responsibility towards social change. This was given expression in the fact that it was one of the leading organising bodies of the Christians for Socialism Conference (1972). After the Chilean coup that brought Augusto Pinochet to power, however, it ceased to organise centrally; although *Cristianismo y Sociedad* continued to be published. Míguez Bonino participated in all of ISAL’s consultations; gave papers at most of these; contributed widely to its periodical; and promoted many of its theological insights. The theology of ISAL was a significant contributing factor in the rise of the Theology of Liberation.

At national level, Míguez Bonino continued to be occupied with church life. Most notably, he was closely involved in the process which led to the *Iglesia Evangélica Metodista Argentina* (IEMA)²⁰ becoming autonomous. At the 74th

¹⁵ Latin American Evangelical Conferences.

¹⁶ Movement Towards Evangelical Unity in Latin America.

¹⁷ The Association of Theological Institutes.

¹⁸ Church and Society in Latin America.

¹⁹ Christianity and Society.

²⁰ Argentine Evangelical Methodist Church.

Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Argentina (1966), he gave a series of talks entitled: ‘What does it mean to be the Church of Christ here and now?’ (1966k). In those talks, he posed some serious questions about the institutions and structures of the Methodist Church and its identification of the church with the people of Argentina:

Have we been content (in terms of the structure of our Church, distances, human groups, the way of life of our countries) with reproducing those elements which have emerged in other contexts which are very different from our own? Are we organized institutionally, financially, in our buildings, and in our ministry in terms of our numbers and of the human and economic possibilities of our membership. Or are we bleeding dry the enthusiasm and money of our members and countries in our attempt to spread the resources, personnel, and institutions in order to set up and maintain programmes created for memberships of millions in an opulent society? (1966k)

Míguez Bonino was president of the committee, which during the period 1965-1969 negotiated with the United Methodist Church of America and wrote the constitution of the newly formed independent denomination. He insists: ‘There was a need to simplify very seriously the structure of the church... We spent most of our time in useless discussions of purely institutional things instead of dealing with the issues of work and mission. Autonomy allowed the churches to have a kind of organization that would really deal with the issues’ (Interview 2001). He preached at the inaugural service, which took place on 5th October, 1969.

2.8 DIRECTOR OF THE *ASOCIACIÓN DE SEMINARIOS E INSTITUTOS TEOLÓGICOS*: BUENOS AIRES (1970-1976)

Historically for Argentina, the first half of the nineteen seventies was one of growing economic crisis, social unrest and political turmoil. From 1970-1973, two successive military governments attempted and failed to bring economic and social stability to the country. Political violence was increasing. In this context, the Peronists called for Perón’s return. But by the time he returned to Argentina (June, 1973), Perón, was seventy-seven, frail, and lacked the charismatic presence of Evita at his side. The Peronist movement was pulling itself apart. It contained fascist, Cuban style Communist, and social democratic factions. In spite of the return of Perón, left wing insurgents continued to bomb, kidnap and assassinate. Right-wing death squads, such as the notorious Argentinean Anticomunist Alliance (Triple A)²¹ were used by both Perón and subsequent military governments to deal with any left wing opposition.

On 1st July 1974, Perón died of a heart attack and the country was plunged into chaos. Peron’s third wife, Isabel took over as president but proved powerless to unite the country. In the face of a collapsing economy and a growing militant insurgency, the military, led by General Jorge Videla took over the government. This trend of military intervention was mirrored in the rest of Latin America. The list is as striking as it is sad: Guatemala (1970-1982), Bolivia (1971), Ecuador

²¹ Alianza Anticomunista Argentina.

(1972), Chile and Uruguay (1973), Bolivia (1974), Honduras and Peru (1975), and of course, Argentina (1976).

Keeping his promise of 10 years earlier, Míguez Bonino left the post of Rector of the FET. In January 1971, the FET established a partnership with the Lutheran Faculty of Theology and changed its name to ISEDET. A year earlier, he had replaced Emilio Castro as Executive Secretary of 'the Association of Seminaries and Theological Institutes' (ASIT)²², and now took up the task full time. ASIT was formed in November 1963; Míguez Bonino had been a part of a committee formed after a consultation in 1962 to lead to the formation of this body. ASIT was partially sponsored by the Theological Education Fund (TEF), and was one of the Associations of Seminaries that were formed at the beginning of the 1960s. According to Pablo A. Deiros, it was 'one of the cooperative experiments that had most success' (Deiros 1992:813-814). It promoted 'accreditation projects, interchange of students and professors, the promotion of libraries and above all, consultation on diverse subjects, especially those that have are specifically to do with theological education' (Deiros 1992:813-814).

Although, ostensibly this was a full-time job for Míguez Bonino, he continued to teach at ISEDET and other institutes. He also continued to publish extensively. The job with ASIT mainly consisted of visiting the member institutions in the various countries, checking their academic levels and advising on diverse matters of theological education. He travelled chiefly to the interior of Argentina and to Chile and Uruguay as well as to a lesser extent, Bolivia. It also meant arranging consultations on various issues related to theological education.²³ He handed this job over to Pablo A. Deiros in 1976.

