THE DECLINE OF CERTAINTIES. FOUNDING STRUGGLES ANEW

- The Biography of François Houtart -

CARLOS TABLADA PÉREZ
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I never thought of writing my memoirs. I considered there were more important things to do. It was the insistence of my friend and colleague Carlos Tablada who with his irresistible tenacity convinced me to record memories of my experiences. Without him and his questioning I would never have done it. This book is the fruit of his initiative; he is the author of its conception, design, planning, structure and way to bring it to its final stage. Carlos informed me of all the above and for my part, I just gave my consent to his idea and to the way to give expression to it.

At the beginning the venture took over six years for the first edition –to which should be added other seven years for the process of updating it and issuing a new book. This was not because of its significance but because of the scant time in the midst of our activities. My work is described in this book. That of Carlos is focused on his duties as full researcher for the Centro de Investigación de la Economía Mundial (CIEM); on his creation and development of the Ruth Casa Editorial, with dozens of books published through his highly efficient editorial work; on his writings as an author and co-author of numerous books; on the organization, development and management of the World Forum for Alternatives (WFA) website, which is produced in six languages; among various other tasks.

These memoirs are not presented in chronological order, but rather arranged by themes, generally geographical ones, including occasional reflections. It is a question of providing the context
in which I tried to develop analysis and theoretical reflections which have been collected in several volumes that are cited in the following chapters. I do not intend to present a new philosophy, but rather an experience of life, with personal reactions and anecdotes that help understand its meaning, leaving the task for the readers to discover the logic and make their own interpretation. My truth is presented here with no pretension of originality or infallibility. I am very well aware that each individual is an actor, the result of a context that conditions them. I have been very lucky to find myself at the crossroads of various networks of social relations. What was interesting for me in this narrative is having lived in a specific period of human history, in various places as it was unfolding: what Karl Polanyi\(^1\) called ‘The Great Transformation’. This is not enough to achieve a theoretical treatise, but it can perhaps help situations that are not very well known to come out to light at least from a particular angle. I should stress, however, that the quotes from conversations that appear in this book convey the meaning of these communications as I perceived them at the time and they are not a verbatim report. It would have been impossible to record all these words accurately.

My experience leads me to believe that the logic of capitalism is leading humanity and the planet to destruction and that it is the paradigms of human development that need to be changed. My Christian faith has guided me in seeking the causes of injustice and in analyzing the mechanisms of appropriation of the world’s resources by a minority. This knowledge reinforced my conviction of the Christian message, its reference to the values of the kingdom of God and the transcendent dimension that gives its precious support to the emancipation and liberation of human beings. Obviously it has no monopoly in this field, but it is a contribution together with others.

Memory is something of the past, vital for the future. I hope that this book will contribute to make this affirmation a modest part of reality.

Quito, May 6, 2017

\(^1\) Karl Polanyi (Austria, 1886-Canada, 1964). He was an Economics historian. His main thesis is that economic liberalism disrupted the economy of society, which in turn allowed imposing its logic on the whole of the latter.
At the very moment when I started writing this article, at 6:30 a.m. June 8 Hong Kong time and 5:30 p.m. June 7 Quito time, I was supposed to start over skype, together with Jade Sit, a lecture on Peasant Agriculture in China. It was supposed to be the concluding session of a series of lectures with François Houtart as Chair of the National Institute of Higher Studies (I.A.E.N.) in Ecuador. This June 7 session, according to François in his May 2, 2017 email, “Will the last session of my Chair of this year be about: Is a post-capitalist paradigm possible? (Common Good of Humanity). I took as one of the possible transitions: peasant agriculture. I have given already a general view of the Chinese Revolution and the rural issues, during the various periods, but it would be very good to go further in the problem. The main questions would be the following: Peasant agriculture has been a response to the failures of collectivization and of rural capitalism. How did it work in China? How do the peasants react facing the introduction of the market in its present forms in China? Is their project a response able to be a step toward a new paradigm (a transition)?”

François invited me to go in person to Quito to deliver the lecture, as well as to connect me to his networks in Ecuador. I had too much work in hand, and proposed a skype lecture instead, bringing in Jade as she has been much involved in the articulation of the rural reconstruction movement in China. François said
he would himself be the interpreter into Spanish for our lecture given in English. Yet, François took a sudden departure. In Quito, on June 6 around 8:00 a.m., his Sri Lankan friend staying in his home for a brief visit heard the alarm clock going on non-stop in François’ room, went in and found him on his reclining chair, still. The departure was so sudden. François had a full schedule planned, which came to a painful interruption. The day before, he had meetings during the day in two universities and in the evening long discussion with two Sri Lankan friends on Sri Lankan political situation and on China’s economism. The day he departed, he had scheduled an interview with a newspaper about mining in Latin America, and the next day the Chair’s lecture. Then, on June 9, he was supposed to fly to Havana to work on the final edits of his Memoirs in Spanish and in English, which were to be completed by the end of June. His book on South-South Relations was also to come out this month.

The publication of the English version of François’ Memoirs is sponsored by the Global University for Sustainability (Global U), of which François Houtart, Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Joao Pedro Stedile, Lawrence Grossberg, Dai Jinhua, Wen Tiejun, Wang Hui, myself, along with 200 intellectuals from across the globe, are Founding Members. The Global U, jointly with the Monthly Review Press, will be publishing the English Memoirs of Samir Amin. François joked with me in Dakar, Senegal in December 2016 when we were together with Samir in a conference on Africa, that his Memoirs was comparable to Samir’s, in terms of length of over 500 pages, and it would be quite a task to have them translated into Chinese for the readers in China. He was modest in comparing the two Memoirs by the number of pages, and not by quality, but of course, we all know the Memoirs by the two activist-intellectual titans are of such significance in recounting their experiences as well as elaborating their thought arising from their praxis. It is my wish to have them translated into Chinese after the English edition is done, so that the Chinese people, for whom both Samir and François have a great fondness (for the revolutionary history of China, with the engagement of Chinese workers, peasants, women, youth...), can access their perspectives and their visions.
Interaction with Chinese Intellectuals

François came to Beijing in 2012 to give lectures at Peking University, Renmin University of China, and Tsinghua University, organized by the professors Dai Jinhua, Wen Tiejun, and Wang Hui, respectively. I assisted with interpretation to ensure the audience understand fully François’ arguments. After the visit, François wrote: “In two of them the theme was Latin America, and in Tsinghua, the crisis and the necessity for a new paradigm. The audience was made up of post-graduate students. The discussions were rich, in great measure because the three professors had developed critical thinking among the students. In all three lectures I brought up the problem of the development model and possible alternatives.”

With Wen Tiejun, François had a lot of interactions. As François showed that peasant agriculture is not less productive than industrial agriculture, but has added value of social, cultural and ecological functions, he promoted a new philosophical approach to agriculture as a survival activity of human beings, conditioned by the renewal of rural society. He had much interest in dialogue with Wen Tiejun. They co-edited the book *Peasant Agriculture in Asia* (2012), which was an outcome of the bringing together of peasant intellectuals from ten countries in Asia in 2010 to Beijing to discuss their plight and alternatives. In 2013, François brought together peasant intellectuals from Latin America to conduct a similar workshop in La Paz and produced a collection in Spanish in 2014. He had wished to do the same for Africa, to be followed by a tricontinental interaction. François had also been quite involved in La Via Campesina for this reason. François was not financially affluent, but he used the award money he got from the UNESCO Madensheet Singh Prize for Promoting Tolerance and Non-violence in 2009 to partially finance the two workshops in Asia and Latin America.

Based on this mutual concern for promoting peasant agriculture and rural reconstruction, François and Wen had a deep respect for each other. On François’ 90th birthday, Wen wrote to him, on behalf of the Chinese rural reconstruction movement:

“Professor Houtart is a world famous progressive thinker, an important teacher to social movements in emerging countries,
a good friend of the people at large. He always listens with a smile to the voices from the bottom, never speaking violent words, yet able to impart strength and encouragement!

Since the re-initiating of China’s rural reconstruction movement in the past ten years in the new century, we have been treated to Professor Houtart’s utmost sincerity as teacher and friend. We have consistently followed the thoughts of Professor Houtart, moving with the times. Under his earnest teaching we have enhanced our exchange with emerging countries. Five years ago, we were much honored to have been able to invite the 85-year-old Professor Houtart to come and speak in China, learning at proximity the wise man’s far-sightedness and innovative thinking. We have consistently joined in the great career that Professor Houtart has given his whole life to the revival of nature and human society. During the process, the wise man, from Europe to Latin America, from Africa to Asia, has contributed every minute of his noble life to the laboring masses. We shall strive to follow his example with a hope to continue his heritage.”

In reply, François wrote to Wen: “It has been so kind of you to take this initiative. I have been very much moved, because it represents for me a sign of deep friendship and because I have a profound admiration for your action in China.”

François was invited as the key speaker at the Third South-South Forum on Sustainability held in Lingnan University in Hong Kong in 2016. We made a video recording of his systematic analyses of the crises today and proposals for the Common Good of Humanity. These constitute the First Series of E-Lectures produced by Global U. http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/5048-2/

I took the opportunity, every time I met him, whether it was in Algiers, Bali, Bamako, Beijing, Brussels, Caceres, Caracas, Dakar, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Madrid, Mumbai, Nairobi, Porto Alegre, Taipei, or Tunis, to interview him on his life story, to listen to his commentaries on world affairs, to enjoy the wisdom and wit of his observations, to hear him recount his experiences. He had lived such a rich life that there were countless stories to tell, countless reflections to make. When we met, he would bring me Belgian
chocolate bars. Once from Quito, he brought me a shawl made of white alpaca wool, and I treasure it so much I have never used it. I would also bring him chocolate, as he was such a lover of chocolate and sweets! His happy laughter, when we presented him with a Belgian chocolate cake in Hong Kong, still rings in my ear. Of the books that I gave him, his favourite was the Book of Tao printed on silk. François had an open attitude towards various religions and faiths. His doctorate thesis analyzed the function of Buddhism in forming the culture and the nation of Sri Lanka.

François wrote of me and him: “We always shared a common view in analyzing capitalism and orientations for the future, bearing in mind the pros and cons of the socialist experiences. We both felt that a renewed socialism was the path to follow, based on sound analysis and a critical commitment, but responsible in social and political construction.” In particular, we shared views on the significance of ecological concerns in our thoughts about the future, and in the World Forum for Alternatives, we had worked together specifically on issues of ecology and peasant agriculture. Which is also why, apart from co-editing Globalizing Resistance (2010), I was keen in getting François’ book Agrofuels: Big Profits, Ruined Lives and Ecological Destruction (2010) translated and published in Chinese (2011). We had our last face to face conversation in Samir’s office and home in Dakar on Dec 9, 2016. The three of us agreed on how important it was to organically incorporate the agenda about ecology in our paradigm for alternatives.

I was so used to this friendship with François that I felt we had been friends for life. Actually, our first encounter was in 2003, when Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA) held its Congress in Penang, Malaysia. François was invited as observer. François had a band aid on his forehead. It would have been impolite to ask about it. After three days of meeting, he was to depart for the airport; I, as Co-Chair of ARENA, politely sat by him to see him off. While waiting, I asked, “What has happened to you,” pointing to his forehead. François gave his grin of humour, which I would find, in the years to come, youthful as always, notwithstanding his age. He removed the band aid, and said, “I still have the band aid for aesthetic reasons, actually this has healed, nothing serious; I bumped into a pillar in the airport.
because I was not looking to the front.” He was traveling with two suitcases full of books, both hands occupied, and while walking and turning around to attend to the suitcases, he bumped into a pillar. He was only 78 then.

In the meetings that we attended together in the subsequent years, in almost all World Social Forums, François would be bringing books and pamphlets, to sell or to distribute. Last year in Tunis, he was carrying the blue pamphlet “For the Common Good of Humanity” around. He not only wrote over 50 books, he also made an effort to bring them along and circulate them. We share this common habit of moving books around. I need not ask François if the books I brought him would be too heavy to carry home. He was always delighted to receive books.

Father, Thinker and Militant

As if he were to console our grief at his departure, François had written:

“Death has not been a great problem for me, a worry or a cause for fear. I see it as part of a natural series of events for everyone and I believe that its meaning is determined by the life that each person has led... The only thing that worried me are the conditions that bring about death; in other words, whether one can live until the last moment with a certain dignity that makes it possible to be responsible for one’s end... I think that a life does not end with death and, for this reason it is a transition, one more stage, the achievement. What the future holds after this is a great mystery about which no one can bear witness. As far as I am concerned what the future could be is a wager: perhaps it is a spiritual continuation. Anyway, it is perhaps of no importance. I have always tried to live in the present as intensely as possible and, for this reason, I do not feel that the end is something dramatic. Death is part of life and we must experience it in the same way as we have always experienced life... Thus a trajectory of faith helps to live to the full and to have hope at the moment of death.”

François was soft, gentle and kind, but immensely purposeful in his dedication to the cause of justice and equality. He was
ordained as a priest but had not worn a clergy collar or a cross after Vatican Council II, seeing them as mere accessories to show off status. He had been professor of sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain for 32 years, and had taught or mentored statesmen, politicians, theologians, and most importantly, activists and militants. He is revered and loved as theorist and practitioner of Liberation Theology, but he has also won respect from believers in Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Marxism, communism and other faiths, seeing that we all strive for the Common Good of Humanity. He had written dozens of books, and traveled to be with working people in the three continents, especially in Latin America.

François’ wish, according to a friend, was to be buried by the tomb of his mother, Gudule Carton de Wiart, in Belgium. François had been greatly influenced by his mother who, after her marriage at the age of 20, gave birth to a child almost every year until there were 14. François was the first born. The family was affluent, but she was frugal, buying the cheapest bread in her area, yet she would visit and aid poor families, taking François and other children along for them to be exposed to the reality of the poor. She began to drive a car at the age of 15, and still drove an ambulance in her work for church missions in Rwanda when she was 83. She had gone to Rwanda annually for some 15 years, and only stopped when she was 85 and could no longer travel. She died at 94.

The influence from the mother was the belief that as part of the elite in comfortable circumstances, they should have obligations and put themselves at the service of the disadvantaged. François became a missionary, and one sister worked as a nurse in a leprosy centre in Tamil Nadu, India.

François was 78 when I first met him. Still, from his Memoirs, I can picture him in his formative years, with traits that continued in his whole life:

At 4 or 5, his dream was to work in a locomotive factory, in order to paint cars.

He went to secondary school, at 10, walking 2 kilometres to catch a one-hour tram ride, then walked another 10 minutes to arrive in school. He never went to primary school, being taught at home by his mother on mathematics, history,
geography and French.

At 13, he assisted his maternal grandfather, Count Henri Carton de Wiart, president of the League of Nations before WWII, and member of the Belgian parliament for over 50 years, to put up posters for election campaigns for the whole night, and accompanied him on political work, meeting various personalities.

At 15, under German occupation of Brussels, in the tram, he used a razor to cut off the buttons and make holes in the uniforms of German officers. Only because he managed to throw away the razor and the buttons early enough that when he was taken to the office of the German military government and searched and interrogated, evidence could not be found.

At 18, he entered the seminary at Malines, preparing himself to become a priest. He joined the Young Catholic Workers (YCW), and in subsequent years, he visited factories, went down mines, met with worker priests from France, and discovered the reality of the working class.

At 19, he joined the resistance movement. In June 1944, his guerilla group was allocated a task to blow up a four-lane bridge which was a supply railway line for the German troops. It was two weeks after the Normandy landing and the English had bombed the other railway line from Brussels to the port of Ostend. François carried the dynamite, the wires to detonate the dynamite, and a 9 mm revolver; the group cycled 15 to 20 kilometres to the site and successfully destroyed the bridge. Only the commander and he remained at the scene to ensure the mission was done, while the guide and others had run away.

At 24, he was ordained priest. In the next three years, he studied political and social sciences at the Catholic University of Louvain. He rode his little 125 cc motorcycle to go around for investigations in socialist municipalities and working-class neighbourhoods. Instead of dressing in a cassock with a clerical collar, he asked permission from the cardinal to dress like a peasant. He said, oddly enough the cardinal accepted, but on one condition, François was not to go to the cinema!
He stayed in a centre for delinquent youth. The thesis he wrote was on the social history of Brussels and religious institutions. He showed that the Church had neglected setting up pastoral structures in working-class districts, and was biased towards bourgeois and middle-class neighbourhoods. He wanted to understand why the working class saw Christianity as an enemy.

At 28, he got a scholarship to study in Chicago for a year. Studying urban sociology, he also repeated his research in every city on pastoral institutions to analyse the relationship of the church to different social sectors, understanding racial segregation in US society and closeness between the church institutions and the rich elite and government. He made a brief trip to Cuba and Haiti in 1953.

At 29, for six months, he toured Latin America: Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Colombia (where he invited Camilo Torres to study in Belgium), Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia (where he went to tin and copper mines), Chile, Argentina (where he stayed for four months and taught urban sociology in the University of Buenos Aires), Uruguay, and Brazil (where he was shocked by the condition of the favelas.) He was exposed to the realities of discrimination and exploitation, the domination of US capitalism, the privileges enjoyed by the elite, the distance between the social classes, but he was also moved by the solidarity among the poor, and the commitment of some priests to the well being of the indigenous. François said after this journey, “I feel myself to be Latin American”.

With these thirty years of formation of his subjectivity, outlook, faith and personality, François was to conduct his invaluable work in Liberation Theology, teaching, and promotion of movements for the rest of his life. The irreducible sense of justice that he had fought for was his input into the Vatican Council II between 1958 and 1962. Liberation Theology, in his simple words, is to see the world with the eyes of the oppressed. For him, Marxist analysis is an appropriate instrument for a better understanding of society.

François had led an active and intense life. The roots were deeply
grounded in the exposure to different realities, the familiarity with
the operation of the church and the global network of progressive
priests, and the elaboration of Liberation Theology and Marxism.
After the age of 30, he had been active in several main arenas:

The Vatican Council II.

When Pope John XXIII convened the Vatican Council II in 1958-
62 for new orientations to be introduced into the Church, François,
with the status of peritus expert, helped produce 43 volumes of
social research. He traveled widely to network with progressive
cardinals and bishops to promote an inversion of the Church
pyramid for the grassroots (God's people) to come first and the
institution (hierarchy, clergy) to serve the people, for a strong link
between theology and social commitment. François found that
engagement in the Council enabled him to live a different church,
to legitimize and actualize aspirations that he already had.

The Academia

Teaching and researching from 1958 onwards, François traveled
to African and Asian countries, did his doctorate on religion
and ideology in Sri Lanka, and after the 1970s, identifying with
the poor and downtrodden of the South, he adopted Marxist
method of analysis, and rebelled against the hypocrisy of the West
which promoted human rights but at the same time exploited
the labour and wealth of the South, using war and violence to
preserve its interests. He stood on the opposition of the powerful
elite of the North. He said, for him, in spite of the Inquisition,
he was still a Christian; in the same vein, in spite of the crimes
of the Soviet regime, he was still a socialist. Engaged in the
academia, he founded the Social, Demographic and Economic
Centre (SODEGEC) as part of the University of Louvain in 1962.
Tricontinental Centre (CETRI), an autonomous research institute,
was founded by François in 1976. The building was constructed
with François’ inheritance from his father who died some years
ago, with inadequate funds topped up by François’ mother who
personally saw to the construction and furnishing of the institute.
In 1994, CETRI started to produce a quarterly review, *Alternatives Sud*, which publishes writers from the South. The institute also lodged almost 400 postgraduate students from Asia, Africa and Latin America, among whom were Rafael Correa, Monsignor Lebulu, Georges Casmoussa, and numerous leaders of social movements as well as from different faiths.

**Social Movements**

Because of his many active engagements, François had been asked to serve in different capacities in relation to social and liberation movements. Just to name a few: around 1965, he was Vice President of the Belgium-Vietnam Friendship Association, supporting the Vietnamese war against US imperialism. In 1967, he assisted in the International War Crimes Tribunal where war crimes by the USA in Vietnam were heard. In 2005 he was part of the Permanent People’s Tribunal on the US embargo against Cuba. In 2012, he chaired the People’s Tribunal on Sri Lanka, and was part of a peace mission in Syria. In 2007, he started his first meetings with La Via Campesina and the MST, and had worked with them from then on. In that same year, he entered into direct contact with the Zapatistas.

With the indigenous peoples, the miners, the peasants, the displaced, François was always humble and compassionate, with utmost gentleness. He practiced what he believed in: to see the world with the eyes of the oppressed, and to fight along with them with a firm belief in the power of the oppressed to confront gross injustices and strive for the common good of humanity.

François is revered as a person of integrity and honesty. He was mentor or friend to quite a number of state leaders in Latin America, including Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa. On many occasions he interacted with these leaders, but he never concealed his criticisms about what he felt was not correct. He told his Cuban friends that if they were real Marxists they could not be dogmatic; he argued with Fidel Castro on internationalism and ways to deal with dissidents. He sent to Rafael Correa reports about his findings of the problems of developmentalism and dependency in Ecuador, such as growing
broccoli for export. He told me, on March 24 this year, “Today I accompanied my friend Frei Betto to the presidential palace where he received an Ecuadorian award. Rafael Correa profited of the opportunity to celebrate my birthday, with a big cake at the lunch and a kind gift (a madonna). And this in spite of my strong critics to his policy.” François had this marvel of never compromising his positions, always making his point, but gaining trust and respect because it was difficult to doubt his noble cause and his goodwill.

The Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry stated on June 8, 2017, the second day after François’ death, “We are deeply sorry for the loss of a thinker who has devoted much of his life to the struggle for human rights and Liberation Theology. Without doubt, the great intellectuals of history are teaching throughout their lives. This is the case of Houtart, who from his space in the academy knew how to support our government and other governments in the region. Houtart will be remembered, throughout history, as a courageous propeller of the welfare of all humanity.”

The words of Samir, the close co-procreator and co-fighter with François since the mid 1990s when they founded the World Forum for Alternatives, promoted the Other Davos and the World Social Forum, and initiated so many encounters and gatherings in Asia, Africa and Latin America, beautifully presented François on François’ 90th birthday:

“Great great ideas do not have any procreators, they say. They germinate on the fertile ground of collective struggles. They are refinement in the open and frank debate of their actors. Great ideas are the collective inventions of mankind.

No, the great just ideas also have procreators. Those who, a little more lucid than others, endeavor to understand the unavoidable requirements of the coherence of thought and action. Beyond this lucidity, those who persevere with courage so that the great righteous ideas become material forces that change the world.

François is an exemplary model. From 1996 onwards, he was able to counter the invasive tide of the liberal virus and to think of the need for a World Forum that would become one of the privileged places to build the effectiveness of the resistance
of the people who were victims of the system. He expressed it to Louvain la Neuve in 1996. An idea that convinced all of us. Without him the World Forum for Alternatives, founded a year later in Cairo, would probably not have been born. Without him the entry of this Forum on the stage in Davos in 1999 would probably not have been imagined. Read the Manifesto of the World Forum for Alternatives. The precision of the great just ideas that you will find there, their formulation with all the power of poetry, owe much to him.

Let’s not say to François: thank you for all that you have done and continue to do. Let us say to him: we want to do as you do, as much as you do, as well as you do.”

Dearest François, we want to do as you do, as much as you do, as well as you do.

June 2017

Postscript:
The project to write a biography of François Houtart is completely by Carlos Tablada Pérez. Carlos Tablada Pérez published the first biography entitled *El Alma en la Tierra. Memorias de François Houtart (The Soul on Earth)* in August 2010, after seven years of working together with François. The current edition presented by Carlos Tablada Pérez has been revised on the basis of the first one, with extensive additions. Thanks to this initiative of Carlos Tablada Pérez, the exemplary thoughts and experiences of François can be approached. How we had wished that François himself would be present for the book launch! In sadness and with gratitude, let us celebrate François’ life lived so intensely, and let his spirit of selfless, tireless determination be always with us, inspiring us to move on with love and audacity.

The Fourth South South Forum on Sustainability was held in Hong Kong, July 2017. The opening session was dedicated to the memory of François. Please visit: [http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/homage-to-francois-houtart/](http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/homage-to-francois-houtart/)

January 2018
François Houtart is without doubt one of the best known, most cosmopolitan, controversial and multifaceted personalities in his own country of Belgium. This highly unusual priest has spoken and acted on behalf of humankind for more than seventy years, making outstanding contributions that embrace and transcend the doctrines of his church. His constant quest for “a tool to see societies through the eyes of the oppressed” has resulted in his being at the forefront of the most progressive social projects of his times, always putting forward alternatives that promote a move towards social justice. Apart from being a fascinating personal history, the story of his productive life opens up a window on events, countries and personalities that many know only through historical texts or news reports.

For this reason, in March 2004, I suggested to François Houtart that we start recording conversations about his life, with a view to publishing a biography. I was convinced of the value of telling the story of this long and intense life, which in its unique scope and range would bring us close to all the battles of his time. François was surprised and not very keen to talk about himself, but as the project progressed he became more enthusiastic.

I dedicated six years to interview him, to talk to dozens of people and conduct a research of numerous documents. This was the origin of my first book on François’ biography, which I finished in August 2010; it saw the light in December that same
year entitled *El alma en la tierra. Memorias de François Houtart* (*Soul on Earth. Memoirs of François Houtart*).

The book I am presenting comprises my first biography plus what François lived during the past seven years, with sundry notes to help you understand better his life and work as well as new enquiries and reasoning. He not only continued with the rhythm of his life but increased it with uncommon lucidity, wisdom and vitality.

The book reproduces – as in my first biography of François – almost word for word all the conversations that I had with François in countless long sessions: interviews during which he gave me an intimate, thorough and unusual picture of his life. Later, we continued to have discussions about the structure of the book and the selection of information to be included, while he spent considerable time revising and improving the manuscript.

This edition of the book also includes some essential data on the personalities with whom François has been in contact. It has been a gigantic task and is still incomplete, given the enormous number of people he has met, the many different places where he has worked and the immense sum of knowledge he has accumulated.

This is the biography of a man who has allowed experience to change him, always adopting the better options, rarely clinging to preconceived ideas and always prepared to modify his position in that ecumenical spirit that characterizes him: non-sectarian, open-minded and humanist. Today this priest is a close and dear friend to thousands of people throughout the world, an obligatory point of reference in the social sciences, an expert and indispensable adviser to progressive social networks and movements, and a person whose judgements are respected by his church. As François himself says, he considers himself to be Belgian to his very marrow, as well as being Latin American when on that continent, and a brother of the peoples of Asia and Africa. He knows, however, that he can also be an unwelcome visitor in places where he seeks to correct injustice.

After almost twenty four years of working together systematically –in ways that were sometimes contradictory but always enriching– I have never stopped learning from him. Apart from anything else, this text is a small expression of my gratitude for all that I owe him.

May 6, 2017
PART ONE
A WORLD OF CERTAINTIES
CHAPTER I: EARLY YEARS. FAMILY ORIGINS

One of my paternal great-grandfathers—it was about 1860—ran a fair-sized glass-works factory in Jumet, near Charleroi.\(^1\) He organized social and medical security for several hundred workers, which was very unusual in those days. Because of his advanced social views, a number of famous personalities came to visit the factory. One day, the heir to the throne—who later became King Leopold II of Belgium—\(^2\) came to visit the factory, together with Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico.\(^3\) This happened to coincide with the wedding of one of my great-grandfather's daughters and he asked the future monarchs if they would be witnesses at the wedding. They accepted.

I never knew my paternal grandparents because they died in Brussels before I was born. They formed part of a family that was very active in industry in general and, because of the family tradition, especially in glassmaking, which in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century was one of the most important industries in Belgium. They had

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1. Documents preserved from the 12\(^{\text{th}}\) and 13\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries testify to the origin of my paternal family in the small nobility of glaziers.
2. Leopold II of Belgium (1835-1909), king of the Belgians from 1865. He was sovereign of the Independent State of the Congo (1884-1908). He as succeeded by his nephew Alberto.
3. Fernand Maximilian Joseph of Habsburg-Lorraine (1832-1867) was an Austrian noble who married Charlotte Amelia of Belgium, daughter of Leopold I of Belgium. He accepted to become Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico in 1864. He was executed in 1867.
two other sons, Albert and Francis, as well as my father. The latter administered his property and particularly that of his wife's, daughter of a rich notary from the south of the country. My uncle, Albert Houtart, was a judge and governor of Brabant province and he had to play a very difficult role during the Second World War.

My mother's family was called Carton de Wiart. They were originally from the Ath region in Wallonia but like my father's family they moved to Brussels in the 19th century. My mother's father, Count Henri Carton de Wiart, dedicated his life to politics and literature. He became a lawyer and also studied legal medicine at the University of Brussels. He became involved in politics in the Catholic Party at a very young age. In spite of the rather conservative character of the Catholic Party, he was one of the founders of its Christian Democrat wing. He was a member of the Belgian parliament for more than fifty years and during the First World War he was the Minister of Justice in his country's government in exile before the Second World War, he was the President of the League of Nations at the time when Italy was expelled because of its war against Ethiopia and he also served as president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. He became prime minister and after World War I, he was made Minister of Justice. In 1911, already in office, he promoted a law for the social protection of minors, which was famous at the time. He was the author of several novels especially historical ones. He wrote a book about Liège, entitled La Cité Ardente, which gave rise to the name by which this city is still known. He was a member of the Académie de la Philosophie et des Lettres in Paris and was friend with many of the most famous French writers of that epoch, like Paul Claudel⁴ and Léon Bloy.⁵

I had a wonderful relationship with my grandfather. I was his first grandson and his godson too. I was soon involved in them. As he was very active in politics before the Second World War, when I was only 13 or 14 years old, I was putting up posters in

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⁴ Paul Louis Charles Claudel (1868-1955), French diplomat in China and in various European countries, his last mission being to Brussels in 1933. He was a poet and the author of various theatrical works.

⁵ Léon Bloy (1846-1917). French novelist and essayist.
the election campaigns. Once, in one of his campaigns I spent the whole night sticking them up in the town where we were then living. In what was called the Phoney War, when I was 15, my grandfather had to attend a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Lugano, Switzerland and he took me to keep him company. I did not attend all the debates, but I went to the receptions. It was there that I had the extraordinary experience of meeting politicians from various countries. When we came back through Paris, the Belgian government designated my grandfather to be its official representative at the funeral of Admiral Ronarch, a hero of the First World War. I participated with him in a national ceremony at Les Invalides. Naturally, all this had a great impact on me.

My grandfather on my mother's side had several brothers. One of them (René) lived in Egypt and he dedicated himself to modernizing the law in that country. He acted as a judge and was called bey, an Arab title of nobility. Another of his brothers (Maurice) was a priest and he practised his ministry in England, at a time when the Catholics were extremely marginalized. He became vicar-general of the London diocese and held it until his death. Edmond, the third brother, was the private secretary of King Leopold II during the colonization of the Congo. As a financier, he then became the head of the Société Générale the most important bank in Belgium at that time.

My mother's family always had contacts with the royal family. My great uncle, as secretary of Leopold II, and my grandfather, because of his governmental position, had very good relations with King Albert I. It so happened that the king died in an accident in the mountains near Namur, just in front of the property of my great uncle Edmond, so that it was he who was the first to come and recover his body.

My maternal grandmother was called Juliette Verhaegen. She was the niece of Théodor Verhaegen, the founder of the Free University of Brussels, created in 1834 against the Catholic University of

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6 Admiral Pierre Alexis Ronarch (1865-1940), of the French armed forces, played a key role in protecting the Belgian army at the beginning of the 1914-1918 war, enabling it to remain in part of the national territory in Yzer.

7 Albert I of Belgium (1875-1934). He took the throne on the death of his uncle Leopold in 1909. His successor was his son Leopold II of Belgium.
Louvain. He was an anticlerical man, although religious. She was orphaned very young and educated in Ghent, in the Flemish part of the country, with her uncle, one of the founders of the Christian Workers Movement in this region. At that time at least –the end of the 19th century– intellectuals played an important role in guiding the worker's unions. My grandmother dedicated herself to social work and she also had a lot of contact with artistic circles. Each week intellectual and creative artists would meet in her salon. During the First World War, she remained in Brussels while my grandfather stayed in France with the Belgian government in exile. She acted as liaison between that government and the activists inside Belgium, but not for long; the Germans discovered what she was doing and imprisoned her in Berlin. She was in the same prison as Rosa Luxemburg. I only learnt about this after her death so I was never able to ask her about their contacts with each other. All that I know is that to call to one another they would whistle the tune of the International. But they were in prison for very different reasons: my grandmother, a future countess, because of her Belgian nationalism against the German occupation; Rosa Luxemburg, a Marxist intellectual, because of her commitment to socialism.

My father, Paul Houtart, was born in Brussels in 1884. Before the First World War, he lived on his rents. He had horses and entered them into competitions and races. During the conflict he was a volunteer in the trench artillery –but always on Belgian territory. When the war ended, he was an administrator in the steel and other industries. The conflict had delayed his life plans. He was around 40 years old when he married my mother, who was 20. He died at the age of 82.

My mother, Gudule Carton de Wiart, was born in 1904. Since she was a girl she was full of life –and also worries. During the exile of her family in France, the Belgian cabinet would meet in her house and she would take up her position in a corner from

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919). Was born in Poland and she adopted German nationality. She happened to be in prison at the same time as Juliette Verhaegen because she participated in a pacifist campaign against the war in 1915. She was against the integration of the working class into capitalist society as promoted by the Social Democrat Party and also against Lenin for his lack of democracy.
which she could see and hear the discussions. Once, when she was playing as usual with other children on a little hill –in the region of Le Havre, close to the coast– she slipped and fell 30 metres. A small tree saved her life. She began to drive cars when she was 15 years and at 83 years of age she still drove an ambulance in her work for the church missions in Rwanda.

My parents married in 1924. A child was born almost every year, until there were 14 of us. I remember that my mother said that the only time when she could rest a little was when she was in the clinic to have another baby; but in fact she never complained. Even though we had some servants in the house, she worked hard, cooking for everyone and looking after our education. In spite of all these domestic chores, she continued to be interested in social work.

