

7 CONCLUSIONS: THE RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGE OF THE MISSIONARY THEOLOGY OF MÍGUEZ BONINO

Mission is the privilege and responsibility of the whole people of God, mission is the “ecumenical” responsibility of the whole people of God, mission is the announcement and the making present of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of *shalom*, of *tsedaqah*, of *hesed*—by the whole people of God (2004b:431 Italics in original).

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter will explore the relevance and challenge of the missionary theology of Míguez Bonino in two directions: in terms of the context of the mission of the global Church and in terms of the development of the Latin American missionary movement.

7.2 THE GLOBAL CHURCH-IN-MISSION

Chapter one noted how mission and missiology were searching for a new self identity. The relevance and challenge of the missionary theology of Míguez Bonino is considered here in the context of the mission of the global Church in the contemporary world. ‘Mission’ is not to be understood as simply international or intercultural mission but rather the Church-in-mission, in six continents.

In a paper written for the Iguassu Dialogue held in Brazil (1999), the Peruvian Evangelical theologian, Samuel Escobar reflected upon the state of world mission at the beginning of the Twenty-first century. He mentioned eleven areas for reflection: the translatable gospel, the global Church, the new balance within world Christianity, globalisation and contextualisation, world poverty and injustice, the end of Christendom, the post-modern culture, a new religiosity, the growth of fundamentalisms, the Pentecostal phenomenon and the rediscovery of Biblical patterns for mission (Escobar 2000:25-46). These eleven topics can be grouped into four main areas. This section will use Escobar’s reflections as a framework and reflect upon the challenge of Míguez Bonino’s missionary theology to the global Church-in-mission under four headings: the context of the Church-in-Mission; the socio-political context; the religious context; and theological education.

7.2.1 *Context of the Global Church-in-mission*

The Church that carries out the missionary mandate in the world is experiencing massive and rapid change. One of the most fundamental changes over the past fifty years has been the end of Christendom and the growth of global Christianity. This is experienced in various ways. Christianity has lost power in the Western world.

‘Christendom presupposed the predominance of Christianity in Western societies and a certain degree of influence of Christian ideas and principles on the social life of nations and on their international politics’ (Escobar 2000:34). Consequently Christians expected their society to uphold Christian values and ethics and in regard to mission, missionaries expected their governments to support or protect them. This is no longer so.

Additionally, ‘colossal migration movements caused by economic change allow Christians and churches in the West and everywhere else to experience the amazing rich diverse varieties of expression of the Christian faith’ (Escobar 2000:27). Western Christians have begun to wrestle with multiculturalism. Growing churches in the traditional sending countries are made up of immigrant communities. African, Asian and Latin American Churches are those that are most vibrant and missionary within Europe and North America. New and foreign forms of worship are being experienced by traditional Christians.

Moreover, the centre of gravity of mission has moved southwards. Churches in Europe and North America, the traditionally Christian and missionary sending nations, are experiencing stagnation or even decline, whereas Churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America are experiencing rapid and vibrant growth and are even sending missionaries. There is a ‘new balance of numerical and spiritual strength in the Christian world’ (Escobar 2000:28).

Finally, the growth of the Pentecostal movement is a new phenomenon. Due to urbanisation, new groups of people have emerged in many cities around the world. These are often formed from previously hidden rural populations with little formal education. ‘The expansion of Popular Protestantism in the form of Pentecostal and Pentecostal-like Churches among these emerging masses has been one of the most surprising phenomena of our century’ (Escobar 2000:40). The existence of these Churches challenges world Christianity in various ways: how does Pentecostal spirituality challenge traditional spirituality? How does the ecumenical movement relate to these Churches? If the majority of the Protestant Christians in the world are either Pentecostal or Pentecostal-like, then how should mission theology engage with their theology? These questions will become urgent as the twenty first century progresses. An analysis of the growth, spirituality, and expression of being and mission of the Pentecostal Churches is an essential task for the global Church. It is especially urgent for the Pentecostal Churches themselves.

