

*The thinking of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who first became known for his strikingly new concept of literacy training, is being widely discussed around the world. Since 1969 a special consultant of the WCC Office of Education, he here turns his attention to the peculiar opportunities and dangers of the churches in education. The article, originally written in Portuguese as a substantial introduction to a volume of analyses of education in different Latin American countries, has been translated by William Bloom with the help of Esther Meyer, Helen Mackintosh and Helen Franco.*

SE/38

STUDY ENCOUNTER  
Vol. IX / No. 1 / 1973

## Education, Liberation and the Church

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We begin with an affirmation; though almost a truism, it clearly sets forth our position on the present subject. We cannot discuss churches, education or the role of the churches in education other than historically. Churches are not abstract entities, they are institutions involved in history. Therefore to understand their educational role we must take into consideration the concrete situation in which they exist.

The moment these statements are taken seriously, we can no longer speak of the neutrality of the churches or the neutrality of education. Such assertions of neutrality must be judged as coming either from those who have a totally naive view of the church and history or from those who shrewdly mask a realistic understanding behind a claim of neutrality. Objectively, nevertheless, both groups fit into the same ideological perspective. When they insist on the neutrality of the church in relation to history, or to political action, they take political stands which inevitably favour the power elites against the masses. 'Washing one's hands' of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

However, alongside the neutral attitude, there are more subtle and more attractive means of serving the interests of the powerful while appearing to favour the oppressed. Here again we find the 'naive' and the 'shrewd' walking hand in hand. I refer to what we might call 'anaesthetic' or 'aspirin' practices, expressions of a subjectivist idealism that can only lead to the preservation of the status quo. In the last analysis the basic presupposition of such action is the illusion that the hearts of men and women can be transformed while the social structures which make those hearts 'sick' are left intact and unchanged.

The illusion which thinks it possible, by means of sermons, humanitarian works and the encouragement of other-worldly values, to change men's consciousness and thereby transform the world, exists only in those we term 'naive' (or 'moralist')

as Niebuhr would have said <sup>1</sup>). The 'shrewd' are well aware that such action can slow down the basic process of radical change in social structures. This radical change is a precondition for the awakening of consciousness, and the process is neither automatic nor mechanical.

Although, objectively, both groups are equally ineffectual in producing liberation or the real humanization of human beings, there is still a basic difference between them which should be underlined. Both are caught up in the ideology of the ruling social class but the shrewd consciously accept this ideology as their own. The naive, in the first instance unconscious of their true position, can through their action come to take the ideology of domination for their own and, in the process, move from 'naiveness' to 'shrewdness'. They can also come to renounce their idealistic illusions altogether, forsaking their uncritical adherence to the ruling class. In committing themselves to the oppressed, they begin a new period of apprenticeship. This is not, however, to say that their commitment to the oppressed is thereby finally sealed. It will be severely tested during the course of this new apprenticeship when confronted, in a more serious and profound way than ever before, with the hazardous nature of existence. To win out in such a test is not easy.

This new apprenticeship will violently break down the elitist concept of existence which they had absorbed while being ideologized. The *sine qua non* which the apprenticeship demands is that, first of all, they really experience their own Easter, that they die as elitists so as to be resurrected on the side of the oppressed, that they be born again with the beings who were not allowed to be. Such a process implies a renunciation of myths which are dear to them: the myth of their 'superiority', of their purity of soul, of their virtues, their wisdom, the myth that they 'save the poor', the myth of the neutrality of the church, of theology, education, science, technology, the myth of their own impartiality — from which grow the other myths: of the inferiority of other people, of their spiritual and physical impurity, and the myth of the absolute ignorance of the oppressed.

This Easter, which results in the changing of consciousness, must be existentially experienced. The real Easter is not commemorative rhetoric. It is praxis; it is historical involvement. The old Easter of rhetoric is dead — with no hope of resurrection. It is only in the authenticity of historical praxis that Easter becomes the death which makes life possible. But the bourgeois world-view, basically necrophilic (death-loving) and therefore static, is unable to accept this supremely biophilic (life-loving) experience of Easter. The bourgeois mentality — which is far more than just a convenient abstraction — kills the profound historical dynamism of Easter and turns it into no more than a date on the calendar.

The lust to possess,<sup>2</sup> a sign of the necrophilic world-view, rejects the deeper meaning of resurrection. Why should I be interested in rebirth if I hold in my hands, as objects to be possessed, the torn body and soul of the oppressed? I can only experience rebirth at the side of the oppressed by being born again, with them, in the process of liberation. I cannot turn such a rebirth into a means of *owning* the world, since it is essentially a means of *transforming* the world.

If those who were once naive continue their new apprenticeship, they will come to understand that consciousness is not changed by lessons, lectures and eloquent sermons but by the action of human beings on the world. Consciousness does not arbitrarily create reality, as they thought in their old naive days of subjectivist idealism.

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<sup>1</sup> Niebuhr, Reinhold, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> A phrase I owe to Fromm, Erich: *The Heart of Man*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965.

## Conscientization

They will also discover to what extent their idealism had confused any number of concepts — for example conscientization, which is so badly understood — when they tried to offer magic remedies for healing the hearts of mankind without changing the social structures, or, equally idealistic, when they claimed that conscientization was a similarly magic means of reconciling the irreconcilable.