Her strong sense of social ethics kept her going. For a long time she would walk to the Aldi\(^\text{9}\) to buy the cheapest bread in her area. When we suggested getting air conditioning because she had respiratory problems, she would never accept, saying that it was too expensive. She managed her money carefully in order to save for projects that were worthwhile. For 30 years she was a member of the San Vicente de Paul Conference\(^\text{10}\) and also took part in weekly meetings of spiritual dialogue. She visited and aided poor families, taking us with her so that we became aware of this reality.

My mother was very open to religious social thinking, which she inherited from her parents who were both socially and politically committed and, at the same time, very Christian. She aroused our interest in the missions in Africa and Asia, the life of the Church, etc., which she never abandoned. She supported my sister Godelieve when she went to work as a nurse in a leprosy centre in Tamil Nadu, in India.\(^\text{11}\) My mother went to visit her and was enthusiastic about the work she was carrying out there. For some 15 or 16 years she would make an annual trip to Rwanda and in

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\(^{9}\) Commercial centre belonging to the Aldi group, a chain of discount supermarkets. When it started it was considered as a cheap shop and better-off families would not frequent it.

\(^{10}\) Groups of people concerned with aiding the poor, guided by San Vicente de Paul, a Franciscan priest (1581-1660).

\(^{11}\) Godelieve then went to Bihar, also in India, and later to Bangladesh.
the last years of her life she always worked in the Burundi refugee camp in the southern part of the country. She left the European winter to go and work there, living in the missions, working in the clinics, helping the sick and driving the ambulance. The news about the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was a terrible shock for her. She knew many people there and the mission where she used to work was destroyed. When at 85 years of age she could no longer make the journeys to Rwanda, she would spend almost all the time in a garage, sorting out second-hand clothing and medicines that were not yet expired, making up parcels to send.

When my father died my mother was 62. For some 15 to 20 years afterwards she continued to live in the enormous and isolated house in Meer, which had been bought by my father at the end of the Second World War. So she decided to sell the house and go to live in Brussels, in the neighbourhood of Montgomery Square. Although this was one of the districts of the well-to-do in that city, she lived in a small apartment in a residence for the elderly. With the other inhabitants, she organized the saying of the rosary every evening; and each year, when we were having a family reunion, she would ask me to celebrate a mass. Towards the end of her life she became very fragile and had difficulty in breathing. She did not want to live like that after such an intense life. She wanted to rest and even requested me to ask the Pope for permission to accelerate her death. She would ask me, “Why has God forgotten me?” She died soon afterwards, at 94 years of age. Her faith was strong, but she was open-minded. After the Vatican Council II, I abandoned the use of the clerical collar. For a long time I was criticized for this by some members of my family who thought I should at least wear a little cross. For them these accessories were a symbol of belonging and status. Nevertheless, my mother willingly accepted my decision.

Even in situations that were difficult for her to swallow, she stood by her children and she was forbearing. The divorces of two of her children were inconceivable to her, but she never broke off her relations with them, only showing them her disagreement. When one of my sisters decided to wed a man who had been married, the family did not accept it very well. My mother did not want to receive them until he had divorced his previous wife.
However when in the end the two decided on a civil marriage, she made a huge effort to take part in the ceremony. Her health had greatly deteriorated but she wanted to show her solidarity.

**Childhood and Early Education**

I was born in Brussels on 7 March 1925, the firstborn of the family. When I was four or five years old my greatest dream was to be an engineer in a factory of locomotives, mainly to be able to paint them. I never went to primary school; my parents chose to keep their children at home. We lived for two years in Knokke, a coastal area where there were not many schools nearby. Then we moved to Gaesbeek, in Flanders, to a small 16th century castle the property of my grandfather, some 15 kilometres from Brussels, so that it was also difficult to attend school every day where the classes were in French. My mother taught me French, mathematics, history, geography and –sometimes with the help of teachers, and then I sat for examinations in the Jesuit College in Brussels.

On New Year's Day every year the whole family travelled to Brussels to visit the grandparents, but they also visited the Papal Nuncio to give him our best wishes. Monsignor Clemente Micara, famous for his magnificence, was succeeded by another nuncio, called Fernando Cento, who became a cardinal in 1958. Cento talked in a literary way. He spoke Italian very well but his French was poor. When he spoke he made many mistakes which were the cause of much mirth. On one of these visits, my mother presented all her children to the nuncio, who said in French, “One can see that they are all cast in the same mould”. The word *moulde* in French can be either masculine or feminine. If pronounced as masculine the word does indeed mean mould, but he put it in the feminine and we started to laugh. So instead of saying that we were all cast in the same mould, he said that clearly we were all coming out of the same mussel.

When we lived in Knokke, near the sea, sometimes my parents would go out in the evening, leaving my smaller brothers and sisters

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12 He was invested Cardinal in 1946 and died in 1965.
13 Fernando Cento. He was invested Cardinal in 1958 and he died in 1973.
in the care of Lilian Baels, the daughter of the governor of Western Flanders. I only visited her house a couple of times, because I was the oldest, but all of us knew her well. At the time she was 18 or 19 years old. Because of her father’s responsibilities she met King Leopold III\textsuperscript{14} before he was arrested by the Germans during the Second World War. The king fell in love with her and since she was a young girl who did not belong to the aristocracy, this became one of the great socio-political problems of the period. In the middle of the war, the king married Lilian. He was a prisoner of the Germans in the Palace of Laeken, so he could not leave it to attend a civil wedding. The cardinal then married them in a religious ceremony, which was against the law that gave priority to the civil wedding. For having made this exception for the king, he was strongly criticized by society. However, in the 1940s there was a very strong link between the royal family and the Church.

I finished my primary schooling two years earlier and went to the Jesuit middle school in Brussels at the age of ten. It was not a good idea to start secondary schooling so young so I had to repeat one course because I was not at the same level as the others. I had to leave home very early in the morning to get to the school and walk two kilometres –which took nearly half an hour– to catch a tram that took about an hour to reach Brussels. Then I had to walk for ten minutes to the school.

I had a good teacher, Father Jean Marie de Buck, S.J., an excellent writer who had authored many books on adolescence and novels that had had great success at that time. He was a progressive intellectual and through literature he introduced us to social issues. It was he who first put me in touch with the Young Catholic Workers movement (YCW), which later played an important part in my life. My companions and I were always very interested in what he taught us during his lessons.

At ten years old I already wanted to be a missionary. I did not say so then, but I certainly was very much convinced at the end of my secondary studies, although I had not been able to travel much because of the war. In fact there was no other kind of

\textsuperscript{14} Leopold III (1901-1983) was King of Belgium from 1934. He abdicated the throne in favour of his eldest son, Baudouin.
recreational activities. I began getting involved in the work of the Jesuit missions. I kept up a regular correspondence with a Belgian missionary of that order, who worked with the indigenous people in Bihar, India. I was very soon in touch with the San Vicente de Paul Conference, to which my mother belonged. Its approach was very paternalistic but it enabled me to discover a reality that I had never known before.

Most of my vacations since I was 13, I went camping with the scouts; during the short holidays at Christmas and then the ‘great camp’ that took place in the summer in the Belgian part of the Ardennes. The ‘great camp’ lasted one or two marvellous weeks: we played games in the fields during the day and at night we sang songs. For me it was a way of escaping for a while from my family, who were very strict. My father would not allow participation in any other activities but agreed to my joining these scouts because this particular troop was a prestigious one. It was called the ‘Lones’, which meant the isolated ones. Its members were young men who lived outside Brussels and could not meet every week, as the other scout troops did, but only once or twice a month.

There were various kinds of scouts, both Catholic and other non-denominational ones. Ours was a special federation of Catholic scouts and we had a very nice chaplain who belonged to a missionary group but his health prevented him from going abroad as a missionary. During the war when so many other activities ceased, the scouts never stopped functioning. I became the head of a patrol and then assistant of the troop, which was a very interesting experience. We were all very patriotic against the German occupation. This training was therefore positive because it was rigorous but also quite open-minded.

Having been a Catholic scout was important for me; besides helping to educate young people in values and commitment, it was a very concrete way of living religion without false devotion or mysticism, but very down to earth which was appropriate for our age. Our religious ceremonies were wonderful; although they represented a rather romantic vision, they were a real experience. And in the camps we celebrated mass in a different way, in keeping with the surroundings. That was when I developed the idea of greater informality in religious rites.
My maternal grandfather wrote a book entitled *The Bourgeois Virtues* that considered the values of human beings in this social context. There was a strong concept of the importance of the family in our household. This was reflected in our domestic style of life: my father, for example, wanted us all to accompany him every Sunday on a walk through the woods. For all the children, and me in particular, this was very inconvenient because we would have much preferred to go out with our friends or with the scouts. But we had to obey him. He assisted the boys at school and saw that we had done our homework. We could not end the day unless we had carried out our duties. My mother visited the Jesuit school to follow our studies and my father, in spite of his professional commitments, sometimes went there too. The family was certainly concerned about us and our relationships were very close. However this also tended to create a kind of family ghetto.

The ideal of belonging to a nation, to a religion and the history of our own heritage as those who serve the country, particularly in time of war: all these ideals were deeply rooted in our family. In general we were aware of belonging to a group who had to be responsible for society and it was necessary to be faithful to such responsibilities.

Before the war, when we were outside the city in Gaesbeek, we developed relationships with the neighbouring peasants. My family had a hectare of land with a garden and we had to work on it, even growing vegetables. Often we would also cooperate with our peasant neighbours in agricultural activities and even more with the livestock; we fed the cows, organized the milking, and looked after the horses. This was always done with great respect for nature and thus we assimilated its importance and the need to be in contact with it.

In the field of politics there was also much respect for public responsibilities and it was a question of pride to take them on, not as a way of earning money, but for civic duty. Obviously, official positions came with a salary; but due to the economic situation of the bourgeoisie—which was mostly the class that undertook them—the fact that these tasks were remunerated was irrelevant. There was a deeply entrenched belief in duty, which was considered
normal at this social level. It was believed that we had to be the ‘elite of society’ but elite with obligations and a certain sense of service to others. This was typical of the bourgeois conception of society that was quite ignorant of social relations and their origins.

We had a radio in the house and my father was very proud of the fact that it had been made in Austria, which was technically more advanced in this field. He always tuned in to Radio London to listen to news of the war, as well as classical music. My father loved this kind of music, preferring Bach to Mozart, but he also listened to the Lent sermon in the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris and insisted that we did so too, which was quite an ordeal for us. I had bought at a bargain price, with money that my mother had secretly given me, a gramophone and some records of classical music. My first preference in this kind of music was Beethoven: *Romance in F Major*, the *Third Concert for Piano* and the *Ninth Symphony*. I also listened to more recent works, like the *Joan of Arc* opera of Paul Claudel and Paul Hindemith, whose music was very modern and I found it most interesting.

For ethical reasons, during the foreign occupation we did not go to parties and dances and the like. In the Fine Arts building in Brussels there were concerts called *The Young Musicians* and since my father also liked this music, he paid my subscription. He was very demanding and home-loving had a very strong sense of domestic life so that when I and my brothers and sisters were growing up, he always wanted us to stay at home and not go out. We felt this to be very reactionary and as I was the oldest I had to fight my father on behalf of all the children. My mother was the mediator, because sometimes my father was really intransigent. I never had a penny, either in the secondary school or in the seminary, because my father did not give us any pocket money. This created problems for me, for example when I had to buy books. My mother was the one who gave me something, but without my father knowing it.

My father’s ideas about education were much more conservative than those of my maternal grandfather who, on the contrary, was much more open-minded. I was very grateful for that. The grandparents came to our house or we visited them in Brussels.

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In vacation time I was always with my grandparents who had a summerhouse near the Meuse, in Hastière. It was very exciting for me because all cousins got together to walk and to fish in the river and other such activities. The links with the rest of the family were rather regular; we had very good relationships with our uncles, aunts and cousins.

**My Inclination for the Priesthood**

My family was also very religious. Every evening, before going to bed we would pray together and every Sunday we would go to mass. We found this quite natural; it was never an imposition for us. Since I was very young I very much enjoyed participating in religious ceremonies, above all as an altar boy. I liked the liturgies, the prayers, the meditation. I felt something really mystical in them that greatly attracted me. In spite of the fact it was not the main motive for wanting to be a priest, it did have its importance when the time came to make a decision.

At the age of 11 and 12 I had a very large photo of Pope Pius XI\(^{16}\) in my room. I did not know exactly who he was but what impressed me was his missionary concern. So, when I was young I spent a lot of time selling missionary calendars. I would go from house on my bicycle to house near Gaesbeek, in the Flemish region. The money I received was divided partly for the general fund of the missions and partly for the work that was being done for the missions in school.

In the school, during my secondary studies, we were taught religion by Jesuits. It was a very classic method of teaching but I did not reject this kind of religious education because in general it was quite reasonable. Daily participation in the mass was obligatory, which resulted in the present atheism of many of my companions of the period. But I was very much inclined towards participating in the religious services, sacred music and praying. In the last years of my secondary schooling I used to go to mass every morning, especially that celebrated by Father Jean Marie de Buck, S.J.. It meant quite an effort on my part as I had to leave home about seven in the morning but I enjoyed it.

\(^{16}\) He was Pope from 1922 until his death in 1939.
When I entered the seminary I did not do so with the idea of assuming a religious life –this was already in my mind, though– but to accomplish a task: that of the missions, to put myself at the service of what we today call “the search for justice” in far-away regions that did not know Christianity. I discovered this motivation with my secondary school professor and my grandfather, who always fought social injustice and who decided to become involved in politics that were based on religious, Christian principles. Since I was young I saw in Christ a divine being who expressed God’s magnanimity towards mankind.

There were no other priests in my immediate family circle. My grandfather’s brother was a priest in England but I felt this was a rather far away reference. Also there was one of my mother’s cousins, Étienne Carton de Wiart, who was the auxiliary Bishop of Malines at the time that I entered the seminary. However, although he had made various visits to our house, I did not know him well.

17 Priest in the archdiocese of Malinas (Belgium) and cousin of Gudule Carton de Wiart, he became the auxiliary Bishop in the same diocese and then Bishop of Tournai. There he took up the defence of the workers when the traditional coal and steel industries started to be dismantled.
CHAPTER II
CATHOLIC AND PASTORAL TRAINING

The Second World War

War came to Belgium on 10 May 1940. Four or five days later almost all the family moved to Normandy. My mother had just given birth a few days earlier and we were already eleven children; we needed two cars to take us to France. My father took us only as far as the French city of Lille –as my father, because of his profession and my uncle, governor of Brabant had to remain in Belgium– and there we met with an aunt and two cousins. Between the two families there were thirteen children –I at fifteen was the leader of the pack– and two women.

In spite of the German bombing during the journey, we managed to reach Normandy without problems. We moved into the summer residence of the French General Leclerc.\(^1\) The house was empty, we never saw the owner there, but we did see the Germans who arrived a few days after our arrival. We stayed there two months and then returned to Belgium.

During the war many activities came to a halt, but my father always found work. My mother was busy with the household. It was difficult then to ensure food for so many children even for people with means. I remember we sometimes had to go out into the fields to buy wheat and potatoes.

During the German occupation we left Gaesbeek and returned

\(^1\) His real name was Philippe François Marie de Hauteclocque (1902-1947). He tried to obtain a political solution for the First Indo-China Vietnam War. He died in a plane accident in Algeria and was posthumously designated Marshal of France.
to Brussels. My mother made great efforts to provide food for the family, but she also looked after other people. My father did too; they did not hesitate to give hospitality to persecuted Jews, which was a very dangerous thing to do. They thought it was their duty to hide them and we took in whole Jewish families for months in the basement of the house in Brussels, which had small windows in the front and large ones at the back. For this my mother received the title of ‘The Just’ by the Israeli Government and when she died, its ambassador was present at her funeral.

During and after the German occupation, my brothers and I with some school friends did a lot of things against the German soldiers. In the tram that we used to take each day to go to school, surreptitiously we used razors to cut off the buttons and make holes in the uniforms of the Germans around us. The officers carried behind them a small sabre held by a braid with metallic thread and the best thing to do –the most difficult though– was to cut it without them noticing. Once, an officer realized what had happened but did not know who had done it. Immediately, to remove the proof, I got rid of my razor. However, at the next stop at the Royal Square in Brussels, he ordered me to come with him and he took me to the General Falkenhausen’s headquarters, head of the military government in Belgium during the occupation. I still had uniform buttons in my pocket and did not know what to do because they were made of metal and they would jingle if they were thrown to the ground.

When we entered, the two soldiers who were standing guard presented arms to the officer and I took advantage of this to drop the buttons. The officer asked other soldiers to search me thoroughly, down to the smallest seams. He became irritated and finally said that what he was looking for was the braid of his sabre. When they looked in one pocket they thought they had found something, but it was only my rosary. As they had no evidence against me they had to let me go.

The following week we met with the same officer on the tram. Of course I stayed very quiet but when we reached the Luxembourg

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2 Those who had helped to save Jews during the Nazi occupation were given the title of ‘The Just’ by the Government of Israel, and a tree was planted in the desert in their memory.
station stop he told me to get off. He took my satchel and extracted an exercise book in which I had painted the English and Belgian flags and symbols hostile to the occupation. The following day the Gestapo came to the school to find me. They took me to an office and started to interrogate me in the presence of the officer. In the end they asked him: “Are you sure it was him? Because there were other youngsters too”. They decided to look for the others, including, my younger brother. They interrogated them as well, but we all indicated the same respective location in the tram, contrary to the officer’s testimony. Finally the Gestapo official did not believe the officer, arguing that it was the testimony of four against one.

In the meantime, my parents, who had been warned by the school, immediately turned up on the scene. They arrived at the moment when they were taking my brother away. They stopped their car in front of the Gestapo car and asked where they were taking their son. The Gestapo replied that they were taking him to be interrogated. Although my father did not know where they were going, he could turn his car around to follow them. As it was nearby he reached there a few minutes after my brother’s arrival. The Germans were very surprised because they had not given the address of their office and thought that my parents had information about them. They said, “We will interrogate them and later we shall set them free”. I was then fifteen years old and my brother, twelve.

**Entering the Seminary**

In 1943 I finished my secondary schooling. The Jesuits invited me to join them, but I set one condition: that I would be sent on a mission abroad. They were honest, saying, “We cannot guarantee it. You have to be obedient and do what you are told. It could be that you go on missions, but it could be that you stay in a college here”. What interested me were the missions and, in particular, a fairly new organization called Société Auxiliaire des Missions (SAM) which placed missionaries at the service of indigenous Bishops.

The SAM was founded by a very well known Belgian priest, Father Lebbe,\(^3\) who was a real innovator. It was at the time of the episcopal

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\(^3\) Vincent Lebbe (1877-1940). Was a missionary in China who founded the first Catholic periodical there and fought for the constitution of a Chinese
consecration of the first Chinese Bishops and then –already under Pius XI and Pius XII– four local Bishops in Asia and Africa. It was not a religious congregation but rather a missionary association of priests who went to serve these local Bishops. In fact, the chaplain of my scout group belonged to this organization and I was impressed by his spirit and very much interested his work.

My father did not agree. While he totally accepted my becoming a priest he did not wish me to work with the missions. He used to say that he was getting old; that I was the oldest of his many children and that therefore I should stay with the family. I did not accept his argument. Perhaps he had another reason, which was that this missionary organization did not have the social prestige of the classic religious orders. If I had gone to the Jesuits or the Benedictines my father would have probably been delighted.

I felt rather disconcerted and went to consult with my mother’s cousin, Monsignor Étienne Carton de Wiart. I did not go to see him only because he was a relative, but because he was a very open-minded man who, though he had died young, at an early age had taken up very advanced social positions when he became Bishop of Tournai. He said to me, “Well, why don’t you come to the seminary of Malines? This seminary provides good training and after six years of studies you can choose a missionary path”. My family was completely in agreement and I was very happy. So, at 18 years, I entered the seminary at Malines. We were then over a hundred of us taking the first year of studies. These days the Brussels seminary is closed for lack of candidates.

Five days after entering the seminary it was said that the Germans would come to recruit us to work in their factories to replace their soldiers at the front. So the seminary authorities decided to send us away immediately. We had classes only two or three times a week. So as not to draw the attention of the Germans we had our lessons outside the seminary, in Catholic hospitals, in secondary episcopate. He was imprisoned by the Maoist army and died shortly after being liberated.

Pious XII. He was originally registered as Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli (Italy, 1876-1958); he became Cardinal Pacelli and later Pope from 1939 until his death.
schools. In this way we were able to continue our studies.

As it was too dangerous for me to return home, I went to live for some months in Brussels with my maternal grandparents, which was very interesting for me because of their political and social activities. As a child I remember reading some religious literature, the stories of the saints and texts of the same kind because of their style of writing. Naturally, I also read Tintin!\(^5\) However, my stay with my grandfather encouraged me to read much more. Then, in the seminary, I started to read books with more of a social content, such as the novel by Maxence Van der Meersch,\(^6\) *Fishers of Men*, about a young member of the YCW (Young Christian Workers) in the factories of northern France, which made a big impression on me.

**The Resistance**

After I had stayed some months with my grandfather, I returned to the house at Gaesbeek. I then joined the resistance in the Armée Secrète. There were two Belgian resistance movements: one was the communist one, linked to the clandestine Communist Party, and the other was the Secret Army, which was founded and run by former officers in the Belgian Army. As could be imagined, I said nothing to my parents.

In the resistance I began participating in guerrilla operations. We had arms, which came to us from England and were dropped by parachute. We were informed in code by radio, what was to be the night, the hour and place, and what the contents would be. The arms were kept in an isolated farm, a few kilometres from where I lived.

On 21 June of 1944, two weeks after the landing in Normandy,

\(^5\) Tintin, a fictitious Belgian reporter, was created in 1929 and his stories became a classic in the French language. His adventures, although fictional, were based on real-life documents and expressed ideological values linked to pacifism and tolerance, typical bourgeois positions; but some felt that they sometimes supported racism, anti-communism and Belgian colonialism.

\(^6\) Maxence Van der Meersch (1907-1951). He was a lawyer who wrote novels that described the situation of the French working people.
we received an order to destroy the railway line. The Germans had transported many troops towards the sea as they thought that the landing would also take place in the area close to the Belgian coast. Many troops and much equipment were arriving by train. The English had already bombed the railway line from Brussels to the port of Ostend, in a place where the two lines that joined the cities passed within 500 metres of one another, across the river Dender. They had succeeded in destroying one of the bridges, but failed to knock the other one out. So they asked us to dynamite it.

One night we left on bicycles from the isolated farm. We had to cover 15 to 20 kilometres without lights along rough tracks that were not asphalted and every so often someone fell off their bike. I was carrying the dynamite and the cables to detonate it. We reached the bridge that, as it was close to the railway station that was occupied by the German military, was not guarded. We spent the night listening to the conversations of the soldiers and we got ready to place the dynamite. We had very little, only 11 kilos, to blow up a large four-lane bridge. We had to be economical with the little dynamite we had, putting it just in key places. We had an expert with us but even so the job took almost four hours.

I was somewhat separated from the others to see that no one approached us. We also had the order not to derail the trains because they also carried civilians. Often steam-propelled trains would go by. Sometimes a burning coal would fall and we were frightened that it, rather than our detonator, would explode the dynamite. When the job was finished, our commander told us to light the fuses. Just when we were doing so, a train came along. We had to wait for several minutes for the explosion and we did not know whether the train would blow up or not. With the commander, I waited in hope, while the others ran off with the guide. Finally the bridge exploded and thus the train was derailed. Of course our commander told us to flee and we hurried away on our bicycles.

Going back, this time without a guide along the tracks, we had to cross through the local town. The explosion had made a great noise and in some streets the windows of the houses had shattered. I was behind the others because underneath me were the remains of our materials and in my hand I had a large 9 mm revolver. We had to pass some police, but fortunately they
were Belgians and the commander shouted, “Don’t shoot!” and there were no shots although both we and they were armed. We continued hastily until we came to a field of wheat already half-grown; there we stopped to rest, because we were absolutely exhausted for so much running around. When we hurried on we met a peasant patrol who was guarding the fields to ensure that the harvests were not set alight. They had home-made arms, while we had revolvers, and they were really frightened. We persuaded them that if they were asked whether we had passed there, not to say anything, because it would be very dangerous for them to speak about seeing us.

After we got going again we suddenly saw a light and immediately reached for our revolvers. But it was only a little lamp in front of the statue of the Sacred Heart in a little rural chapel. It was celebrating the month of the Sacred Heart, which is in June.

At the end of the offensive, when our allies arrived, at the end of July/beginning of August 1944, we had the job of rounding up and making prisoners of the last Germans who were scattered around the region. I remember one night, with my gun at the ready, entering a farm building where there were 20 or 25 German soldiers. They shouted, “Terrorists!” We replied, “No!” We treated them respectfully, they did not try to defend themselves, but they were absolutely terrified.

Belgian patriotism is a fundamental belief in my family. Several of my uncles volunteered to fight in the war. One of them was killed while piloting an English plane against the Germans. My father had also been a volunteer in the First World War. It was natural that a family like ours should participate in the war as volunteers. Thus, my joining the resistance was above all part of our tradition to defend the country.

End of the War

When Belgium was liberated, in September 1944, I returned to the Malines seminary and was placed in the second year because of the classes we had taken before and those exams were taken into account. There were still many problems. For three months in a row there was bombing from the Germans, by V1 and V2 rockets, and Malines suffered greatly. It did not happen every day
but frequently the bombs aimed at Brussels fell in our region. The seminary lost its glass windows.

I have pleasant memories of this place, although of course we were shut away. It had a garden outside the town and two or three times a week we would go there. We only left the seminary at vacation time, so our parents had to come and visit us. Even during vacations we were forbidden to go to the cinema. To see a film about Schubert, I was given special permission.

The seminary was situated beside the cathedral, which had a chime that sounded every hour, every half hour, every quarter of an hour and every seven minutes and a half. At the beginning I could not sleep but after three or four days I began to get used to it. We got up at 5:17 in the morning with the bell and then we meditated in the chapel for half an hour. After that there was mass and then breakfast. From 8 to 8:30 classes started that lasted until mid-day. Then there was studying time in the afternoon, during which we were given certain tasks. In the week we had to speak three days in French and three days in Flemish. Only on Sundays could we communicate in any language we liked. So the Francophone speakers had to speak to each other in Flemish and the Flemish speakers with each other in French.

During dinner there was a collective reading of religious history and we were not allowed to talk. I was often the reader and sometimes I invented impossible things that were not in the text, and everyone laughed. At night-time we recited a short prayer together. We had to retire to bed at 10 p.m. As all our daily activities ended at 9, we had a free hour, but we had to keep silent. We were not allowed to listen to the radio or read the press. However each week the director gave us a summary of the news; if there was some important news item he would communicate it.

In the six years of study we took two courses in Philosophy and four courses in Theology, divided into Fundamental Theology, Ecclesiology, Liturgy and Church History.

At that time there was little questioning of the Church as an institution. Luckily for us we had a history professor, Roger Aubert,7

7 Roger Aubert (1914-2009). Was a Belgian priest, historian and theologian, author of books on Pius IX and on the Vatican Council II.
who dedicated his theological post-doctoral thesis to Pius IX and the opposition of the Church in the 19th century against all modern ideas. He explained all this, the causes in their context and, finally, why in our time these attitudes were no longer held. Thus we developed a critical mind that was quite unusual in that period. When the professor completed his thesis I was in charge of delivering the congratulatory speech.

The curriculum included a course on Archaeology and another on Sacred Music. One day, an archaeology professor expounded the architecture of the cathedral of Malines, one of the largest in Belgium. He described the different periods of its construction very seriously. Curiously enough, with the utmost conviction and without a trace of humour he said that the oldest part of the tower was its base!

In philosophy we had classes in Thomism from the original text in Latin, the History of Philosophy, Biology and Physics. Two or three classes were taught in French and Flemish, but they were considered only minor subjects. We had to take our exams in Latin, which I had learnt in my secondary schooling with the Jesuits. Each week there was a conference with some specialist invited to speak on scientific or literary themes—a little of everything.

But the seminary included other activities besides teaching. Every morning in the chapel we meditated on a biblical text. Also, each day we would read the breviary, psalms and sacred texts, for at least three-quarters of an hour. These exercises imbued me with great spirituality and although performing them in Latin was not very appealing, it was a sign of belonging to the priesthood. In those times spirituality was expressed through a theological reading of Jesus, with the accent more on his being the Son of God rather than an historical actor. I absorbed this kind of spirituality without difficulty: it corresponded with my imaginary of that period.

There was intense devotion to the Virgin Mary, which influenced me greatly. Not to Maria as a woman from Palestine, but as the Mother of God. Every time that something positive happened it was interpreted as the result of her protection and in moments of difficulty we always prayed to her. The celebration of Mary’s feast days in May

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8 Pius IX was Pope from 1846 until his death in 1878.
was very important for me. When I read the note that I made at that time, I see what the Virgin Mary meant for me as a protector. I always organized the classroom that, like the other classrooms had a statue of the Virgin. Every two or three days I would look for fresh flowers to place around her to express my sincere devotion. When I learnt the marks that I received in that period I saw it as evidence that the Virgin Mary was indeed my protector.

After the years spent on Philosophy, we went –some 400 of us– to another seminary in the centre of Malines for the course in Theology. In that period the diocese of that city was the largest in the world, containing over 800 parishes.

At the end of the seminary I joined an association of priests called the Friends of Jesus, which had been founded by Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines. It was relatively strict. The secular clergy took no vow of poverty; for example, they could keep property inherited from their family. The Friends of Jesus, in addition to chastity and obedience to the Bishop that was incumbent on all priests, maintained the vow of poverty as well as one hour of meditation each day. Each year they also organized a retreat of at least one week, greatly inspired by the spirituality of St. Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits. It was agreed at that time that the association would remain secret so as not to give the impression of being an elitist group, close to the Bishop. Later on it abandoned this anonymity. Although I disliked the secrecy I was particularly attracted to the vow of poverty.

The vow of poverty entailed never having any property. If one received an inheritance it was to be given away immediately; one had to be content with the salary one received; and never to accumulate capital. In actual practice the result were only partial. It is easy to take a vow of individual poverty in religious communities, when collectively there is much wealth as well as security for life, which cannot be compared with the situation of the poor. But we did not think much about this. The vision we had of the Church at that time was very sacred and the Church was not

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9 Cardinal Désiré Joseph Mercier (1851-1926). During the First World War he opposed the German occupation of the country. He promoted neo-Thomism at the Catholic University of Louvain and also the «Malinas conversations» between Anglicans and Catholics.
part of the world, it had other standards. The dignitaries like the pope and the Bishops could not be questioned as they were the expression of the divine.

Contacts with the Young Catholic Workers

Although I spent six years studying in the seminary, my deepest experience was during the vacations, with the Young Catholic Workers (YCW), which was the ‘pool’ of Christian trade unionism. I came into contact with it, as already mentioned, thanks to my college professor, the Jesuit Father de Buck, whom I much admired.

The YCW was founded in 1925, after the First World War by Father Joseph Cardijn, who was a priest in the Malines diocese. He had studied social sciences at Louvain University and was to some extent influenced by Marxist practical ideas. He developed a very simple and effective method for the movement: see the situation, analyse it, make an ethical judgement of it and act accordingly. Many of the young workers could not read or write then, but they could all see, judge and act. It was indeed a brilliant maxim in the sense that it was a pedagogy that had been assimilated. In fact it was later taken up by other social movements.

Strangely enough, and as an opposing formula, at the beginning of the 20th century more or less at the time that Christian trade unions were being constituted, a Christian peasant movement developed. However, this was usually done from above, i.e. organized by the clergy and local notables and not from below (by the peasants), with the idea of safeguarding the peasants from socialism. It was successful because the control of the Church in the rural areas was very strong. The Boerenbond (Peasant’s League) was created, consisting of cooperatives usually run by the parish priest and which served as an instrument to integrate small peasants socially into the capitalist system. It was economically so successful that at the present time its financial arm is one of the three or four pillars of

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10 Monsignor Joseph Cardijn (Belgium, 1882-1967). He was a priest of the Diocese of Malinas who studied Social Sciences in Louvain. He participated in the Vatican Council II. Although politically a Social-Christian and an anticomunist, he was influenced to a certain extent by the practical ideas of Marxism. He founded the Young Catholic Workers, (YCW), and was appointed Cardinal.
Belgian capitalism. It is a large-scale provider of agricultural inputs and its bank, now autonomous, has investments all over the world. In contrast, the Christian workers had a more radical tradition. They entered into the struggle after the socialists and most times against them but they were also against capital.

The YCW was Cardijn’s idea to give the worker's movement autonomy vis-à-vis the Church and the Catholic world in general. I met him on various occasions in my YCW activities –he was then a monsignor and subsequently a cardinal. It is true that, at the end of his life, Cardijn was politically a Christian Democrat and anti-communist but he was always faithful to the worker's struggle in general and the young workers in particular.

Thanks to the YCW, I was involved in many activities during which I discovered a lot about the situation of the workers. I visited several factories and went down mines. While my experience in the resistance –among others– had influenced my social awareness, the YCW experience was fundamental. For me, religion was something normal. In my family we did not have much contact with atheists and those we knew were usually intellectuals and artists. Therefore, the contact with the reality of the worker's lives shocked me greatly. In the YCW I learnt to share and discuss with other kinds of people. I dropped the image of the socialist as a devil. I wanted to be a priest because my interest was religious but at the same time I began to feel it was socially useful.

In this period during vacations I took part in many meetings of YCW in Belgium and later on in other countries like Germany and England; but above all in France, where I often met worker priests who impressed me greatly. Through them, I discovered the reality of the working class in a very concrete way: after the war their situation was indeed very difficult. That was the time when Europe was trying to recover its industrial strength and working conditions were tough, with a high degree of exploitation and poor living, education, and health conditions.

