

## 4 THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HUMAN ACTION: THE ESCHATOLOGY OF MÍGUEZ BONINO

The Kingdom is not a riddle to be solved but a mission to be fulfilled. (1975h:143)

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

If mission is the locus of Míguez Bonino's theology, then the Kingdom of God can rightly be considered to be one of the important axes around which much of his thought has revolved. It has always been—even from the earliest days—a central theme for obedient faith in its search for effectiveness. For Míguez Bonino, the church, although a vital element in his theology, is considered to be a penultimate step towards the Kingdom of God. For most of his career, the Kingdom of God was the ultimate horizon in his theology.

This chapter will describe the role of the Kingdom of God in Míguez Bonino's missionary theology. It will begin by sketching various developments in theological reflection on the Kingdom of God in the twentieth century (4.2). Thereafter, it will detail his important writings on the Kingdom of God, mentioning the context in which they arose (4.3). The main section will describe and analyse his understanding of the Kingdom of God (4.4) and the chapter will end with some concluding remarks (4.5).

### 4.2 DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Although eschatology was very important in the New Testament, it was neglected from the end of the apostolic era up to the nineteenth century, tending to be a 'short harmless chapter' (Barth 1933a:500) at the end of systematic theologies. This situation changed when J. Weiss (1863-1914) and, more importantly, Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) claimed that eschatology was central to the New Testament message. For Schweitzer, Jesus' message was wholly eschatological. Jesus mistakenly thought himself to be the promised Messiah, entered Jerusalem in order to force the coming of the eschatological Kingdom, but was arrested and killed. David J. Bosch calls this the reopening of the 'eschatological office' (Bosch 1991:501).

In the Twentieth Century, eschatological interest became focussed on the issue of the Kingdom of God and flourished in almost every Christian Tradition. Before the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholic clergy and theologians understood the Kingdom and the Church to be more or less identical. At and after that council, Edward Schillebeeckx (b. 1914), Karl Rahner (1904-1984), and Hans Küng (b. 1928), changed the understanding of eschatology. Schillebeeckx, a Belgian Dominican, emphasized that the Church journeys towards the Kingdom and that its

message is not the announcement of the solutions to the world's problems, but rather the declaration that a solution exists. For this reason, the German Jesuit Rahner said that the Church's mission should not be confined to combating individual sin; institutional injustice should also be a concern. Swiss theologian Küng describes the Church as the "herald" of the Kingdom. He strongly emphasized that while the Church announces the Kingdom, only God can actually bring it about.

Vatican II produced the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), which relates the Kingdom of God to the church and occasionally still equates the Church with the Kingdom. This can be illustrated from the following quote: 'The Church, or, in other words, the Kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world' (LG 3). In other parts of the document, however, a strong distinction is made:

From this source, the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder...receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that Kingdom. While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King (LG5).

The church proclaims and spreads the Kingdom of God and is its initial budding forth but does not embody it.

The document *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), also produced by Vatican II, although not putting a great deal of emphasis on the Kingdom of God, relates it rather to the world and not to the church. It is, however, careful to distinguish it from human progress. 'While earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's Kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God' (GS 39).

Later encyclicals tend to make mention of the Kingdom of God in terms of the Council, but sometimes highlight one of these two emphasis. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), for instance, Pope Paul VI reflects widely on the Kingdom of God. He makes a sharp distinction between the Kingdom and the church. He says that Christ first and foremost proclaimed the Kingdom and: 'Only the Kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative' (EN 8). This of course includes the church. Then, reflecting the words of LG, he states that the Church must proclaim and establish the Kingdom and thereby find its true identity in being 'the sign and instrument of this Kingdom' (EN 59). Pope John Paul II dedicates a whole section to the Kingdom of God in *Redemptoris Missio*. While he does call the church the 'seed, sign and instrument' (RM 18), of the Kingdom his emphasis is more on the unity of the visible church and the Kingdom of God rather on than their distinction.

Turning to Latin American Catholicism it can be observed that eschatological thought was practically non-existent before the Second Vatican Council. The final documents of the Río de Janeiro conference (1955) mention the Kingdom of God only once, relating it to the Apostleship of the laity. In its 'continuous effort to conserve and defend holistically the Catholic faith, [the laity] must be a conquering missionary apostolate for the extension of the Kingdom of Christ in all sectors and environments' (Title Four, Chapter One. Apostolate of the Laity in General). The focus is on the protection of the interests of the Church and the extension of the Kingdom is directly associated with these interests.

The Medellín documents (1968) reflect Vatican II's interests in the Kingdom of God. The section on Human Promotion speaks of the way in which the eschatological hope stimulates 'the concern for the perfection of this world.' It quotes almost verbatim from *Gaudium et Spes*, and warns that 'temporal progress should not be confused with Christ's Kingdom although the better arrangement of human society is a concern of the Kingdom of God (*Promoción humana, I.III*). Other references to the Kingdom of God are liberally distributed in the Medellín documents on the Church. Christ is referred to as the mediator of the Kingdom as High Priest; priests in general are presented as dedicated to bearing witness to the Kingdom; all believers are encouraged to seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness; whereas the life of the religious is spoken about as a 'pre-announcement of the Kingdom;' and living the values of the Kingdom are said to be related to solidarity with the poor. These reflect and deepen the concerns of *Lumen Gentium*.

The final documents of the Puebla Conference (1979) reveal a rich theology of the Kingdom of God, reflecting many of the concerns of Vatican II and Medellín, with various references to the Kingdom in the documents. The Kingdom is shaped Christologically (197) and has its centre in the proclamation about Jesus Christ (226). It is realized in history (787) at the same time it is more than historical realizations and should not be identified with them (193). Furthermore human progress should not be confused with the growth of the Kingdom (475). The relationship between the Kingdom and the Church is dealt with in a separate section (226-231). The Kingdom transcends the Church (226) but cannot be separated from the Church (226, 228). The Church proclaims and establishes the Kingdom (227), is the seed of the Kingdom (228); the Kingdom is in the Church (229); the Church is the mystery of the Kingdom (230); but has not become what it should be (231). The Conclusions state that the Latin American people 'should continue to be evangelized as the heir of the past, protagonist in the present and generator of a future, as a pilgrim to the definitive Kingdom' (Conclusions II). The work of Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino is clear at this point. They were two of the most radical theologians involved in the background preparations for the meetings at Puebla (cf. Ellacuría 1984).

The Santo Domingo Conference (1992) mentions the Kingdom of God many times but adds little to Vatican II, Medellín or Puebla. The most significant phrase in the document in regard to the Kingdom of God declares the Church to be the 'seed, sign and instrument' (RM 18) of the Kingdom, therefore, the church preaches and baptises (SD 7). These documents seem to reflect Pope John Paul II's association of the church with the Kingdom of God.

Conciliar Protestantism regarded the church, and not the Kingdom of God, as the important factor in missionary thinking until the mid-point of the twentieth century (cf. Castro 1985:18-37; Philip 1999:55ff). It would be wrong to suggest that there was no theological reflection on the Kingdom of God in ecumenical circles but there was tension between a North American Social Gospel understanding of the Kingdom of God—the Kingdom as task—and the European eschatological understanding—the Kingdom as a gift that was not resolved (cf. the Life and Work Congresses at Stockholm [1925] and at Oxford [1937]; the IMC meetings at Jerusalem [1928] and the Second Assembly of the WCC at Evanston [1954]). Although Evanston met under the title, 'Jesus Christ: The Hope of the World', it was

unable to develop a unified position regarding Eschatology or the Kingdom of God (cf. Potter 1980:6-21).

The Dutch Theology of the Apostolate (especially the writings of Johannes C. Hoekendijk); New Testament Studies on Eschatology (especially the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Oscar Cullmann); along with the Willingen meetings of the IMC (1952) that fleshed out the idea of the *missio Dei*, led to a process of change in this emphasis. The Kingdom of God and the world replaced the church as the focus in ecumenical and missionary theology. T.V. Philip says: ‘After 1960, the world became the focus of attention in ecumenical missionary theology and, by 1980; the Kingdom of God became its central concern. It was not a theological interest in the Kingdom as such, but in the Kingdom of God as it is related to the world’ (Philip 1999:132-133).

Responding to the CWME meetings in Bangkok (1973), the two subsequent conferences of the CWME and a document from that same body attempted to develop a clear theology of the Kingdom of God. The Melbourne conference (1980) was entitled “Thy Kingdom Come” and was held whilst Míguez Bonino was a member of the Presidium of the WCC and was strongly influenced by the work of the theologians of liberation during the nineteen seventies. It discussed four aspects of the Kingdom of God: (1) “Good News to the Poor”; (2) “The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles”; (3) “The Church Witnesses to the Kingdom”, and (4). “Christ - Crucified and Risen - Challenges Human Power” (WCC 1980).

Melbourne’s focus was chiefly on the relation of the church to the Kingdom of God in *this* world. Section one begins with the statement:

The Kingdom of God...brings justice, love, peace and joy, and freedom from the grasp of those demonic forces which place human lives and institutions in bondage and infiltrate their very textures. God’s judgment is revealed as an overturning of the values and structures of this world. In the perspective of the Kingdom of God, God has a preference for the poor (1.1).

The Kingdom of God is mainly seen as a new social order; it is primarily of this world, not of the next. The task of Christians is to witness to, and work towards, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, at the same time waiting for its consummation. Witnessing to the Kingdom means proclaiming that the Kingdom is near. Christians are witnesses to the Kingdom in two ways. They are called to ‘say what they have seen and heard and experienced. But they are also, in themselves, by the lives they lead’ witnesses to the reality of that Kingdom now (WCC 1980:143). This means working for justice for the poor. Melbourne reflects the critical social and political situation in Latin America and beyond during the nineteen seventies. It was criticized for being “horizontalist.” However, it tried to maintain the balance between the Kingdom of God as a gift and as a task. ‘The whole church of God, in every place and time, is a sacrament of the Kingdom which came in the person of Jesus Christ and will come in its fullness when he returns in glory’ (WCC 1980:192).

