

5 CONFLICT FOR THE TRUE CHURCH IN THE WORLD: THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF MÍGUEZ BONINO

If there is no faith except as embodied in a concrete historical praxis, we must see ecclesiology *as a conflict for the true Church*, as the confrontation of concrete historical options embraced as the obedience that faith is (1975h:170 *Italics in original*).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter emphasised that the Kingdom of God was God's action in establishing God's rule over nature and history. In search of effectiveness the task of theologians is to reflect theologically on how best to adjust Christian action and witness to God's action in the concrete context in which it is placed. This clearly raises some important ecclesiological issues. What is the relationship of God's action in Jesus Christ to the church in its life and mission? What is the relationship of the church to the world? What effect does the mission of the church have in God's Kingdom? How should God's action in Christ be understood in relation to the church in the world? This chapter describes how Míguez Bonino has understood the church in relation to God and the world and seeks to answer some of these questions.

The most important question in Míguez Bonino's ecclesiology is not so much: where is the church or what are the marks or signs of the true church, but: what is the goal of the Church? This final question may be implicit in the previous questions but his point of departure is the mission of the church, not the nature of the church. The experience and insights of Christians involved in obedient mission is, therefore, the starting point for the way Míguez Bonino has developed his ecclesiology. He examined the new understanding of the church proposed by those Christians involved in obedient mission and assessed the theological articulation of the ecclesiological insights developed. He then attempts to express a new ecclesiological understanding in the light of the theological issues raised and finally proposes ways forward for the church in its self-understanding and mission.

This chapter examines the context of Míguez Bonino's ecclesiological reflection (both ecclesiastical developments in Latin America and the ecclesiological developments in theology) (5.2). It then notes the most important writings by Míguez Bonino on ecclesiology and ecumenism, briefly mentioning the context in which each was written (5.3). From there it will move to a detailed examination of Míguez Bonino's ecclesiological argument (5.4). Finally, it will make some concluding observations (5.5).

5.2 DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

5.2.1 *Ecclesiastical Developments*

The most important ecclesiastical development in Latin America for Míguez Bonino's ecclesiological thought was Christian involvement in social and political work and the subsequent reflection upon that involvement. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants in Latin America have been involved in social, and to some degree, political action throughout their history but it was in the nineteen fifties and sixties that this became an important theological issue. In the mid-nineteen fifties, militant members of Catholic Action started to reflect upon their social activity and the reasons behind the poverty they were discovering. This led them to become critical of the Roman Catholic hierarchy (cf. Coleman 1958:33). Subsequent to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and especially Medellín (1968), they began to reflect in a more theologically consistent way on their action in the light of their faith as well as on the Base Ecclesial Community (BEC) as a movement (cf. Boff, L 1985:131-137; Cook 1985 and Dawson 1998). This new understanding of the church was not generated by theologians but rather by ordinary members of the BECs involved in the process of liberation. Leonardo Boff puts it in the following way: 'A theologian trying to explain this phenomenon must be one who first listens and learns' (Boff, L. 1985:131). It is only then that the theologian begins his or her reflections. Míguez Bonino, in his ecclesiological reflections, has attempted to do just that.

In this regard, the *Movimiento de Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo* (MSTM) is also significant. This group was originally formed in Argentina in 1965, by a group of priests, mainly working in Argentina's *Villa Miserias* or shantytowns. After Vatican II they were asking questions such as 'What is the Church for?' (1975h:50). Inspired by Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967), the movement became radicalised and subsequently made a conscious decision to support Peronism. It was not an option to aid only the Peronist Party but rather to espouse a movement that was supported, in particular, by the most marginalized of the people. The MSTM also consciously espoused a type of socialism that it described as 'national (responding to "the uniqueness of our people"), popular (enabling the people to participate and decide), Latin American, humanist (giving a place to spiritual, cultural and ethical fulfilment of humanity) and critical (allowing for constant renewal)' (1975h:51). It was for much of its history intimately related to the *Montoneros*; a revolutionary group on the far left of the Peronist party (cf. 1975h:157-158). Although Míguez Bonino did not agree with the specific option for Peronism, he did respect and later espouse the need for some sort of political option.

Social action had always been part of Protestant missionary work in this part of the world, but it began to be radicalised in the late nineteen fifties with the formation of ISAL, (1957). ISAL was formed to think through the church's social responsibility in the context of rapid social change. During the nineteen sixties, in both its consultations and its periodical *Cristianismo y Sociedad*, ISAL's approach oscillated between a developmentalist approach and a revolutionary one. It achieved greater consistency when it took up the "sociology of dependence" and opted for a clear socialist and revolutionary programme (1967). The churches rejected this option: 'for groups like ISAL the only way out was to become auxiliaries of the

revolutionary forces and to work principally towards the development of a revolutionary consciousness among popular core groups' (Nuñez 1985:70). From 1970 onwards, however, ISAL redefined its role: to mobilise the church for involvement in socio-political action and thereby achieve more acceptance of this involvement within the church.

ISAL was also instrumental in organising what could be described as the high point of Christian reflection upon political involvement in Latin America: the First Conference of Christians for Socialism (1972) (Aroyo 1973). This was a truly ecumenical gathering of Catholics and Protestants, with both ordained and lay people taking part. This movement defined itself as follows:

Christians who, starting from the process of liberation which our Latin American countries are undergoing and from our concrete and active in engagement in the building of a socialist society, think out our faith and re-examine our attitude of love for the oppressed (1975h:vii). Míguez Bonino was deeply moved by this conference.

A second ecclesiastical development is what Míguez Bonino calls 'the New Oikoumene'. He says that Christianity, and especially Protestantism, is becoming 'increasingly atomized'. The religious field is defined more through social, cultural, psychological and other factors than by nation, family, and traditional relationships (1993d:113-116). The decades of the nineteen sixties to the nineteen nineties saw a dramatic realignment of denominational allegiances. Before the sixties, denominational lines were clearly drawn and often theological battle lines were drawn along them. Those decades changed these traditional understandings. In various writings during these decades Míguez Bonino speaks of the revolution within the ecclesial landscape. Latin America was witnessing what he calls 'a re-grouping of the Christian community' (1974d:103). Although the denominations by no means disappeared, the lines were drawn not between Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists, but between, in Míguez Bonino's terminology, 'charismatic, revolutionary and conservative' Christians. Each of these 'ecclesial families' has a different conception of the church.

The 'charismatic family' is eager to experience a 'common immediacy of the Spirit'. This experience liberates and transforms, and opens up a new sphere of existence. It is marked by joy, freedom and love. The members of this family expect miracles, including speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy. There are the normal signs of solidarity, such as mutual help and care of the needy, but these are not considered as signs of the expected Kingdom, even less are they seen as something to be extended to the whole of society; they are the external radiance of internal spiritual life.¹ Therefore, the Church, 'is the realm where this life becomes available

¹ A later development that took place, related to this ecclesial family that has been important to Míguez Bonino's ecclesiology is the rise of the Pentecostal movement. Míguez Bonino's commitment to a sociological analysis of the church meant that he would inevitably have to take into account the Pentecostal churches. The fact that the vast majority of these churches arose among the poor and marginal sections of society; and the fact of the massive growth of these churches—beginning in the late nineteen fifties and receiving a real spurt of growth during the nineteen-eighties—meant that they had become an important part of the context. From the late nineteen-sixties onwards, there was a growing bibliography analysing the Pentecostal phenomenon in Latin America. This bibliography exploded during the mid to late nineteen-eighties with Latin American sociologists and even some Pentecostals themselves making a contribution. Míguez Bonino uses these sociological analyses in various writings. The insights of the sociologists and the fact of Míguez Bonino's sympathetic outlook on the Pentecostals give a different colour to his ecclesiology during the later years of his ministry.

and consequently the invitation to participate in the fellowship is the most significant form of service. This is what the church is for!' (1974:103-104). For, the 'revolutionary family', on the other hand, the gospel is heard as a call for justice, opposing neo-colonialism and capitalist oppression as well as the dependence in which most of humanity lives. In the concrete situations, faith must answer to the struggle for liberation. The Church is not neutral but needs to be committed to God's liberating purpose. 'To make the right commitment, the option which corresponds to God's liberating purpose at a given time is the call and function of the church' (1974:104). The 'conservative family', as the third ecclesial family, simply claims to be the 'continuing embodiment and depository of the "normative" Christian faith, the "real" church over against sect, group and movement' (1974d:104). The individualism of this family has led to a weak understanding of the church; it is more or less an external help to individual faith, to which Christians commit themselves according to their needs.

This realignment is exacerbated by another problem. The divisions within Latin American society have entered the Protestant churches and have caused deep divisions. There are middle, lower and upper class churches that fight for their own ideologies and not for the good of all (cf. 1981h:12). This 'complex unity' (1984d:257) has had an impact on how the whole area of ecumenical relationships should be conceived. In this context, Míguez Bonino says: 'we are looking for a new conception of unity that attempts to articulate effectively the biblical understanding of unity and the present existence of the church in the context of the total Latin American situation' (1969d:80).

5.2.2 *Ecclesiological developments*

In Latin America, ecclesiological definitions have tended to emerge from Reformation and Counter-Reformation definitions. These are inclined to revolve around the definition of the true and false church. Polemics are common and often vitriolic. Roman Catholic definitions tended to emphasise history, institution and continuity with the past, seeing no validity in ecclesial expressions outside the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church, whereas Protestant definitions based upon preaching, sacraments and discipline, tended to become 'frozen into a static and controllable doctrinal orthodoxy and puritanical moralism' (1975h:155). The twentieth century, however, witnessed great changes in ecclesiological thought. This is as true of the Roman Catholic Church as it is of the Protestant churches.

One of the most important twentieth century events to understand the Roman Catholic view on the nature and mission of the church was the Second Vatican Council. Before the council, its self-understanding was confused and fixed in the static definitions of the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), with its emphasis on the hierarchy, focussed on Papal authority. This does not imply that there were no radical thinkers within the Roman Catholic Church who were questioning those old definitions. French theologians such as Yves Congar, Henri. Godin and Yves Daniel were already challenging previous concepts.