Although Míguez Bonino developed his missionary theology in the context of the global south he was in constant dialogue with Northern Christianity. Those Churches were working through the consequences of the end of Christendom; indeed, it could be said that Míguez Bonino, as an active participant in the WCC, was instrumental in accompanying the Northern Churches in that process. Míguez Bonino’s insistence that theology should accompany the Church in its search for missionary effectiveness and obedience, gives a framework for the continuing process of the assimilation of the end of Christendom in the world Church. This is especially true of the more conservative evangelical sector of the Church that, in some quarters, still carries out its mission from within a Christendom model. Additionally, as a Protestant in a predominantly Catholic context, Míguez Bonino never assumed the help of the state for mission efforts. His work as a pastor and a theological educator was rarely done in the context of power and privilege. There is no doubt that Northern agencies accompanied his work but it was essentially carried

out in weakness. How mission can be done without the forces of the state and without the intervention of countries that openly or covertly support Christian mission, will be an important factor in the future.

Míguez Bonino has always done theology in the context of world Christianity and the change of the centre of gravity of world Christianity. For Míguez Bonino, theology done at local level must never lose sight that it is part of a greater whole. Even more strongly, he insists that theology done at global level must have a local expression. This is especially clear in his ecclesiology: global ecumenism must always seek locality.

Additionally, it is also clear in Míguez Bonino's concern that catholicity and contextuality remain in tension. On the one hand, the desire to maintain the unity of global Christianity must not consume contextual expressions of local faith. On the other hand, local expressions must not be allowed to divide the Church. In the context of global Christianity where the stubborn belief still exists that Western theology is the norm and the fact that theologians from rich countries possess considerably greater publishing power than those from the global south, he sees the danger of the global crushing the local as more acute.

Míguez Bonino's concept of mutual accountability is vital in this area. Based upon the belief that all theologies are contextual and one cannot be used as the 'yardstick' for all others, he proposes that global theology moves beyond dialogue to an attitude of 'mutual accountability.' This was first suggested in a paper for the WCC (1986) but is equally applicable in other contexts, both international and ecumenical. Western theologians must be willing to make themselves accountable to theologians from Africa, Asia, and Latin America and not exercise the power given to them by economic factors. On the other hand, Latin American, Asian and African theologians need to have the confidence in their reflections in order to present their insights to Western theologians. This is more than simply respecting the opinions of others; it is being willing to accept correction from Christians from different cultures and different traditions.

Finally, Míguez Bonino challenges the global Church to engage with the Pentecostal Churches. His methodology forced him to reflect upon the Pentecostal phenomenon. He has been open minded enough to take Pentecostals seriously and learn from them. This does not mean that he has not been critical but rather he has been faithful to his methodology in being willing to engage in a critical but sympathetic analysis; to reflect upon this analysis in the light of the Bible and, especially Trinitarian doctrine; and then to engage in a profound dialogue with Pentecostal missionary thinkers and theologians in order to sharpen understanding of their role in the wider Church and in society.

7.2.2 Socio-Political context

Míguez Bonino's missionary theology is not only relevant to the Church-in-mission but also to the context of mission itself. The context of world mission is very complex, and there are many interpretations of it. This section will focus on two areas: globalisation and its link to the growth of poverty; and the rise of fundamentalism; especially Christian fundamentalism.

Globalisation is a highly complex phenomenon and this section does not propose to explain or even describe it; it will be sufficient to make some general

comments. Globalisation has generally spread Western, or more accurately North American, culture across the world. The liberal economic market system has encouraged the diffusion of North American culture, throughout the world and often the subsequent, irreversible and negative changes made upon indigenous cultures. Through news media, films, advertising and franchising, both ideas and products from North America, and to a lesser extent Europe, have been planted in many countries of the global south. Through television stations such as MTV, young people are connected to each other in a way that their parents never experienced.

‘In tension with the globalisation process, we have the rise and expansion of a movement that seeks to affirm local cultures in their search for autonomy and full expression. This may be described as a contextualisation movement’ (Escobar 2000:31). Globalisation is a force of unification but also of uniformity. Contextualisation pulls in the opposite direction. ‘Missionaries will be caught in the tension between globalisation and contextualisation, and they also have to avoid a provincialist attitude that exaggerates contextualisation to the detriment of biblical global awareness’ (Escobar 2000:31).