The document “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation” (1982), although the product of lengthy discussions with churches all over the world, makes wide use of the reflections on the Kingdom of God made by Melbourne. It tries to stress both commitment to Jesus Christ in the world and incorporation into

the church. 'To receive the message of the Kingdom of God is to be incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church, the author and sustainer of which is the Holy Spirit' (ME 20). The document also points to the essence of the church's task:

At the very heart of the Church's vocation in the world is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen. Through its internal life of eucharistic worship, thanksgiving, intercessory prayer, through planning for mission and evangelism, through a daily lifestyle of solidarity with the poor, through advocacy even to confrontation with the powers that oppress human beings, the churches are trying to fulfil this evangelistic vocation (ME 6).

This document is developing an integral missionary theology.

The San Antonio Conference (1989), gathered together under the title "Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ's way." It had four sub-themes: (1) Turning to the Living God; (2) Participating in Suffering and Struggle; (3) The Earth is the Lord's; and (4) Towards Renewed Communities in Mission (Androussa 1989:320). It was a more circumspect meeting than Melbourne. San Antonio emphasised God's will and God's ability to work out that will, i.e. to bring about God's Kingdom. The focus was on the church as a witness to the Kingdom and God as the protagonist. The conference was far more aware of the danger of declaring that the church knows the will of God and so can work out that will. The church's work for the Kingdom of God is seen as penultimate and provisional; it is always a work "in draft". The church must turn to God, participate in suffering in God's world and renew its own life in order to carry out its mission.

The ecumenical movement's emphasis in mission was upon the Kingdom of God and not upon the church. The church has a role in witnessing to the Kingdom, in working to establish the Kingdom, it must be very careful in not acting as the "owner" of God's Kingdom.

The evangelical missionary movement has reflected very little upon the Kingdom of God. Declarations such as Wheaton (1966), Berlin (1966), Lausanne (1974), and Manila (1989) make little or no reference to that concept. One evangelical document that does make wide use of the Kingdom motif is "Transformation: The Church in Response to Human Need" (1983). Its final section, 'The Coming of the Kingdom and the Church's Mission', tries to strike a balance between the present and future; the individual and societal; and the physical and spiritual natures of the Kingdom. God's activity in the Kingdom is mainly in the church, but also in the world:

A repentant, revived, and vigorous church will call people to true repentance and faith and at the same time equip them to challenge the forces of evil and injustice (2 Tim. 3:17). We thus move forward, without either relegating salvation merely to an eternal future or making it synonymous with a political or social dispensation to be achieved in the here and now. The Holy Spirit empowers us to serve and proclaim Him who has been raised from the dead, seated at the right hand of the Father, and given to the church as Head over all things in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:10, 20-22) (LCWE 1983: note 52).

There have been various evangelical writers who have been instrumental in making the Kingdom of God an important theme in evangelical missiology. George Eldon Ladd (1911-1982), Hermann Nicolaas Ridderbos (b. 1909) and Arthur Glasser

(b.1914) deserve special mention. Glasser especially has influenced many young missiologists who graduated from Fuller Seminary, School of Inter-Cultural Studies.

Those Latin American Protestant Churches that were planted by missionaries from the United States, have tended to hold a Pre-millennial Dispensationalist position; this is especially true of the Pentecostal churches. Churches planted by British missionaries from the Free and Plymouth Brethren would also fall into this category. Other more historic churches would have had a greater emphasis on an A-millennial tradition. Those churches from a more liberal tradition, and influenced by the Social Gospel Movement emphasized the ethical aspects of the Kingdom of God, but did not develop a doctrine. This being the case, there was little, or no serious creative eschatological thought in Latin American Protestant theology until the early 1960s. The vast majority of subsequent theological reflection on the Kingdom of God in the historic churches was done in the context of the consultations and publications of ISAL and within the CELAs. Míguez Bonino was deeply involved in this process and did much of his reflection from within this context. How he reacted to some of these developments will emerge in the course of this chapter.

From 1970 onwards, under the leadership of C. René Padilla, the FTL began to reflect seriously upon the theme of the Kingdom of God. This began with the conference held in Peru, which Míguez Bonino attended and where he gave a paper. The book *Reino de Dios y América Latina* (1975) resulted from this conference. Padilla was deeply involved with the writing of the “Transformation: The Church in Response to Human Need” and has continued to reflection upon the Kingdom of God as a significant missionary motif.

#### 4.3 MAIN PUBLICATIONS

Míguez Bonino has written widely and deeply on the Kingdom of God throughout his career. The main publications on this issue can be divided into two sections: those that deal directly with the Kingdom of God or with a certain aspect of that theme and those that avail themselves of the theme in the context of a different issue, such as the social responsibility of the church.

Four publications are mentioned that deal with the Kingdom of God directly. Míguez Bonino conducted a series of Bible studies on the theme of the Sermon on the Mount for the WFCS (1955c). He interprets Matthew 5-7 as part of Jesus’ ethic in the context of God’s new world. He rejects the idea, however, that this is simple moral teaching isolated from the rest of the New Testament’s teaching on God’s Kingdom—as in some expressions of the Social Gospel—but rather it is central to the biblical message of what God has done in Jesus Christ. He relies heavily upon Bonhoeffer’s interpretation in *Cost of Discipleship* for a modern interpretation of the sermon.

Míguez Bonino’s first systematic treatment of the Kingdom of God reveals his overriding interest in the theme: God’s action in history (1966b and 1972c). This article is an academic and theoretical treatment of how theology should understand that action and how humanity should to respond to it. This article was written in the light of developments in the Roman Catholic understanding of the interpretation of history. This was especially seen in the theology of Teilhard de

Chardin and in the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*. It was also reacting to developments within Protestant theology; both in ISAL and the WCC department Church and Society. The main aim of this article, however, is to develop new lines of thought.

An important treatment of the Kingdom of God is found in a paper that Míguez Bonino gave for the second consultation of the FTL (Lima, Peru 1972, subsequently published as 1974k, 1975g and 1976j). This was a small consultation with only twenty-seven theologians attending. The theme was the Kingdom of God and Latin America; Míguez Bonino's contribution was an article of the Kingdom of God and history.

This article is important because it forms the basis of other later treatments of the subject. Chapter seven of Míguez Bonino's *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age* (1975h) includes a significant section of the 1972 article but also contains a lengthy dialogue with European Political Theology, especially with Jürgen Moltmann. 'Historical Praxis and Christian Identity' (1979d:260-283), written for a compendium of articles by theologians associated with Liberation Theology, also uses a great deal of the article but is designed around the presentation of the theology of liberation to a European audience. A short section of the original article can even be found in an article published much later (1999i).

*El Reino de Dios y la historia* is also important because of its historical context. It was written a year after the Spanish publication of Gustavo Gutiérrez' seminal work (1971) and represents one of Míguez Bonino's first responses to that book. Furthermore, the consultation took place eight months after the Christians for Socialism Conference (Aroyo 1973), which was so influential in Míguez Bonino's option for socialism. The article mentions the importance of making a political option. Historically, for Argentina 1972 was a very turbulent time, filled with government and insurgent violence during the last anti-Peronist government of General Alejandro Lanusse, preceding the return of Juan Domingo Perón (July 1973).

*Towards a Christian Political Ethics* (1983m), a book prepared for the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC (1983) deals with relationship between the Kingdom of God and the important issue of political utopias. The issue is vital because of the philosophical and political ethos of the development of Latin American Theology during the nineteen seventies; some sort of theological response was necessary.

In regard to those publications which avail themselves of the concept of the Kingdom of God three will be highlighted. Míguez Bonino wrote a paper for the first consultation of ISAL (Peru, 1961; cf. 1961c and 1961b; see also 1962a). The aim of the paper was to discover the biblical and theological roots for Christian involvement in society. The historical context of this conference is significant in that it was two years after the final success of the Cuban Revolution (1959), which was greeted with such great excitement in socialist circles within Latin America. Also it was at the time of the announcement by John F. Kennedy of the Alliance for Progress (April 1961). It was clear to many within the Ecumenical student movement that Christians should be involved in society but needed a biblical and theological basis.

In 1964 Míguez Bonino wrote a second article treating the same issue of Christian involvement in society in a study guide published by ISAL. This booklet

was designed to help the Latin American churches and individual Christians think through their social responsibilities (1964b:22-31). This type of study guide was one of the outcomes of the previously mentioned ISAL consultation.

Míguez Bonino also avails himself of the concept of the Kingdom of God in chapter four of *Ama y haz lo que quieras* (1972a). His concern is to establish a Christian ethic for involvement in society. There are important elements in this chapter that complement other articles and papers. This is especially true of the biblical understanding of the nature of the Kingdom and the ethical outworking of the Kingdom.

#### 4.4 THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HUMAN RESPONSE

##### 4.4.1 *The Kingdom of God and Theological Responsibility*

Two sentences from *El reino de Dios y la historia*, are essential to comprehend Míguez Bonino's understanding of the Kingdom of God and its ethical and missionary significance. The first sentence states that the Kingdom of God is: 'the sovereign action of God over the world (natural and historical in its unity and totality), especially and representatively exercised and attested to in Israel, perfected in Jesus Christ and promised in full manifestation in the parousia of Jesus Christ' (1975h:75). It highlights that in the strictest sense the Kingdom of God is God's sovereign action. Although Míguez Bonino later deals with human responsibility towards the building of God's Kingdom, the primary protagonist in the establishment of the Kingdom is God in the whole world, taking into account all humanity not just the church. It regards the biblical record (of God's action in the life of Israel and Jesus Christ) as the prime witness to God's action in establishing the Kingdom. Although the primary witness to God's action is found in the biblical witness and this action is primarily seen in the life of Israel and Jesus Christ, God's action is universal, from its beginning until its full consummation connected with the second coming of Jesus Christ. There is, for Míguez Bonino an 'eschatological reserve'.