The Second Vatican Council caused a breakthrough in ecclesiological thought. Some of the documents contained new insights. *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, does not describe the church as 'a societal entity on a par with other societal structures like the state' (Bosch 1991:371-372),

but as a sign, sacrament and instrument (LG 1, 9, and 48) of unity with God and with all humanity—a saving unity. Subsequent to the Council, this phrase became widely used. The Encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), is another important document calling the church a sign and a sacrament of the Kingdom of God in its task of preaching (EN 59). It became important in Latin American Catholicism as well. Although, the phrase is not used in the final documents of Medellín (1968), it appears widely in the documents of Puebla (1979). In a section on the truth of the Church, Christ is said to continue the work of evangelising through the church as ‘sacrament of fellowship of humanity in the unique people of God, pilgrim in history’ (2:220). The church is a servant is the: ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ (2:270). It is clear that this phrase changed the idea of Vatican I. The church is not anymore viewed as being gathered around the papacy and the distributor of the means of grace. Nor is the teaching Church considered to be a community of elevated souls, it is transformed into a simple servant pointing the way to salvation. This phrase relativised the church as institution and placed the emphasis upon God’s work in unity and salvation; the church is called to serve that purpose.

The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, also opens up new perspectives. It gives a Christological and Trinitarian dimension to ecumenical relationships. God, in Christ, gives life and unity to the “entire human race”; God creates, within that framework, a community which is made one in Christ; and God provides a focus for ecclesial unity in the hierarchy with its papal head (UR 2). Two reference points for ecumenical relations emerge in this decree: the restoration of the unity of all humanity and unity in the hierarchy. The first reference point was inspirational for Míguez Bonino in his understanding on ecumenism and mission. The second reference point arises in his dialogues with Roman Catholic theologians especially in relation to the existence and theological importance of the Base Ecclesial Communities. Both of these will be expanded later in the chapter.

In Conciliar Protestantism, post-War conferences of the International Missionary Council were important in ecclesiological developments (cf. Bosch 1991:370-371). The formation of the World Council of Churches (1948) and the shift from the church-centred-mission (Tambaram) to a mission-centred-church revealed the incongruence of missionary and church councils existing alongside one another. The IMC at Willingen (1952) gathered together under the title of ‘The Missionary Obligation of the Church;’ it took the argument even further, recognising that: ‘God’s salvific work precedes both church and mission’ (Bosch 1991:370). Neither church nor mission is more important as such; both are subsumed into the *missio Dei*. This later became an all inclusive missiological concept. It is clear that it had drawn upon the Dutch “theology of the Apostolate” (Kraemer, Hoekendijk, et al.) which had emphasised that the church cannot be thought of without mentioning the world into which it is sent (cf. Hoekendijk 1967).

Subsequently, the emphasis on the church was eclipsed in the ecumenical movement by a focus on the Kingdom of God. Various factors were instrumental in this development. These include, the integration of the IMC and WCC (New Delhi: 1961) that structurally united the missionary and ecclesiastical elements in the ecumenical movement; the Mexico meetings of the newly formed Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME; 1963) with its emphasis on the world as the director of the agenda of mission; and the Church and Society meeting in

Geneva (1966), with its harsh criticisms of the church and its emphasis on “humanisation” as the main missionary category. The conclusions of these meetings were taken up by the Second WCC Assembly in Uppsala (1968), shifting the missiological focus from the church to the Kingdom of God and its relationship to the world. This does not mean that ecclesiology ceased to be a central concern in the WCC; it merely implies that the church and its mission were relative in the light of the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is clear that Míguez Bonino’s ecclesiology was influenced by these developments.

Míguez Bonino was a member of the Commission on Faith and Order (FO) for sixteen years (1961-1977). Consequently, he was involved in the many discussions related to the church and its witness in the world, especially the discussions on the issue of the relationship between the unity of the church and the integration of all humanity. At Lund (1952), Faith and Order (FO) recognised the importance of the Christological nature of ecclesiology; ‘As we seek to draw closer to Christ, we come closer to one another’ (Tompkins 1953:15). This subject arose from the third assembly of the WCC in Uppsala and thereafter it was taken up by FO, specifically at the Louvain meeting (1971). Míguez Bonino gave a paper responding to John Meyendorff, the then Chairperson of the Commission on Faith and Order and Professor at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, N.Y. (*Ecumenical Review*, Spring 1972). Between 1967 and 1971, Míguez Bonino had already dealt with this matter several times.

FO’s most notable document on the church in the second half of the twentieth century was *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) (1982). Míguez Bonino was involved in the document as it was proposed, discussed and drafted. This was a massive comparative project that goes back as far as the FO meeting at Lausanne (1927), and was discussed at the meetings in Accra (1974) and Bangalore (1978). Finally it was published in Lima. Although Míguez Bonino presented papers to FO over the years and left in 1977 (cf. 1972b; 1974d), he presented a paper at the Lima meeting (1982q).

David Bosch summarises convergence in Catholic and Protestant understandings of the church in five ways: (1) that the church is missionary by its very nature; (2) that it is a pilgrim people; (3) that it is a sacrament, sign, and instrument; (4) that the world, not the church is the focus of God’s activity; and (5) that the local church is the primary element in the church-in-mission, not the universal church (Bosch 1991:372-378). It will become clear in the course of this chapter, that all these issues are present in the ecclesiology of Míguez Bonino.

5.3 MAIN PUBLICATIONS

During his career, Míguez Bonino has written many articles and chapters and books on the church. The most important of these are divided into those publications treating the issue of ecclesiology in a more or less general way and those writings relating specifically to ecumenism.

Míguez Bonino deals with ecclesiology in the final chapter of *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age* (1975e). He describes and critiques the ecclesiological understanding of Liberation Theology that emerged from the experience of Latin American Christians. This chapter gives a framework for his

understanding of ecclesiology generally and his concerns raised by Liberation Theology specifically. A further publication that deals with the same subject was a paper written for a Roman Catholic conference called to reflect upon the life and ecclesiology of the Base Ecclesial Communities (1983d). Míguez Bonino raises some important ecclesiological issues from a Protestant perspective, challenging Roman Catholic theologians to accept the Base Communities as a valid expression of the Church. These two publications will be extensively used during this chapter along with various other incidental publications (See 1954e; 1960c and 1966i).

Míguez Bonino has written extensively on ecumenism and mission during his career. In 'Christian Unity in Search of Locality' (1969b), he deals with the importance of the locus of visible unity (see also 1974d and 1984d). He explores how the church can concretely understand its unity in the world; where is this unity to be located? This article clearly demonstrates Míguez Bonino's desire to maintain a concrete base to all ecclesiological reflection. The book *Integración humana y unidad cristiana* (1969d), was a result of the Ecumenical Lectures on the Church and its Universal Mission at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, dedicated to Thomas Liggett. It is an examination of the relationship between the search for Christian unity and human integration (cf. 1975j). This publication is a vital document in order to grasp Míguez Bonino's understanding of the link between mission and ecumenism. Other peripheral articles on ecumenism will also be used (cf. 1993d, 2000b and 2000c).

5.4 ECCLESIOLOGY AND MISSION

5.4.1 *Point of Departure*

Míguez Bonino says that the church is: 'a basic fact which underlies all possible action and reflection: the life of the Church is the presupposition for the very existence of a Christian consciousness' (1975h:154). This reflection on the church, however, can only emerge from Christian commitment and specifically: out of Christians' participation in the fight for liberation. All theology is done in the light of the reality of the church and reflection on the church is to be done in the light of commitment to liberation.

Consequently, Míguez Bonino begins his reflections on the church with the experience of those Christians who, involved in social and political activity as Christians, came to reflect upon their work. They considered their involvement to be Christian work not simply work as a good citizen conceived of in secular terms. This brought into sharp focus, what Míguez Bonino calls the 'split of consciousness' (1975h:154; cf. 1977a:184).² This, he says is intrinsic to the situation of the Christian. The Christian's memory, identity and hope have a twofold reference: the human reference and the Christian reference. The Christian's faith confesses the unity of these two references but empirically they are experienced 'as an irreducible duality and tension' (1975h:154-155). More specifically, he says: 'The experience of the popular Christian Communities (BECs) has allowed us to draw attention to the indissoluble unity in this tension' (1983d:169).

² In *Fe en busca de la eficacia*, he uses the word 'fractura', equivalent to the English word 'fracture'. This emphasises the often violent nature of the experience of Christians involved in liberation.

5.4.2 “Ecclesiogenesis”

During the nineteen-sixties, many Christians were searching for a new way of being the church. What they discovered, Leonardo Boff has called an ‘ecclesiogenesis’ (the birth of the church.) He said ‘the true ecclesiogenesis, that is, the genesis of the Church, is born of the faith of the people’ (Boff 1985:131). Some Latin American theologians and foreign missionaries took part in this experiment and through their involvement with the poor, became aware of a different understanding of the “location” of the church.

Common to the new Christian awareness in the continent is the discovery of “the people,” “the poor,” “the oppressed,” the vast masses of marginal population as a fundamental call to the Christian. This experience is not only a sociological discovery. It takes on theological dimensions when seen in the light of Christ’s special and foremost concern for the poor. The people become “a theological *locus*,” the meeting place where Christ himself has promised to be present, the privileged sanctuary and sacrament of his presence (1975h:157-158).

In this context, Míguez Bonino feels forced to ask ‘If the Church is where Christ is, do not the poor become constitutive of the mystery of the Church?’ (1975h:158). This is not Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ‘the church-for-others’, or even Puebla’s ‘the preferential option for the poor’ but rather the fact of the poor as constituting the locus of the true church. Míguez Bonino says the same thing when reflecting on the Base Ecclesial Communities. He calls Jesus Christ the ‘founder, norm and power of the church’ (1983d:170). The church finds its identity in him. ‘The people of God are ‘the “assembly”, the “church” that Jesus Christ founds and unites and in which he is present through the Holy Spirit’ (1983d:168). When the question is posed; what is Jesus Christ’s way of being? The New Testament answers unanimously: his identification with humanity, and especially with the poor.

The consequence is clear: the greater the identification of the church with Jesus Christ, it will be pushed towards identification with the people; the more it is identified with them, the more it is in conditions to reflect the identity of its Lord. The identity drives the church towards identification and identification is the matrix of a true identity (1983d:170).

To take part in Christ’s mission among the poor is to be part of the church. Míguez Bonino argues that a church which does not accept Christ’s identification with the poor seems to have misunderstood its own Christology. The church has made two errors: it has conferred on Christ an identity that is separated and separable from his identification with the poor; and it has also misunderstood the quality and implications of that identification. Christ was not a champion of the people; not a warrior messiah who came to save the people; rather ‘he made himself poor; to bring to birth within humanity the seed of the Kingdom that must grow until its consummation’ (1983d:170). The true church, that is the church that knows its identity in Christ, does not try to get everybody to come to it or absorb the people into its own identity, nor does it try to become the leader of the people, but rather: it incarnates, it structures itself as the community of faith within the people and it pushes forward the search for the Kingdom from that position (cf. 1983d:170). This

is what Míguez Bonino, calls the measure of the ecclesial density of the Base Ecclesial Communities.

