

## Report

# Christians for Socialism

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Throughout the final week of April, a group of over 400 Christians, mostly Catholic priests, met in Santiago, Chile, for the First Latin American Meeting of Christians for Socialism. Convened by the Chilean Secretariat of this movement, which has grown rapidly in the last year, the meeting drew participants from every Left Christian group and from virtually every country in Latin America. Observer-participants from North America and Europe were also welcomed.

After a week of work commissions, debates and reports, a Final Document was issued—and, in the view of some observers, a still larger, continent-wide movement was effectively launched, the first movement within the Church attempting to meld Christianity and Marxism in the search for solutions to the common problems of the underdeveloped world.

Following are the sympathetic impressions of one North American observer and the text of the Final Document.

The genesis of Christians for Socialism is fairly well known by now: Shortly after Allende's election, eighty priests (*Los Ochenta*) signed a statement pledging their cooperation in building a socialist society. They formed a "sacerdotal team" to explore the meaning of Christianity in the socialist process, expanded to some two hundred members, including laymen and religious, Protestant and Catholic, met with Fidel during his visit to Chile and, on his invitation, sent a delegation of twelve to visit Cuba. This was the time, they decided, and Chile the place, to convene a continent-wide gathering of Christians committed to socialism.

Similar meetings have been held over the last two years, most notably the Bogota Symposium on the Theology of Liberation (1970) and a semi-clandes-

tine gathering of activist clergy and laymen from every country in the Hemisphere held in Costa Rica last fall. But these, and the several national or regional meetings that surrounded them, were all carried on with due respect for the dangers involved. Ecclesiastical censure was one risk, but far more immediate—and effective—was the danger of forceful intervention by rightist governments.

Allende's Chile, however, offered a new and different *ambiente* for such gatherings. The *Encuentro* was reported widely in the press, the delegates had a pleasant if inconsequential meeting with *Compañero Presidente* (and a less pleasant if equally inconsequential meeting with the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez), and the week passed without demonstrations or interruption by hostile groups. Chilean tolerance, of course, carried no safe conduct guarantee beyond the national borders, as Don Sergio Mendez Arceo could testify. On his return to Mexico, the much-respected bishop of Cuernavaca was greeted by cries of "traitor" and "Communist" from rightist students, who threw red ink at him before escaping in a car.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of "private" groups that operate in various countries to stifle free expression and the activities of progressive movements. One is represented by the youths who attacked Don Sergio. From internal evidence—a paucity of imagination—they were probably members of MURO, a student organization that makes a habit of disrupting meetings, as they did in 1968, for example, by tossing red paint on Ivan Illich as he began a lecture at the National University. (Undaunted, Illich donned a painter's smock and continued his talk.)

The same group several times interrupted an inter-American seminar on social communication held in Mexico City in May, 1971. That meeting was sponsored by the most official ecclesiastical bodies imaginable and included representation from the Holy See, but MURO was convinced it was directed from

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Moscow. Their handout described CICOP (Catholic Inter-American Co-operation Program, an annual conference sponsored by the U.S. Catholic Conference Division for Latin America) as a cover for the Black Panthers and the "Jung Lords," and Harvey Cox, a speaker at the seminar, as a leading Death-of-God theologian. MURO's antics are not as frivolous as they may appear. Such groups are to be found in every country (we have them in growing abundance in the U.S.) and they both feed on and feed the middle-class fear of change. Yet there is scant evidence to suggest that such groups are anything more than private collections of outraged, confused conservatives.

Far more vicious groups with proven ties to the police or military operate almost with impunity in a few countries. In Brazil and Uruguay, especially, they go under the name of Death Squads and are known to enjoy the protection of, if not active direction by, elements of the government.

There was simply no question of anyone coming to the *Encuentro* from Brazil; Dom Helder Camara was rumored to be coming, but another of his associates, José Comblin, was deported to his native Belgium just days before the meeting and the Brazilian bishops were preparing another statement, since issued, denouncing restrictions against free speech and the press. The people of Brazil were represented, however, by Brazilian exiles living in Chile, and the film *No Time for Tears* was shown.