Conscientization appeared to them then as a sort of Third Way which would allow them to escape miraculously from the problems of class conflict, creating through mutual understanding a world of peace and harmony between oppressor and oppressed. When both were conscientized there would be neither oppressor nor oppressed, for all would love each other as brothers, and differences would be resolved through round-table discussions — or over a good whisky ...

Basically, this idealistic vision, which works only for the oppressors, is exactly the position that Niebuhr vehemently condemned as 'moralistic', whether it be found in the religious or the secular domain.<sup>3</sup>

Such mythologizing of conscientization, be it in Latin America or elsewhere, be it at the hands of the shrewd or the naive, constitutes an obstacle rather than an aid to the liberation process. It becomes, on the one hand, an obstacle because, in emptying conscientization of its dialectical content and thus making it into a panacea, it puts it, as we have seen, at the service of the oppressors. On the other hand, it creates an obstacle because such idealistic disfiguration leads many Latin American groups, especially among youth, to fall into the opposite error of mechanical objectivism. In reacting against the alienating subjectivism which causes this distortion, they end up by denying the role of consciousness in the transformation of reality and therefore also denying the dialectical union between consciousness and the world. They no longer see the difference between such things as class consciousness and the consciousness of class needs.<sup>4</sup> Between the two there is a sort of dialectical gap which must be bridged. Neither subjectivism nor mechanical objectivism is able to do this.

These groups are right in affirming, as do we, that one cannot change consciousness outside of praxis. But it must be emphasized that the praxis by which consciousness is changed is not only action but action *and* reflection. Thus there is a unity between practice and theory in which both are constructed, shaped and reshaped in constant movement from practice to theory, then back to a new practice.

Theoretic praxis is what occurs when we step back from accomplished praxis (or from praxis which is being accomplished) so as to see it more clearly. Thus, theoretic praxis is only authentic when it maintains the dialectical movement between itself and that praxis which will be carried out in a particular context. These two forms of praxis are two inseparable moments of the process by which we reach critical understanding. In other words, reflection is only real when it sends us back, as Sartre insists, to the given situation in which we act.

<sup>3</sup> Referring to the 'moralists', Niebuhr says: 'They do not recognize that when collective power, whether in the form of imperialism or class domination, exploits weakness, it can never be dislodged unless power is raised against it ... Modern religious idealists usually follow in the wake of social scientists in advocating compromise and accommodation as the way to social justice.' (*op. cit.*, Introduction, pp. xii and xix.)

<sup>4</sup> 'For the purposes of the historian, i.e. the student of micro-history, or of history "as it happened" (and of the present "as it happens") as distinct from the general and rather abstract models of the historical transformation of societies, class and the problem of class consciousness are inseparable. Class in the full sense only comes into existence at the historical moment when classes begin to acquire consciousness of themselves as such.' (Hobsbawm, E. J., 'Class Consciousness in History', in Meszaros, Istvan (ed.): *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 6.)

Hence conscientization, whether or not associated with literacy training, must be a critical attempt to reveal reality, not just alienating small-talk. It must, that is, be related to political involvement. There is no conscientization if the result is not the conscious action of the oppressed as an exploited social class, struggling for liberation.<sup>5</sup> What is more, no one conscientizes anyone else. The educator and the people together conscientize themselves, thanks to the dialectical movement which relates critical reflection on past action to the continuing struggle.

## Education for liberation

Another dimension of the mythologizing of conscientization — whether by the shrewd or the naive — is their attempt to convert the well-known 'education for liberation' into a purely methodological problem, considering methods as something purely neutral. This removes — or pretends to remove — all political content from education, so that the expression 'education for liberation' no longer means anything.

Actually, in so far as this type of education is reduced to methods and techniques by which students and educators look at social reality — when they do look at it — only to describe it, this education becomes as 'domesticating' as any other. Education for liberation does not merely free students from blackboards just to offer them projectors.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, it is concerned, as a social praxis, with helping to free human beings from the oppression which strangles them in their objective reality. It is therefore political education, just as political as the education which claims to be neutral, although actually serving the power elite. It is thus a form of education which can only be put into practice systematically when society is radically transformed.<sup>7</sup> Only the 'innocent' could possibly think that the power elite would encourage a type of education which denounces them even more clearly than do all the contradictions of their power structures.<sup>8</sup> Such naiveness also reveals a dangerous underestimation of the capacity and audacity of the elite. Truly liberating education can only be put into practice outside the ordinary system, and even then with great cautiousness, by those who overcome their naiveness and commit themselves to authentic liberation.

A growing number of Christians in Latin America are discovering these things and finding themselves forced to take sides: either to change their naiveness into shrewdness and consciously align themselves with the ideology of domination or else to join forces with the oppressed and in full identification with them seek true liberation. We have already stated that, if they renounce their uncritical adherence to the dominant classes, their new apprenticeship with the people presents a challenge; in meeting this challenge they encounter risks formerly unknown.

During what we are calling their 'new apprenticeship', many Christians soon realize that previously when they had engaged in purely palliative action — whether social or religious (for example, fervent support of maxims such as 'The family

<sup>5</sup> On this, see Lukacs, Georg: *Histoire et Conscience de Classe*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1960.

<sup>6</sup> Freire, Paulo: 'Cultural Action, An Introduction', in *Conscientization for Liberation*, Washington, CICOP, 1971.

