

3 FAITH SEEKING EFFECTIVENESS: THE THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY OF MÍGUEZ BONINO

Theology is a service to the church—(understood correctly in function of her mission.) Míguez Bonino (1969a:66)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines Míguez Bonino's theology as a missionary theology. It is possible to conceive of a missionary theology that begins from first principles, working through a systematic process, establishing universal rules, norms and criteria along the way, in order to finally arrive at a proposal for the outworking of the mission of the Church in all contexts. Ralph Winter's *Perspectives* (Winter 1999) and Church Growth missiology are examples of this method. But Míguez Bonino's missionary theology is different: it is a theological and critical reflection upon the church's missionary responsibility at a given time and in a given place. It starts with present praxis, questions the validity of that praxis in the light of biblical and theological thought, and then projects forward to examine how this should be carried out effectively.

For Míguez Bonino, theology is not an intellectual process carried out at a desk, but rather one which is carried forward from within missionary obedience by the church as theological subject, accompanied by professional theologians. Theology should not, and indeed cannot, be done as a non-committed act—active commitment is an essential prerequisite. Theology, thus conceived, is a synthetic act comprising both action and reflection. Míguez Bonino's theology is not so much following Anselm of Canterbury's *fides quaerens intellectum*—faith seeking understanding—but rather *fides quaerens efficacitatem*—faith seeking effectiveness. One could précis Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, saying: 'it is not the responsibility of theology to understand the world but rather to change it' (Marx 1886:64). Or more precisely it is the task of theology to accompany the Church in its task of changing the world. This, of course, means that Míguez Bonino's theology must be understood, not necessarily as a product, but rather as a process.

This chapter traces the development of theological methodology and hermeneutics during the twentieth century in broad terms (3.2). It then categorises Míguez Bonino's main publications relating to this subject (3.3). The major sections of the chapter deal with doing theology (3.4), epistemology (3.5) and theological methodology (3.6). It then makes some final observations (3.5).

In speaking of mission and theology the focus tends to be on biblical interpretation and the philosophical and linguistic issues surrounding that interpretation (Jongeneel 1995:216-217). In this regard, Jongeneel prefers the term missionary hermeneutics (Jongeneel 1995:216), whereas C. Timothy Carriker alternates between missiological and missional hermeneutics (Carriker 1993:50). A missionary hermeneutics, however, must take into account the whole interpretive process not only the biblical hermeneutic. Treatments of hermeneutics, on the other hand do not take into account the missionary nature of the church in its reading of reality and the Bible.

For much of the twentieth century, the essence of theology has been a central theme of discussion. Karl Barth's break with the Liberal theology of his teachers and his development of dialectical theology in various forms was simply the first step in a process that has questioned some of the most fundamental presuppositions in theology. This section does not presume to make an exhaustive survey of these developments but simply to highlight some of the more significant advances that have had direct impact upon Míguez Bonino.

Within Conciliar Protestantism's understanding of theology and hermeneutics, Míguez Bonino has been a significant protagonist. It will become clear in the course of this chapter to what extent he has influenced its direction, especially that of Faith and Order (FO) in the WCC. The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal (1963) is a historical landmark in the process (FO 1963) Montreal differentiated between the one *Tradition* (capital "T") and the many *traditions* (small "t"). It defined *Tradition* as the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That *Tradition* is transmitted through the generations in and by the Church; it is Christ Himself present in the life of the Church.

It defined *traditions* as the *traditionary process*, through which the *Tradition* is transmitted. The *traditions* are the multiplicity of forms and confessional traditions within historical Christianity. Montreal saw clearly that all Christians live within a tradition whose starting point is Jesus Christ as witnessed to in the New Testament; they receive *Tradition* through the transmission of the truth within *traditions*. Montreal asserts: 'Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit.' (Section II, para. 45.) Human traditions throughout Christian history are both related to, but different from, the one *Tradition*. They are, therefore, viewed as expressions and manifestations in varied cultural and historical terms of the one reality: Christ Jesus. In this way Montreal sought to overcome the old dichotomy of *sola scriptura* and "Scripture and tradition." It did not, however, provide criteria for the evaluation of those human *traditions* and only pointed out the three main features of the process of transmission: the events and testimonies preceding and leading to Scripture, Scripture itself, and subsequent ecclesial preaching and teaching. This was an issue left untreated for many years.

Subsequent to Montreal, several FO studies took place on the subject of hermeneutics. Several reports on the Authority of the Bible were assembled as a contribution to the hermeneutical discussions of that period (cf. Flesseman-van Leer 1983:42-57). The Odessa consultation (1977) addressed the problem of permanence

and change in the doctrinal tradition of the Church. The process of putting together, “A Common Account of Hope” (1978), made FO aware of ‘the contextual aspects of confessions of faith, both in the sense of the original contexts in which they were made and of the effect on their use produced by the changing contexts of Christian discipleship’ (FO 1998). Finally, ‘Treasure in Earthen Vessels’ (1998) was published. This brings together many of the hermeneutical developments in one ecumenical document.

In regard to the Roman Catholic Church, the Tridentine formula of the word of God divided into two vessels: Scripture and Tradition, was generally unquestioned up to the Second Vatican Council. Early in the twentieth century, “Modernist Roman Catholic Theologians” attempted to respond to the challenges of the enlightenment especially in regard to the doctrine of the immutable character of dogma and tradition but were unable to articulate it in a way acceptable to the hierarchy.

Dei Verbum (DV), the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, is the definitive document for the Second Vatican Council’s reflections upon this subject. DV sees this issue from a radically new perspective. It deals with the nature of divine revelation in Christological terms and speaks of the importance that divine revelation is passed on. The emphasis of this document is the Gospel (*paradosis*) and its communication. This seems to point towards the possibility of a more dynamic re-reading of Scripture and Tradition. It does, however, in spite of everything affirm official interpretation of both Scripture and Tradition:

the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted *exclusively* to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls (DV, 10 authors italics).

Although the tenor of the document as a whole gives the impression of being more open to a more dynamic biblical reading. Míguez Bonino comments: ‘How can the Church be uprooted from herself and placed at the feet of Jesus Christ if she only sees Jesus Christ in terms of herself, if there is no way in which He confronts her and corrects her from above her own definitions’ (1967c:109). The real break for Roman Catholicism came from Latin America.

For much of the 500 years of Christianity’s presence in Latin America, theology done in the Continent was a static repetition of imported theological categories. The motives for the static nature of theology are different in Protestantism and Catholicism. Samuel Escobar, the Peruvian Evangelical Theologian says:

In Latin America, the *evangélicos* always have done theology from the starting point of a sharp sense of mission: to win the continent for Christ, advance with the gospel, and hope that this produces a radical change in the world. The Catholics, in doing theology, have begun from a more apologetic position: how to defend the faith from the attack of hostile ideologies, or from the proselytizing advance of the *evangélicos* (Escobar 1987:67).

Míguez Bonino comments, that for the Latin American Protestantism, theology in its apologetic function became more a deposit of answers, than a search for truth. ‘The ideal of the theologian is to be able to dominate the arsenal of answers in order to utilize them effectively to quite doubts or silence adversaries’ (1969a:66). Whereas, in Roman Catholicism, theology tended to be defensive, assuming that the continent is already Christian and needs preserving in that state.

From the second half of the twentieth century, this situation changed. In the Conciliar Protestant world, the work of the Ecumenical Youth Movements during the nineteen fifties and the work of ISAL during the nineteen sixties were instrumental. Also, exposure to neo-orthodoxy—especially the theology of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer—along with the radically worsening social and political conditions of Latin America led ecumenical Protestant theology to become radical and contextualised. Subsequent to the first consultation of ISAL (1961), the use of sociological tools became vital for theological reflection on the central social issues of the day. Theology was seen to become a more dynamic process than a dead repetition of foreign theological categories.

The fundamental paradigm shift in theological thinking in general came with the dawn of the liberation theologies of Latin America. Influenced by the philosophies of Frenchman Paul Ricoeur (b. 1913-2005) and German Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), theology started to question the meaning and nature of truth. This led to what Jon Sobrino, the Salvadorian priest has called ‘the epistemological break’ (cf. Bosch 1991:423-425). This break questioned whether the perspective of the theologian—normally male, rich and white--was the only, valid viewpoint. He proposes that the poor’s perspective gives new insights into ‘the ultimate truth of things’:

From the poor we receive in a way hardly expected new eyes for seeing the ultimate truth of things and new energies for exploring unknown and dangerous paths...it is clear that in aiding the poor one receives back from them meaning for one’s life (Sobrino and Pico 1985:11; cf. Sobrino 1984).

The poor read reality from a significantly different perspective and serve the theologian by reflecting the meaning of life in service to others. So Gustavo Gutiérrez (b. 1928) can say that his understanding was not so much ‘a new theme for reflection as a new way of doing theology’ (Gutiérrez 1988:12). Other Roman Catholic theologians of liberation such as Juan Luis Segundo (1925-1996) (Segundo 1976), José Severino Croatto (1930-2003) (Croatto 1981; cf. Croatto 1987), and Clodovis Boff (b. 1944) (Boff 1987) also began to attempt to do theology from the standpoint of a different reality; the reality of the poor in their struggle for liberation. Míguez Bonino says that the new theology, which came about in the late sixties and early seventies in Latin America, had ‘not gotten past its prolegomena, nor should it be in any hurry to do so’ (1979d:260).

In this regard, the contribution of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) was crucial. The inaugural meetings in Dar-es-Salaam (1976) sought to decolonise theology through Copernican revolution in the method, concept, content and goal of theology (Rayan 2000:65-66). Dar-es-Salaam emphasised the primacy of praxis, social analysis and involvement. Article 2 of the constitution declares that EATWOT is committed to 'new models of theology which would interpret the gospel in a more meaningful way to the people of the third world' (Fabella 2000:70). John S. Pobee says that EATWOT defined theology as wholesome, 'not only by academic criteria but also in terms of obedience to the will of God or spirituality' (Pobee 2002:358). It sought to do this through a 'dialogue between socio-political and religious-cultural structures on the one side and the Word of God on the other' (Pobee 2002:358).

3.3 MAIN PUBLICATIONS

The main publications of Míguez Bonino that concern this chapter of the study can be divided into two sections; generally, the nature and function of theology; and more specifically, epistemology, theological methodology and biblical hermeneutics. Míguez Bonino has written many articles on theology and its methodology during his life and so only the more significant ones will be mentioned here.

Míguez Bonino's writings on the nature and function of theology can be subdivided into those publications that responded to the emergence of Liberation Theology and those that deal in a more general way on theology. In a chapter in a book edited by Rubem Alves, Míguez Bonino published an early attempt at explaining some of the hermeneutical and methodological principles of 'the new way of doing theology' that were emerging after the publication of Gustavo Gutiérrez' ground breaking book. He dealt with the importance of discovering a hermeneutical key, of analysing the new social context, of accurately describing, and making a constructive critique of this new theology (1972f). In 1979, he dealt with the nature of theology in a paper given at a regional consultation of the *Asociación de Seminarios e Institutos Teológicos* (ASIT) (1980a). Liberation Theology had influenced the way theological education was carried out during the nineteen sixties and seventies. Míguez Bonino explained why there have been so many changes in seminary curricula during this period; attempted to establish certain criteria for theological education in the dynamic context of Latin America and; finally made some suggestions for the context of a curriculum adequate for the new context.

A third publication was an article in the periodical *The Christian Century* (1980d). In the light of the theological revolution in Latin America during the nineteen sixties and seventies, Míguez Bonino wrote a personal account of his theological journey and his understanding of the meaning of theology. It deals with some of the theological insights during that period and reflects upon theological methodology, some basic motifs and how theology should sharpen the tools of contextual theological reflection.

Míguez Bonino also wrote several articles on theology in general. At his inauguration as rector of the FET (1960), he set out his vision for theological education in that institution. He describes how Christian theology lives in dialectical

relationship between obedience and freedom (1961e). Theology facilitates obedience in mission by reflecting upon the church's preaching and life; and it lives in the freedom created by Jesus Christ. The influence of Karl Barth's theology is clear in this paper. He also wrote a report for the Central Committee of the WCC (1989d). He spent two months at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva studying the structures and departments of the World Council attempting to find a way forward in the development of a Vital and Coherent Theology. This concern was expressed at the Sixth Assembly of the WCC in Vancouver (1983). It specifically tried to identify barriers to such a theology and pathways forward. Finally, he wrote an extension and revision of an article written for theological consultation held in Norway (1993) on the universality and contextuality of theology (1997c). Míguez Bonino wrestles with this dialectic showing the inevitable nature of contextuality but suggesting the way forward for a universal ecumenical theology is through a process of dialogue in the context of mutual accountability.

Míguez Bonino's publications on hermeneutics can be subdivided into those that deal with theological methodology and those that deal specifically with biblical hermeneutics. His writings specifically focussing on theological methodology are contained in chapters in *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (1975b); *Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (1976b); and *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (1983m). Each of these chapters, in some way were written in a response to the rise of Liberation Theology. They describe how theology is both affected by the context in which it arises and must respond to that context.

In regard to biblical hermeneutics, three writings should be mentioned. His first and most detailed treatment of biblical hermeneutics comes in his ThD thesis (1960e). He describes developments within the thought of some representative Roman Catholic biblical scholars and how they have moved beyond Tridentine formulae in regard to the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. He subsequently describes his own understanding, revealing a desire for a dynamic reading of the Gospel Tradition in the light of human tradition. This writing will be used extensively in this chapter. He takes up some of those same themes in a short, post-Vatican II article for a *Festschrift* for Oscar Cullman (1902-1999) (1967a). He examines the issue of Scripture and Tradition from the perspective of the concept of *Heilsgeschichte*. He asserts that although the church's interpretation of Scripture must be located within the context of Salvation History and therefore, with assurance of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the church cannot claim 'indefectibility' in its interpretation of that Scripture. Consequently, human interpretation, including the interpretation by the church, must be viewed in the light of the contradictions of human life.