Míguez Bonino's reflections upon ecumenism and liberation (1984) focus on Jesus Christ as the centre of church unity, asking: 'Which Jesus Christ, however, are we talking about?' (1984d:258). It is only the Jesus Christ of the Gospel who can gather and unify his Church. This Jesus Christ is presented in the New Testament; his ministry, death and resurrection reveal its aim. Therefore, Míguez Bonino asserts: 'The Church can only understand itself by reference to Jesus Christ, to his message, mission and person' (1984d:259). Unity of faith which does not take into account the fact that faith is indissolubly connected to commitment does not establish true unity. To clarify this he says:

Translated into ecclesiological language, therefore, the issue is that of the "mission" of the Church. Our differences—now specifically the questions of dependence and domination, of racial oppression, of poverty and economic justice, of human and social rights—are not *adiaphora*, issues peripheral to the life of the Church. They touch the very essence of the Church: the God we worship, the Christ we confess, the nature and task of the community of faith (1984d:258).

Mission is at the very centre of Míguez Bonino's definition of the church. Issues such as economic and social dependence and domination, racial oppression, poverty and justice are central to the church's identity and therefore are crucial if the church is to move forward in ecclesiological discussions and ecumenical dialogue.

5.4.3 *Early ecclesiological definitions*

For Míguez Bonino, Christ is always central to the church but he has expressed it in different ways over the years. A brief look at two early definitions will clarify certain aspects of continuity and discontinuity in his thinking.

In 1960, Míguez Bonino wrote an article responding to the use by the Roman Catholic Church of the term 'sect' for the Protestant churches. This was especially acute after the Rio de Janeiro meeting of CELAM (1955). He states:

Christ and his church form an indissoluble unity; it is He who constitutes the Church. It is the presence of the Lord in proclamation by preaching and the sacrament that makes the church what it is. Apart from this relationship we have a religious society, a cultural community, a fraternal fellowship, but not the church (1960c:8).

He then works out various marks of the church in the light of Christ's presence: Ecclesial government is in this way, the organization of the church through which the authority of Jesus Christ is made manifest and expressed in the church; evangelism is the self-proclamation of Jesus Christ through his church; the catholicity is the recognition and the realization in the life of the church of the fullness of Christ. We could continue to analyse the "signs" of the church in Christological perspective (1960c:8; cf. Bonhoeffer 1961:117ff).

For Míguez Bonino, at that time, Christ was the one who brings the church together, whose presence is central to the church. *How* Christ's presence is expressed is fundamentally different from Míguez Bonino's later work. Earlier, his understanding was that the church expresses the presence of Christ in its activities of

preaching and administering the sacraments (cf. Luther and Calvin); later the poor and oppressed emerge as the central elements in ecclesiology.

Later Míguez Bonino uses the incarnation as a model for the church to explain his understanding of the permanent and changeable nature of the church. The Church, like Christ, has a divine and human nature. In Jesus Christ God became human: 'this is not a mere formal fact: God is not present in Jesus Christ in spite of the humanity of Jesus Christ, but rather in that same humanity, in that weakness and because of it. The glory, the power of God, God's divinity, resides precisely in the form of a servant, in its condescension' (1966i:6). This is the same analogically with the church.

God does not work in spite of the humanity of the church, as God does not work in spite of the humanity of Jesus Christ, but rather God works in the humanity of the church and through its humanity. And that humanity does not only embrace those higher aspects, solidarity, sense of community, etc, but all: history, social conditioning, institutional structures, etc. (1966i:6).

The divine nature of the church was the emphasis in Latin American Catholicism and, to some extent, in Protestantism of the time. So Míguez Bonino's emphasis is a corrective to accentuate the humanity of Christ. The Church is part of history, as Christ was part of history. Christ was not unaffected by history, he was a first century Jew and so part of the history of his time. God worked through that historicity in Christ's life, and so it is with the church. The church is divine in the same way as Christ was divine, and in that way is part of history as well (cf. Barth 1967:62-63). Míguez Bonino reflects on the battle for the true church:

The constant combat between the presence of Jesus Christ and the presence of sin in the church, God's fight is to hold back the degeneration so that the nature of the church is not denied. In this sense, there is no other final guarantee than the promise by Jesus to Peter that he will ask that his faith should not fail; only a promise that Christ will ask the Father that his faith should not fail (1966i:10).

The more radical emphasis of later writings is emerging here. The presence of Christ in the church is related to the fact that Christ himself identified with the world. However, at this time, the poor and oppressed have not yet emerged as constitutive of the identity of the church in Christ.

It is clear that early in Míguez Bonino's career his definitions of the church are influenced by Reformation articulations. His emphasis upon preaching and the sacraments as the marks of the true church reveal a traditional 'Reformed' conception on the church. As will become clear, he modified this emphasis during a later period. He also emphasises the Christological centre of the church. It is likely that this Christological Reformation emphasis has been mediated by Barth. Míguez Bonino does not weave his ecclesiology into salvation history in quite the same way as Barth, but rather describes the church as the self-expression of Jesus Christ in the world. Christ's relationship to the church and his activity within the church are examples of the continuity within Míguez Bonino's ecclesiology. However, the form in which Christ's self-expression is articulated is different.

5.4.4 *Theological Articulation of the New Ecclesiology*

Míguez Bonino's insistence that the very nature of the church is to be found in its attitude and action towards the issues of poverty, injustice and oppression and its identification with the poor, leads immediately to some problems related to the struggle for liberation. A member of the base community or any Christian involved in the struggle for liberation is confronted with the problem that there are many people who do not accept Christ, and even are hostile to the church, but are committed to Christ's 'special and foremost concern'. Míguez Bonino therefore states that a Christian can experience 'the reality of love, fellowship, sacrificial commitment, solidarity, and hope within this community in which the name of Jesus Christ is not invoked' (1975h:158) and can raise the question whether this revolutionary fellowship assumes 'a certain "missionary," ecclesial character?' (1975h:158). This suggests that the revolutionary is unconsciously and even unwillingly part of the church.

At the same time, committed Christians are also confronted with the 'ambiguous nature of their community of religious faith' (1975h:158). The struggle for the life of the poor throws into sharp relief the bourgeois and reactionary nature of the hierarchy and certain lay groups in the church. The question is: if the church is gathered around Christ and Christ is committed to the poor, how does the committed Christian understand those people who claim to be committed to Christ but are hostile or indifferent to the poor and their struggle? In other words: are there people who claim to be in the church but are actually not part of it because they are, in this sense, opposing Christ?

The dilemma described by Míguez Bonino here is similar to that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer reflects consciously on the experience of the Confessing Church and how they felt close to non-Christians committed to the opposition to Hitler, and distant from the German Christians who supported Hitler. Reflecting on Mark 9:40 (whoever is not against us is for us) and Matthew 12:30, (whoever is not with me is against me) Bonhoeffer says that these claims belong together. When separated, the exclusive claim of Matthew can lead to 'sectarianism and fanaticism,' and the all-encompassing claim of Mark can lead to 'secularisation and the capitulation of the church' (Bonhoeffer 2005:344). Earlier, in the section, 'Ultimate and Penultimate Things' and basing his remarks on his statement that 'whatever in the fallen world is found to be human and good belongs to the side of Jesus Christ,' he concludes: 'it would be more Christian to claim as Christians precisely such persons who no longer claim to be Christians' (Bonhoeffer 2005:169-170).

As with Bonhoeffer's experience, these two questions open up a new front: the struggle against the Church, which is revealed as part of the system of oppression, maintaining people in dependence and getting them to adopt capitalist individualism as the norm for their lives. This struggle is aimed at the reformation of the church or, more radically, 'the reconstitution of a Christianity in which all forms of organization and expression will be humanized and liberating' (1975h:159). Míguez Bonino says in a different context that 'the ecumenical question is for us the struggle for a reconstitution of the Church' (1974d:105). He experienced this during the nineteen sixties and seventies in the frustration of ISAL with the Protestant

churches. This was even more the case for radicals in both Catholic and Protestant communities who were involved in the 'Christians for Socialism' movement.

Míguez Bonino was beginning to suffer from this tension in the early nineteen sixties:

That which separates the Christian from the world, that which makes the church, church and not the world, and the believer, believer and not unbeliever, is that they have recognised the meaning of that love which does not claim its rights but takes the form of the servant. Paradoxically, that which separates us from the world is what constantly compels us to give ourselves anew, without fears or reservations, to the world, in a total solidarity of love (1961k:110).

The church is that group of people which lives in solidarity with the world and tries to serve the world in solidarity of love. Later the tension becomes acute when Míguez Bonino finds himself together with non-believers, who are committed to the world in 'total solidarity of love' and consequently in conflict with Christians who are apathetic or hostile to the world and to those who commit themselves to the world. These facts, however, cannot be reduced or ignored, but must be integrated into a correct understanding of the church and, more importantly into a correct praxis for the church for the sake of the world.

Since 1955, Míguez Bonino was involved in a small middle class church in Buenos Aires, sometimes as pastor, sometimes as ordinary church member. He does not seem to have been able to resolve this problem at the practical level of his ecclesial involvement.

Míguez Bonino asserts that the doctrine of the church needs to be developed as relating to two poles: faith in Christ and commitment to the poor.

"the poor"—understood in the total socio-political meaning of the concept, and applying a rigorous socio-political analysis—are not merely objects of Christian concern or an external entity to which the Church relates in one way or another, but an integral and structuring part of the mystery of the Church, as much as faith in Jesus Christ. Christ is present in the believer through faith and in the poor according to his promise (1975h:159-160).

The Christological Centre must not be lost, and the marks of the true church must be rethought in terms of the presence of Christ among the poor, not in the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. Therefore,

the Church is not entirely within the Church—as long as the poor who await their liberation do not know the name of Jesus Christ and do not recognize him in his visible Body committed together with them; as long as those who hope in Christ and know his name do not know how to meet him, to name him, and to wait for him in the liberation of the poor. (1975h:160).

For the church it is essential to be a true church. That is only the case when the poor recognise Christ as being on their side in the church. The church must also recognise Christ in the poor. Gustavo Gutiérrez understands this in terms of 'creating a new ecclesial presence' (Gutiérrez 1983:30; cf. pp. 30-35) among the poor. The basic task of the theologians of liberation was to make clear how this fundamental premise is articulated theologically.