<sup>7</sup> See Freire, Paulo: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, Herder and Herder, 1970; and London, Penguin, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> A representative of a Latin American elite, answering a journalist's question during an interview, said: 'I could never permit an educational process which would awaken the potential of the masses and put me in the difficult situation of having to listen to them. It would be like asking for a rope to hang myself by.'

that prays together stays together') — they were praised for their Christian virtues. They now begin to realize, however, that the family that prays together also needs a house, free employment,<sup>9</sup> bread, clothing, health and education for their children, that they need to express themselves and their world by creating and recreating it, that their bodies, souls and dignity must be respected if they are to stay together in more than suffering and misery. When they begin to see all this, they find their very faith being called into question by those who wish to have even more political, economic and ecclesiastical power for the re-shaping of the consciousness of others.

As their new apprenticeship begins to show them more clearly the dramatic situation in which the people live and leads them to undertake action which is less 'help-oriented', they come to be seen as 'diabolic'.<sup>10</sup> They are denounced as serving an international demonic force which threatens 'Western Christian civilization', a civilization which, in reality, has very little that is Christian about it.

Thus they discover through praxis that their 'innocent' period was not in the least impartial. But at this point many are afraid; they lose the courage to face the existential risk of historical commitment. They return to their idealistic illusions, but now as members of the 'shrewd' camp.

But they need to be able to justify their return. So they claim that the masses, who are 'uneducated and incapable', must be protected from losing their faith in God, which is 'so beautiful, so sweet, and so edifying'; they must be protected from the 'subversive evil of the false Christians who praise the Chinese Cultural Revolution and admire the Cuban Revolution'. They sign up for the 'defence of the faith', when what they are really defending is their own class interests, to which that faith is subordinated.

They must then insist on the 'neutrality' of the Church, whose fundamental task, they say, is to reconcile the irreconcilable through maximum social stability. Thus they castrate the prophetic dimension of the Church, whose witness becomes one of fear — fear of change, fear that an unjust world will be radically transformed, fear of getting lost in an uncertain future. However, a Church that refuses historical involvement is nevertheless involved in history. In fact, those who preach that the Church is outside history contradict themselves in practice, because they automatically place themselves at the side of those who refuse to allow the oppressed classes to be. Afraid of this uncertainty, and anxious to avoid the risk of a future which must always be constructed and not just received, the Church badly loses its way. It can no longer test itself, either through the denunciation of the unjust world, or the annunciation of a more just world to be built by the historical-social praxis of the oppressed. In this situation, the Church can be no more utopian, prophetic nor filled with hope than are the ruling classes to which it is allied.<sup>11</sup> Deprived of its prophetic vision, it takes the road of formalism in bureaucratic rites where hope, detached from the future, becomes only an alienated and alienating abstraction. Instead of stimulating the pilgrim, it invites him to stand still. Basically, it is a Church which forbids itself the Easter which it

<sup>9</sup> Concerning free employment as a necessary condition for human liberty, see *Fifteen Bishops Speak for the Third World*, Mexico, CIDOC, 1967, Dec. 67/35, pp. 1-11.

<sup>10</sup> Dom Helder Câmara, the prophetic Archbishop of Olinda and Recife (Brazil), is today considered as one of these terrible 'demons'. It's always the same. The necrophiles can never stand the presence of a biophile ...

<sup>11</sup> 'From the beginning of modern times, hopes for something new from God have emigrated from the Church and have been invested in revolution and rapid social change. It was most often reaction and conservatism that remained in the Church. Thus the Christian Church became "religious". That is, she cultivated and apotheosized tradition. Her authority was sanctioned by what had been in force always and everywhere from the earliest times.' (Moltmann, Jürgen: *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969, pp. 5-6.)

preaches. It is a Church which is 'freezing to death', unable to respond to the aspirations of a troubled, utopic and biophile youth to whom one can no longer speak a medieval language, and who are not interested in discussing the sex of angels, for they are challenged by the drama of their history. Most of these young people are well aware that the basic problem of Latin America is not the 'laziness' of the people, or their 'inferiority', or their lack of education. It is imperialism. And they know that this imperialism is neither abstraction nor slogan but tangible reality, an invading, destroying presence. Until this basic contradiction is overcome, Latin America cannot develop. It can only modernize.<sup>12</sup> For without liberation, there can be no real development of dependent societies.

## A theology of liberation

Many Latin American theologians who are today becoming more and more historically involved with the oppressed, rightly speak of a political theology of liberation rather than one of modernizing 'development'. These theologians can really begin to speak to the troubling questions of a generation which chooses revolutionary change rather than the reconciliation of irreconcilables. They know very well that only the oppressed, as the social class which has been forbidden to speak, can become the utopians, the prophets and the messengers of hope, provided that their future is not simply a reformed repetition of the present. Their future is the realization of their liberation<sup>13</sup> — without which they cannot *be*. Only they can denounce the 'order' which crushes them, transforming that 'order' in praxis; only they can announce a new world, one which is constantly being re-created and renewed.

That is why their hope rests not in an invitation to halt the pilgrimage, an invitation offered not only by the traditionalists but also by the alienating modernizers. Their hope lies in the call 'Forward march!', not the senseless wandering of those who give up and run, but the 'Forward march' of those who hold history in their hands, who create it and re-create themselves in it. It is the 'Forward march' which they will eventually have to embark upon if they are to experience 'death' as an oppressed class and be born again to liberation.