Finally, Míguez Bonino wrote an article as a response to criticism of the use of Marxist categories in Latin America Liberation Theology (1974e, cf. 1993:e). He shows how Marxist critical tools can expose the ideological frameworks that are inserted into biblical interpretation by scholars; reveal the socio-economic matrices behind certain biblical texts; and release the 'truth of the Bible' by showing the relationship between praxis and interpretation. He concludes by showing how Marxist tools are limited in their usefulness because of their reductionism.

3.4 DOING THEOLOGY

3.4.1 *Basic Characteristics*

There are certain basic characteristics of Míguez Bonino's theology that must be clarified before moving on. His theology is not only contextual but also consciously contextualized. It is generally accepted today that all theology is contextual, i.e. written from within a given context and, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by the concerns of that context. His theology, however, takes a further step: it is not only aware of the influence of the context but is consciously responding to it. His starting point, therefore, is not what the church should do but rather what it is currently doing.

This leads to a related characteristic. Míguez Bonino's theology is occasional rather than systematic. He says in an article written in 1980:

‘Like most theologians from the so-called Third World, I have never set out to develop a theological program or to articulate an all-encompassing system. Rather I have spoken or written as questions came up, as issues were pressed upon me by circumstances or requests. Consistency or logical development has never been a conscious objective. (1980:1154).

In an interview with the author in 1997 he says:

I felt that I was challenged, or invited, or called by things that were happening which I had to respond to. If there is any coherence it has to do with the things that happened. Maybe I have tried to respond with a certain approach to life, faith and the Bible but not with a sort of fixed purpose (Interview 1997).

Finally in an autobiographical chapter in a book written in honour of his eightieth birthday he explains how he felt like Martin Luther (1483-1546). ‘God took me wherever he wanted like a donkey with blinkers’ (2004b:429). He didn't know exactly where he was going but felt accompanied on the journey by God.

A brief examination of the bibliography at the end of this dissertation will demonstrate the truth of these comments. Although he has written several books, the major part of the bibliography is made up of articles dealing with concrete issues from a theological perspective. Orlando E. Costas could have been thinking of Míguez Bonino's theology when he commented that missiology in Latin America is a reflection “‘done on the road”, as it were, promoted by a significant event or specific issue’ (Costas 1977:91).

The fact that Míguez Bonino's theology is occasional and not systematic, leads to a further observation. Some theological issues appear regularly in his writings but others hardly appear at all. The central theological concepts that have been emphasised throughout his career are the Church, the Kingdom of God, and the Trinity. Subjects such as the future state of believers and unbelievers and baptism, however, have been peripheral. Furthermore, some subjects were significant in the early part of his career but have become less important later. An example of this is the issue of Scripture and tradition. It was central in the nineteen sixties in his discussions with the Roman Catholic Church but, thereafter it has not been treated explicitly, or has been dealt with in different terms. Other theological questions,

however, which were not significant in the early part of his career, have become more so in the last few years—for example the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The growth of Pentecostalism in Argentina, along with his work in translating some of John Wesley's sermons, has meant that the Holy Spirit in the context of the Trinity has become more prominent. Consequently, this study does not cover the whole range of theological and doctrinal elements but rather concentrates on his hermeneutic along with various theological motifs and their attendant issues.

In addition, Míguez Bonino's theological method is also ecumenical. This is not only due to his deep involvement in the ecumenical movement but also caused by his dialogue with a wide ecclesiastical context. His theology dialogues with other Christian traditions: his knowledge of these traditions is wide and deep, and has profoundly influenced his theology. He has had contacts with Christians from most traditions—the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, Orthodox churches, Conservative Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Míguez Bonino is not 'a lonely bird on the roof tops' (Barth 1933b: 40, quoted in Bosch 1991:424) but rather has done his theology from within the widest possible ecclesiological context. He has made many contributions to the study of the phenomenon of Latin American Protestantism and has written several articles on how this phenomenon should be interpreted. For Míguez Bonino it is impossible to do theology without reference to how the Church relates to society and how it is already a part of that society.

Míguez Bonino's theology is also historically rooted. It has been essential for him to discuss theological issues with "the fathers and mothers" as well as with "the brothers and sisters". Ever since he studied historical theology at Emory University, he has considered it vital to reflect on all issues from an historical perspective. Church history and especially the history of theology is very much part of the context in which he has done theology.

A final significant characteristic to note about the nature of Míguez Bonino's missionary theology is that it is provisional and should never be considered to be a completed product. He comments on his own theology as follows:

An American doctoral student announced that he identified three distinct stages in my theological development, moving from a church-centred to a world-centred theology. Perhaps he is right! An erstwhile colleague used to tell me that the decisive break in my thought occurred in 1968, at the time of the popular uprisings in Argentina against the military dictatorship of Onganía. Even more precisely, he timed it with the death in Rosario of a student killed by the police. He contended that my theology had since become more militant and political, that it had broken away from the captivity of a self-contained theological universe and had accepted the challenge of historicity. I had never intended to live in a purely theological universe—but, again, perhaps he is right! My wife—who is usually right—tells me that what I have consistently tried to do is simply to reread and explain the Bible: "Questions, issues and challenges have changed," she says, "but at bottom you remain what you have always been: a preacher bound to his text." I hope she is right this time! (1980d:1154).

As Bosch notes, there is never anything except 'missiology in draft' (Bosch 1991:489). It should be said that Míguez Bonino's missionary theology is always and purposely theology in draft. He is loath to give definitive answers to missionary or ethical questions, even after a thorough theological treatment. His reflections are always in the way of "soundings" or "musings", or what he once called "ruminations" (1995c:112). He sees these soundings or musings as the beginning of

a theological dialogue rather than the end of a theological argument. In his theology, one encounters more tentative questions than authoritative answers. Even the answers that are given are more as suggestions presented for discussion than as dictates. Samuel Escobar once commented to the author that Míguez Bonino was a teacher who ‘opens pathways.’

3.4.2 *Theology as Task: Service to the Church in Mission*

For Míguez Bonino, theology as a task is primary. Theology is a service rendered to the church in its mission. The church is constantly presented with new challenges and responsibilities in mission; theology accompanies it by reflecting upon and clarifying certain aspects of mission in the light of God’s word. This is true throughout his career

At his inauguration as Rector of the Evangelical Faculty of Theology (1960), Míguez Bonino described theology as living in the tension between obedience and freedom (1961e:90-93). Obedience in theology is for him nothing but ‘missionary obedience’ (1961e:90, cf. Barth 1955 CD I/1: 14-15). Theology reflects upon the church’s ‘fidelity in preaching’ (1961e:90). Theology, ‘must continually confront our daily preaching with the norm we have received from Jesus Christ in the biblical testimony’ (1961e:90). By preaching, he is referring to any announcement of the gospel whether it takes place in the pulpit, the Sunday-school, or open air meetings. Theology comes as a second act, accompanying the preaching of the Church: it confronts preaching with the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible. It asks the question as to what gospel is being preached. Is the gospel that the Church is preaching influenced by ideologies, human philosophies or personal opinions foreign to the gospel? Theology is a humble and devout reflection.

Theology also facilitates and enables the proclamation, ‘of the eternal gospel of what God has done in Jesus Christ in terms men will understand’. In this task it is vital to ‘know the world in which we live—our Latin American world as well as our world community’ (1961e:91). Theology must relate the gospel to the world. It is the task of theology to accompany the Church’s preaching in its task of making the gospel understood. So Míguez Bonino can assert that theology ‘is effective only as an act of obedience to the missionary mandate of the Church and as it serves the Church in fulfilment of that mission’ (1961e:93).

Reflecting upon the work of ISAL, Míguez Bonino returns to this issue. He says: ‘theology is a service to the church—(understood correctly in function of its mission)’ (1969a:66). This service cannot function as a theoretical isolated discipline but in dialogue. There are two interlocutors for Protestant theology’s dialogue in Latin America that he mentions at this time: the Roman Catholic Church and its theology, and Latin American thought and society in general (1969a:66). The ISAL movement during the 1960s achieved this type of dialogue. It included Roman Catholics in its consultations and also entered into deep dialogue with the world. According to Míguez Bonino, the results were significant. These comments, at the same time, respond to the tendency in most of Latin American Protestant theology in the sixties to operate, on one hand, as if Roman Catholic theology did not exist and, on the other, as if the world had nothing to do with the theological task (1969a:66-67).

The nineteen seventies were the time of both theological and militant ferment in Latin America. This is reflected in *For Life and Against Death* (1980), which clearly states that ‘theology is not the main subject of the struggle. It is the struggle of the people (particularly the struggle of the poor) for their life’ (1980d:1154). He goes on to say: ‘theology comes at the rearguard, as a reflection, as a help to rethink and deepen (and thus perhaps, also, if we are faithful, to correct and enrich) a commitment already taken as an act of obedience’ (1980d:1155). Whereas before the main focus had been the Church in its mission, Míguez Bonino now extends the role of theology to incorporate the task of accompanying the poor in their struggle for life. Theology, serves this struggle by rethinking, deepening, correcting and enriching it—that is by participating and reflecting. The praxis upon which theology is reflecting is the praxis of the poor and the church’s contribution to that struggle not only upon its own praxis. This reflects a movement in Míguez Bonino’s theology that focuses more upon the world than the church. In many of his writings during the nineteen seventies and eighties it is notable that Míguez Bonino is in dialogue with the context in Latin America. He has, in his own words, ‘had to sit at the feet of the sociologists’ (1980d:1155) in order to learn how to interpret the world in which the church accompanies the world in its struggle for life.

In his analysis of the ‘Concern for and Vital and Coherent Theology’ (1986), a WCC report, Míguez Bonino’s emphasis once again in theology’s task towards the church and its praxis. Theology renders a necessary service to the churches which are ‘frequently at a loss to see coherently the many tasks which are constantly pressed on them by the world and which they need to understand in the light of and as integral dimensions of their faith and mission’ (1989d:160). Here, there seems to be a different relationship between the Church and the world. Whereas in *For Life Against Death* the church accompanies the poor by reflecting on their struggle, here theology accompanies the church in its responsibility to fulfil the tasks presented by the world and to understand them in the light of their faith and mission. This is emphasised because this report was given to the World Council of Churches.

In *Faces of Latin American Protestantism* (1995a), Míguez Bonino continues in this vein. In its mission, the church must be a faithful witness to the gospel in its mission. The Church, in its theology, must be ‘constantly asking itself, in the light of the Scriptures, about the faithfulness of its witness, about the coherence of its message, its life and its worship.’ Once again theology follows praxis by reflecting upon the faithful witness of the Church in its presence in the world (1995a:111). The focus, however, is on the Church’s witness rather than on the struggle of the world.

It is clear that from the earliest years of Míguez Bonino’s career, he understands theology to be a task given to the church in the service of mission. The mission of the church comes first; theological reflection is a second act. This is, of course, in harmony with the theologies of liberation: praxis is primary. In his seminal work, Gustavo Gutiérrez makes this point from the beginning (cf. Gutiérrez 1988:xxxiii; Segundo 1976:75-90). The epistemological questions are discussed below.

3.4.3 *Theology as Gift: Dependence on Revelation and Tradition*

Early in his career, Míguez Bonino emphasizes that theology is also gift. Theology is something that is received. For, 'if God had not spoken, theology would be impossible.' God has spoken about Godself to humanity, and humanity and theology must make a thankful and modest response. God has spoken to humanity in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This is the absolute gift for theology (1961e:92). Once again it is easy to perceive the influence of Karl Barth. God, by speaking to humanity in Christ, not only makes theology's task possible but also opens up a space in which humanity can be free to talk about God. Jesus Christ, therefore, constitutes: 'an expression of our freedom.' Theology is a place where God has asked humanity to be on its own. Nevertheless, God's revelation in Christ also becomes the only limit on theology. These two things are not in conflict with one another but rather emphasize that there is always a limit to freedom. Theology cannot say more than God has already said. It is significant to note that Míguez Bonino posits that God's revelation in Christ is the *sole* limit to theology; theology should not be held captive to any ideology or ecclesiastical programme. However, he sounds a warning, 'More than once theology has forgotten that true freedom is to be found only in obedience to the truth as it is in Christ, and at times has confused freedom with attempts to replace the Word of God with every kind of human speculation or ideology' (1961e:93). This early comment about ideology and human speculation show how in the nineteen sixties and seventies ideology critique and awareness had become constitutive of the theological task for Míguez Bonino.

Elsewhere, Míguez Bonino speaks of theology as 'a gift that is handed over to the church to be handled with respect, with admiration and with gratitude. And this does not only mean a gift handed over by the fathers of the church as a theological production: it means to receive it as a gift of grace' (1989d:170). Theology must have an historical perspective in the sense that God's revelation in Jesus Christ is an historical event, but also because the church always receives its faith handed down from those whom have gone before. This issue will be expanded later in this chapter. To sum up: 'only if it [theology] uses its freedom, given in Christ, to search for the truth in Christ, and only if it examines respectfully, humbly, critically, every doctrine creed, confession or system, in the light of the Word of God' (1961e:93) can theology really serve the church in its mission.