This time was one of the most intense periods of publication for Míguez Bonino. Between 1970 and 1985 almost half of his total literary production took place. The theological and historical articles he wrote during this time cover a multitude of issues. They deal, for instance with Christian education, history of Latin American Protestantism, explanations of the Theology of Liberation, papers for Faith and Order, mission strategy and theology, evangelisation, Christology, interpretations of Catholicism and Protestantism, ecumenism, Methodism and its theology, democracy, and history.

Four of his thirteen books were written and published during these six years. Two were written for the Latin American church and two for the English Speaking theological world. These four books represent his most important thought of this period. *Ama y haz lo que quieras: Hacia una ética para el hombre nuevo* (1972a) was written as part of a series of short books on ethical issues for the Latin American church. The series was sponsored by the Theological Education Fund, but all the writers were Latin Americans. In this book he poses the question: 'what is the Christian's responsibility in regard to the burning ethical questions of the day?' And he moves towards the question: 'how can this be carried out effectively?' He rejects

²² Asociación de Seminarios e Institutos Teológicos.

²³ The consultations that took place during Míguez Bonino's time as Executive Secretary of ASIT were as follows: A consultation on Theological Education by Extension (Buenos Aires 1970) participation in the First Latin American Consultation of Theological Educators (Sao Paulo, Brazil 1970), and consultation on What does it mean to educate theologically? (Argentina 1971), another treating the subject of Secularization and Theological Education (Asuncion, Paraguay 1972), also Images of the Pastor and a Consultation of Professors of History (both in Montevideo, Uruguay 1973) and finally another consultation on Theological Education by Extension (Santiago, Chile 1975).

‘law’ as a valid basis for Christian ethics, preferring the concepts of the ‘New Creation’ and the Kingdom of God. He argues that Christians are made new in Christ and introduced into the Kingdom. This new humanity is given a new maturity and a freedom in faith, hope and love. They do not follow a series of rules and laws; legalism and pride tend to result. They live out their lives, however, in a context of combat and action. Augustine’s axiom ‘Love and do what you will’ is a précis of this understanding.

The context of the next two books to be mentioned is the dialogue between European and North American, and Latin American theology. Both these books were written in English. In January 1974, Míguez Bonino travelled to the United Kingdom and spent six months in teaching “Latin American History and Theology” at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. It was during this time that John R.W. Stott, under the influence of Andrew Kirk, a former professor at ISEDET, invited him to give the “London lectures in contemporary Christianity”, sponsored by the Langham Trust and hosted by the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies of the Polytechnic of Central London. The subject was ‘Christians and Marxists: A Mutual Challenge to Revolution’ (published as 1976c) He was unsure whether to accept the invitation because of the way Latin America theologians felt they were becoming part of the northern world’s theological marketplace (1974e). However, he decided to go ahead after he met personally with John Stott (Stott 1974a).

Míguez Bonino wanted to take a pragmatic approach rather than a speculative one. He only wanted to touch upon theoretical issues where they impinged upon the reality of the cooperation between Christians and Marxists (1974e). The promotion, consequently introduced the lectures as:

concerned not only with a theoretical discussion of the Christian and Marxist world-views, but also and particularly with our active response to concrete situations. In Latin America (‘our dependent and oppressed continent’ [cf. 1974e] he calls it) concerned Christians often find themselves with Marxists in a common struggle (Stott 1974b).

According to Míguez Bonino, this reflects the way Latin Americans have approached the issue of cooperation with other in general and with the Marxists in particular (1974e). Although well received, the lectures caused much controversy. John Stott said that a lot of the vocabulary and concepts that Míguez Bonino used in these talks were quite alien to him and that a lot of the people who attended “could not believe their ears” that Míguez Bonino was advocating Christian cooperation with Marxists. In a letter to Míguez Bonino after the talks Stott signs, “Your concrete brother!” (Stott 1974a) revealing how Míguez Bonino had used the term and how it expressed a significant difference in the use of terminology.

The second book—*Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (1975b)—was written upon his return from England and can be considered one of Míguez Bonino’s most influential books. It is an explanation, defence and critique of liberation theology. He begins by describing the historical reality of Latin American Christianity and its relations to colonialism. He then explains the socio-political situation in the continent in terms of dependence and dominance. This led to a description of the way certain Christians have begun to respond to the concrete reality in which they live and subsequently how various theologians have begun to reflect upon the actions of those Christians in the light of the socio-political

problems described. In the second half of the book he treats four theological loci—hermeneutics, Kingdom of God, love and reconciliation, and ecclesiology—that were important for the theology of liberation and then evaluates and critiques these reflections in the light of his own understanding.

The final book to mention is *Espacio para ser hombres: Un interpretación del mensaje de la Biblia par nuestro mundo* (1975c, cf. 1979i). When Míguez Bonino returned from England, he was asked to take up the role of Pastor in a small Methodist Church near his home. This was the church he had begun in 1947. The book emerged from a series of evangelistic talks held in the church, and the ensuing dialogue with the audience. Using various provocative titles, he shows how the Christian doctrines of God, humanity, salvation and mission should be liberating rather than oppressive within society. He explains the meaning of humanity in the world, the meaning of life in this world today, and the freedom and assurance that comes from life in Christ.