There was even greater drama and tension in Montevideo, where a state of internal war had been declared just days before the *Encuentro*. The home of Julio de Santa Ana, leader of the ISAL movement (Church and Society in Latin America) was bombed, as was the Central Methodist Church where Emilio Castro is pastor. The offices of *Vispera*, the journal of the Pax Romana student movement in Latin America, were seized by the police and two persons connected with the movement arrested. Even with permission to leave the country, Uruguayan Christians would have had to think twice about attending the Santiago meeting.

What, then, really happened at the *Encuentro* to make those seven days in Santiago so historic, a new Medellín, as someone said? At the very least, it produced, as did the Medellín conference of Catholic bishops in 1968, a series of remarkable documents. The Medellín Conclusions have had a profound effect upon the lives of Christians throughout Latin America, turning upside down the old, resigned acceptance of evil social, political and economic structures, now terming them "situations of sin" to be fought against. Medellín made acceptable for Latin America the concept of institutionalized violence, again reversing the prior notion that violence is what revolutionaries do while the State and the corporations serve law,

order and progress. And Medellín condemned, in fairly unmistakable terms (it was, after all, an episcopal document) the activities denoted by such terms as neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism and structures of dependency.

All that was well under the belt at Santiago. There were no impassioned denunciations even of ITT, no calls to (spiritual) arms, no rhetorical abuses. Theologians don't waste time cursing the Devil; they just analyze his works and pomps and plan carefully the ways to counter them. In short, nobody needed to denounce capitalism or proclaim his faith in socialism; they had done all that before. They were not gathered for a "Christian-Marxist dialogue." This was a meeting of Christians who recognized the Marxist-Leninist tools of analysis as the most serviceable and accurate ones yet available and who were seeking to understand their own best role, precisely as Christians, within the one global revolution now in process.

It is important to stress, as the final document does, that they were not looking to create or buy into any form of Christian socialism. As Don Sergio remarked, the very term suggests an absolutizing of socialism and the relativizing of Christianity. They reject the so-called Third Way (*ni comunismo, ni capitalismo*) promoted by Christian Democracy over the last decade, chiefly because it implied a sectarian Third Way, a socialism with adjectives.

The documents of Santiago '72 are of four kinds, each with its own importance. *First* was a collection of twenty-six preparatory papers, most extracted from other publications, some prepared for the *Encuentro*, all bringing together the best current thinking on the ten problem areas chosen for discussion (Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith, Popular Mobilization for Socialism and Christian Commitment, Political Action and Faith, Women in the Revolution and the Christian Factor, Class Struggle and Christian Unity, etc.). *Second*, national reports on the current situation in the various countries with particular reference to the role of the churches and the relation to the social process. *Third*, the conclusions of the twenty work groups (two groups for each of the ten problem areas).

And *fourth*, the Final Document, a brief, clear, hard-hitting paper that will be quoted frequently in the months to come. A fifth category, ephemeral but fascinating, could be added: transcripts, interviews with the press and with President Allende, letters exchanged between Cardinal Silva and Gonzolo Arroyo, the Jesuit convenor of the *Encuentro*, messages of solidarity received and statements of concern or protest sent by the *Encuentro* to various groups—the mimeograph machine was never still. Partly because this was a more public meeting and more publicized than any of the previous ones, more people than those in direct attendance were prodded to examine their own positions.

Some, like the Archbishop of Santiago, the Jesuit Provincial in Argentina and a group of five Chilean priests, were prompted initially to take negative actions. Cardinal Silva's letter refusing Arroyo's request to be a sponsor of the *Encuentro* was widely distributed throughout Latin America and was at least partly responsible for the Argentine Provincial's express prohibition against Jesuit participation from that country. (Nearly forty non-Jesuit Argentine priests did attend, most of them members of the Third World priests' group.) But its final effect was positive; the charges and presuppositions of the Cardinal's letter were thoroughly examined and responded to, point by point, in letters prepared by the Coordinating Team and by Arroyo. Even the subsequent meeting with the Cardinal during the *Encuentro*, while still awkward and frustrating, did give some evidence of his newer appreciation of what *Cristianos por el Socialismo* were really about.