We must stress yet again, however, that this journey cannot be made 'within' their consciousness. It must be made in history. No one can make such a journey simply in the 'inside' of his being.

But there are a growing number of people who, whether or not they still claim to be Christians, commit themselves to the liberation of the dominated classes. Their experience teaches them that being Christian doesn't necessarily imply being reactionary, just as being revolutionary doesn't always imply being demonic. Being revolutionary implies struggling against oppression and exploitation, for the liberation and freedom of the oppressed,<sup>14</sup> concretely and not idealistically. In their new apprenticeship they finally realize that it is not sufficient to give lip

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<sup>12</sup> This theme is more fully worked out in my *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>13</sup> In reality, only the oppressed can conceive a future which is radically different from their present, in so far as they gain a dominated class consciousness. The oppressors, as the ruling class, can only imagine the future as the preservation of their present — their role of oppressors. So while the future of the first rests in the revolutionary transformation of society — a condition for their own liberation — the future of the second presupposes mere social modernization in which they can maintain their position as rulers.

<sup>14</sup> At this point, of course, no revolutionary, Christian or non-Christian, can accept a Church which innocently or shrewdly aligns itself with the ruling class, loses its utopian dimension and empties itself of prophetic mission. There is no need to denounce such a Church. It denounces itself through its defence, surreptitious or not, of the ruling class.

service to the idea that men and women are human beings if nothing is done objectively to help them experience what it means to be *persons*. They learn that it is not through good works (Niebuhr's phrase here was 'humanitarian'), that the oppressed become incarnate as persons. They have, then, managed to overcome the first obstacles which were too much for some of their travelling companions; but that, however, is no guarantee that they will survive the harder trials that lie ahead.

At some point in the process the oppressor's violence will be directed exclusively against the working class, usually sparing committed intellectuals, since in the last analysis they belong to the same group as the ruling class; at other times, however, their violence will be indiscriminate. When this happens, many will retreat, keep quiet, or adjust to the situation; others will react by undertaking new commitments. A basic difference between those who leave and those who stay is that the latter accept, as an integral part of existence, the dramatic tension between past and future, death and life, staying and going, creating and not creating, between saying the word and mutilating silence, between hope and despair, being and non-being. It is an illusion to think that human beings can escape this dramatic tension. We have no right so to submerge ourselves in the 'dramaticity' of our own life that we lose ourselves in daily triviality.<sup>15</sup> In fact, if I lose myself in the details of daily life, I lose, at the same time, a vision of the dramatic meaning of my existence. I become either fatalistic or cynical. In the same way, if I try to escape from the daily demands and details to take up my life's dramatic character — but without at the same time becoming historically involved — I can have no other destiny than to fall into an empty intellectualism, equally alienating. I shall then see existence as something impossible and hopeless. I have no other chance of conquering the alienating trivialities of daily life than by way of historical praxis, which is social and not individual. It is only in so far as I accept to the full my responsibility within the play of this dramatic tension that I make myself a conscious presence in the world.

I cannot permit myself to be a mere spectator. On the contrary, I must demand my place in the process of change. So the dramatic tension between the past and the future, death and life, being and non-being, is no longer a kind of dead-end for me; I can see it for what it really is: a permanent challenge to which I must respond. And my response can be none other than my historical praxis — in other words, revolutionary praxis.

The revolution, however, does not do away with the dramatic tension of our existence. It resolves the antagonistic contradictions which make that tension even more dramatic, but precisely because it participates in that tension it is as permanent as the tension itself.

A reign of undisturbed peace is unthinkable in history. History is *becoming*; it is a human event. But rather than feeling disappointed and frightened by critical discovery of the tension in which my humanity places me, I discover in that tension the joy of being.

At the same time, dramatic tension cannot be reduced to my own existential experience. I cannot of course deny the singularity and uniqueness of my existence, but that does not make my existence, in itself, isolated from other existences, a model of absolute meaning. On the contrary, it is in the inter-subjectivity, mediated by objectivity, that my existence makes sense. 'I exist' does not come before 'we exist', but is fulfilled in it. The individualistic, bourgeois concept of

<sup>15</sup> Kosik, Karel: *Dialéctica de lo Concreto*, Mexico, Grijalbo, 1967.

existence cannot grasp the true social and historical basis of human existence. It is of the essence of humanity that men and women create their own existence, in a creative act that is always social and historical even while having its specific, personal dimensions.

Existence is not despair, but risk. If I don't exist dangerously, I cannot be. But if my existence is historical, the existential risk is not a simple abstract category; it is also historical. That means that to exist is first and foremost to risk oneself, though the form and effectiveness of the risk will vary from person to person and from place to place. I do not assume risk in Brazil as a Swiss assumes it in Geneva, even if we are both of one political mind. Our socio-historic reality will condition the form our risk will take. To seek to universalize the form and content of existential risk is an idealistic illusion, unacceptable to anyone who thinks dialectically.

Dialectical thinking constitutes one of the major challenges to those who follow the option we are talking about here. It is not always easy, even for those who identify with the people, to overcome a petit-bourgeois education which is individualistic and intellectual, dichotomizing theory and practice, the transcendent and the mundane,<sup>16</sup> intellectual work and manual work. This trademark shows constantly in attitudes and behaviour patterns in which the dominated classes become mere objects of their 'impatient revolutionarism'.