2.9 DIRECTOR POST-GRADUATE STUDIES OF THE *INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DE EDUCACIÓN TEOLÓGICA*: BUENOS AIRES (1976-1985)

The overwhelming social and political fact for Argentina during this period was, what has come to be known as the ‘Military Process’ and in the wider world as the ‘Dirty War’. The military government that ruled from 1976-1983 was one of the most vicious Argentina has seen. When it took over, it immediately re-imposed Orgaía’s policy of the technocratic dictatorship (1966-1969). This time, however, the model of the Pinochet regime in Chile was followed: military officers were appointed to run government ministries in order to conquer inflation and to balance the budget. The practical application of this was the ruthless suppression of any opposition to the new military dictatorship. Trade unionists, left-wing political groups, and even church officials were imprisoned, tortured and murdered. It is calculated that during the period 1976-1983 over 30,000 people disappeared and were murdered. After their defeat in the *Malvinas* or Falklands’ War, the myth of the military as the defender of the national interest was shown to be false. Leopoldo Galtieri, the leader of the *junta* and *de facto* President resigned and his successors promised a return to democratic government.

In December 1983, Raúl Alfonsín of the *Unión Cívica Radical*²⁴ was elected to power. The economy was in a dreadful state: the interest on the forty-five billion dollar foreign debt was consuming fifty percent of export earnings, and inflation was on the point of reaching 1000% per annum. The survival of democracy rested upon the revival of the economy and the reconciliation of political interests. The first years of democracy were ones of uncertainty and hope.

In 1976, Míguez Bonino took on the role of dean of post-graduate studies at ISEDET. He and his team designed and shaped the curriculum, set accreditation criteria, and promoted the new department. The ongoing work of the department mainly consisted of the supervision and assessment of post-graduate students and all the administrative work involved in their supervision. This is noted in order to emphasise Míguez Bonino’s continuing commitment to the task of theological

²⁴ Civic Union Radical Party.

education and also the emphasis he placed upon higher level theological reflection in the context of Latin American theology.

Other activities, apart from Míguez Bonino's main work were diverse. At the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC, he was voted onto the Presidium of that body. He did not attend the Assembly because it took place in the unstable period between the death of Juan Domingo Perón and the military coup (1976). He feared that if he left the country he would not be able to return. The new role in the WCC generated a lot of extra work such as managing the programmes of the World Council of Churches, projecting for the future, and dealing with institutional matters such as budget. An interesting fact to note is that because Míguez Bonino held such a prominent position in the WCC his life was probably spared during the 'Military Process' (1976-1983). It also gave him freedom to travel, to report on local issues; and to continue his publishing activities.

An important activity that lies outside his theological activities was that Míguez Bonino was a founder member and vice-President of *Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos* (APDH)²⁵. In December 1975 representatives of various political parties, social and religious groups (including representatives from the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant communities) met to constitute the APDH. He attended the meeting but it was Carlos Gattinoni who was the official Evangelical (Evangélico) representative. The formation of the APDH was a reaction to the activity of Peron's death squads—the infamous *Alianza Argentina Anti-Comunista* or *Triple A*.²⁶ When the military coup took place three months later (March 1976), the APDH began to receive reports of disappearances, abuses of human rights, and torture. Míguez Bonino, as one of the vice-presidents spent many hours (almost half his available time) interviewing people who had lost family members or friends, and meeting various other human rights groups.

This period was one of deep personal experience in Míguez Bonino's Christian life. He explains how in one interview, a Jewish woman, who was a member of the Communist party recounted to him how her son had disappeared. She said to him, 'Pastor, help me because I realise that I am starting to hate' (1991c:205). He felt impotent. 'What can one do there? I think I said, "Look here, I can't help you much but what I would do if this happened to me is pray, because I know of no other way not to hate. I know you don't share this belief but do you want me to pray for you?" And we had a prayer together for a few minutes' (1991c:205). This story illustrates his deep piety and desire to integrate faith and praxis.

The APDH's work did not finish with the end of the military government (1983) because it took on the even more complicated task of eradicating the ghosts of the past, eliminating all threats to democracy and so achieve justice. Míguez Bonino continued his association with this organisation up to the end of the nineteen nineties.

Míguez Bonino continued to travel extensively during this period and to give conference papers at various meetings. Since 1971, there had been dialogue between Latin American theologians and European and North American ones. However, after the publishing of *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (1975b), a storm blew up. Jürgen Moltmann, one of the most respected European theologians who had influenced Liberation Theology, wrote an *Open Letter to José*

²⁵ The Permanent Assembly of Human Rights.

²⁶ Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance.

Míguez Bonino (Moltmann 1976), criticising him over various points. These include the accusation that Latin American Liberation Theologians drew heavily from modern European theology and that; in fact, European theologians had been saying the same things as the Liberationists. In 1976, in a meeting of a small group of Liberation Theologians, it was decided not to respond to its author directly and so cause further controversy but rather to write a series of articles, explaining their viewpoint and dialoguing with Moltmann.

Furthermore, in 1977 Moltmann was invited to give the annual Carnahan Lectures at ISEDET on the subject of “the Theology of Hope.” Míguez Bonino, as professor of Systematic Theology and Director of Post-Graduate studies, was invited, along with Dr. Armando Jorge Levoratti, professor of Holy Scripture at the Higher Seminary, La Plata, to respond to each of Moltmann’s lectures. Both Míguez Bonino and Levoratti gave their reactions, with Moltmann having the opportunity of concluding the time with a response to the reactions (Moltmann 1978).