This kind of re-examination and clarification is going on in many parts of Latin America today because of the meeting. With the failure of Christian Democracy in its once most fertile area, Chile, some ex-PDC priests have decided that party ties (priests with adjectives) are bad. They are beginning to realize that *Cristianos por el Socialismo* have been saying just that right along. Most of the Chileans at

the *Encuentro* have their own individual political options—some with Allende's *Unidad Popular*, many, apparently, with the more radical *MIR*, and none (so far as I could determine) with the *Izquierda Cristiana*, the group that still seems eager to pour baptismal waters over the revolution. But all seem in agreement with Mendez Arceo that their party affiliations are relative.

For them, only their Christianity, their commitment to Jesus Christ and to the liberation of all men, is absolute. This means renouncing and denouncing all that alienates and oppresses (preeminently capitalistic structures and bourgeois ways of thinking), and it clearly means choosing the way of socialism. "*No hay otra salida*," as Mendez Arceo said in Santiago, echoing scores of other bishops, theologians, social thinkers and just plain people in Latin America.

A process of extraordinary revitalization of a part, now a significant and growing part, of the Christian community. (In thirty years Latin America is expected to be the home of one-half of the world's Roman Catholics.) It is a process that has been going on for some years, and the place names mentioned above—Medellín, Bogota, Costa Rica—suggest some of the most important events in the process. Santiago '72 should be added to the list.

## First Encounter of Christians for Socialism

### The Final Document

*Introduction:* Over 400 Christians from all the Latin American countries (laity, Protestant pastors, priests, and nuns), plus some observers from the United States, Quebec and Europe, met in Santiago. We wanted to reflect in the light of our common faith, taking into consideration the injustice that penetrates the socio-economic structures of our continent, about what we should do and can do in the historical moment in which we live concerning the concrete circumstances which surround us. We want to clearly identify ourselves as Christians who, starting from the liberating process lived by our Latin American nations and our practical and real commitment in the construction of a socialist society, think about our faith and revise our attitude of love toward the oppressed. The immense majority of us work with workers, peasants and the unemployed who painfully live their lives of misery, of constant frustration and of economic, social, cultural and political denial. There is a lot to do, and we must urgently do it with them.

We have met in Santiago at the same time that the third international meeting of the U.N. Confer-

ence on Trade, Aid and Development (UNCTAD) is being held. UNCTAD is debating a problem which each day is becoming more acute. A relatively small group of humanity is progressing and is getting richer at the cost of oppressing two-thirds of the human population. And what hurts the exploited people's conscience is to see that their precarious economy is the consequence of the increasing wealth and welfare of the world powers. Our poverty is the other side of the enrichment of the international exploiting classes.

How do we confront this undeniable injustice? At least one thing is clear: the nations dominated by imperialistic capitalism should unite themselves to break with the situation of oppression and deprivation to which they are submitted. But this unity which seems so logical is not easy, since external dependence favors disunion—a disunion which is clearly or subtly encouraged by imperialism. Therefore we Christians from all the Latin American countries gathered here before the UNCTAD world meeting want to make a call to the exploited social classes and to the dominated countries to unite to defend

their rights rather than to beg for help.

The economic and social structures of our Latin American countries are based on oppression and injustice, a consequence of a capitalist situation revolving around the great centers of power. Within each of our countries small minorities, accomplices and servers of international capitalism, maintain by all possible means a situation created for their own benefit. This structural injustice is, in fact, open or disguised violence.

Those who consistently have exploited and continue to exploit the weak exercise violence against them. Many times this violence is disguised under a false order and a false legality. But this does not make it less violent or unjust. This is not human and therefore it is not Christian.