A further effect of globalisation has been the widening of social inequalities. Escobar rightly notes that on the one hand, globalisation

has generated new wealth and unprecedented comfort, placing the most sophisticated technologies within the reach of the average citizen of the rich nations and of the elites in the poor nations. On the other hand the figures indicate that a large proportion of people are being driven into extreme forms of poverty (Escobar 2000:32).

This has caused uncertainty, suffering and a decline in the quality of life for many. The vast majority of people in poorer nations are suffering not only from poverty but also from the awareness of the widening divide between their lifestyles and the lifestyles of the rich, both those in their own countries and those from rich countries. Globalisation is feeding a sense of despair.

An additional effect of globalisation facing 21st century mission is that of fundamentalism. There has been a staggering growth of Islamic fundamentalism during the past twenty years. There has also been an opposite reaction on the part of Western nations in the form of crusade mentality. ‘Unfortunately many Christians still operate within those categories’ (Escobar 2000:39). Former US President Jimmy Carter said

During the last quarter century, there has been a parallel right-wing movement within American politics, often directly tied to the attributes of like-minded Christian groups. The revolutionary new political principles involve special favours for the powerful at the expense of others, abandonment of social justice, denigration of those who differ, failure to protect the environment, attempts to exclude those who refuse to conform, a tendency toward unilateral diplomatic action and away from international agreements, an excessive inclination toward conflict, and reliance on fear as a means to persuasion. (Carter 2005:43-44).

Escobar says that Christian fundamentalism ‘became a reactionary cultural phenomenon associated with the defence of a conservative political agenda in the United States and with racism, nationalism, blind anti-Communism, and the arms race’ (Escobar 2000:40). This has been expressed in the concept of ‘Manifest

Destiny', which has been part of both North American political and missionary mythology for over a century.

Míguez Bonino challenges the Church in this context. His theology is one that takes the world seriously. He views missionary theology as a contextual reflection on the relationship between God, the world and the Church. Theology cannot only be an upward look towards God; it must also be an inward look towards itself and an outward look towards the world. In theology's upward look towards God, it cannot ignore the fact that the Bible emphasises God's relationship, not only with the Church but also with the world. God's relationship with the world is not peripheral but central to God's character.

Theology that does not take the world into account in theological reflection is ignoring an important element in the process. Theology investigates the way in which the Church exists in the world. The existence and being of the Church cannot be seen as only related to God and the divine Kingdom but also in primary relationship with the world. The Church is part of the world. Theology also investigates the world as the context in which the Church carries out its mission. The actions of the Church are not carried out in a vacuum of obedience, or disobedience to God but rather in the warp and woof of the world. Missionary effectiveness can only be encountered through a deep reflection upon the relationships between God, the world and the Church.

Míguez Bonino's contextual missionary theology, challenges the global Church-in-mission to think practically, contextually and theologically about how genuine expressions of Christian faith can take place in a globalised world. Míguez Bonino accepts that the context of the world must be the starting point of mission. A serious analysis of both macro and micro contexts is necessary if mission is to be genuinely contextual as well as global. He recognises that there is a tension between the global and the local; especially how globalisation has been expressed. Míguez Bonino is convinced that Christian globalisation (oikoumene) must be expressed differently from globalisation as it is expressed commonly in contemporary society.

Additionally, Míguez Bonino's missionary theology developed in a context of increasing poverty. The nineteen sixties and seventies—the years of theological ferment for Míguez Bonino—were years that saw the growth of poverty and violence in Argentina and in the wider context of Latin America. The contemporary context is not exactly the same but Míguez Bonino's insistence upon a profound critical analysis of the socio-political context and the causes of poverty are vital today in context which, in fact, may be even more complex. The churches in North America and Europe—churches that feel under pressure—need to rediscover God's commitment to the poor, so prevalent in Míguez Bonino's theology. God's mission in establishing divine government in a context of injustice; the Church's identity and mission being intimately associated with the struggle of the poor and oppressed and the Trinitarian commitment to justice must be recovered for the health of churches in the richer countries.

Finally, Míguez Bonino's missionary theology challenges Christian fundamentalism, and especially that fundamentalism that associates the gospel with North American Christianity. Míguez Bonino's critical hermeneutics—his epistemology and ideology critique—have exposed the myth of the absolute nature of human knowledge; all theology is partial and incomplete.