Two other opportunities for dialogue with Northern theologians are worth mentioning. Firstly, a conference in Detroit (1976) discussed of liberation issues, and Míguez Bonino was one of the respondents. The book *Theology in the Americas* (Torres and Eagleson 1976; cf. Torres and Eagleson 1980) came out of these meetings. Secondly, in 1978 Míguez Bonino presented the final Lovell Murray lectures to the Ecumenical Forum of Canada with the title “Mission as Conflict and Challenge” (1978). He appeals to the northern missionary societies and missionaries to get involved in the project of liberation and to stop imposing their own agendas.

His continental ecumenism should also be mentioned. In September 1978, UNELAM held very important meetings in Oaxtepec, Mexico. These meetings led to the creation of a continent-wide ecumenical body, called *Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias en proceso de formación*²⁷. The creation of an ecumenical body for the whole of Latin America had been rejected in CELA I (1961). It was Míguez Bonino, in Oaxtepec who suggested that this should be a process towards the formation of a Latin American Council of Churches. ‘It just came to me during the meetings in Mexico’ (Interview 28.2.2002). The process towards this national Council of Churches culminated in the inaugural assembly of CLAI which was held in Huampaní, Peru (November 1982). As one of the major movers of CLAI, he gave a paper entitled, “Jesus Christ: committed vocation with the Kingdom (in search of an interpretation of CLAI)” (cf. 1982f:311-314). In this paper he sees the formation of CLAI as a covenant with Jesus Christ, who gives meaning to this covenant; it is a covenant with all brethren in the Lord as well as with the Latin American people (1982f:311-314).

Part of his responsibilities, as a member of the Presidium of the WCC, was to prepare for the forthcoming General Assembly in Vancouver (1983). The Presidium perceived the need to bring ecumenical theology down to the level of the congregation. Various meetings were organized at national and regional levels in order to produce materials for the churches. Part of the regional preparations in Latin America was the production of a book on the subject of politics and the Christian Faith. This was the context of his book *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (1983m).

²⁷ Latin American Council of Churches in Formation.

2.10 RETIREMENT: BUENOS AIRES (1985FF)

From the late nineteen eighties, Argentina has experienced relative calm in the political realm. There have been no military governments and democratic handovers are becoming the norm rather than the exception. On the other hand, the governments have strictly implemented neo-liberal economic policies. Carlos Saul Menem, was the major instigator of these reforms, selling off most of the profit-making national industries such as electricity and telephone.

The most important world event of the nineteen eighties and early nineties that has bearing upon this study was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet Communism. This, according to Míguez Bonino, had two major effects. Firstly, Latin Americans realized that, as a result of this, they were destined to live under a Capitalist system for the next twenty or thirty years. He especially mentions that the older people realized that they would be condemned to spend their last years under a capitalist system dominated by one superpower. The theological question, according to Míguez Bonino was: how does one give an Evangelical testimony in such a context? (Interview 28.2.2002).

Secondly, these events liberated Latin American theologians from the fear of being accused of working as an agent of Communism! The end of Soviet communism allowed for a greater discussion of social and political issues within the Evangelical church. During this time, many conservative Evangelicals started social programmes within their church such as feeding centres and adult literacy courses. This is also true of the Pentecostal Churches who are poor themselves. There was even a realisation within some Pentecostal churches that political action was part of its mission. Míguez Bonino sees this as a very positive development. A worrying aspect, however, is the lack of a theology to reflect upon this work. He is convinced that this presents theological teachers with a great challenge; biblical teaching is the only answer (Interview 28.2.2002).

After the Vancouver Assembly (1983) and Argentina's return to democracy (1983), Míguez Bonino continued in fulltime teaching until 1985 when, at the age of sixty-one, he retired. In reality, his retirement was only a release from regular duties. He continued to teach at ISEDET; to speak at conferences; to write books and articles; and to travel widely. Up to 2003, when he suffered a stroke, he was still in great demand as a speaker on Latin American history and theology, on the Protestant churches in Latin America, Pentecostalism, Liberation Theology and a multiplicity of other subjects. He also had more time to think and to reflect upon the journey that his theology has taken.

Only a few important events will be mentioned here. The late eighties and early nineties also saw Míguez Bonino involved in three large publication projects. Firstly, he, along with other scholars such as Julio R. Sabanes and Justo González, was involved in the translation into Spanish of the work of John Wesley. This was a mammoth task, leading to the publication of ten volumes. The translation was part of the process which led Míguez Bonino to begin to return to his pietistic roots. Secondly, he wrote several articles in the *Diccionario de la historia de la Iglesia* (1988g), including articles on the life and thought of various theologians, as well as on the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, and on Uppsala. And finally, he was one of the general editors of the 1000 page *Dictionary of the Ecumenical*

Movement (1991k) edited by Nicholas Lossky and others. He also wrote fourteen articles, including those on Conflict, Ethics, Medellín 1968, Natural Law and Theology of Liberation.