## The role of the churches

In trying, now, to analyze more deeply the role of the Latin American churches, especially their educational role, we must return to some of the points made above; first of all, to the fact that they cannot be politically neutral. They cannot avoid making a choice, and therefore we in turn cannot discuss the Church's role abstractly or metaphysically. Their choice will condition their whole approach to education — its concept, objectives, methods, processes and all its auxiliary effects.

This conditioning affects the theological training of the leadership of the militant church, as well as the education dispensed by the church. Even theological education and reflection are touched.

In a class society, the power elite necessarily determine what education will be, and therefore its objectives. The objectives will certainly not be opposed to their interests. As we have already said, it would be supremely naive to imagine that the elite would in any way promote or accept an education which stimulated the oppressed to discover the *raison d'être* of the social structure. The most that could be expected is that the elite might permit talk of such education, and occasional experiments which could be immediately suppressed should the status quo be threatened.

Thus the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM) can talk about 'liberating education' in nearly all its official documents; as long as it is not put into practice, nothing serious will happen to it. At any rate, we should not be surprised (though this is not based on actual knowledge) if one day CELAM is severely restricted by the power elite, through the anti-prophetic church of which we spoke. This church, which is 'freezing to death' in the warm bosom of the bourgeoisie, can certainly not tolerate any ideas, even if only verbal, which the elite consider 'diabolic'.

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<sup>16</sup> This term refers here to the condition of incarnation in the world.



Our task in considering the role of the Latin American churches in education would be simplified if we could count on coherence between Church and Gospel. In that case, it would be sufficient to look at the dependent condition of Latin American society (with the exception of Cuba and up to a point Chile) and set up a strategy of action for the churches. The reality, however, is different, and we cannot think in a vacuum.

It is not possible to speak objectively of the educational role of the Latin American churches as being unified and coherent. On the contrary, their roles differ, sometimes opposing each other, according to the political line, whether evident, hidden, or disguised, which the different churches are living out in history. The traditionalist church, first of all, is still intensely colonialist. It is a missionary church, in the worst sense of the word — a necrophilic winner of souls, hence its taste for masochistic emphasis on sin, hell-fire and eternal damnation. The mundane, dichotomized from the transcendental, is the 'filth' in which humans have to pay for their sins. The more they suffer, the more they purify themselves, finally reaching heaven and eternal rest. Work is not, for them, the action of men and women on the world, transforming and re-creating, but rather the price that must be paid for being human.

In this traditionalist line, whether it be Protestant or Catholic, we find what the Swiss sociologist Christian Lalive calls the 'haven of the masses'.<sup>17</sup> This view of the world, of life, satisfies the fatalistic and frightened consciousness of the oppressed at a certain moment of their historical experience. They find in it a kind of healing for their existential fatigue. So it is that the more the masses are drowned in their culture of silence, with all the violence that this implies on the part of the oppressors, the more the masses tend to take refuge in churches which offer that sort of 'ministry'.<sup>18</sup> Submerged in this culture of silence, where the only voice to be heard is that of the ruling classes, they see this church as a sort of womb in which they can hide from an aggressive society. In despising this world as a world of sin, vice and impurity, they are in one sense taking their 'revenge' on their oppressors, its owners. It is as if they were saying to the bosses: 'You are powerful — but the world over which your power holds sway is an evil one and we reject it.' Forbidden as a subordinate social class to have their say, they fool themselves that the prayers for salvation they voice in their 'haven' are a genuine form of 'speaking out'.

However, none of this resolves the real problems of the oppressed. Their catharsis actually alienates them further, for it directs their anger against the world and not against the social system which is ruining the world. So, seeing the world itself as the antagonist, they attempt the impossible: to renounce the world's mediation in their pilgrimage. By doing so, they hope to reach transcendence without passing by way of the mundane; they want meta-history without experiencing history; they want salvation without knowing liberation. The pain of domination leads them to accept this historical anaesthesia in the hope that it will strengthen them to fight sin and the devil — leaving untouched all the while the real causes of their oppression. They cannot see, beyond their present situation, the 'untested feasibility', the future as a liberation project which they must create for themselves.

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<sup>17</sup> See his *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (London, Lutterworth Press, 1969).

<sup>18</sup> A sociological analysis of this fact in Latin America is essential, but it is important that the starting point of such research be social class structures and not the religious phenomenon itself.

This traditional type of church is usually found in backward, 'closed' societies, mostly agricultural, which depend upon the export of raw materials and have only a minimal internal market; here the culture of silence is fundamental. Like the archaic social structures, the traditionalist church remains unchanged throughout the modernization of these societies. The force of such traditionalist religion<sup>19</sup> is seen even in the urban centres which are being transformed under the impact of industrialization. Only a qualitative change in the consciousness of the people can overcome the need to see the church as the 'haven of the masses'. And as we have seen, this qualitative change does not happen automatically, mechanically or 'inside' the consciousness.

Furthermore, technological modernization does not necessarily make people more capable of critical analysis, because it too is not neutral. It is dependent on the ideology that commands it.