According to Míguez Bonino, there must be a balance between inductive and deductive methodologies. He emphasizes that the deductive method, starting from general foundational statements such as 'God was incarnate in Jesus Christ', and 'God has redeemed us through the cross' is valid. There are basic affirmations of the faith (1980a:72), especially, what which function as theology's fundamental principle: 'a knowledge of faith rooted in God's self-expression, centred and fulfilled in Jesus Christ' (1980d:1154). This principle is given to the church in order that it might work out its faith in the present situation. He also warns that this must be balanced by an approach that begins with praxis. These fundamentals do not give the theologian the excuse to pretend that his or her theology is universal. As will be shown later, in the nineteen seventies praxis has become primary for Míguez Bonino.

Although theology as task is primary for Míguez Bonino, he does not deny the significance of what theology receives: from Scripture, from tradition and from

the Holy Spirit. Theology must receive what is given and interpret it in the light of the task of mission.

3.5 EPISTEMOLOGY

3.5.1 *Nature*

The starting point of Míguez Bonino's theological method is epistemological. Without this basis, his theology does not make sense. According to Míguez Bonino, western theology is incorrect in its understanding of the location of truth and knowledge. They are not to be found in the area of ideas but rather in the area of action and practice. Correct knowledge is not primarily to be found at 'the cognitive level of understanding and interpretation but the historical level of praxis and obedience; or to put it more precisely, the mutual relation and unity of the two' (1975h:87). Theological statements about God may be received as a gift, but theologians always interpret those statements from the perspective of praxis. As far back as the last training conference of the WFCS in Strasbourg (July 1960), he first perceived the importance of obedience in relation to both knowledge and mission (cf. Bassham 1979:47). In a reflection on the conference he states: '*the discernment of the will of God is given only in the concrete act of obedience. Only in the measure in that we do the will of God humbly and silently—that will that we understand, confidently, even in the darkness of our own uncertainty—will we discern our mission more clearly and widely*' (1960d:54-55, author's italics). This is also clearly reflected in his report on the first ISAL meetings later that month. He remembers how he proposed that 'the precedence of obedience over reflection is the theologically correct order' (1972f:208). Praxis, or what he describes as a 'concrete act of obedience,' is primary because knowledge is only possible in obedience; praxis is a prerequisite for knowledge. Or in other terms, faith's search for effectiveness can only be successful when carried out in obedience. This is the 'very basis of the method and interpretation and the structure of theological reflection' (1975h:87) in a proper missionary theology.

Truth, as traditionally understood, has been conceived as belonging 'to a world of truth, a universe in itself, which is copied or reproduced in "correct" propositions, in a theory (namely a contemplation of this universe) which corresponds to this truth. Then, in a second moment, as a later step comes the application in a particular historical situation' (1975h:88). Truth, therefore, is held in the world of ideas; the role of theory is to reproduce that truth in propositions and action. Subsequently, then, correct action is the accurate interpretation and application of pre-existing truth. 'The realm of action corresponds to a second level: that of "consequences" or "inferences" of these truths (1976c:30). In order to act properly, the Christian is required to interpret the realm of truth correctly and apply it to the world of action. Therefore, the truth of the theory (or theology), is judged, not by its correspondence to historical conditions but rather by its correspondence to the world of truth. Theory is never judged on its effectiveness in the fire of historical conditions but only on its philosophical integrity.

Traditionally, theology was not evaluated on how it corresponded to concrete historical conditions, but as to whether it was correct in its relation to the

heavenly world of truth. Theology done in the Western world therefore was thought to be the norm for all other theology. It was believed to correspond to the world of truth and was therefore correct. This attitude is still reflected in many seminary and university curricula in courses on ‘theology’—meaning Western theology—are offered over against other courses on ‘contextualized theology’—meaning Third World or Two-Third’s World theologies; feminist theology; etc. The attitude commonly held was that theology done in the Non-Western world, had to repeat what was understood to be the truth in the West and to apply it to their different situations. If theology done in context was to question Western theology, it could do so, but only on the basis that Western theology had misunderstood the world of truth. For Míguez Bonino and other Latin American theologians, this understanding of truth legitimizes the status quo and does nothing to transform reality. For Latin America, this meant (and means) accepting the contemporary conditions of poverty, injustice, dependence and inequality.

In a programmatic statement, Míguez Bonino rejects the traditional understanding of truth: ‘there is no truth outside or beyond the concrete historical events in which men [sic] are involved as agents. There is, therefore, no knowledge except in action itself’ (1975h:88). For Míguez Bonino, the world of truth, as described above, does not exist. Theory and theology are to be judged as true or false in the way they correspond to the concrete situation in which human beings find themselves.

Míguez Bonino believes that the classical view of truth is unfaithful to how the Bible conceives of truth. He states: ‘God’s Word is not understood in the Old Testament as a conceptual communication but as a creative event, a history making pronouncement. Its truth does not consist in some correspondence to an idea but in its efficacy in carrying out God’s promise or fulfilling his judgment’ (1975h:89). Karl Barth argues the same thing in his section ‘The Nature of the Word of God’, (CD I/1: 143). Consequently, this creative event is not presented for consideration but as a call for a response from Israel. Response to truth is ‘not an ethical inference but an obedient participation’ and ‘always a concrete obedience’ (1975h:89).

In *Christians and Marxists* he examines this idea more fully. Quoting G. Johannes Botterweck’s comment on Jeremiah 22.15-16, Míguez Bonino observes that justice is, for the king, the totality or the essence, [*Inbegriff*] of knowledge of God. He also examines briefly Jeremiah 9.23 and describes this verse as: ‘a brief summary of Jeremiah’s understanding of the true relation to the Lord...to know the Lord is to pattern one’s life after God’s own action’ (1976c:33). After briefly mentioning passages in Hosea, Isaiah and Habakkuk, he concludes with two bold statements: ‘to do justice is to know Yahweh,’ (1976c:35), echoing Gutiérrez’ words ‘To know God is to do justice (Gutiérrez 1988:110-112), and: ‘the practice of justice is not a mere interpersonal relationship or social virtue; it is the very nature of the covenant with the Lord who practices justice, with him in whom “the orphan finds refuge”’ (1976c:35). According to the Hebrew prophets, knowledge of God is not found in the religious realm but rather in obedience to the God of the covenant of justice. It is not intellectual knowledge that leads to ethical action, but ethical action that constitutes the basis of knowledge of the truth and is the prerequisite for knowledge. This is obedience; it is a ‘way’; or as the Apostle Paul puts it, a “walking” (1975h:89).

Turning to the New Testament, Míguez Bonino examines various passages in the Johannine literature, emphasizing their Old Testament background. He cites John 3.14 and John 5.24—both speaking of passing from death to life. The former sees this as a result of love and the latter as a result of faith. Following José P. Miranda, Míguez Bonino states that John calls all to respond to the coming of the messianic Kingdom in Jesus Christ that has created a wholly new situation where there is the possibility of new life through being ‘born of God’, ‘remaining in God’ and ‘having fellowship with him’ (Miranda 1974:127-128). This new life is possible through God’s eternal Word in Christ. This eternal word, however, is not the philosophical word of the Platonists but the creative Word of God. So to respond to the new situation is to commit oneself to this situation in love—that is in action—and in faith of this creative Word.

In *Revolutionary Theology*, Míguez Bonino argues the same point in a slightly different way. He quotes John 8.43: ‘Why do you not understand what I say (*lalia*)? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word (*logos*)’ and concludes: ‘only he that *does* the word will know the doctrine’ (1975h:90, italics in original). Only those committed to the project of God in Christ, that is to receive the logos of Christ, will truly understand the truth of God in Christ. This doing of the word can be summed up in John’s concept of love. Míguez Bonino puts this in the following way: ‘To be in Christ and to love are not two things but one thing, which can be described either by looking at the total and the possibility of such new life—the fact that God has sent his own Son—or by looking at the operation and reality of this new life—that we love one another.’ (1976c:37). Love in the Johannine literature is not, as was once thought, ‘the spirit’s aspiration towards the divine’ (1976c:37), a view close to that of Liberal Theology, but rather ‘a historical course of action, which has to do with our relationship with actual human beings’ (1976c:37). Therefore, ‘knowing God is the equivalent to coming actively to grips with God’s concrete demands and actions’ (1976c:38). He concludes that ‘It seems clear enough that the classical conception can claim no biblical basis for its conception understanding of truth or for its distinction between a theoretical knowledge of truth and a practical application of it’ (1975h:90). Knowledge of truth in the Bible is only revealed in action.

For Míguez Bonino it is not only vital that the conception of truth is true in relation to the Bible but also whether it is tenable in relation to social sciences. Relying upon the sociology of knowledge, mainly of Paul Ricoeur, Míguez Bonino argues: ‘we think always out of a definite context of relations and action, out of a given praxis’ (1975h:90, cf. Ricoeur 1976). Praxis is not a result of theory but also a defining element in the formation of theory. Rudolf Bultmann argued in relation to the biblical text that every person brings a preunderstanding to that text. Whereas Bultmann identified this preunderstanding as ‘abstract philosophical analysis of existence’ (1975h:90). Míguez Bonino wants to widen it, including ‘the concrete conditions of men [sic] who belong to a certain time, people and class who are engaged in certain courses of action, even of Christian action and who reflect and read the texts within and out of these conditions’ (1975h:90-91). Every interpretation of both social reality and text are dependant, to a great extent upon the praxis that is brought to that interpretation. Rebecca Chopp summarises well when she says that ‘Míguez Bonino’s hermeneutics...depends on a dialectical relationship

between knowledge and praxis: knowledge grows out of praxis, but is never reduced to mere action' (Chopp 1992:87).

3.5.2 *Implications*

Míguez Bonino's epistemology, most polemically, leads to the fact that the theological process must include an interpretation of the interpreter, or, what has sometimes been called, 'ideology critique.' He proposes an analysis of the 'location' of the interpreter. To put it in its bluntest form: 'we cannot receive the theological interpretation coming from the rich world without suspecting it and, therefore, asking what kind of praxis it supports, reflects or legitimises' (1975h:91). Because 'every interpretation of the texts which is offered to us (whether as exegesis or as systematic or as ethic interpretation) must be investigated in relation to the praxis out of which it comes' (1975h:91). Therefore, he proposes that "'ideological suspicion" is a fundamental critical tool for interpretation' (1974e:108). It is 'crucial to ask about the ideological presupposition and functions which such interpretations may have' (1974e:108).

Míguez Bonino illustrates the use of ideology critique by utilizing Marxist critical tools to illustrate the classical interpretation of Protestantism regarding Jesus' teaching on riches and the rich. Marx said that Protestant ethics reflected a Capitalist ideology that replaced 'being' with 'having'. This is clear in the interpretation of riches. When treating the issue of wealth, exegetes slip an ideological presupposition into the interpretation. The argument is as follows: 'riches (in themselves) are good—therefore Jesus could not have condemned them as such, nor rich people as such—consequently the text must mean something else' (1974e:109). This "something else" is located in the area of intention or attitudes. If somebody has riches but has the right attitude towards them, they cannot be condemned. Once this framework of interpretation is in place, all texts are then interpreted in the same way. One can be rich and have the right attitudes and therefore please God. Moreover religion blesses your efforts. Joachim Jeremias' interpretation of Luke 16.19-31 is an illustration of this ideological presupposition that subsequently governs the interpretation (1974e:109). Jeremias affirms that God is revealed as God of the poor and destitute (Jeremias 1972:184) but concludes with incredible statement that 'Jesus does not intend to take a position on the question of the rich and poor' (1974e:109; cf. Jeremias 1972:186). For Míguez Bonino this is a classical example of how Western theologians unconsciously *ideologize* the biblical text.

In the early nineteen eighties, Míguez Bonino develops further the application of, and the implications for, his epistemology. He continues to argue that the sociology of knowledge has revealed the importance of social location: 'On the one hand there is the theologian's location within a theological discipline with its particular epistemological conditions and demands; on the other hand the theologian is also a social agent within a particular social formation' (1983m:42). He insists that this should not lead to social determinism where theology simply becomes a reflection of social location. The theologian is not simply a victim of his or her own social condition but is free to make an option to locate him or herself differently. He refers to it as the "double location" of the theologian. 'We are *situated* in reality, to be sure—historically, geographically, culturally, and most of all, groupwise and

classwise—but we can also position ourselves differently in relation to that situation’ (1983m:44 *Italics in original*). There is no doubt that class and group background affect interpretation but one can choose to interpret both the text and the context from the position or location of the other. This is summarised in a paper Míguez Bonino gave to the 15th Council of the YMCA, in Oaxtepec, Mexico.

We all are already, whether we want it or not, in a certain 'location' and therefore not in another. But also we can adopt a voluntary 'position'. This is, in very simple terms, what being human means. Every human being and every association of human beings is born or created in certain terms, and conditions- this is their location, determined by history, place, social, cultural, religious background, environment, traditions. Being human is always being 'located' somewhere in time and place. Even theologians should understand that! But being human means also the possibility of being dissatisfied, of rebelling, of moving to another place, of examining other conditions, of 'placing' themselves differently. Thus, the dialectics of 'location' and 'position' is the dynamics of human life (2002b).

For the Christian, Míguez Bonino believes this is kind of ‘conversion.’ Moses had to choose to leave the luxury of the Egyptian palace to ‘rediscover’ his people. Saul of Tarsus had to become a follower of the one whom he saw as the fulfilment of his faith (2002b). In the case of Latin America, this conversion means conversion to the location of the poor. Analysis of the concrete context, the written word and the activity of the living Word are presented to the theologian in the framework of how to approach the alternatives and challenges. He concludes: ‘Theological and social location for the Christian are one, united in the specific commitment to the poor’ (1983m:44). Consequently, hermeneutical interpretation is not only a mental exercise but also an ethical choice.