The Second Vatican Council was significant in liberation theologians' attempts at this articulation. By speaking of the church as 'the sacrament of the salvation of humanity' (LG 48; AG 1), the Council sought to express the role of the church in relation to the world as one of service rather than as the deposit of salvation. Míguez Bonino explains the understanding of the Council in the following way: 'The Church is the visible manifestation of the history of salvation, the anticipatory presence of that which God intends to consummate for the whole of humankind'. He also says: 'it is the witness of God's saving action in the world, the place in which this universal activity of God—which takes place in all realms of human existence and activity—is manifested and interpreted. In this sense, the Church holds the meaning of human history' (1975h:160). All these statements relativise the role of the church in regard to the world; God's activity is primary. The church is the means through which God's activity is mediated to the world; terms such as 'visible manifestation', 'anticipatory presence', and 'witness' make this clear. God's action is primary and the church is the channel or agency through which God reaches the world.

Míguez Bonino shows that while Latin American theologians make use of this concept, they revise it drastically (Gutiérrez 1988:145-148). They prioritise God's saving action in the world; the church does not hold the meaning of human history, but rather God's mission. Moreover, they revise the ecclesiology theologically because of their experience. They believe that God's mission is the liberation of humanity. The struggle of liberation is pioneered and carried out by revolutionary movements and social classes (i.e. the poor), among whom Christians are a minority; moreover, the churches (both Protestant and Catholic) are usually indifferent and in some cases even hostile to this mission. For this reason the theologies of liberation have reversed Vatican II's concept of the relationship between the church and God's activity in the world: *the secular struggle for the liberation of the poor discloses the meaning of the Church*. This struggle becomes in one sense the true sacrament of God's activity, thus recalling the confessing community to its true meaning and destiny (1975h:162 author's italics).

The church does not hold the meaning of history; the struggle for liberation makes present (is a sacrament) of God's activity in the world. Only when the church joins the struggle of the poor for liberation (i.e. God's mission), it becomes the true church. Gutiérrez calls this the 'uncentering' of the church (Gutiérrez 1988:143).

5.4.5 *Problems of the New Ecclesiology*

Míguez Bonino shares this understanding of the relationship between God's activity, the world and the church but he is aware of serious dangers. One danger is that this new ecclesiology does not provide a theological understanding of the church as it exists in reality. The existential fact is that most of the church is apathetic, or even hostile to the liberation project. Most of the ecclesial structures in the world would have to be excluded from the church if the criteria of the new ecclesiology were to be taken into account. Theology should not speak of the nature of the church in 'ideological' (in the negative sense) terms and ignore the reality.

Míguez Bonino deals with this issue when reflecting upon ecumenism. The church is declared to be one but in reality is not. For the committed Christian to declare the existence of unity when it is lacking is a facile way out of a serious

difficulty. He says: 'If we satisfy ourselves with a formal appeal to transcendent unity or with a latitudinarian pluralism, we are 'healing lightly' the wounds of Christianity. The question of unity is, as we see it, the question of the mission of the Church in the world' (1984d:258). Those who try to declare unity without commitment to God's project of liberation turn this declaration of unity into an ideological smoke screen. When there is a call to unity, Míguez Bonino reacts with suspicion. 'Who calls for unity? With whom? Against whom? On what basis? For what purpose? For whose benefit?' Unity can end up 'a tool of oppression rather than of liberation' (1984d:257). If the concerns of the poor are not seen as clear categories of ecclesiology, unity becomes 'an instrument of domination that leads to both self-deception and to the deception of others' (1985h:228). It is theologically unacceptable simply to ignore the fact that the vast majority of ecclesial institutions are either indifferent or hostile to the liberation struggle of the poor.

Another theological danger is that the identity of the church is blurred. If the church is the community gathered around God's activity in the struggle for liberation, Míguez Bonino asks:

[what] distinguishes the Church *qua* Church of Jesus Christ from any other human group? Can we rest satisfied with a definition of the Church which coincides entirely with certain—real and important—needs formulated from an extra-ecclesiastical viewpoint? What is the meaning for the world of such a Church (except in a purely pragmatic, tactical game)? Is it possible to give to the face of the Church a greater definition without falling back on the imperialistic reflexes which the churches have so profoundly developed? (1975h:163).

Míguez Bonino wants the church to have a clearer definition of the relationship between its own identity and God's purposes for humanity and the world. Lack of clarity not only affects the mission of the church but also the secular struggle for liberation. When God's mission and the cause of Christ, and therefore the Church 'in any missionary understanding of it' is entirely associated with the project for social and political revolution, either Christ and his Church are made superfluous or the political and social revolution is dressed up in religious or quasi religious clothes. Either the Church ceases to exist outside the revolution, or the non-Christian revolutionary is co-opted as an 'anonymous Christian' into a species of holy war.

5.4.6 *Towards a Solution*

Creation and Salvation

Míguez Bonino suggests that the way ahead is to reflect upon the relationship between creation theology and soteriology or, 'the covenant of creation' and the 'covenant of redemption.' He asserts that God created humanity in order that it may grow towards full maturity. Human beings were not created for 'religious' reasons but for wholly 'secular' ones. Christ's work re-launches that creation movement with the same purpose. In creation, humanity has been given responsibility for its environment due to a three-way relationship: to the world; to God; and to humanity's peers. The Christian dispensation, therefore, is understood as God's purpose to restore those relationships and to reinstate humanity in its place as responsible partner in the creation process. Creation, therefore, is the inauguration of

a movement; an invitation and command to humanity to create its own history and culture, to transform the world, to make it its home and to explore the possibilities of human relationships. Sin and salvation are not part of God's original plan, but are 'accidental.' The challenge, for Míguez Bonino, is to understand the church: 'holding fast both to the original, all-encompassing, and final unity of human history and to the particular density of the events gathered around the name of Jesus Christ' (1975h:164).

The ultimate reference point for the Bible, argues Míguez Bonino, is not the church but humanity; not salvation but creation. In *Room to be People* (1979h; cf. 1975c), he argues that God 'created a human family to increase and form a community of work and love' (1979h:16) and invited human beings to be involved in making the world with God; to create a society, and to transform and perfect all creation. When God speaks to humanity in the Bible, God does not speak about divine nature and its attributes but rather about the divine purposes for humanity. God did not say: "Look at the sky and think about me," but rather: "Fill the earth and have dominion over it" (1979h:28). Conservative Evangelicals tend to think about God as the one who looks after God's followers, but Míguez Bonino is convinced that their sort of God is an idol. 'The God of the Bible, on the other hand, is constantly busy in the world, in its course, in the creation of life and its fullness, in justice and truth among people' (1979h:16).

God is not the divine nanny who arranges human life without reference to the life of humanity; God makes human beings partners in relationship through a covenant. In an article written on the subject of John Wesley's understanding of sanctification of Míguez Bonino states:

This relationship, which God wishes and has offered since creation, is "covenant". When God created the human being, a "partner" (minor) was raised up, making God a "partner" (major) with a purpose—which is the content of this partnership. This purpose can be defined in terms of its outward manifestation—the reconstruction of the world—or in its inner a motivating dynamic—the exercise of agape (1988b:22; cf.1983b:252).

This covenant relationship demonstrates the importance of seeing human life from the standpoint of a worker in God's creation. God made human beings to be workers in creation. Humanity's dignity is to be found in the mission 'to subdue and cultivate the world' (1975h:109) as God's partner. Míguez Bonino states this in his reflections upon the covenant of Genesis 9. In the context of violence, God renews the covenant with all humanity and restores humanity as partner in that covenant of life. 'The covenant puts in human hands the most precious treasure of creation, a treasure so precious that not even the just and infallible divine wrath against sin will be cause enough to abrogate the alliance' (1981a:344; cf. 1999f:50-54). Humanity is given the task of the development of human life, of justice and equity, within creation relationships: with God, with the world, and within humanity.

Míguez Bonino also deals with this question when reflecting upon the issue of *Oikoumene* (cf. 1969d and 1975j:151-153). In classical Greek *oikoumene* is the inhabited world. This meant the whole world, but more specifically the world as inhabited by humanity. For the Greeks, and later for the Romans it designated the world shaped by Greek culture and ruled by the Roman Emperor. For Christians, the word became the vehicle to embrace the idea of the whole of God's creation

(Genesis 2.15; Psalm 24.1; Acts 17.26). God wanted *oikoumene* to be inhabited by humanity in love, justice, peace and freedom.

According to Míguez Bonino, sin is the disruption and destruction of the purposes of creation. Humanity, as worker in God's creation, has denied the covenant with God and has used creation and the relationships of creation for its own benefit. Míguez Bonino worked this topic out in terms of oppression of the vulnerable and destruction of creation. Sin as a disruption of God's original harmony becomes part of everyday life. The world seen from the perspective of present human existence is not the harmonious life which God intended for humanity but a distortion of that life. Salvation is the restoration of God's original will for creation. Therefore, 'Jesus Christ does not come to superimpose a different, transcendent or celestial reality on top of the realm of nature and history' (1975h:166), but to restore the human community's ability to fulfil its creational responsibilities.

Christ as the New Human Being and the Creation of the New Humanity

The statement of the previous section that creation has primary significance and that salvation is 'accidental'; does not relativise Christ and his work. For Míguez Bonino, Christ's role in the restoration of humanity is vital in understanding the relationship of the Church to God's universal purposes in the world. The origin of the nature and mission of the church are based in Christ and his work of salvation but also the hope of all humanity, of the whole *oikoumene*. The solution to Míguez Bonino's ecclesiological problem is to be found in Christology.

The backbone of Míguez Bonino's argument is that Christ's work is representative of humanity, not substitutionary for humanity. 'Jesus Christ did not come to substitute for people but rather to open the way for them to realize their human plan [task]' (1979i:20).³ Míguez Bonino explains that being a 'substitute' means to completely and permanently take the place of another in a task. In *Christians and Marxists* he says that the substitute 'replaces and absorbs the person and initiative' (1976c:109) of the substituted. Moreover, to be a representative is to take, temporarily and within certain limits, the place of the other *until* the represented person is able to carry out the task assigned to him or her. The representative 'takes up the temporarily necessary function of doing, on behalf of the represented—a minor, incapacitated, a powerless person or a group - that which he or they cannot do, *in order that they may arrive at the point at which they themselves may do it*' (1976c:109; italics in original). In Christ, therefore, humanity is reinstated into a covenant relationship in which it can grow into full maturity, that is: 'grow into the fullness of creativity, freedom, fellowship which Christ himself displayed and made available' (1976c:109). Consequently, Míguez Bonino says that Christ's freedom before God, his love for humanity, and humanity's power over nature are not ends in themselves, they have 'a truly representational function, in order that and until we ourselves may assume such relationships' (1975h:167). Putting it in traditional terms, Míguez Bonino describes this as the forgiveness of sins; due to God's grace, human beings can take up once again the work committed

³ The original Spanish uses the word, "tarea". This is best translated "task" rather than "plan". The English seems to suggest that humanity has a job to do, apart from the reference to God. To use "task" implies that God's gave humanity a job to do and it must work out how to realize that assignment (1975c:16).

to it in creation. In *Ama y haz lo que quieras*, Míguez Bonino describes this in terms of Christ's life:

In His miracles, His merciful healings, in His teaching, in His unbreakable faithfulness to the poor and unvalued, above all in His giving himself on the cross and triumph over death, He does what the real humanity should do—He does it in representation of humanity, as its defender and advocate (1972a:52).