But it is not enough to diagnose these facts. Christ through his example taught us to live what he proclaimed. Christ preached human fraternity and the love which should exist in all social structures. Above all, he *lived* his message of liberation to the ultimate consequences. He was condemned to death. The powerful of those days saw in his liberating message and in the effective love of which he gave testimony a serious danger to their economic, social, religious and political interests.

Today, the spirit of the resurrected Christ is as active as ever, giving an impulse to history, manifesting itself in solidarity in the selfless giving of those who fight for freedom in an authentic love for their oppressed brothers.

The roots of our society's structures should be transformed. Today, more than ever, it is urgent to do this because the people who enjoy the unjust order in which we live aggressively defend their class interests and use all means (propaganda, subtle forms of dominating the awareness of the masses, defense of prejudicial legality, dictatorship when necessary, repression) to impede revolutionary transformation. Only through access to economic and political power will today's exploited class be able to construct a different qualitative society—a socialist society without oppressors or oppressed in which everybody has the same opportunities for human fulfillment.

The revolutionary process in Latin America has started. Many are the Christians who are committed to it; but many more are those who are prisoners of mental inertias and categories impregnated by bourgeois ideology. They see the revolutionary process with fear and insist on traveling through impossible reformist and modernizing roads. The Latin American process is a unique and global process. We Christians do not have, and do not want to have, our own political means to offer. The understanding of this unique and universal characteristic makes comrades of and unites in a common task all those who commit themselves to the revolutionary struggle.

Our revolutionary commitment has made us re-

discover the meaning of Christ's liberating work. It gives to human history its profound unity and allows us to understand the meaning of political liberation, placing it in a broader and more radical context. Christ's liberation is necessarily given in liberating historical events, but it is not limited to them. Christ's liberation points out boundaries. Above all, it takes liberating events to their fulfillment. Those who limit Christ's work are those who want to remove it from the pulse of history, from the place where some men and social classes fight to free themselves from the oppression to which they are submitted by other men and social classes. They do not want to see Christ's liberation as a radical liberation from all exploitation, from all deprivation, from all alienations.

We objectively commit ourselves to the construction of socialism, because based on historical experience and in an attempt to strictly and scientifically analyze events, we conclude that it is the only efficient way to fight imperialism and break our dependent situation.

The construction of socialism is not done by vague denunciations or calls to good will. It implies an analysis that reveals the mechanisms which really move society, an analysis that will make oppression evident and that will be capable of uncovering and calling by name those who openly or subtly oppress the working class. Above all it supposes a participation in the struggle which puts the exploited class against its oppressors. The current charity motivated by those who in their attempt to defend or increase their privileges exploit the people cannot silence this struggle.

If we make public our reflections it is because we think that they can help other Christians and men of good will to reflect with us and to decide to search for the way to radically transform the present structures in our continent.

#### **The Latin American Reality: A Challenge for Christians**

The socio-economic, political and cultural situation of the Latin American nations is a challenge to our Christian conscience. Unemployment, undernourishment, alcoholism, child mortality, illiteracy, prostitution, constantly increasing inequalities between rich and poor, racial and cultural discrimination, exploitation, etc., are events which constitute a situation of institutionalized violence in Latin America.

First of all, we verify that this reality is not the unavoidable fruit of nature's insufficiency and even less an inexorable "destiny." Nor is it the result of a "god" untouched by human drama. On the contrary, it is the fruit of a process determined by the will of men.

That "will" belongs to the minority of privileged people who have made possible the construction and maintenance of an unjust society—capitalist society—based on exploitation, luxury and competition.

This unjust society is based on the capitalist relationship to production which necessarily generates a class society.

The colonialist or neo-colonialist capitalism as an economic structure constitutes the reality of the Latin American countries. In its superior stage, this capitalist formation leads to imperialism and sub-imperialism that work through multiple mechanisms such as military and economic aggression, alliances of repressive governments, multinational companies, cultural dominion, presence of the CIA, presence of the State Department, etc.