The second important sentence points to the task of missionary theology in regard to the Kingdom of God. The task of missionary theology is to discover 'how can we understand the active and dynamic presence of God's Kingdom in our history so that we can adapt our witness and activity to it, particularly at this concrete moment in Latin America when we must profess our faith and serve the Lord' (1975h:75; cf. 1979d:266). Here Míguez Bonino makes clear that theology seeks to 'understand the active presence of the Kingdom' in history. This task, of course, is clearly related to the task of hermeneutics. Furthermore, 'understanding' is directly related to practical obedience—that is towards an already existing praxis. The word 'adapt' emphasizes this further. It presumes a process that is already in progress—a process in which previous action leads to or facilitates understanding, and subsequently understanding leads to further modified or adapted action. Moreover, the reason that this understanding of God's action is sought is in order to adapt, improve, or adjust Christian activity and to aim at a better praxis. Or putting it in other terms, the reason for theological reflection on the Kingdom of God is to improve missionary effectiveness. Active obedience is always related to witness and

activity. This phrase along with ‘profess and serve’ reveal Míguez Bonino’s wholistic approach to mission. Christian mission, as conceived in, and related to the Kingdom of God, is activity that embraces verbal witness and active service. And active obedience that proceeds from understanding is absolutely contextual. It must lead to obedience in a particular place—Latin America—and in a particular time—this concrete moment.

In summary, there are two intersecting circles to Míguez Bonino’s understanding of the Kingdom of God—God’s activity and the human response to that activity. This has resonance with Míguez Bonino’s approach to hermeneutics as revelation and reception described in chapter three of this study.

#### 4.4.2 *God’s action in history*

Míguez Bonino deals with this question of how God’s action relates to history in detail in *How does God Act in history* (1972c)? This article, originally written in 1966, reflects the growing awareness of Latin America’s special place in history; the claims by various ideologies to interpret history; and the awareness that ‘the faith carries within it an imperative which impels toward the quest for an ethic which will both be true to the Gospel and relevant to the present situation’ (1972c:22). In this context, various Christian attempts were being made at interpreting God’s activity in history. This was one of the most important theological issues being discussed at the time and this article is a response.

Míguez Bonino begins by stating that ‘neither the reality nor the manner of God’s action in history can be established other than on the basis of the self-revelation of its purpose, compass, and meaning, evidenced in biblical history, as proclaimed to us in that same prophetic and apostolic testimony, with its pivotal centre in Jesus Christ’ (1972c:23). God’s revelation to humanity is given in the concrete acts of God in history, attested to in the Bible. Therefore, it is not possible to develop a general, or Christian philosophy of history because the Bible presents God as acting through specific events, at specific times, and in specific places. Strictly speaking, what can be known about God is only how God acts in those specific events. The contribution of both Barth and Cullmann can be perceived here.

During the nineteen sixties and early seventies, both secular ideologies and Christian theologies were claiming the ability to discern the meaning of human history and, in the case of Christian theology, to discern the meaning of God’s activity in history as well. Vatican II (especially *Gaudium et Spes*) and various theological statements within ISAL were claiming to have found the key to understand God’s activity in history. Míguez Bonino opposes what he sees as a facile and over confident interpretation of history. He is aware that the danger for such theologies is that history will become a second source of revelation (cf. Bassham 1979:68). Richard Shaull’s ‘A God who acts in and transforms history’ (ISAL 1961:57-70) does not seem to be aware of the dangers. Míguez Bonino demonstrates divergence with those Liberation Theologians who tried to see God’s activity in present history as analogous to God’s involvement in biblical history.

Míguez Bonino also emphasises that the Bible witnesses to how ‘the boundaries of God’s action are those of history in its entirety in time and space, within which God works according to a divine plan to establish his universal reign’ (1972c:24). God’s action is action in all of human history. It is not limited to some

people or to a specific timeframe in history—it is truly universal. The totality of God's action is directed towards the establishment of God's reign over all of humanity and the world as a whole. At this time Míguez Bonino emphasises the corporate nature of life and later he writes that 'the Biblical horizon is centred in a total human programme, the Kingdom of God, more than in individual ethical life' (1972a:6). God's action is not in some divine realm of spiritual activity but is rather focussed upon the establishment of God's Kingdom upon the earth. This Kingdom is not centred upon, individuals but upon collective life and creation itself. In later writings, Míguez Bonino makes this point very strongly because of the tendency within the Latin American Protestant churches to assign sovereignty over the church to God and sovereignty over the world to the devil. This dichotomy has, on the one hand, led to a withdrawal from involvement in the world by Latin American Protestants (1972c:24 and 1962c:74-75) and, on the other hand, to a spiritualization, internalization and individualization of the Kingdom of God and its ethics and mission (1972a:83-84). In 1961, he asserts that, 'this world, with its powers and structures is already under the sovereignty of Christ, even though this sovereignty is not manifested (Heb 2.5-9)' (1961c:21). In 1964, he writes that 'the extent of the interest and action of Jesus Christ is the totality of human society and even the totality of creation' (1964b:26). In the same article he says that 'the totality of human existence individual and collective is under his rule' (1964b:27). He clarifies and emphasizes this assertion as follows: 'He is Lord; the totality of human existence individual and collective is under his sovereignty. He is the Lord of human history, not only of the Church but also of society' (1964b:27). The whole of creation and the whole of human society are under God's sovereignty.

In 'How does God Act in History', Míguez Bonino deals with the thorny issue of *how* God's action in history relates to human history. He posits the thesis that 'God works through the dynamic of historical events, without either suspending or eliminating its categories, but assimilating them into his creating and redeeming purpose' (1972c:25). God does not suspend the categories of human history or create an ultra-history over against human history but rather works through that history, establishing God's Kingdom upon the earth. Míguez Bonino extends this understanding later, emphasising that according to the Bible, God's action and human history are inseparable. There is no divine action that is not worked out in human history. Moreover, there is no story in the Bible that is not related to God's action. God's relationship with creation is always narrated in the context of history. However, God's action is not equated with human history as if that history is able to fulfil God's will entirely; God's will is worked out polemically in history (1975g:76). God's purposes were worked out in the life of Israel in its political, social, cultural and religious life, which, of course, is intimately related to the life of the nations around. God confirms God's sovereignty by 'calling, rejecting, forgiving and punishing, and so erects signs and the way of his own sovereignty by the consummation of God's coming victory' (1975g:77). Míguez Bonino concludes that for the Old Testament 'History, is precisely, this conflict between God and his people in the midst of and in relation to all peoples' (1975h:134).

Although God's action is placed firmly in the context of human history, events are recounted in the context of prophetic interpretation. The tendency to separate events from the prophetic interpretation is more the result of Greek thought than biblical theology. According to Míguez Bonino, 'Scriptural evidence of God's

action is found in the interlocking of historical fact and prophetic witness to form a whole so closely knit that it becomes impossible to present the historical fact as a mere “brute fact” or the prophetic interpretation as a general principle to the situation from which it arose’ (1972c:26). Or: ‘the sovereignty of God is the effective Word that makes and is made history, drawing together and rejecting humanity and the peoples in relation to the divine purpose’ (1975g:76). God’s Word is a creative word because it not only comments on history it also creates it. Míguez Bonino concludes: ‘This prophetic interpretation itself constitutes an integral part of that event—so much so that the Bible does not hesitate to say that the “word of God” delivered by the prophet “brought about” this or that event’ (1972c:26-27). In the same way, worship in the Bible is

not a mere commemoration nor a human act of presentation and homage, but rather, as has been demonstrated by numerous studies, the active and effective presence of the liberating Word of Yahweh (God’s Word in the Exodus or of creation) in the liturgy and sacrifice, operating today’s liberation in the congregation (and including the cosmos) (1975g:76).

Events in the Bible, therefore, have meaning because God’s action has declared it to be; they function teleologically.

He adds two important caveats to the previous assertions. The concept of historical fact and divine interpretation cannot be applied to all historical events or to the whole of Church history; this denies the special quality of ‘salvation history.’ Also the prophetic role of the Church must be clarified. The prophetic vocation is sometime thought to indicate ‘the theological significance of historical events, particularly in the political and social field, and is based on that of the prophets, whose mission is was to “discern” what God was doing in historical events’ (1972c:27). Míguez Bonino calls this a facile use of the prophetic paradigm because it does not recognize the difference between the true prophet who speaks the message from God and the false prophet who “discerns” God’s action and speaks his own words. This statement was particularly directed towards some tendencies within Roman Catholic theology at the time, particularly the theology of Teilhard de Chardin. It also takes into account certain trends within the ISAL movement, especially the “theology of revolution” as posited by Richard Shaull. Shaull spoke at the Geneva meetings of Church and Society (1966) on that topic.

The fact that in the Old Testament, God’s action is firmly rooted in world history means that God’s action is eminently political in the widest sense of the word—from the broadest sense—the totality of the life of peoples as collective political entities—to the narrowest sense—as related to the use of power. God’s polemical, conflictive and political sovereignty comes to fulfilment in the covenant. The covenant was given to Israel as a whole and it is on this basis that God deals with Israel—as a social group. Therefore, in the Old Testament, ‘every attempt to separate the religious element from the political element in the Old Testament proves to be artificial’ (1979d:267).