Christ, the perfect human being, represents distorted humanity in order that it eventually becomes true and perfect humanity.

Christ as the new human being creates the new humanity. Paraphrasing one of his colleagues at ISEDET, Lambert Schuurman, Míguez Bonino says that in Christ people become more human: 'We don't become human beings in order to become Christians; we become Christians in order to become human beings' (1979i:37). He shows how Christ restores humanity both spiritually in its relationship to God and physically as a full human being. He shows how in Matthew's account of the healing of the man let down through the roof, Jesus both forgave the man his sins and cured him of his physical illness. This act is not recounted as two separate acts but as one seamless act of salvation. 'The forgiveness and physical cure are two dimensions of the same healing' (1979i:38). An encounter with Jesus is never the end of the journey; it is rather its starting point. 'What he really did was to take imprisoned people and put them back on course, in the direction of a fuller humanity in regard to their health, integration into the community, vocation—in the final analysis, in the direction of the Kingdom of God, which is the fullness of humanity and of the world' (1979i:38).

The new humanity lives out genuine human existence not under the law but according to humanity's true and original reality. This 'original and authentic reality' has been given to humanity in Jesus Christ. Míguez Bonino describes this as follows: 'the original humanity, the quality of existence for which we were created' (1972a:32). The basic content of life is 'joyful and spontaneous obedience of love that is identified totally with the liberating purpose of the Father and therefore with the needy condition of humanity' (1972a:32). Christ's obedience is a voluntary obedience; this behaviour does not originate from a law imposed upon him from the outside but from his true existence and character, the authentic way of being the Son. Life in the Spirit is governed by a will that trusts in God's purposes. That trust, and not a set of religious traditions, is what the New Testament primarily calls faith.

Jesus Christ is this true human being. This resonates with Bonhoeffer's Christology. 'Humanity becomes human because God became human' (Bonhoeffer 2005:82). Christ became human in order that fallen humanity can regain its pristine humanity in Christ. In Christ, humanity is re-formed as humanity before God (cf. Bonhoeffer 2005:83).

This goes beyond Peter Abelard (1079-1142) and liberal theologians in their understanding of Christ as 'moral example' to humanity. Míguez Bonino sees Christ's death as objectively changing the status and character of the human individual. This seems to be the 'Recapitulation *Christus Victor*' theology of Irenaeus (ca.130-202). 'God recapitulated in himself the ancient formation of man and woman, that he might kill sin, deprive death of its power and vivify humanity' (*Against Heresies* 3.19.1). Christ's victory over sin and suffering is representative,

liberating and transforming. A person is given an example in Christ but is also empowered by Christ to give themselves on behalf of others as Christ did.

People assume the new humanity in Christ by faith. For the apostle Paul, ‘faith is a new *reality* that erupted in our world, a new *situation* in which we have been placed, a new *power* that has been allowed to be seen in its action, a new *form of existence* that has been made available to us’ (1972a:46 Italics in original). This new life goes beyond the infancy of the law and the selfishness of the flesh. It is not simply a continuation or perfection of that which came before but an invasion and interruption: ‘an act of God.’ ‘In this act of God, however, all reality participates and is transformed, not as a mere object, but upon being actively incorporated into a new relationship, in a new situation’ (1972a:47). Faith is a total change of orientation, of direction. The word “conversion” illustrates this. This means that the whole of life is reoriented, not only subjectively but also objectively, because it is placed under the dynamic sovereignty of God.

When discussing John Wesley’s view of conversion, Míguez Bonino puts it a different way. From a phenomenological point of view conversion may be ‘the encounter between the call of the Christian message and personal response’ (1988b:11) but from an ontological point of view it is ‘the process by which God incorporates the human being as active and conscious partner into God’s covenant with humankind, a covenant witnessed to, renewed, and assured in Jesus Christ’ (1988b:11). Humanity, in Christ, is re-made into a creation partner with God. The covenant is not something that simply benefits the Christian; rather it is for the benefit of all humanity. The Christian is not incorporated into the covenant to save him or her from hell but to make him or her partner with God for the transformation of the world.

Míguez Bonino does not expand upon this conversion experience in pneumatological terms. Without this, the converted person that is made a partner in God’s covenant in Jesus Christ lacks a basis for the spirituality that prompts their involvement in the transformation of the world: this can only come from the force of the Spirit in the life of the believer. The new life of Christ which drives a Christian to involvement in God’s mission comes from regeneration carried out by the Holy Spirit not through inner effort. Without this ‘prompting of the Spirit’ the temptation is for the person to enjoy the benefits of Christ’s work without taking on its responsibilities.

A dynamic pneumatological approach also may also help to resolve a problem Míguez Bonino identified earlier in this chapter; that God is on the side of the poor but the vast majority of the church is hostile to the struggle of the poor. Missionary theology must reflect upon the spirituality that transforms both the victim of sin and the middle class church into a protagonist of liberation. Without this pneumatological reflection conversion is robbed of its life force.

It is important to emphasise that the dynamic change of orientation discussed above, extends not only to individual life, but also to the whole of life and the whole of creation. ‘This life in faith is a totally new project, the new creation, that uproots all created things from their emptiness, their slavery, and puts it in harmony with the new human life, that life of the children of God’ (1972a:48). Throughout his letters, Paul relates this to various relationships. Faith is openness to this new reality in Christ and therefore it is the only way into the recreated humanity, to the new creature. ‘The goal of conversion is not just the reception of a

conceptual message or the formal acceptance of a doctrinal formula, but the “creation of a new creature” (1983c:31).

Faith is a common form of community life that embraces every aspect of life. Faith is lived out in community. Although it is an act of God, it is also a human response; it is an ‘interpersonal community relationship’ (1972a:49) with God. This is part of being the new humanity, being part of God’s family. The believer is incorporated into the community of faith and acknowledges God as *Abba*, ‘in the same act, the incorporation to humanity of the faith establishes a direct and immediate relationship with neighbour –“my brother or sister”’ (1972a:49).

The vision of the New Testament—especially in Galatians and Ephesians—is that the racial and cultural barriers caused by sin within the creation, are broken down in Christ. In Christ, there is no longer slave or free—Jesus Christ is Lord of all. This type of life finds its source in God’s own being and work and therefore defines the meaning of unity. The unity of the triune God is not solitary and non-communicative but rather an expression of ‘essentially and ontologically fellowship, co-participation and love’ (1969d:37-38). Fellowship, co-participation and love are the marks of God’s love for Godself within the Trinity and at the same time the model for Christian unity. It is useful to note that Míguez Bonino does not develop this concept of the Trinity until later in his career. It will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

God’s work also bears the mark of this unity. God’s plan, the chosen people, salvation, God’s Word and the Church are characterised by singularity, simplicity, fellowship and love:

The totality of God’s work in our humanity—which is dispersed and divided in its sin—is a unifying work. The great terms that characterise God’s action in the New Testament underline this, from its etymological root, this character: covenant, redemption, reconciliation and conversion (*shub*: to turn around), peace, pacification. Terms such as justice, adoption, fulfilment, sanctification, election, all are closely linked with the idea to unite, reconcile, and restore fellowship (1969d:38).

This unifying will of God is all embracing—including all human beings. Already the Old Testament explains the unifying purpose of God but the New Testament is even clearer. Jesus Christ is: ‘the fulfilment of the Messianic hope and in the apostolic community is the eschatological congregation of promise’ (1969d:39). The letter to the Ephesians puts this in a different way: God will unite all things in Christ, who is the head of the body. ‘In the Church, Jesus Christ has constructed a building in which inhabits a “humanity” in which Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled, have been built into a temple whose fullness He fills out, there has been formed a body in which all people have been incorporated’ (1969d:40).

Christ has made it possible for humanity, once again to take up its role as God’s partner in creation within those relationships that God originally established. Christ did this through the creation of a new humanity that all people can enter through faith in Christ.

So in *Ama y haz lo que quieras* (1972), Míguez Bonino concludes,

The ethical contribution of the gospel to the moral crisis—that of the first century and also of our own—does not consist fundamentally in new principles, institutions or laws as much as in a *new humanity*. What Jesus Christ puts in this world is a new

humanity, and a new form of being human. And this new humanity in Jesus Christ does not last nor penetrate human history primarily through laws and institutions (that without doubt exist and have value) but rather through a message that ceaselessly engenders new life, and through a community of people “reborn” and “resurrected” to a new life, “redeemed” (that is liberated), and renewed (with a new “mind”—a totally, radically changed orientation). (1972a:26-27 *Italics in original*).

The church is this new humanity, it is those who through faith in Christ, are incorporated into the life of Christ, into this new way of being human in order to serve the world in its ethical crisis. This does not come about through laws but through announcing and living out the new life given to it by Christ himself.

Oikoumene, ecumenism and mission

Míguez Bonino has dealt with how Christ’s work in salvation relates to the creation of the new humanity. He now turns to the issue of how that new humanity relates to the world. In doing this he begins to answer his question as to what distinguishes the church *qua* church. In his understanding, if the ‘secular’ struggle for liberation is the ‘true sacrament of God’s activity’ then the church

is only truly the church when it is a witness to God’s saving activity in Jesus Christ, that means when it makes clear that God renewed the authorization, commandment, and liberation to humanity to be human, for humanity to create its own history and culture, to love and to transform the world, to claim and exercise the glorious freedom of the children of God (1975h:167).

The Christian message ‘is a call to accept that freedom;’ not to become superhuman or demigods, ‘but rather to live like human beings in the presence of God, to be lovingly responsible for the world and for other human beings’ (1979i:39). The unique message of Christianity is the certainly scandalous claim ‘that the fullness of this humanity is given in the explicit, faithful, and grateful acknowledgment of Jesus Christ’ (1975h:167). Míguez Bonino concludes: ‘the Church, that is, the fellowship of those who embrace a historical task in the freedom of God’s forgiveness and sanctification, cannot exist except as it concretely celebrates this freedom, reflects on it, and proclaims it’ (1975h:169). Leonardo Boff also views the church in these terms. The church is the community of faith that celebrates its faith and life in *koinonia*, service and ministry (cf. Boff 1992:87-91). Boff emphasises that *koinonia* always overflows into service to others. This celebration, reflection and proclamation must be carried out in the concrete context of this world.