In spite of my concern for the European working class I was also interested in the work of the missions. Thus I started to exchange correspondence with missionaries as well as seminarians and priests of different countries –not only from Europe but also from Latin America, Asia and Africa. Each week I would pin up extracts
from their letters in public places in the seminary to encourage an international view among my fellow students. This correspondence interested people considerably because it was impossible to have more direct relationships, nor were there many journals or possibilities of acquiring knowledge about what was happening abroad.

Soon after the war, together with two other seminarians, I went to Germany to get to know our German counterparts, particularly in Cologne and Berlin. We were enthusiastic about the spirit of reconciliation and peace. Quite accidentally, in Berlin we participated in a communist demonstration. We came out of the metro and were caught up in a march brandishing red flags. We were obliged to take part so as not to draw attention to ourselves. In those days it was still possible to go from one part of Germany to the other.

During these years at the seminary, towards 1947, I came into contact with two young Polish priests, who were studying theology in Rome. Because of visa problems, it was difficult for them to return to Poland for short holidays and so they would come to Belgium. In Rome they lodged in the Belgian college as there was no Polish college. One of them was Karol Wojtyła, who later became Pope John Paul II. In 1948 he spent the Easter and Christmas vacations in Malines. As we were already in correspondence it was I who received him. The other Pole later went as a volunteer priest to Brazil, where he remained. While they were in Belgium I arranged visits for them, especially with the YCW. We would attend its meetings and visit factories. The future pope, who was interested in languages, studied Flemish and I helped him a little in this task. We were friends all this time and even later.

The YCW was a youth movement that at the beginning, in 1925, as I explained earlier, served to form cadres for Christian trade unions. Interestingly enough in the mid-fifties, when the non-governmental development organizations began to emerge over much of Europe,
their first leaders –French, Belgian, German, Dutch– were invariably former members of the YCW. This was natural enough because the association had very active contacts in the continents of the South.

The difference between the YCW and the General Catholic Action was that the former was the Catholic action specialized in the world of workers. It started off as an organization of trade union youth and then the Catholic Student Youth (CSY), the Catholic University Youth (CUY) and the Catholic Agricultural Youth (CAY) were created. In contrast, the General Catholic Action, which was founded in Italy, claimed that there were no class differences and brought all the young people together in one movement. Cardijn always thought that there were different classes with identities, mentalities and interests of their own. The YCW experienced many difficulties until Pope Pius XI approved it as a movement of the Church, which was a very progressive move against the French Catholic employers who wanted to fund a Catholic association formed by employers and workers together. Pius XI also approved the ideas of Monsignor Liénard, Bishop of Lille, who defended the autonomy of the workers.

Not only was the YCW a school that helped me to discover social realities, it also taught me pedagogy. I had to work with young people, many of whom had little formal education, so that their cultural level was low –in the classic sense of the term. It was necessary to be very clear and practical and to develop an education that would enable them to understand and discover their world, also in its religious dimension. For example, in groups of ten to twelve young workers we analysed, the situation in the factories. We studied the logic of the whole process, and then made an ethical and social evaluation of it in order to take the best possible action. This experience trained me to always take into

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12 Achille Ratti (1857-1939). He was Archbishop of Milan, an alpinist and an erudite historian. As Pope Pius XI he signed the Lateran Agreement with the Italian State for the creation of the Vatican State. He opposed Nazism and communism.

13 Achille Liénart (1884-1963). As Bishop of Lille (France) he supported Christian trade unionism and especially Catholic Action. He played an important role at the Vatican Council II, in favour of liturgical and theological renewal.
account the kind of public I was dealing with and helped me to understand how they thought. It was very useful for me in my later work in teaching and communication.

In 1949 when I was ordained priest it would have been normal for me to seek work in a parish in the diocese or in a college. Theoretically it would have been possible to enter a missionary religious order when I finished my studies, as I had thought of doing at the beginning. But in the meantime, I had discovered the extensive nature of YCW’s work and that gave me the idea of international evangelization. It was not essential to enter into a missionary congregation.

For three months I worked in Brussels as a teacher in a secondary school, the College of St. Peter in the municipality of Jette, in a lower middle class neighbourhood. It was a pleasant experience but not very interesting for me, as I had other prospects in view. I was a colleague of Charles Moeller, the great connoisseur of modern literature, who taught at Louvain and participated as an expert at Vatican Council II. Finally he became the No. 2 in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the former Holy Office) in Rome and he came back very disillusioned to die in miserable conditions in Belgium.

Working with the YCW was like carrying out a mission inside the country, as was proposed in the famous book *France, Country of Missions*. It was written by two priests, YCW chaplains—I knew one of them very well, Yves Daniel, because each time I went to Paris I would stay in his apartment. This book had a great influence on seminarists in the 1940s. It also had a great impact in Europe because it described the religious situation of the workers. While France was considered to be ‘the eldest sister of the Church’ those pages described the real state of affairs.

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14 Charles Moeller (1912-1986). A Belgian priest, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, author of *Siglo y Cristianismo* (6 volumes), a monumental work on the literature of the 20th century. He was rector of the Ecumenical Institute of Jerusalem and one of the main editors of the *Gaudium et Spes*. He was an expert in the Vatican Council II.

15 Yves Daniel (1909-1986). Was chaplain to the French YCW, a worker priest and author of various works on catechism and religious sociology.
PART TWO
THE BEGINNINGS OF CRITICAL, SOCIAL
AND RELIGIOUS THINKING
At the University

I requested if I could follow social studies courses at the Catholic University of Louvain and my Bishop Cardinal Jozef-Ernest van Roey agreed. He was a very conservative man, but intelligent and a good theologian, with a certain independence vis-à-vis Rome, which was a traditional position among the Belgian episcopate. His attitude during the war was, however, criticized, although in fact he maintained a firm stand towards the Germans and had an indisputable authority. Later I got to know him better because, a few years afterwards, they appointed me as secretary of the Episcopal curia. Cardinal Van Roey had a vision of the future and did not hesitate to send priests to be trained in different disciplines, like the Social Sciences, Philosophy, Theology, etc. He wanted an educated clergy, partly because the Catholic University of Louvain was situated within his diocese.

For three years, from 1949 to 1952, I studied political and social sciences. At that time these subjects formed part of the faculty of law, so that we had many courses of a legal nature: Penal Law, International Law, among other. All this was very interesting, but not for one who was more concerned with social action. However, the legal knowledge I acquired during those years was to be very useful to me some decades later when I was a member of the Permanent People’s Tribunal.  

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1 Jozef Van Roey (1874-1961), Archbishop of Malines, who succeeded Cardinal Mercier. He resisted the German occupation.
2 International tribunal of opinion, which judges violations of human rights. It was founded after the initiative of Italian senator Lelio Basso, a member
Of course we also had courses in Political Economy, Contemporary Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology. The only discipline I had difficulties with was Statistics! Our professor was a great economist but a poor teacher. I ended by learning everything off by heart. Sociology, however, was taught in close relationship with Philosophy. Canon Jacques Leclerc—a free-thinker who had studied at the University of Brussels before converting to Catholicism—introduced some interesting elements of US empirical sociology. Social Ethics and Natural Law were two other courses I studied with Professor Leclerc, as well as Sociology of Religion, although this subject was not very far advanced then. Canon Franz Grégoire taught us about contemporary ideologies: Nazism, existentialism and Marxism. His teaching helped us to overcome prejudices against Marxism, which was considered in Catholic circles as a purely ideological theory.

At this time I was a friend of Prince Charles of Luxembourg, whose brother became the Grand Duke. We were in the same year of studies in political science. Charles had asked me to tell him about the YCW and the French worker priests and wanted my assistance in getting to know some of them in order to help him understand this reality. In Paris we met with the worker priests—to whom he never introduced himself as a prince, but just as a Canadian student. He could pass as one as he had spent his youth during the war in Canada.

Once I invited him to dinner with young workers in the YCW centre for delinquent youth in Brussels, where I was chaplain and of the Russell Tribunal for the United State’s war crimes in Vietnam. In fact, the People’s Permanent Tribunal is the successor of the Russell Tribunal. Since its foundation in 1979, this institution has held more than forty sessions on diverse matters, from violations of human and social rights in different periods and countries—as El Salvador, Guatemala, Eritrea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Iraq—to violations of International Law-Nicaragua, World Bank and IMF, multinational enterprises, etc. The basis of the trials, besides International Law, is the Declaration of Algiers on People’s Rights.

Jacques Leclercq (1891-1971) was professor of moral philosophy at the Catholic University of Louvain, where he promoted Sociology.

Franz Grégoire (1898-1977), Philosophy professor at the Catholic University of Louvain and author of a book on the sources of Karl Marx’s thinking.
I presented him also as a Canadian. As a group of them wished to immigrate to Canada, they started to talk about that country, which luckily he knew well and the dinner concluded by singing the Canadian national anthem.

I had a little 125 cc motorcycle, which I used to take me round to my various commitments, including the journey between Louvain and Brussels. It was especially hard in winter; the temperatures were very low and I was still dressed in a cassock. One day Charles said to me, “I have kept my clothing from my days in the tank regiment during the Second World War; I am going to give it to you to keep you warm” (a few years earlier, at the end of the war he had enrolled in a British tank regiment). I used this equipment for two or three years and it was very useful as I had to move around making surveys and consulting archives in socialist municipalities and working-class neighbourhoods, where a cassock with a clerical collar would have been an obstacle. When I asked the Cardinal for permission to dress like a peasant, oddly enough he accepted –but on one condition. I was not supposed to go to the cinema! Thus I continued with my investigations and developed contacts with members of the socialist parties of various nationalities to whom, at that difficult period, I never did reveal that I was a priest.

One day I visited Prince Charles in the chateau of the ducal family in Luxembourg and after that I only returned to see him two or three times. Unfortunately, the poor man died relatively young. He was a good person, rather sad and very shy but he was always open-minded. He realized that his social position prevented him from doing almost anything with his life.

I was very interested in my university studies and received good marks. However, the link between theory and practice always concerned me most. During this period I was quite active in other fields. Although we as priests could stay at the Justus Lipsius College in Louvain, during most of the last two years I remained in the centre for delinquent youth working with them in Brussels and only going to classes from time to time. There were some courses I did not attend and once I had to sit an exam with a professor whom I had never seen. As all the professors were in a large hall I did not know to whom I should present myself!
First Contacts with Urban Sociology

I followed many excellent courses at Louvain, especially with Canon Jacques Leclerc, a great thinker and social philosopher, with whom I worked quite a lot. The social science building in Louvain-la-Neuve now bears his name. I was very attracted to urban sociology because studying the socio-religious history of Brussels had posed me a fundamental question: how is it possible that the working class could see Christianity as an enemy, given its message of human emancipation?

Historically, the Church was considered the enemy of the working class and I did not understand it. I had contacts with communist leaders in Belgium and France and the same problem was always posed: how is it that a priest can get interested in the workers? For the worker’s leaders it was a contradiction in terms. It was evident to them that the Church was allied with the bourgeoisie and that it formed part of it. This made an impression on me although I had not yet fully analyzed the situation. I believed that to understand it, it was imperative to study the processes of industrialization and urbanization. This was why I decided to concentrate the thesis for my sociology degree on the evolution of the religious structures in the city of Brussels. My hypothesis was that the Church’s pastoral work had not been adequate for the working class.

As there were no urban sociology studies at Louvain, I organized a private seminar with a few students interested in the subject who were preparing for degrees. I also started taking classes in the evenings and during vacations at the International Institute for Advanced Studies in Applied Urbanism, part of the St. Lucas Architectural School in Brussels. I was obliged to study the resistance of materials and other such subjects; but what interested me were the courses in social analysis that provided me with the methods and tools that helped to satisfy my desire to improve my understanding of urban sociology.

The co-founder of the Institute was the French architect Gastón Bardet—a great adversary of Le Corbusier—who was so brilliant

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5 Gaston Bardet (1907-1989) was chief architect of the Paris International Exhibition in 1937 and was against functional architecture. He opposed
that he ended by going mad. Exaggeratedly religious, he created a sect that announced the end of the world. On a certain date he went up a mountain in France to await this event, until he thought there had been a mistake in the date. However, he had developed a good method of social analysis of the city and I learnt and applied it in my research into the social history of Brussels, particularly in the history of the most important religious structures.

I was in contact with the group of experts responsible for urban planning in Brussels, who had assigned me the task of studying the religious institutions. I began to work in the archives in the archbishop's curia, as well as in those of all the parishes, the Royal Library, etc. I was able to show that it was precisely in the working-class districts, where logically there was the densest population that the Church had neglected to set up enough pastoral structures; while in bourgeois and middle-class neighbourhoods parishes had been created and churches had been built.

I made a map of religious practice in Brussels in the 1950s, using the data collected for my professor of religious sociology, Father Ernest Collard. In the social scene of that time there were considerable differences. While in the bourgeois neighbourhoods there was a 50% participation in the weekly mass, in the working-class districts attendance was less than 10%. At the end of the 19th century, Brussels had received in 22 years 200,000 new inhabitants and no more parishes had been created at a time when the rural parishes in Wallonia were being re-institutionalized, the same ones as before the French Revolution. Thus, while in the bourgeois parishes the faithful numbered four to five thousand as an average, the population of the working-class neighbourhoods was from 10,000 to 40,000. The Church had not followed the urban development and still less had it dealt with the working-class population.

I also discovered the social history of the city from the documents I consulted. The workers had to labour ten to twelve hours for seven days a week, without holidays. The first generation that had come ecological destruction and the financing of the economy from a conservative viewpoint (he was close to Petainism) and he initiated an empirical method of urban social analysis. He dedicated the end of his life to writing on Christian spirituality as against Oriental currents of thought.
from the countryside was very religious. On the great feast days of Easter and Christmas, the clergy had to listen to confessions up until midnight and they started again at 4 a.m., as the faithful began work early in the morning. It was quite unbelievable. Besides, it appeared that some priests who took the side of the workers experienced enormous difficulties with the Church hierarchy. A few of them even risked being excommunicated. But at the same time, the bourgeois culture inherited of the French Revolution was very anti-clerical. For example, my maternal great-grandfather, Théodor Verhaegen—a freemason—despite being a believer, founded the Free University of Brussels in opposition to the Catholic University of Louvain. Gradually, during the course of the 19th century part of the bourgeois class returned to the Church; doubtless for many of them, to find personal spirituality. But also to seek an elitist education of quality which the ecclesiastical institution was providing and which was useful for its social reproduction. The Church also mitigated the social reactions of the working class with charitable actions and schools for the poor. I published the results of this research and reflections on urban and religious sociology in the book *Les Paroisses de Bruxelles* in 1955 and, later on, in *La mentalidad religiosa en evolución en la ciudades*, in Bogota in 1959.

Although the subject of my thesis concerned Brussels, I was interested to know whether the situation was similar in other European cities. Using my YCW contacts I travelled to Paris, Vienna, Rome, Barcelona and Madrid in order to carry out the same kind of research. I noted the date on which each parish was created, its demographic evolution and compared the curves. Thus it was possible to verify that the situation in the other cities was similar, if not worse than in Brussels. In the working-class districts of Paris, for example, there were parishes with 80,000 inhabitants and pastoral care was insufficient. My idea was that sociology could, and should serve to analyse this situation, albeit in the spirit of “see, judge and act” to transform the practice of the Church in dealing with the problem.

6 Théodor Verhaegen (1796-1862) was a lawyer and member of the liberal party. He was twice president of the Belgian Chamber of Deputies and Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge of Brussels.
There were various conferences for the clergy in this period that I attended. At the beginning, when I showed them, parish by parish, the map of religious practice in Brussels there were very strong reactions. Some of the parish priests saw my work as a personal attack on themselves, as if the low level of religious practice was their fault. In fact, it was a social and not an individual phenomenon. But such reactions did not last long and the message began to get across.

I wrote some texts on the theme, supporting the idea that as well as pastoral work in each parish, special pastoral work should be developed for the working-class sectors. The period was very favourable; these studies also introduced me to urbanist circles and State and municipal administrations.

While I was completing my university career in Louvain, there was a possibility of obtaining Fulbright scholarships to continue studies in the United States. J. William Fulbright\(^7\) was a US Democrat senator for Arkansas who, since the war, had created a scholarship programme for Europeans in order to build better links between the intellectuals of the old continent with the USA. These scholarships offered various choices of university and I selected Chicago because of my interest in urban sociology and Sociology of Religion, this city being universally famous for its urban sociology. I was lucky enough to be chosen.

It was after my return from the United States that I sat for my last examinations in urbanism. Each academic year of the Institute they paid tribute to the person who had made the greatest contribution to this discipline. It so happened that the year of my graduation, my uncle Baron Albert Houtart was so honoured. As governor of Brabant he was very interested in urbanism and it was he who inspired the first Belgian law on territorial planning.

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\(^7\) J. William Fulbright (1905-1995) opposed Senator Joseph McCarthy and his anti-communist campaign. He was also against the decision of President J.F. Kennedy to support the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba.
CHAPTER IV: FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH US SOCIETY

A New Country, a New World

As a child I had made several journeys with my mother who had a sister living in France. She was married to a surgeon, Dr. Marcel Ombredanne,¹ inventor of the Ombredanne Mask for prolonged use of anaesthetics. After the war, during the seminary and while I was studying in Louvain, through my YCW activities I also visited France, Germany and other European countries a number of times. Once, a friend took me by car to Rome when Pius XII was Pope, in the Holy Year of 1950. All this travel was in Western Europe but in 1952 I crossed the Atlantic for the first time for my stay in the United States. It was the only time I made the crossing by ship.

I embarked at Rotterdam. For two days we had very bad weather. There was much luxury aboard, extraordinary meals that lasted for four hours. I remember that one day they announced a particularly attractive menu and all the passengers assembled in the restaurant. But the weather was execrable and as the dishes took a long time to serve, the passengers disappeared, one by one, suffering from seasickness. At the end of the meal there was hardly anyone left at the tables. The journey took nine days. We reached New York at night-time but the ship stopped before disembarking until the following morning. We were very close to the Statue of Liberty and we could see the skyscrapers and the lights of the cars.

¹ Marcel Ombredanne (1900-1969), a French surgeon and ENT specialist.
A Belgian friend who worked at IBM was to accommodate me, but I stayed only one day in the city. I took the train to Bloomington, Indiana because for one whole month, before starting classes at Chicago, we had to follow a programme introducing us to the history and culture of the United States at the University of Indiana.

Bloomington was a small, charming town, with impressive lawns. We were 50 students from various parts of the world, following an excellent course on the country, its history, its politics, etc. I was interested in studying the cities, and through these lessons discovering the extent to which migration had been essential to the history of the United States in general, but also to the history of different cities. I thought it could be a factor influencing religious behaviour, so that during this month I studied all the relevant texts I could find in the library. I also made contact with the Catholic parish. At that time the mass was celebrated every day and I got to know some of the parishioners who invited me to their homes. It was a very pleasant and enriching experience, sharing with them.

The annual national conference of the university student movement, which brought together thousands from all US universities, was taking place at Bloomington. These huge meetings started with a prayer and a blessing but, as we were there during the priests’ vacation time, we saw no Catholic chaplain. They asked me to give the opening prayer, together with a Protestant minister. I participated in other meetings that also helped to introduce me to life in the United States. I was reading the works of Alexis de Tocqueville, who stressed the importance of the religious factor in American life. Gradually I came across more and more revealing details; it was a time of extraordinary discoveries and enchantment.

One day the foreign students went on an excursion to a national park where the houses of the first colonizers had been reconstructed. I was sitting next to a Japanese student who showed me a souvenir he had bought, an ashtray with a reproduction of one of these houses. I happened to look at the back and found

2 Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) was a French politician, serving at one time as minister of foreign affairs, as well as being a diplomat. He analysed democracy in the United States in a study that became a classic. He took up an anti-slavery position.
the label ‘made in Japan’. The Japanese had not noticed it and he was quite disillusioned.

There were three more weeks to go before the classes in Chicago started and I decided to travel to the south of the United States to know more about the country. I took a bus to Tennessee. First I stayed a day in the abbey of Thomas Merton,3 a famous Trappist monk, a great modern mystic who died electrocuted by a fan in Bangkok in 1968. I had read some of his works. It was in this same abbey that the Nicaraguan Ernesto Cardenal4 had entered but for health reasons he was not able to continue there. He became ordained as a priest in a seminary for those with a late vocation for priesthood in Colombia where much later I also gave some lectures.

I continued the journey towards Atlanta and was very much struck by racial segregation, which I saw for the first time. I remember a discussion I had with an elderly black American who showed me the two cemeteries, one for the whites and one for the blacks. The degree of segregation astonished me. “As if after being buried we were not all of the same colour”, he told me. Then I went on to Little Rock, the town where there was to be a revolt on racial issues.

My trip in buses to different places and discovering other environments made a strong impact on me. I went through Mississippi to Saint Louis, where there was a Catholic university, set up by a Jesuit who was my great-grandfather’s brother, the founder of the Free University of Brussels. There I was received by a priest, not very friendly, rather absent-minded and offhand. I explained who I was, which changed his attitude immediately. He accommodated me in the ‘Verhaegen Hall’ and I was able to stay there for several days without problems, accepted by the

3 Thomas Merton (1915-1968). Monk, poet and social activist of Australian origin, born in France. He entered the Benedictine Gethsemane monastery in Tennessee (USA) and he was concerned with inter-monastery dialogue. His best known book was his autobiography The Seven Storey Mountain.
4 Ernesto Cardenal (1925- ) Nicaraguan theologian, poet, sculptor, writer, author of Evangelio de Solentiname (an island in Lake Cocibolca in Nicaragua). Minister of Culture in the first Sandinista government, he was later very critical of the policies of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), particularly on the canal project.
I then journeyed on to Chicago. When I reached this city, the Korean War was ending. It was considered a combat against communism in general; there were many activities related to what they called a ‘crusade’. I remember giving blood for the US soldiers.

**Urban Pastoral Work in Chicago**

The University was not far from the centre of the city. I looked for a parish where I could lodge. This was partly for economic reasons, partly for the opportunity to be introduced to urban pastoral activities in the United States. Through the YCW I had got to know, although not personally, a priest who was an assistant in a parish in south-east Chicago. We established friendly relationships and it was agreed that I stay in his parish. However, as he was on holidays, I had to wait for some days and he proposed that meanwhile I stayed a week in another parish in the south of the city.

In that parish, in exactly eight days, I discovered another country, an extremely clerical America. The parish priest was called Rebedeau and his family originally came from the French part of Canada who, in the 18th century, were obliged by the English to emigrate to Louisana. In those years, some of the Chicago priests considered themselves as princes and Rebedeau was one of them. In the dining room he ate at a separate table and had a special menu. One day he was ‘kind enough’ to invite me to his table and he started up a conversation during which he asked me whether Belgium was totally or partially occupied by the Soviets. He also said to me, “I had the great honour of dining with your great Marshal Foch”. Evidently he had confused Belgium with France. Total ignorance. During this week some youths in the Catholic school wrote messages on the notice board against this priest because he was very authoritarian. In his sermon the following Sunday he accused them of sacrilege and the whole congregation was terrified by his fury. Fortunately I did not have to spend more than eight days with him.

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5 Ferdinand Foch (1851-1929) was a marshal in the French army, chief commander of the allied forces during the First World War.
Thus I left Father Rebedeau for my friend’s parish, which assisted about 5,000 inhabitants. The head of the parish was of Irish origin, a wonderful man, humble and kind. He had no Cadillac or Buick like his fellow priests who drove such cars as a sign of their status. He himself had only a Chevrolet and was viewed critically by the others who felt he was lowering his status. But the priest and his team of assistants, which included Bill Quinn, YCW chaplain from Chicago, were all very agreeable. Sharing things with them was great because it completely integrated me into the work of the parish, although they were aware that I had to go to the university.

This parish was situated in a lower middle-class neighbourhood. Most of the inhabitants were Polish and the rest were Irish. Mass was celebrated every day, relatively early in the morning. The parish was considered advanced, not only from a social viewpoint, but also in its liturgy, catechism and other religious aspects. They had abandoned the black vestment for the mass that was celebrated for the dead as in all the other parishes and had returned to the colour corresponding to the different periods of the liturgy – white, green, etc. But, not seeing the priests in this church dressed in black, people would not know whether it was a mass for the dead or not. For this reason, before starting the mass it was necessary to say that it was being celebrated in the memory of Mr. or Mrs. So and So. The names were written out in the sacristy. One day I read out the names of a man and a woman listed there and announced that the mass would be dedicated to their memory. When I returned to the sacristy the parish priest corrected me; in fact it was a wedding anniversary and the couple had been standing in the front line before us!

I spent many hours hearing confessions because at that time American Catholicism was still very puritanical and it was believed that to take communion it was always necessary to make one’s confession first. One Saturday a little boy came running in and approached me, saying, “Father, I stole a lorry, but I have returned it!” I had many contacts with youth groups, especially with members of gangs – although in those days they were not as violent as they later became. They were youths who were already stealing at the age of 13. Once a group came to tell me that that evening they were going to be attacked by another gang who
used knives and they asked me if they could use what they call in French coup de poing américaine– knuckledusters. They accepted me and I had to deal with this kind of problem. I had bought a small second-hand Dodge in which, later on, I managed to go around the whole country, more than 40,000 kilometres. When they organized parties they invited me and always said, “Father you can leave your keys on your car because nothing will happen”. They were the ones who stole the cars. All that was really momentous. I still have the diary that I kept in Chicago, so I have a historical record of my work in the parish.

North American Catholicism was, as I have already said, very clerical. To be a priest was to have authority over everyone and to be at the top of the social ladder. The faithful would do anything for him, saying, “Nothing is too good for father”. Everyone was at his service and no one could do anything against him. Living with the clergy, I saw how the priests were accepting such privileges. Their intentions were not bad but for those who were integrated into the system they considered that nothing was sufficient or too good for them. They considered that all this was quite natural. This upset me a lot because I did not share their concept of priesthood. It seemed shocking to me, sometimes bordering on the ridiculous.

To reach the university I had to drive 11 kilometres along an avenue with lots of traffic lights. Although there were very strict laws about speeding, if one went a bit faster it was possible to pass through without stopping at any of them. One day there was a number of cars which, like mine, were exceeding the speed limit, not noticing there was a police car behind them. At a certain moment it flashed its headlights and we all had to stop. When the policeman opened my door and saw me with my clerical collar, he exclaimed, “Father!” I replied, “Yes, I am”. And he said, “As a penance you will recite ten Hail Marys”. The other had to pay 10 dollars! When I was going into the centre of the city, where it was impossible to find a place to park one’s car, I used to put mine in a prohibited place and leave my breviary in full vision through the windscreen. I never received a fine: the priests were privileged. Almost all the policemen were Irish and they were Catholics.

The clergy in the U.S. were both traditional and modern at one and the same time. They lived like rich people. They had
the latest TV models and playing golf each week was a clerical pastime. They had summer and winter holidays as well as other free days. They went to Florida and passed the time there without celebrating mass. They did not always read their breviary because an ecclesiastical rule exempted them if they had to travel more than 10 or 15 kilometres. This law dates from the time when the clergy made their pastoral visits on foot but now, with the cars, it was quite different. Also, I sometimes saw in the parishes the breviary being read by the priests in front of the television (only lowering the volume) because reading the breviary was considered an obligation. It was incredibly formal and I asked myself whether this was spirituality. I found this clergy rather unusual.

Once I was invited, with all the clergy of Chicago, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the tenure of Monsignor Bernard J. Sheil, an auxiliary Bishop who was very well known. He was social in a classic sense, a friend of the poor, organizing good works and the like. The celebration was in a big hotel in the city, with a meal and an orchestra. For the dessert, 50 waiters advanced, 25 on either side, bearing an ice cream concoction in the form of a Bishop’s mitre. Then the orchestra started up, playing Some day my prince will come from Walt Disney’s film of Snow White. I could hardly contain my laughter at the contradiction, but they were all very serious, reflecting to some extent the culture of North American Catholicism. They were kind, clerical, very rigid and formal.

When I published my book on Catholicism in the USA, I did not dare cite in the text a quotation from Cardinal Francis Spellman, Archbishop of New York at that time and the top chaplain of the army: “Our Lord Jesus has inspired a new ‘way of life’, the American way of life, which we have a mission to extend the world over”. However, I did put it in a footnote.

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6 Bernard James Sheil (1888-1969) was a priest of Chicago who organized the local scout movement. He also founded the Sheil School of Social Studies in 1943. As auxiliary Bishop he opposed the policies of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

7 Francis Spellman (1889-1967) worked as a young priest in the State department of the Holy See in Rome. In 1939 he was nominated national chaplain to the US armed forces. He was Archbishop of New York for 28 years.
It was a time when the Catholics were in a minority in the country, to be a Catholic meant having the status of a secondary citizen. To be American meant being a Protestant so that the Catholics had to stress that they were promoting American values in order to be integrated and affirm themselves in the society. This only changed with the election of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who was a Catholic. This striving to beat others in demonstrating American values affected everything, including religion. For example, the parish bulletins were talking a lot about money. “We received such and such an amount in last Sunday’s collection”; “We renovated part of the church and it cost so many dollars”, etc. These were the symbols of success in US society.

Studies in Chicago

At the University I attended classes in sociology and, particularly, urban sociology. I also went to the Divinity School, the school of the Protestant Churches, which gave lectures in the Sociology of Religion. There was a tradition of Thomist philosophy at the University of Chicago which was indeed curious. In fact it was said that it was a university founded by Baptists where atheistic professors taught Thomism. It was also the first place where nuclear fission was carried out—in fact the formula of the atomic bomb—and there was a museum on the campus dedicated to the subject.

Nevertheless, even if I found the whole institution very interesting, I did not participate much in university life because I was more integrated into parish affairs, as well as working with a centre for foreign students called Crossroads. This was run by the International Women’s Auxiliary, a lay missionary organization of Belgian origin, to which my sister Godelieve belonged. I was chaplain there for a year. There were various meetings at the centre, above all with the students. Among the Asians I got to know was Ngô Đình Diệm, brother of the Archbishop of Huế. Diệm regularly attended the mass that I was celebrating there.

8 President of the USA from 1961 until his assassination in 1963.
9 He was president of South Vietnam from 1955 to 1963. An ally of the United States, he was assassinated in 1963.
The most significant part of my work was the making of a religious and historical map of the Chicago parishes, similar to the one I had done in Brussels. I studied the archives of the diocese and worked with the Chicago Planning Commission, the urbanistic service of the city. They were very interested in my work as this kind of research was totally new for them. Research had been made in the field of social, but not religious, history, nor of the establishment of the religious groups in the territory. They greatly stimulated me and made all the maps I used and subsequently published in my book on the sociological aspects of US Catholicism. Their technical expertise was excellent.

I took as a departure point the date of the founding of each parish in Chicago and discovered that there were two types, territorial and national –Polish, Hungarian, German, Italian, etc.– corresponding to the various waves of immigration. I found that there were more than 250 parishes and half of them were national, belonging to the ethnic origin of the parishioners and not to the territory. It was clear that over the years there had been enormous changes. For example, the Germans who had installed themselves in the centre of the town, once they began to climb the economic and social ladder they moved to the northern periphery of the town and the others did likewise. Through the immigration and the lack of adaptation on the part of the ecclesiastical structures, one came across German parishes in Black neighbourhoods. I studied, group by group, their history and evolution as well as the industrial development of the city to find out where the first parishes and different immigrants were established.

I discovered that, in Chicago, in contrast with Brussels, it was the working-class neighbourhoods that had the greatest number of religious institutions, especially parishes. I also found that in century of existence of the city there were never more than four or five thousand Catholics in each parish, even though there was a relatively large number of clergy. For the immigrants the priest represented the group’s natural leader, as he was the only intellectual. In this way the priests clearly identified with the immigrant groups and kept a watching brief on their situation, participating in social conflicts alongside the workers. They were never considered as class enemies.
The migration factor was very important in US society, among other reasons because the first generations of immigrants hoped that, however difficult their situation, it would be better for their children. As there was genuine social mobility, their expectations were not altogether misplaced at that time. This was very beneficial for North American capitalism, as the waves of immigrants represented cheap labour, ready to undertake any work. It helped the building up of labour reserves and at the same time did not accentuate social struggle too much. Gradually I discovered the reality of Chicago society through this study. When I returned to Europe, I reported the results of this research in a book entitled Aspects Sociologiques du Catholicisme Américain, published in Paris in 1958.

At the University I got to know Andrew Greely, a priest in the Chicago diocese and a sociologist. He worked at the National Opinion Research Center. In 1953 his university career was in danger due to a statistical error he had made in one of his researches. The colleague who was defending him asked me to intervene with the academic authorities and as a result he was allowed to remain, but he was never made professor. In fact Greely had another vocation; he was a brilliant writer and he produced some fifty novels, one of which was a bestseller, The Cardinal Sins. Years later I invited him to the Sociology of Religion International Conference in Montreal. It was not a happy contact as he clearly showed his belief in the superiority of North American empirical sociology over the contributions of his European colleagues.

A Latin American Parenthesis: Cuba and Haiti

One day I participated in a YCW meeting in Milwaukee, north of Chicago and I was lodged in a parish with Monsignor Luigi Ligutti, a US priest who was the observer of the Holy See at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome.  

Luigi Ligutti (1895-1983) was a priest from the diocese of Des Moines (USA) who founded the Catholic Rural Life Conference and was later the observer of the Holy See to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. In the United States he fought against corporations like Monsanto. He travelled intensively throughout the three continents of the Global South and was concerned about the food situation at the international level and about the destruction of peasant world. His contacts in the US helped him finance
He had founded a Christian rural movement in the United States, inspired by the YCW method: see, judge and act. At night-time we talked together and I told him about my work, showing him the graphs and the maps, and he became enthusiastic about it. I saw that he was very interested in Latin America, where he had worked with peasant movements and was concerned about the situation of the Church and the future of religion.