A second consequence of Míguez Bonino’s epistemology, proceeding from the first, is that if concrete action precedes knowledge, it follows that praxis must be prior to theory. This is completely different from the way in which theological hermeneutics has been traditionally conceived. In Western theology, the tendency has been to establish the relationship between theory and praxis in a non-dialectical way. As was mentioned earlier, the traditional way of doing theology has been to apply theory (Biblical Studies, Church History and Systematic Theology) to all the relevant contexts in practical theology. For Míguez Bonino, this is unacceptable because it denies the fact that all theories, including Christian theology, emerge from an already established praxis. Theory, therefore, to a certain extent, is the result of existing praxis. Biblical studies, systematic theology, church history and practical theology written in a certain context cannot be taken to be true for all other contexts because they have emerged from a particular context reflecting particular concerns.

Praxis is not the outcome of the analytical process but rather the primary condition for the possibility of theory. In Míguez Bonino’s understanding, there is no way of thinking about any object or process—that is forming a theory—without a previously existing praxis already informing that theory. To this extent, theory becomes a function of existing praxis. Theory takes the data gathered under the influence of the praxis and subsequently informs a new praxis. He puts it in the following way: ‘Action overflows and challenges the theory that has informed it; and thought, projecting the shape and future of reality, pushes action to new ventures’ (1983m:39). Furthermore: ‘reality is transformed through human action,

and action is corrected and reoriented by reality' (1983m:39). In conclusion: 'facts constitute the framework and support for decision. Theory is a human construction abstracted from past and present praxis that in turn opens the way for new praxis. Praxis incorporates a theory and challenges it by changing the reality from which it has been abstracted' (1983m:42). These sentences could almost be seen as a summary of Míguez Bonino's theological methodology.

Míguez Bonino's epistemology is not ground-breaking and follows closely the criteria developed by Liberation Theology. He is keen to show, as is José P. Miranda, that his epistemology is biblical; it maybe in harmony with the Marxist understanding but it is not, by definition wrong. This 'hermeneutics of the world' (Chopp 1992:83-87) liberates Míguez Bonino from the straitjacket of having to find approval and correspondence with Western theology. Western theology cannot serve as the measure for his theology because its perspective as is limited as any other theology. This epistemology is not uncommon among Liberation Theologians but, there can be little doubt that Míguez Bonino developed this understanding much earlier than other theologians. Even in the early nineteen sixties he was beginning to see how theology, in order to fulfil its task in mission (that is, in order to understand the gospel correctly) must be involved in that mission. Míguez Bonino's epistemology also stimulates people to develop a truly contextualized missionary theology. Knowledge of the context of mission, knowledge of the text, and knowledge of correct action in that mission can only be achieved from within the commitment to that mission.

3.6 THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

3.6.1 *Moments in theology*

Clodovis Boff wrote a book outlining his understanding of theological methodology (Boff 1993:1-21) in which he proposed to view the basic schema of the methodology as developed in three 'moments' or 'times' which correspond to the classic pastoral methods of the Roman Catholic Church—seeing, judging, and acting. He calls each stage 'a mediation' because, apart from being moments in the theological process, they serve as instruments of theological construction. Boff calls them the *socioanalytic* mediation, the *hermeneutic* mediation, and the *practical* mediation.

The *socioanalytic* mediation contemplates the world of the oppressed. It seeks to understand why the oppressed are oppressed. The *hermeneutic* mediation contemplates the word of God. It attempts to see what the divine plan is with regard to the poor. Finally, the *practical* mediation contemplates the aspect of activity and seeks to discover the appropriate lines of operation for overcoming oppression in conformity with God's plan (Boff 1993:11).

Míguez Bonino's method corresponds generally to this schema but with significant differences. Míguez Bonino expands *socioanalytic mediation* beyond the world of the poor and oppressed. The context of the poor and oppressed is not forgotten by any means in his theology, but the contexts in which Míguez Bonino has worked out his theology are wider. The context of his life and theological career has led him to

reflect not only upon issues related to Latin America and its context but also issues such as ecumenism and power. Also related to the socioanalytic mediation, Míguez Bonino includes, and indeed starts from, an analysis of the church. He starts from the Christian community and its expression of faith and then moves onto the church's expression of faith as part of the concrete historical situation in which the church finds itself. To analyze the social and political context without relating it to the church or to analyze the church as without relating it to the context is to ignore the fact that the Church is part of the society in which it ministers. The first ISAL consultation (1961) was concerned with this issue. Míguez Bonino attended and gave a paper at this conference. In the development of his theology, he always emphasized the importance of the church in the context of its mission.

In regard to the *hermeneutic mediation*, Míguez Bonino emphasizes the re-reading of the revelation of God in his salvific actions. In the light of an analysis of the Church in the context of its mission, Míguez Bonino reflects upon how the church reads and re-reads God's action in saving humanity and establishing the Kingdom. The Bible is less of a source of inspiration for further action as God's present word to the Church in its mission. This item will be developed later in the chapter. Whereas Clodovis Boff notes that most liberation theologians prefer Exodus, the Hebrew Prophets, the Gospels, the book of Acts and Revelation (Boff 1993:17), but Míguez Bonino prefers the Pauline and Johannine writings which point to the Church, the Kingdom of God, and the Trinity.

In regard to the *practical mediation*, Míguez Bonino considers practical ways in which the role of the church in God's plan for the world. His theological proposals are more or less restricted to general lines of action; however, his theology is not properly understood the aspect of practical mediation is included. In certain books he emphasises the more pastoral role, in suggesting concrete ways of carrying out the mission of the Church (cf. 1972a; 1975c and 1979i).

Míguez Bonino's theological methodology using this model of 'three moments' needs to be related to the theme of this study by posing three questions. The *socioanalytical* mediation poses the question: How can the context of faith's search for effectiveness be understood here and now; and what is the church's place in that context? The *hermeneutical* mediation puts forward the question: how does God's revelation, both in the Bible and in current history, relate to, direct, and inform faith's search for effectiveness? The *practical* mediation asks: in the light of the context, the church's place in that context, and the reflection on God's action how, in concrete terms, does faith find and work out its mission effectively? The next three sections will deal with these three questions one by one.

3.6.2 *Socioanalytic mediation*

Analysis of the social context

As has been stated, Míguez Bonino's theology starts with the concrete context of the mission of the church. If faith is to be authentic in its search for effectiveness, then the analysis and interpretation of that context are vital. This is especially true of the socio-political context. Any context, however, is bewilderingly complex and therefore Míguez Bonino's hermeneutics seeks for 'a scientific analysis of reality'. He explicitly points out: 'An engaged faith and obedience cannot stand outside or

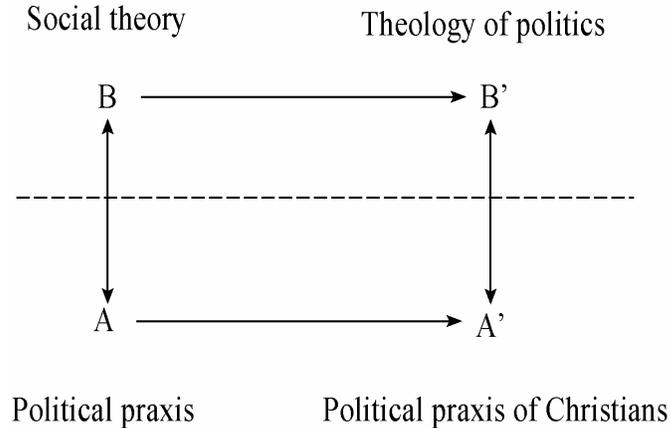
above the world in which they are engaged. This is the reason why, in the effort to enter into this theology, we are forced to dwell on the understanding and analysis of the world in which it finds its locus' (1975h:21).

In *Towards a Christian Political Ethics*, Míguez Bonino deals with the issue of how to interpret the socio-political context of Christian mission directly. In a section called, 'sociologies: which and how' (1983m:44-53). Míguez Bonino asks the question what kind of social analysis is needed in order to achieve real effectiveness in mission. He rejects three theological approaches to social issues. Firstly, he rejects the position that one can, in an unmediated way, understand and analyse social problems by simple observation. This "Samaritan-Like" approach is seen in many social action projects which, in reality, are often based on functionalist sociology and lead to reformist answers to social problems. Secondly, he rejects the purist idea of developing specifically Christian answers to secular problems. To some extent this is seen within the Roman Catholic "social doctrine of the Church," where theology uses certain philosophical and sociological categories without examining them critically. A third way, mixing theological and sociological categories is also rejected. There is no way of finding direct correspondence or analogy between biblical categories and contemporary situations as analysed through sociological categories. These analogies can end up being arbitrary, He cites the case of the use of Jesus' attitude towards the zealots, as a support for revolution or a rejection of it.

Míguez Bonino proposes 'the recognition of social analysis as a constitutive moment in theological reflection on politics' (1983m:45). He stipulates that there is no other way of "knowing" social reality; some sort of social analysis is needed. He is consistent in recognising that there is no value-free science and no value-free theology. In general terms, and risking oversimplification, he sees the functionalist and the dialectic visions of society as the most significant:

Functionalist sociologies conceive of society as an organism, with social groups, classes, and functions being constitutive parts of that organism which should function in harmoniously; conflicts are therefore understood as maladjustment and, directly or indirectly, social analysis serves the end of conflict solving. Dialectic sociologies, on the other hand, have a conflictual understanding of society; viewing society as a complex phenomenon full of contradictions and conflicts, they undertake to understand the structural basis and dynamics of such conflicts (1983m:46).

Míguez Bonino posits that, in general terms, functionalist sociologies represent a vision "from the top" and serve those sectors of society for whom the status quo benefits their position and the dialectic sociologies represent a vision "from below" and serve those for whom 'society appears as inadequate, badly structured, full of conflict, and in need of transformation' (1983m:47). In spite of certain philosophical and ideological presuppositions, which Míguez Bonino feels need to be questioned, he believes that the Christian should make an option for the critical and serious use of the analytical instruments of dialectical sociologies without absolutizing or theologically legitimizing them (Segundo 1976:39-68).



The next question posed by Míguez Bonino is how theology should incorporate the “socioanalytic moment” into the theological process. Using a model developed by Clodovis Boff, Míguez Bonino seeks to understand the complex interaction and relationships between political praxis and social theory, and between Christian praxis and a theology of politics (figure 1). He questions how to move from political praxis to a theology of politics ($A \rightarrow B'$). There are two approaches: $A \rightarrow A' \rightarrow B'$ and $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow B'$. In the first case, a Christian reflection on political practice is mediated by the indispensable hermeneutical key of Christian experience of political engagement; in the second case, it is mediated by secular social theory.

Christians are able to develop a Christian understanding of politics in two ways. Firstly by reflecting on the political praxis of Christians, which Míguez Bonino calls: ‘the discernment of Christian faith and love, which acts out of its obedience by assuming historical praxis that is then subjected to critical reflection on the basis of Scripture and tradition’ (1983m:48). In the second case ‘the theoretical elaboration of a political praxis is again assumed and then subjected to critical reflection from the standpoint of specifically Christian Faith’ (1983m:48). He does not think that it is necessary to make a definitive choice between these options but simply emphasises that some sort of practical mediation is essential.

Although Míguez Bonino in this case is focussing upon politics, all Christian mission falls within the realms of human activity, and so can be analysed sociologically. To analyse any context, theology can use the mediation of the already existing practice of Christians, or even non-Christians as the point of departure. Whether the activity is communication, social action, or political involvement, the mediation of praxis is essential.

Míguez Bonino chooses dialectical sociologies in order to understand the context in which Christians search for obedience in their mission in the world. These sociologies, lead him to opt for a Marxist analysis of society. Sociologists used by Míguez Bonino include Italian Communist political theorist and activist A. Gramsci (1891-1937) who wrote on the state and ideology and Greek Marxist and sociologist N. Poulantzas (1936-1979) who wrote on power in the capitalist state. This is obviously a complex, difficult and dangerous programme. On the one hand, some

who have wanted to take up the cause of the oppressed have rejected this process and so ‘lacking a rigorous historical mediation, not infrequently end up in frustration,...or different forms of reformism’. On the other hand, people who embraced Marxist theory uncritically have tended to lose their faith or give up the historical nature of the gospel. Míguez Bonino proposes a third way. This approach recognises that Christian obedience requires a solid method of analysing reality—not only in general terms but also in specific political, social, and economic terms. At this level of committed analysis, Marxism can be assumed not because it is ‘an abstract or eternal theory or dogmatic formulae’ but rather it represents

‘a scientific analysis and a number of verifiable hypotheses in relation to conditions obtaining in certain historical moments and places and which, properly modified, corrected and supplemented, provide an adequate means to grasp our own historical situation (insofar, moreover, as it is closely related and significantly shaped by the model originally analysed)’ (1975h:95-96).

Although Marxism can be described as socio-economic-political tool developed at a certain point in European history, Míguez Bonino sees it as ‘the best instrument available for an effective and rational realization of human possibilities in historical life. A Marxist praxis is both the verification and the source of possible correction of the hypothesis (1975h:97). He points out that if Marxist tools of analysis are compatible with the realities of human life and history, then ‘they become *the unavoidable historical mediation* of Christian obedience’ (1975h:98; italics in the original).