Even though the New Testament focuses upon the activity of God in Christ God’s action remains rooted in world history and, is therefore, political. Míguez Bonino does not deny that there is an obvious change in the relationship between God’s action and human history. Míguez Bonino is happy to state: ‘The action of Jesus Christ in our world—including in the church—is by nature “a conflict” and “a

fight” (1961c:28). This does not imply that God is merely dealing with the nation of Israel as a political entity; God rather deals with peoples from all nations, which are not so much political entities, as in the Old Testament, but a new society—the Church. There is a difference which cannot be reduced—as has been done in many Protestant Churches in Latin America—to a personal and spiritual Lordship of Christ (New Testament) over against a political and collective sovereignty of Yahweh (Old Testament). According to Míguez Bonino, the difference is to be located in the fact that, in the New Testament, the history of salvation acquires a certain “consistency” or “density” of its own; a certain “distance” in relation to the totality of human history. This does not mean that God’s action becomes disconnected from human history; it is still related to

the story of Herod, of Pilate, or of the merchants of Ephesus. But as a new mission emerges, which is indissolubly tied to a particular historical nucleus (that of Israel and Jesus Christ), which becomes dated in time, the faith of the converted “heathen” becomes related to a two-fold historical reference: their own history and this other, which now comes to be constitutive of their faith (1975h:135-136; cf. 1975g:78).

Much later Míguez Bonino says ‘While for a Jew, conversion meant the *reinterpretation* of his people’s history, for the Gentile it was the *assuming* of another history, the history of Israel and of Jesus’ (1999i:77). He concludes:

to confess the Kingdom is not for us, Gentile Christians, only to enter into the inheritance of our own history, but at the same time to take distance from it and to become grafted to this other one. It is to confess the Exodus, the exile, Bethel and Nazareth, Golgotha and the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea as our own—and this not merely in their significance or in their exemplariness in their particular and unrepeatable historicity (1975g:78).

This gives the faith of the Gentiles a double historical reference—the reference of the historical actions of God in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ, and the reference of humanity’s history, i.e. general history.

#### 4.4.3 *Between Two Views of History*

The double historical reference of God’s history and human history cannot avoid the old question of the duality of histories—what Míguez Bonino calls the ‘eternal theological problem’ (1975h:136). He asks whether God’s action, salvation history or the history of faith constitutes a separate history or is part and parcel of human history. This subject is explored in detail in *Reino de Dios y la historia*: Míguez Bonino examines the answers given along two general lines—the dualist and the monist. The dualist solution seems to propose that two histories exist: human history and God’s history. Therefore, God’s activity, the history of the gospel and the Church are assigned to a special ‘salvation history’, whereas human history was relegated to secondary importance (cf. 1975g). The Kingdom of God, therefore, is related to the history of faith, ‘which thus becomes a univocal, sacred, and distinct line’ and reduces secular history ‘to a general episodic framework devoid of eschatological significance: a mere stage’ (1975h:136). Up to the nineteen sixties a

dualistic understanding of history was common in Latin American Protestant theology and Church life.

Míguez Bonino rejects this dualism firstly because it seems to leave an area of human life outside the realm of God's authority. He believes that if Christ is Lord over creation and history then secular history must be included. Moreover, the dualist approach is questionable because of the 'evident failures of the Church' (1975h:136). The so-called sacred history of the Church bears too many of the frailties of secular history to make such a separation. A sectarian solution, where a true, hidden church and the visible church opposed to one another cannot resolve the problem. Finally, whoever reads the Bible carefully will become aware of the importance it places upon history. Míguez Bonino says:

In my opinion, its conception of redemption is borrowed from that of Gnostic and mystery religions. The God of the prophets and of Jesus can hardly be equated with the *soter* ("savior") of such sects, for the latter is busy trying to populate his Olympus with a few select souls who have been rescued from the tumultuous sea of matter and human history (1979d:271).

Luke's description of the mission of Jesus and the Church in Luke-Acts, John's vision of all nations bringing their offerings to the heavenly city, and Paul's vision of the old creation sighing in expectation of a new humanity and all things united under Christ does not seem compatible with narrow-minded religious views of many Protestants.

Míguez Bonino also notes that 'the dilemma might seem to be solvable by celebrating some transforming activity of God in the history *mediated through the Church*' (1975g:81-82; cf. 1979d:282).<sup>1</sup> He engages with C. René Padilla's understanding of the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom. Padilla says 'Christ has been enthroned as King, and his sovereignty extends to the whole universe'. The Church is the messianic community, in Padilla's words 'the sphere in which we find operative the life of the new age unleashed by Jesus Christ.' He asks: 'in what sense, then, are the church and the world historical correlates of the Kingdom?' and records Padilla's answer:

'The Church has cosmic significance because it is the affirmation of Christ's universal authority. In and *through* the church, the powers of the new era unleashed by the Messiah are present in the midst of human beings. The correlate of God's Kingdom is the world, but the world which is redeemed *in and through* the church' (1979d:282).

Míguez Bonino makes some observations about Padilla's statement. 'In the New Testament there is undoubtedly a close unity between the Lord and his church, by virtue of which the church shares in his prophetic and sacerdotal ministry' (1979d:282). However, together with the Reformers of the sixteenth century, Míguez Bonino affirms that: 'that the Lord is not limited to or by the mediation of the church' (1979d:282). The Reformers expressed this viewpoint in terms of Common Grace or General Revelation. Míguez Bonino, however, looks at the theme biblically saying that, in the Old Testament, God sovereignty in the world is manifest over the whole world and even people who do not profess his name are

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<sup>1</sup> Originally from 1975g. This section passage also appears in the footnotes of 1979d but does not appear in 1975h.

used to carry out God's work. In the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit goes beyond the walls of the Church. In this way, he contradicts Padilla's wish to see the world as only a correlate of the Kingdom through the mediation of the Church. For Padilla, God's Kingdom is only related to the world through the mediation of the Church, whereas Míguez Bonino would see that God's Kingdom as more directly related to the world. In this way the fight for justice carried out by non-Christians can be identified as work in the Kingdom of God. Moreover, he attempts to counter the dualistic tendency, especially strong in Latin American Protestantism and some conservative Catholic circles to limit the mediation of salvation to the Church: the church as the only channel of spiritual blessings.

Míguez Bonino sees the need to relate the two manifestations of the Kingdom—Church and World—intrinsically and not only formally. Very early on, Christian theology tended to focus on the priestly role of Christ (especially as it is understood in the Church), while ignoring his prophetic ministry in the world. However, the theologies of liberation, especially in their Roman Catholic expression, have corrected a tendency in Catholicism to understand the Church in exclusively sacerdotal terms. According to Míguez Bonino, the theologians of liberation had done this, either through an appeal to natural theology—that injustice is against natural law—or through an evolutionary conception influenced by Teilhard de Chardin, or through a popularist or Marxist approach. Míguez Bonino asserts, however, that: 'it is precisely the message of the Kingdom, embodied in its prophetic content and in the concrete humanity of Jesus, that makes it possible for us to recognize and tie together that action of the Spirit (i.e., the risen Lord) in the world and its priestly-prophetic mediation in the church' (1979d:282). In *El reino de Dios y la historia* (1975g), he puts it in a different way: 'it is the action of the risen one in the world, which provides the call to interpretation and prophetic proclamation of the Church' (1979g:82). The Church, as it identifies the action of the risen Christ in the world, is called to interpret and proclaim God's Kingdom of justice. Míguez Bonino rejects, therefore, the dualist solution and its tendency to identify the Kingdom with the Church or even to see the Church as the only mediator of the Kingdom.

The second solution offered to resolve the issue of the duality of histories is sometimes called monism. For Míguez Bonino, the monist solution given by some theologians of liberation is more coherent. Gustavo Gutiérrez' book *A Theology of Liberation* rejects the "two planes" model of reality and opts for "a single history" where God is the actor. 'There are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, "juxtaposed" or "closely linked". Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history' (cf. Gutiérrez 1996:79). In Míguez Bonino's words, 'the faith does not constitute a distinct history but rather a dynamic and a motivation and in its eschatological horizon, and transforming invitation' (1975g:80). This transforming invitation takes place in history 'with its economic, political and ideological options' (1979d:270). God's action is in human history, through human history and within historical human structures. Míguez Bonino's third thesis from *How Does God Work in History?* is once again pertinent here: 'God works through the dynamic of historical events, without either suspending or eliminating its categories, but assimilating them into his creating and redeeming purpose' (1972:c:25).

However, the monist solution also has its theological problems. Particularly, it fails to find a way to speak of the gospel message in the context of human or secular history. He emphasises: ‘If we are to give significance to this one history, we must find a way to transcribe the gospel message so that it can be seen to operate meaningfully on the level of human history’ (1979d:271). This is expressed in terms of ‘naming the Kingdom’, and identifying God’s sovereign action in history and the presence of Christ, which leads to the call for obedient faith. The question is: if God is active in and through human history, how can that activity be identified as divine? Although this problem has been approached in many ways over the centuries, Liberation theologians and European political theologians have proposed to speak of ‘love’, ‘liberation’, and ‘transformation’ when identifying God’s action in history.

Love has been especially important in describing both God’s action in salvation and human response to that action. Juan Luis Segundo has been the Latin American theologian who has most consistently used love as the central theme to describe God’s action in human history. In the first volume of *A Theology for the Artisans of a New Humanity* (1973) he made the phrase, “no action of love is lost in God’s world” to be the key to his interpretation of Matthew 25 (Segundo 1973: 43ff). Gustavo Gutiérrez has made love a central theme in spirituality (Gutiérrez 1984 and 1987).

Míguez Bonino also finds the theme of love central to God’s action in history. In *Ama y haz lo que quieras* (1972), he states: ‘Jesus sees love, therefore, as the quality of the life of the Kingdom, whose completion has been indicated in his own coming and whose fullness must overcome according to that which correspond to the plans of God’ (1972a:68). And in a section on the power and efficacy of love done in solidarity in *Christians and Marxists* (1976c), love is the central theme of the Kingdom of God because ‘Biblical love is defined in its intension by God’s active purpose: the establishment of his Kingdom, the sovereignty of his covenantal, humanizing love’ (1976b:110).