Latin America attracted me for different reasons. At the beginning of the 1950s an international YCW congress had been held in Brussels, during which I made contacts with Latin Americans. It was an extraordinary sight, the Heysel Stadium with some 80,000 participants from all round the world. Joseph Cardijn spoke, addressing the public in much the same way that Fidel Castro, the historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, was later to do. Also, in Louvain, I had been friendly with Miguel Vuskovic, an Argentinian priest of Croatian origin, who was received at the home of my parents while he was studying for his university exams.

During the vacation of Holy Week in 1953 there was a YCW congress for Central America and the Caribbean, which was held in Cuba, taking the opportunity of the Easter holidays and of the celebration of the Cuban Catholic Action’s 25th anniversary, which was presided by Cardinal Arteaga y Betancourt. Monsignor Cardijn suggested that I participate and use the occasion to know Latin America and the YCW in that region. So I travelled to Miami where I took the plane for Cuba.

I was accommodated in the Jesuit college of Belén, where Fidel Castro had studied. I participated in both events, thus getting to know priests, YCW chaplains and leaders of various countries that I later contacted when I was finally able to organize a trip to Latin America. One day there was a curfew because there had been an attempted assassination of Batista, the president. The activities of the congress were interrupted and we had to spend the whole day in the College of Belén.

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some studies, like the socioreligious research on Latin America and the book Nourrir les Hommes. He was an expert in the Vatican Council II.

11 Miguel Vuskovic, a priest from the diocese of Cordoba (Argentina) who graduated in sociology from the Catholic University of Louvain and taught Sociology at the University of Cordoba.
Cardijn was staying in the archbishop's palace at Havana. One day, when I had a meeting with him, I went there and got lost. I took the wrong door and all at once I found myself in a very modern hairdressing salon, with furniture in the latest fashion. I remember Cardijn, when he was in this palace, got very indignant and exclaimed, “How these people are living! They don't realize what is going to happen in the future!”

Members of the Catholic University Association invited me to a meeting in the University of Havana, with some professors and Catholics, mostly progressive ones. I found out that they had carried out a sociological analysis of the religious situation of Catholics in Cuba. The results were very important to the Church because they showed that in many parts of the country, religious practice was at a very low level and there was a need for pastoral work.

As I was interested in the theme of pastoral structures, I began to do research in Havana as I had done before in Europe and Chicago, and I saw that it was easy to collect information on the demographic evolution of the city and the dates when the parishes were established. I found out that there were 16 parishes, with an average of two priests for each parish –that is, 32 priests for doing pastoral work in a city that had a million inhabitants. Another discovery was that there were practically no catechism activities in the Cuban countryside. Havana was the first place in Latin America where I did this kind of research but later I could repeat it in other cities in the region. For the first time, I could make a comparison with Chicago and see all the differences.

In the Catholic colleges of Havana there were more than 200 priests. A quick glance showed the social distribution of pastoral work, as it was the upper middle classes who could pay for private tuition. The YCW national chaplain in Cuba was a Jesuit who lived in the college of Belén but because of his responsibility he was working a lot with groups of young workers. He said that in this country the YCW provided more of a vocation for the priesthood than the college of Belén, which was a very elitist school and was chosen not so much for religious purposes than because it was a good place to train and socially reproduce the bourgeoisie.

I participated, together with this YCW chaplain, in various meetings of young workers and was struck by the impoverishment
of their social environment. Thus I discovered the two aspects of the Church: on one side, the archbishop’s palace with its beauty salon and on the other, the young Christian labourers who worked and lived in miserable conditions. I still have the photos of the marginalized neighbourhoods in the Havana of that era. I also remember that with Cardijn I visited a sugar refinery where the working conditions shocked us both.

But this was only the first part of the journey, as I was invited to Haiti by the YCW adviser who was present at the congress. So, after eight days in Cuba, we flew to the capital, Port-au-Prince. There I was lodged in a seminary situated alongside the archbishop’s residence. Here, too, I discovered the country’s rural structures, the impact of the large US factories on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, which was a small city of 150,000 at that time. I was not surprised by what I saw because I had known various Latin American students at Louvain, who had told me a lot about it. However, it was my first personal contact with the social reality and the local Church, which struck me forcefully.

Haitian society was extremely unequal, with very poor neighbourhoods and a rich minority that was extremely opulent. I saw with my own eyes the exploitation of the local labour force by US capital, particularly in the pita plantations. Belgian and Canadian missionaries were very active there and the YCW, guided by a French priest, trained popular leaders who later played an important role in the workers movement and in Haitian political life.

On my return to the USA I had a controversial exchange with an American Jesuit who had published, in a magazine for Catholic workers, an article that compared North American and European capitalism. He wrote that, whereas in the latter capitalism had been unbridled and terrible, in the former it was humane and the capitalism of the future. I replied with an article that described, based on my experience, the North American capitalism in Cuba and Haiti.

**Last Sojourns in the United States and Canada**

After the two weeks I spent in Cuba and Haiti, I flew to New Orleans. There I spent two days with a Jesuit friend, Father Joseph
Fichter, who at that time was considered the leading figure in Catholic sociology in the United States. He was an extremely intelligent person, very American and a rigorous clergyman, who worked at the Catholic University. He had studied religious practice in New Orleans and we shared our experiences. He was disgusted because the Church had forbidden him to publish his book. There was a scandal among the clergy and the local hierarchy because its results showed that only 60% of the Catholic population went to church on Sundays. It showed that everything was not perfect, counter to the triumphalism of the Catholics who were still in the phase of integrating the values of the country, trying to emphasize nationalism and money, as symbols of success in society, to prove that they were good Americans.

In the parish of Saint Galle, where I was staying in Chicago, the parish priest was very interested in modern religious art. He possessed some very beautiful candelabras, which he only displayed on feast days. Some years later, he came to my country and visited my father’s house. And he told me more about the candelabra, “Don’t tell anyone, but they were a present from Al Capone!” In Belgium, he bought some chalices made by an excellent artist called Colruyt.

Joseph Fichter (1908-1994), North American Jesuit, a specialist in the Sociology of Religion. He was a professor at the Jesuit University of New Orleans and he carried out the first survey of Sunday church attendance in that city, the first to undertake such a study in the United States. He published the first volume of his findings on the Chicago parishes and was forbidden to publish the three remaining volumes.

Saint Galle was an Irish saint, a wandering monk in the 7th century. He founded the Benedictine monastery of Saint Gallen in Switzerland. His name was chosen for the parish in Chicago because the majority of the clergy in Chicago was of Irish origin, although most of the parishioners were of Polish origin.

Al Capone (1899-1947) was a mafioso of Italian origin who organized prostitution in Chicago and illegal trade in alcohol and cigarettes during the prohibition period. He was considered a modern Robin Hood for his donations to charity organizations.

Of the Colruyt family who came from the Flemish city of Halle, close to Brussels. One of the brothers in the 1950s converted family groceries into the biggest and cheapest supermarkets of the country. Another was a goldsmith, specialized in religious art and yet another was a secretary in the archbishopric of Malines.
Another experience in the United States was in the Christmas holidays when I travelled to Washington for the inauguration of President Eisenhower.\textsuperscript{16} I was invited by a Belgian priest who taught at Fordham University and with whom I had already been in contact in Belgium concerning YCW matters. I was able to attend the ceremony in one of the offices of the Secretary of the State Department. What impressed us most was the official procession, very orderly and distinguished but with a mixture of things—the West Point cadets, a folkloric group, the Supreme Court judges, a clown on a monocycle—all very typical of the US style of doing things.

When the elections were held I was chosen as a ballot official for the Democrat Party so that on the day of the election I was monitoring the voting process. It was the first time I had seen voting machines. However, I had to help people who did not know how to use them.

At the end of the course in Chicago I obtained an extension of my scholarship to do a third term at the university. When it was finished I was invited to teach another term at the University of Montreal, thanks to one of their professors, Father Norbert Lacoste,\textsuperscript{17} who had been a colleague of mine in Louvain and had then taken a summer course in Chicago.

When I was to leave Chicago I did not know what to do with the mass of my socio-religious research materials, especially the large maps made by the Chicago Planning Commission. I thought it best to leave them with the archbishop’s curia. I spoke with the general vicar, who was most impressed to see all the work and reacted like the good American he was: he asked how much it had cost. I said about 400 dollars and he immediately issued the order, “Prepare a cheque for 500 dollars for Father Houtart!” I was very surprised: 500 dollars was an enormous sum in those days.

\textsuperscript{16} Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969) was the commander in chief in World War Two who received the surrender of the German troops and afterwards was elected president of the United States (1953-1957).

\textsuperscript{17} Norbert Lacoste was a priest in the archdiocese of Montreal. He studied sociology with Professor Yves Urbain at the Catholic University of Louvain, specializing in urban sociology. He became professor at the University of Montreal.
I travelled to Montreal via Detroit. Of course I made a stop to see the Niagara Falls on the US side of the border. That night I was expected in a convent in Toronto and I did not want to arrive too late. But before continuing the journey I had to eat something. I entered a cafeteria, which was very crowded. At one table there was a man sitting alone and I asked whether he would mind if I sat at this table. He was very pleasant and we started to talk. He told me that he was the sheriff of the town. “Here we get people from many nationalities and I have to say that in all my life I have never had a problem with a Belgian”, he said. We went on talking for a while and then I realized I had to go, so I excused myself and left. Halfway to Toronto I remembered that I had gone away without paying. On my arrival I sent the sheriff a dollar with a message. “You said you had never had a problem with a Belgian. And now you have! Please accept a dollar”. A few days later a card arrived from him, confirming that he had had to pay my bill.

In Toronto I stayed for two days where I met the French philosopher Etienne Gilson.\(^\text{18}\) He was one of the great ones of that time: a classic Catholic and very conservative, but a distinguished intellectual. In Chicago he had attended some extracurricular courses with Jacques Maritain,\(^\text{19}\) another French Catholic philosopher who was much more open-minded. He inspired social Catholicism, which was quite influential in the southern cone of Latin America.

I stayed three months in Montreal, lodging in a parish and continuing my contacts with the local YCW. At the university I gave courses in urban sociology and sociology of religion and I started to carry out research, similar to that which I had done previously, on the parishes of Montreal. I did this with my colleague Father Lacoste who continued with the work in a much more elaborate

\(^\text{18}\) Etienne Gilson (1884-1978) a French Thomist philosopher, a conservative Catholic who exercised considerable influence over the French Catholic Church and the political life of the country during the post-war period. He participated in the Foundation of the Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies in Toronto.

\(^\text{19}\) Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), French philosopher inspired by Thomism and the Church's social doctrine, who had great influence on European Catholics after the Second World War. He was also influential among progressive Christians in Latin America in the 1950s.
form. I discovered Quebec society, still very Catholic, conservative and rural, although there was already a strong reaction against Catholicism among the students. A religious and cultural change was under way.

During this period I also worked for the cardinal, Paul-Emile Léger, who was to play an important role in the Vatican Council II. He gave me some studies to do although he was not exactly enamoured by sociology of religion. But I also worked with a Bishop from Quebec who was very interested in the subject and who participated each year in the meetings of the International Conference for the Sociology of Religion (CISR). He asked me to make a survey in his diocese that was on the other side of the Saint Lawrence River, facing Montreal. I came to conclusions that were the very opposite of what he had expected. As there were bridges over the river half the people in his city worked in Montreal and although he thought he had built up his pastoral work on an absolutely independent basis, I showed that his diocese had no autonomy at all, neither cultural nor economic, from Montreal. I remember his reaction, “This is your sociology but I have another one”.

Paul Emile Léger (1904-1991) was cardinal Archbishop of Montreal from 1950 to 1967. He was active during Vatican Council II, supporting those in favour of an opening of the Church. When he left the archdiocese he went to Africa to work in a leprosy centre.

The International Conference for the Sociology of Religion was founded in 1952 by Canon Jacques Leclercq, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain. Its first meeting was held in the same year and the second one took place in 1953 in Breda (Netherlands), with the collaboration of Professor Georges Zeegers, director of the Institute for Socio-Religious Research of the Dutch Catholic Church. In 1953, at the third conference I was nominated secretary, a position I held for ten years. Every second year a conference was held (in Louvain, Florence, Barcelona, Yugoslavia). I was succeeded by Emile Pin, a French Jesuit, professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. On the death of Professor Jacques Leclercq, Jean Labbens, professor of sociology at the University of Lyon, became president and he was succeeded by professor Bryan Wilson from England. In the 1990s, the secretariat returned to Louvain where it established close cooperation with the socio-religious journal Social Compass and between the two universities of Louvain (Leuven, the Flemish university and Louvain-la-Neuve, the Francophone university).
In Montreal I received an official letter from the United States –from the Senate if I remember correctly– to appear before the Un-American Activities Committee of Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy.\textsuperscript{22} The University of Chicago had been one of the places that McCarthy had ordered to be investigated and many professors had been called for investigation by his committee. I did not reply and I never knew why they had summoned me. Perhaps because I had frequented left-wingers like Walter Reuther,\textsuperscript{23} president of the United Automobile Workers (UAW), or a socialist activist called Dorothy Day,\textsuperscript{24} who gave me several of the books she had written. She had founded a Catholic worker association, which was close to the workers and made a considerable impact on North American Catholicism of that period. I had also frequented another Catholic activist, Saul Alinsky,\textsuperscript{25} who had supported the stockyard workers of Chicago. He was a thinker whose philosophy was partly inspired by the YCW, but also by anarchism. I did not know much about him but at that time he was doing intellectual and social work that was very interesting. These were personalities in the US Catholic left and, as can be imagined, they were quite marginalized by the national Catholic community.

\textsuperscript{22} Joseph Raymond McCarthy (1908-1957), US Senator in the 1950s who presided over the Senate Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations which he used to hunt out those he considered communists. He was particularly against left-wing intellectuals: in the early 1950s the University of Chicago was considered to be one of their centres.

\textsuperscript{23} Walter Reuther (1907-1970) an American labour union leader and an activist in the Democratic Party. He was president of the United Automobile Workers from 1946 to 1970.

\textsuperscript{24} Dorothy Day (1897-1980) a militant anarchist who converted to Catholicism. She founded the Catholic Worker Movement and The Catholic Worker magazine to spread the Church’s social doctrine. She created a movement of houses of hospitality and farming communes. She opposed the sexual revolution of the 1970s. Pope John Paul II started her beatification cause and Pope Francis quoted her in his speech to the American Congress en 2015.

\textsuperscript{25} Saul David Alinsky (1909-1972) was a Jewish intellectual from Chicago inspired by anarcho-unionism who helped the workers in the Union Stockyards to organize themselves and became known as a radical community organizer of the ‘have-nots’ all over the United States. Hillary Clinton wrote a (critical) thesis on him and his methodology, while he inspired the first presidential campaign of Barack Obama.
I had earned some money when I was professor in Montreal, where I was living for free in the parishes, much as I had done in the United States. I realized that with all my savings and the sale of my car I could fulfill the dream that I had been cherishing for some time already: to make a trip to Latin America. I wrote about this to the auxiliary Bishop of Malines, Leon Joseph Suenens, who later became a Cardinal.

Monsignor Suenens supported me during my studies and when I chose to take the scholarship to the United States. When I received the scholarship I had received another attractive proposal. It was from a group that advocated spiritual retreats and its founder, Father Rostang, who was linked to the spirituality of Paray-le-Monial, asked me to join them. Suenens said, “You accepted the scholarship in the United States and you should take that”. It was just as well because this group later became dominated by fundamentalism.

Since the beginning of my travel to the US I used to send to Monsignor Suenens copies of the letter that I sent to my parents.

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26 Leon Joseph Suenens (1904-1996) was a priest in the archdiocese of Malines, professor of philosophy and then vice-rector of the Catholic University of Louvain. He was nominated auxiliary Bishop by Cardinal van Roey in 1946 and succeeded him as Bishop in 1961. One of the four moderators of Vatican Council II, he played an important role in supporting the reformist wing of the Church. He was close to Dom Hélder Câmara, Archbishop of Recife (Brazil) and became Vice-President of CELAM (Latin American Episcopal Conference). He was enthusiastic about the Legion of Mary, a religious movement of Irish origin which promoted evangelization through home visits. After the Council, his proposal to decentralize ecclesiastical power to the episcopal conferences earned him the hostility of the Roman Curia and distanced him from Pope Paul VI. He was close to the charismatic Catholic movement in the United States and he participated in many meetings in that country, including the health cures promoted by that organization. He was very close to the Belgian royal family and the spirituality of King Baudouin.

27 Father Rostang, a Jesuit, developed a method of spiritual retreats inspired by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, but adapted with the help of Margarita Maria Alacoque. It was spiritually rich but had fundamental tendencies which developed almost into sectarianism. He finally abandoned the priesthood and his Christian faith.

28 It was said that here, in the XVII century, Christ appeared to the nun Margarita Maria Alacoque. This developed into the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which has now spread throughout the world.
Now my letter explained how much I would like to take advantage of my stay in this continent to visit the YCWs in the different countries of Latin America. If Suenens managed to get the permission of Cardinal Van Roey, it would be almost a miracle as the latter was not very concerned with international affairs. But, contrary to all expectations, the cardinal gave his agreement.

I still wanted to visit some parts of the United States, especially California, before leaving for Latin America. My friend Lacoste and I drove from Montreal to New York together with one of the youths who had been in the delinquent centre in Brussels and had immigrated to Canada, but had problems in adapting himself. Along the way, we were caught in a heavy snowstorm. Fortunately we were able to stop in a town and stay in the parish centre, before continuing the journey. I spent a few days in New York to complete my data on the evolution of the Catholic pastoral structures in that city in order to verify what I had found in Chicago.

With Georges Schoeters, I crossed the United States, passing by Florida, New Mexico, etc. As I had some appointments in Los Angeles and San Francisco, we could not dilly-dally on the way. One day we travelled 1,400 kilometres without stopping in order to see the Grand Canyon. It was quite a tough journey, encountering snow on our way. During the night, in a bend in the road, there was a wild horse that slept on its feet because the tarmac was so hot. We nearly hit him; luckily he was not looking at us and had no time to react. Finally we reached Los Angeles and then, San Francisco, where I stayed in a parish for two weeks to collect data for a study similar to those I had carried out in Chicago and New York.

Thus my first visit to the United States ended, which had lasted a whole year. Later on I returned some fifty times for conferences, above all when the war of Vietnam was at the centre of attention, and to take part in political and religious meetings.

29 Georges Schoeters (1930-1994) was born in Amberes and emigrated to Canada in the 1950s. He was one of the founders of the Quebec Liberation Front. Accused of having placed a bomb in Montreal he was extradited to Belgium and he requested political asylum in Sweden. He had great difficulty in adapting to the country and committed suicide at the age of 64.
CHAPTER V:
IMMERSION IN LATIN AMERICA
WITH THE YCW

Central America

It was the winter of 1954. I had been able to sell my car to two friends from the Catholic University Youth, one Canadian and one American, who were studying in San Francisco. With these funds and my savings I was able to undertake what turned out to be a journey of six months in Latin America.

I started out for Mexico. I travelled by road from San Diego to Tijuana and then I took a plane to Mexico City. There I stayed in a convent where there was a French sister who had been with the French YCW and was working in the marginal neighbourhoods of the city. I did not linger in that country because the YCW hardly existed there. Instead there was the monopoly of Catholic Action, which was very traditional. Nevertheless I was able to visit some people, like the national chaplain of that organization, who was a relatively open-minded man, very Americanized with a car that looked like a yacht.

In this first contact with Mexico I became especially close to a movement that was much inspired by the YCW methodology, the Catholic Action Family Movement, founded by Pepe Álvarez1 and his wife, parents of fourteen children. Although it was distinctly bourgeois in origin, the movement was open-minded in the ecclesiastical sense of Catholic biblical spiritual renewal and to some extent in the social sense. Later the Álvarez, influenced by

1 José Alvarez, founder of the Christian Family Movement of Mexico, inspired by the YCW method «see, judge, act» He became more radical politically and supported Liberation Theology.
Liberation Theology, became more progressive and formed a left-wing party. During my visit they invited me to various activities and I remained in contact with them and some of their children who continued their work.

The popular devotion of the Mexicans strongly impressed me. I was in the basilica where the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is conserved. It is a place that constantly receives streams of pilgrims and the sight of the indigenous people walking on their knees up to the church filled me with emotion. There was nothing artificial in it; it was a cultural expression of a deeply-held religious faith. The intellectuals can be critical about these demonstrations and as a sociologist of religion I tried to understand the socio-cultural origin of the phenomenon, but its existential character moved me. To be able to celebrate the mass at the altar of the Virgin was a privilege and a way of showing my solidarity with these popular expressions of faith. “Opium of the people” –maybe, but devotion is not necessarily in opposition to social struggle. It represents the symbolic language of real people and a popular religious expression—polysemic, certainly—but no less authentic.

I flew to Guatemala, together with an official from the government of Jacobo Arbenz. He was a progressive president and was democratically elected, but demonized in the US media. Because of his measures like those of agrarian reform they accused him of being communist. When the plane took off, my companion very deliberately made the sign of the cross. It was interesting for me to talk with a ‘communist’ who made this sign. I did not know very much about the government of Arbenz, but I sympathized with him because he was making social change and for the opposition this was as terrible as it was for the US media.

In Guatemala I stayed with a priest chaplain of the YCW who took me to various meetings in the city and in the countryside. I was able to meet young peasants who asked me to explain how the YCW functioned in Europe, its history and other details. This was for me a new encounter with the reality of the agrarian

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2 Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe developed among the indigenous peoples of Mexico and, afterwards, in many other parts of Latin America. Tradition has it that the indigenous Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin had a vision of the Virgin in 1531.
problem; of the exploitation of the rural workers; of the contempt for the peasants who were considered as pawns. A number of them worked in plantations financed by foreign capital, particularly from the United States and they were in favour of a political regime that was starting agrarian reform. It was probably this measure that provoked the opposition of the dominant economic interests.

The government of Arbenz, which was in fact more nationalist and social-democrat than communist, ended by being defeated by a coup, financed and organized by the United States, which radicalized the resistance. The contacts I had in Guatemala were a real learning experience as I approached Latin America from below. I did not hobnob with the local bourgeoisie; I did not play the tourist. I was always living in the parishes of the working-class neighbourhoods and with priests who were much concerned about the poor classes.

From Guatemala I travelled to El Salvador. When I was at that congress in Havana I had known some Salvadoran priests and also some lay youth leaders. I was able to stay in a seminary, in spite of the fact it was very conservative. They were difficult times because of the military dictatorship that created a climate of withdrawal and abstention from any radical action. The terror provoked by the governing political regimes since the massacre of the communists was still patent. The young workers with whom I talked complained about the Church’s lack of commitment concerning the exploitation to which they were subjected in the industries. All the while I was taking notes about what I saw and writing letters to Bishop Suenens and my parents.

I then went on to Managua in Nicaragua. I wanted to go at once to León, to see the Bishop, a YCW adviser, as he was due to leave the country shortly. I got on a very ancient milk train which very soon came to a halt, just after we had left the city suburbs behind. When we passengers tried to find out what had happened we heard that a man had fallen from the train and was lying on the road. I got off the train to see how he was. I ran towards him; he was not dead but drunk, with a wound that happily was not very serious. I remained with him for a few minutes and soon the train left with my luggage on board. I started to run while the passengers called out to encourage me. Happily the train was
moving so slowly that I could reach it. I jumped on to the last carriage and I realized I was on top of the milk bottles. It shows the kind of train there was at that time, when a radio programme was broadcasting an ironic song at nine o'clock about the arrival of a train that was due at six o'clock.

At León the Bishop awaited me at the station. I spent two days of meetings with YCW groups, in which the young people described their situation and together we practised the method of see, judge and act. In Managua, it was the same as in Leon, there were meetings of young workers in the same situation of exploitation: long hours of work; appalling hygienic conditions; social protection almost inexistent; impossibility to organize themselves in unions, etc. It was similar to what I had seen in Guatemala with young rural workers and in El Salvador as well. In Nicaragua, the Somoza\(^3\) dictatorship had lasted some 20 years, since the assassination of Sandino.\(^4\) It appeared to be a barrier against communism and for this fact one family could dominate the economy of a country. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, in opposition to communism, adopted an attitude quite close to power, which was criticized by the young people of YCW. Some years later, various leaders of the movement united with the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN acronym in Spanish) that toppled the Somoza dictatorship in 1979.

Then I journeyed on to Honduras where I carried out similar activities. I was struck by the social scene. The ‘banana republics’ were dominated by the economic interests of a minority social class, which was very closely linked to international capital. At the same time, I saw the difference between the concrete situation of the people and the Church as an institution that lived in its own world and which identified with the dominant powers.

On 17 March I was already in Costa Rica. There I stayed for a few days because the person in charge of the Church’s social

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\(^3\) Anastasio Somoza García (1896-1956). Twice president of Nicaragua (from 1937 to 1947 and from 1950 to 1956). Two of Somoza’s sons succeeded him: Luis Somoza Dubayle (president from 1956 to 1963) and Anastasio Somoza Dubayle (twice president, from 1967 to 1972 and from 1974 to 1979, when he was deposed by the Sandinista revolution).

\(^4\) Augusto César Sandino (1895-1934) organized the resistance that forced the US Army to withdraw from occupying Nicaragua.
action was not available and the YCW chaplain was a very busy man. He was to be designated Archbishop of San José, as he had the necessary qualifications required in theology and canon law, but he was considered too progressive for the post. He was rather disappointed by this. With him I went to YCW meetings, not only in San José, but also in small towns in the interior of Costa Rica. Under a social democrat regime, society was less unequal than in the other countries of Central America, although this did not improve the unfair situation of many of the young workers. Thus I completed my first month in Latin America.

South America

I decided to go straight to Colombia, but because of unfavourable conditions for landing there, our plane had to come down in Panama and continue the following day. In six months it was the only time I slept in a hotel. I took advantage of the opportunity to visit a parish in the outskirts of the city, where priests whom I had known from the Chicago diocese had started an interesting pastoral renewal from the viewpoint of the liturgy, with participatory masses and social action, in a poor neighbourhood.

The following day I arrived in Medellin and from there continued to Bogota, where the director of the seminary was Father Paradis, a Canadian priest whom I had known in Montreal. He was a very open-minded man and was kind enough to invite me to speak in the seminary. I already knew some Italian and I had been practising Spanish only since passing the Mexican frontier; but I was able, in a mixture of languages, to give a talk about the social compromises made by the Church with the system. At the end, one of the seminarists approached me asking if I could return one or two days later to meet with young students who were interested in social issues. That youth was Camilo Torres.5

Camilo Torres Restrepo (1929-1956). Born in Bogota. He became a priest in the archdiocese of Santa Fe in Bogota. He studied Sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain (1954-1958) and at the University of Minnesota. He was chaplain of the students at the National University and professor of Sociology, with Orlando Fals Borda. He founded the Frente Unido to unify the left in political struggle faced with the increasing violence exercised by the
Two days later I met with that group and we had a long debate. I got the impression that Camilo was very intelligent and concerned about social problems. I suggested, “Why don’t you come to Louvain to study sociology after you have been ordained?” At this time the Catholic University of Louvain had great prestige in Latin America, so that he obtained permission to travel to Belgium that very September, in 1954. There were quite progressive currents in the faculties of theology, philosophy and social sciences of the university in those years. Years later, the cardinal of Bogota wrote a letter in which he virtually accused our university of being responsible for Camilo’s ‘deviation’. In Colombia my contacts with the YCW were made through the Jesuit chaplain, Father Londoño, who also advised the movement of the Catholic employers. Afterwards I had a disagreement with him about the very notion of a workers’ movement. He had a tendency to take up an interclass position that was a real danger for the autonomy of an authentic workers’ movement. I also had an encounter with the Christian Family Movement, which was quite developed and I participated in a meeting in Bogota where one of their members invited me to visit Manizales. To my great surprise, when I arrived there a police car was waiting for me which raced along at top speed, with the sirens wailing, along the twenty kilometres between the airport and the city. The person who had invited me turned out to be the head of the police and had ordered this reception for me. Here I gave a talk to the Movement and participated in a discussion on Christians and their lack of social commitment. I passed through Cali but did not stay and went on directly to Ecuador.

My arrival in another South American country coincided with a service in the cathedral, to which I was invited by the chaplain of the YCW. When I entered I found myself seated next to the dominant classes. Finally he joined the National Liberation Army (ELN), which was inspired by Che Guevara and he was killed in action on 15 February 1966. He became known all over the continent as an example of a Christian revolutionary. See also chapter VI.

Padre Londoño, a Jesuit who was adviser to the YCW and the movement of the Catholic Colombian businessmen. His interclass positions created certain tensions in the workers’ movement.
cardinal. The ceremony began with three rosaries, one after the other, because it was a feast dedicated to the Virgin. We prayed on our knees, but without any supporting pew.

I was tired because of the long journey and the altitude, but I had to do likewise because I was beside the cardinal. The following days I had similar meetings with groups of the YCW, and experienced the same situations as in the countries already mentioned. It was in Imbabura that I met Father Leonardo Proaño, who was adviser to the YCW there and very concerned about the fate of the indigenous people.

I continued my journey, this time to Peru. I took the Grace Airline, a company operating in the United States and Latin America, which belonged to Peter Grace, a US Catholic capitalist who also had various mines in Bolivia. Much later I got to know him, in New York.

In Lima I was put up in a popular parish in the centre of the city. The parish priest was the YCW chaplain and also rector of the

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7 Leonidas Proaño Villalba (1910-1988). In 1954 he was designated Bishop of Riobamba, where he distributed the land of the diocese to the Indian communities. He was an active member of CELAM (the Latin American Episcopal Council). The military accused him of subversion because of his Liberation Theology orientation and his work with the indigenous movement. With the Coordination of the Indigenous Movements (CONAIE acronym for Spanish) he prepared the 500th anniversary of the conquest of America.

8 Peter Grace (1913-1995), one of the most important US businessmen in the 1950s. He was a Catholic, which was exceptional at that time as the business world was dominated by the Protestants (this was the basis of the famous thesis of the German sociologist Max Weber: the link between the Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism). He was the grandson of the first Catholic mayor of New York. His father built up an economic empire in the chemical industry. He created the Grace Airline company, which covered most of Latin America in competition with Panamerican Airways. He established sugarcane plantations in Peru and mines in Bolivia, as well as investing in the postwar reconstruction of Europe. He was a rightwing Democrat and he worked with President Kennedy on the Alliance for Progress, then with President Reagan to fight against wasteful expenditure in the federal administration. He supported many Catholic causes in the United States and his wife was close to the Legion of Mary. He also supported Cardinal Suenens.
Pontifical Catholic University. At that time the political leader, Haya de la Torre, was in prison and there was considerable controversy about this. He was being accused of communism and the young people of YCW had a lot of sympathy for him. In fact, he was a left-wing social-democrat, which was in strong contrast with the right-wing regimes that dominated the political scene in Latin America at that time.

During this trip, I certainly did not meet any radical left-wing movements. It was still an unknown world to me. It was clear that in Latin American Catholicism, capitalism was considered an adversary against which it was necessary to struggle and transform, with agrarian reforms and banking, educational, reforms, fair salaries, etc. However, this was to be done without falling into what was then considered to be communist extremism. In Latin America the young people of the YCW could be more or less radical, but always in the framework of the Church's social doctrine. That is, they took up social struggle, but within class collaboration that in the end led to many of its leaders joining the Christian Democrat Party. However, later on, from a religious viewpoint, it led some of them to Liberation Theology. As we can see, various orientations owe part of their origin to the YCW.

At that time the YCW had chaplains whose role was most significant in other branches of the lay movement where they were also animateurs. They were Jesuits, Oblates and lay priests. In most cases these priests had studied in Europe and had a broader vision thanks to which they could see the transformation that had developed in different sectors of the life of the Catholic Church, even before the Vatican Council II that started in 1962. In Latin America their experiences with the under-privileged classes made them see the need to make changes. Consequently, they were major actors in the renovation of Latin American Catholicism in general, not only in social action, but also in liturgy, ecumenism and biblical studies.

Victor Raul de la Torre (1895-1979) was the founder, in 1930, of the political party APRA with a social democrat orientation. He was often exiled or had to take refuge in embassies. He never took power, mainly because of interventions by the military.
I then travelled to Bolivia in a Conver-Metropolitan plane. There were only two passengers, the US Ambassador and myself. I remember, as we flew over the Andes the pilot ordered us to use the oxygen masks because there was insufficient air in the cabin. We landed in La Paz, where I was met by the YCW chaplain, a Dutch priest. I participated one night in a meeting of the organization that was attended by the Minister for Labour, former president of the YCW, who was part of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR acronym for Spanich) at the beginning of the revolution of 1952. For the most part I listened at these meetings, only at times insisting on the methodology of ‘see, judge and act’. It was an exceptional school in which I learnt a lot. More than in the other countries, I saw the political dimension of social action. For the YCW members it was obvious they should be in favour of the MNR, as opposed to the official positions of the Church. This was novel to me as in Europe there was a considerable distance from politics, partly because there were Christian parties that tried to instrumentalize the YCW on behalf of its electoral interests. Generally it was the upper and middle classes that led the Christian Democrat parties.

Besides the meetings in La Paz, I went with some lay youth to visit the tin and copper mines that were situated far away from the capital. It took a day to get to them because of the difficult mountain roads. One of these Bolivian mines belonged to Peter Grace, owner of the air company in which I had travelled to Peru, who also possessed plantations, above all of sugar cane, in that country. We held meetings with young miners, who recounted their lives to us. I was struck by the conditions inside the mine: the workers were exploited brutally and there was virtually no social security. The difficulties faced by the unions were very great. Most of the miners were indigenous people.