It is imperative that the use of Marxist tools in Míguez Bonino’s theological method should be deepened. This should take place, not only in the realm of theology (and its ideological assumptions) but also in the realm of the tools of that ideological critique (and their theological assumptions). Put another way, there is not only a need for a sociological critique of theological tools but also a theological critique of sociological tools. Míguez Bonino asserted the need to critique theology and biblical interpretation in the light of the sociological tools of suspicion. This does not mean to criticise God or the Scriptures but rather to reveal the ideological presuppositions behind much of theology. Míguez Bonino does this in several writings, such as his critique of the ideological presupposition of the division of the supernatural and the secular or of most theological reflection upon Jesus’ attitude to money that grossly distorts the radical biblical call. It is necessary, however, to critique the sociological tools themselves. Some of these have been blunted as tools for the search for effectiveness in mission by being inadequate in some way or by being reductionist. Míguez Bonino quite rightly notes this in a couple of places (cf. 1975h:97 and 1976c:114). A glaring example of this is Marx’s view of religion as only a reaction to economic conditions. In general terms, Marx assumed that all of religion was the same as the form of Christianity in nineteenth century Germany (the quasi-religious nature of the German state at the time) and generalised it for all religions at all times in all places. This is reductionist and needs adjustment if it is to be of use to a missionary theology.

It is essential to note, in order not to be misinterpreted here, that the theological critique of the sociological tools of analysis takes place within commitment to liberation of the poor. This theological critique has the same aim as the sociological critique, which is to sharpen the tools in order to achieve greater

effectiveness. It is not a theological mind game to prove the superiority of theology over sociology or Christianity over secularism. Therefore, theological critique of sociological tools takes place in the commitment to the use some sort of sociological tool of analysis.

Míguez Bonino proposes the critical use of Marxist tools of social analysis. He points out that these tools need to be 'properly modified, corrected and supplemented'. They need to be *modified* because they do not exactly fit into the Latin American context due to the fact that they originate from nineteenth century Europe. Furthermore, they need to be *corrected* because they contain both errors and reductionisms. Finally they need to be *supplemented* by other sociological tools because they do not embrace all elements within the Latin American social and political context. Míguez Bonino's argument is weakened by the fact he does not elaborate on how Marxist tools need to be modified, corrected and supplemented.

Two examples of socioanalytic mediation

Although Míguez Bonino constantly offers sections of social analysis in various articles and chapters, it is worth referring to two more complete examples of his socio-political analysis. They can illustrate how he approaches this moment or mediation. In *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age*, Míguez Bonino dedicates a whole chapter to 'understanding our world' (1975h:21-37). His socio-historical analysis revolves around how the liberal Capitalist model has dominated Latin America and has created economic, social and political dependency. He makes a stinging critique of the developmentalist model so popular in the nineteen fifties and sixties, which formed the basis of John F. Kennedy's *Alliance for Progress* (1961).

'In the final analysis, the capitalist form of production as it functions in today's world creates in the dependant countries (perhaps not only in them) a form of human existence characterized by artificiality, selfishness, the inhuman and dehumanizing pursuit of success measured in terms of prestige and money, and the resignation of responsibility for the world and for one's neighbour' (1975h:31).

Míguez Bonino then moves on to describe how these conditions have been the point of departure for a new social consciousness in Latin America. This has especially to do with the success of the Cuban Revolution (1959). This revolution showed Latin America that change was possible; 'that the capitalist and imperialist system can be overcome' (1975h:33). It was not a textbook copy of Dogmatic Marxist revolution but one that had Latin American characteristics. It was able to achieve some of the modifications and corrections needed for making the revolution a success and to supplement it with other forms of analysis. Míguez Bonino concludes: 'Just as the socialist system which will finally emerge in Latin America will not be a copy of the existing one, but a creation related to our own reality, so the analysis has to be adequate to this reality and develop its own categories and methods' (1975h:35).

Another example of social analysis is found in *Toward a Christian Politic Ethics* (1983m). In this study Míguez Bonino's approach to the analysis is historical. He traces the Latin American socio-political situation from dependence upon the Spanish to a dependence upon the British, subsequently upon the United States, and finally upon transnational corporations. He shows how at each stage the continent has lived in dependency and how imperialist systems have used both military and

religious forces to maintain order among the people. Moving from the past to the present, he concludes that ‘the Capitalist transnational project with its technocratic ideology presents itself as the “natural” extension of and successor to the liberal democratic society’ and that

‘the two characteristic features of their project seem to be controlled development within the framework of the world capitalist system, and limited democracy under the management of technocratic elites. In the countries that dominate this world capitalist system, even though the conditions and mechanisms differ, it is possible to corresponding lines of a similar model’ (1983m:76).

In this regard Míguez Bonino’s analysis reflects the changing context that was experienced in the early nineteen-eighties: a slow return to ‘democracy’ after the ‘national security state’ project of the sixties and seventies.

Analysis of the Church in society

The second element in Míguez Bonino’s understanding of the socioanalytic mediation is the interpretation of the church’s place in society. This issue is vital to a clear understanding of Míguez Bonino’s theological methodology. Faith, in its search for effectiveness, starts from the Church’s missionary obedience, i.e. the obedience of the church in its mission in the world. The introduction of sociological tools into the hermeneutical process has enabled this analysis.

Historically, this issue became vital at the first consultation of ISAL (1961) in the early nineteen sixties. The major outcome of this consultation, apart from the formation and structuring of ISAL at continental and local levels and the planning of a second consultation, was the feeling of perplexity. The participants of the consultation became aware that the Church, in its response to the social situation in Latin America, far from being separated from society and thereby able to objectively study its role in society, was involved in and conditioned by society and the revolutionary situation which defined Latin America at that time (ISAL 1961:15). Consequently, there was a note included in the ‘Plan of Action’ to promote ‘the identification of Latin American Evangelical sociologists, encouraging a greater interest among Christian youth in the social sciences as a profession with great opportunities for Christian service’ (ISAL 1961:64). From this time on these issues came to be the premises on which ISAL studies were based (Padilla 1974:120).

Míguez Bonino’s *Revolutionary Theology* (1975h) approached this issue directly when examining how ‘Christianity as it operates historically’ (1975h:92). Any expression of Christianity does not present itself in the world as a set of beliefs or philosophies but as an historical agent. Every expression of Christianity, whether it is a State Church in Russia, an African Initiated Church in Nigeria, or a small group of Christians in the *Altiplano* of Bolivia, operates within history either as an agent of change or a sustainer of the status quo. Míguez Bonino’s hermeneutics proposes that these should be studied in order to make explicit ‘the ideological frameworks of interpretation implicit in a given praxis’ (1975h:94). Christians do not have to start from zero, this kind of analysis has already been done by social analysts such as in Karl Marx in his criticism of Protestant ethics as a reflection of capitalist bourgeois ideology; Max Weber in his sociological studies on Protestantism and capitalism and, specifically relevant to Latin America, Christian

Lalive d'Epinau in his study of Chilean Pentecostalism (cf. D'Epiney 1969). In recent years Míguez Bonino has modified his analysis of the Pentecostal movement. As Pentecostals themselves have begun to analyse their own traditions, he has become more circumspect (cf. 2004a:36-37).

All Churches and Christians possess ideological frameworks of interpretation but they are often held unconsciously. These frameworks support a certain political or economic position, but are not expressed. Even those who believe it is the Christian's responsibility to remain politically neutral possess these ideological frameworks. Míguez Bonino does not view them, however, in a wholly negative way—they are, in fact, inevitable. Every person has an ideological framework through which the world is perceived and thereby coheres their being and action. In this way they can become 'the instrument through which our Christian obedience gains coherence and unity. It is so, though, provided that is be always brought to consciousness and critically examined both in terms of the gospel and of the scientific analysis of reality' (1975h:95).

It is likely that this positive view of ideology has been drawn from the philosophy of the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci, who states that one must

distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, "willed". To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is "psychological"; they "organize" human masses, they form the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc (Gramsci 1971:367).

It is essential for Christian obedience that these ideological frameworks are examined to differentiate between 'arbitrary, rationalistic, "willed"' ideologies and those that are necessary to organize the masses, i.e. the faithful (cf. Segundo 1976:97-123 and Segundo 1984). J.L. Segundo clarifies the relationship between faith and ideologies by saying,

Faith, then, is not a universal, atemporal, pithy body of content summing up divine revelation once the latter has been divested of ideologies. On the contrary it is maturity by the way of ideologies, the possibility of fully and conscientiously carrying out the ideological task on which the real-life liberation of human beings depends (Segundo 1976:123).

Faith, to be effective, must have an ideological framework which enables it to think through its own positioning within society; its reading of the Bible; and the consequences of its actions. This framework must be made explicit in order to serve faith's struggle.

Two Analytical Examples of Church in Society

A multiplicity of examples could be given of how Míguez Bonino analyzes the church's place in society. Two writings will serve as examples or illustrations of this type of analysis of the Church in society. Probably the most comprehensive example of this is his analysis of Latin American Protestantism's understanding of social change and its own responsibilities towards that change (1973h:179-202). This extended essay uses a combined historical, social and ecclesiastical approach which

broadly is based upon Lalive d'Épinay's typology. He begins by recounting the entrance and integration of Protestantism into Latin America. Using the missionary congresses of Panama (1916), Montevideo (1925), Buenos Aires (1949) and Lima (1961), he shows how a situation has been created where some Protestants believe that social change will happen through converted individuals, others believe that social change should be fomented through democratic developmentalist means and still others who reject totally any association between the gospel and society. Finally Míguez Bonino shows how a small sector has committed itself to a revolutionary option in which 'the Church is present and committed to the Latin American humanizing processes, taking the gospel to its ultimate implications' (1973h:188). He then examines this process from an historical/social perspective, noting how Protestantism became associated with the challenge to traditional religion and society in Latin America; from an ideological perspective, showing how the missions and churches who planted Latin American churches held a liberal bourgeois ideology; and from a theological perspective, demonstrating how the theologies of the missionary churches held to a Liberal or Evangelical theology that emphasized the importance of the individual's relationship with God. This, he asserts, has come to a head in a crisis of liberal economics and theology. The neo-liberal developmentalist project of the post-war years and liberal theology entered into deep crisis in the mid sixties (1973h:188-193). The developmentalist project collapsed with the failure of the two decades of development and disintegration of the Alliance for Progress. Liberal theology entered a crisis following the entrance of Neo-Orthodox theologies from Europe (Barth and Brunner) and North America (Niebuhr) to Latin America in the mid nineteen forties. Finally Míguez Bonino draws out three general lines of approach in the Protestant churches to the social aspect of the church's mission: people who take a militantly developmentalist, anti-communist line represented by a magazine called *Principia Evangélica*; people who hold to a "social strike" withdrawing from the world and denouncing involvement in the world; and people who get involved in society and societal change, despite all the problems encountered. The final approach is normally taken by the historical churches and those involved in ISAL (1973h:193-202). In this way Míguez Bonino attempts to understand the historical, ideological and theological background of Latin American Protestantism and to better accompany it in its search for missionary effectiveness.

The second example of Míguez Bonino's analysis of Protestantism's place in Latin American society will be dealt with far more briefly. It comes to the fore in the book *Faces of Latin American Protestantism* (1997). In separate chapters he makes a brief analysis of four faces of Latin American Protestantism: Liberal, Evangelical,¹ Pentecostal and Ethnic² (cf. 1995c:ix.). In each case he gives the historical, social and theological background of the ecclesial tradition involved, showing how each entered and took root in Latin America, and highlights its current position within Latin American society. In the final two chapters he reflects upon the issues of theological coherence and missionary unity in the light of his analysis.

¹ Evangelical here is used in the Anglo-Saxon sense.

² This book came out of the Carnahan Lectures (1993) and only included the first three faces, but because of many complaints and comments he received, Míguez Bonino added the Ethnic Face. This especially reflects the Argentinean reality of Latin American Protestantism.

In conclusion, these descriptions are given as examples of Míguez Bonino's analysis of how the church operates as an actor in society and of his understanding how it could operate in the light of the gospel. He is in harmony with liberation theologians in this area and is consistent in his writings to include this analysis.

3.6.3 *Hermeneutical mediation*

Revelation and reception

This study has insisted that Míguez Bonino's theology can be understood as faith seeking effectiveness. In order to achieve this effectiveness it has shown how Míguez Bonino sees the need to begin with obedience to God's call to mission: obedience is a prerequisite to understanding the road toward effectiveness in mission. He also has seen the need to analyse scientifically the context of the Church's mission as well as the Church's place within that context. There is a danger, however, that this type of process can lose its theological nature and become a glorified sociology. To achieve that this process remains theological, faith must be confronted with God's Word so that the effectiveness that faith seeks conforms to God's purposes in the world.

Míguez Bonino's understanding of how the Church, accompanied by theologians, reads and interprets God's Word needs to be analysed. He does not simply question how the Church reads the Bible but how it receives God's revelation and how it interprets that revelation. This leads to the question how the Church hands on God's revelation to subsequent generations in forms, doctrines and self-expressions and also how it hands over that revelation to those who do not believe in its preaching and mission.

The significant questions of Revelation, Scripture and Tradition are interlinked. Míguez Bonino understands revelation to be God's action in history, especially in Jesus Christ; he understands the Bible as the Apostolic Witness to that revelation; and tradition as the Christian interpretation and communication of that revelation in Jesus Christ as read through the apostolic witness. This means that tradition includes all Christian doctrine, dogma and theology, as well as the creeds, and up to and including the full life of the Church and its presence in the world.