Míguez Bonino challenges fundamentalist Christianity to acknowledge the partial nature of its expression of Christianity. This must be done in mutual accountability with others and will expose the ideological presuppositions slipped into biblical and theological interpretation that gives fundamentalism its ideological logic. If this is done, Christian fundamentalism will be released from a form of cultural idolatry that makes it intolerant and vigorously opposed to any expression of Christianity other than its own. It would allow it to recognise that no political, social, religious or missionary project can be totally associated with the gospel or with God's Kingdom. Such association leads to the domestication of the radical challenge of the gospel message.

7.2.3 *Religious and Spiritual context*

The final aspect of the contemporary context for the global Church-in-mission is the religious context. For Míguez Bonino, the religious and spiritual context is very much part of the socio-political context; religions are politically located. However, this section will deal with religion and spirituality separately in order to analyse them as ideological frameworks rather than simply part of a political context.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modernist and secular philosophers declared the death of God; religion and spirituality would fade away under the acid testing of science. The past forty years have shown how premature this pronouncement has proved to be. Today, more than any time during the past two centuries, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are experiencing a resurgence of interest. Even in 'secular' Europe and North America, postmodern spirituality has replaced atheism.

It is clear that the resurgence of world religions is directly linked to the rise of fundamentalism, and political factors are extremely important. However, Christianity must develop a theology of religions that moves beyond conflictive doctrines into genuine dialogue. It must be sympathetic to other religions but also be faithful to God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

In regard to postmodernism, Escobar says:

The modern ideologies of indefinite progress and social utopia were actually myths that attracted and mobilised the masses for action. Their failure and collapse have brought awareness of a vacuum and disillusionment about the ability of human reason to give meaning to life and provide answers for deep existential questions (Escobar 2000:38).

This has led to postmodern expressions of life and spirituality filling that vacuum. These include: 'the predominance of feeling and the revolt against reason, the revival of paganism in elements such as the cult of the body, the search of ever more sophisticated forms of pleasure, and the ritualisation of life' (Escobar 2000:35). Missionary theology must move beyond modernist expressions of the Christian faith while remaining faithful to God's truth in Jesus Christ.

In the early nineteen nineties Míguez Bonino began to reflect directly upon other religions as a missiological issue. He attempts to develop a Christologically focussed Trinitarian theology in order to avoid either making absolute or 'relativising' the person of Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity. He tries to hold in tension Jesus Christ as the son of Mary and Jesus Christ as the second

person in the Godhead. By emphasising the cosmic second person of the Trinity, Míguez Bonino attempts to identify the activity of the Spirit of Christ in other religions whilst maintaining the connection with the historical Jesus. By emphasising the flesh of the son of Mary, Míguez Bonino is attempting to avoid detaching the Word of God in Christ from the biblical record of God's actions of salvation; something he has insisted upon throughout his career. Given that Míguez Bonino has developed his theology in an anti-colonialist context, this approach may point ways forward for a more profitable dialogue with other religions.

A further way in which Míguez Bonino may be a challenge to missiology done in a postmodernist context is his hermeneutic. His hermeneutical approach is closely related to a postmodern reader response approach. Basing his reflections on the work of Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, Míguez Bonino recognises that biblical interpretation must not be dogmatic and oppressive but creative and liberative. Using this approach the postmodernist reader can be involved in the creation of new meanings; the construction of new traditions and the formation of new spiritualities.

It must be recognised, however, that a theology profoundly influenced by modernist philosophy and theology, responding to modernist issues, and proposing time-bound solutions is limited in its effectiveness in a postmodern context. Míguez Bonino has drawn upon the philosophies of Karl Marx and Herbert Marcuse, as well as the theologies of Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth. His theology has responded to issues that were vital to the nineteen sixties and seventies but some of which are not so important in a postmodern context. His theology proposed solutions that were acceptable for the modernist period but would fail in the contemporary world. Míguez Bonino's hermeneutic can be useful in a postmodernist context, but new approaches to Christian theology, responding to postmodernist concerns, must be developed.