The National Revolutionary Movement (MNR acronym for Spanich) was founded in Bolivia in 1941 by Victor Paz Estenssoro and it came into power in 1952. It carried out some significant social changes in terms of citizen participation, giving the women and the illiterate the right to vote, strengthening the control of the State over natural resources and the Bolivian economy, as well as nationalizing mines and distributing land through agrarian reform.
From Bolivia I went on to Chile, where I had Jesuit friends. Once again I met various times with the local YCW, which was quite developed in that Andean nation. I made contact with some intellectual and former students from Louvain. I found that the society was very westernized. But the visit to the favelas\textsuperscript{11} made an impression on me. The distance between the social classes was so great that it was quite scandalous. In Christian circles there was a certain ‘naturalization’ of the phenomenon. It was sad, but that was how it was; its only attitude was to carry out charitable actions to remedy the situation. Luckily I also met with people who had more radical positions in favour of change, within the logic of the social doctrine of the Church. This was the case of the Hogar de Cristo (Christ’s Home), founded by Father Luis Alberto Hurtado,\textsuperscript{12} a Jesuit who had died not long ago. He was beatified in 1994 by Pope John Paul II and sanctified in 2005 by Benedict XVI.\textsuperscript{13}

Then I travelled to Buenos Aires, where I stayed for four months. One of my mother’s brothers lived there with his wife and two children. He had been a former diplomat and director of the Argentinian Electricity Company (CADE acronym for Spanish) which had Belgian capital.

My uncle Hubert Carton de Wiart was keen on travelling by car. He had motored all over Asia, then Africa and lastly, Latin America. At the end of the 1920s he was going to participate in the

\textsuperscript{11} These were spontaneous settlements on the periphery of Chilean towns mainly by former peasants. The dwellings were tents or shacks constructed with improvised materials.

\textsuperscript{12} Luis Alberto Hurtado (1901-1952) was a Jesuit priest who set up many social activities. He worked with the Christian trade unions and founded the \textit{Mensaje} magazine to spread the Church’s social doctrine. He was canonized in 2005 by Pope Benedict XVI. He represented the humanist tendency of Catholicism, in favour of the poor. However he did not take up the more radical analysis which was later to give birth to Liberation Theology.

\textsuperscript{13} José Aloisius Ratzinger (1927-) was born in Bavaria. He was professor of theology at the University of Tubingen. He authored a new German catechism and was one of the experts at Vatican Council II. From being a liberal theologian he became a conservative after the student revolt of 1968. He was Archbishop of Munich (1977) and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He was elected pope in 2005 as Benedict XVI and he renounced the papacy in 2013.
caravan organized by Citroen to travel through Asia, but the head of the caravan died in Beijing, so the operation was suspended. My uncle decided to return by himself in his car, accompanied only by a mechanic. It was in fact the first car journey from Beijing to Paris. Later, he participated in an expedition from Brussels to Johannesburg and, around 1934, he drove from Buenos Aires to Panama. He wrote a book called *Sur la Cordillère des Andes en Automobile* (*Along the Andean Mountains Range by Car*). Many years later, when I saw the film *The Motorcycle Diaries*, it reminded me of him.

In Buenos Aires I wanted to be in a place where I could do further research into the social situation in this great city; although I felt close to my uncle, I was with him only a couple of times.

I lodged in a popular neighbourhood called Chacarita in the Todos los Santos (All Saints) parish, close to the great cemetery, where carts pulled by horses came transporting the dead every day. I stayed with the parish priest, Father Trusso and two other Argentinian priests, one of them called García and the other, Miguel Ramón Mejía. The latter had worked with the YCW in France and

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14 A biographical film based on the travel diaries of Ernesto Che Guevara and Alberto Granado. It was written by Gianni Mina, directed by Walter Salles and first shown in 2003. Actors Gael García y Rodrigo de la Serna played the main roles.


16 Father Trusso, a priest in the archdiocese of Buenos Aires, was a pioneer in the adaptation of the Catholic liturgy before Vatican Council II. He closely followed the evolution of the European thinking and experiences in the subject, especially that of the Belgian Benedictines of Louvain (Monte César Abbey) and of Brujas. As the parish priest of a popular quarter of Buenos Aires he did not draw too much attention to himself, in spite of his audacity. His parish was an important place for the YCW.

17 Miguel Ramón Mejía, also a priest in the archdiocese of Buenos Aires was Father Trusso's vicar in the Todos los Santos parish in Chacarita and afterwards went to be a worker priest in Paris. He returned to Latin America to work with Monsignor Sergio Méndez Arceo in Cuernavaca (Mexico) and when he died Mejía went to work in Essteli (Nicaragua) with the Sandinista revolution –always as a simple priest He finally returned to Buenos Aires.
had returned to Argentina. He then went to Mexico as a worker priest and later to the Nicaragua of the Sandinista Revolution. Over the years we met in different places and developed a strong friendship until his death in 2004.

An invitation was extended to me to teach urban sociology for a semester at the Architecture Faculty of the University of Buenos Aires, where this subject had never been taught. I divided my time between the parish, the university, meetings with the YCW and my research into the parishes of the city, where I could see the influence of immigration.

In my research I discovered that from the religious viewpoint the immigration had been very different from that of Chicago. The European vision of the immigrants who travelled to the United States was that they were going to a Protestant country and for that reason they were accompanied by Catholic priests. Whereas for those that went to Argentina, a Catholic country, there was virtually no ecclesiastical presence. I found in Buenos Aires the same institutional situation as in Paris, Barcelona and Madrid: parishes with two or three priests to look after 50,000 or 80,000 people.

My research expanded to include the Jews, whose presence here had continued to increase. They were to be found in specific areas of the city that were possible to locate through the census data that until the middle of the 20th century indicated people’s religion. Thanks to my work in the university, I was in contact with a Jewish family of intellectuals of German origin, who had escaped the Nazi persecution and some years later converted to Catholicism because of the social commitment of the current progressive stance of the Church. During this research I could see that those who declared themselves without religion were to be found in the upper middle class and not in the popular classes. Also, the numbers varied according to the political regimes, being more numerous when the anti-clerical liberals were in power and less in other periods.

I was also in contact with Flemish immigrants who had left their country after the Second World War because they had cooperated in some way with the occupiers. They were not war criminals, but collaborators. There were more than 200 of them and they had created an association. They approached me one day because they
wanted to celebrate their Sunday mass, given that I spoke their mother tongue. In this way I was able to perform some pastoral activities for them, especially the young people of the second generation.

I was getting to know Buenos Aires, in meetings at the university or in the homes of Catholic friends with impressive intellectual qualifications—philosophers, doctors, scientists—but they were not all socially committed.

I worked a lot with the YCW, far more than in other countries, because of course my stay in Argentina was much longer. The president of the Argentinian YCW was Emilio Masperó, who afterwards became the leader of the head office of the Latin American Workers (CLAT acronym for Spanish), which coordinated the Christian unions in the region. We then became great friends. He had been many times in Belgium where he dealt with international coordination and he came later on to see me in Louvain to discuss CLAT politics. However, the organization became closer and closer to the Christian Democrats and we

18 Emilio Masperó (1927-2000) was an Argentinian labour leader in the 1950s who was a YCW leader and afterwards he became president of the Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores (CLAT) for 32 years. He was a great defender of the Church’s social doctrine.

19 Worker’s Latin American Union (CLAT, Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores acronym for Spanish): governing body of the Christian trade unions in the continent, most of them led at the beginning by former “jocistas” (members of JOC, Spanish acronym for Juventud Obrera Católica: Catholic Working Youth). The close relationship of this organization with the Social-Christian parties in Latin America brought about a lot of confusion. Its anti-communism led to dubious alliances, as in El Salvador or in Nicaragua. Several of its first leaders had been members of YCW in Cuba, and had gone into exile after the Communist assertion by the Revolution in that country. On the other hand, CLAT was opposed to the influence of North American trade unions in the region and it acted as a minority force in most of the countries. It started a continental trade union school in Venezuela (COPEI) (Spanish acronym for Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente: Committee for the Independent Electoral and Political Organization) with support from the Christian Democracy. Upon the coming of Hugo Chavez into power and the opposition to the new government by the trade union majorities, especially that of petroleum, CLAT took sides with the Bolivarian Revolution.
disagreed about many things; for example about the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, Christian Democracy in El Salvador, not to mention Cuba in the 1980s. He left off visiting me for more than a decade. Then not long before he died, I met him in a meeting of Belgian unionists and in spite of our differences our relations were very cordial.

I was disturbed by the differences between us as I considered him to be a very honest person and dedicated to the cause of the workers. He was very convinced of the Church’s social doctrine that analyzed society in terms of strata rather than classes (although he used to employ this term), in which the common good was considered as an alliance between social groups. In political terms this meant supporting Christian Democracy. In Latin America, even more than in Europe in fact, this actually involved putting the popular interests at the service of bourgeois policies, using the religious argument to do so. This attitude was partly the result of the historical atheism of socialism and in particular, of communism.

One day I heard a speech by President Juan Domingo Perón from the Casa Rosada (Pink House) in front of the Plaza de Mayo. I shall always remember the popular enthusiasm there. Then his conflict with the Church began. Peronismo was popular among the workers, who saw this political movement was oriented towards them in a country where the bourgeoisie had dominated the national scene since independence. Some leftwing intellectuals were critical, considering that the regime was more nationalist than socialist and that it was like the road signs for the great avenues of Buenos Aires that read “To turn to the right, go first to the left”.

Eva Perón had died not long ago. She was particularly popular for her social work in the poor neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires,

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20 Juan Domingo Perón (1885-1974) was three times president of Argentina. He created the political current known as peronismo, the social orientation which was in favour of the workers. He was a Latin American populist and social democrat.

21 Eva Perón (1919-1952) was the second wife of Juan Domingo Perón. She dedicated herself to social work and was very popular among the Argentinian population.
where the walls were covered with tributes to her memory, and they called her a saint. In the Chacarita parish, people came to ask for mass not for Evita, but to Evita, in which they solicited her protection.

On another occasion, I went by train to a national Eucharistic congress in Tucumán with the priests of the parish where I lived. There were thousands of participants, including many indigenous people from the frontiers with Bolivia, with their misa chica (statues of saints) to celebrate the Pachamama (Mother Earth). It was horribly hot and during this mass, held in a field, the cardinal of Buenos Aires talked for nearly 50 minutes on “the two heads of the mystical body of Christ, Jesus and Maria” before a popular audience that understood nothing of this theological elucubration which, indeed, seemed to be an appalling biological anomaly. It was a striking reflection of the distance between popular devotion and the Catholic ecclesiastical institution.

The main link was the sacred character attributed to religious roles by the believers. It was evident that popular belief developed quite autonomously vis-á-vis the hierarchy that was closer to the traditional political powers than to the popular culture. After the congress we returned in an old and uncomfortable bus for more than a thousand kilometres, passing through the cities of Cordoba and Rosario. In August I received a missive from Bishop Suenens in which he explained that it was time for me to return. As I had yet to visit Uruguay and Brazil I prepared to end my journey with those two countries.

In Uruguay I visited the Archbishop of Montevideo, together with the YCW chaplain. I recounted my experience in Latin America and, in particular with the young workers which were already beginning to assume that the Church was an enemy and react against it for its poor social commitment. The Archbishop responded, “Yes, yes, but if I raise the banner of Our Lady, I have all the people with me”. This showed the kind of mentality of the religious leadership at the time. Religious symbols were interpreted differently by the people and by the ecclesiastical authorities. They were like two different religions that were joined by one common symbol. This enabled the Catholic hierarchy to be convinced that the people completely adhered to Catholicism, while the people
saw the religious symbols as the necessary intermediaries for their access to salvation.

I took advantage of my short stay in Uruguay to collect data on the evolution of the parish institutions in the history of the city of Montevideo, its capital, and I found the situation similar to that of the other cities of the continent. That is, there was a lack of pastoral structures and religious personnel, especially in the popular neighbourhoods where there was a large group of European immigrants, mostly originating from rural regions. I contacted the Grupo de Economía y Humanismo, a movement that had been founded by the French Dominican Father Louis Joseph Lebret,²² who had been an officer in the French navy and then decided to enter the Dominican Order. In France he created a method of social analysis—simple, but effective—for economic planning and he founded the Centre and the review *Economie et Humanisme*. Because of his previous engineering studies and his military training, his method was very rigorous and it helped to train development agents.

The situation in Latin America made a strong impression on him and he extended his work to countries in this region, like Colombia, Uruguay and Brazil, and trained many people from these countries. Around 1952-1953, Father Lebret lodged in the same parish where I was living in Chicago and I helped to introduce him to some people there and in the rest of the United States. Years later, through my research into the Church in Latin America, I was able to use almost all his team in Bogota and I also worked with some of his Uruguayan partners.

The Grupo de Economía y Humanismo of Uruguay, made up of economists, lawyers and sociologists who were inspired by left-wing Christian social thinking, drew my attention to their strange informal organization that was however very structured. They did

²² Louis Joseph Lebret (1897-1966). Was a French Dominican, born in Brittany and a former naval officer. He founded *Economie et Humanisme*, a centre for studies and research on economic and social situations. He developed a method of economic research that included social aspects that served as a basis for economic and social planning. He was especially interested in Latin America and he created work teams in Colombia, Uruguay and Brazil (São Paulo). He also founded a review in France (*Economie et Humanisme*), as well as a training centre in Paris, IRFED.
not constitute a collection of individuals or families, but rather formed a genuine social group.

Then, in Brazil, my first visit was to Porto Alegre. I was able to talk with the archbishop, Monsignor Vicente Scherer, a very active man, but also very conservative whose name has been given to various buildings in the town. According to him, the institutional presence of the Church in the fields of education and health and the organization of charity for the poor was the way in which the Church should carry out its social responsibility. He was not interested in a movement like the YCW. He was the typical establishment prelate convinced that power, like service, was an ecclesiastical task. In a society with many social problems this resulted in socio-sanitary works supported by the oligarchy and the upper middle class, without giving even the smallest role to the subordinate classes. Such action responded to real needs of many poor persons; they had religious personnel at their disposal that were dedicated and competent, but in no way affected the social order and enabled it to reproduce itself, giving a moral legitimacy to the elite.

I then went to São Paulo and visited several *favelas* where the YCW had branches. Their situation appalled me, it was worse than that of Santiago in Chile, or Argentina. The dirtiness of these neighbourhoods was overwhelming; the garbage was not collected and children lived among the trash. The contrast with the rich neighbourhoods was enormous. The city was a great metropolis, with much industrialization but at the same time with a marginal population, constantly being increased by rural migration, especially from the North-East. I started to understand exclusion and ‘sub-humanity’ as the result of social construction; I discovered, at the same time, the fallacy of these concepts when I had direct contact with these people, with their wisdom, their desire to live and their demonstrations of solidarity among themselves.

Vicente Scherer (1903-1996). Was Archbishop of Porto Alegre. He was a great administrator and he initiated many social activities in the field of health and education. However he had little social and political vision, apart from reproducing the dominant system and the integration of the Church as an institution.
On one occasion I visited a parish of Japanese Catholics. My uncle who lived in Argentina had recounted to me that when he was a diplomat in Japan, before the Second World War, there was a considerable migratory movement to Brazil; and that the Japanese government organized courses in Catholicism for the emigrating Japanese to help them integrate better in their new environment.

When I went to Rio de Janeiro I met Dom Hélder Câmara, auxiliary Bishop of this city for the first time. He was involved in social work and mainly in the construction of blocks of housing called ‘social houses’. I must admit that when I visited them I did not like them very much because they seemed to be blocks without any soul, but at least they enabled the inhabitants of the shanty towns to have better living conditions. To construct housing which could then be available at cheaper rents was indeed a very classic notion of social action and it was not linked with structural transformation.

Oddly enough –and this I learnt afterwards– Hélder Câmara acknowledged in his memoirs that, in his youth when he was a priest, his first approach was to work with a Catholic organization that was rightwing, almost fascist. I suppose that he had been attracted by the social populist and religious character of this organization. Many Catholic movements at this time were quite intransigent and supported the idea of re-conquering the society that had become de-Christianized. Something similar was happening, for example, with the Italian Catholic Action and also the Christ the King Movement in Belgium. This too was the period of the construction of huge statues of Christ, like that of the Corcovado

Dom Helder Câmara (1909-1999) was a priest in the archdiocese of Rio di Janeiro. As a young man he participated in the movement for Catholic renewal with a fundamental orientation. His social sensitivity led him to concern himself with the needs of the poorest, especially those in the favelas. As auxiliary Bishop he started organizing the construction of popular housing. He was elected secretary of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference (CNBB) and afterwards he was the Brazilian delegate to CELAM. He became Vice-President of the Council. During the Vatican Council II he was very active in promoting contacts between the more progressive Bishops, particularly those belonging to the Church of the Poor. He was made Archbishop of Recife, but he was never made a cardinal because his ideas were too socially advanced for the ecclesiastical circles.
in Rio de Janeiro, in Lisbon, and later in Havana. Nevertheless when I got to know Dom Hélder Câmara, he did not hold with these ideas but believed in working on behalf of the poor. He was a man of integrity, very austere personally, extremely consistent and deeply spiritual. They called him ‘the social Bishop’.

In the archbishopric I collected data on the founding of the parishes. The local Grupo de Economía y Humanismo, accompanied and oriented by Dominicans, helped me to find information about the demographic evolution of the city. Thus I was able to discover that through the enormous deficiency in pastoral work of the past decades, the city began to be filled with new evangelical churches and the *macumba*,\(^{25}\) of African origin, which were developing rapidly.

One day I celebrated mass in a popular parish and after the service a poor, old woman asked me to bless a dozen medals. They bore the image of Saint George on his horse. I knew that this saint was essential to popular religiosity (spiritism) and that his horse played a central role as a medium – but on the condition of being blessed by a Catholic priest. I was then doubtful about what attitude I should take and went to consult the parish priest. He told me there was no problem in blessing the medals of a Catholic saint. This helped me to understand the ambivalent character of the symbols, which had different meanings for different people. This was the basis of the link between the religion of the people and the institution. I blessed the medals that were presented on top of an old newspaper and was glad to see the great smile of the old lady, profoundly happy and sure that she was now protected. Perhaps it was a demonstration of the ‘opium of the people’ as Karl Marx would say, but it also expressed ‘the breathing space of an oppressed creature’.

I remained for a few days in the parish with the Dominicans, close to Copacabana. I remember that they invited me to dinner on 4 August, the feast day of Saint Dominic. Among those present was Eduardo Gómez,\(^{26}\) a Catholic who had been candidate for the

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\(^{25}\) *Macumba* is a Bantu word. In Brazil it is used to refer to any ritual religion of African origin.

\(^{26}\) Eduardo Gomez (1896-1981), a Catholic politician, army general and candidate for the presidency.
Brazilian presidency. While we were there he received a message and immediately departed. They had just informed him that Getúlio Vargas, President of the Republic, had committed suicide.

During six months of travel I had spent almost all that I had saved in the United States because plane tickets were very expensive then. When I had paid for the trip from Argentina to Brazil, I only had enough money to pay a third of the journey home to Belgium. In Argentina there were two State airlines and, as my work at the university had not been remunerated, they met a third of the price of the ticket. My uncle paid the other third and in September 1954 I returned to my country after two years in the Americas.

**One More Latin American**

During my first voyage to Latin America I witnessed the demonstrations of popular devotion, which I had not experienced up until then. As I said before, Mexico, the first country that I visited, was a veritable revelation for me to see people showing their ardour for the Virgin of Guadalupe. It was a way of living religion that had hitherto been little known to me. As a sociologist I found that on the one hand there was a popular faith that was deeply rooted in the culture and, on the other, an institutional Church that, consciously or not, used this popular faith on behalf of its own power. Although some intellectuals looked on this popular Catholicism with a certain disdain and referred to it as superstition, I never had that attitude. What I saw was a particular way in which the people expressed their faith in their culture, in their way of life. It was a way that was no less valid than for example, the formality of the Catholicism of the United States. I have kept until this day the picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which I bought during this first visit.

My stay in Latin America was also an essential experience because, thanks to the YCWs, I was able to discover this continent from below and observe not only its history and culture, but also the distances between the social classes. I became aware of inequality and the need for a different Christian message in the region. A large part of the official Church –the clergy and the Bishops, as centres of power– did not live in the world below
them, with the exception of the YCW and the priests close to this organization. This contradiction had a great impact on me. So I was interested in studying the reality of the sub-continent more systematically to understand it better, as the base of a possible change so that it would correspond with the gospel.

I also discovered that in Latin America most of the believers saw the priests, and particularly the Bishops, as expressions of the Divine. They could be criticized for their way of life or their manner of exercising their authority, but because they possessed the means of salvation (baptism and the other sacraments) they had to be respected.

The social position that I assumed after that visit affirmed the fundamental character of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. In Europe, each year, the YCW celebrated the anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum (Of New Things) of Pope Leo XIII, which was published in 1891 and which recognized the situation of the workers and the need for social justice. Compared with the conservative Catholic circles it had a progressive orientation, in spite of the very anti-socialist character of the document. During my whole voyage in Latin America I defended this position. It was the basis of the YCW training: to support the need for social commitment to the gospel and the Pope’s teaching. It meant struggling for social reforms—such as agrarian reform, an economy based on solidarity, cooperatives—without falling into socialism or communism, which were seen as destroying religious faith and linked to atheism.

Attempting to make a synthesis of my Latin American experience, I published an article on the situation in Latin America in Commonweal, a Catholic journal in the United States. Monsignor

Leo XIII (1810-1903). Raffaele Luigi Pecci was elected Pope in 1878. He was the Papal Nuncio in Belgium where he discovered industrialization and the lot of the workers. He was in favour of renewing Thomist theology and biblical studies and published more than 80 encyclicals of which the most famous was Rerum Novarum about the conditions of the workers. He condemned the concentration of wealth in the hands of a plutocracy and criticized economic liberalism. At the same time he condemned Karl Marx and class struggle. Another of his encyclicals was against freemasonry. He encouraged the French to support the Third Republic.

Ligutti made hundreds of copies of it and distributed it in Catholic circles in the US. Also, not long after my return, in 1954, I attended for the first time the International Conference for the Sociology of Religion in the Netherlands, invited by its founder and president, my old professor Jacques Leclerc. There I presented a comparative study of the religious situation of European, North American and Latin American cities later published in one of the first numbers of the review *Sociaal Kompass*, at that time a Dutch publication on the Sociology of Religion.

To sum up, this voyage to Latin America was the basis of my strong identification with that continent and it was to motivate my desire to make more systematic socio-religious research in the countries of the region –which I was finally able to accomplish between 1958 and 1962. It was an enormous job that gave rise to my participation in Vatican Council II. All my later socio-religious work and also the more political (in the broad sense of the word) has constituted a chain of events that stemmed from my first trip to Latin America. In fact, when I consider this continent I feel myself to be Latin American. Some of my friends even say that I am more Latin American than many of the people who live there, for the simple reason that I have been able to live, study and work in more than a dozen countries in the continent and have visited all the others.
CHAPTER VI:
ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH WORK.
RETURN TO LATIN AMERICA

Between the Diocese of Malines and the Socio-Religious Research Centre of Brussels

On my return journey from Latin America, my plane made a stop-over in Senegal. I decided to stay a few days in Dakar. I visited Monsignor Lefebvre, who besides being the Archbishop of the city was also the representative of the Holy See. This was quite exceptional because normally these positions would be held by two different persons. For this reason he had enormous power, which upset many of the missionaries. We lunched together and I recounted to him the situation in Latin America. This was long before the Vatican Council II and he was not yet a dissident.¹

When I got back to Belgium I had hardly arrived at the archbishop’s house in Malines, when Bishop Suenens informed me that the cardinal was waiting to see me. He received me saying, “I have heard that you have been studying the parishes. I am going to nominate you as secretary to the archdiocesan’s curia, responsible for the budget and the accounts of the parishes”. I counted on the help of a priest colleague, Canon Colruyt, the brother of the artist mentioned earlier, to introduce me to the subject, which he did with great enthusiasm.

¹ Marcel Lefebvre (1905-1991). In 1962 he was the Bishop of Tulle (France) and then General Superior of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. He was against the decisions of Vatican Council II. He founded the Pio X Fraternity and the seminary of Ecône (Switzerland). He was excommunicated for having consecrated four Bishops without the agreement of the Holy See.
There was an agreement between the State and the Church in Belgium which stipulated that some of the expenses of the parishes were to be met by the municipalities and that they should cover any deficits that occurred. At that time, because of these State subventions, the parish budgets and accounts had to be drawn up by a parish council, then approved by the mayor, by the governor of the province and also by the Ministry of Justice, which controlled the funds, and finally by the archbishop. The forms were very large, dating back to the Napoleonic era and they were divided into four sections, one for each controlling institution. My job was to verify the figures, to intervene in the case of anomalies and to sign in the name of the archbishop.

Of course it was very disappointing for me to dedicate my time for this kind of work as my real motivation was the Sociology of Religion and urban pastoral work. I confirmed that of the 800 parishes maybe 5% had problems and the rest worked perfectly. Then, as it was not necessary to study most of the parishes in detail and a secretary could use the stamp, my work could be reduced to half a day a week and I could dedicate myself to other projects.

At that time, there was a very special problem in Brussels, which was the pastoral work for people who did not speak either French or Flemish. Many people from all parts of the world immigrated to the city, searching work or to be included in the European institutions. I began to organize the service in various churches with priests who knew different languages, about 12 of them: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, among others.

There was still no official episcopal conference in Belgium. The Holy See did not allow it because before Vatican Council II, with its vision of centralization of power, it was preferred to have direct contact with each Bishop. Nevertheless with the increasing national character of concrete action (for education, health, etc.), slowly the proper structures were built up. In Brussels there was the Inter-diocesan Centre or common services like, for example, Caritas (Coordination of Charities), the Federation of Catholic Hospitals, the Federation of Catholic Education, and so on. After a year of being responsible for the budgets and accounts of the parishes, the Belgian Bishops gave me the task of officially establishing a centre for socio-religious research within the inter-diocesan centre.
I started to organize it in November 1955, in a very modest way. The objective was to study pastoral problems and also the geographical locations of the churches, schools and hospitals. It was like a religious city planning and it was necessary to recruit some helpers. A lady from the Catholic Action asked me if non-remunerated work could be given to a friend of hers who turned out to be Geneviève Lemercinier.\(^2\) I had returned from Latin America the previous year, in 1954, and I had many slides of this trip and the one to the United States that I used in conferences. So I asked this new helper to organize this material. Apart from her, I only had two assistants in the Centre. She carried out this job very efficiently.

Geneviève Lemercinier had been a voluntary official in the British army in the months following the end of the Second World War. In this capacity she participated in the repatriation of the prisoners of war in this country who had been in German concentration camps. During this period she joined a Catholic lay organization of women, founded by Cardinal Mercier, who maintained rules as strict as those of a religious congregation and who collaborated in the pastoral work in the parishes and in other circles.

As she was very intelligent, she was sent to bible classes in Louvain. She also worked with Monsignor Cerfaux,\(^3\) a great Bible expert, professor of the theological faculty of the Catholic University of Louvain and creator of a school of exegesis. She thus acquired a very solid biblical background, together with her basic specialization in mathematics, in which she obtained a bachelor degree.

She became a teacher at the Social School of Brussels, which was linked to the Christian Workers Movement. As she was an intellectual with her own character she came into conflict with the group of organized lay Catholics to which she belonged and,

\(^2\) Geneviève Lemercinier (1923-1996). A Belgian sociologist who was a researcher at the Catholic University of Louvain. She worked in the Centre for Socio-Religious Research and afterwards with the Tricontinental Centre, participating in my work in Asia and Latin America (see also Chapter IX).

\(^3\) Lucien Cerfaux (1883-1968). Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, specialized in Saint Paul studies.
eventually had to leave it in 1955. It was a great psychological blow for her. This was the background to her entrance into the Centre for Socio-Religious Research.

After organizing the slides, Geneviève Lemercinier took on some administrative duties. When I saw her aptitude, linked with her exceptional capacity for training people, I ended asking for collaborators in the research. During all this period she was working half a day as a professor and half a day for the Centre, but in the latter case as a volunteer. I continued to work in the Centre in Brussels until it was incorporated into the University of Louvain and she went with it. She was my helper for 40 years and as long as she lived she supported me in my intellectual work and social engagement.

In the first years of working in the Centre I lived in Malines, in a house belonging to the arch-diocese, with two priests who were working in the curia. As I had reduced my initial commitment there to half a day a week, I was able to combine it with my work at the Centre, for which I had to travel every day to Brussels. So, at the end of 1955, I finally moved to the Beguinage, a popular parish in the centre of the city, where a friend of mine was the parish priest. Although there was a magnificent church there, the place where I was lodged was quite inconvenient. Later my friend had to move and I with him, to a nearby parish which was called Les Riches Claires. Up until the French Revolution there had been a chapel belonging to this congregation that dated from the Middle Ages. After the Revolution it was transformed into the parish of the neighbourhood.

One of the first projects of the Socio-Religious Research Centre was a study on Walloon Brabant (a region to the south of Brussels) where we analyzed the socioreligious situation, the demographic evolution, ecumenical activities, migration, the distribution of pastoral institutions (parishes, schools, hospitals) and the level of participation in church worship. Afterwards we met with the clergy to explain the results and help them in their pastoral work.

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4 The church of the religious groups of women, who were called the ‘beguinas’, established in the Middle Ages, where the nobles left their wives to go on the Crusades.
We carried out similar work in Brussels and later in both Flemish and Wallonian dioceses. We did these sociological studies in the context of ‘collective pastoral work’ that was bringing together groups of parishes for a kind of religious renewal. The education and health federations also asked us for research to help them situate the location of schools and hospitals.

In 1956, a Maltese priest, Father Benny Tonna,\(^5\) who had studied Sociology in Louvain and whom I had known for some time, commissioned me to do a socio-religious study in his island. So I prepared all the tools for making analyses in Malta, under his leadership. Of course they asked me to be present to elaborate the final conclusions. I consulted with the auxiliary Bishop Suenens, who said to me, “Fine, don't say anything. Take holidays and go there”. He knew that if I asked for authorization from Cardinal Van Roey his response would be negative. I did not know what taking holidays meant but, in fact, I asked for them and went.

On the trip to Malta I spend a few days in Tunisia, where I met the Bishop. I visited the mosque of Kerouan which impressed me with its beauty, spirituality and the religious practices that went on there. This was indeed my first contact with Islam. I continued the trip towards Libya, where a Bishop, who was Italian, gave me hospitality. I visited the capital of that country, which was still an Italian colony. I also met a group of nationalist intellectuals who were preparing its independence.

In Malta there was a meeting with the clergy to communicate the results of the research. We were still in a church of ‘Christianity’, but there were already signs of change in the religious practices and attitudes, especially among the young people. The Archbishop was a middle-aged man and he had an old car, with a chauffeur, in which we went all over the island which was in fact very small, some 316 square kilometres. The number plate of the car was in the form of a mitre and functioned as a license plate.\(^6\) The last

\(^5\) Benny Tona was a priest in the diocese of Valetta, capital of Malta. He studied sociology at Louvain, carried out various researches on his island and in Rome, after the Council, he ran CEDOS, the study centre that served both male and female missionary congregations.

\(^6\) This automobile, with its licence plate, can now be seen in the church museum of Malta
day a meal was organized in a restaurant overlooking the sea. The clergy accepted the conclusions of the socio-religious survey quite well. Later, Father Benny Tonna continued the work assisting his Church that was in full transformation from the medieval age to incipient modernity. I was also invited to eat with the governor, who represented the English Government, as the island was still a Crown colony. All these vestiges of a past that was disappearing quite amused me. The university invited me for a conference on the Sociology of Religions. The rector presented me as the “director of the Centre for Socialist Studies of Religion”, mixing up sociology and socialism. But it did not provoke any reactions, although I did make a small correction to the title.

Father Benny took me to the airport and I almost missed my plane because he took the wrong road and was unable to get back on the right one because of all the hedges that obstructed his vision, in spite of the short distances.

When I got back to Belgium the cardinal had already heard that I had been out of the country. At that time priests had to ask for permission from the Bishop to leave the country. I was not able to leave either for France or for Holland without his authorization. The cardinal called me and said that he knew about my visit to Malta without his authorization. He scolded me severely and in the end asked about the situation in that country. I explained the work that had been carried out and he showed great interest. At the end, he said, “When you want to answer this kind of request, talk to me”. But I knew that he was really not at all flexible.

All in all, for four years I combined the research that I undertook from Brussels, with the analysis of the budgets and accounts of the parishes that had to be done from Malines. As the latter task was also combined with plans for building new churches and creating schools and health centres, I was able to visit quite intensively the two provinces of Brabant (with Brussels) and Antwerp.

When Cardinal Van Roey freed me so that I could work full time at the Centre for Socio-Religious Research it meant that I remained without any income. Likewise, the financial situation of the Centre was uncertain. We depended on the requests of the Bishops or religious organizations. Generally, those who entrusted us with the research had their own ideas about reality. When they asked
us for a study it would often be more to prove the validity of their own ideas than to know what was really happening. Although there were no conflicts at the beginning, the situation became increasingly difficult. Payment for the work entrusted to us depended completely upon them. Sometimes when we presented our conclusions they protested, “But these conclusions say nothing about what we should do”, and two weeks later they would say, “But your role is not to tell us what to do but only to give us a picture of the situation”.

A typical example was the work we did for the Federation of Catholic Schools. These functioned from Monday to Saturday while on Tuesday and Thursday they were open half a day. At that time the government wanted all the schools in the country to be open from Monday to Friday. Those responsible for the Catholic schools were against this and thought that the parents of the children were also against it. They asked us for a survey and in carrying it out we found that most of the parents were in favour of the new hours proposed by the government. As can be imagined, this caused a mini-drama, with some of those responsible for Catholic education questioning the soundness of our study.