This issue is especially significant in Latin America. It is still one that divides Protestants and Roman Catholics. In his ThD thesis (1960e), Míguez Bonino describes this conflict in doctrinal terms. On the one hand 'Roman Catholics find that Protestant theology has falsely objectified the Word of God in the Bible, severing it arbitrarily from its connection with a living community' (1960e:358), and also that Protestantism 'has falsely subjectivized the Word of God by turning the Bible over to individual interpretation' (1960e:358). On the other hand, Protestants feel that Roman Catholics have 'dissolved the objectivity of the Word of God in the witness of Scripture by placing the *Magisterium* on a level with it and thus robbing Scripture of the possibility of confronting the Church as a voice coming from outside her' (1960e:358). Míguez Bonino does, however, feel that this must be qualified: 'Neither does Protestantism identify the Word of God simply with the Bible nor does Catholicism place the doctrinal tradition simply on a level with Scripture. Protestantism does not deny the role of the living community in spite of all its emphasis on its imperfection and fallibility, nor does Roman Catholicism

refuse to acknowledge a mutability and relativity in dogmatic formulations' (1960e:359). This has opened up a space for dialogue.

Míguez Bonino tries to step outside of the traditional approaches to Scripture and Tradition by stepping back and starting from the basic problem of revelation and reception, or in other words, God's word and the human reception of that word. In this sense tradition is understood, not as the creation of human additions to God's revelation but 'as the act of handing over and receiving, as the moment in which something is given and received' (1960e:363). Therefore it can be said that the basic issue is that of the relationship between divine revelation and the human receiving of that revelation.

Míguez Bonino's ThD thesis forms the basis for his later reflections on Biblical interpretation. It will become clear that even as far back as 1960, he was developing an interpretational method that would be used later by other theologians and in due time become, what is contemporarily recognized as a liberationist reading.

Revelation's relationship to human witness: Scripture and Tradition

Míguez Bonino regards God's revelation as the starting point in the process of Biblical interpretation. Revelation is to be understood 'not as a communication of eternal truths, but as God's action in history' (1960e:270). He cuts across the arguments of whether scripture, reason, ecclesiastical tradition or experience are sources of revelation and plainly states that revelation is seen in God's acts of salvation. These acts are what Míguez Bonino has called "the germinal events" of the faith: 'God's dealings with Israel, the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the hope of the Kingdom' (1975h:98) are included. Revelation, therefore, is conceived of as taking place in history (cf. Gutiérrez 1988:106-110). Although, the acts of God in history as recorded in, and interpreted by the Bible, are many and varied (Hebrews 1:1), Jesus Christ is God's ultimate, decisive and definitive action and revelation to humanity. Míguez Bonino stated 'The final saving revelation of God has been uniquely given in Jesus Christ' (1960e:363). This is a programmatic statement for understanding his biblical hermeneutic. Consequently, 'revelation meets us in a person. In the concrete, human existence of Jesus of Nazareth we meet God's Word. He is the truth' (1960e:364). God's revelation in Christ is unique. Later on in his career Míguez Bonino states the same thing but in a different way.

There certainly exists a time and place that has for us a unique and unchangeable, normative nature: the Biblical history. The New Testament is not a testimony of a time and a place among others but rather the time and the place where God made known and put into operation his mission in a exemplary and determinant form for all times and all places. But it is fundamental to caution that God didn't do this through an abstract and extemporal definition of this mission but rather 'incarnating himself' in a particular history (1981h:7).

This does not mean that the New Testament is itself God's revelation but rather that the New Testament records, for humanity and especially for the Church, God's definitive revelation of his own nature in those specific events at a specific moment in history. God is revealed at a specific time and place in history by becoming a

human being. This “Christ event” comprises the frame of reference and the starting point for the understanding of his biblical hermeneutic.

The uniqueness of Christ as God’s revelation implies the following: ‘Jesus Christ stands alone as God’s Word, a designation which nothing else can share at the same level or univocally’ (1960e:364). This leads to the fact that both the Bible and human traditions are relativised. Neither scripture nor tradition can claim to be revelation in the same way as Christ is. Scripture and tradition are placed on the same level because they are both human and both a response to God’s Word; they share the same human characteristics—relativity, contingency and fallibility. This does not empty them of their significance because, as Míguez Bonino says, they ‘fulfil their witnessing function precisely in all the limitation and fallibility of their humanity’ (1960e:365). By saying this, Míguez Bonino rejects both the doctrine of the infallibility of tradition within the Roman Catholic Church and the tendency—in both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism—of the identification of Scripture with revelation. He also opens up the way for a contemporary re-reading of God’s revelation. Once again the influence of Karl Barth is unmistakable. The key to Míguez Bonino’s hermeneutic is the same as Barth’s: the Word of God in Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures (or the Apostolic witness) have a special place in Míguez Bonino’s theology not, because it is the Word of God itself but because it is the primary witness to God’s revelation in Christ. Consequently, he makes a distinction between the scriptures and any other words about Christ. ‘If the Word of God dwelt fully in the humanity of Jesus Christ, the witness to that humanity has a unique, permanent and irreplaceable character which no other instance can share...as temporally and materially original witness to the concrete and definite humanity of Jesus Christ in whom God meets us uniquely and decisively, the Scripture must be distinguished from all later witness as the only normative instance for the knowledge of revelation’ (1960e:365). Later on, when commenting on the relationship between Marxism and Christianity, he says that it is vital to base all reflections on this subject on the Bible because ‘we have no other final source of knowledge of God than his own self-identification in Jesus Christ. And this knowledge is not available for us except in the knowledge of the Old and New Testament’ (1976c:31). For Míguez Bonino scripture has ‘a unique, permanent and irreplaceable character’; it is the ‘final source of knowledge of God’ and the ‘only normative instance of the knowledge of revelation.’ Just as the Christ event is unique and normative as God’s revelation, so the Bible is also unique, final and normative in its witness to that revelation. Scripture has a special relationship with revelation that tradition does not.

The fact that Christ is God’s unique saving revelation to humanity does not mean that revelation is not related to the human reception of that revelation. Although the Church’s interpretation in its preaching, dogma and doctrine are relativised and cannot be considered even to be on the same level as the Bible, it is, however, intimately related to Christ. In other terms, revelation is related to tradition. The relationship between the Church’s tradition and God’s revelation is not only to be conceived indirectly—through the Bible—but also directly—through the presence of the living Christ in the Church. Protestantism has traditionally rejected such a close association between Christ and the Church, fearing the danger of falling into a Roman Catholic understanding which elevates the Church to an authoritative level. Míguez Bonino is insistent, however, that it is imperative to take

seriously how God's revelation is related to the Church. He does this Christologically. God became human in a real sense, not docetically. God's revelation is made fully concrete in history. Theology must give full weight to the fact of the incarnation. God is therefore related to the Church in its reading of the apostolic witness in Christ. He explains this more fully in the following statement:

Christians are incorporated into the body of Christ, they are ingrafted in the living vine: the reality in which they participate is the very life of Christ, the Head, flowing in the members. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit witnesses to the fact that the revelation in Jesus Christ really enters man and takes him into personal, actual communion with Him, as man is, within the limits of his humanity, without divinizing him, but not in a merely external way, to the point that Calvin does not even recoil from speaking of *mystica communicatio* (1960e:367).

This statement has certain consequences. 'The emphasis on the present work of the Holy Spirit in the Church gives meaning and importance to the witness and proclamation of the Church' (1960e:367). This should not be understood in terms, of only the verbal communication of the gospel or the confessional expression but in the whole life of the Church in 'worship, preaching, suffering, acting of the Church' (1960e:367). Míguez Bonino calls this 'active tradition'. In the very life and preaching of the Church, in communion with the Holy Spirit, the Church not only interprets God's revelation but lives it out. In terms of the thesis of this study: the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church enables the Church to achieve effectiveness in its life and mission.

Furthermore, Míguez Bonino proposes, what he calls, a *passive tradition*. Not only does the Church listen to the Holy Spirit, it also listens 'to the voice of the Church of the past, not merely as a voice of the past, but as the voice of the Church in obedience to the Holy Spirit' (1960e:368). He asserts that often Protestantism is so interested in getting to the truth of scripture that forgets the command to love and unity. He poses the question at two levels. The first level is that of space: the ecumenical question. The Church is called to speak the truth in love and to dialogue with other Christian traditions in order to understand the presence of the Holy Spirit in those other traditions. The second level is that of time: the question of dogma and confession. The contemporary church cannot forget how the Church has listened to the Holy Spirit in the past. The Church has attempted to listen to the Holy Spirit throughout the ages and has tried to seek God's will; the Church of today, recognizing the Spirit's presence, listens to the voices of both the Church of the past and that of the Holy Spirit and must respond.

Additionally, 'the previous statements must be understood in the light of the fact that the Holy Spirit is sent from God and Christ to bear witness to Christ' (1960e:369-370). God continues to be present in the Church and in the world through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This presence cannot be understood as a type of continuing incarnation. The incarnation was a once for all, unrepeatable event but, analogically understood, the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church to inspire the Church in its mission. 'The Spirit of God has not been absent in the shaping of the particular location in which we read Holy Scripture today' (1960e:265-266). Furthermore, 'If the promise of Christ is true, we may expect to hear in the voice of the tradition of the Church which hands to us the Scripture, and echo, however dimmed or mixed, of the voice of the Spirit disclosing to us the meaning of the

Scriptures which witness to Christ' (1960e:266). It is possible to discern here the influence of Oscar Cullman's understanding of *Heilsgeschichte*. Due to the fact that salvation history extends through to the Parousia, the presence of the Holy Spirit is fully guaranteed to the Church in its interpretation of Scripture (cf. 1960b:94-107 and 1967a:295-301). Or, as he puts later (1982), when referring to the contemporizing of the message of revelation: 'Jesus Christ himself has promised that His Spirit (John 14-16) would lead His community in that "actualizing"' (1981h:7). In the 1990s, he treats this issue again, stating that our historical, conditioned understanding is a supernatural process: 'it takes place in the surroundings of the operation of the Holy Spirit; it is the work of the Triune God (1997c:90). It is discernment. 'The understanding and expression by the Church and therefore by theology, as an act of the church, of revelation and redemption has its place in the Holy Spirit (1997c:90). Therefore, Míguez Bonino states:

on the basis of these facts we must draw the consequence that tradition in the Church, if it is to be real proclamation of the revelation in Christ, if it will listen to what the Holy Spirit teaches, must be a constant return to the concrete humanity of the Word made flesh. The presence of the Word in the Church cannot be conceived as a seed planted once in the bosom of the Church and developing in it but an as ever renewed contact with the original, full Incarnation in Jesus Christ (1960e:371).

He adds: 'hearing the Word of God in the power of the Spirit means being placed in the presence of Jesus Christ' (1960e:372). In this sense, the critical function of Scripture becomes clear. The Church is a mixture of the divine and the dusty; 'nothing in the life of the Church can once and for all be placed above confrontation and crisis and transferred to the category of final norm' (1960e:372). The Church is, in Luther's words, *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time justified and sinner). The Church must always examine its proclamation, witness and life before the light of God's revelation in Christ which is witnessed to in the scriptures.

Finally, 'for our preaching, doctrine, dogma to become that which it intends to be, namely the effective witness to Jesus Christ, He Himself must act' (1960e:373-374). Jesus Christ is active in the life of the Church. Míguez Bonino would agree with Segundo when he says: 'dogma is not an encapsulated version of the absolute' (cf. Segundo 1976:175. How ever much the Church prays and trusts, it can never claim to be God's revelation. Only when Christ is active in the handing over of the gospel, the Church's activity can be effective. In Míguez Bonino's own words 'In the life of the Church the revelation is always given in the tradition. But the relation is irreversible: tradition is never in itself revelation' (1960e:374). Because Christ is active in the handing over of God's revelation in the life the Church, revelation is always handed over in tradition.

This handing over does not render the Church immune from the creation of human traditions. Human traditions are created when human understanding of the *paradosis* (gospel tradition) is elevated to a divine reality in itself or when authority is claimed for human understanding of that *paradosis*. This, Míguez Bonino says, makes our traditions not only meaningless but also contrary to God's revelation. Moreover, when traditions really communicate God's revelation in Christ, they will lose their effectiveness when they claim authority. The only authority is that of the *paradosis* itself as recorded in the Apostolic Witness.

Revelation, the Church and History

Míguez Bonino affirms that the Church is accompanied by the living Christ in the process of handing down and handing on God's revelation. However, it is still deeply affected by its involvement in history and this has deep implications for Christian witness and effectiveness in mission.

As was argued in the section on Míguez Bonino's epistemology and its implications for theological methodology, humanity is socially and culturally conditioned. Whenever cultural change takes place or a new tradition is received, it always takes place within the framework of already existing cultural traditions. Míguez Bonino puts it in the following way:

The language structures of community, mores, science, religion of our community are the categories within which we determine the meaning of our own existence. They do not destroy our freedom but they condition it and give the concrete conditions which make possible the exercise of that freedom. In other words, creativity, freedom can only take place in the framework of tradition (1960e:377).

That is to say: 'we do not read the Bible as people of the first or second century, but as people of our own time and place' (1960e:263). Much later in his career he says:

'revelation and faith are always absolutes: they are the revelation of the only true God, nothing more and nothing less...At the same time, all understanding and expression of this revelation, all experience of this faith is necessarily relative: conditioned by time, place, culture, sex, temperament, social status, language, and modes of expression' (1997c:89).

The Church's reading of the Bible, therefore, is always a contextual reading.