Míguez Bonino is convinced that the love, liberation and transformation need to be clearly identified as Christian love, Christian liberation and Christian transformation. He describes the danger of losing identity in the following way:

Once we historicize these terms in the general history of humankind, there is a danger that they will be uprooted from the particular history of the faith and hence dehistoricized with respect to it. We may soon be talking about some “love” or “new person” or “liberation” in which reference to the history of divine revelation is secondary, merely exemplary, and even dispensable. If that happens, then we must say that the reference to God has ceased to be meaningful insofar as we are trying to speak in Christian terms. Of what God are we speaking, and of what Kingdom? If we carry that tendency to its ultimate conclusion, we will wittingly or unwittingly deify history or humanity itself. In that case we would be better to call things by their right name and profess to total immanentism (1979d:272).

It is significant to note that Míguez Bonino is not only warning of the danger in G. Gutiérrez’ monist approach but also in R. Alves’ understanding that God is dependent upon the history in which God is involved and thereby become a symbol of liberation within history itself (Alves 1969:144).

Míguez Bonino points out, that the loss of Christian identity is far from the intention of Gutiérrez and Segundo who certainly overcame the problem in their piety and practice but did not solve the theological problem.

Later Míguez Bonino widened and deepened his critique of the monist view (1998f:181-182) and 1999i:78-79). This view tends to interpret ‘the history and person of Christ as prototypical, illustrative, figurative or exemplary’ (1999i:78) and, therefore, tends to make Christology a hermeneutical tool rather than an objective reality. This point is particularly serious in connection to Segundo’s use of love as a critical category to identify God’s action in history (as the aforementioned quotation clarifies). There is a blurring of both the specificity of the incarnation, the unrepeatable nature (*ephapax*) of God’s action in salvation. This leads to a further criticism. Míguez Bonino asks whether the use of love as an anthropological category does not lose sight of how Christ is the definitive measure of all love; moreover ‘if this emphasis on one single history, is not critically confronted with the Christ event, do not the story of Jesus, the Cross and the Resurrection become mere models of service, suffering, to be reproduced, rather than a once for all event into which we can enter eschatologically through the power of the Spirit? (1998f:181 and 1999i:78). Therefore, the seriousness of sin is underestimated—a common criticism made of Liberation Theology by European and North American theologians. Further, Míguez Bonino makes the points that the loss of the eschatological nature of God’s action in Liberation Theology reduces the overcoming of evil to a process; it is not anymore a conflictive and decisive action witnessed to throughout the Bible and especially in the apocalyptic literature. Finally, these theological weaknesses lead to a missionary and evangelistic weakness. It tends to reduce the radical nature of the call for repentance, conversion, and encounter with Christ. What is called a turning or a new birth in the Bible is reduced to conscientisation, or to growth. ‘This “personal encounter with Christ”—to use typically evangelical language<sup>2</sup>—is liable to be totally equated with a commitment to the poor and the struggle for justice, with serious loss both for the life of faith, and service of the individual Christian and for the community’ (1998f:182).

Míguez Bonino accepts that there is only one history through which God is establishing the Kingdom. The Church is not the only mediator of that Kingdom; God also works directly in the world. To name the Kingdom, that is to identify God’s activity in history, is an ambiguous task. When the duality of histories is rejected, there is the danger of sacralising human history and reducing the radical effect of Christ’s life, death and resurrection to human improvement. Míguez Bonino overcomes these dangers are, however, not so much in theological investigation but in action and piety. He is closer to ‘monism’ than ‘dualism’. In fact he would qualify as a ‘dialectical monist.’ God’s activity in history can only be identified by faithfully participating in God’s project to establish God’s reign. There is no guarantee of infallibility but, because this participation takes place between action and reflection, the praxis is neither sacralised nor fossilised.

It is important to make a few comments at this point. Míguez Bonino’s strongly criticises the traditional Liberationist understanding of God’s relationship to humanity and human history. He shares many of the Liberationist viewpoints; at the same time, he feels the need to deepen the theological reflection in order to sharpen

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<sup>2</sup> In the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word.

the theological tools in the search for effective praxis. Míguez Bonino's unique contribution to the reflection on this theology demonstrates a clear contrast to the understanding of conversion prevalent in Latin American Roman Catholic theology. In general terms, the Catholic concept can be expressed as: everybody in Latin America is baptized and is therefore a Christian; conversion, therefore, is conscientisation, deeper commitment, or greater involvement. Míguez Bonino, as a Protestant, calls for a more radical understanding of change: conversion is both qualitative and quantitative. Further, it is instructive to note that this critique was developed in dialogue with Methodist theology. One of his writings on the issue at stake is conceived in dialogue with John Wesley's concept of salvation, sanctification and how Christ defines the nature of love (1999i:69ff; cf. 1998f:181). Finally, these considerations lead Míguez Bonino to reflect upon a theme that became vital to his theological reflection in the last few years—the role of the Trinity in history (cf. 1998f:182 and 1999i:79-83). This theme will be developed more fully in chapter six.

#### 4.4.4 *The Relationship Between Present History and the Future Glory*

Míguez Bonino declared that the Kingdom of God is promised in full manifestation in the Parousia of Jesus Christ (1975g:75); the Kingdom of God has a future aspect, an eschatological reserve. He wants to avoid what he has already termed total immanentism. The view that there is only one history and that God works in and through that history leads to another crucial issue: the relationship between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his coming in glory at the end of history and the fulfilment; i.e. 'when God will definitely establish his Kingdom' (1961c:27). He makes this point in the following way:

Do historical events and human activity in history in all its various dimensions have any meaningfulness with respect to the Kingdom that God is fashioning now and will establish in glory at the second coming of the Lord? Or is the latter the complete and total negation of the former? If there is some positive relationship between the two, how are we to understand it and how does it cut into our own activity? (1979d:272; cf. 1975h:139).

Before moving on with a detailed description and analysis of Míguez Bonino's argument, it is important to refer to some statements concerning the meaning of human history made earlier in his career.

In *Nuestro Mensaje*, written for CELA II (1961), Míguez Bonino considers dualism. He approaches this issue from the knowledge that many Latin American Christians believe that the world is in the hands of the devil and, therefore fear the world and withdraw from it. He asserts that the Christian message believes that Jesus Christ is universal Lord at present. He asks whether 'we as Evangelicals have not begun from the basis that Christ only has sovereign rights in the Church but the world does not belong to him' (1962:c:74-75). Míguez Bonino claims that 'as Christians we can rightly claim and breathe easily in a world that Christ has already put under his sovereignty, even though we do not see it yet' (1962c:75). Although he does not directly deal with the theological issues regarding the relationship between Jesus Christ's sovereignty and human history, he lays the ground for later developments.

In the first ISAL consultation, running at the same time as CELA II, Míguez Bonino gave a paper on the biblical and theological bases of involvement in society (1961b and 1961c). He admits that the biblical evidence seems to suggest that the coming age is more important than this one. He argues that the New Testament views Jesus Christ as the 'end of the world'. This world is judged and is passing away. Christians are rescued from this world and have their citizenship in heaven. The Christian message, therefore, is essentially eschatological. This reflects a common understanding at the time. Having said this, he submits that this world is important in two ways. Firstly, human history between the resurrection and the Parousia is the time of God's patience (I Pet 3.20; II Pet 3.9, 15; Act 17.30-31), the time in which Christians must preach the gospel and work for peace and justice in order that all may hear and accept the gospel (cf. Bosch 1991:503; Jongeneel 1997:204). In *Ama y haz lo que quieras*, Míguez Bonino makes the same comment (1972a:116). This is significant because that book was written in the same period as *Revolutionary Theology* (1975) and *Christians and Marxists* (1976), the books which are viewed as his most radical works.

Míguez Bonino adds, that the church has not only the freedom to preach the gospel; it also:

includes the conditions of "decent human life", of opportunity of access to all human possibilities, of "human dignity" that God has created for the person in this world in which we live. The psychological barriers that create misery, oppression, injustice, disorder, insecurity for the reception of the gospel are as real as those of suppression of the freedom of proclamation. Somebody<sup>3</sup> has said that the function of the church is "in such a way to cure the temporal scars of humanity so that it is exposed to the eternal ones" (1961c:22-23).

Present human history, in this context, does not have importance in itself but only in so far as the conditions for the preaching of the gospel are maintained. Human conditions must be improved to make people more willing to receive the gospel. The importance of 'this present era' is spiritual.

The present time is the time of the church. Míguez Bonino makes the following observation:

This is the time in human existence whose essential content is the proclamation of the Kingdom, and therefore, whose central agent is the proclaiming community, the missionary people of God: the Church. The logic of world history, the goal of the transformation of the world, the disappearance of the world as *terminus a quo* rather than *ad quem*, is to be found in the community of the church (1961b:240).

Human history, in this perspective, gains its importance because it enables the Kingdom of God to be proclaimed. Míguez Bonino is careful in his phrasing: the church is allowed to be the 'central agent' not the only agent. The Church is central in history because it is the bearer of the logic, transformation and meaning of the world.

Although Míguez Bonino is using ontological terms in this section, he still develops the relationship between the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ, the Church and the World in terms of the church's mission. The Church continues the work of

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth

the suffering servant. Jesus triumphed over the “powers of this world” on the Cross and his coming reign is an extension of that service. In the same way the Church’s suffering service is to be conceived as ‘its testimony to “God’s new world”. As such, it, at the same time, signals the true character of human community’ (1961b:240; c.f 1955c). The life and work of the Church, as the community of the Kingdom, testifies to the reality of the coming Kingdom. In its ‘conduct that “conforms to the new age”’ (1961b:240). Jesus Christ reigns now; his reign reflects the coming reality. The Church’s mission is to testify to the relationship between human history, the Kingdom of God as a coming future reality and the church as the witness and mediator of that coming reality.