In 1990, Míguez Bonino started to relate to the more Evangelical wing (in the Anglo-Saxon sense) of the Latin American churches. C. René Padilla, at that time the General Secretary of the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* (FTL)²⁸, invited him to a consultation on “Theology and Life” in Quito, Ecuador, organised in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the formation of the FTL. He was invited as respondent to papers given by the Mennonite John H. Yoder, C. René Padilla and Samuel Escobar (1991b). This conference marks an important turning point in the latter part of his life. After the end of the military dictatorship, Conservative and Ecumenical Evangelicals (*Evangélicos*) started to talk and work more closely.

This led Míguez Bonino to be invited to the third *Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización* (CLADE III) in Quito, Ecuador (1992)²⁹ which was also organized by the FTL. As one of the main plenary speakers, he gave one of the two theological papers on, “The Gospel of Reconciliation” (1993b:100-114). He also gave a paper in one of the seminars on “The Roman Catholic Church and evangelisation.” This was part of a group of studies commemorating the 500 years of Christianity in Latin America (1993d:421-428). In a later reflection, Míguez Bonino comments that, ‘probably CLADE III will remain marked in the history of the Latin American Evangelical (*Evangélico*) Churches as the beginning of a new stage.’ He refers to CLADE III as an “Ecumenical Encounter” (1993a:161).

In 1993, Míguez Bonino was invited to give the annual Carnahan Lectures at ISEDET. He was given a free hand as to the subject. The invitation letter stated, ‘some theological topic of your interest, on which you are working’ (1995a:vvi). Míguez Bonino chose to deal with the subject of Latin American Protestantism, an issue which has fascinated him over many years. The book that came out of this series of lectures, entitled *Faces of Latin American Protestantism* (1995a) will be analysed in detail later in this study.

In 1994, Míguez Bonino formed part of the committee in the reform of the National Constitution of Argentina (cf. 1994c:17). This was a reformation of the 1853 constitution. According to an article he wrote explaining his participation in the process, it gave an opportunity for ‘a transformation of society’ (1994b:7) but needed all sectors of society to contribute to the political process. He had been invited by FREPASO (*Frente País Solidario* or *Frente Grande*), a coalition of centre-left Argentinean political parties, to put his name forward as ‘an independent candidate’ (1994b:6). He mainly took part in two Commissions: the “Commission on International Agreements,” which dealt with human rights agreements and the “Commission on New Rights.” This commission dealt with the rights of the indigenous peoples, the environment, women and the marginalized of society—rights ignored by the 1853 Constitution. He also had a small part in the “Nucleus Commission” when religious issues were discussed. Although this constitution did not give take away the privileged position of the Roman Catholic Church, according to Míguez Bonino, its greatest achievements were that it did give Protestants greater equality, especially allowing a non-Catholic to take the position of President and vice-President and to put the issues of the rights of indigenous peoples in Argentina

²⁸ Latin American Theological Fraternity.

²⁹ Latin American Congress on Evangelisation.

and their inclusion in the agenda (1994b:7). Míguez Bonino also notes another positive outcome of this reform process: ‘that in the Evangelical (evangélico) Churches in general there is a greater consciousness of the importance of this whole social-political dimension than there was a few years ago’ (1994b:7).

Responding to the Pentecostal growth in Latin America, Míguez Bonino took part, as a respondent, in a 1996 conference on Pentecostal studies in San José, Costa Rica, sponsored by Vanguard University of Southern California (1999b:116-123). Twenty-two scholars from all parts of the world and from every part of the ecclesiological spectrum gathered together, including a number of Roman Catholic experts. Other participants were Harvey G. Cox, Viney Samuel, Edward L. Cleary O.P. and Douglas Peterson. In his response, he commented on the quality of the studies presented by the Pentecostal scholars and, rather ironically, notes that ‘studies on Pentecostalism, which are usually quite bold in their own interpretations of what Pentecostalism is and does, seldom stop to listen to how Pentecostal scholars themselves interpret their own faith and experience’ (1999b:116).

He also took part in CLADE IV (2000), again held in Quito, Ecuador in a Pentecostal Seminary. His involvement was even deeper this time. He led one of the eighteen work groups, gave a plenary paper and also two papers in other work groups. The importance of his involvement in the CLADE assemblies is most significant in the fact that these conferences originated with a conference organized by Peter Wagner and the Billy Graham Organization (Costas 1976:199). CLADE I seemed to be an attempt by certain North American Evangelical movements to limit the growth of interest in the Theologies of Liberation. With the formation of the FTL, the CLADE assemblies³⁰ became increasingly driven by Latin American concerns such as the integrity of the church’s mission, systemic injustice, poverty and the unity of the church.

2.11 EXCURSUS: THE INFLUENCE OF KARL BARTH

Míguez Bonino has been influenced by a wide variety of theologians during his career but one theologian’s influence towers above all others—that of Karl Barth. A full investigation into the influence of Barth upon him and other Latin American theologians would require exclusive treatment. This is partly due to the variety of ways in which Barth’s inspiration was felt and also due to the fact that by his eightieth birthday, Barth had written 553 books, papers, sermons and articles (Brown 1967:24). What is proposed here is to explain which parts of Barth’s theology were important in Míguez Bonino’s development as a theologian. In order to achieve this, three sources will be used. Firstly, personal interviews with Míguez Bonino himself conducted by the author during the study give this section its basic structure. Secondly, an article on Barth’s influence in Latin America written by Emilio Castro (Castro 1956:5-16) will be utilized to demonstrate how Barth’s influence was felt early on in Latin America. And thirdly the ‘Introducción’, by Míguez Bonino, to the Spanish translation of Barth’s *Evangelical Theology* (1986e:11-25), will give an insight into what Míguez Bonino felt important to emphasise in Barth’s theology much later in his career.