7.2.4 *Theological Education*

Míguez Bonino's missionary theology seriously questions the way theological, pastoral and missionary training is carried out. Primarily, the local congregation is the protagonist of missionary theology and needs to be educated theologically. Theology's primary point of reference is the Church in mission and, more specifically, the experience of the Church members in their mission. Theology, in this perspective ceases to be the preserve of the academic; it is primarily the task of ordinary Christians. The church leader, pastor or missionary accompanies the Church in its mission. In this way the concrete issues of the Church are raised for theological reflection. The role of the academic is to accompany both church and leader in the process of seeking effectiveness in mission. If the church member is the primary protagonist in the theological task, then each church member must have an awareness of biblical and theological themes. The ideal is not that the church member raises the issues for the theologian and the theologian takes these issues away and comes back with the correct answers but rather that the theologian accompanies the Church in the process of analysis, reflection and practical application.

Additionally, missionaries also need to be trained not only to do mission but also to think about mission, in short, they need to be able to do missionary

theology. Missionary training must be theological. Theology cannot be sidelined in missionary training. Inter-cultural missionaries especially need theological formation so as to be able to discern how to read and re-read the gospel from the perspective of the new context.

Moreover, in the light of Míguez Bonino's theology, the traditional way of training pastors also needs a serious review. Pastors should not be trained simply to 'care for the flock' but also to reach out to those outside the Church. If the Church is missionary then the pastoral role does not end with pastoral care; pastoral care serves the missionary mandate of the Church. Church leaders should be committed to mission both locally and globally. Pastors should be trained to reflect critically and creatively upon their mission task.

Finally, theologians must be trained to do theology not only to study and teach it. The academic should be aware how each area of theology relates to the central theological task of seeking effectiveness in missionary obedience. This is true for biblical studies, systematic theology, historical studies, sociology, psychology and pastoral studies. All these subjects should be studied in order to make mission theology more effective. They are but tools to be assumed in the greater overall task of seeking for effectiveness in mission obedience.

7.3 THE LATIN AMERICAN MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

This section will explore the challenge of Míguez Bonino's missionary theology for the Latin American missionary movement. The late twentieth century growth in cross-cultural missionary vision in Latin America can be traced to the formation of COMIBAM International in 1987. (Pate 1989:40). There is not space, at this point, to recount the history of COMIBAM but a few brief comments are required as a framework for discussion. In broad terms, Christians involved in COMIBAM reject higher biblical criticism; are theologically and politically conservative, anti-liberal, anti-liberationist and anti-socialist. They also have a world denying and often fundamentalist theology, with a generally narrow definition of mission, restricted to verbal proclamation and Church planting. Various important issues for reflection emerge from this brief analysis. Among them are: theological pragmatism in the search for a practical missiology; uncritical use of socio-analytical tools; refusal to use the tools of biblical criticism in the development of truly biblical missiology; a world denying missiology, and a weak definition of mission, the Church and the Kingdom of God. Míguez Bonino's theology challenges the Latin American missionary movement in at least four ways: theology and the Bible; the world, the Church and the Kingdom of God; wholistic and contextual mission; and missionary training.

7.3.1 *Theology and the Bible*

There is little doubt that theology and the Bible are important to the Latin American missionary movement. It is, however, defined by its enthusiastic and practical nature. The missionary task is urgent; there is no time for scholastic enquiry that does not include practical application. There is a healthy disregard for theology done for its own sake; a feeling that it shares with many Latin American theologians.

However, this has also led to an unhealthy pragmatism where theology has been marginalized and where missionary practice is never questioned.

Míguez Bonino's praxis orientated missionary theology combines practice with theological reflection. In fact, it could be said that his theology is an integral part of the missionary task. He does not separate theology from mission; in fact one needs the other. For Míguez Bonino, theology needs mission to give it a purpose and mission needs theology in order to critique its praxis. Theology without mission will be academic but mission without theology will continue to repeat the errors of the past. Theology must be seen as part of the missionary task and mission must be part of the theological task.

The Latin American missionary movement's pragmatic approach aims for effective mission practice. However, unhealthy pragmatism often leads a lack of rigor in analysis. Without rigorous analysis the missionary does not gain a precise understanding of the context of mission. This can lead to misunderstanding about important issues for the context and more importantly it could lead to faulty praxis.