Míguez Bonino develops the above mentioned reflections three years later (1964) in a study book which was drafted to help churches to reflect upon the issues in the area of social responsibility (cf. 1964b:22-31). The churches need a basis for their involvement in social issues. He rejects the Pietist approach of individual piety leading to a better society as individualist and unrealistic. He also discards the Social Gospel approach that draws ethical principles for the Kingdom of God based upon the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and the action of Jesus in the Gospels. He believes that it is a hermeneutically impossible task to apply first century social principles to a twentieth century social context. The Roman Catholic Social Doctrine of the Church with its basis in natural law is also rejected. He believes that Natural Law is not inherent in all human social interaction but the slow influence of the Gospel on society. More importantly it is not based upon ‘the redeeming revelation of God in Jesus Christ’ (1964b:25). Finally, he rejects Classical Protestantism’s understanding of the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms of Martin Luther or the sovereignty of God over all society of John Calvin. Neither of these teachings achieves ‘an adequate articulation of a specifically Christian doctrine of society’ (1964b:26).

Having rejected these theological articulations for a Christian participation in society, Míguez Bonino posits the reign of Jesus Christ as the centre of Christian mission. Human history is important because ‘Jesus Christ is present and active in creation’: he has demonstrated his commitment to humanity and its history through his incarnation; thereafter his ‘sovereignty is universally present’ in the church and in the world.

Míguez Bonino wishes to define more precisely the relationship between present history and the future of the Kingdom of God. Earlier in his ministry, Míguez Bonino was convinced that:

the Church interprets and creates history by the preaching of the Gospel, through which Christ himself is present in the world, requiring and making the mystery of his present and future sovereignty, and at the same time disclosing the source in which the Christian community has its being and by which human history is sustained until its final consummation (1972c:31).

In the church’s preaching of the gospel, Christ is present in the world. There is a causal link between Christ’s presence and human action. This was a major discussion between the theologians of liberation and European theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Johannes Baptist Metz.<sup>4</sup> The Liberation Theologians

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<sup>4</sup> This argument does not occur in 1975g or 1979d..

understood that European theologians attempted to avoid terms that imply causality; they were reticent to admit that human action has a causal effect in the Kingdom of God. ‘In other words, historical action is not really significant for the Kingdom; at most, it may succeed to project provisory images which remind us of it’ (1975h:140). That is, they refer to the Kingdom of God but are not the Kingdom of God in reality. Segundo is a little more measured than Míguez Bonino, saying that ‘except in rare exceptions, the historical reality produced by human effort is described at “anticipation” (Moltmann), “analogy” (Weth), “rough draft” (Metz), and so forth (cf. Segundo 1976:144). The Latin American assertion is clear; in European theology the future action of God swallows up the present action of human beings. The future is emphasized to the detriment of the present.

Míguez Bonino wants to define the relationship between the Kingdom of God and present history in sharper terms. He believes that the New Testament makes a strong causal link and believes that European understanding does not take note of the biblical evidence. Míguez Bonino opts for eschatological analogies. He proposes that one can ‘consider this question in the analogy of the eschatological concepts of the “body” and “resurrection”’ (1975h:140-142). These concepts are obviously not commensurate with the Kingdom and history but they can serve to clarify the relationship.

Míguez Bonino regards the resurrected body as for ‘a continuity that affirms the recognizable identity of both, and a transformation that inaugurates the resurrected life’ (1979d:272). He refers to the Apostle Paul who speaks of the transformation of the physical, earthly body into the resurrection body, not as a “disfiguration” or “denaturalization” of the life of the body but rather as its fulfilment, its perfection, the elimination of its corruptibility and weakness. In the resurrection body the earthly body finds its true nature and significance—fellowship, love and praise. Rather than being a rescue of the spirit, the resurrection is the ‘bodily life cleansed from self-deception and self-seeking (flesh) and made perfect in transparent (glorious) singleness of purpose and experience (spiritual) and full community with God’ (1975h:141).

The Pauline concept of “works” complements the aforementioned analogy. Míguez Bonino asks whether human works, done in this life, have eschatological significance? He answers with an emphatic ‘yes’ (cf. Boff, C. 1987:203). The works done in the body ‘belong to the new order, to the order of the resurrected world, to the order of love’ (1975g:83-84). These works are not done in an ideal or spiritual world; but done by concrete human beings in concrete human contexts. It is not a matter of differentiating between sacred and profane, religious and secular, or Christian and human works, but rather—in Pauline terms—between ‘works done in the flesh’ and ‘works done in faith’. Works done in faith have eschatological significance. Seen in this light, the Kingdom of God does not deny and destroy history but rather eradicates its corruption, frustration, limitations and ambiguity. It destroys sin so that the full meaning of communal life is fulfilled (cf. Chopp 1992:89). Christians must use terms that imply growth, development, construction and establishment: these is the language used by the Bible. Christian mission is not simply a set of unrelated actions but ‘a new reality; a new life which is communicated in Christ, in the power of the Spirit’ (1975h:143). The Kingdom of God is not an object for study but a call to action. ‘The Kingdom is not a riddle to be solved but a mission to be fulfilled’ (1975h:143).

#### 4.4.5 *The Kingdom of God and Utopias*

Christians are called to announce, to live out, and thereby, bring about the Kingdom of God. Many people on the political left in the nineteen seventies viewed that statement as something purely utopian. In *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, Míguez Bonino questions whether the Kingdom of God is a utopia (1983m:90-94). The latter is of special interest for people involved in Liberation Theology and in the Marxist-Christian dialogue. Marx rejected utopian socialism in favour of scientific socialism. In the Soviet Union, his disciples denied the “objective facts” of the historical process. Marx himself criticized the Christian concept of love: Christians have the vision of a new world but they do not have the tools to realise that vision. According to these Marxists, utopias and the Christian hope hold back revolution and change by offering the possibility of an impossible future.

Marxists such as Ernst Bloch have tried to reinterpret Marx in order to find an impulse to change the utopian concept. According to Bloch, the concept of utopia has three social functions—it is a protest against the present situation; it explores the possibility of a still unattained, different reality; and it demands the immediate realization of that new reality (Bloch 1986:1195). Míguez Bonino, following Bloch, declares that ‘Utopia is not an illusion, it is knowledge—an anticipation of the possible future of reality’ (1983m:91). This knowledge-based utopian thinking has two philosophical presuppositions—nature is a process that carries within it the possibilities of its own transformation; and humanity acts as a ‘midwife’ of that transformation. Although Míguez Bonino accepts that utopia has its limits, he considers it a useful concept, ‘a resolute invitation to anticipatory, realistic struggle spurred by hope’ (1983m:91; cf. 2000c:138).

With these general considerations in mind, Míguez Bonino opts for a more indirect relationship between the Christian hope—as represented by the theological motif of the Kingdom of God—and the concept of utopia. The Christian hope of the Kingdom of God contains certain elements common to utopias—both positive advantages and negative dangers—but is both more and less than these utopias. He takes this route because ‘in eschatology we are not speaking of “human anticipations” but of God’s time of consummation which, while it assumes history, does not simply crown history’s achievements but also judges and transforms it’ (1983m:92). God’s action in history is decisive and new; it transforms and judges and it cannot and should not be confused with any human action. Moreover, Míguez Bonino emphasises that relating human utopias directly to the Christian hope not only ignores the ‘qualitative newness’ of God’s transformation of history but also opens the dangerous possibility of ‘sacralising’ and ‘clericising’ human projects. Human action should not be “taken over” by the Church as proof of God’s action. Human action is justified and given value not by being made into God’s working but in itself a human effort to build a better society. In its worst case, human action is literally “taken over” by the Church in some sort of effort to “Christianize” or “baptize” human action. It is important, for Míguez Bonino, to relate God’s action to human effort to build a better society (utopia) but at the same time to distinguish between both concepts.

Míguez Bonino’s attitude to utopias is necessarily ambiguous. For him, utopias are human creations; they have an important social function by ‘negating the negative’ and projecting the possibility of a new future. In the cooperation between

Christians and Marxists in Latin America this has been an important factor. Moreover, utopian thinking has been an important part of Western thinking and Christian theology. Many aspects of the biblical faith stimulate utopian thinking. Especially concepts such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the regeneration of humanity have demonstrated, using Moltmann's term, the 'negation of determinations' and have avoided subjective cynicism. Furthermore, these biblical events and concepts 'indicate a direction' in God's purposes. Words such as justice, peace and life both protest current conditions and indicate the direction for change. Finally, utopias call for action. In this sense the concept is at its most ambiguous. Without a doubt the Bible does recount stories of God's action towards a different future and 'engages and commits human beings to action' (1983m:93). The history of Christianity has shown, however, that eschatology has often been spiritualized and individualized and so the ethico-political aspect has been amputated. At the same time, Christians, especially in Latin America, have uncritically committed themselves to certain dubious historical projects. 'We are faced at this point, therefore, with a double task: critical assessment in the light of the direction pointed by the biblical prophetic-messianic tradition, and recovery of the praxis-provoking character of Christian eschatology, the dimension of call' (1983m:94).

#### 4.5 HUMAN ACTION: DISCERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN OBEDIENCE

This double task, discussed at the end of the previous section, brings Míguez Bonino back to the question that he posed at the beginning: 'how can we understand the active presence of the Kingdom in our history in such a way that we will be able to adapt our testimony and action, particularly at this particular time in Latin America in which has been given to us to profess our faith and serve the Lord' (1975g:75). It is important to note that Míguez Bonino's question is not, the where of the Kingdom of God present or visible, but the how: how do I participate—not only individually but as a community of faith in history—in the world that is coming, in the promised Kingdom? (cf. 1975h:143). 'How can we participate, act out, produce the quality of personal and corporate existence which has a future, which possesses eschatological reality, which concentrates the true future?' (1975h:143). Míguez Bonino resists the temptation to sacralise his own interpretation of God's action in history.