For all these reasons and for many more that would take too long to analyze, the traditionalist line is unquestionably allied to the ruling classes, whether or not it is aware of this. The role that these churches can (and do) play in the field of education is conditioned then by their view of the world, of religion, and of human beings and their 'destiny'. Their idea of education and its application cannot help being paralyzing, alienating and alienated. Only those who hold this perspective naively — rather than shrewdly — will be able to escape from their trap through praxis, by entering into a totally different commitment to the dominated classes and so becoming truly prophetic.

## The modernizing church

Some churches abandon the traditionalist perspective for a new attitude. The history of Latin America shows that the new position begins to emerge when modernizing elements replace the traditional structures of society. The masses of the people, previously almost completely submerged in the historical process,<sup>20</sup> now begin to emerge in response to industrialization. Society also changes. New challenges are presented to the dominating classes, demanding different answers.

The imperialist interests which condition this transition become more and more aggressive. They use various means of penetration into and control over the dependent society. At a given moment the emphasis on industrialization gives rise to a nationalist 'ideology of development' which makes a case for, among other things, a pact between the 'national bourgeoisie' and the emerging proletariat.

Latin American economists have been the first to analyse this process, followed closely by sociologists and some educators. Together they plan and put into practice the concept of social planning. At this point, the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) begins to play a decisive role, both through technical missions and through its adherence to 'development politics'. Later comes the contribution of the Latin American Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES), an organ of the United Nations whose job is to educate economists for the entire continent.

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<sup>19</sup> See Muniz de Souza, Beatriz: *A Experiência da Salvação: Pentecostais em São Paulo*, São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1969.

<sup>20</sup> Freire, Paulo: *La Educación como Práctica de la Libertad*, Montevideo, Tierra Nueva. (Also in French: *La Pratique de la Liberté*, Paris, Eds. du Cerf.)

Obviously, none of this happens by chance or in isolation. The process is an intrinsic part of the history which Latin American societies are living, in varying degrees of intensity. This complex movement, like the different perspectives produced in response to the so-called 'backwardness' of Latin America, is neither accidental nor the result of some caprice.

As we have seen, imperialistic economic interests, such as the need for wider markets, force the national elite (which is almost always a purely local expression of a foreign elite) to find ways to reform the archaic structures without, at the same time, frustrating their interests. For imperialism and its national allies, the important thing is that this reformist process — publicly called 'development' — should not affect the basic relationship between the master society and its dependent societies. Development is acceptable, but it must not alter the state of dependence! With the exception of a few minor points which will not alter the state of the subordinate society, the political, economic and cultural decisions concerning the transformation of the dependent society will be made in the master society.

So it is that the Latin American societies, with the exception of Cuba since its revolution, and up to a point Chile, are 'modernizing' rather than 'developing' in the real sense of the word. Latin America can only truly develop when the fundamental contradiction of dependence is resolved. This demands that decision-making regarding change must rest in the hands of the masses of oppressed people in the society concerned; it must be independent from a superimposed bourgeois elite.

Thus development is liberation on two levels: the whole dependent society liberating itself from imperialism, and the oppressed social classes liberating themselves from the oppressive elite. This is because real development is impossible in a class society.

The process of imperialist expansion produces new political and social situations. The process of transition in the dependent society implies the contradictory presences of both a proletariat which is being modernized and a traditional proletariat, a technico-professional petite bourgeoisie and a traditional middle class,<sup>21</sup> a traditional church and a modernizing church, a highly baroque academic education and the technico-professional education demanded by industrialization.

So it is that in spite of what the 'mechanists' think, the movement from one stage to another is not automatic. There are no rigid geographical frontiers between the stages; both dimensions co-exist in transition.

The proletariat of the modernization phase lives in a new historical experience, that of transition, giving birth to a new political action style: popularism. Its directors play the game of mediator between the emerging common people and the ruling classes.<sup>22</sup> Popularism is unthinkable in a situation where the common people have not yet made their emergence. It is found in urban centres rather than in the *latifundios* where the peasant masses are still 'submerged'.

At the same time, in the historical framework which gives birth to it, populism tends towards 'do-goodism'; hence its possibilities of manipulation. The emerging masses of common people are intensely conditioned by their experience in the culture of silence.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Cardoso, Fernando Henrique, *Politique et Développement dans les Sociétés Dépendantes*, Paris, Editions Anthropos, 1971.

<sup>22</sup> See Weffort, Francisco: *Classes Populares e Política (Contribuição ao Estudo do Populismo)*, Universidade São Paulo, 1968.

<sup>23</sup> Freire, Paulo: *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Harvard Educational Review and Centre for the Study of Development and Social Change, Cambridge, Mass., 1970; and London, Penguin, 1972.

During the process of emergence they obviously have no class consciousness since their former state of immersion gave them no chance to develop it. They are, then, as ambiguous as the populism which attempts to respond to them. On the one hand they make demands. On the other, they accept the formulas of do-goodism and manipulation. That is why the traditionalist churches also survive during the period of transition, even in the modernized urban centres. These churches often choose to enhance their own prestige, since after the stage of populism there may well be a new phase characterized by violent military regimes. Repression, reactivating the old life-styles of the masses (the culture of silence), forces them to take refuge in the Church. As we have seen, these churches, existing side by side with those which have modernized, modernize too in certain respects, thereby becoming more efficient in their traditionalism.