Míguez Bonino relates this issue to the question of ecumenism time and again. He says: ‘we need to restore the relation of “ecumenism” to the “oikoumene”, to relocate it in the ground of the human’ (1982q:115). This is related to God’s ultimate desire for humanity. ‘The prayer, the task and the hope of faith is the common home--the oikoumene--the healthy body, the city of peace which is the goal and meaning of our present communities, families, bodies’ (2002b). Therefore, Míguez Bonino’s ecumenical thought and action must be conceived of in missionary terms.

Míguez Bonino has written both on the relationship between Christian unity and mission and on the concrete issues surrounding visible Christian unity. He

says that, without the former, Christian unity is simply a domestic affair and irrelevant to the world; and, without the latter, ‘the ecumenical movement is doomed to suffocate in an increasingly rarified atmosphere of abstraction’ (1969b:187).

Through faith in Christ, the church is the new humanity in the true human being—Jesus Christ; the creation of an *ekklesia* within the *oikoumene*. The church witnesses to God’s will that all human beings live within the creational relationships in freedom, fellowship and love. It lives out God’s will in its own life, celebrating, reflecting upon, and proclaiming that Christ has opened the way for a return to God’s original universal purpose for humanity. Seen in this light, Christian division is not only a domestic problem, but a tragedy for the world and a betrayal of the God given task. In the division of the church, the basis of human unity has been fragmented and the means of reconciliation is assailed by an internal conflict. This division questions the Christian message itself.

For Míguez Bonino, the search for Christian unity is both an end and a means. It is an end because it is an urgent demand of the faith and an answer to Jesus’ prayer that all believers may be one as He and father are one (John 17). It is a means because it is a ‘way towards human unity to which God has called all humanity; the integration of the whole human family in the “Oikoumene of God”’ (1969d:21).

Four statements can express the theological basis of Míguez Bonino’s understanding of the link between Christian unity and human reconciliation; between the church and world:

- (1) Unity has its origin and effectiveness in the universal will of love of the living God;
- (2) the aim of that unity is the totality, and its dynamic is the reconciliation in Jesus Christ;
- (3) the unity of the Church is ministerial to that human unity in its fullness;
- (4) the full realization of that universal unity is the work of God and has an eschatological projection (1969d:22-23).

The first two statements have already been discussed. How the church is ministerial to human unity is now examined.

Míguez Bonino understands that there have been three ways in which the church has understood its role in regard to the world’s integration; he groups these under the headings: ‘protagonic⁴’, ‘programmatic’, and ‘parabolic’ (1969b:188-191).

The church as protagonist is basically the Constantinian or Christendom model of human integration and Christian unity. It is marked by a wish for uniformity of belief, worship and practice. The unity of the church guarantees and supports the unity of society. Historically it led to institutional centralization, the formation of hierarchical structures, and precise ideological definition. It affected every part of the life of the Church—doctrine, ministry, sacraments, worship. In the decaying Roman Empire it led to the violent suppression of dissent and the forced Christianisation of subject peoples. Integralist Roman Catholicism in Latin America in general and in Argentina in particular reveals this tendency (Klaiber

⁴ It is recognised that there is no adjective for this word in English, the text will maintain the word used by Míguez Bonino for consistency.

1998:66-91). It is a constant danger and a temptation in Latin America for both Catholic and Protestant (cf. 1997a:111 and 145).

The pluralist context of the world and the gospel cannot accept an externally imposed centre of human integration. Christendom has come to an end. Since the Enlightenment diverse ideologies, religions and politics come to the fore. The church is not anymore the centre of human unity in the Western world; the vast majority of humanity in the West does not anymore accept the lordship of Christ and is even hostile to the Church.

Another way in which the relationship between Christian unity and human reconciliation and integration can be conceived is 'programmatic'. The argument is that the values, goals and institutions of Western Catholic and Latin American society have been shaped by the Christian faith. Therefore, this society can achieve unity, reconciliation and integrity through a programme motivated by the church. 'The unity of the church, therefore, is indispensable in order to enable it to provide society with a unified programme and outlook for its integration' (1969b:189). This is often propounded by Latin American politicians in order to unify the people around a single principle, whether that is the dignity of the individual, the integrity of the family or the solidarity with the poor. The Protestant church in Latin America has not broken away from this understanding either. The growth of Protestant Christian political parties in Latin America is an expression of this notion. The basic concept has clear similarities with the above mentioned understanding of the church as protagonist in human unity.

The final way proposed by Míguez Bonino is to understand the unity of the church as 'parabolic' in relation to human unity. In this view, the church points beyond itself to the ultimate horizon: the Kingdom of God. Neither Christian unity nor human integration is the ultimate goal but rather God's action in Christ to establish God's Kingdom.

It is only through this eschatological reference of Christian unity that it can be brought legitimately to bear on the problem of human integration. But it is precisely this eschatological reference that liberates Christian unity from mere subservience to human patterns of integration and makes it possible to explore the disruptive as well as the integrative function of Christian unity with regard to social integration (1969b:190).

The church does not only seek integration in human relationships by being, in its own life an example of an 'integrative' force but also through its challenge of the social system via its 'disruptive,' prophetic voice.

At a time that Christianity was being charged with being a force of disintegration and dissolution in the Roman Empire, the *Epistle to Diognetus* was published. It describes how Christians live, dress, act and are under the same laws as the whole of society. By their special mode of being they integrate society. As the soul is to the body, so the Christians are to society by means of their individual and corporate lives. Church unity is parabolic: there is no 'straight line' (1969b:190) between Christian unity and human integration. It is also parabolic because the church serves society by being a model of unity. There is no way of transposition of structure or of allegory of programme; the world must exegete its own unity from the church's unity. The church witnesses to the fact that Christ destroyed the barriers that separate humanity is done by it being a parable of human unity.

Míguez Bonino suggests various ways in which the church serves as a parable of unity in society. It is an open channel of communication in a world of broken relationships. It refuses to recognise definitive divisions in the world; it does not serve any party within the world (north or south, east or west). It is not for some people and against other people but with God for all. It is an open community where a person does not have to justify him or herself in order to be heard because all have been justified in Christ. Communication, even between natural enemies, is made possible in Jesus Christ. When the church takes the message of Jesus Christ seriously, it is an agent for openness and genuine human dialogue. Leonardo Boff expresses it in the following way: 'there can be real communion only when the members of a community regard one another as equals' (Boff 1992:89). Jürgen Moltmann explains the same concept in terms of 'open friendship' that leads to mutual acceptance (Moltmann 1978b:60-63).

The church is also a parable of human unity because it functions as a voluntary community. The church makes a call to unity rather than arbitrarily imposing it. The members of the church respond in: 'free personal consent, in a human encounter that is projected onto a network of relationships and external structures' (1969d:29). The church is not uniformity, but unity in diversity; it is a group of people who without coercion or compulsion choose to be unified, not in spite of but because of their diversity.

In this way the church can be a paradigm in regard to the issue of globalisation, which became important to Míguez Bonino in the late nineteen nineties. Ecumenism, with its emphasis on unity must be clearly differentiated from globalisation with its tendency to homogenise. Globalisation puts 'everybody and everything into a single bag' but ecumenism builds 'a common home which all build together and each one participates keeping his or her identity' (2002b). In regard to ecumenism, unity does not presuppose uniformity, just as diversity does not presuppose division.

Finally, Christian unity is a paradigm of the way that has been opened by Christ, the way to the human integration in a divided world. The church, in all its diversity, is a model to the world. Through patient discussion, confession of sin and free and honest appeal for forgiveness, continuous self-examination and the effort to understand others, the church seeks to show that Christ opened the way.

Consequently, the church does not try to impose unity but 'simply offers itself, in its own search for interior community, as a servant of humanity (1969d:30). Or to put it another way: the church's role is 'to offer in humility and simplicity, illustrations, partial and precarious but significant realizations—small signs—of what unity in Christ means' (1969d:80).

Intensive and Extensive Forms of Fellowship

In Míguez Bonino's constant search for concrete effectiveness in theology, he faces the difficult problem of how the church concretely can offer 'a service, a paradigm and a method of integration of the human community' (1969d:31). Using concepts first proposed by the Swedish-American theologian Nels F.S. Ferré (1908-1971), Míguez Bonino suggests articulating the relationship between the church's unity and the world in terms of 'extensive and intensive forms of fellowship' (Ferré 1940:59ff). He explains the extensive modes of fellowship as the resources and tools

of human co-existence: economic, social and political relationships within society. This corresponds to what Míguez Bonino later calls the total human reference. The latter are the “spiritual fellowship” upon which the former are based: the Christ reference. Ferré goes as far as to say that intensive forms of fellowship are essential because without them, ‘the extensive forms of fellowship can only be thinly good’ (Ferré, 1940:64). Míguez Bonino puts it in a slightly different way: ‘The Christian contribution to human integration consists in exploring and realizing the type of intensive fellowship that corresponds to the Church of Jesus Christ’ (1969d:32). The church cannot, and should not, try to be the centre of extensive modes of fellowship because that would be a return to the protagonic model of Christendom.

Míguez Bonino states that intensive fellowship (*koinonia*) is based upon love (*agape*); love within the church and, more importantly, love for the whole world. The Christian is part of the new humanity, a “new race” or “new genus of life”. Through faith in Christ, the Christian is enabled to live this strange way of life. The Christian is not separated from society but rather committed to others in love and open to neighbours. The first Christians were an example of this attitude. They went way beyond what the law required. When they suffered persecution they showed love; when they were in poverty, they were generous; when they were accused falsely, they blessed their accusers; when they were punished, they did good to others; and when they were injured, they honoured those who injured them. With this strange way of living the Christians enhanced the health and unity of society (cf. *Epistle to Diognetus*). Christians live out their lives in fellowship with other Christians and in service to those outside the church. So the church lives out intensive fellowship as a model and promotes extensive fellowship through its service to the world.

This fact means a double reference of fellowship for Christians—relation to God and relation to all people. The former is not primary and the latter secondary. ‘They are two inseparable and uncompromising dimensions of the same and unique reality’ (1969d:42). To be united with Christ *is* to be united with other Christians. One cannot exist without the other. It is also important to note that it ‘has to do with personal relationships not magical transmutations or the substitution or annihilation of the person’ (1969d:43). In the New Testament, these personal relationships are expressed in concrete action.

Christian fellowship is not a “spiritual” abstract unity but rather an active and concrete co-participation in the thousands of tasks, sufferings, prayers, and hopes that are included in the pathway that the Church is called to follow in the pilgrimage through history towards the Day of the Lord (1969d:43).