Generally, this process takes place unconsciously. A group of people unconsciously assumes the existence and validity of the culture: 'we receive the tradition and pass it on without understanding or evaluating it in particular' (1960e:377). The consequence of this, of course, is that groups of people are children of cultural traditions. Therefore they 'give birth to a tradition which at the same time is and is not what we have received' (1960e:378). The tradition that is created upon the reception of a new cultural element or tradition contains qualities of that tradition that has been handed down; at the same time it is different because of the "traditioning process". The Church cannot place itself outside the framework of this process:

The core of the tradition—in the passive sense—are the facts, symbols, ideas, meanings which cluster around the historical person Jesus of Nazareth and the early Christian community's understanding of him. But we do not escape here the general law of transmission. Christian tradition is not a mechanical handing down of the original traditions, but a constant reconception and reinterpretation in the changing conditions of human history and the history of the community (1960e:378-379).

Each epoch and each culture has its basic approaches. Consequently, 'the Church receives and transmits the *traditions* in the context of its own internal development but also in that of its relations with this surrounding world' (1960e:379). Therefore, 'Conservation and creation, reception, understanding and reconception are also a

part of the process of tradition in the Church' (1960e:379). This process does not annul the validity of its tradition but gives it a new meaning in a new situation.

Christianity is presented in the world. It must be presented as an interpretation of the historical act of God in Jesus Christ. Míguez Bonino puts it in the following way:

For the Christian faith, the event of Jesus Christ is not merely history, but it is the disclosure in history—And fully under the conditions of history—of that which transcends history, namely God's own Word, the creative and redeeming word. This Word, in the power of the Spirit is present and active in the Church and leads her into all truth. Therefore, in the human historical fact *traditioned* in history, we come in contact with Truth itself which transcends tradition (1960e:379-380).

This makes possible the conception of new meanings, values, symbols in the historical Christian faith. These are not errors but new meanings for new circumstances, illuminated by the Holy Spirit. This means that the proclamation of the gospel is not merely the repetition of a formula; it is also, in a limited sense, the creation of new meanings. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).

Míguez Bonino argues that this process was already taking place in the Bible. Critical studies have shown how Scripture is the product of the communication of an oral tradition. 'Oral tradition is not only due to the fact that the biblical communities were not "bookish communities", but to the very character of the biblical faith' (1960e:260). The biblical faith is one of constant reinterpretation. God's actions in the Old Testament are:

not left as isolated facts of the past, but taken up in each generation, told and retold, and re-lived as they are told again. The community goes through the experience of the Exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea or the Covenant at Sinai as these events are repeated in the tradition—whether oral or written. Thus the living tradition of these "traditions" re-enacts, contemporizes the past event,³ whether in the great religious festivals or in the modest setting of the life of the family. The revelatory event constitutes a community and this community transmits the event (1960e:260-261).

In the New Testament, Jesus 'proclaims himself as the true interpretation of God's past acts of redemption, as the present fulfilment of these events and, therefore, in a real sense, as the true tradition' (1960e:261). Although he is the goal of Israel's traditions which find fulfilment in him, he is also the foundation of a new tradition—the Apostolic tradition.

The historical character of God's revelation in Christ makes necessary that the knowledge of him be transmitted, handed over and handed down. This process takes place in the community, so that again the revelatory event constitutes a community and this community transmits the event (1960e:261).

In this passage from his ThD thesis, it is clear that Míguez Bonino is engaged in developing a dynamic hermeneutic that allows the re-reading and recapturing of Scripture for the believing and witnessing community. The hermeneutical

³ This concept will be revisited later in this chapter in the section on J. Severino Croatto (1930-2004).

community of the biblical world listened to the tradition of the acts of God—in the Exodus and in other events of their history and especially in Jesus Christ—and recounted and relived these events before they were written down.

In *Revolutionary Theology* (1975e), Míguez Bonino illustrates his viewpoint further by using Pierre Bonnard's understanding that the Apostle Paul interprets the resurrection not as a simple historical fact (which it is) but as an event which has meaning as "bearer of a present word" (1975h:101, cf. Bonnard 1970). Therefore, the text is open to a contemporary reading 'not in spite of its concrete local and dated historicity but because of it' (1975h:102). Consequently, it is possible to propose a 'hermeneutical circulation', a dynamic interpretation that takes place between the history within the text and the historical contemporary reading of the text. An engaged reading of the Bible is not only inevitable but the Bible itself requires that this will be done.

Míguez Bonino notes that this hermeneutical process is worked out systematically by the Argentinean Roman Catholic theologian, Severino Croatto (1930-2004). Croatto uses the concept of the "reservoir", "reserve" or "surplus" of meaning, adapted from the work of the French sociologist and theologian Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1976). An explanation of Croatto's argument is needed to understand Míguez Bonino's hermeneutics (cf. Croatto 1987).

Croatto says: 'A human event does not exhaust itself simply occurring, nor in the chronicle that describes it. It has the capacity to generate other happenings—what H. G. Gadamer calls the "historical effect"' (Croatto 1981:1; cf. Gadamer 1960 and 1975). He adds that 'The meaning of the more recent event is found to be already included within the prior event. As the chain of events lengthens, its significance retrospectively accumulates in that remote starting point' (Croatto 1981:1). This means that an event accumulates meaning as it becomes chronologically removed from the original event. There are certain events that become foundational events and are formed as a 'reservoir-of-meaning' for subsequent readings. Consequently as the reading becomes chronologically remote from the foundational event the significance of those original events become more important. This means that more meaning is assigned to a foundational event when it gets further away in time.

This explanation clarifies that, 'the event precedes the word and the word interprets the event and unfolds its reservoir-of-meaning' (Croatto 1981:2). In terms of revelation and reception, God's revelation in Jesus Christ is the event that precedes the word of the apostolic witness, which interprets and begins the process of the accumulation of meaning for the event. Consequently, interpretation adds meaning to a foundational event. The interpretation of an event, or even the interpretation of an interpretation of an event, adds meaning rather than simply drawing out meaning. Exegesis cannot, and does not want, to avoid *eisegesis*.

The dynamics of what Croatto calls the "hermeneutic circularity" (Croatto 1981:2; cf. Lapointe 1968) is conditioned by an interaction between the original or foundational event and the word spoken about that event. Christ, the foundational event, is interpreted (the word) by the first Christians through the Old Testament. They also interpreted the Old Testament in the light of Christ. Therefore, the New Testament became a re-reading of the Old Testament. In conversation, with the speaker and listener present, the meaning of the words is determined by the speaker and listener together. The words could be ambiguous but there is the possibility of

clarification. When speech becomes writing, what Paul Ricoeur has called, a “distanciation” or a distancing appears. Consequently this process ‘opens the text to an understanding from the vantage point of its new horizon’ (Croatto 1981:2-3)—the horizon of the reader.

Because the practices of any group take place between the foundational event and the historical praxis, a ‘conflict of interpretation’ occurs. In all human groups, self identity and praxis becomes concentrated in certain foundational historical events. This is no less true of Christianity. It was founded in the conflict of interpretation around the person of Jesus Christ. One interpretation saw Jesus’ message as a recovery of the original life of Israel whereas the Pharisees saw it as an innovation. Both interpretations were generated within common worldview and symbolic vision. Therefore

a hermeneutic reading of the biblical message occurs only when the reading supersedes the first contextual meaning (not only that of the author but also that of his first readers). This happens through the unfolding of a surplus-of-meaning disclosed by a new question addressed to the text (Croatto 1981:3).

Croatto expressed explicitly the process of the receiving and the passing on of Scripture and tradition that Míguez Bonino had been developing even in the early nineteen-sixties. Míguez Bonino sums up his understanding in *Faces of Jesus*.

A hermeneutics that respects not only the original historicity of the text but also the singularity of the reader’s locus—hence a hermeneutics incorporating careful exegesis and historico-social analysis as well—is the only one that will permit access to the ‘reserve’ (1978j:6).

Although Míguez Bonino does not explicitly mention it, it is clear that his early reflections on Scripture and tradition in the early nineteen sixties were seminal, and led to a more explicit liberationist hermeneutic later expressed by Croatto.

Preservation and Evaluation of Tradition

In the light of the preceding argument it is clear that theology must find ways of both preserving and evaluating tradition—the search for effectiveness in mission. Míguez Bonino suggests three principles to supervise this process. What he calls ‘the principle of limited authority’ (1960e:381) does not allow received tradition to possess universal nor eternal authority. The Church, accompanied by theologians, has the task of receiving the tradition handed down to it by past generations of Christians in the confidence that the living Christ, through the Holy Spirit, has been working in the Church. That having been said, the Church never renounces the right to question that tradition in the light of the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ. Tradition can only have partial influence. Theological tradition can only be theology on the road.

Consequently, there must be a permanent evaluation of received tradition. Tradition must always be confronted with its norm—the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ: at the level of biblical exegesis in which ‘we endeavour to identify and articulate the original meaning of scriptural texts’ (1960e:382) and at the level of theology where the questions are asked as to whether a particular doctrine points to

Christ or not. ‘This radical Christological evaluation of dogma—which cannot be pursued apart from the previous exegetical one—is the basic task of theology’ (1960e:382).

Finally, ‘the principle of permanent reconception’ (1960e:383) proceeds from the previous point where the relationship of tradition to revelation has been evaluated. Here the relationship of tradition to the context is evaluated. Míguez Bonino puts it in the following way: ‘One consists in testing the proclamation of the Church against the apostolic witness to Christ; the other in rethinking this proclamation in terms of our own situation’ (1960e:383). The gospel, therefore, must be rethought in the light of the new situation. Míguez Bonino’s emphasis is on the use of philosophical categories. Each new proclamation of the gospel assumes a worldview with its attending philosophical presuppositions: ‘In view of this fact, the theologian is called to the double task of the identification and criticism of the philosophical categories used in Church dogma in the past and the evaluation and criticism—but also the faithful use—of the philosophical categories of the present which make communication possible’ (1960e:384).

Decades later, Míguez Bonino proposes that mutual accountability should be applied at both international and ecumenical levels in the context of a ‘disciplined, continuous and committed conversation at each level of life and thought in the worldwide Christian community’ (1997c:90). There should be accountability in three areas; ‘our hermeneutical approach and our understanding of the authority of scripture’ (1989d:169-170; cf. 1997c:90), the way theology is related to the ‘manifold tradition of the church,’ and in interpretation of reality ‘as an economically, socially and politically structured system’ (1989d:169).

In *Universalidad y Contextualidad*, he goes on to discuss the issues of syncretism. For Míguez Bonino this preservation and evaluation of tradition must not become an ideological inquisition, rooting out syncretism but theology must always recognise the relative nature of *all* understandings of the absolute. Mutual accountability must be carried, recognising that syncretism is not only inevitable but, as Leonardo Boff says ‘is positively the historical and concrete way in which God comes to people and save them’ (Boff 1985:99). It is ‘the incarnation, expression and objectification of a religious faith or expression’ (Boff 1985:93). Míguez Bonino suggests that historical projects, new lines of Christian praxis, new traditions produced through the reflection process will all be syncretistic by nature. In this way Míguez Bonino hopes to establish a dynamic but monitored reading of the Bible.

3.6.5 *Practical mediation*

Back to Obedience

Míguez Bonino’s theological process moves from Christian obedience, through analysis and reflection, and to obedience; it starts with action and leads to action; it is the journey from praxis to praxis. This practical mediation is the final stage in faith’s search for effectiveness but also the stage in which action, resulting from this stage in the process, becomes the concrete obedience to the gospel that forms the basis for beginning of the continuation of the hermeneutical circulation.

The practical mediation, although its focus is upon strategies, options, possibilities, dangers, and consequences, remains for Míguez Bonino a wholly theological task. The main theological work done at this point is to define how theology's reflection upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the salvation God has wrought relates to concrete action. Or as Míguez Bonino poses it: 'how do the original events (or the "germinal" events as it would be more accurate to call them), namely, God's dealings with Israel, the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the hope of the Kingdom—how are they determinative in this single, synthetic fact that we call historical praxis of a Christian?' (1975h:98).

The Necessity of an Option

Míguez Bonino believes that in order to ensure that theological reflection leads to effective praxis, the Christian must opt for some type of already existing praxis. It has been argued throughout this chapter that Christian obedience, worked out in a concrete practice, is a prerequisite for knowledge of the truth and therefore a requirement to do theology in any context. In order for faith to find true effectiveness in mission it is essential to include a concrete political option. For the Christian, these options are what Míguez Bonino calls 'historical projects'. An historical project is a limited, measurable attempt at a model of political and economic organization in obedience to God.

The danger is that the choice of historical projects and options will "sacralize" those options. The choice of political and social options must not be considered or treated as if they were given by God, or drawn directly from the Bible, but rather that they are decisions taken in obedience to God's command by fallible and sinful human beings. It is vital, for Míguez Bonino, to avoid this 'sacralization'. He seeks to solve the problem in terms of attitude towards alternatives. The first solution is connected to people's attitude towards historical projects. In the case of historical projects people make their choices 'in obedience to the dictates of our faith, will not be anything but a human project, fallible, destined to fulfil a relative and transitory role in history' (1981h:9). Any Christian action, including the Christian action taken as a result of social analysis and theological reflection, is described as human and fallible. Although there is no guarantee that the action is either right or will be successful, action must be taken. The historical project is only destined to fulfil a relative and transitory role. It is not the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God; it is nothing more than a considered but humble attempt at Christian obedience done in faith.