We have seen that the modernization process of the dependent society never gets translated into fundamental changes in the relationship between the dependent society and the master society, and that the emergence of the masses does not by itself constitute their critical consciousness. In the same way, it is interesting to note, the churches' pilgrimage toward modernization never gets translated into historic involvement with the oppressed people in any real sense that leads toward that people's liberation.

Challenged by the increased efficiency of a society which is modernizing its archaic structures, the modernizing church improves its bureaucracy so that it can be more efficient in its social activities (its 'do-goodism') and in its pastoral activities. It replaces empirical means by technical processes. Its former 'charity centres' directed by lay persons (in the Catholic Church by the Daughters of Mary) become known as 'community centres', directed by social workers. And the men and women who were previously known by their own names are today numbers on a card index.

'Mass media' (which are actually media for issuing 'communiqués' to the masses), become an irresistible attraction to the churches. But the 'modern' and modernizing church can hardly be condemned for attempting to perfect its working tools; what is more serious is the political option which clearly conditions the process of modernization. Like the traditionalist churches, of which they are a new version, they are not committed to the oppressed but to the power elite. That is why they defend structural reform over against the radical transformation of structures; they speak of the 'humanization of capitalism' rather than its total suppression.

The traditionalist churches alienate the oppressed social classes by encouraging them to view the world as evil. The modernizing churches alienate them in a different way: by defending the reforms that maintain the status quo. By reducing such expressions as 'humanism' and 'humanization' to abstract categories, the modern churches empty them of any real meaning. Such phrases become mere slogans whose only contribution is to serve the reactionary forces. In truth, there is no humanization without liberation as there is no liberation without a revolutionary transformation of the class society, for in the class society all humanization is impossible. Liberation becomes concrete only when society is changed, not when its structures are simply modernized.

In so far as the modernizing churches busy themselves with no more than peripheral changes and plead the case of neo-capitalistic measures, they will have their audience only among the 'naive' or the 'shrewd'. The young people who are neither naive nor shrewd but are challenged by the drama of Latin America

cannot accept the invitation of the modernizing churches which support conservative and reformist positions. Not only do they refuse the invitation: it provokes them into assuming attitudes which are not always valid, such as the objectivist position discussed elsewhere in this article.

The churches' conservative position, rejected by these young people, does not contradict their 'modernism', for the modernization of which we are talking is eminently conservative, since it reforms so as to preserve the status quo. Hence the churches give the impression of 'moving' while actually they are standing still. They create the illusion of marching on while really stabilizing themselves. They die because they refuse to die.

This is the kind of church which would still say to Christ today, 'Why leave, Master, if everything here is so beautiful, so good?' Their language conceals rather than reveals. It speaks of 'the poor' or of 'the underprivileged' rather than 'the oppressed'. While it sees the alienations of the ruling class and dominated class on the same level, it ignores the antagonism between them, the result of the system that created them. But, if the system alienates both groups, it alienates each in a different way. The rulers are alienated to the degree that, sacrificing their *being* for a false *having*, they are drugged with power and so stop *being*; the dominated, prevented to a certain degree from *having*, finish with so little power that *being* is impossible. Turning work into merchandise, the system creates those who buy it and those who sell it. The error of the naive and the shrewdness of the shrewd is seen in their affirmation that such a contradiction is a purely moral question.

The ruling classes, as is the logic of the class system, prohibit the dominated class from *being*. In this process the ruling class itself ceases to *be*. The system itself keeps them from rising above the contradiction, from any movement which would end their alienation as well as that of those they dominate. The dominated alone are called to fulfil this task in history. The ruling class, as such, cannot carry it out. What they can do — within their historical limits — is to reform and to modernize the system according to the new demands which the system allows them to perceive, thus in effect maintaining that which results in the alienation of all.

Under the conditions in which the modernizing churches act, their concepts of education, its objectives, its application, all must form a coherent unity within their general political position. That is why, even though they speak of liberating education, they are conditioned by their vision of liberation as an individual activity which should take place through a change of consciousness and not through the social and historical praxis of human beings. So they end up by putting the accent on methods which can be considered neutral. Liberating education for the modernizing church is finally reduced to liberating the students from blackboards, static classes and text-book curricula, and offering them projectors and other audio-visual accessories, more dynamic classes and a new technico-professional teaching.

## The prophetic church

Finally, another kind of church has been taking shape in Latin America, though it is not often visible as a coherent totality. It is a church as old as Christianity itself, without being traditional; as new as Christianity, without being modernizing. It is the prophetic church. Opposed and attacked by both traditionalist and

modernizing churches, as well as by the elite of the power structures, this utopian, prophetic and hope-filled movement rejects do-goodism and palliative social change.

In contrast with the churches considered above, it rejects all static forms of thought. It accepts becoming, in order to *be*. Because it thinks critically this prophetic church cannot think of itself as neutral. Nor does it try to hide its choice. Therefore it does not separate worldliness from transcendence or salvation from liberation. It knows that what finally counts is not the 'I am' or the 'I know'; the 'I free myself' or the 'I save myself'; nor even the 'I teach you', 'I free you', or 'I save you', but the 'we are', 'we know', 'we save ourselves'.

This prophetic line can only be understood as an expression of the dramatic and challenging situation of Latin America. It emerges when the contradictions in Latin American society become apparent. It is at this moment, too, that revolution is seen as the means of liberation for the oppressed people, and the military coup as the reactionary counter-move.