The New Testament expresses this fellowship of being and existence sometimes as a description, but other times as an exhortation to have “the same mind”, “the same attitude”, “the same opinion”, etc. This does not suppose homogeneity of thought, action and attitude. Any reading of the New Testament reveals a variety of practices and even theologies. There is not a call to a homogenous “healthy doctrine”⁵. Paul, in Romans 14, appeals to the Church to accept one another in spite of different

⁵ *Sana doctrina* or *Recta Doctrina* are phrases used in the Evangelical Churches in Latin America to indicate that theology which is acceptable. It has often been used both as a blunt instrument to threaten and also as a popular, ironic description of narrow mindedness.

attitudes and practices. 'The unity in Christ does not suppress these differences but integrates them into the new humanity, where they find their true meaning in mutual submission and mutual service in love' (1969d:48). This is the new humanity of acceptance and love of one another within the diversity that is the mark of all humanity (but without divisions).

Consequently, the new humanity can only find its true expression in the local congregation, not in hierarchical structures or in mega-churches. It is the local community of believers which can express this intensive fellowship as a parable to the world. In the church as hierarchy or as a pastor-centric business, religious power is experienced as the reproduction of divine power. In the congregation the Spirit is central: God is experienced as love and the individual is known and accepted and accepts the other as a 'brother or sister' in Christ. The daily life of the congregation becomes more important than the religious Sunday service.

In a society that conserves the supremacy of class and privileges through the division of labour and specialization, only the church can represent the hope in a future more human as in the charismatic congregation...the congregation is that place in which the people become subjects of their own history with God; they go beyond the religious passivity of the individual which collaborates with political oppression (1977g:8).

In this way the congregation can fundamentally identify with the people and therefore become a catalyst of fundamental renewal within society because the new creature creates new initiatives from within the congregation.

The church's so-called "religious", mystic, arcane traditions and practices are only meaningful if they are related to 'concrete creational practices.' Prayer, singing, confession, saying the creed are only truly significant when they relate to God's original plan for humanity to live in harmony with God, with each other, and with the whole of creation. In *Ama y haz* this is explained in even more radical terms: 'the only legitimate service to God is that of neighbour. God is not interested in the cultic practice but rather justice; the love of neighbour is the best prayer; service of the poor is fellowship, thus these are sacraments of the presence of Christ' (1972a:118). Involvement in the liberation of the poor is love for God. 'The Bible, prayer, the waters of baptism, the bread and wine, brotherly fellowship—these are visible signs of the covenant' (1972a:119). Therefore, intensive fellowship only has meaning as it is relevant to the promotion of extensive fellowship.

In this way, the Church becomes the medium through which the fullness of Christ expands to all and at the same time the place where this fullness is manifested: it is the illustration of the universal purpose of God, the sign of that fullness that will be achieved when God is all in all. The unity of the Church is not, therefore, accidental or secondary to its own being but rather the sign of that being. The hope and love of those in which that unity is expressed are the sign of the presence of the Lord in the Church; and the manifestations of unity—baptism, ministry and communion—find their meaning in relation to that person that give existence and unity of the Church (1969d:40-41).

From a Theology of the Church to a Sociology of the Church

David Bosch rightly points out that ‘the church is a theological and a sociological entity’ (Bosch 1991:389). Míguez Bonino seeks to understand Christian unity sociologically as well as theologically. He is convinced that the church and its theologians must use both doctrinal or ideological language (using *ideological* without pejorative meaning) and historical or sociological language to articulate how the church relates to the world. The doctrinal language is the universal declaration of unity theologically conceived. It inspires and urges the will towards unity. In this way, it acts in the same manner as the concept of utopia described in the previous chapter. At the same time, it must use “historical” or sociological language. This “historical language” is used to describe ‘the conditions of unity and conflict as they appear empirically and to describe the human actions related to them’ (1982r:122). It includes issues such as class conflict, economic, social and political oppression and the arguments which support ‘newness’. In other words: Míguez Bonino believes that the quality and texture of Christian unity must be analysed socio-theologically; to make it ‘a scientific instrument which makes it possible to unmask the insufficiency of an analysis of Christian unity that has been confined to the elements relevant to a “macro-sociological”, natural enough when the church is assimilated to civil society, but utterly unable to get at the depth of the unity of fellowship’ (1969b:193).

Basing his reflections upon Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Sanctorium Communio* (Bonhoeffer 1998). Míguez Bonino makes several comments in this regard. Sociality is part of human life. The human being cannot be understood without reference to the relationships in which that person is found. Bonhoeffer calls this ‘social basic-relation’ (Bonhoeffer 1998:34ff). In theological terms this means relationship to God and to other human beings. The relationships to other human beings can be studied and therefore sociology becomes a primary tool in understanding Christian and human unity. Reality also needs to be investigated from the standpoint of ‘the fall’: human relationships are corrupted and corrupting; Christians live in the ‘peccatorum communio’ (Bonhoeffer 1998:118). This caused and causes disruption into human sociality. Míguez Bonino describes it as ‘institutional objectification, despotic power, division, pride, juridical objectification of human relationships and depersonalisation, are forms—among others of this corruption’ (1969d:50). These phenomena are concrete realities of daily life and, therefore, can also be studied sociologically. Further, redemption is the restoration of the original human existence, putting humanity in correct relationship to God and to other human beings. What sociology observes can be changed for the better. At this point theology and sociology can interact. Moreover, ‘this New Creation was realised and represented in Jesus Christ: he is the new Adam—singularly and socially humanity’ (1969d:51; cf. Bonhoeffer 1998:134-141). In spite of this, the new humanity lives out its existence in the old world of sin and corruption. The purpose and power of change is Jesus Christ whose life was lived out in a corrupted world. And finally, ‘the Church must be the Church under the diverse conditions of human sociality: we expect to find in the Church institution, community and society’ (1969d:5s; cf. Bonhoeffer 1998:252ff). At the same time Church reveals the problem of all society: law, power, pressure groups, tension; and the threat of depersonalisation, as well as the means to overcome these sins and corruptions and

hopefully, the signs of the new creation of love and fellowship. Míguez Bonino puts it in the following way:

These signs are characterised by a double dynamic: on one hand they always seek its manifestation in the conditions and empirical concrete forms and on the other hand they press for the dissolution of these conditions for the realisation of a total and spontaneous sociality and the open contriteness that correspond to the original and authentic structure of humanity (1969d:52).

This, once again echoes his statements about the role of the intensive forms of fellowship of the church and their relationship to the extensive forms of fellowship of the world.

In this light, theology has various tasks. Primarily, it must search for the common centre in Christ: 'the unity of the New Creation' (1969d:53). This implies a constant redefinition of unity in all its fullness, in the light of Jesus Christ and his creation of the new humanity. Furthermore, it must take part in 'a sober analysis of the concrete conditions of human existence in the context of our historical and sociological situation' (1969d:53; cf. chapter three of this work). To understand how Christian unity relates to human integration, theology must understand how humanity relates socially. Finally, theology must determine 'the concrete forms of human mutuality in which fellowship in Jesus Christ is best articulated in terms of the analysis that we have done' (1969d:53-54). This theological task has a double framework: a universal one and Christian one. It is related to the internal and external modes of fellowship in the church. Theology examines primarily how the Christian community directly supports and develops human integration in society, how the church's service contributes to the formation, development and maintenance of extensive forms of fellowship. The church is not called to be the central protagonist of the unity in the context in which it finds itself, but rather called, along with others, to work for the destruction of the sinful structures that promote disunity, inequality and injustice, and to support and develop the creation of a society where sociality corresponds to 'original and authentic' human structures, purposed by God in creation.

Additionally theology investigates how it can aid integration through the development of 'forms of mutuality (of living together and cooperation) of the Christian community that best permit this, in the context of a given situation, how it fulfils its mission of being paradigm, instrument, and vehicle of human integration' (1969d:54). In regard to this internal mode of fellowship, the church need to seek to display the unity it has in Christ within the world as it is. The way the church is manifested in the world depends upon the way division and unity is manifested in the world around it. The expression of Christian unity in one context will not always be the same in another context. The church is not called to withdraw from the world but to use the cultural forms of expression of unity which are available at that place. In this way, the church is able to serve the world via its own internal life.

5.4.8 *Pastoral and Missionary Consequences*

The consequences of seeing the church in this way are far reaching. It has consequences in regard to the ecumenical question. Ecumenism cannot only be the search for unity in doctrine and structure but the search for unity in truth and action.

‘If there is no faith except as embodied in a concrete historical praxis, we must see ecclesiology *as a conflict for the true Church*, as the confrontation of concrete historical options embraced as the obedience that faith is’ (1975h:170). To be part of the church is to participate in the struggle for ‘true, faithful, historical obedience.’ From what has been said previously it is clear that the conflict *for* the church becomes a conflict *with* the church. How church unity is conceived is brought into question (cf. 1985h:227-230). In this context, Míguez Bonino sees the discussion of church unity as an endeavour that deals with both drawing together and taking apart, gathering and separating. He boldly declares that ‘whoever does not understand the problem of Christian ecumenism in the perspective of this panorama of ‘encounter and conflict’ of humanity in our time, will have a much reduced vision of the faith and of the unity that God wants’ (1975j:155). Those who reject the relationship between Christian unity and human integration are, therefore, treating the whole ecumenical problem as purely doctrinal, structural, creedal, and governmental. ‘This formal unity, however, has very little to do with the Christian concept of unity that is fundamentally “fellowship”, a *quality of human existence* characterized by mutual giving, service, solidarity, unity of purpose, active and concrete co-participation of task, responsibilities and historical mission of faith’ (1975j:157; cf. comments re FO in 1997a:131; italics in original). Doctrinal, structural, creedal, and governmental unity is nothing more than ‘pacification.’ The church has often taken part in this sort of ecumenism, fulfilling Marx’s view that religion is the opiate of the people. Jesus loved both Zaccheaus and the rich young ruler, but had true fellowship with the first, but not with the second. ‘A true ecumenism cannot, for us, take form except in the struggle for a true oikoumene. And in turn, the struggle for a true oikoumene (for a human habitation for the whole human family) includes the struggle for a true ecumenism, for a Christianity truly and in reality lived at the level of the whole Christian family’ (1982r:115-124). Ecumenism means conflict: conflict against sin and for true unity.

Only when Christians take responsibility for proclaiming the totality of the message of Christ, with all its consequences for humanity and society, to do it concretely in its world—in this world of hunger and underdevelopment, of exploitation and violence—and to invite its own Christian people to work bravely in the world to the service of that message, only then will the true lines of conflict and tolerance be perceived (1975j:163).

In other words: ‘The true quest for unity is not therefore to be found in the negotiations of ecclesiastical bodies—which are only a field, not the real contenders— but in this conflict and encounter which takes place within and across them’ (1975h:170).