³⁰ CLADE II (1979), CLADE III (1993) and CLADE IV (2000).

There are a number of important ways in which Barth influenced Míguez Bonino. The way Barth was able to use higher critical tools without losing the message of the Bible was important (Interview 28.8.2001). At the FET, Míguez Bonino described how it seemed to many students that higher biblical criticism and liberal theology were shaking their faith. He comments, however, that: 'Barthianism gave the Bible back to us, and not only as a simple, exegetical, historical critical study, but with a message' (Weisheit 2001:281). On another occasion Míguez Bonino says of Barth that 'without rejecting exegetical and critical studies (texts, historical location, etc.) he advanced the theological question (what is God saying to me, about Jesus Christ, about faith) and the practical (what is the message for the church, for me, for the world as God's Word for today)' (Interview 7.3.2001). In the wider context, Emilio Castro says that this helped Latin American Protestants in the wider Fundamentalist -- Modernist dilemma. Castro shows how Barth's doctrine of the Word of God allowed Latin American theologians to maintain both the nature of the Bible as Word of God and intellectual integrity. 'Recognizing the rights of Biblical science to study the Biblical books as a human document, totally human, does not deny the rights of God. This very human instrument can serve as the mediator of God's Word to humanity (Castro 1956:14). There was no need to give up intellectual honesty and deny the use of the higher critical tools, taught by the professors at the FET in order to read the Bible as the Word of God. This will be observed in chapter three.

Related to this was that Barth gave the Bible back to the preacher as an instrument to declare God's Word. Míguez Bonino was at the beginning of his pastoral career at the Central Methodist Church in Ramos Mejía when he first discovered Barth's theology and needed to communicate God's Word each Sunday. Barth gave him the tools. In this, his experience was something like Barth's when he rediscovered, 'the strange world of the Bible.' Míguez Bonino comments: 'You could really preach Barth's theology!' (Interview 1997).

Barth's political writings and activities were also influential on Míguez Bonino. He said in an interview: 'I learned something of his militancy and social vision, this bringing together of a very strong theology and Christology and a social engagement with the poor and persecuted' (Interview 7.3.2001). He quotes *Church Dogmatics* where Barth states that, 'God always takes his stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly, against those who already enjoy right and privilege and in favour of those who are denied it and deprived of it' (Barth 1955:434). He learned from Barth that theology did not have to be Liberal to be socially relevant.

Barth was also, however, able to link his theology with the concrete socio-political climate at the time. He was involved in the drafting of the famous *Barmen Declaration* (1933), which was a 'self-conscious challenge to the Hitler regime, insisting on autonomy of the church from political coercion' (Miller and Grenz 1998:10).

Apart from his Socialist activities, Barth's theology had a fundamental political objective. Barth states,

that we cannot reach clarifications, especially in the broad field of politics, which are necessary today, and to which theology today might have a word to say (as indeed it ought to have a word to say to them!), without having previously reached those

comprehensive clarifications in theology and about theology itself with which we should be concerned here (CD I/I, xiii).

And,

that a better church dogmatics (even apart from all ethical utility) might actually make a more important and weightier contribution, even to questions and tasks such as German liberation, than most of the well-intended material which so many, even among theologians, think they can and should produce when they dilettantishly take up such questions and tasks (CD I/I, xiii rev.)

It is obvious that Barth's political clarifications were dependant upon theological reflection. Politics, for Barth, needed theological reflection. Míguez Bonino, along with many other Latin American theologians were fully in agreement with this conviction.

Barth's ecclesiology was significant much later in Míguez Bonino's career (Interview August 1997). David J. Bosch states that Barth developed a 'magnificently and consistent missionary ecclesiology' (Bosch 1991:373). He does not have a section in *Church Dogmatics* on ecclesiology but rather weaves it into volume IV on 'The doctrine of Reconciliation.' Characteristically Barth's doctrine of reconciliation and therefore his ecclesiology are founded on Christology. 'All ecclesiology is grounded, critically limited, but also positively determined by Christology' (CD IV/3:786). In justification, the Church is gathered by her Lord, through the obedience of the Son of God, as the earthly-historical form of His body. In sanctification the Son of Man builds up the community so that it knows that it is not an end in itself but rather serves her Lord by being a provisional representation *de facto* of the *de jure* sanctification of humanity in Jesus Christ. And finally the God-Man destroys the falsehood and condemnation of humanity thereby giving a vocation, which is summed up in the sending of the community. The church for Barth is the community called to God's vocation in the midst of world history. It will become clear in chapter five how much Míguez Bonino has been influenced by this approach.