Míguez Bonino's insistence that analysis should be an integral part of the missionary theological task reduces the danger of misunderstanding. Analysis must be nuanced and not simply rely upon cultural anthropology. Míguez Bonino's dialectical and later structuralist and semiotic approaches to social analysis has made it possible to understand a society in the grip of rapid social change. Analysis that explains the dynamics of social change is essential for understanding the effects of preaching the gospel and the presence of Christian witness in society. It also reveals how the Church should be expressed culturally within society.

However, there is a need to expand the horizons of social, cultural and religious analysis to include issues such as the place of women in mission, understanding of race and racism and inter-religious tension. Míguez Bonino did not deal with these issues in any depth but the contemporary context requires such a deepening of the analytical tools.

The Latin American missionary movement is convinced of the need for biblical understanding of mission. The insistence on the literalist use of the Bible has sometimes led to subjective and individualistic readings of the Christian scriptures. There are serious dangers when this kind of hermeneutic is used in an inter-cultural setting. The message of the Bible is weakened by an uncritical hermeneutical method. It becomes an imported and foreign message. The missionary's narrow and culturally biased interpretation is imposed upon the recipient. The message of the gospel can remain forever lost. This means that reading the Bible through the eyes of the people is made impossible.

Míguez Bonino's dynamic biblical hermeneutic allows the missionary to think and act biblically as well as contextually. He emphasised that Jesus Christ is the true revelation of God; revelation is historical. Neither the Bible nor any other human reading of that revelation can be equated with Christ. However, the first witnesses to this event were in a privileged position to interpret God's revelation in Christ; the Bible is special in any reading of the gospel. The missionary task is to reread God's action in Christ, through the experiences of the first witnesses, in the light of the traditions handed down from Christian history, from the perspective of the new missionary context, and with the help of the Holy Spirit. This rereading must be a dialogical encounter between the Bible and the people, who are accompanied in this task by the missionary. Both the missionary and the hearer are

able to encounter the gospel in a powerful way: the reserve of meaning can be revealed. The hearer can recognise his or her own cultural ‘accent’ in the message and the missionary can hear the message in a completely new way. The challenge to the Latin American missionary movement is clear.

Finally, the Latin American missionary movement has a strong focus on the role of the Holy Spirit. However, this role has been confined to work in the lives of individual believers. The Spirit’s role in mission has had little place in the movement’s missiological reflection. One area where this role is especially undeveloped and undervalued is the role of interpretation. Supernatural interpretations of dreams and visions are common but the role of the Spirit in Bible reading is not deepened.

Míguez Bonino has emphasised the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of re-reading the Bible from a new context. He based his reflections on the work of Oscar Cullmann who insisted that the gift of the Holy Spirit, as part of Salvation History and so accompanies the Church in its interpretation of the Christian scriptures. The Church must have the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to re-read God’s actions in Jesus Christ from a new missionary context.

7.3.2 *The World, the Church and the Kingdom of God*

The Latin American Protestant churches’ accepted eschatology has almost uniformly been dispensationalist. This has influenced the missionary movement’s understanding of the relationship between the world, the Church and the Kingdom of God. The world is an enemy of both God and the Church and therefore antagonistic to the Kingdom. The Kingdom is viewed as an entirely future reality with no present importance apart from being the arena for individuals to make a decision for eternity. The Kingdom is future and spiritual. Therefore, mission is calling people to make a decision now to enter that spiritual future and by nature, therefore, mission is a ‘religious’ activity.

In regard to the dominant COMIBAM missiology, the ‘nations’ of Matthew 24:14 are interpreted as ‘ethno-linguistic groups’ or ‘people groups.’ These ‘people groups’ are unreached because they must have the gospel of the Kingdom preached among them. The concept of a ‘reached people group’ is one that has a viable Church, with the Bible in their own language that can reproduce itself. The task of mission is to establish self-multiplying churches among those groups and this will bring about the Parousia. Because the Church is equated with the Kingdom, the world is seen to be totally outside the Kingdom. The world—being outside of the Kingdom—belongs to Satan. The Church—being in the Kingdom—belongs to God. The Church is the haven from the world. This makes the Latin American missionary movement world denying and dualistic in its thinking.