It was very difficult to work in these conditions. At that time there were some ten collaborators at the Centre. In 1962 as an economic alternative, more or less with the same staff, I founded another centre to finance the former one. We called it the SODEGEC, Social, Demographic and Economic Centre for urban studies and territorial planning. Then in this new institution we also brought in the religious dimension, but it was not our only theme. In addition, the centre was concerned with the sociological aspect of planning, not only of towns, but also of broader regions of the country. In the end, we took on almost all the socio-geographical studies throughout Belgium, both in the Flemish areas, as well as in Wallonia and Brussels. Planning sites for worship, schools and hospitals of the Catholic Church, together with my studies in urbanism, had prepared me for this kind of work. However, as this planning and urbanism centre was so successful the downside was that most of our energies were spent on SODEGEC and we hardly had the time necessary for the socio-religious studies which were indeed the reason why we had created the second centre.
Towards Latin America Again

In Rome, Monsignor Luigi Ligutti had proposed that I carry out the same analysis that I had done in Chicago, but in Latin America. Since my visit of six months to the continent I was very interested in that region. Ligutti said to me, “It is absolutely necessary. We must try to convince the Roman curia of the need for a serious study, as they do not realize the situation there. The reports that they receive from the nuncios are not very realistic”. He believed in a modernization of the Church in a very concrete and practical way.

I travelled to Rome. It was my first direct contact with the Vatican curia. It was in 1957, when Pius XII was still Pope. The Church was considered very sacred and for me, coming from outside, Rome was like a bit of paradise. Monsignor Ligutti and I went to visit various offices in the Holy See, which are considered ‘dicasteries’. As he had very good contacts in the State Department, in the Office for the Teaching of the Catechism and with various important personalities, we were received very well everywhere, but no one was interested when we explained the situation in Latin America and the importance of studying it. There was no response. The Church never undertook much research. To talk about sociological studies applied to religion was almost a sacrilege. In the Vatican it was as if theology provided all the answers. And, in addition, the prevailing attitude was very Eurocentric. Europe meant universality and there was little interest in the Latin American continent, considered as Catholic to the marrow.

In spite of everything, Monsignor Ligutti did not abandon the idea and one day he sent me a cable in which he asked for an estimated budget for the project. I had never calculated what this kind of study could cost, nor did I have any experience in this, but I finally answered that it could cost 150,000 USD. Two weeks later I received another telegram announcing that he had found the finance in the United States, from one of his friends who was rather rich and who had created a foundation.

This was excellent news, but I was the secretary of the archbishopric of Malines. How could I start the work from there? In any case, I

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7 Pius XII (1876-1958), Cardinal Pacelli, was Pope from 1939 to 1958.
began to search sociological collaborators in Latin America among former students at Louvain as well as others whom I had met during my travels. In Rome there was my French Jesuit friend Émile Pin, a professor of sociology in the Gregorian University, but before that he had visited Latin America. Also, he had another French friend, Jean Labbens, a lay professor of Sociology of Religion at the University of Lyon, who also knew that region, having been the Unesco representative in Brazil. The three of us met in Castel Gandolfo, near Rome, to prepare a socio-religious research project. In two or three days we elaborated our proposal and sent it to Latin America for consultation with our friends and colleagues. We also drew up a list of possible collaborators in each country.

It was essentially planned as a descriptive study; to know the number of priests and parishes in the towns and in the countryside, the social and charitable activities of the Church and as far as it was possible, to collect information on religious attitudes and practice. There was no knowledge about all this, or only very partial information. As the study was not only religious, but socio-religious, we also decided to study demographic trends, agrarian structures, urbanization, social classes and Protestantism.

We looked for what work had already been done that was relevant to our project. We realized that there were a few local anthropological studies and some sociological ones like that of the Catholic Group of Cuba and the work I had done in Argentina, in contact with Gino Germani, a sociologist of the North American functionalist school and who for that reason was interested in an empirical study of the religious aspects. Nor were there Catholic yearbooks with lists of the parishes, schools, hospitals, addresses

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8 Émile Pin. He was a French sociologist and a Jesuit priest who was a professor of Sociology of Religion at the Gregorian University of Rome.

9 Jean Labbens (1921-2005), a sociologist, specialized in the Sociology of Religion and the sociology of poverty. He taught in various Latin American countries, especially in Chile and Brazil. He worked for Unesco in these two countries and was president of the International Conference for the Sociology of Religion (1958-1962).

10 Gino Germani (1911-1979) was an Italian emigrant to Argentina. He established sociological studies at the University of Buenos Aires. He had difficulties with peronismo and ended his career as a Harvard professor.
of the religious congregations, etc.; the kind of publication that our research would serve to promote and Monsignor Ligutti spoke about this study with Pope John XXIII.

Since sociology first began to be considered a scientific discipline, the pioneers had been interested in religion. Such was the case of Émile Durkheim, the French sociologist, and Karl Marx and Max Weber, each one of them with his specific theoretical approach. They saw, in essence, the social function of religion in culture, in politics, in the construction of social structures, etc. However, this research was carried out by people outside the Church. So our work would be carried out for the first time by religious people and inside the Church.

Systematic studies on the pastoral function started in the Netherlands before our own studies in Belgium. In France, under Professor Gabriel Lebras\textsuperscript{11} at the Sorbonne, there was interest in finding out the extent of participation at the Sunday mass, which was also analyzed later in Barcelona. Thus, studies were appearing in various parts of the world, but usually organized within the Church as applied research, while it existed only in a few universities.

Thanks to the International Conference of Sociology of Religion (ICSR), I had got to know the authors of these studies, both academics and those involved in applied sociology. In 1954 the conference took place in Breda (Netherlands) and two years later there was another in Louvain, which Jacques Leclerc commissioned me to prepare. There were more than 100 participants. I remember Leclerc reading out a letter from the Holy See that stressed the danger of introducing the social sciences in religious matters, which was fairly typical of the position of the Holy See at that time. After the 1956 meeting I was appointed secretary of the conference, a post that I held for ten years, during which I organized meetings in Barcelona, Bologna, Rome and Yugoslavia. In this period the International Federation of Institutes for Socio-Religious Research (FERES) was also created.

\textsuperscript{11} Gabriel Lebras (1891-1970) was a French sociologist, professor at the Sorbonne, who initiated a new wave of research on the religious phenomenon in France, emphasizing the importance of religious practice, such as assisting at Sunday mass and participating in the sacraments.
This coordinating institution was created by Professor Georges Zeegers\textsuperscript{12} director of the Katholiek Sociaal Kerkelijk Instituut (KSKI) of The Hague. Then, FERES continued to affiliate centres in Austria, Belgium, England, France, Germany and Italy, as well as other countries. Mrs Marga Klompé\textsuperscript{13} combined her work as Minister of Culture, Leisure and Social Work of the Netherlands, with four fruitful years at the head of FERES. I was first the secretary and then vice president. The two positions involved some 30 years of work.

In 1960, when the Dutch gave up the headquarters of the review *Social Compass* (former *Sociaal Kompass*), as part of my work with the Conference, I had it established in Brussels. It was transformed into an international review and I directed it until 1999. With more than a thousand subscribers it became the most important publication on the subject of social religious studies. After Jacques Leclerc, Jean Labbens was elected as president of the Conference\textsuperscript{14} and Émile Pin succeeded me as secretary.

**The Latin American Research**

After the agreement on the project for socio-religious research on Latin America, it was decided that at least those most involved should meet in some Latin American country to draw up the plans and elaborate the research tools with similar and comparative methods, even though it was to be a very descriptive study. Bogota was chosen as the site for the meeting.

\textsuperscript{12} Georges Zeegers. He was a Dutch sociologist who founded the Catholic Institute for Socio-Religious Research in Hague, as well as the journal *Sociaal Kompass* (which later changed its name into English: *Social Compass*) and the International Federation for Socio-Religious Research Institutes, which turned into FERES (derived from Federación Internacional de Institutos de Investigaciones Socio-religiosas: International Federation of Socio-Religious Research Institutes).

\textsuperscript{13} Marga Klompe (1912-1986). She was a member of the Catholic Popular Party (Katholiek Volkspartij). In 1956 she was the first woman to become a minister in the Netherlands; she was active in the resistance against the German occupation and was appointed Minister of State.

\textsuperscript{14} He was later succeeded by Professor Bryan Wilson, from England.
I kept Bishop Suenens informed about the project. Monsignor Ligutti asked me what I thought the reaction of the cardinal would be to the plan to involve me in the study and I replied, “He is very concentrated on his diocese and the situation in Belgium. For him international affairs (the missions in particular) were the business of the religious orders and congregations. I am not sure that he is going to react in a positive way”. We thus had to think of a strategy to convince him to allow me to do the work.

In the Roman curia there was a monsignor who was a friend of Ligutti and he supported our idea. We thus decided that he should come to Malines and talk with the cardinal and intercede for the project, saying that his presence indicated Rome’s interest in it. He came and, at the last moment before the encounter, the cardinal who did not know many languages –neither Italian, nor English, only Flemish and French– asked me to act as interpreter in the discussion. This changed the whole strategy. The Roman prelate said that the diocese of Malines was essential for the Church and had played a major role in missionary history, and that Latin America was very important, etc. The cardinal and the Belgian Bishops had founded a Latin American college in Louvain a few years previously. This was done at the request of Pope Pius XII, who knew that priests were scarce in Latin America and had asked the European dioceses to send them to that region. The cardinal thought that the Roman prelate was referring to that initiative so that the whole conversation laboured under a misunderstanding. Although the Roman prelate only wanted to ask him to free me for directing the socio-religious research, the cardinal explained how much they had done for the Latin American college in Louvain. They never managed to understand each other and our plan came to nought.

As the meeting in Bogota was already planned, I spoke with Bishop Suenens to see if I could travel. He agreed but insisted that I also had to ask authorization from Cardinal Van Roey. I went to speak with him, explaining all the work we had done and that we thought of having a meeting in Bogota. He started to laugh, “A meeting in Bogota? No, not in Bogota!” and he laughed even more. “This evening I have a meeting with my auxiliary Bishops and I shall discuss it with them, but I am already sure of their
opinion”. For him it was like going to the moon. I began sending letters to all those involved in the project warning that we would have to suspend the meeting.

A few days later the cardinal called me and said, “Well, what are you still doing in the archdiocesan curia?” I did not know whether to reply that I was doing the work assigned to me or that I was doing almost nothing. At the end, he said, “From now on, you can consider yourself free to do socio-religious study in Brussels, but you will not travel to Bogota”. I discussed this with Bishop Suenens, telling him, “I go to Latin America and continue the work, or I must renounce”. A month later, our proposal was to organize the meeting in Río de Janeiro and this time the cardinal accepted it.

In 1958 I travelled to Río de Janeiro for what was to be the first of a series of meetings with the main experts in socio-religious research in Latin America: an exchange of ten days which marked the beginning of four years of work. As already mentioned, our objective was to see how to understand better the situation of the Church in Latin America, starting with the structural aspects: number of priests, of parishes, of education and health classes, etc., as up until then this information was not systematically organized. We also wanted to present the data within its socio-economic environment.

Immediately I got into contact with Dom Hélder Câmara who, as well as being auxiliary Bishop of the city, was secretary of the Brazilian Conference of Bishops. When we met he confided to me, “You know that there is a letter from the Holy See to all the Bishop conferences in Latin America saying ‘be careful of Houtart’s studies’?” He was told this by Monsignor Armando Lombardi, the Apostolic Nuncio in Brazil,15 who was a great friend of his. I was not expecting it but neither was I surprised because I already knew that the Holy See was afraid of sociology because it believed that it could bring discredit to the Church as an institution.

It is true that part of the sociological tradition came within a philosophical criticism of religion and the promotion of atheism, which could justify a certain concern among the religious authorities. However, there were other reasons that were linked

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15 Armando Lombardi (1905-1964). In later years he served as Secretary of State at the Holy See, together with Cardinal Benelli.
with the exercising of the Church’s authority, particularly the difficulty of accepting the mediation of the social sciences. It is typical of all powers that do not accept the risk of criticism. I also met with it later in the socialist countries.

Dom Hélder Câmara added, “As secretary of the Brazilian Conference of Bishops my position is that I am totally in favour of this study. I am requesting that you follow your work for us and in this way the Holy See cannot have any objections”. This served as a green light for me, because when I then went round the various countries to organize the work I always approached the secretariat of the Conference of Bishops and those responsible were interested in our making a record of the Catholic Church in their countries. We compiled data on the parishes, the social activities, the schools, the hospitals, etc., which did not exist in many parts and at the same time we prepared the bases of yearbooks of the local Catholic Churches.

During the four years that the work lasted we thoroughly analyzed almost all the countries of Latin America; that is, those of the continent. As for the islands, we only studied Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Our research network was composed largely of former students from the University of Louvain, which facilitated the work and provided a certain common methodological orientation. Almost all of them were priests, except for the one in Mexico. Also, they were almost all Latin Americans, except in Chile, where our collaborator was a Belgian Jesuit, Father Roger Vekemans, who had organized the Research and Social Action Centre in the Bellarmino Centre.

Roger Vekemans (1923-2010). Was a Belgian priest who was sent to Chile. He founded the DESAL (Desarrollo Social para América Latina). He was close to John Kennedy, obtaining a subsidy of five million dollars to support the candidature of the Christian Democrat Eduardo Freire in 1964. When Salvador Allende first came to power Roger left for Caracas and then to Bogota where he founded the journal Tierra Nueva against Liberation Theology, together with the auxiliary Bishop of Medellin and later Archbishop and cardinal of the Roman Curia Alfonso López Trujillo.

The Bellarmino Centre for Socio-Cultural Research (CISOC) functions as a body for research, post-graduate degrees and consultation in the fields of culture and religion at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Alberto Hurtado University.
together with the Chilean Jesuit Renato Poblete,\footnote{Renato Poblete (1924-2010) was a Chilean Jesuit who trained at the Jesuit Fordham University in New York where he worked with Father Vekemans on the Chilean part of the Latin American socio-religious research. He was a collaborator of the Bellarmino Centre and he continued to carry out socio-religious studies in subsequent years.} who had studied in the United States. In Brazil, it was Father Affonso Gregory,\footnote{Father Affonso Gregory (1930-2008). A Brazilian priest who studied sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain. He founded the centre for socio-religious and statistical research (CERIS) in Rio de Janeiro and finally became the Bishop of the Imperatriz diocese. For 4 years he was president of Caritas International in Rome.} who studied sociology at the University of Louvain who later became Bishop of Imperatriz. In Bogota it was Father Gustavo Pérez,\footnote{Gustavo Pérez. A Colombian priest in the Bogota diocesis. He studied sociology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and afterwards sociology and demography at the Catholic University of Louvain, where he was a companion of Camilo Torres. He created the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales (ICODES) in Bogota, participated in the Latin American socio-religious research and ran the Latin American section of FERES, headquartered in Bogota. He then worked for several years in the UN Statistics Division (demography) and he married the widow of the Ecuadorian ambassador. He was a member of the History Academy of Ecuador, to which he contributed various works on the historical process of the country since independence and on the Afrodescendant peoples. He also wrote a biography of Camilo Torres.} who had studied with Camilo Torres and who wrote his biography 40 years after his death. Gustavo had founded an important centre in Bogota with the former team of Economía and Humanismo of Father Lebret and had made general sociological studies.

Once established this network began to operate collecting information and sending it to Louvain, where I had a small team that organized the material for publication. In several countries, thanks to this research, permanent centres were set up. Later on, their financing was difficult to find. Some of them joined with universities. Other carried out general research, like the Colombian Institute for Social Development (ICODES) of Bogota and the Economía y Humanismo Centre of Montevideo. The centre that was the most original in finding economic support was the Centre for Religious Statistics and Social Research (CERIS)
of Rio de Janeiro, which under the leadership of Father Gregory had a team of nuns who, to raise funds for the work, prepared snacks for the airlines.

Our aim, apart from organizing the statistics, was to interpret them, considering them in relation to social development, urbanization, the problems of the rural world, the social history of Latin America, the development of the Protestant churches, etc. We considered the data that we collected as essential as a basis to start the work of interpretation. In various countries, to obtain access to the archives of the Church it was necessary to have an official contact and for this we had the mediation of Dom Hélder Câmara. In many cases it was not a very difficult job because in general the dioceses had their data on the parishes, priests, and the like, even if there was no record at the national level. Only in Mexico were we obliged to send people on horseback to make the census in a few dioceses. There the trauma of persecution still lingered and because of fear there were no archives.

I think that the success of the research was due to the fact that we drew up a plan that was very precise and well discussed beforehand. Afterwards I had various experiences in international work with experts who sometimes preferred not to use this method, arguing that it did not give enough freedom to the researchers, but their approach invariably ended in disaster.

Our study only encountered some difficulties with the centre of Chile, as the time limits were not met. Another problem was that we had to reconstruct, as well as we could, the data on Cuba, as the research was lost in the post. In the 1950s correspondence in Latin America was still difficult. Many letters never arrived and neither the fax nor the internet existed.

On the other side of the Atlantic, some specialists and collaborators, like Jacques Dorselaer (demography)\(^\text{21}\) and Freddy Debuyst (social

\(^{21}\) Jacques Dorselaer, a Belgian sociologist who trained at the Catholic University of Louvain. He participated in the collection of data for the Latin American research, especially demography. He was a member of the centre for socio-religious studies in Brussels and he founded a Latin American documentation centre which functioned for years until the advent of the electronic data base.
classes), were enrolled in the research to elaborate the final texts to be published. Father Émile Pin compiled the qualitative studies that already existed, especially the anthropological analyses, to complete the quantitative data that we had gathered.

During this period I visited all the countries of the area again and, at the end, with various collaborators, including Émile Pin, Freddy Debuyst and his wife Chantal who took care of the secretarial work, I spent four months in Bogota drawing up the conclusions.

This was done together with the offices of the CELAM in Bogota. It took four or five months during 1960. The work was carried out in the name of FERES and the publications—printed in Madrid—were completed at the beginning of 1962.

The CELAM had been founded in 1956 by Pius XII, at the end of his pontificate. This was somewhat of a paradox, for he was a very centralizing pope, but he had a certain interest in Latin America and was especially concerned about the lack of priests in that region. When the first Latin American Episcopal Conference discussed its headquarters most of the Bishops voted for Rome. Pius XII felt that this did not make sense. He chose the place that had the next number of votes, Bogota. Generally speaking, the Latin American Bishops were very conservative and they did not see this as a positive initiative. They saw it as a decision of the Holy See, that came from Rome and not from inside the region. They did not see the need for a Latin American coordination. When they were deciding the representatives of each country to CELAM, they chose Bishops that had studied in Europe and who knew various languages, etc. In this way the representatives tended to be the most open-minded Bishops of the continent. They had had contacts with Catholic Action in Europe, with the YCW, with

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22 Freddy Debuyst, a Belgian sociologist who trained at the Catholic University of Louvain. He worked on various aspects of the Latin American socio-religious research. In 1960 he spent several months in Bogota with the team making a synthesis of the research, together with Gustavo Pérez and Camilo Torres. He later worked in Chile and Peru for a number of years before returning to Louvain as professor at the Development Institute. For some years he was a member of the administrative council of the Tricontinental Centre at Louvain.
theological and biblical renewal, with the liturgical movement and they were interested in social issues. In 1960, when it was decided that Bogota should be the place for making the synthesis of the socio-religious studies that we had carried out in Latin America, the idea was put forward that we should share offices with CELAM. Its president was the Chilean Bishop Monsignor Manuel Larraín,\(^{23}\) the vice president, Dom Hélder Câmara and the secretary, the Colombian Monsignor Julián Mendoza.\(^{24}\) The three of them recognized the relevance of the research and agreed that we could work on their premises. They also offered to lodge me in the house for the priests who formed part of the CELAM secretariat. For four months I lived close to that team and, as they had no car, each morning I would take the whole group to the office in the old Ford that I had bought second-hand for the research work.

It was at that time that a conflict arose between the Holy See and CELAM. The Holy See wanted to exercise more control. The coordinator of the Roman curia was Cardinal Samore,\(^{25}\) who then directed the Latin American Council that was concerned with all matters concerning Latin America, and, from one day to the next, he ordered that the lay members of the secretariat be dismissed. The various department heads found themselves in a very uncomfortable position to be without an executive secretariat at the very moment of preparing a meeting of the Bishops of the sub-continent. We offered to put our executive team at the disposal of Monsignor Mendoza so that the work could continue and he accepted very gratefully.

\(^{23}\) Monsignor Larraín (1914-2004) was Bishop of Talca in Chile and president of CELAM during Vatican Council II. He supported the Latin American socio-religious research and helped to fund FERES-Latin America after the Council when the Medellin conference of 1968 was being prepared.

\(^{24}\) Monsignor Julián Mendoza of Colombia was the secretary general of CELAM in Bogota and in Rome during Vatican Council II.

\(^{25}\) Cardinal Antonio Samoré (1905-1983). Was an Italian member of the Roman curia in charge of the Latin American commission (CAL) in the Holy See. He strongly opposed the Sociology of Religion research and expressed his views in all the episcopal conferences of the continent. He promoted the building of huge seminaries to recruit priests which, after only a few years, were almost empty and were transformed by the army into other functions (retirement homes, offices of Catholic services, etc.).
Between 1960 and 1962 forty-three volumes were published, containing the results of our socio-religious research in Latin America. They were edited in Spanish, which was the task of the OCSHA (Obra de Cooperación Sacerdotal Hispano Americana), a Spanish institution that trained priests and sent them to Latin America and that had an open-minded attitude. Thanks to its director, relations with this institution were very close and I travelled every two or three months to Madrid to work with its team. The main creator of the edition was Isidoro Alonso, who afterwards worked for Manos Unidas, the development organization of the Spanish Church. As the work advanced the books treated various themes (agrarian structures, the situation of the workers and unions, demographic trends, among other aspects). Many of them dealt with the ecclesiastical structures and the recruiting of priests by country.

One of the books undertaken with the International Labour Organization (ILO) was about the work of the Church on behalf of the indigenous peoples. It was prepared by Father Macías under the direction of Monsignor José Leónidas Proaño, whom the people called the ‘bishop of the poor and of the indigenous people’. When he died they made a beautiful grave for him in Pucahuaico that was close to his birthplace in San Antonio de Ibarra. Years later, in 2010, I officiated over a mass to commemorate the centenary of his birth. The indigenous peoples considered him a saint. As for the Bishops, they wanted to build a basilica in his honour. There was much resistance to this as it was against the spirit of Proaño. I looked through his will to see what he had in mind. I even spoke in Rome with my friend the French Basque cardinal Roger Marie Élie Etchegaray, who was also his friend and who

26 Isidoro Alonso was a collaborator of OCSHA, a body of the Spanish Church for working with the Latin American Churches with its headquarters in Madrid. It was charged with the publication of the 43 volumes of FERES’s socio-religious research on Latin America. Afterwards he became a member of Manos Unidas, a body of the Spanish Church for development cooperation and was particularly concerned with Africa.

27 Father Macías, a priest of the diocese of Riobamba in Ecuador.

28 Roger Etchegaray was born in 1922 at Espelette (in the French Basque country) and he served as an expert at Vatican Council II. He was
did not approve of the proposal. Finally no basilica was built. The Bishop of Ibara wanted him to be buried in the cathedral but there was again a lot of popular resistance to keep him where he was, in his humble grave.

A Spanish Jesuit, Prudencio Damboriena was the author of *Protestantismo en America Latina* in two volumes. He was an excellent historian, but rather anti-Protestant and I had to edit his style in order to be able to publish it. When he heard this he was rather annoyed; but since he was a very good person, we were able to maintain friendly relationships. For a long time these books were considered the reference for Protestantism in Latin America.

The result of Father Émile Pin’s work became a chapter of the book written by both of us and published in Buenos Aires, *Christianos en la Revolución en America Latina*, which was translated into Italian, Polish, German and French. The title seemed to refer to the influence of the Cuban Revolution; however, in fact it dealt with the socio-cultural change of the continent.

The book entitled *Evaluación de los resultados sobre los niveles de vida del campesinado*, by Camilo Torres and Berta Corredor and published by FERES, contained a study by Camilo “Las escuelas radiofónicas de Sutatenza (Colombia)”, about the experience of Radio Sutatenza, an initiative of the Colombian Church, initiated by Monsignor Salcedo. Its aim, as I already mentioned, was to use the radio to educate and make the peasants literate. There were programmes that taught how to read and write, on agriculture and religion as well, among other things. The project was based on a very conservative philosophy—seeking to save the peasants from communism—but it was a valid experience from the methodological viewpoint; and also once given this knowledge it was no longer controllable. For many peasants it gave them

Archbishop of Marseille, the Prelate of the French Mission (worker priests) and President of the French Episcopal Conference. He was responsible, in Rome, as cardinal of the curia, for the Justice and Peace Commission. Pope John Paul II gave him many delicate missions to China, Cuba, Iraq, and Russia. He was the No. 3 at the Vatican.

29 Monsignor José Joaquin Salcedo was born in 1921 in Colombia. Ordained priest in 1947 he was the founder of the Escuelas Radiofónicas round the world and of Acción Cultural Popular.
an opportunity to understand their situation better and served to create a new awareness and leadership; not only in Colombia, but also in other Latin American countries.

As most of the books published by FERES on religious aspects were, in general, rather descriptive, they did not arouse the opposition of the ecclesiastical authorities. With the Vatican we were always very careful, but no one could object to anything because our work was always subordinated to the authority of the local Churches. In addition, many of the books in the collection began to be distributed at the same time that Vatican Council II was taking place and were accepted very positively in that context.

The more analytical studies –especially those that concerned the social function of Catholicism in Latin American societies– were published in other editions, or as articles. It was odd that these materials were most used in the United States, through the Rand Corporation, the famous think tank of the Pentagon. They were also read in the more progressive circles of the Church in all Latin American countries. To a certain extent they served as a basis for reflection –during and after the Vatican Council II– as well as for the preparation of the CELAM conference in Medellín, in 1968. In general, our publications also made it possible for various theologians of the continent to gain a better understanding of the Latin American situation.

Camilo Torres

During this period in Bogota, I worked with Camilo Torres and Orlando Fals Borda a lot. Camilo was a sociologist who had

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30 The Rand (Research and Development) Corporation was established in 1945 by Henry Harley Arnold to improve political life through research. It published the *Journal of Economics* and there were 1,500 people on its pay roll.

31 Orlando Fals Borda (1925-2008) was a Protestant Colombian sociologist. He became director of the school of sociology at the National University of Bogota and Camilo worked with him. He created a methodology of action research that was adopted in many parts of the world. It made it possible to combine scientific rigour with actions on behalf of the underprivileged. He was a member of M-19 when the revolutionary movement changed into a political party and actively participated in drawing up the new constitution,
trained in Louvain, particularly with Professor Yves Urbain, who was a real maestro, son of a miner and very open on social issues, a convinced Catholic but critical of the Church as an institution. Orlando was a Protestant who had been trained in the United States.

In Colombia, according to the spirit of the agreement between the Holy See and the State, there was a great influence of the Catholic Church as an institution in society. It thus exercised real control over the National University. Orlando had tried to organize the teaching and research of sociology at the National University, with Camilo Torres. He was supposed to be director of the new department, but as he was not a Catholic, the Church was against his nomination. They both asked me to speak with Cardinal Concha. The latter received me and I explained that, in spite of being a ‘heretic’, Orlando was a very decent and impartial person. It seems I was able to convince him because there was no more opposition from the Catholic Church to his nomination. At that time the Colombian Church was not only conservative, but rather conventional. Thus, as well as the titles of ‘eminence’ (for a cardinal), ‘excellence’ (for a Bishop), priests used the title of ‘reverence’. They used to say that one day a priest saluted a colleague, saying “How is your reverence?” and the other replied: “Very well. And yours?”

Orlando Fals Borda had a brilliant career at the National University and at the same time he was greatly involved with especially concerning the status of the indigenous peoples. He often participated in opinion tribunals as a member of the jury.

32 Yves Urbain, a Belgian economist and historian. He was the son of a miner who trained a number of Latin American students like Camilo Torres and Gustavo Pérez, as well as members of the team of the Centre for Socio-Religious Research in Brussels, and later in Louvain, such as Jacques Delcourt, Jean Remy and particularly François Houtart. He was minister of the economy in a Belgian Social-Christian government and was a master in developing people’s critical thinking.

33 Cardinal Luis Concha Cordoba (1891-1975) was Archbishop of Bogota who asked Camilo to renounce being priest because of his political commitment: he considered that he had abandoned the social doctrine of the Church, probably under the influence of the University of Louvain.
social movements. In the 1990s he was a deputy for the M-19 and worked on the elaboration of the Constitution concerning the explicit recognition of the indigenous peoples. His own Protestant church did not agree with his social and political commitment and for a number of years removed him from its ranks: he was re-integrated only a few years before his death. He asked me to edit the first publication of the faculty of sociology on religion in the large cities.

Camilo Torres had returned to Belgium four years previously and started his work at the University of Bogota with a view to furthering sociology. He wrote for the FERES a series of books, the study on the experience of Radio Sutatenza in literacy and education work with the peasants.

It was difficult for Camilo to dedicate himself to the research, as he was a man with a thousand jobs. Many people asked his help or advice. He was also the university chaplain and afterwards he directed the State administration school. Because of his positions, he had already had difficulties with the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The story of Camilo Torres has been very well recounted by Gustavo Pérez, his personal friend. He came from a liberal family, his father being an atheist, a doctor, a scientist and rector of the National University. When he was very young he spent a year in Belgium, as an intern at the Cardinal Mercier College, near Brussels. He wanted to enter the Dominican order in his country where, as in Brazil and Uruguay, the order had a genuine opening to social issues. The presence of French Dominicans and the work of Father Lebret played a determining role in this decision. His parents were opposed to it. After some semesters in the law faculty of the national university of Colombia, he entered in the diocesan seminary of Bogota. When I knew him he was a typical young seminarist, interested in social problems and in the role that the Church could play in Colombian society. That is why I encouraged him to study social sciences at Louvain.

Movimiento 19 de Abril. This began in Colombia as a political organization. Later it took to guerrilla activities. When it demobilized it became the Alianza Democrática M-19, but it no longer exists.
He spent four years in Belgium. When he ended his three years of studies, he remained another year, as vice rector of the Latin American College—which had been founded by Cardinal Van Roey and the Belgian Bishops. He was adopted by my family, becoming friends with my brothers and sisters and my parents. In preparing for his exams he came regularly to our house in Meer (near the Dutch border) because it was spacious and isolated—no train passed close by and to go to Brussels it was necessary to take three buses. So that it was a very appropriate place for him to study. His mother, Isabel Restrepo became a friend of my mother’s and spent almost a year in Louvain.

In 1958 the Brussels Universal Exhibition took place and a commission was set up the previous year to prepare the pavilion of the Holy See under the supervision of the mayor of Ottignies (the town where, in the 1970s, the Francophone Catholic University of Louvain was established under the name of Louvain-la-Neuve). Count Yves du Monceau de Bergendal\(^{35}\) was a very rich person, a classic, conservative Catholic. His wife was the owner of G.B. (Grand Bazar, the main Belgian supermarket). Both Camilo and I found ourselves in the preparatory committee. Because of my position as secretary of the archdiocese, I was designated secretary of the project. CELAM nominated Camilo as representative of the Latin American episcopate. We had ideas that were totally opposed to what the mayor wanted to do. He wanted to project a triumphant message of devotion to Pius XII, which would show the artistic riches of the Vatican museums and the importance of the Catholic Church around the world. Camilo and I were in such disagreement with this that after six months both of us renounced our membership in the project.

Camilo was very much interested in the approach of the YCW, applying the social doctrine of the Church in a way that seemed very open and effective. It was in fact based on a non-Marxist analysis of society. Its social ethics implicitly analyzed society, as already said, in terms of social strata—they were called classes but they were superimposed social strata and within this

\(^{35}\) The mayor who negotiated with the Catholic University of Louvain for the transfer of the francophone university to this municipality which, in 1968, adopted the name of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve.
perspective–, the common good was the result of collaboration between all the social groups to construct a world that was more just, that denounced the injustices but always within the established social order. This perspective contrasted diametrically with the Marxist analysis in which the social classes existed in structural relationships in contradiction with each other which is what our sociological studies had helped us to understand. In fact our way of analyzing things was close to a Marxist analysis. The basic ethic was how to build justice and how to demand that the actions of the upper classes vis-à-vis the lower classes were based on this value. To resolve it there had to be a series of radical reforms, as in the agrarian, urban and banking fields, etc., to reduce the distances between the social groups. This was also Camilo’s position.

When he returned to Bogota, Camilo continued with this idea of applying the social doctrine of the Church and started work along these lines. He was the chaplain of the university and he used to take students to visit the poor neighbourhoods in the south of the city. He collaborated with the rural development project Communal Action. Afterwards he was appointed by the Bishop as their representative on the national commission for agrarian reform. In this way he was active in these various social fields, with a view to reforming the different sectors and regulating the system. As he was an intelligent man, with strong convictions, he gradually realized that all these efforts were in vain because they did not affect the structures of social relationships.

As a member of the agrarian reform commission, he discovered that there was no real will to take the work seriously and he started to criticize the projects, coming into conflict with more and more people and institutions. As a consequence the Archbishop transferred him from the university to a small Bogota parish. During one of my visits there I stayed with him. As the parish priest he had to be responsible for the Catholic primary school, the catechisms, etc., but soon he had problems with the parents of the children attending the school, who were relatively well-off and did not share his ideas. They denounced him to the Episcopal curia. I visited the curia to speak with an auxiliary Bishop who was a friend of mine to discuss these matters and, in particular,
the question of sending Camilo away from the university. The Bishop, who was very kind, told me that the situation was very difficult to handle because Camilo had distanced himself too far from the social position of the Church. It was however clearer than ever to Camilo that the Marxist analysis was closer to reality and that using it as a tool for understanding and a basis of action corresponded to the ethical requirements of Christianity.

Between 1960 and 1965 I had the opportunity of meeting Camilo on various occasions. We were both in Argentina for a congress of the Latin American Sociological Association and in Germany for a meeting with Adveniat, the organization of the Church in that country responsible for religious assistance to Latin America. We also met several times in Colombia. Confronted by the social and political paralysis of the country, he reached the conclusion that only the union of all the political forces for change could transform the situation. To achieve this Camilo brought together various political tendencies into a united front, from the Christian Democrats to the Communist Party. The Church demanded that he renounced exercising his priesthood, which he sadly accepted to do, in the hope that one day he could return to it. Camilo’s political commitment was, by its very success, increasingly fought, even with serious threats as the Colombian right usually does. They even put a price on his head and he could not sleep two nights in the same place. I tried to persuade him to come to Louvain and to study for his doctorate, thus removing him from a dead-end situation. He answered that going away would be betraying those who had trusted him.