Additionally, Míguez Bonino highlights that the coherence and continuity in Barth's theology are to be found in his emphases upon grace, and the centrality of Jesus Christ. Barth's Christocentrism had an impact on Míguez Bonino. In talking about grace, he shows how Barth rejects cheap grace and the liberal understanding of grace so articulately rejected by H.R. Niebuhr (A God without wrath offers to humanity without sin, a Kingdom without judgment through the ministry of a Christ without a Cross) (Niebuhr 1957:16) describing it as 'the arrogance of that time that believed that it could easily construct utopia, that believes that, with its science it can manage all the material and spiritual problems of humanity, and bring a 'worldly paradise' of our own making' (1986e:16). For Barth 'grace is mercy, light and hope, it is confidence and for that reason action and commitment' (1986e:17). This grace is good news that God has destined humanity to 'go beyond itself' not to become superhuman but 'real humanity.' God's grace in Christ creates this new humanity. This 'real human being' that God has predestined is no other than Jesus Christ. Míguez Bonino states that in the *Epistle to the Romans*,

Barth has to destroy the liberal ‘anthropocentrism’ or the easy pietistic illusion that believes it can make an equation between Jesus Christ and our ideals or human values, our speculations or our experience. For this reason, Jesus Christ is God’s ‘no’, the insurmountable ‘frontier’ before the arrogance that leads us to deify ourselves, the ‘stranger’ that does not allow us to ‘possess’ in our experience, objectivise in our theological formulas or serve our programmes (1986e:17).

In this way, Jesus Christ is very much the ‘no’ of God, the wholly other; in Kierkegaard’s famous words, ‘God is in heaven and thou art on earth’ (Barth 1933a). Míguez Bonino is very much aware of the dangers of this anthropocentrism within his own, and others’, theologies. He has always been at pains to show the qualitative difference between God’s project and humanity’s effort.

This concept of Jesus Christ as the wholly other was highly influential upon Míguez Bonino and other Latin American Protestant theologians until the mid sixties. The ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ is somewhat modified later in Barth’s career where he views Christ as the ‘humanity of God’. Míguez Bonino expresses this change in the following way: ‘In Jesus Christ, the freedom of humanity is completely included in the freedom of God. Without the condescendence of God, there would be no raising up of humanity’ (1986e:19). Christ is the wholly other but is the wholly other, for humanity. Précising some comments from *Evangelical Theology: An introduction* the following can be said: God exists neither *next* to humanity nor merely *above* it, but rather *with* humanity and, most importantly, *for* humanity (1963:16). God is as lowly as exalted. God is exalted precisely in God’s lowliness (cf. 1963:17).

2.12 FINAL OBSERVATIONS

There have been various elements in Míguez Bonino’s life that have remained constant. Firstly, it is important to mention the importance of Míguez Bonino’s family. This is seen in two ways. During his career Míguez Bonino travelled a large number of times, sometimes with his family and other times without. His wife, Noemí has had to facilitate these journeys. During the early nineteen sixties, this was especially complicated for her. During the second session of the Second Vatican Council (1963) Míguez Bonino was absent from home for nearly a month, leaving his wife with Nestor (fifteen), Eduardo (four) and Daniel (a few months old). He was also absent two years later for the same period of time. Other times the whole family travelled. Noemí, Nestor (ten) and Eduardo (two) accompanied him to New York (1958-1960); Noemí, Eduardo (twelve) and Daniel (five) were with him in 1968 at Union Seminary (1968); and he took Noemí and Daniel (eleven), to England for several months (1973/74). Míguez Bonino was active in travelling up until 2003. Both when he was absent and when she was travelling with him were especially demanding for Noemí.

In an interview (1986f) Míguez Bonino recognises that as a married theologian he may have been an agent of oppression. Noemí was a very creative person and ‘repressed her own creativity’ (1986f:62) in order to facilitate his ministry. He even admits that he did not think in those terms back then; nor did his wife. Given that Míguez Bonino’s theology is rooted in the life and mission praxis of the church and that he recognises that his wife was instrumental in his ministry,

this leads to the conclusion that his marital relationship was vital to his theological development.

Also important is the role of his sons in regard to Míguez Bonino's knowledge of sociology and anthropology. Not only did he read many sociological books and articles but he also gained from interaction with his sons. Nestor is a theologian and Eduardo and Daniel both are social scientists. Evidence of how Míguez Bonino appreciated the interaction is to be found in the dedication of the book *Christians and Marxists* (1976c). 'To my sons Nestor and Eduardo, 'in the long conversations with whom I have learned more than in many books' (1976c:6). This was especially true of his relationship to Marxism and social analysis. As of the time of writing, Míguez Bonino lives most of the time at ISEDET, while his wife Noemi lives in an old people's home in the city of Tandil, where Eduardo and Daniel live.

Another important area of continuity is his commitment to the church. This is expressed by fact that the local church has always been central to his life and ministry. From his early ministry up to today, he has always kept close relationships with local churches. He was essentially a pastor from 1948 until 1958 and from that time on he has been called to stand in as pastor of the Methodist church in Ramos Mejía. He has also, from very early on been a regular visiting preacher all over the country in many different churches, not only in Methodist churches, but in other denominations as well. His work as youth secretary and later as supervisor of the Methodist Church around Buenos Aires has kept him active in many different local churches.