Within each nation, imperialism works in complicity with the dominant classes depending on it or the national bourgeoisie. These dominant groups appear allied with the institutional Church.

Some of the last resorts of imperialism are dictatorships and fascist regimes which generate repression, tortures, persecutions, political crimes, etc.

The desperate struggle of imperialism produces economic blockades against the countries which have opted for socialism. Such is the case of Cuba and Chile.

Imperialism tries to divide the people by opposing Christians to Marxists with the intention of paralyzing the Latin American revolutionary process.

False models of economic growth made at the cost of the proletariat, workers and peasants attempt to distract the people from the authentic overall goals of the revolution. (Example: promotion of the Brazil and Mexican models of development.)

The imperialist forces and the national dominant classes impose through all means of communication and education a culture of dependence. This culture justifies and hides the situation of domination. Besides, it prepares a man resigned to his alienation. At the same time, it encourages the oppressed to be bosses and exploiters of others.

The historical process of the class society and the imperialist domination fatally culminates in a necessary class confrontation. Although this becomes more evident every day, the confrontation is denied by the oppressors. On the other hand, the exploited masses discover, and progressively assume, a new revolutionary conscience.

Through the increasing acuteness of the class struggle, it is evident that today in Latin America there are only two possible alternatives: a dependent and underdeveloped capitalism; or socialism. On the other hand, within the different countries the historical failure is evidence that there is no possibility of intermediate positions between capitalism and socialism, eliminating any type of reformism.

Certain leftist, nationalist movements have revolutionary importance, but they are insufficient if they do not lead to socialism within the present framework of the Latin American liberating process.

The present position of all men in the continent and therefore of Christians, whether aware or un-

aware of the situation, is determined by the historical dynamics of the class struggle in the process of liberation.

The Christians committed to the revolutionary process admit the ultimate failure of the Christian social "Third Way" and try to insert themselves in the only history of liberation in the continent.

The acuteness of the class struggle means a new stage of political, ideological struggle and excludes all forms of presumed neutrality or apoliticism. This acuteness of the struggle gives to the Latin American revolutionary process its authentic dimension of totality.

From scientific analysis and revolutionary commitment with the struggle of the exploited necessarily emerge the real elements of the situation: relationship to production, capitalist appropriation of profits, class struggle, ideological struggle, etc.

In this sense the Cuban revolution and the process toward socialism in Chile postulate the return to the sources of Marxism and a criticism of traditional Marxist dogmatism.

The people, through the efficient elements of analysis offered especially by Marxism, are becoming aware of the necessity of moving towards the authentic assuming of power by the working class. Only this will make possible the construction of an authentic socialism, the only way to currently achieve total liberation.

#### Liberation Thrusts in Latin America

In Latin America there is a common process of liberation following from Bolivar, San Martin, O'Higgins, Hidalgo, José Martí, Sandino, Camilo Torres, Che Guevara, Nestor Paz and others. It concerns a second fight for independence, where the revolutionary forces of a continent having in common a past of colonization and a present of exploitation and misery are being united.

The dependent capitalism which exists in Latin America necessarily generates the working classes, workers and peasants. As such, these classes constitute the objective, revolutionary social base. On the other hand, they present an urgent task of politization so that they will progressively acquire the power to destroy the capitalist system, replacing it with a more just and fraternal society.

Numerous thrusts at liberation, especially after the Cuban revolution, are noticed throughout the continent. They assume similar forms insofar as they break with dependence and share the anti-imperialist struggle. According to the diversity of the nations, they acquire different and diverse forms.

The numerous thrusts at liberation which sprout in the different countries tend to unify themselves above tactical differences. The aspiration of a new strategy of bringing together the revolutionary forces in a common thrust for liberation is verified.

The revolutionary process urges the overcoming of

# **. . . in the struggle, neutrality is not possible**

sterile divisions among the different leftist groups in Latin America, divisions which are encouraged and used by imperialism.