Míguez Bonino challenges this way of thinking in various ways. He emphasises that the Kingdom is present in this world. The Kingdom of God is not only a future event but also a present reality. It was inaugurated in Jesus Christ and will be fulfilled in the Parousia. He does not deny an ‘eschatological reserve’ (Moltmann) but the presence of the Kingdom is eschatologically important. It was seen in the life of Israel and perfected in Jesus Christ. Preaching the gospel, calling people to repentance and planting churches are not the ultimate aim of mission; they are only steps along the way. The ultimate goal of mission is the Kingdom of God—

God's reign over nature and history. The present era is the time where God is building the Kingdom for the good of humanity now.

Additionally, Míguez Bonino asserts that God is active in the world to bring about the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is primarily the work of God; it is God's rule over nature and history. It is not the work of humanity, nor is it the work of the Church. God's mission is to establish God's Kingdom. Mission is not primarily the mission of the Church but the mission of God. God not only works in the lives of individual human beings but in the life of the world. In fact, God works directly in the world without the agency of the Church. The world is the arena of God's work towards the divine Kingdom

Also, Míguez Bonino is in no doubt that the Church contributes to the extension of the Kingdom of God but not in a direct way. The Church, in mission, witnesses to the Kingdom by 'naming the Kingdom' and living it out. It must discern the presence of the Kingdom of God in present history. This discernment takes place only in obedience. It is not the result of magical divination nor is it the product of intellectual study but obedient action and reflection. It is a spiritual exercise done in concrete obedience.

The Latin American missionary movement often uses the slogan: 'united that the world may believe.' In spite of this, most of the churches involved in the movement are anti-ecumenical. The slogan encourages churches to unite in the sending of missionaries, rather than ecumenical unity. Once the need for cooperation disappears then unity can be dispensed with. This pragmatic ecumenism needs to have a theological articulation.

Míguez Bonino has insisted that unity must begin with the practice of unity rather than either an ideological declaration or a theological discussion. In his ecclesiology, he makes a very close association between unity and mission. In short the unity of the Church serves the reconciliation of the world; ecumenism serves *oikoumene*. The Church demonstrates to the world God's desire for all humanity. Church division is not an internal and domestic matter; it is a tragedy for both the Church and the world.

According to Míguez Bonino true missionary ecumenism is achieved by the Church acting as a paradigm for the world. The Church both establishes its own internal unity as a model for the world but it also militates within the world for the establishment of human unity. The Church must exegete from the world the forms of unity. It must ask the questions as to how the world, in this context and this situation expresses its unity. The Church then demonstrates the quality and centre of that unity to the world in Christ. It offers to the world the example of its unity, based upon unity in Christ but expressed in terms the world recognises. The world then is able to exegete its own unity from the unified life of the Church.

If the Latin American missionary movement assumed some of these theological insights then the pragmatic ecumenism described above would be challenged to ecumenical commitment beyond expediency. Unity would become a truly missionary concept.

7.3.3 *Wholistic and Contextual Mission*

Early on in its existence, COMIBAM adopted missiological concepts and methodologies such as "unreached people groups," "the 10/40 window," and the

“Adopt-a-People” programme of the AD2000 Movement. This is what Samuel Escobar ironically describes, as ‘managerial missiology’ (Escobar 2002:159). Missionary methodology and strategy are the major concerns of this missiology rather than theology. Many of the books published by COMIBAM tend towards a pragmatic approach rather than a theological one.

Spiritual warfare missiology has been inserted into “unreached people group” teaching. In ‘reaching’ the ‘unreached group,’ the missionary is ‘claiming the ground’ and ‘defeating Satan.’ The terminology of warfare is heard alongside that of adoption. Planting a Church among the group means ‘bringing God’s Kingdom.’ This has led to the tendency to see mission in only religious or spiritual term, and commitment to Christ in terms of personal and legalist ethics. William D. Taylor says: ‘COMIBAM’s missiology must develop and strengthen into a more holistic and contextualised mission of the Church if it wants to avoid the charge of shallow theology and activism’ (Taylor and Nunez 1996:173).