According to Míguez Bonino, the participation of humanity in the creation and establishment of God's Kingdom in history that has eternal consequences is the type of 'action that *names* this future and that *corresponds to its quality*' (1975h:143; italics in original). This is announcement and action—word and deed. Míguez Bonino insists that both are important because 'both action and announcement are eschatologically significant' (1975h:143). There can be no separation of proclamation and social and political action in relation to the Kingdom. The Church announces the coming of God's eternal Kingdom in which corruptibility and sin will be destroyed and history will be made perfect; at the same time, it works towards that incorruptibility and sinlessness.

The topic of the Church's participation in the Kingdom is connected to the issue of discernment. How does the Church know when and where to participate in the coming Kingdom? The answer given by Míguez Bonino is through *discernment of the Kingdom in obedient faith*. Although God's action in history is universal and

pervades history with its energy, 'its meaning is discernible only by faith, within the limits of perception prevailing in the "age of the Church" in which we live' (1972c:28). In the terms of this study, this is faith seeking effectiveness.

There is no guarantee of inerrancy in Christian action because the church cannot project God's action in the Bible into a seamless philosophy of history. God's activity presupposes 'distinct "times" and distinct "methods" of action' (1972c:24) which means that God does not always act in the same way at the same time. The Bible is the concrete recounting of how God acted at a certain place and at a certain time. Nevertheless, there exists 'constancy in God's "ways of acting"—not "standards" but "types" or "structures" of action,' signs 'i.e. glimpses of the meaning of God's actions in the world based upon what we know of God's action in the history of salvation' (1972c:25,28). In *Fundamentos bíblicos*, Míguez Bonino states that 'God has worked in history; the Bible is the register of that action. And this action has left us certain "paradigms", "parables" that orientate and govern our action. God uses these paradigms today to guide us to a contemporary decision' (1964b:30). This is manifest in how God acts through the creation of a responsible community, manifest in the congregation of the Church—'that is the sign and prefiguration of the Kingdom' (1964b:30). In this way, the Church is able to provide a prophetic witness to what occurs in the world. In this rather limited and tentative way, 'we can discern a direction in the action of God apparent in the Scriptures, namely the redemption of human life in its totality (individual and community, spiritual and physical, present and future)' (1972c:29). This 'direction' is manifest in phenomena such as reconciliation, justice, peace and liberation.

In *Ama y haz lo que quieras*, Míguez Bonino fills out his understanding. Both the Old and New Testaments witness to the fact that God is the God of all peoples, establishing the divine rule in various ways. God has always had to combat the tendency of people—in Israel and the Church—who think that God's government is limited only to them. In the Old Testament, Ruth and Jonah are prime examples of how God breaks out from Israel's ethnocentrism, racism and reductionism. God is the God of all and for all. The three principal characterizations of God in the Old Testament demonstrate this point: God is seen as the legislator who guarantees justice for all; the creator who has always and will always govern and order all things; and the king who guides and protects his people, 'who secures its unity and harmony and who establishes right and justice' (1972a:85). God's government is foremost a government of justice. God is active in establishing justice by giving a law. The Law of Moses governed Israel's life in order to maintain correct relationships between races and classes of people, especially the most vulnerable within society. God also establishes justice in the inspiration of the prophets who denounced injustice. Through the establishment of justice God seeks to create peace—*shalom*, which 'embraces the well-being of the whole person and the whole community' (1972a:87). *Shalom* is only possible 'when the conditions that God has established and which ensure justice and well-being of the community are kept' (1972a:88).

The New Testament declares that the incarnated Christ, who is present and active in creation, is the demonstration of God's attitude towards all human beings. He has revealed God's universal purpose to redeem all of humanity and to establish God's Kingdom (cf. 1964b:27). The New Testament also declares Jesus Christ to be the promised king. Jesus Christ taught and preached the presence of the Kingdom in

his own person. He was—as Origen states—the *autobasileia*. Jesus Christ will bring in God’s reign of peace and justice. The fact of his life, death and resurrection is the ‘decisive fulfilment’ of the promise of God’s just reign (cf. 1972a:90).

Míguez Bonino is convinced that Christians have nothing more than guides to orientate them regarding their role in what Augustine called the *civitas terrena*. He says: ‘the action of the Church and the Christian is always an encounter between the reading and meditation upon the action of God in the past—the Scriptures—and prayer, asking for direction of God in the midst of the circumstance’ (1964b:30). In other words:

this then is the task—the very limited and penultimate task—of theological ethics: to perfect the instruments of theological analysis of biblical testimony, and to define the conditions, which make possible its “parabolic” projection, indirectly and in an intermediary role, into the contemporary situation (1972c:29).

Some have approached the issue by first asking the question: ‘what is God doing in contemporary history,’ and later have attempted to link Christian action to God’s action (cf. Lehmann 1963). Míguez Bonino agrees that this can be a fruitful method but warns that it runs the risk of sacralising human action and moreover, can lead to the belief that our actions correspond to God’s action. There is no direct route from the Bible to Christian obedience. There are merely mediations: the reading of the Bible, the use of the gospel and hermeneutics, and the understanding of the context in which action takes place.

At this point in *el Reino de Dios y la historia*, Míguez Bonino speaks of the need of the mediations which guide the Church’s actions in this discernment in obedience. He says: ‘these mediations are of two orders. On one hand, there is our understanding of Scripture, of the gospel and the “rationality” or instruments of theological hermeneutics that we use. On the other hand there is our understanding of the context’ (1975g:86). As was argued in the previous chapter, neither of these mediations is adequate without concrete commitment to the political process.

In *Revolutionary Theology*, Míguez Bonino makes a stinging criticism of European Political Theology for its refusal to make this concrete commitment and its desire to remain neutral in its options. In his view, European and North American theologians believe that the gospel or “Christ-reference” relativizes the “present” historical reference of our faith and action’ (1975h:144). He takes Jürgen Moltmann as an example of a theologian who wishes theology to maintain a “critical function” and therefore not to make a choice between concrete historical alternatives. Without a doubt, Moltmann ‘is the theologian to whom the theology of liberation is most indebted and with whom it shows the clearest affinity’ (1975h:144) and subsequently was one of the European theologians to engage in dialogue with the Latin Americans but Míguez Bonino believes that he does not go far enough.

Moltmann attempts to become concrete in his search for obedience. He points to, what he calls, the ‘demonic circles of death’ under which humanity suffers ‘poverty, violence, racial and cultural deprivation, industrial destruction of nature, meaninglessness or Godforsakenness. Consequently, justice, democracy, cultural identity, peace with nature, and meaningful life are the concrete contents of historical hope’ (1975h:146; cf. Moltmann 1974:304). These “demonic circles of death” and their corresponding “contents of historical hope” take the theologian into the area of politics. It is not enough, however, to identify these elements. It is also

vital ‘to understand them in their unity, their roots, their dynamics, i.e. without giving a coherent socio-analytical account of this manifold oppression?’ (1975h:147). Moltmann has made a good start in the process to make the historical obedience of Christians concrete, but fails, according to Míguez Bonino, to take the final step. He asserts: ‘It seems that a point has been reached at which theologians cannot continue to make theological assertions concerning the political and social significance of the gospel without facing the facts of the actual empirical significance of the Christian churches and relating the two things in order that their statements may become *historically* significant and not simply idealistic assertions’ (1975h:148). Moltmann wants to proclaim that God is without country and without class but on the other hand that God is not a-political; that God is the God of the poor and oppressed. Míguez Bonino insists, however, that the poor do have a country and that they are a class. In this Moltmann, as representative of European and North American theologians, is in danger of not perceiving the situation as it is. Míguez Bonino asks: ‘Are we really for the poor and oppressed if we fail to see them as a class, of members of oppressed societies?’ (1975h:148). Therefore, he insists that theology (done at any level) must move from the abstract to the concrete. Reflecting on the Kingdom of God, he puts it in the following way: ‘The Bible gives us a motivation, an orientation, certain coordinates, but not an economic nor a political order’ (1981h:9). He views Moltmann as a Western theologian who, after all, still prefers to stay at the level of abstraction. When the theologian moves from the abstract to concrete options, it is not a case of drawing a political order from the Bible but a case of finding a human political order in which to work. Míguez Bonino goes on to say that ‘it is for this reason that Christians must choose between the possible diverse historical projects, in terms of the justice and solidarity that correspond to the Kingdom, in obedience to the liberating God of the poor’ (1981h:9).

It should be pointed out that, although Moltmann may have theologially wished to remain at the level of abstraction, he always made a political option himself. He has always been a social democrat and was deeply involved in the anti-nuclear movement.

In his famous ‘Open Letter to José Míguez Bonino’ (Moltmann 1979), Moltmann admits that Míguez Bonino’s desire to “materialise” the kingdom of God from an historical perspective’ is new: a perspective that he had not seen clearly enough (Moltmann 1979:197-198). However, he goes on to say that European theologians have said very similar things.

You present the positive relationship between the kingdom of God and human undertaking in history as calling, invitation, and impulse to engagement. Our concrete historical options should “correspond” to the kingdom (true to Barth). You describe the critical connection of the judgment of God to the whole of our human efforts (true to Luther). Finally, you speak of the “utopian function” of Christian eschatology, of Christian faith as stimulus and challenge for revolutionary action, and of the eschatological faith that makes meaningful the investment of life for the building of a temporal, imperfect order, and of the resurrection of the dead as the triumph of God’s love and of God’s solidarity with all human beings in which the imperfect is perfected (true to Moltmann). One can also read all of this in Bonhoeffer, Barth, Gollwitzer, Metz, and other Europeans. One is, therefore, inclined to agree fervently with you, but then ask what sense your criticism has after all (Moltmann 1979:198).

This is not the place to enter into a prolonged discussion on how Míguez Bonino's theology is more or less European but it is important to clarify a couple of points. Míguez Bonino is not embarrassed about the link between his theology and European theology, however, he shows how he, and other Latin American theologians 'are increasingly claiming their right to "mis-read" their teachers, to find their own insertion in the theological tradition, to offer their own interpretation of the theological task' (1975h:62). There is no doubt that Míguez Bonino and others incorporate the concepts of European theologians but they often use those concepts in a way the authors would not have originally expected. They use reader orientated hermeneutics even on their theological teachers.