Míguez Bonino becomes most concrete in this regard. For him, it is necessary to find means by which mutual knowledge and frequent contact among Christians can be established (cf. 1969d:92). It implies the organisation of opportunities for personal contact between both leaders and laity and eventually the finding of economic and organizational resources to facilitate this contact. Studies need to be carried out by separate ecclesiastical groups but also together in mutual consultation. Consultation and study cannot be ends in themselves; they need to lead to cooperation and celebration of the Eucharist together. The latter has been a

sticking point between Roman Catholics and Protestants but also between some Protestant groups in Latin America.

In *Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (1976b), Míguez Bonino reflects on the ‘promise and limits’ of Christian ‘ecumenical’ cooperation with non-Christians (1976b:118-132). He observes the fact that both Christians and Marxists already cooperate together in Latin America in the revolutionary struggle. Although there are significant differences, both groups agree on many points of theory and philosophy. Each has considerable contributions to make, both to the revolution but also to each group’s conceptualisation of that struggle.

Míguez Bonino’s understanding of the church also has consequences for the relationship of the Christian to both the church and the world. This is connected with the tension created by the total human and specific Christ reference discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It seems that the stronger the commitment to the total human reference, (i.e. to humanity and the liberation of the oppressed), the weaker the Christ reference becomes. Or the other way around: the stronger the specific Christ reference, the weaker the commitment to the world becomes. Christians tend to experience life as a tension between the importance of their historical human option that has the tendency to become self-contained and unconditional, and their Christian reference which threatens to become ‘religious’ and unconnected to their historical option—an opiate. This tension is seen on the corporate and church level as well as on the individual level. Míguez Bonino proposes that this tension can be handled by looking at the Christian’s and the Church’s tension separately in the creation—salvation framework mentioned above. On the corporate level the explicit reference point is the specific Christ reference. This is the area of confession, worship and proclamation. Historical praxis is implicit but not forgotten. Even the church, at this level, must make historical options because it is ‘a community of faith in decision’ (1975h:171). However, the primary way in which it serves the world is through its ‘intensive mode of fellowship,’ through its internal life. The church can never lose its universal projection; it serves that universal projection via being a parable, and not being a protagonist of human integration. The total human reference is implicitly served.

At the personal and individual level the governing reference is the human or ‘creational’ one. In this sense the Christian reference is for the most part implicit. The Christian does not cease to be part of church life; he or she doesn’t cease to witness, or to participate in the church community. However, his or her main reference is to be part of the Christian *diaspora* in the world; to be the salt of the earth. As a member of the church, the Christian serves the world indirectly; but as an individual he or she knows and experiences that the total human reference is primary and religion is secondary. The decisions which Christians make are made in reference to the Christian’s faith, recognising that the locus of action is the world. The Christian as an individual serves directly the extensive mode of fellowship.

Finally Míguez Bonino’s ecclesiology has consequences for the whole way the church conceives of ‘ecclesiality.’ He puts it in the following way:

If the Church is in fact that which happens in the struggle for the true faith-obedience which takes place within the “field” of the formal explicit confession of Jesus Christ, should we not recognize that “Church” is an analogical term covering a number of different instances? (1975h:172).

Or putting it in another way: “ecclesiality” is the sphere in which testimony to the liberating action of God in Christ is made explicit in the world’ (1983d:171). The church is broader than the local congregation or the ecclesiastical structure; it can be found in many “condensations” in the fight to confess Jesus Christ concretely in history. These ecclesial expressions

belong within this struggle and therefore are in their own right “churchly” as much as any national, denominational, or local Church. In fact, it is only as Christians seek together—in a common historical commitment celebrated in praise and confession—the obedience that faith is, does the face of Jesus Christ acquire identifiable features in a given time (1975h:173).

Theology needs to think through a new characterization of the church, a parallel revision to the revision of the idea of unity. Unity should be considered as ‘a reality that is manifested in different ways and assumes different characteristics in several planes and environments’ (1969d:84). The search for unity should be concentrated in the ‘determination of the places and circumstances’ (1969d:85). There is not one place where unity is centralized but rather many ‘localities’. The issue finally becomes a question as to how each of these ‘localities’ are integrated into the mission of the Church? ‘How do they fit in critically and positively into the contemporary local situation? How do they illustrate, manifest and communicate the power of the Gospel? How open are they to the participation, critique and service of other Christians and to all people’ (1969d:88). This requires constant open and critical dialogue and theological reflection.

These questions also must touch on the effectiveness of the ‘ecclesial condensations.’ Míguez Bonino says: ‘by effectiveness we understand the search for adequate structures of organization, of action; the determination of relevant methods; and evaluation in terms of the appropriate productivity in the area of the initiative’ (1969d:90). And he warns of

the tendency to detach an action from its results as to introduce criteria of success that are far away from the nature of Christian action. The secret of a Christian understanding of action seems to me to reside in the establishment of the relationship between action and result that corresponds to revelation and redemption—and this not only in general but also in the diverse type of action (1969d:90).

Seen in this light, the existence of such ecclesial ‘condensations’ is essential to theological reflection upon the church. Without these groups, theology returns to static conceptions of the church and ideologically conditioned definitions of its mission. That is to say, the mission of committed Christian groups is both the starting point and aim of Míguez Bonino’s ecclesiology.

5.5 FINAL OBSERVATIONS

This final section will summarise Míguez Bonino’s ecclesiology; highlight some more important influences on his ecclesiology and analyse how Míguez Bonino tried to resolve the God—Church—World and God—World—Church debate. The point

of departure for Míguez Bonino's ecclesiology is the experience of radical Christians taking part in the liberation project of the nineteen sixties and seventies. They discerned that the church is the community gathered around Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is to be found among the poor. God's action is not located within the church but in the poor's struggle for freedom, in the revolution. Two dangers arise from this articulation: the Church ceases to exist outside the revolution, and the non-Christian revolutionary is co-opted as an 'anonymous Christian' into a species of holy war.

Míguez Bonino proposes that the solution can be found in the Church's relationship with Christ and Christ's relationship with God's original purposes for humanity. Christ's death and resurrection are not viewed as the salvation of individuals from individual sin for an a-historical future but rather the re-launching of the original divine project for humanity. Christ is the new human being who is the representative of that new humanity, not only giving an example to it but also empowering it to live as a representative of the world. The church therefore, is called to witness in its life and preaching to the possibility of the unity of all humanity in Christ. The church is *ekklesia* within *oikoumene*.

Theology examines how the church can directly support and develop human integration in society and how it can indirectly aid societal integration in through the development of 'forms of mutuality (of living together and cooperation) of the Christian community'. On the one hand, the lives of individual Christians should be focussed upon service to the world not upon the internal fellowship of the church. They work toward the establishment of justice, for human life and liberation; this is their spiritual service. The life of the church, on the other hand, is focussed upon its own internal fellowship as a model to the world. This does not mean that it avoids direct action in the world but its primary focus is internal.

The influences on Míguez Bonino's ecclesiology are, by definition multiple. His experience of church life in Rosario as well as the liberal theology of many of his professors was clearly an early influence on him. Reformed theology quickly made an impression on his understanding of ecclesial definitions, which he felt he had to deal with theologically. Vatican II was a watershed in Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Míguez Bonino's attendance at the Council and his association with the liberation theologians, meant that all his subsequent ecclesiological reflections were in part a reaction to Vatican II.

Although Míguez Bonino never uses the term 'missionary ecclesiology,' it is clear that this is how his understanding of the church can be expressed. Jan A.B. Jongeneel, in his description of missionary ecclesiology, states that classic missionary ecclesiology emphasises the order God – church – world. God's action in the world is mediated through the church. It 'emphasises the primacy of the church in mission but runs into the danger of making the church seem to have a monopoly of salvation' (Jongeneel 1995:92). The modern model, on the other hand, emphasises the order God – world – church. God's action is seen directly in the world without being mediated by the church. This model 'emphasises God's plan for the salvation of the whole universe but is open to the danger of relativising the role of the church' (Jongeneel 1995:92). David J. Bosch describes the tension between the varying ecclesiologies in a different but complementary way.

At one end of the spectrum, the church perceives itself to be the sole bearer of a message of the salvation on which it has a monopoly; at the other end, the church

views itself, at most as an illustration—in word and deed—of God’s involvement with the world. Where one chooses the first model, the church is seen as a partial realisation of God’s reign on earth, and mission as that activity through which individual converts are transferred from eternal death to life. Where one opts for the alternative perception, the church is, at best, only a pointer to the way God acts in respect to the world, and mission is viewed as a contribution towards the humanisation of society—a process in which the church may perhaps be involved in the role of consciousness raiser (Bosch 1991:381).

These two authors highlight a significant problem that Míguez Bonino endeavoured to confront in his ecclesiology. He attempted to maintain a dialectical understanding of the relationship between God; the church and the world by articulating a missionary ecclesiology that emphasises the priority of God’s mission in the world (the establishment of God’s Kingdom), but at the same time, highlighting the fundamental role of the church in that mission. He attempted to work out this approach in regard both to the issue of liberation and ecumenism, in the light of his theological methodology and its commitment to a praxis driven hermeneutic.

Míguez Bonino believes that God works directly in the world to re-establish the Kingdom of God; the church is not the exclusive mediator of God’s mission, it does not fill the whole horizon of ecclesiology but rather points the way towards the true horizon: the Kingdom of God. However, he does not want to see the church’s role completely relativised. The church is more than just a signpost towards the Kingdom of God. The church is seen in the same relationship to the world as Christ is to the church. Christ represents the new humanity until it can assume the role that he took and the church does the same thing for the world. Christ primarily works in the world, establishing the divine Kingdom. The church’s role is to represent the world giving both a model to the world and enabling the world to become what God originally meant the world to be.

Using Nels Ferré’s concept of intensive and extensive forms of fellowship, he states that the life of the church serves as a model of the quality of fellowship desired by God for the world. The extensive forms of fellowship of the world, however, serve the church as a model of the structure of the intensive forms of fellowship its own life. The church looks to the world as a model of the cultural forms of relating. The world looks to the life of the church as a model of the quality of those human relationships. Therefore, the quality of the church’s intensive forms of fellowship are not inward looking but lead to its members militating for the establishment of qualitative extensive forms of fellowship in the world.

Therefore, Míguez Bonino’s view of the church does not fall back onto either the God-Church-World or the God-World-Church model of ecclesiology. God acts both in the church and the world; God’s action is primary. However, God’s work in the world is done in the context of the life, witness and militancy of the church and God’s work in the church is on behalf of the world. Therefore, the Church must respond to the world’s agenda, because it is in that arena that it finds its true identity. Commitment to the world is commitment to God and to God’s mission.