Míguez Bonino’s missionary theology challenges this attitude in various ways. This study has repeatedly insisted that his theology is ‘faith seeking effectiveness.’ Effectiveness is not seen in terms of simple pragmatism: the quickest and cheapest way of doing mission. For mission to be effective it must be both wholistic and contextual. That is, it must be faithful to both the gospel—a gospel which affects every area of human life—and to the world—in all its contextual complexity. For Míguez Bonino, mission has always been preaching and social activity. From his earliest days, of ministry he has insisted that the gospel is essentially a message to be announced and lived out. Theology must accompany the Church to preach and live out its mission in the context (1960e:91). Even in his latest publication he still insists on the same thing.

Mission is the privilege and responsibility of the whole people of God, mission is the “ecumenical” responsibility of the whole people of God, mission is the announcement and the making present of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of *shalom*, of *tsedaqah*, of *hesed*—by the whole people of God (2004b:431 Italics in original).

Míguez Bonino has also insisted that the establishment and growth of the Church is not the ultimate aim of mission. The Church does not serve itself but rather the world. Mission aims at the transformation of the world rather than its own growth and glory. Evangelisation does not come to an end when a Church is planted in the area; this is the beginning of the mission of the Church. The Church takes on the role of a community sent into the world in order to announce and point the world towards the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. In this case, this is a reorientation of the aims of mission.

Míguez Bonino rejects the ‘people group’ theory of mission’ mainly because it treats human beings as part of ‘groups,’ ‘targets,’ or ‘peoples.’ The tendency, in practice is to convert as many people as possible in order to make sure that a people can be said to be ‘reached.’ The missionary motivation demonstrated here is not love but statistical success. To Míguez Bonino, this is less than Christian.

7.3.4 *Missionary Training*

Latin American missionaries must be trained to understand theology as an integral part of the missionary task. Without a dynamic missionary theology the burgeoning

Latin American missionary movement is doomed to repeat the mistakes made by its predecessors. It will be incapable of preaching the gospel in a relevant and contextual way. This missionary theology must be done at every level. Primarily it must be done at the level of the individual missionary. The experience of the Latin American missionary must be the starting point. Missionaries need to learn how to relate the context in which they are working to the reading of the Bible and how to apply this reading to an improved missionary practice. Theological education of missionaries cannot be a matter of filling heads with knowledge but rather giving them the tools to take part in a dynamic theological process of action and reflection. There is no doubt that this process requires the presence of knowledge but it is rather what is done with that knowledge that is more important.

The mention of the need for knowledge raises the issue of curriculum. Missionary training requires biblical, systematic and practical knowledge, as well as sociological tools. Courses on the human sciences cannot be viewed as peripheral; they are central to the theological process. Finally, the ability to use the knowledge gained to analyse and interpret new contexts is also essential. A course on theological integration cannot be ignored. Without integration and the ability to carry out the process of theological reflection knowledge remains academic

The experience of Latin American missionaries and their theological reflection is also the point of departure for the theological reflection of Latin American missionary movement as a whole. Missionary leaders in Latin America must respond to the theological and missionary needs of Latin American missionaries. The tendency is toward ‘one way traffic;’ missionary leaders instruct missionaries. The feedback and rethinking of biblical, systematic and practical issues on the basis of the experience and reflection of Latin American missionaries is essential for the development and maturing of the Latin American missionary movement. Finally, at a professional level, the cross-cultural missionary experience of Latin Americans must also be included into the academic theology of Latin American theologians. If it is true that missionary contact with those of other faiths and worldviews is the fuel for theology, then Latin American academic theology must be ready to engage in that dialogue. Latin American missionary theology must be directed toward both the non-person—as was expressed in Liberation Theology—but also toward the non-believer—as expressed by COMIBAM missionary theology.

To conclude, in an article written for the 2004 Forum for World Evangelisation, Charles Van Engen, The Arthur F. Glasser Professor of Biblical Theology of Mission at Fuller Seminary School of Intercultural Studies, asserted that the contemporary world context requires a missiology that

builds on classical concepts of mission developed over the past 100 years; overcomes the dichotomies between evangelism and social action that arose 50 years ago; and recreates itself in a trinitarian praxis of mission appropriate to the global/local challenges of Church and world in this new century (Van Engen 2004: 93).

This study has made it clear that Míguez Bonino’s missionary theology is relevant and a challenge to both the world church in its mission to transform the world and also the Latin American missionary movement.