In October 1965, on my return to Belgium from the United States, I decided to pass by Colombia as I had managed to get a scholarship for him. I arrived five days too late; Camilo had just taken to the mountains, as he had said he would, faithful to his ideal of being a Colombian, a sociologist and a Christian. After his death in 1966, I came to Bogota and I delivered the commemorative plaque that was put up on his family’s house. By then his mother, Doña Isabel Restrepo, was living in Cuba, 36

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36 Doña Isabel Restrepo was very close to Camilo’s projects. After the death of Camilo, she was invited by Fidel Castro to come and live in Cuba. She inaugurated, with Fidel, the school in the province of Havana that bears the name of Camilo, and she remained in Cuba until she died.
where she died. I still have an ashtray painted by her that she had given to my mother as a present. For years I wrote articles and gave conferences on Camilo, stressing the evolution of his thinking and commitment.

While a person is still alive it is impossible to forecast what the significance of his death will be. I always thought that for a leader it was better to live in order to continue activities. However, the strength of the symbol is also important, as was the case of the Che and also of Camilo Torres. Even so, this is not something that can be chosen or predetermined.

In 1971, the Orbis publishing house that belonged to the US congregation Maryknoll—run at this time, by Father Miguel D’Escoto—published a book of mine entitled The Church.

Maryknoll is the name of a town outside New York, in which the Maryknoll Fathers had their centre of operations in running the foreign missions of the US Church, like the ‘Missions étrangères’ for the French Church or the ‘de Scheut’ (suburb of Brussels) of Belgium. They have missionaries in three continents, mainly in South Korea, Kenya and Chile. A woman’s branch has been established, whose members are mostly in the South.

Miguel D’Escoto (1933-) is a Nicaraguan priest belonging to the Maryknoll Fathers. He did his secondary school studies in the United States, where his father was the Nicaraguan ambassador. Miguel entered the religious missionary congregation. He studied political science at the Catholic University of Washington and was sent to Chile after his ordination. There he carried out numerous social actions, especially the construction of popular housing in the shantytowns round Santiago de Chile. In the 1960s he was in charge of Maryknoll publications and in the 1970s he returned to Nicaragua, where he set up building cooperatives. He joined the Sandinista revolution and when it triumphed in 1979 became a minister. The Holy See demanded that he renounce practising his priesthood, but Maryknoll continued the contact with him. After the electoral defeat of the FSLN in 1990 he wished to return to exercising his ecclesiastical ministry but the Holy See never allowed it. In 2008, with the support of all the Latin American countries, he was named president of the UN General Assembly session of 2008-2009. He established the UN Commission of Experts on the Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System, headed by Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prizewinner in economics. D’Escoto called for a world conference on the crisis in June 2009 but it was boycotted by the Western powers and thus considered not very effective at the international
and Revolution. It included a chapter on Camilo Torres. A little while afterwards, while I was carrying out studies in Kerala, in southern India, I interviewed a young Catholic fisherman and later I sent him a copy of the book. A year after he told me that he had married and had had a son whom he had called Camilo Torres. I never imagined that his name would be given to an Indian child.

Already in 2004 the National University of Colombia in Bogota awarded me the Camilo Torres prize, which had been established in 1972, but up until then had never been awarded. On 15 February 2010, on the anniversary of his death when Camilo would have been 80 years old, I was asked to give a lecture on him in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana. To a crowded hall, I tried to explain the life of this Colombian priest who was a sociologist and who fought for justice and was persecuted by the oligarchy in his country until finally he joined the guerrilla movement. I also spoke the same day at a school that bore his name which had been inaugurated some years previously by Fidel Castro and Camillo’s mother.

The school lies some 50 kilometres from the capital and my audience was 800 children who had organized songs and dances in homage to the ‘guerrilla priest’. I spoke to them of his profound conviction and his sacrifice. That night there was an ecumenical religious service in the Episcopal Cathedral of Havana in honour of Camilo. Among those present there was Frei Betto who was in level. The only head of state who attended was Rafael Correa of Ecuador. In 2014 Pope Francis reintegrated D’Escoto into the priesthood.

Frei Betto, a Dominican, whose real name is Carlos Alberto Libánio Christo, was born in Belo Horizonte. During the Brazilian dictatorship he was arrested and tortured. He is a prolific writer, linked with Liberation Theology and the basic ecclesial communities. In 1986 he had a long interview with Fidel Castro which was published under the title Fidel y la religion, which was a bestseller in Cuba, with more than a million copies sold: it was translated into many other languages, including Vietnamese. President Lula appointed him to head the anti-poverty programmes but he renounced the position after a year because there was a lack of more structural social policies.
Cuba to present one of his works at the Book Fair, Raúl Suárez⁴⁰ and his son Joel, as well as Caridad Diego.⁴¹

**Liberation Theology**

It was in Latin America that Liberation Theology had developed. In 1967 the first book on the subject was published in Lima and in Brussels (by the *Centre Lumen Vitae*).⁴² The author was the peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez,⁴³ who had studied theology at the Catholic Institute of Lyon and psychology at the Catholic University of Louvain, where I met him. In Europe a

⁴⁰ Raúl Suárez, Pastor of the Baptist Church of Cuba who at the outset of the Revolution was assigned to the special brigade in the military service that was composed of homosexuals, criminals and Catholic seminarists. He founded the Martin Luther King Centre, which is very active in social projects and also gives Christian training in a revolutionary process. He was president of the Council of Cuban Churches. He collaborated with the Pastors for Peace in the United States, which was a solidarity group with the Cuban revolution. He was elected deputy to the National Assembly of the Popular Power. A great preacher, he was close to the liberation theologians and he participated actively in the World Social Forum and many other Latin American activities.

⁴¹ Caridad Diego, head of the office concerned with religious affairs in the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Previously she had been president of the Young Communists. She was able to act wisely in difficult circumstances, like the visit of the three popes, the proselytism of the Pentecostal Churches and the renewal of the Santeria (Way of the Saints).

⁴² The Lumen Vitae Institute was founded in Brussels in the 1970s by the Jesuits for catechism and liturgical training.

⁴³ Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928-) was born in Lima. He started medicine studies and then psychology at the Catholic University of Louvain. He defended his doctoral thesis in theology at the Catholic University of Lyon. He worked as a priest in a poor area in Lima where he rethought his theology in function of the lives of the poor. He was the author of the first book on Liberation Theology. His thinking influenced the conference at Medellin organized by CELAM in 1968 to apply the results of Vatican Council II. He became a Dominican to escape the jurisdiction of the cardinal of Lima, who was a member of Opus Dei. Gutierrez was accused by the Holy See of taking up Marxist positions but shortly afterwards the accusation was withdrawn.
new theological school, called contextual, had developed, not without difficulties. This included the political theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer\textsuperscript{44} and Johann-Baptist Metz\textsuperscript{45} in Münster (Germany), the theology of secular reality of Gustav Thills\textsuperscript{46} in Louvain, the moral theology of Bernard Häring\textsuperscript{47} in Tübingen (Germany), as well as—in a certain sense—the work of Yves Congar\textsuperscript{48} in France, Edward Schillebeeckx\textsuperscript{49} in Nijmegen and Karl Rahner\textsuperscript{50} in Germany.

A number of theologians who had been trained in Europe were interested in this orientation, knowing that the Latin American context was very different: a peripheral society of capitalism, with high levels of poverty and heavy dependency on the centre of the world economy. Samir Amin\textsuperscript{51} had already published his

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\textsuperscript{44} Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). A German who did his thesis on the theology of salvation, introducing notions of sociology. He dedicated himself to pastoral activities and strongly opposed Nazism, while defending the Jews. He was sent to various concentration camps and executed at Flossenbürg at the end of the war.

\textsuperscript{45} Juan Bautista Metz (1928-). He developed at the University of Munster a theology concerned with human suffering and solidarity (political theology) which influenced the liberation theologians of Latin America.

\textsuperscript{46} Gustave Thils (1909-2000). A Belgian national who founded the *Theological Review of Louvain* and was specialized in ecclesiology. He was a professor at the Catholic University of Louvain and an expert at Vatican Council II. He published a book on the theology of earthly realities.

\textsuperscript{47} Berard Häring (1912-1998) was a German Redemptorist and a missionary in Brazil. He renewed the perspectives for Christian morality in his work, *The law of Christ*. He was an expert at Vatican Council II.

\textsuperscript{48} Yves Congar (1904-1995) was a French Dominican, a theologian specialized in ecclesiology and in ecumenism. He was suspended by the Holy See but afterwards was made expert at Vatican Council II and created cardinal.

\textsuperscript{49} Edouard Schillebeeckx (1914-2009). A Dominican Belgian specialized in sacramental theology; he developed a theology of human experience. He was professor at the Catholic University of Nijmegen (Netherlands) and an expert at Vatican Council II.

\textsuperscript{50} Karl Rahner (1904-1984). German, who developed the idea that all human beings had a latent awareness of God. He was an expert at Vatican Council II.

\textsuperscript{51} Samir Amin (1931-). Egyptian. He studied political science and economics in Paris. He was a member of the Communist Party (critical of the Soviet Union). He produced an economic thesis with François Perroux on
doctoral thesis in Paris, *La Desconexión*; and a new economic thinking inspired by Marxist economics, the Dependency Theory, was developed in Latin America. It emphasized the structural ties of Latin America’s economy with the central capitalist system, especially with the United States.

Like Jesus of Nazareth in the Palestinian society of that time, the new Latin American theologians were concerned about the poor, and stood for justice, solidarity and love of one’s neighbour –values of the Kingdom of God. They were impressed by the social struggles of the oppressed on the continent and wanted to create a theology that was relevant for the subordinate classes, joining faith and commitment to build a more just society. They said they were not so much seeking to know whether God existed as where He was to be found. Nonetheless, they elaborated a veritable theology and not only a social ethic.

Leonardo Boff\(^52\) worked on ecclesiology (the theology of the Church), tackling subjects such as power. Others developed a Christology (theology of Christ) like Jon Sobrino\(^53\) from the Central capitalist accumulation at the global level. He was Adviser to the Bandung Conference in 1955 and later to the Planning Ministry of Mali. Director of the African Institute for Development and Planning (IDEP) in Dakar. Founder of the Third World Forum in 1980 and the World Forum for Alternatives (WFA) in 1997. He has specialized in South/South relationships.

\(^52\) Leonardo Boff (1938-). A Brazilian Franciscan theologian. He studied theology and philosophy in Munich. Theology professor in Petrópolis (Brazil), he was suspended *a divinis* and from all editorial and educational activities, and obliged to keep silent for one year after the publication of his book *Church: Charism and Power*. As a theologian he participated in the basic ecclesial communities. He left the Franciscan order and got married. He was named ethics professor at the University of Rio de Janeiro. He developed the ecological perspective of Liberation Theology.

\(^53\) Jon Sobrino (1938-). Born in Barcelona of Basque origin, he studied engineering at the University of Saint Louis (USA). He obtained his doctorate in theology in Frankfurt and became professor at the University José Simeón Caña of San Salvador. He collaborated with Monsignor Romero and escaped the massacre of the Jesuits as he was at a meeting in Thailand. He wrote the book *Jesus the Liberator*. Criticized by Pope Benedict for having emphasized the historical Jesus, in 2007 he was forbidden to exercise his doctorate.
American University of San Salvador. Ivonne Guebara\textsuperscript{54} in Brazil started the feminine Liberation Theology. The thinking in the Reformation churches also promoted this kind of theology as was the case in the Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas in Cuba and the Evangelical Faculty of Costa Rica. An ecumenical centre such as the DEI (Ecumenical Research Department) of San José in Costa Rica developed a biblical Liberation Theology with figures like Pablo Richards\textsuperscript{55} and Franz Hinkelammert.\textsuperscript{56} In Brazil, Frei Betto, as well as José Comblin\textsuperscript{57} (theology of the Revolution) and Eduardo Hoornaert,\textsuperscript{58} both of Belgian origin, also contributed to this line of thought. This was the first wave. Then there came the theologies of ecology (Leonardo Boff), of the Indigenous Peoples, of the Black People.

\textsuperscript{54} Yvonne Guevara is a nun, born in Brazil. She developed a feminist Liberation Theology and was censured by the Holy See. She took a doctorate at the Catholic University of Louvain with the title \textit{El mal visto desde la mujer}, a critique of Western patriarchal theology, stressing the woman as an oppressed historical subject.

\textsuperscript{55} Pablo Richards (1939- ), a Chilean pupil of José Comblin. He studied at the Biblical Institute of Jerusalem. He wrote on Jesus as a historical figure and his fundamental choice of the poor. Since the military coup in Chile he has been working at the DEI in Costa Rica.

\textsuperscript{56} Franz Hinkelammert (1931- ), a German theologian and economist. He has a doctorate from the Free University of Berlin and was a professor at the Catholic University of Chile. His social ethic is critical of capitalism. He was expelled from Chile by Pinochet and cofounded with Pablo Richards, the DEI of Costa Rica. He emphasized the importance of the subject in the functioning of society. He received the first Liberator Prize from Venezuela for his book \textit{El sujeto y la ley. El retorno del sujeto oprimido}.

\textsuperscript{57} José Comblin (1923-2011) was a priest in the Brussels diocese. He obtained a doctorate in theology at the Catholic University of Louvain. In 1958 he went to Brazil as a YCW adviser and professor of theology at the University of São Paulo. He worked with Dom Hélder Câmara in Recife. Exiled during the Brazilian dictatorship, he went to Chile where he published a book on the ideology of national security. He was expelled by Pinochet and returned to Chile, where he was adviser to the basic ecclesial communities. He was close to Monsignor Proaño of Ecuador.

\textsuperscript{58} Eduardo Hoornaert was a Belgian priest, historian and theologian. He was particularly concerned with popular religion and he organized theological weeks in Brazil.
Contextual theology has to recognize reality, where God the Liberator is present, and for this reason must accept the mediation of social analysis. It introduces an element of relativity in the construction of theological thought. This focus reveals an eternal reality: all theology is contextual (time and place); but there are theologies that explicitly recognize it and others that conceal it or regard it as implicit. The Liberation Theology is clearly going one step further, turning the situation of the poor into a ‘theological place or locus theologicus; that is, the basis of its disciplinary focus. This inevitably provokes a confrontation with certain ecclesiastical authorities, who cannot accept that the sole criterion of authenticity is not their own orientation as the custodians of tradition.

Another reason for the confrontation is the fact that in order to understand the context, it was necessary to use a method of analysis. In a society that is far more complex than that of the time of Jesus, it was not so easy to identify the causes of injustice, poverty, and destitution. It was also necessary to interpret reality in the context of the poorest; in other words, to see the world with the eyes of the oppressed. The methodology of the YCW, which as said before was founded in 1925 by José Cardijn and well established in Latin America, was based on three principles –seeing, judging and acting– which prepared the ground for Catholics engaged in social struggles. Liberation Theology considered Marxist analysis an appropriate instrument for a better understanding of society and its structures. It was particularly inspired by the Dependency Theory. This accentuated the conflict, particularly with the authorities in Rome. Cardinal José Ratzinger, President of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (once the Holy Office) and subsequently elected Pope with the name of Benedict XVI condemned Liberation Theology; affirming, inter alia, that the adoption of Marxist analysis inevitably led to atheism.

In spite of ecclesiastical repression, Liberation Theology has had a great impact on Latin America, together with the development of the Christian Basic Communities (CEBs). However, in spite of the fact that the usual ecclesiastical transmission channels (seminaries, theology faculties, publications) were cut and a number of theologians prohibited from teaching, the movement
did not die. Because of the world crisis and the need to construct a new paradigm for developing humanity on the planet, it has become more necessary than ever.

As we know, the first socio-religious study at continental level was mainly descriptive. However, it established the bases for more systematic thinking and a concern for analysis. Well received by the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) at the end of the 1950s; inspired by the orientations of the Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes*; and consecrated in practice by CELAM at its conference in Medellin in 1968, this approach spread and advanced qualitatively.

**Consequences of the Focus and Work of FERES**

In the long run, the FERES initiative turned out to be the basis for a task that continued in various countries. CERIS still exists. The nuns managed to get themselves called to Rome to start the Centre of Statistics of the Holy See. Then they undertook, for the Bishops Conference of Brazil, the religious statistical work in that country.

It should be pointed out that these centres functioned outside the academic world. This was partly because the Catholic universities were not interested in this kind of research. And in the lay universities religion was almost a taboo, with very few exceptions. Not only were they anti-clerical, which was understandable, but they did not feel that religion should be focussed on, intellectually and politically. There was very little Sociology of Religion in Latin America in the 1960s. Religion was a field that was relegated to anthropologists.

However, eventually there was a change and a number of collaborators in our research were appointed as university professors. Religion became an interesting theme for both Catholic and Protestant universities and also for some lay universities. This happened partly because of the influence of the Vatican Council II, but perhaps even more because there was a renewal of the Latin American Catholic Church, under the impetus of CELAM, with the development of the Christian Basic Communities and the Liberation Theology.
As we have seen, as from 1968 there was a development in Latin America of grassroots ecclesiastical communities and of Liberation Theology. There was also strong participation of Christians in resistance to the dictatorships. In various places the Church was the only place where there was a certain freedom of expression and action. In others, many Christians committed themselves to the struggle against social and political injustice and to revolutionary movements. And finally, it should be added that the influence of the Socio-Religious Research Centre of Brussels, integrated since 1969 into the Catholic University of Louvain, contributed to developing new trends inside the university, where many Latin American students studied, with the creation of a group of specialists in the Sociology of Religion, like Jean Rémy, Geneviève Lemercinier and Jean Pierre Hiernaux; in the sociology of education like Jacques Delcourt; and on Latin America like Freddy Debuyst and André Delobelle.

59 Jean Rémy, Belgian economist and sociologist, specialized in urban sociology and sociology of religion. Emeritus professor of the Catholic University of Louvain. He was the co-director of the Socio-Religious Research Centre.

60 Jacques Delcourt (1928-2009). Member of the Socio-Religious Research Centre and professor of the sociology of education and work at the Catholic University of Louvain.

61 André Delobelle. Historian and sociologist of religions. Member of the Socio-Religious Research Centre and professor at the Catholic University of Louvain.
CHAPTER VII:  
THE VATICAN COUNCIL II

The Convocation

When, in 1962, Pope John XXIII\(^1\) convened the Vatican Council II, the news came as a great surprise. He had had a very conventional career in the diplomatic service of the Holy See – he had been the Nuncio in Turkey and afterwards in Paris, then Archbishop of Venice. His election in 1958 had taken place in very particular circumstances. The cardinals could not agree on electing either a more progressive candidate, like Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini,\(^2\) Archbishop of Milan, or on a very conservative one, like Cardinal Giuseppe Siri,\(^3\) Archbishop of Genoa. They therefore chose the Archbishop of Venice, who was 77 years old, thinking that it would be a transition period and that nothing would change or last for long. Meanwhile they would have time to take a more appropriate decision.

However, as the Council is a meeting of all the Bishops in the world to discuss such matters as the state of the Church and to redefine beliefs, trends and organization, the initiative to hold the Vatican Council II was very relevant. The First Vatican Council (held in 1869-1870), had been conditioned by the turbulent events

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1 Pope from 1958 until his death in 1963.
2 Giovanni Battista Montini (1897-1978) was Secretary of State for Pius XII and Archbishop of Milan. He was elected Pope as Paul VI. He continued Vatican Council II on the death of John XXIII.
3 Cardinal Giuseppe Siri (1906-1989), Archbishop of Genoa. He resisted fascism. He took the conservative line in Vatican Council II.
of the unification of Italy and the constitution of the national State. It was interrupted by the war between France and Germany, and it reconvened shortly after the Commune of Paris. The reaction of the Bishops at that time had been very rigid and centralizing. One century later, John XXIII was aware of the blockage of a Church that was too inflexible and narrow-minded, and recognized the need for a serious revision, to be able to deal with the many new problems that had arisen in the modern world.

In ecclesiastical practice the announcing of a Council is irrevocable. While the more advanced and open part of the Church was very enthusiastic at this unforeseen call, the Roman curia was rather upset and did its best to control the whole process so that the progressive elements did not get too much latitude. It was felt that holding a Council in the 20th century was not very realistic as there were then some 4,000 Bishops in the world and it was questionable whether it was possible to assemble them effectively.

The work of the Council was carried out in plenaries, commissions and subcommittees. The Bishops met in plenary in the Basilica of St. Peter. It was an impressive venue, as it was able, like a stadium, to accommodate thousands of prelates with its monumental baroque background. But to be able to function, the Council's procedures had to be strictly organized. There were four moderators – one of them was Cardinal Suenens, who succeeded Cardinal Van Roey as Archbishop of Malines and Primate of Belgium and in whom John XXIII had confidence. The moderators were in charge of all the operations and had to solve problems of organization or of competence, if they arose. The Bishops discussed, article by article, the texts prepared by the commissions. Each of them had the right to speak for five minutes. In the most important meetings, communication was in Latin, although in the commissions and subcommittees other languages were allowed according to the speaker.

General issues to be discussed were divided into more specific topics such as ecclesiology (theology of the Church), the liturgy and the Church in the world. All these commissions and sub-commissions were organized for the purpose of preparing documents for debate. After this they worked on the comments of the Bishops and discussed whether they could integrate them
into the texts or not. There always had to be a conclusion, either positive or negative.

When the Council was first announced, Bishop Larraín, President, and Dom Hélder Câmara, Vice President of CELAM, asked me to work with them on the preparations on the basis of the Latin American research that I had directed. However, in order to participate in the Council itself and in the preparatory commissions, it was necessary to have expert status.

A number of theologians at the Catholic University of Louvain had been designated as responsible for preparing various Council documents. One of them, Monsignor Delhaye, had been appointed secretary of the sub-commission which had to draft the introduction of the document *Gaudium et Spes* (*Joy and Hope*); that is, the Constitution on the Church and the contemporary world. One year earlier I had written a little book entitled *The Church in the World*, which was published in Paris and translated into various languages. It formulated a methodology for studying the institution in its global context. Starting from looking at the situation (first, see); then trying to propose theological thinking and principles (second, judge); to come up with some orientations concerning the problems of the Church and the building of bridges between it and society (third, act). Monsignor Delhaye, who wanted to concentrate on another document of the theological commission, proposed that I substitute him and, of course, I was enthusiastic about doing so. Cardinal Suenens approved and gave me the status of expert.

**Conciliar Activities**

For almost all of the two years of preparations of the introductory document on the Church in the world –which was also known as *Scheme 13*– before its presentation to the plenary session, we met in Rome approximately once every three months. It was a subcommittee of the theological commission and we were a team

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4 Philippe Delhaye (1912-1990). Professor of theology in Lille, Lyon, Montreal and the Catholic University of Louvain. He was an expert at the Vatican Council II and secretary of the international theological commission created by Paul VI. He adopted conservative positions after the Council.
of 20 people. The president was Monsignor Marcos McGrath,\(^5\) at that time Auxiliary Bishop of Panama, and I was the secretary. Among the other members were Monsignor Jean Zoa,\(^6\) Archbishop of Yaoundé (Cameroon); Monsignor John Wright,\(^7\) Bishop of Pittsburg in the United States and who was also chaplain to the army; Monsignor Fernández,\(^8\) auxiliary Bishop of Bombay, a lay person from Australia and some of the great French theologians, in particular Jean Daniélou,\(^9\) a Jesuit. When I was in the seminary we considered him a star, a specialist in oriental religions, but when he became a cardinal after the Council, his activities were very conservative. Another French Jesuit was Henry de Lubac,\(^10\) an ecclesiologist who was appointed as a cardinal after the Council and who was always open-minded. Then there was the Dominican Yves Congar, who was also appointed a cardinal later and who

\(^5\) Marcos G. McGrath (1924-2000). He studied theology at the Catholic University of Chile and at Notre Dame in the United States. He was president of the sub-commission for the introduction of the Council Constitution *Gaudium Spes*. Archbishop of Panama. He took up conservative positions after Vatican Council II.

\(^6\) Jean Zoa (1922-1998) was Archbishop of Yaoundé for 37 years, member of the theological commission of the Council. He defended African culture as part of universal culture.

\(^7\) Monsignor John Wright (1909-1979) was a doctor of theology and professor of philosophy and theology. He was a cardinal and prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy in 1969 until his death.

\(^8\) Monsignor Fernandes was auxiliary Bishop of Bombay (Mumbai). He was a member of the sub-commission on the introduction of the Council Constitution, *Gaudium Spes*.

\(^9\) Jean Daniélou (1905-1974) was a French Jesuit who was a co-founder with Henry de Lubac of the Christian Origins collection, a patristic work. Professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris and an expert at Vatican Council II, he was created cardinal. Since the Council he adopted conservative positions.

\(^10\) Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), a French Jesuit. He was professor of theology in the Catholic Faculty of Lyon. Wounded during the First World War, he participated in the Resistance during the Second World War. He was accused of modernism by the Holy See and prohibited from teaching. His books were taken out of circulation. He was nominated by John XXIII as expert at Vatican Council II and created cardinal. He lamented the ‘drifts’ of the Council.
never abandoned his progressive ideas. One of the other members was Karol Woytila, the future Pope John Paul II.

Because of the resistance of the Roman curia to change, once the Council was announced by the Pope they tried to control the elaboration of the texts and this they did throughout the Council. This attitude provoked conflicts right from the start. The first plenary meeting lasted hardly an hour and it was interrupted for a few days because there were various interventions by cardinals –including those of Lille, Cologne and Vienna– rejecting the agenda that the Roman curia had drawn up. This victory of the Bishops made far more democratic processes possible than those that had been envisaged. In spite of this setback, the curia –which evidently did not inspire much sympathy– maintained its reluctance to accept transformation, which was the very objective of the Council, and it had no hesitation in exercising pressure on certain Bishops, for example those of Asia and Africa, who were economically especially dependent on Rome.

The Latin American Bishops had decided to organize a secretariat in Rome to ensure better coordination among themselves, but the Roman curia had prohibited the presence of CELAM. In spite of this, during the first days of the Council, the African Bishops created a secretariat without asking permission. When they heard this, the Latin Americans decided to do something similar and designated the secretary of CELAM, Monsignor Mendoza, to organize it. He came to Rome and within a month he had set up his office.

Paul VI –who, at the death of John XXIII in 1963, became the new Pope and presided over the second part of the Council– also tried to put on the brakes for fear of possible consequences. He thus intervened in a very authoritarian way on the theme of family planning, forbidding any discussion in the competent commission –to the extent that it could hardly function.

During the period of the Council, the plenary sessions took place every year, from September through to December. I travelled from Belgium to Rome in my little car (a Volkswagen ‘beetle’) and I had the assistance of Guislaine Lemercier –my colleague Geneviève’s sister– who remained my secretary until her retirement in 1988. I passed through France to visit the Mission de France in Pontigny, the seminary that trained worker priests. I regularly
gave talks there on the Sociology of Religion at the request of my friend Father Jean Frisque, a theologian who was the adviser of Cardinal Marty of Paris during the Vatican Council II. I also visited the Protestant monastery of Taizé, near Dijon, which had sent two observers to the Council and had a small apartment in Rome. I was asked to take items necessary for the work, from books on theology to marmalade. When I reached my destination, my car turned out to be very useful for transporting Bishops and cardinals and distributing draft documents, among other tasks.

Dom Hélder Câmara, who never spoke in the Council, was very busy making contacts. He set up what he called the ‘Opus Angelorum’, meaning the work of the messengers (a humoristic reference to Opus Dei). He sent me round to various places with notes that he had prepared for discussion with this person or that. I and my little car were kept very busy.

It was a pity that I was not able to take many notes during the Council; only a detailed report on the first session. But there was no time. However, Dom Hélder Câmara wrote at length about the event and with many references to the work that we carried out together, which can be read in his memoirs. He had a very special way of thinking and expressing himself. He once told me that it was impossible to understand the essence of Brazil without knowing about the carnival and football. I remember he called me once and said, “I want to tell you how I see the end of the Council”. He started to walk back and forth in his residence at Villa Maria, where he stayed during the sessions of the Council. He gesticulated quite wildly and spoke for an hour about a celebration in which there would be choirs, songs and dances. He already had in his mind

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11 Jean Frisque (1925-1980) was a Belgian priest of the Auxiliary Mission Organization (SAM). He had a doctorate in theology and was a professor at the French Mission (Pontigny).
12 Cardinal François Marty was Archbishop of Reims, Prelate of the French Mission. In 1968 he became Archbishop of Paris and first president of the French Episcopal Conference.
13 The Taizé community was founded in Burgundy by Hermano Roger, son of a Protestant minister. He studied theology at Strasbourg and Lausanne. He gradually drew closer to Catholicism and his successor was a German Catholic monk.
the opera *La Messe Pour le Temps Futur (The Mass for the Future)* which he was later to write in collaboration with Maurice Béjart,\(^{14}\) the great French choreographer. Just to listen to him explaining his idea was in itself a spectacle: the announcement of the renewed Christian message to the world.

Meanwhile in the pontifical city there was a very dynamic, intense spirit and a passionate atmosphere. The days flew by incredibly quickly because something was always happening. Besides the official programme, there were all sorts of extra-curricular activities. Cardinal Suenens established a regular meeting of Bishops who were concerned about the situation of the poorest of the planet and the meetings took place in the Belgian College every two or three weeks. One day they invited me to talk about the state of the poor in the world before a group that included the sixty or seventy most progressive Bishops present in Rome. I used the statistics of the UN organizations to try to show that poverty was not a natural phenomenon but a social construction due to the logic of the economic system. During the four years of the Council I gave numerous talks of this kind with Bishops and cardinals from many nationalities. The intellectual discussions were indeed rich.

There were observers from other Churches participating in the Council. Among them was Metropolitan Nikodín,\(^{15}\) the Orthodox Archbishop of Leningrad, whom I had met at the World Council of Churches in Geneva and who had organized the translation of my book *The Church in the World* into Russian so as to circulate it among Russian Church circles. Members of the Anglican Church and of other Protestant Churches were also observers and participated in the parallel activities.

For the two sessions of the Council I stayed in the Pio Latino College (for the Latin American students) with Don Méndez

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\(^{14}\) Maurice Jean Béjart (1927-2007). A choreographer, born in Marseille, who created the Ballets du XX e Siècle. He ended his career in Lausanne.

\(^{15}\) Metropolitan Nikodín (1929-1978). Studied at the Theology Academy in Leningrad. He was part of the Russian mission in Jerusalem in 1959, was at the forefront of relations with foreign churches and oversaw the publications of the Moscow patriarchy. He was President of the World Council of Churches (Geneva) and he established relations with the Catholic Church, being critical of the papal function. He died in the Vatican.
Arceo, Archbishop of Cuernavaca, a place I had visited previously. He was a man with a very open mind. Even before Vatican II, he had renewed the liturgy and in his magnificent cathedral with its Mozarabic architecture he had introduced mariachi music in the Sunday mass. We were very close. After the Council he asked me to conduct a seminar for his clergy, which I carried out for three days in Cuernavaca. In the 1980s, I also met him various times in Managua, in the celebrations of 19 July, the anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution when he was invited by the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) to act as ‘the Bishop of the Revolution’. The last time I saw him was in Bogota, in 1991, when I presided a session of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal on Impunity in Latin America. He, too, was a member of the jury. In the Council he made some important interventions, including one in defence of freemasonry as he felt that the Church should not excommunicate Catholics who were members.

16 Sergio Méndez Arceo (1907-1992) received a doctorate in history at the Gregorian University in Rome. He became Bishop of Cuernavaca (Mexico) and was known as the Red Bishop. Member of the Mexican Historical Academy and of CELAM. He supported Liberation Theology and the Christian movement for socialism. He accommodated in his diocese the Centro de Investigación y Documentación (CIDOC) founded by Ivan Illich. Pope Paul VI prohibited Mexican clergy to participate in its activities. He denounced the Vietnam War, the blockade of Cuba and the war of the Contras in Nicaragua. Arceo was a member of the Permanent People’s Tribunal.

17 Typical Mexican musical groups originally using string instruments but later incorporating wind instruments. They were particularly associated with wedding ceremonies. Hence the name ‘mariachi (marriage)’ attributed to them by the French troops of Maximilian. Their music is deeply rooted in Mexican tradition.

18 International Tribunal of Opinion, which judges violations of human rights. It was founded after the initiative of Italian senator Lelio Basso, a member of the Russell Tribunal for the United States’ war crimes in Vietnam. In fact, the Peoples’ Permanent Tribunal is the successor of the Russell Tribunal. Since its foundation in 1979, this institution has held more than forty sessions on diverse matters, from violations of human and social rights in different periods and countries –as El Salvador, Guatemala, Eritrea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Iraq –to violations of International Law– Nicaragua, World Bank and IMF, multinational enterprises, etc. The basis of the trials, besides International Law, is the Declaration of Algiers on People’s Rights.
The conciliar texts were accorded different status. The first were the constitutions. In the Council’s subcommittee, in my role of Secretary I started drafting the introduction of the Constitution on the ‘Church in the Contemporary World’, based on my book *The Church in the World*. Debates on the document lasted for hours and hours. I remember that the French cardinal Garonne,¹⁹ considered an open-minded man said, “This seems to be written by a sociologist and not by a human being”. For many, it was material of secondary importance because it did not constitute a theological text.

In spite of objections it was decided to make *Gaudium et Spes* one of the two constitutions of the Council. The other document that had the same status was called *Lumen Gentium* and it was concerned with the Church, its definition, its organization and its pastoral tasks, as opposed to the former that was concerned with the Church in the world, and began with a description of the current world scene.