Christians, urged by the Spirit of the Gospel, are integrating proletariat groups and parties with no less duties or rights than any other revolutionary. The Christians committed to socialism recognize in the national and continental proletariat the vanguard of Latin America's liberating process.

The increasing popular mobilization postulates new demands, such as the overcoming of sectarianism bureaucracy, bourgeois ideals, corruption of leaders.

## **Christians and the Process of Liberation in Latin America**

Some Christians are becoming aware that the Christian reality (institution, theology, conscience) is not above the confrontations between exploited and exploiters. On the contrary, it is marked by colonialism and in many cases is objectively an ally of dependent capitalism.

Each time it is more intensely verified that the revolutionary commitment increasingly assumed by Christians together with the people is having growing impact on the entire continent.

At the same time an increasing interest is noted in Christian and non-Christian groups to analyze and take into account the negative and positive sociological impact that Christianity has had, and has, in the social configuration of the Latin American continent.

Ever widening groups of Christians discover the historical importance of their faith starting with their political action in the construction of socialism and the liberation of the oppressed of the continent. The Christian faith is thus manifested as a new, critical, liberating element.

This praxis, joined with the proletariat, destroys in the Christian ethical-affective obstacles to the commitment to the class struggle. These obstacles constitute, by their historical weight, an especially important aspect of the cultural revolution.

Priests and pastors in an increasing commitment with the poor, the oppressed and the working class, illuminated by a new type of theological reflection, discover new dimensions of their specific mission. This same commitment causes them to assume a political responsibility which is necessary to make real the love for the oppressed that is demanded by the Gospel and relocates them in the prophetic direction inserted in the process of Revelation. Sometimes, gathered in their own movements and organizations, they constitute a positive contribution to the Latin American liberation process.

There is an increasing awareness for the strategic alliance of revolutionary Christians with Marxists in the process of liberation. This should be a strategic alliance which overcomes all tactical or opportunist short-term alliances and which signifies always walking together in common political action toward the same historical project of total liberation. This historical identification concerning political action does not mean for Christians the abandoning of their faith. On the contrary, it brings more dynamism to their hope in the future of Christ.

## **Some Aspects of Our Revolutionary Commitment**

The revolutionary commitment implies a global historical project of social transformation. Generosity and good will are not enough. *Political action demands a scientific analysis of reality*, creating a constant interrelation between action and analysis. This analysis has its own scientific rationality, qualitatively different from the rationality of the bourgeois social sciences.

Our countries' social structures are based on the relationship to production (predominantly capitalist and depending on world capitalism) founded on the exploitation of the workers. *The recognition of the class struggle as a fundamental fact allows us to develop a global interpretation of the Latin American structure.* Revolutionary practice leads to the discovery that all objective and scientific interpretation should use the class analysis as the key to interpretation.

Socialism is presented as the only acceptable alternative to overcome the class society. As a matter of fact, classes are the reflection of the economic basis which, in the capitalist society, antagonistically divides the possessors of capital from those earning a salary. The latter must work for the former, and, therefore, they become the object of exploitation. Only by replacing private property with social ownership of the means of production can the objective conditions for the overcoming of class antagonism be created.

*The taking of power which leads to the construction of socialism requires a critical theory of capitalist society.* This theory, making obvious the contradictions of Latin American society, uncovers the objective revolutionary potentiality of the working classes. The working classes are exploited by the system but have the capacity to transform it.

*To achieve socialism, more than a critical theory is required. Also needed is a revolutionary practice by the proletariat.* This implies a change of consciousness; that is, overcoming the current gap between social reality and the workers' awareness. This

change requires a denunciation and an unmasking of the ideological mystifications of the bourgeoisie. Thusly, the people identify the structural causes of their misery and conceive of the possibility of eliminating those causes. But at the same time, a change of consciousness requires popular parties, organizations and a strategy that leads to the taking of power.

*The construction of socialism is a creative process in opposition to all dogmatic schematizing and all acritical positions.* Socialism is not a uniting of non-historical dogmas but a critical theory, in constant development, of the conditions of exploitation. It is also a revolutionary practice that, by the taking over of political power by the exploited masses, leads to the social ownership of the means of production and financing and to a rational, universal economic planning.