The second solution to the danger of sacralization is that the election of a historical project is part of an on-going process of action and reflection. The relationship that exists between the direction perceived in Scripture and tradition, the ideology that mobilises and gives coherence to praxis and the analysis which defines and directs action is 'neither one-directional nor static' (1975h:151). As Christians engage in the process of "action—analysis—reflection—action," they experience that new challenges drive them back to a new analysis. In Míguez Bonino's own words:

New human possibilities lead us to enlarge our understanding of the biblical witness—indeed, in evangelical terms—the Spirit discloses Jesus Christ to us as we engage in the concrete witness to his redeeming love. But also the love which belongs

to God's Kingdom suggests further horizons for human life which act as magnetic poles or horizons of hope for kindling man's [sic] analytical and ideological imagination (1975h:151).

Historical projects cannot be sacralized because the very employment of this historical project opens up new possibilities and drives Christians back to the analysis and theological reflection. As new situations are created by Christians in their search for effectiveness, they are driven to reflect upon these new situations in the light of social analysis and biblical reflection.

The Choice of an Option

In order to make Christian action concrete and effective theology must move from the 'general and indeterminate to the particular and determinate' (1983m:100). Míguez Bonino's methodology began with the particular and determinate in the socio analytical moment; moved to the general and indeterminate in the hermeneutical moment and now returns, via a second moment of analysis, to the particular and determinate in historical projects and concrete action. The question that must be answered here is: how is this done?

The effectiveness that faith seeks is not the cheapest, quickest, and easiest way to achieve a previously decided goal, but rather it is a genuine search for the best means and methods, in order to achieve the goals of God's Kingdom in the concrete situation in which the Christian church finds itself. It is 'a prophetic word of discernment received in faith' (1975h:103). Therefore, it is not a planning meeting that could be carried out by executives but rather a deeply spiritual and theological exercise carried out by committed Christians.

Míguez Bonino warns that 'an intelligent and responsible action demands that we distinguish between levels of action for the Christian' (1972a:99). Not all action takes place on the same social level. He identifies three levels of action. The level of *personal action* relates to work, neighbourhood, family, recreation, education, etc. Here, each Christian must make personal decisions about concrete situations. Then there is the level of *organized action*. This takes place in institutional frameworks such as clubs, unions, school organizations, political and cultural organizations. These institutions are not established simply "to be a good witness" but rather to truly work for justice and peace from within those organizations. The final level of action is that of *the Christian community*. This level is one which has been very polemical in Latin America, especially in the area of politics and social involvement. The church has been loath to make social and political statements or decision and has certainly been more comfortable staying at the level of "critical function" or to ignore totally its social and political responsibility.

Míguez Bonino suggests two mediations to achieve an engaged reading of the text and thereby to move from the biblical to the practical, or from the abstract to the concrete—the reading of the biblical text, and the determination of historical conditions. These are what he calls: 'conditions for all Christian action' (1972a:101). Firstly, speaking of the biblical text, he warns that in this act there cannot be 'a direct historical consequence' between the reading of the scriptures and 'a form of law' (1975h:103) in the formation of a plan of action or project. By this he means that there is not a direct route between the biblical text and historical praxis. The

failure of the Calvinist project at Geneva and the tendency, even in Liberation Theology, to draw direct political conclusions from Jesus' relationship to the Zealots, suffer from this misconception.

The solution to this problem Míguez Bonino proposes in a section called 'Getting close to the action' in *Ama y haz lo que quieras* (1972a; cf. Boff, C. 1993:8-9). There should be a 'deepening of the biblical testimony' (1972a:102) in relation to the context or of the issue or problem under consideration. This requires an identification of biblical paradigms of action. In *Revolutionary Theology* and other writings, however, he describes this as the reading of the direction of the biblical text. He identifies that the germinal events of the faith point to such notions as 'liberation, righteousness, shalom, the poor, love' as concepts that guide Christian obedience. These should be considered only as dimensions of action or paradigms not abstract principles. 'They serve as an orientation in the elaboration of a social ethic that guides the action of the Christian and the Church in society' (1964b:31).

Then there is what Míguez Bonino calls 'the determination of the historical conditions and possibilities of our present situation, as discovered through rational analysis' (1975h:103). In *Ama y Haz lo que quieras*, he suggests 'the consideration of the Christian community—the Church—past and present' (1972a:102) is vital. It is essential to consider how the church has treated certain issues and their contexts; how it has been successful, failed, and resolved ethical issues in the past. This obviously relates to the consideration of the passive tradition explained above.

For Míguez Bonino, it is obvious that, the practical moment in theology must be done in community. Consequently his ecumenism is not only theologically based; it is also shaped practically and, in a positive sense, pragmatically. Furthermore, there must be an analysis of the contemporary social problems surrounding a given context. There is a difference between the analysis of the socioanalytic moment and the analysis done in the practical moment. Whereas in the socioanalytic moment the issue is dealt with on a macro scale, at this point it is much more detailed. The macro context must still be taken into account but, at this point, a single issue is in focus and it is the surrounding elements that are vital to the investigation. In this moment of analysis, the problems that are dealt with are local unemployment, drug use, local government corruption, and other social questions. Míguez Bonino reiterates that the Christian's search is for an effective course of action. Finally, theology must consider various options. Various questions should be asked at this point: 'What alternatives exist? What are the consequences of each of these options? What level of cooperation do I need to best work out these alternatives? What are the possibilities of success?' (1972a:104).

In his address to the 15th World Council of the YMCA he mentions four important questions that all those committed to involvement in the world must consider:

what are the most important needs?--the critical points which demand immediate action and the further development to advance the process of change; (ii) what are the resources that at individual and institutional level are available to us to respond to these needs--and I mean resources at the level of people, abilities, spaces that are possibly open to our work, economic and infrastructure to respond to the needs in the immediate situations that we face and in the continuation of these initial actions; (iii) where can we be more useful and efficient--if we spread our work too much we will probably have only a 'token' presence: is this an area which we know? is it likely to

open to our work? Do we have enough leadership and can we enlist our memberships in the task? And iv) what kind of concrete programs can we define and organize? (2002b).

All these questions and their careful and analytical consideration are not ‘a foolproof key to Christian obedience but a significant framework for it’ (1975h:105).

3.7 FINAL OBSERVATIONS

This final section will summarise Míguez Bonino’s theological methodology described above; it will note various influences upon his methodology; and analyse it in terms of a practical, contextual and biblical methodology. For, Míguez Bonino theology is both gift and task. Theology is gift because it is based upon God’s revelation to humanity in Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament and it is task because it serves the church in its missionary obedience. Míguez Bonino’s understanding of epistemology means that this task set before the church must begin with concrete missionary obedience, not abstract theory.

Míguez Bonino’s methodology has three moments: social analysis (socio-analytic moment); biblical and theological reflection (hermeneutical moment); and practical analysis and application (practical moment). Social analysis is essential in order to clarify the context of the church’s mission. It is also important in order to clarify church’s role in society. The church is very much part of society and part of the context. Míguez Bonino uses dialectical tools of analysis as he believes that these better describe the dynamics of oppression and social change.

The issues raised by this social analysis are assumed by biblical-theological moment. Míguez Bonino’s biblical hermeneutic is dynamic. It is very close to Barth’s ‘threefold word of God’. God has revealed the divine nature to humanity in Jesus Christ. The Bible records that revelation, but is not God’s revelation in the same way Christ is. The original witnesses wrote from their own context re-reading God’s revelation from their own context, according to their own tradition. Theology’s role is to reread that original divine revelation, through the eyes of the original witnesses but from its contemporary perspective. In a very real sense it creates a new tradition which is, both the same as, and different from that which is received.

These contemporary theological readings are partial and incomplete and so there must be a constant critical contemporary reevaluation of both received and new re-readings of God’s revelation in Christ. World Christianity must take an active role in this. There must be mutual accountability between traditions across confessional and national boundaries; it must be ecumenical and international.

Míguez Bonino insists that the theological process is not complete until it returns to praxis. The journey from the abstract (hermeneutical moment) to the concrete (practical moment) must be mediated by a concrete option. It is not possible to be objective at this stage. Options of action must be mediated by the context (its possibilities or lack of them) and an engaged reading of the gospel. At this point social analysis of micro contexts is important. The practical projects that emerge from the practical moment then form the basis for the analysis that begins the hermeneutical process once again.

Míguez Bonino draws upon a wide range of theologies and theologians in order to develop his theological method. Early in his ministry, Barth's three-fold word of God allowed Míguez Bonino to develop a dynamic reading of the Bible. Cullmann's concept of *Heilsgeschichte* helped him to understand the Holy Spirit's role in theology and biblical interpretation. Interaction with Roman Catholic theologians during the early to mid-nineteen sixties was a foil to both these developments. At the same time, ISAL was challenging Míguez Bonino's Barthian interpretation with a theology of God's action in history. Interaction with EATWOT and Roman Catholic liberation theologians was important during the nineteen seventies in helping Míguez Bonino refine and systematise his methodology. Their use of the theories of Paul Ricoeur and Hans Georg Gadamer helped him clarify various epistemological and hermeneutical issues. The work of J. Severino Croatto, a colleague of Míguez Bonino at ISEDET, was especially important in this regard. Finally, later contact with more conservative evangelicals and with Pentecostals mollified some of the more radical elements of his biblical hermeneutic.

Given Míguez Bonino's involvement and dialogue with EATWOT, it is significant to note that neither critical race theory nor feminist ideology critique have been very prominent in his theology; themes important to EATWOT (cf. Fabella 2000:70). In regard to race, Míguez Bonino has commented on Minjung Theology (1988d) and wrote on 'Land' (1991a)—a theme that embraces critical racial issues in Latin America, especially in regard to the oppression of indigenous peoples. He also uses the term 'Abya Yala'—the indigenous phrase for Latin America (2004a) but this seems to be more a recognition of a neologism than theological reflection. Class seems to be more important than race to Míguez Bonino.⁴

The same can be said of feminist ideology critique. Chapter two mentioned how he was prompted to comment on feminist issues in an interview with Elsa Támez (1986f). He recognised how women have played an important role in both the ecumenical movement and in his own local church. He was also aware that they often had to create social space for their service in the church. This led him to say: 'the limitation of women is objectively incorporated into the mechanisms of the functioning of society' (1986f:62). It is clear that Míguez Bonino was aware of, and was using feminist ideology critique here; something he may have learned from his contacts with EATWOT. Having said this, the issue is almost completely absent from his work subsequent to that time. There can be no doubt that Míguez Bonino was committed to women rights and place in society and the church but the issue seems to be peripheral rather than central to his social analysis.

Míguez Bonino's theological methodology is practical, contextual and biblical. For Míguez Bonino, theology is 'faith seeking effectiveness'. His methodology begins and ends with praxis. Theology is not done for interest or curiosity, much less is it done to guard against heterodoxy. Theology is the process by which the church obeys its missionary mandate. This is healthy pragmatism. Effectiveness is not conceived of in terms of efficiency—the cheapest and quickest way to carry out a task—but rather in terms of an interaction between faithfulness to

⁴ It should also be noted that Míguez Bonino wrote a chapter on 'Ethnic Churches' in Latin America (1997a). However, this section was not in the original talks given at ISEDET (1993)—the conferences from which the book is taken. He admits a lack of knowledge about these churches and that his omission in the original talks was taken as a position that they were not as important to his analysis (1997a:ix).

the gospel and faithfulness to the context. Faith's search is the dynamic interaction between gospel and context. It is driven by praxis and it is aimed at a more effective praxis.

Stephen B. Bevans 'praxis model' (2002:70-87) is helpful in understanding Míguez Bonino's theology. Bevans says that there are theologies that employ the praxis model without assuming the liberationist emphasis on socio-political issues. As has already been stated, Míguez Bonino's interest is not only in social and political issues but also in cultural, ecclesial, and religious ones. Bevans asserts that, 'the praxis model gives ample room for cultural expressions of faith, while providing exciting new understandings of the scriptural and older theological witness' (Bevans 2002:78). Bevans calls the praxis model 'faith seeking intelligent action,' (Bevans 2002:73) which broadly corresponds with 'faith seeking effectiveness.' A good term for Míguez Bonino's theology is 'a praxis driven missionary theology.'

Emerging from this fact, it is clear that Míguez Bonino's methodology is also contextual. This approach assumes some kind of social analysis. Míguez Bonino's contextual analysis happens at every stage of the theological process. The social location and positioning of the theologian and the hermeneutical community are analysed in order to make explicit their ideological presuppositions about reality and the Bible. The context of mission is analysed in two stages: before the hermeneutical moment in order to clarify the important issues for reflection and after the hermeneutical moment in order to clarify how the results of theological reflection are to be worked out in the context of mission. The hermeneutical moment is analysed to reveal the social issues behind the text and to expose the ideological presuppositions which commentators bring to the text.

Finally, Míguez Bonino's methodology is biblical. Following Barthian hermeneutics it charts a line between a liberal and fundamentalist biblical interpretation. Unlike classical liberal theology, religion is not humanity's aspiration for the divine but something that God has revealed in Jesus Christ. Theology must reflect upon that revelation recorded in the Bible in order to achieve effectiveness in its missionary task. Míguez Bonino is not interested in a descriptive analysis of biblical religion or a social understanding of the text he is interested in the prescriptive ethical and missionary challenge of the text.

Míguez Bonino also avoids a fundamentalist biblical interpretation. This is done in two ways. As in the case of Barth and Bonhoeffer, Míguez Bonino is not afraid to use the tools of higher biblical criticism. However, he only employs them as a means to access that revelation of God in Christ behind the text. By doing this, he is saved from simplistic interpretations and applications of Scripture. He also uses sociological tools. Through his epistemology and sociological studies, he is aware that his interpretation of God's revelation in Christ is not all embracing and final. He is not dogmatic about his interpretations but presents them as 'soundings' or 'ruminations'.