His commitment to the church is also seen in how Míguez Bonino's ecumenical involvement has been constant. Even as far back as his work in the Methodist Church in Rosario, Míguez Bonino experienced ecumenical fellowship and cooperation with other churches. In the FET, he met people from other denominations. Thereafter, he encouraged ecumenism in his pastoral work in Mendoza, in his activities as youth secretary for the Methodist Church and in his involvement in the student movements (ULAJE and the MECs). His experience of worldwide ecumenism at Willingen and Lund was a further impulse to this involvement. Later on he held interdenominational conversations at Union Theological Seminary in New York and at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) his ecumenical experience was enriched by contacts with people in the Roman Catholic Church. Within Protestantism, his involvement in the CELAs, ISAL, UNELAM and CLAI are further evidence of his commitment to ecumenism. This involvement is also clear in the dialogue with the theologians of liberation internationally. He held posts from 1961 through until 1983: he participated in Faith and Order (1961-1977); in the Central Committee of the WCC (1968-1975); and in the Presidium (1975-1983). The numbers of articles and works by Míguez Bonino on the subject of ecumenism are witness to his concern and commitment.

Additionally, Míguez Bonino has also been involved in mission and evangelism. Early in his ministry he was involved in youth work, which involved organising evangelistic and youth training camps. As a pastor in San Rafael visited homes and built up the church. He also attended the IMC meetings in Willingen (1952) and reported on the theme of the 'Missionary Obligation of the Church'. As a theological teacher and international speaker, his contacts with non-Christians were

naturally more limited but it was noted above even in his human rights work he was involved in witnessing to the gospel in a low key way.

He also wrote consistently on mission theology and strategy. Two of his earliest published writings treat the subject of evangelism through small home groups (1949a and 1949b). He reported and reflected upon ecumenical mission theology and strategy in the early nineteen fifties (1952f, 1952h and 1953b) and his writing upon Christian mission has continued throughout his career (1961k, 1968d, 1974i, 1977d, 1978l, 1981h, 1982n, 1983g, 1992c, 1994d, 2000d).

A final area of continuity in Míguez Bonino's life is his constant commitment to theological education. While at seminary he was part of a group formed by Valdo Galland to help in the theological and biblical training of university students; this continued when he was pastor in Mendoza. After the completing his doctorate in the USA, Míguez Bonino has constantly been teaching at FET/ISEDET: taking the role of Rector (1960-1970), and being initiator and director of the post-graduate department at ISEDET (1975-1983). He taught here up until 2003. His work in ASIT (1970-1975) in developing theological education and accreditation was essential for theological education in the Southern Cone³¹ of South America is also witness to this. He has also written widely on the subject and his influence as teacher and theologian has been vital to the development of many pastors and theologians throughout Latin America.

It is important to mention some areas of development. It is significant to note that Míguez Bonino's contacts with the Roman Catholic Church have ebbed and flowed. Early in his life and ministry there was more contact with other Protestant denominations than with Roman Catholics but during the late 1950s and early 1960s he started to be involved in informal and then in formal contacts with the Roman Catholic Church. The formal contacts reached their height at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Informal contacts grew rapidly when ISAL began to include Roman Catholics in its discussions on the social involvement of the Church in the world. The Christians for Socialism Conference (1972) was one of the highlights of informal discussion and cooperation between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Latin America. The informal meetings with other, mainly Roman Catholic liberation theologians continued during the nineteen seventies and eighties. Contacts on a formal level, however, waned from the mid nineteen eighties onwards. This reached a crisis when no Protestant was invited as an observer to the Santo Domingo Meetings of CELAM (1992). This fact, along with Pope John Paul II's attitude towards the 'Protestant Sects,' eloquently expressed in his "rapacious wolves" comment, articulated the position of the Roman Curia towards Protestants in Latin America. Informal contact and cooperation with Roman Catholics has continued up to the present.

Moreover, his political and social involvement have also ebbed and flowed. As was noted earlier, Míguez Bonino was involved in the Argentinean Socialist Movement in Rosario. This was reduced drastically from the time he went to seminary up until the mid nineteen seventies. His collaboration with the APDH was a reactivation of his political and social activities. This is also true of his work in the redrafting of the Argentinean Constitution (1994). Thereafter, time restraints were

³¹ The Southern Cone of South America is comprised of Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

limiting. This is not to say that he was not involved in political activities anymore and certainly not that he was not interested in politics.

The geographical and denominational extent of Míguez Bonino's theological dialogue represents another area of development. In the nineteen fifties his theological dialogue was more or less limited to Argentina and its Protestant churches. In the nineteen sixties this extended not only to the Roman Catholic Church—as was mentioned above—but also to both the protestant churches of the whole continent, as well as the world-wide ecumenical movement. This was due to his involvement in ISAL and the CELAs and also to his participation in Faith and Order (1961-1978) and the Central Committee of the WCC (1968-1975). There was a further extension to his theological dialogue in the nineteen seventies. With the publication of Gustavo Gutiérrez' *A Theology of Liberation*³², an intense and sometimes polemical dialogue began with European theologians. A final dialogical partner was added in the mid nineteen eighties. The growth of the Pentecostal churches had been an important factor since the late sixties in Latin America; in Argentina it became important with the ministry of Carlos Annacondia. Since then, Míguez Bonino has reflected more profoundly on these churches: their growth; their influence and contribution to Latin American Protestantism. These four levels of theological dialogue have continued, in one way or another in Míguez Bonino's theological thought up to the present day.

³² 1971 in Spanish and 1973 in English