The lack of proper recognition of the rationality of the class struggle has led many Christians into mistaken political activity. These Christians, not knowing the structural mechanisms of society and the necessary contributions of a scientific theory, want to deduce politics from a certain humanistic concept ("dignity of the human person," "freedom," etc.) resulting in political naïveté, activism and volunteerism.

#### Christianity and Ideological Struggle

*The class struggle is not limited to the socio-economic level. It extends to the ideological field.* The dominant class generates a series of ideological justifications which impede the recognition of this struggle. The ideology of the dominant classes, popularized by the means of communication and education, produces a false consciousness in the dominated class which stops revolutionary action.

Therefore, revolutionary action evaluates ideological struggle as an essential element. Its purpose is the liberation of the consciousness of the oppressed people.

The dominant ideology assumes certain Christian elements which reinforce it and spread it among vast groups of the Latin American population. On the other hand, the dominant ideology to a certain extent penetrates the expression of Christian faith, especially Christian social doctrine, theology and Church organizations. The ideological struggle has as one of its main tasks the identification and unmasking of ideological justifications which are supposed to be Christian.

The profundity of the faith we profess, as a free gift from Christ, requires us to be critics of the ideological use, sometimes subtle and unconscious, made of it. The unmasking of partisan and impoverished usage of the Christian faith is a Gospel demand. However, it requires a proper scientific instrument and a commitment to the poor, the oppressed and the working class. It is not a matter of using the faith for other political purposes, but to return it to

its evangelical dimension. In our Latin American continent this task is urgent, since the ideological usage of it paralyzes its liberating, evangelical strength so decisive in the present moment.

The dominant culture imposes an image of man as a being called to accept an already established system, presented as the objective order, based on human nature and expressed in laws and natural rights. Inequalities and dependence, division of labor and separation between the people and power are presented as natural necessities of society. Through this the basis of these relationships is hidden in the same capitalist system, and the perspective of a global and radical change is eliminated.

*Culture imposes an individualistic concept of man, a man with exclusively individualistic capacities, tasks and destinies.* This culture appears through its several forms of liberalism, humanism and personalism, as the defender of personal freedom, individual liberty, private property, competition, a love reduced to something interpersonal, etc. Through these forms, structural aspects of social relationships and contradictions engendered in the system are covered up.

*The system's culture imposes a "spiritualistic" idea of man, explaining his behavior and history as if they were mainly based on moral ideas and attitudes; as if the world's evils were only based on individual ideological or moral deviations.* Without denying the creativity and moral value of the person, we believe that the system's dominant culture takes away attention from a scientific study of the economic and social mechanism that mainly directs the march of history; it hides the fundamental role of structures in the oppression of men and nations; it hides the fundamental impact of economics, particularly on class relationships and on political, cultural and religious life. Thus, the idea of searching for a change through the transformation of the economic system is eliminated.

*The dominant culture, using the Gospel in a partial and distorted way, imposes a soothing idea of society, describing the diversities, dependencies, division of labor and privileges as forms of pluralism and as complementary things demanded by order and the common good.* Therefore, it encourages "collaboration" and "dialogue" among classes and nations. With this, the conflicting character of the relationships among classes and among nations and of all authentic process of liberation is covered up; the system's institutionalized violence is also covered up; and the appeal to violence to fight against the dominant class and for the revolutionary struggle is held back. Through such a procedure the authentic communion among men is definitely delayed.

The basis of the obstacles a majority of men have regarding the class struggle is the class struggle itself. This works efficiently for the oppressors to the extent that it works without the oppressed noticing its influence and mechanisms.

*The alliance between Christianity and the dominant classes explains in a large degree the historical forms that the Christian conscience takes.* Therefore, what is needed is a decided stand by Christians alongside the exploited to break this alliance; and going through the verification by praxis, this stand will allow rediscovery of a renovated Christianity that will creatively rescue, in an evangelically faithful effort, the combative and revolutionary character of its original inspiration.