Also, it is important to point out that although Míguez Bonino did not directly respond Moltmann's criticisms, in the development of his theology, it is possible to see how he has incorporated this interchange into his thinking. A clear example of this is how later Míguez Bonino relates the concrete option that the Christian makes to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of the penultimate (Bonhoeffer 2005:125-133). In *Ethics* (2005), Bonhoeffer insists on the significance of both 'ultimate ethics' (connected with the final fulfilment of God's reign), and 'penultimate ethics', (connected with the concrete context of this world). Penultimate ethics continue to exist and have consequences until the consummation of the Kingdom. Penultimate ethics find their meaning in relation to the ultimate event—the Kingdom of God (Bonhoeffer 2005:243). Míguez Bonino relates the concept of "historic projects" to Bonhoeffer's concept of Penultimate Ethics. Historic projects are 'concrete visions of the future and strategies to realize them in different groups within society commit their efforts in the realization of justice and participation' (1981h:9). This is obviously not the church's own project or a new Christendom but a way forward in making concrete God's Kingdom. Míguez Bonino insists that Christians must make a choice between various available historical projects. These choices are made on the basis of the justice and solidarity of the Kingdom, in obedience to the God of the poor. These projects are not, by any means, the fullness of the Kingdom of God but are always fallible and human. They can only have a relative and transitory role in relation to the Kingdom. They are 'penultimate' and must constantly be revised and improved. However successful a project may be: 'it is not the Kingdom in its fullness' (1981h:10). It does express God's Kingdom in its reality but in a relative and transitory way. Précising Míguez Bonino, it is possible to say with that this eschatological faith enables the Christian to invest her or his life historically in the construction of a true expression of the Kingdom of God, however temporary and imperfect that expression may be. But the Christian can do this with the confidence that neither life nor work has been wasted but has eschatological significance (cf. 1975h:152). The Christian's 'penultimate' contribution has effect in the 'ultimate' fulfilment of the Kingdom of God.

#### 4.6 FINAL OBSERVATIONS

This final section summarises Míguez Bonino's doctrine of the Kingdom of God, highlights some of his more important influences in regard to this topic and finally makes some analytical comments regarding continuity and discontinuity. Míguez Bonino defines the Kingdom of God as 'the sovereign action of God over the world

(natural and historical in its unity and totality), especially and representatively exercised and attested to in Israel, perfected in Jesus Christ and promised in full manifestation in the parousia of Jesus Christ' and declares that the role of Christian theology is to discover 'how can we understand the active and dynamic presence of God's Kingdom in our history so that we can adapt our witness and activity to it, particularly at this concrete moment in Latin America when we must profess our faith and serve the Lord.' His emphasis is that the Kingdom of God is God's action in history. How that action is understood and how human action relates to it is the main thrust of his reflections.

God's action in history is witnessed to in the Bible in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ. God's purposes are worked out in the context of world history. This does not mean that everything that happens is God's will nor does it mean that there are two histories: one that corresponds to the world—a secular and political history—and one that corresponds to God's will—a spiritual or ecclesial history.

In the context of the New Testament, God's purposes are still worked out in the context of world history but God's purposes acquire a certain 'density'. Theology's task is to identify that 'divine density' in world history. Míguez Bonino accepts that the concept of 'love' could serve as a reference point for God's purposes in world history but warns of the danger of immanentism. 'If we carry that tendency to its ultimate conclusion, we will wittingly or unwittingly deify history or humanity itself. In that case we would be better to call things by their right name and profess to total immanentism.' He proposes a 'dialectic monist' position where God's activity in history can only be identified by faithfully participating in God's project to establish God's reign. There is no guarantee of infallibility but, because this participation takes place between action and reflection, the praxis is neither sacralised nor fossilised.

The relationship between history and the Parousia should be viewed as an elimination of corruption, sin and weakness, not the negation of the existence of matter. Human action, therefore, that fulfils this criteria is, in a very real sense, bringing about the coming Kingdom. To distinguish between human action prior to the Parousia and God's action in the fullness of the Parousia, Míguez Bonino resorts to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of 'penultimate' and 'ultimate' ethics. Human historical projects actually bring about the Kingdom of God but are only 'penultimate' to the Kingdom of God that will come in the Parousia. The Christian's 'penultimate' contribution has effect in the 'ultimate' fulfilment of the Kingdom of God.

Influences upon Míguez Bonino's doctrine of the Kingdom of God are many and various. He was taught a liberal understanding of the Kingdom of God at the *FET* but in the nineteen fifties, his reading of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was instrumental in drawing him away from this and giving his understanding a Christological emphasis. Oscar Cullmann's *Christ and Time* (Cullmann 1951) led Míguez Bonino to understand the eschatological nature of the New Testament but also to continue to affirm the importance of the Church's role in the intermediate time between the resurrection and Parousia. Other traditions were a foil in this regard. Developments within ISAL and the theology of Vatican II led Míguez Bonino to oppose a facile view of God's action in history; some of his articles at this time are a response to this. In the nineteen seventies, he was in dialogue with a vast array of theologians and theological positions which were influential in challenging

his existing theology of the Kingdom. Among these were, of course, the liberation theologians, Jürgen Moltmann, the Latin American Theological Fraternity, and the CWME.

Míguez Bonino's reflections on the Kingdom of God are consistently in harmony with his theological method described in chapter three. The questions posed to the Kingdom of God motif emerge from missionary obedience and point towards missionary obedience. In the context of the Kingdom of God the question is posed as how the Christian, in the context of the church, can adjust his or her Christian action in order to bring it in line with God's action in history? Míguez Bonino's reflections, although they do become abstract, emerge from concrete experience and are posed in order to achieve greater effectiveness in mission. After reflecting on the nature of God's action he then reflects on how to become concrete once again. These reflections are not left in idealistic formulations but, through social analysis attempt to make praxiological projections. This has meant that Míguez Bonino has developed a dynamic missionary theology of the Kingdom of God. By emphasising both God's action and human action in a synthetic and creative way, he develops a dynamic theological reflection on the Kingdom. God's action does not negate human action but nor does human action towards the Kingdom of God eclipse God's initiative in the Kingdom. Within this framework, reflection upon the Kingdom of God is a constant task, not only of theological reflection but also missionary obedience. His concept of discernment of the Kingdom of God in obedience makes this explicit.

Míguez Bonino has been consistent in asserting that God's action brings about the coming of the Kingdom. Neither church nor world is definitive in the establishment of the Kingdom. Míguez Bonino has always resisted the temptations of the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies to claim facile identification of the Kingdom of God with human action. He has always attempted to be both concrete and circumspect. This has led to a certain ambiguity in his assertions. It could be claimed that Míguez Bonino's theology of the Kingdom of God is precarious. He recognises both the theological and praxiological dangers of the one history but insists on leaving them in dialectical tension. There will always be the danger of sacralising human action and subsuming God's action into human action, thereby losing the radical call of God to repentance and conversion. Míguez Bonino's conceptualisation of the Kingdom of God and the process through which he works from praxis to praxis via analysis and reflection is useful in lessening the danger of the gospel becoming an ideology but it can still be distorted towards human action or divine intervention depending on the theological tradition of the theologian.

Míguez Bonino's reflections on the Kingdom of God have always taken God's action in Jesus Christ seriously. God's action in bringing about justice in God's Kingdom is centred on the life, death, resurrection and return of Jesus Christ in the Parousia. In order to do this, he does not only refer to the gospels and Old Testament prophets but also to Paul's letters and the Pauline interpretation of the work of Christ. This means, of course, that Míguez Bonino relates the Kingdom of God, so prominent in the synoptic gospels, to the Pauline concept of the New Creation and the Johannine concept of Life. What is implicit in the synoptic gospels, that the event of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ inaugurates the Kingdom of God, is made explicit in the New Creation.

Up to the mid-nineteen sixties Míguez Bonino focussed upon the Church and the Kingdom of God, whereas later in the nineteen sixties, he focussed on the world and the Kingdom of God. The search for a firm biblical and theological basis for the Church's involvement in society naturally focussed upon the church as the main protagonist but during the late nineteen sixties, he began to see a greater role for the world. Theological discussions within ISAL certainly contributed to this change as did the unwillingness of many Protestant Churches in Latin America to accept a role within society. This also reflects the trend in WCC theology that was strongly influenced by the theologies of liberation and in turn stimulated further reflection by those involved in Latin America. The role of the Church in later writings on the Kingdom of God seems to be having a more positive function.

An additional development is Míguez Bonino's concept of the 'historical project,' which he assumed into his theology in the nineteen seventies and eighties. In order to both associate and distinguish God's action and human action towards the Kingdom of God, Míguez Bonino proposes that limited efforts be established. The historical projects are true expressions of the Kingdom of God but are limited; God will bring about the full expression of the Kingdom in the Parousia. These historical projects are both the basis upon which theology's reflection upon the Kingdom starts and also a response to the call to obedience.

The Kingdom of God has been a vital and fruitful motif in Míguez Bonino's search for effectiveness in missionary obedience. It maintains the focus of his theology of God's action but calls for human action in the form of historic projects in order to make God's action in concrete history. Reflection on the Kingdom of God is dynamic for Míguez Bonino. A once for all study on the Kingdom of God, and a subsequent application of the principles drawn out from that study is inadequate. That method sacralises the theologian's interpretation and fossilises the Christian's action. A constant search for effectiveness is the answer. This search, however, must be carried out from within commitment to God's Kingdom; it must reflect upon God's action in biblical history; it must discern God's action in present history; and then must constantly adjust its own praxis to bring it in line with God's action. This process must be critical and continuous.