Latin America's 'prophetic' Christians may disagree among themselves, especially at the point of 'action', but they are the ones who have renounced their innocence in order to join the oppressed classes, and who remain faithful to their commitment. Protestant or Catholic — from the point of view of this prophetic position the division is of no importance — clergy or lay, they have all had to travel a hard route of experience from their idealistic visions toward a dialectical vision of reality. They have learned, not only as a result of their praxis with the people, but also from the courageous example of many young people. They now see that reality, a process and not a static fact, is full of contradictions, and that social conflicts are not metaphysical categories but rather historical expressions of the confrontation of these contradictions. Any attempt, therefore, to solve conflict without touching the contradictions which have generated it only stifles the conflict and at the same time strengthens the ruling class.

The prophetic position demands a critical analysis of the social structures in which the conflict takes place. This means that it demands of its followers a knowledge of socio-political science, since this science cannot be neutral; this demands an ideological choice.

Such prophetic perspective does not represent an escape into a world of unattainable dreams. It demands a scientific knowledge of the world as it really is. For to denounce the present reality and announce its radical transformation into another reality capable of giving birth to new men and women, implies gaining through praxis a new knowledge of reality. The dominated classes must take part in this denunciation and annunciation. It cannot be done if they are left out of the picture. The prophetic position is not petit bourgeois. It is well aware that authentic action demands a permanent process which only reaches its maximal point when the dominated class, through praxis, also becomes prophetic, utopian and full of hope — in other words, revolutionary. A society in a state of permanent revolution cannot manage without a permanent prophetic vision. Without it, society stagnates and is no longer revolutionary.<sup>24</sup>

In the same way, no church can be really prophetic if it remains the 'haven of the masses' or the agent of modernization and conservation. The prophetic church is no home for the oppressed, alienating them further by empty denunciations. On the contrary, it invites them to a new Exodus. Nor is the prophetic

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<sup>24</sup> A prophetic vision need not be the result of a religious position.

church one which chooses modernization and thereby does no more than stagnate. Christ was no conservative. The prophetic church, like Him, must move forward constantly, forever dying and forever being reborn. In order to be, it must always be in a state of *becoming*. The prophetic church must also accept an existence which is in dramatic tension between past and future, staying and going, speaking the Word and keeping silence, being and not being. There is no prophecy without risk.

This prophetic attitude, which emerges in the praxis of numerous Christians in the challenging historical situation of Latin America, is accompanied by a rich and very necessary theological reflection. The theology of so-called development gives way to the theology of liberation — a prophetic, utopian theology, full of hope. Little does it matter that this theology is not yet well systematized. Its content arises from the hopeless situation of dependent, exploited, invaded societies. It is stimulated by the need to rise above the contradictions which explain and produce that dependence. Since it is prophetic, this theology of liberation cannot attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable.

At this moment in history, theology cannot spend its time discussing 'secularization' (which in the end is the modern form of 'sacralization'<sup>25</sup>) or try to entertain us with the 'Death of God' discussion which in many ways reveals an a-critical tendency of complete adaptation by the 'unidimensionalized and depoliticized man of the affluent societies' as Hugo Assmann says in an excellent book published recently.<sup>26</sup>

To digress a moment from our specific subject, we should add here that this prophetic attitude towards the world and history is by no means exclusive to Latin America or other areas of the Third World. It is not an exotic attitude peculiar to 'underdevelopment' — firstly because the original Christian position is itself prophetic, at whatever point in time and place. Only the particular content of its witness will vary, according to the precise historical circumstances. Moreover, the concept of the Third World is ideological and political, not geographic. The so-called 'First World' has within it and against it its own 'Third World'. And the Third World has its First World, represented by the ideology of domination and the power of the ruling classes. The Third World is in the last analysis the world of silence, of oppression, of dependence, of exploitation, of the violence exercised by the ruling classes on the oppressed.

Europeans and North Americans, with their technological societies, have no need to go to Latin America in order to become prophetic. They need only go to the outskirts of their big cities, without 'naiveté' or 'shrewdness', and there they will find sufficient stimulus to do some fresh thinking for themselves. They will find themselves confronted with various expressions of the Third World. They can begin to understand the concern which gives rise to the prophetic position in Latin America.

Thus it is clear that the educational role of the prophetic church in Latin America must be totally different from that of the other churches we have discussed. Education must be an instrument of transforming action, as a political praxis at the service of permanent human liberation. This, let us repeat, does not happen only in the consciousness of people, but presupposes a radical change of structures, in which process consciousness will itself be transformed.

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<sup>25</sup> There are no societies more 'sacral' than those which are bourgeois. They react viciously to the slightest attempt to disrupt patterns which they consider universal, eternal and perfect.

<sup>26</sup> *Opresión-Liberación: Desafío a los Cristianos*, Montevideo, Tierra Nueva, 1971.

From the prophetic point of view, it makes little difference in what specific area education happens, it will always be an effort to clarify the concrete context in which the teacher-students and student-teachers are educated and are united by their presence in action. It will always be a demythologizing praxis.

Which brings us back to our opening statement: the Church, education and the role of the churches in education can only be discussed historically. It is in history that mankind is called to respond to the prophetic movement in Latin America.

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