### Faith in the Revolutionary Commitment

*For many Christians, one of the most important discoveries is the convergence between the radicalness of their faith and the radicalness of their political commitment.* The radicalness of Christian love and its demand for efficiency gives impulse to recognizing the rational aspect proper to politics and to accept with all coherence the mutual implications of revolutionary action and scientific analysis of historical reality.

This experience of faith in the heart of the revolutionary praxis itself, gives rise to a fruitful interaction. The Christian faith becomes a critical and dynamic revolutionary yeast. *The faith emphasizes the demand that the class struggle decidedly move toward the liberation of all men,* especially toward those who suffer the most acute forms of oppression. It also emphasizes orientation towards society's global transformation beyond economic structures. This is the way the faith contributes—in and by the committed Christians—to the construction of a qualitatively different society and to the emergence of the new man. The specifics of the Christian contribution should not be considered as something happening before the revolutionary praxis that the Christian brings ready-made to the revolution. What happens is that during his revolutionary experience the faith is revealed as the creator of new contributions which no one could have foreseen from outside the process.

But the revolutionary commitment also has a critical and dynamic function regarding the Christian faith. It criticizes the open or disguised historical complicities with the dominant culture. It is dynamic in that it obliges the Christian faith to travel on uncompleted and unexpected roads. In effect, Christians committed to the liberation process have the vivid experience that the demands of the revolutionary praxis and of the changes of mentality and discipline that it implies make Christians rediscover the central themes of the Gospel message now freed from ideological masks.

*The real context of the faith experience today is the history of oppression and the liberating struggle against it.* To be within this vital context, effective participation in the liberation process is necessary. This participation is attained through incorporation into organizations and parties which are authentic

instruments of the working-class struggle.

The Christian committed to the revolutionary praxis discovers the liberating force of God's love, of Christ's death and resurrection. *He discovers that his faith is not the acceptance of a ready-made world and of a predetermined history. Instead he discovers that his faith is the creative existence of a new and solidified world* and of an historical initiative encouraged by Christian hope.

*The revolutionary commitment teaches the Christian to live and think in terms of conflict and history.* He discovers that a transforming love is alive in antagonism and confrontation, and that the definitive aspects are chosen and developed in history. Thus, the Christian begins to understand that in the struggle for a distinctive society no neutrality is possible and that the future of mankind is attained in the struggles of today. He finally discovers that the unity of the Church is achieved through the unity of mankind and, therefore, the revolutionary struggle, which reveals the deceptive unity of today's Church and prepares for the authentic unity of tomorrow's Church.

Reflection about faith ceases being speculation outside the commitment to history. *The revolutionary praxis is recognized as the generating matrix of a new theological creativity.* Theological thinking thus becomes a critical reflection in and on the liberating praxis, in permanent confrontation with the Gospel demands. Theological reflection implies as an indispensable requirement for completing its task the proper socio-analytical instrument to critically understand the conflicting elements of historical reality.

This leads, in a spirit of authentic faith, to a new reading of the Bible and Christian tradition, that redefines Christianity's basic concepts and symbols so they will not hinder Christians in their commitment with the revolutionary process. Instead, the redefining will help to assimilate creatively the revolutionary process.

*Conclusion.* As we leave this Encounter to return to our tasks with a renewed spirit of commitment, we adopt Che Guevara's well-known words which currently, in some way, we are putting into practice:

"Christians should definitely opt for the revolution, especially in our continent where the Christian faith is so important among the popular masses; but the Christians in the revolutionary struggle cannot attempt to impose their own dogmas, nor proselytize for their Churches. They should come without attempting to evangelize the Marxists and without the cowardice of hiding their faith in order to become assimilated.

"Once Christians dare to give an integral revolutionary witness, the Latin American revolution will be invincible because until now Christians have allowed the reactionaries to utilize their doctrine."