For this introduction we used a logic that was not very usual in theological methodology. Classic theology was deductive and was based on divine revelation to free mankind; whereas our logic was inductive, based on the social and psychological reality of humanity. For this reason we encountered a lot of resistance. Finally we were able to prepare a paper of five or six pages. It was a controversial text. On the one hand, many theologians and Bishops did not consider it to be necessary and, on the other, it seemed dangerous as it meant that the source of inspiration and thinking did not come from above, but from below. When the introduction was presented to the plenary we did not know until the last moment whether it would be accepted or not. The Bishops could have decided to leave it aside and start afresh in another manner. However, it was finally approved by a large majority.

I think that this was the first time that a Council document adopted an approach that was based on reality instead of revelation. This spirit seemed also present in the documents on ecumenism, the

¹⁹ Cardinal Gabriel Marie Garonne (1901-1994), Archbishop of Tulus was vice president of the French Episcopal Conference. He was the first president of the Pontifical Council for Culture.
liturgy and other matters, however not in such an explicit way. In this sense, in spite of having a modest place in the overall production of the Council and being more descriptive than explanatory, the introduction of *Gaudium et Spes* was in fact unique.

All the while there was also a reflection on the practical aim of the document. The idea was proposed by a number of the participants, including Cardinal Suenens, that a Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace should be established, with the specific aim of ensuring a follow-up to the Constitution. Of course the curia was against the proposal, but finally the Pope gave Cardinal Maurice Roy,\(^{20}\) Archbishop of Quebec, the task of studying the possibility of setting up such a commission.

Once, after a session of the Council, I was travelling home in the same plane as Cardinal Suenens. During a stop-over in Milan, Suenens who was in the VIP room of the airport, asked me to accompany him and told me, “I would very much like, if it is possible, to be the president of the Justice and Peace Commission. If this happens, would you agree to come with me?” Surprised, I said that I would. Anything that made it possible to give a practical orientation to the Council would be highly innovatory and useful. But Suenens was not appointed. He was put to one side by the central Church because he wanted to decentralize it and give more power to the Bishops’ conferences and less to the curia. He published an article on these topics in the French review *Actualités Catholiques Internationales* and Pope Paul VI was so upset that Suenens was never again able to have a post in Rome. Thus, someone relatively conservative was nominated for the Commission and, happily, I escaped the destiny of becoming a member of the Roman curia! In the last stage of the Council, I was called to Rome for an audience with Cardinal Roy, because there were various approaches for the organization of the Commission. While the orientation of the curia was for more centralization and, of course, control, I defended a position of greater autonomy.

The Vatican Council II involved a new conception of the Church and a new attitude towards the world. Thus, instead of seeing the Church as a hierarchy, it was defined as ‘God’s people’. So it was not

a question of dominating, but of providing a service. This implied a change in both the concept of how the institution was organized and in the way that it functioned. The philosophy of the Council was a kind of inversion of the pyramid, in which the grassroots (God's people) came first and the organization (hierarchy, clergy) was seen as a service. This explains why it was so difficult to accept for the curia and some of the more conservative Bishops.

My book *The Eleventh Hour: Explosion of a Church*, published by Sheed shortly after the close of the Council, was the result of a course given in a training programme of the US Conference of Religious Women. I defended the thesis that there had been great changes in values, which tried to reintroduce a perspective that was closer to the Gospel but that it had not really affected the structure of the curia, or the power of the Holy See. That meant that there was a danger that this organization could recover its power of decision making. John XXIII had assumed that it was necessary to transform many aspects of the Church and saw that the only way to doing this was to trust in the Holy Spirit, which would motivate all the Bishops in the world to re-make a new Church and give it a different face. In fact, the curia was not able to control this movement but in the long run it did recover its power, if not completely, at least a good part of it. I think there was a lot of ingenuousness in believing that fundamental changes could be made without affecting the power system. The interpretation of the Council by Paul VI and, later, by John Paul II was increasingly restrictive and both allowed a gradual restoration of the pyramidal organization. It is clear that with Benedict XVI (from 2005 to 2013) this reconstruction was yet further reinforced.

Hence, in recent times, the curia and the popes have been trying to re-establish ecclesiastical power by publishing very restraining documents, encyclicals, etc. Being the pope the one who nominates the Bishops, this makes it possible to moderate the ways of thinking and acting of local churches. Rome also controls the seminaries and, in general, the theological and pastoral teaching. In Latin America this has resulted in the impossibility to talk of Liberation Theology in any place where the Catholic Church as an institution is involved, and the liberation theologians are forbidden to teach. The intention was to eliminate it. Clearly,
it was impossible to do this completely because in these days the media prevent such measures from being very effective. Also, in some cases, there have been unexpected changes within the clergy itself. Bishops who had the reputation for being conservative have gradually changed, as was the case of Archbishop Romero\(^{21}\) in El Salvador, who was murdered because of his new views.

Nevertheless many of the results of the Council were irreversible; for example, acceptance of the vernacular language for the liturgy. This democratized the ritual aspect and provoked the reaction of the conservative milieux that were no longer able to exercise the same control. Sunday mass participation, however, decreased greatly, but at the same time, the link between theology and social commitment became stronger. Opening up the opportunities for lay people to read texts in religious services, the distribution of the communion and the exercise of other Church functions have transformed the concept of the ecclesiastical body as an exclusive one.

Also, the Council helped to desacralize the image of the priest. We used to think that the priest should be respected almost as a divine being; wearing his cassock, he celebrated the mass in Latin with the public behind him, and with very strict rules. Since the Council, gradually the priests have begun to dress informally, talk the language of the people in the church service and change their style of communication. Personally, I had the advantage of having interacted with young workers and travelling through Latin America acquiring another vision of the role of the Gospel and of the priest that was much more closely linked to social commitment and to the values of justice in the Kingdom of God.

\(^{21}\) Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero (1917-1980) was Salvadoran, of a modest family. He worked as a carpenter’s apprentice since he was 12 years old. Rector of a seminary and director of the periodical Orientation with a traditional and conservative position, he encouraged Paul VI to beatify the founder of Opus Dei. However, after the assassination of Father Rutilio Grande, S.J., he changed completely. He denounced individualism and poverty. He wrote to Jimmy Carter to demand that the United States stop giving military assistance to El Salvador. He was Doctor Honoris Causa of the Catholic University of Louvain. He believed that the poor should be the protagonists in their own struggles and he recommended soldiers to disobey. He was assassinated.
However the Council has been a transformation to which many have been unable to adapt. Thus a group is trying to return to having the mass in Latin, and using the clerical collar, among other practices, in order to conserve a kind of protection and also an affirmation of their authority. Others, with their identity so damaged, have abandoned being priests.

I also think that, as an effect of the Council, the way in which religion is seen from outside the Church has changed. I shall just cite two examples. In the Soviet Union many people give the name John to their children, in homage to John XXIII, considered to be a good and open-minded man. In Belgium I have seen the change in relationships that were formerly relatively tense between the Christian and non-Christian circles, as has happened with the Free University of Brussels and the Socialist Party.

Personally the Council was fundamental for me because it enabled me to live another church, to legitimize a whole series of aspirations that I already had, especially regarding social commitment. It allowed me to see the priesthood in a more comprehensive and less institutional way.

It is true that, scared by the effects of the Council, the restoration had begun towards the end of Paul VI’s papacy. It deepened during the long mandate of John Paul II, who was convinced that the Church should be strong, with a safe doctrine and a sound organization to deal with contemporary enemies: communism and Western secularism. Finally, Benedict XVI took the same line, with its preoccupation for doctrine. The result has been the constitution of a conservative world episcopate, a reinforcement of charismatic movements and rigid Catholicism (Opus Dei, Communion and Liberation, etc.), the dissolution of the basic communities and finally the condemnation of Liberation Theology.

It has not been easy to live through this period after the hopes that had been created by Vatican Council II. Some of my friends, both believers and non-believers, are surprised that I still remain in the institution. But I felt that an institutional rupture would not be useful and would only waste time on secondary conflicts, when the essential task is to fight for the values of justice, equality and love, as promoted by Jesus.
The Sociology of Religion has also taught me that institutions reproduce themselves in a similar way over time and that churches, dissident and contrary to the rigidity or the deviations from the original message of the Catholic Church, experience the same problems a century later.

The election of Pope Bergoglio was a surprise: a Jesuit who took the name of Francis, who changed the style of life of the head of the Church, who unequivocally declared in favour of the poor, who has taken up issues considered as doctrinally taboo, such as homosexuality, holy communion for the divorced and contraception. He had not been known as being very progressive. His behaviour in Argentina during the dictatorship was influenced more by his concern to protect the unity of the Church rather than taking up a prophetic position. He defended the social doctrine of the Church, without identifying with Liberation Theology. His disagreements with the Kirchner governments were quite strong.

After the Council, during my visit to Argentina to participate in a CELAM meeting, he invited me to give a talk at the Jesuit seminary on the *Gaudium et Spes* Constitution. I noticed that he took a certain distance from my interpretations.

As soon as he was elected Pope, the whole atmosphere of the Church changed. His simplicity, his pastoral concern, his opening to everyone, his stand in favour of the poor, his declarations on behalf of Nature: all this won sympathy for him well beyond the Catholic Church. His denunciation of the economic system in which it was money that prevailed, his meetings with the social movements of the excluded and the exploited, his defence of those who had been forced to migrate indicated his chosen camp. His efforts on behalf of peace and of a rapprochement between the United States and Cuba and his recognition of the Palestinian state, testified to a papal policy that favoured re-establishing justice.

It is true that he does not mention the word ‘capitalism’, although he describes its characteristics, and he considers Marxism as belonging to the past. Nor does he speak of Liberation Theology. But he opens up new spaces that make it possible to breathe and think of new advances.

Nevertheless his age goes not give him enough time for carrying out transformations, as had John Paul II had been able to do in
his efforts for ecclesiastical restoration. Because of the enormous resistance that Francis encounters, not only in the Roman curia but also from other parts of the Church, a conservative recovery is not to be excluded. However it is to be hoped that the support of ‘the people of God’ which he has received from all over the world, the serene logic with which he attends to his pastoral concerns and his universal moral leadership are leaving traces that cannot be effaced.
CHAPTER VIII: 
FROM PASTORAL STRUCTURES TO THE ACADEMIC

The New Context of Socio-Religious Research

After living for some ten years, first in the Beguinage\(^1\) and then in the parish of the Riches Claires,\(^2\) in the mid-1970s I moved to the new seminary which, since the Vatican Council II, had been founded by Cardinal Suenens in an old convent in Louvain. The socio-religious research centre was integrated into the Catholic University, where I had already been teaching since 1958, when I was called to teach the first course in pastoral sociology, initiated by Jacques Leclerc.

The centre in Brussels had been economically supported by the other centre that I had founded, the SODEGEC. When it was integrated into the University, the latter took on the salaries of four assistants and the rest were financed with contracts that were made with the dioceses and other bodies. At that time the University started to be interested in urbanism and was beginning to set up an institute for city planning.

We passed on to it all the SODEGEC contracts and collaborators. Thus it contributed to the development of this discipline at the

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\(^1\) The beguinas were lay women in the Netherlands who lived in communities, each in her own house but with a common church. After the French Revolution this church in the centre of Brussels became a parish church.

\(^2\) The order of the Clares was founded by Francis of Assisi. They were divided into two branches: the poor, who lived on alms and the rich who had property. At the French Revolution the nuns were dispersed and in the 19th century their church was converted into a parish church.
academic level. Our introduction into these surroundings had been negotiated very well by the university secretary-general, Michel Woitrin\(^3\) and we were warmly received. We were installed in a large house that belonged to the academic institution and it was spacious enough for activities such as the struggle against the Vietnam War, Portuguese colonialism, apartheid, etc., as well as solidarity activities with social resistance in Latin America.

At the beginning I took part in the organization of the institute for city planning as a new discipline of the University. This began taking up too much of my time, so that I soon sought to liberate myself from that task. In this period, however, my means of subsistence were scanty. My salary at the university depended on the number of hours that I taught –far from full time– and besides, the priests had to give a third of their salary as a contribution to the university. Fortunately I had been able to live in Brussels in parishes, participating in pastoral work, and afterwards in Louvain, in the seminary, which saved me some expenditure on rent.

At the socio-religious research centre in Brussels we had organized an annual census on Sunday attendance in all the churches of the country, which made it possible to elaborate a religious cartography of Belgium. This work continued afterwards, as a statistical service of the Church, at the inter-diocesan centre in Brussels. We also carried out in Louvain more in-depth research in various regions, commissioned by the local clergy, in order to organize ‘internal missions’ for religious renewal.

As for the Holy See, it continued to resist socio-religious research. Nevertheless, because of the way that the Catholic Church was organized, the Bishops and the episcopal conferences had genuine autonomy and they had no hesitation in asking for studies. The Catholic University of Louvain was also independent, which was very important. Luckily, I was in the faculty of economic and social sciences and not in the theology faculty, where I would

\(^3\) Michel Woitrin (1919-2008) was a Belgian jurist and economist. He was general administrator of the Catholic University of Louvain while it was being transferred to Louvain. He oversaw the construction of the university city of Louvain-la-Neuve.
have been more vulnerable. Sometimes there were complaints or denunciations to the episcopal curia about my teaching, which was considered by some to be dangerous but as Cardinal Suenens knew me well there were no consequences. The Holy See in fact intervened twice to expel me from the university. Once it was the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and on another occasion it was the Congregation of the Catholic Universities. However, these efforts came to nought as it was the State that paid the professors and it was not possible to dismiss them without serious reason, as determined by judicial commission.

When I had worked in Brussels I had tried to encourage empirical religious sociology, but I was aware that it was necessary to maintain a more theoretical approach to respond to academic requirements and also to develop sociology. While I used US structural functionalism –that I had learnt in Chicago– I felt the need to develop a tool for analysis that was more relevant to reality. Therefore, at the centre we continued to do more research into the theoretical aspects. From the North American focus on empirical sociology we gradually moved towards a more explanatory sociology, which led us to adopt the perspectives of Max Weber and then Karl Marx. Up until then in Louvain and, in general, in Europe, sociology was associated with philosophy and law, which were at the base of my studies as a student. The step we took was to discover the need for an empirical approach and an appropriate methodology but also the need to enrich it through theoretical concerns about the construction of societies and in particular on the role of religions within them.

The First Tricontinental Study:
Latin America, Asia, Africa

It was the last years of the 1970s. Monsignor Ligutti had been very pleased with the research of FERES on Latin America. As he was the Vatican Observer to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), he was also concerned about Africa and Asia and felt it would be useful to extend this kind of study to those continents.

We elaborated a research project on the contribution of the Christian Churches to development, involving both the Catholic
and Protestant Churches. The project was run jointly by Egbert de Vries, Director of the Institute for Social Studies in The Hague, on behalf of the World Council of Churches, and me on behalf of the Catholic Church. As Monsignor Ligutti was from the United States it was he who opened the doors for us to obtain and manage funds from the Ford Foundation, with which Professor de Vries also had contacts. As at that time it was practical to pass through New York to travel to Latin America, so I took advantage of ten stop-overs there to advance the negotiations with the Foundation. It was not easy to get the approval of the Foundation. They wanted to ensure that the project was feasible, scientifically based and that it had sufficient funding. They also had a certain mistrust of the churches—misgivings about the real importance of their contribution to development and concern about proselytism. However, once the Foundation approved the project, it gave us total freedom. They demanded practically nothing, only the accounts at the end of the report. We were left to ourselves to organize the research as we wanted.

We defined the themes in function of the most important fields of action from a quantitative viewpoint. In fact we did not criticize the concept of development, accepting it in the general understanding of that time, in which priority was given to health, education and other social initiatives. Nevertheless, it was clear to us that ‘development’ was not the same as pure economic development and that it integrated social and cultural aspects such as social justice and ethics.

As Christian churches were present in many countries of the three continents of the South, the selection of the nations was based on practical considerations. I was a friend of Monsignor Zoa, Archbishop of Yaoundé, as we had worked together in the Vatican Council II, so we chose to make a study in Cameroon to study the contribution of the Church to health. We chose Indonesia because Egbert de Vries had worked for several years there and the theme chosen was the political participation of Christians in

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4 Egbert de Vries, an agronomist, was born in the Netherlands in 1901. He worked in Indonesia and was adviser to President Sukarno. He was the first rector of the Institute for Social Studies (ISS) from 1956 to 1966.
constructing the nation after independence. Tanzania was also selected because de Vries knew its president, Julius Nyerere,\(^5\) who was particularly concerned with education, to study the role of the Christian primary and secondary schools in that country's development. We also chose, as themes, higher education in India and the values transmitted by Catholic secondary schooling in Colombia, as well as the social work of the Catholic Church in north-east Brazil, a particularly deprived region of that country.

Of course we made contacts with the respective churches but we remained fairly independent of them because we were working in the name of an institution, FERES and the funding came from an external source.

In all there were six studies, divided into the three continents. For this reason, from a methodological point of view, this project was less comprehensive than the study on Latin America. In each country we entrusted the work to local researchers; this was not possible in Cameroon, so we sent someone from our centre in Louvain to undertake it. Each member of the team had considerable liberty of action on condition of respecting the quality of the work.

I had already been in Africa, in 1959, in Belgian Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. With this new opportunity to visit the African continent, I supervised various case studies and took part in the conclusions of some of them. I remember that in Tanzania I visited the teachers' college, situated in a small town near Dar-es-Salaam, an institution whose students were chosen as researchers. They were working under the guidance of a social psychologist, who wanted to use his own method. This consisted of putting questions to people and then, after one month, putting the same questions again to the same people, so as to confirm the accuracy of the information. The students told me that when they returned the second time, the people, although they did not refuse to reply, complained, claiming that the students had returned after a month because they had forgotten all the replies.

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\(^5\) Julius Nyerere (1913-1999) was known as mwalimu (teacher). He studied at Makerere University in Uganda and in Edinburgh. He became the first president of Tanzania and was in power from 1962 to 1985. He promoted African socialism through *Ujamaa*. 
When I was in Tanzania I had a meeting with Julius Nyerere. The President invited me to tea in his house and we had a long talk. He told me, “I am reading a book in which I found your name”. I was surprised and asked him the name of the book. It turned out to be a biography of Camilo Torres and we started to discuss the situation in Latin America. Then, we talked about Tanzania, where they were putting into practice Ujamaa, and the development communities that had been encouraged by Nyerere himself. Finally, we talked about the Church. It was before Vactican Council II. He found that all the titles were really useless: for the cardinals, Your Eminence; for the Bishops, Your Excellency, and so on. He said, “When the constitutional Assembly of the United States discussed how to refer to the President, they ended by calling him ‘Mr. President’. Why can't they do something like that in the Church?”

Professor Egbert de Vries and I wrote the synthesis of the research. During this period, I often went to the Institute for Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague and the collaboration was very fruitful. Finally we presented the results of our work respectively to the Holy See in Rome, and the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

As a result, a number of books were published. In India, a national seminar was organized to discuss the results, with the participation of the Minister of Education; the author of the governmental report on higher education; and Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay. One of the two books produced was dedicated to the structure of Christian higher education and its geographical distribution throughout the country, and the other was the first yearbook on Christian higher education in India.

It is difficult to assess the impact of this effort. There was no real tradition for empirical studies in the churches, and less reflection even on the real social function of its socio-cultural activities. Almost everything was based on good will and intentions, with a view of social reality that was often ingenuous. The simple fact of carrying out a sociological study was seen by some as an aggression. Nor

6 Cardinal Valerian Gracias (1900-1978) was Archbishop of Bombay (Mumbai) in 1950. He was President of the Episcopal Conference of India.
was there discussion of the relationships between the religious institutions and economic and political powers, because religious ends were by definition positive (the will of God) and an individual commitment at the service of the institution was seen as mediation for salvation. Hence, the social action of the Churches could not be called into question. In spite of its limitations therefore, this survey posed the principle of a critical interpretation, but it also revealed the high level of dedication of many men and women involved in these projects.

Moving to a Marxist Approach in Sociology

During the years of contacts with various Asian peoples and cultures, I was deeply impressed by Eastern culture and especially by Buddhism. I wanted to study this philosophy and religion, in particular, even if officially it did not involve a belief in God. I thus decided in the 1970s to choose a Buddhist society, Sri Lanka (at the time it was still known as Ceylon), as the subject of my Ph.D. I worked very intensively for two years carrying out field work with Geneviève Lemercinier during the university vacations, which enabled me to get closer to this world, to read many books, to visit temples and get to know its monks.

I discovered that Buddhism was a very rich cultural religious system, with deep human content and a profound spirituality. First, it maintained the Hindu tradition of close relationships with nature and a vision of it, not to be exploited or seen as commodities, but as something to be admired. This is evident from its traditional symbols, such as flowers (particularly the lotus) and the moon. Of course the basis for this was the geographical region where the religion was practised: natural surroundings are determinant in the organization of daily life and the moon was observed to calculate the time. In addition, I was very attracted by the tradition of ‘compassion’, a relationship that involved much affection. All this was very different to what I was used to and it impressed me very much. I met friends in Asia who were saying that they were both Christians and Buddhists at the same time. Basically I am in agreement and I do not consider that there is a fundamental contradiction but rather a certain complementarity.
It is true that there have been deviations in the Buddhist tradition, for example individualism. It is a ‘religious’ philosophy that tends to concentrate strongly on the individual and personal salvation, which is very evident in its temples. Even so, social aspects still persist, although they are not so well known and have been less formulated into an organized and articulated social ethic, because Buddhism has only recently entered into direct confrontation with capitalism. Except for the colonial regimes linked with capitalism this occurred only in the last fifty years, whereas Christianity has had to confront it for two centuries. In fact, in Asia the Buddhists reacted more strongly against political domination than economic exploitation. It is also necessary to recognize that Buddhism had been closely linked to pre-colonial political power in Sri Lanka as well as in Thailand, Cambodia and Burma –a little less in Vietnam and China– and as it happened with Christianity, this changed its original perspective. The link with the political system encouraged the instrumentalization of religion for legitimization purposes. This is why I called my thesis *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*.

My doctoral studies and experiences of the last years of the 1970s led me to adopt a Marxist sociological approach and method of analysis. There were two reasons for this. First, it was because of the contact with the Marxists and the practical experience of social struggles. Through my contacts with the European working class and after my 1954 travels in Latin America, I had seen communism as something that should not be spread particularly because of its atheism. However, I gradually reached an intermediary position in which, although I did not share a communist perspective, at least I did not see its ideology as the work of the devil, as was the case in my own social milieu and in the religious tradition of my training. Later, I had a more objective discovery of Marxism through my practical relationships with communists in Belgium, in particular as concerns the Vietnam War.

Jean Verstappen⁷ introduced me to the Belgium-Vietnam Friendship Association and was a Christian and a senator of

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⁷ Jean Verstappen was born in Brussels in 1923. Member of the communist party, he was a senator for the Wallon Popular Movement. He founded and became secretary of the Belgian-Vietnam Association.
the Communist Party; and especially Isabelle Blume—who was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize—and who was not a theoretician but a great popular leader. I was with her at the end of the 1970s at a meeting in Khartoum in solidarity with the struggles of the Portuguese colonies. We had a real friendship and I was the last person to see her alive in her hospital bed in Brussels. Sharing the values of justice with communists was an existential experience. Disagreements did not prevent taking common action.

I had contradictory impressions of the communist countries. On the one hand I found that the social and cultural objectives were set much higher than was acknowledged in the West and this showed a political concern for the general welfare of the whole population. I also learnt that no socialist regime had been able to develop without carrying out wars against its adversaries. And as we know, war is the worst enemy of socialism as it leads to centralization, authoritarianism and foreign policies of protection or retaliation.

In Eastern Europe and particularly in the Soviet Union, I witnessed the enormous human and material cost of the Second World War to their country: it was not only the Western allies that had defeated fascism as we thought at home. But also, the socialist bloc supported the emancipation of the African colonies, the struggle against apartheid, Cuba’s sovereignty, the Vietnamese resistance, the great movement of emancipation from colonialism and imperialism. It would of course be very naïve to believe that all this was only motivated by altruistic feelings for there were also State and geostrategic interests. However, in fact, for these struggles, this support had been essential.

The conflict between the Soviet Union and China was not only ideological and its consequences on international solidarity were fatal in Indochina and in Africa. Nevertheless I am sure that without the socialist countries, the struggles of the people of the South

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8 Isabel Blume (1892-1975), born in a Protestant environment, became a socialist and feminist militant and fought against fascism. In 1964 she joined the Belgian communist party and was president of the World Peace Council from 1966 to 1969.

9 The Lenin Peace Prize was awarded annually by the Soviet Union to those who contributed to the cause of peace. Isabel Blume received it in 1953.
would have been crushed for much longer and that I discovered in practice too.

However, inside these countries, in spite of important social achievements, I noticed the weight of bureaucracy that, together with ideological dogmatism, not only paralyzed many activities but hindered social and political dynamism. Accentuated by the fear of external aggression, it gave rise to a repressive system.

I was rebelling against the hypocrisy of the West, the great defender of human rights and at the same time exploiter of the work and wealth of the South, posing as protector of religion and identifying with Christianity, which was using war and violence to preserve its interests. All that made me consider favourably what its adversaries were saying. Of course I did not identify socialism with the Kingdom of God, knowing that ambiguity is part of the human condition (what Christian tradition calls original sin). But the problem is not to seek unambiguous situations, as these do not exist, but rather to choose between the ambiguities.

Clearly this is a dangerous exercise and it is all too possible to make mistakes. According to the reference points and to the social commitment, one’s practical judgement can get out of balance. In this way, the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe revealed the extent of the internal contradictions. But it also enabled the neoliberal hegemony to convince most of the people, both inside and outside the ex-socialist countries, that capitalism was superior, even though the advantages of the previous system had been lost, like free access to education, health, full employment. However, one does not live by bread alone.

I thought that, as in spite of the Inquisition I was still a Catholic, so the mistakes and crimes of the Soviet regime would not prevent me from being socialist. Many exchanges that I had with Marxist intellectuals showed the difference between Marx’s thinking and the achievements of socialism, which some Western intellectuals called ‘actually existing socialism’. Marx’s positions should not be considered as valid for all time, for they were obviously related to a certain historical moment, but it is important to recognize the relevance of his criticism of capitalism and his vision of a society freed from the social relations of exploitation. As in many other cases, his thinking was institutionalized and became fossilized,
creating political and social roles that had their own interests, wanting to reproduce themselves rather than conveying the message. This also happens with many religions.

The second reason to adopt a Marxist approach in sociology was the fact that, as my studies progressed on Buddhism in the pre-capitalist society of Sri Lanka, I saw that functionalism—although I had used it quite a lot in my sociological work—had its limitations in explaining socio-religious realities. The society I was studying had to organize, as in all societies, the production of its material means of subsistence. Religion, in this case Buddhism, formed part of the culture—that part which referred to a post-historical reality and dominated the ideological scene. Nevertheless, culture could not be explained by religion alone. I found that functionalism does not show neither for whom and how these societies were organized, nor the function of culture—particularly religion—in this process. This approach could certainly produce a good description of the reality and some understanding of the social mechanisms related to the role of religions, but it was unable to give a real explanation of what was happening.

Although in Louvain I had had some excellent classes in Marxism from Professor Grégoire, it was above all in Sri Lanka that I began to read Marx’s texts with real interest. I began considering that it could furnish explanations better than those provided by functionalism. This was particularly the case when I read the Grundrisse.\textsuperscript{10} It convinced me that the Marxist approach was more useful for my objectives as it enabled me to go much further in my research—as long as that I did not treat it as a dogma, but as a constant source of elaborating hypotheses of explanation.

In order to understand the dominant role of Buddhism in the various stages of the history of Sri Lankan society it was necessary to study social and political relationships. There had to be a reason for the legitimization by religious references of power relationships and this had to be investigated. The contribution made by the theoretical approach of Marxism was that social relationships

\textsuperscript{10} The work by Karl Marx which was also known as the Foundations of the Critique of the Political Economy.
were built in function of the way that societies organized the material basis of their subsistence. Without falling into a paralyzing determinism, it was therefore important to carry out the study at this level of reality.

In other words, the Marxist perspective made this approach necessary also for a sociological study of religion. No aspect of social life exists on its own: it is part of a whole and requires a holistic view if it is to be studied. Moreover, the historical dimension is essential to understand the origin of the phenomena. Finally the dialectic aspect of Marxist thinking was helping to conceive society, not as a structural monolith, but as an interaction between actors building structures and conditioned by them, but also capable of transforming them. This is what I tried to show in my book Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka, which was published in 1974.

Of course, entering into the field of Marxism caused some conflicts. The first was how to use it without embracing atheism. This is one of the problems that I had to discuss in depth with numerous Marxists, in Asia, Latin America and Europe. Some thought it was not possible to be a Marxist and a believer. Historical materialism would not allow it, as the director of the institute of scientific atheism in Moscow told me with great conviction. This was the position of various philosophers. While I was preparing an issue of Social Compass on the theme of Marxism and Religion, together with Pedro Vuscovic, who had been a minister under Allende, I found that Marx, taking his distance from the disciples of Feuerbach, did not consider that atheism was a sine qua non condition for socialism. For him, this position was ‘a back-to-front theological discourse’. It was important to study the actual role of religions as in certain situations it could be an obstacle to the social emancipation of subordinate groups and a legitimization of unequal class relationships.

Already back in the 1950s the Dominican fathers of Brussels, who had a publishing house, had asked me to write the preface

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11 Salvador Allende (1908-1973) was a medical doctor. He was supported by the Unidad Popular and was the socialist president of Chile from 1970 to 1973 when he was overthrown by General Augusto Pinochet.
to a book of the French philosopher Jean Lacroix\textsuperscript{12} entitled \textit{L'humanisme marxiste}. It explained what this philosophy was, showing that it corresponded to a real humanism and not only to atheism as was generally believed in Catholic circles.

But this then posed the problem of the relevance of the Marxist approach in studying the field of religion, particularly in pre-capitalist societies. Marx had studied the transition of pre-capitalist societies to capitalist ones and the transformation of traditional societies to modern ones. It was interesting to enquire into the role of religions in this process. For lack of analytical knowledge, religion in pre-capitalist societies was strongly linked both to an explanation of how nature worked and to the legitimization of social relationships, the latter being partly also because of the absence of tools to analyze them.

Religions functioned as an ideology in societies where the class or the power relationships were not justified by mutual exchange of services. Thus, if one gradually eliminated religion as the explanation both of the relationships with nature and the social relationships, what remained? At this rate—it was a thesis rather broadly defended—a logical evolution would lead to the end of religion.

Nevertheless, identifying religion with its social functions meant reducing the reality. In fact even in a world where the thinking is analytical (modern), where the causes of these natural and social phenomena are to be found in their respective fields, there are believers among the intellectuals.

At least, it was not automatic that people lost their faith when entering into an analytical culture. The coexistence of two ways of thinking could not be dismissed as just backwardness or schizophrenia. Clearly there could be many hypotheses as to why this is so but my argument was that the explanation of relationships with nature and of social relationships was not the only function of religion, even seen from a sociological viewpoint. It was also a response to more general problems, such as, what is the meaning of the universe? What is the meaning of mankind? What is the origin and end purpose of life? Are these cultural sequences different from the two preceding elements?

\textsuperscript{12} Jean Lacroix (1900-1986) A French Catholic philospher who founded the review \textit{Esprit}, a humanist philosophy particularly based on the works of the young Marx.
I developed these ideas in my book *The Sociology of Religion*, which was the content of the course that I gave in Louvain. After having been given in Havana, through a Cuban initiative this course was turned into a book that had various editions between 1986 and 2013 in Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Nicaragua and South Korea. The work adopted a Marxist approach to study religion sociologically and showed that it did not necessarily lead to atheism. For me it was important, not only from an intellectual perspective, but also for an existential reason of personal faith. It is clear that a sociologist, like any other intellectual, can abandon religious faith through the adoption of scientific rationality. I had sociologist colleagues who practically said to me, “You are not reasonable, still believing in all these things. How can a sociologist be a believer?” An important reason to tackle this question was that my experience of all these years had created a major objective for me, which was to reconcile socialism with Christian faith.

Even if I had a critical attitude for the way in which Catholicism, Protestantism and other religions treated social situations, I also reproached the socialism that had developed with an atheistic philosophical perspective. I could understand the historical and sociological viewpoints but at the same time I considered that atheism was a huge obstacle for the development of socialism, especially among the masses who were believers. It was not only an intellectual problem, but a political one and, in the end, a social one. Due to this I wanted to work in socialist countries like Cuba and Vietnam where I sincerely supported —although often critically— the social and political processes that were taking place, but at the same time I maintained, both to the believers and to the militant socialists, that it was possible to combine both convictions. For this reason I was attracted to Sandinismo that affirmed “There is no contradiction between Revolution and Christianity”; as well as, later on, to the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, which was in no way against a religious faith perspective.

I discovered the political dimension of this problem particularly when I was with the Buddhist and Hindu popular leaders in Asia. Many Marxists in India and Sri Lanka were intellectuals from the middle classes (petit bourgeois, according to a classic expression but this is too pejorative). They were quite rational and depreciated
religion, believing that to be a good socialist it was necessary to be an atheist. This attitude was a fundamental obstacle in penetrating the religious popular masses of the continent. In China and in North Vietnam it was rather different because religion did not have such a central role in social construction as, for example, in India, Sri Lanka or the Philippines.

There was a similar situation in European societies, where the YCW, among other Catholic movements, was fundamentally anti-socialist. This was because at that time the socialists, even many social-democrats, were not merely anti-clerical, but anti-religious. One could understand it, given the social history and the fact that the worker’s struggles had seen the Church as an obstacle and a class enemy. Nevertheless I saw no contradiction between holding a religious faith, which was my personal case and having a Marxist socialist perspective. Unfortunately, the socialist countries had adopted atheism as a ‘State religion’ and marginalized (and sometimes persecuted) the believers and not always because many of them were identified with preceding oppressive regimes.

Some media describe me as a ‘Marxist priest’, which I had never personally declared myself to be for the simple reason that most people would not understand what that means. For many, indeed, it signifies someone close to ‘dictatorial regimes, violent movements, materialist philosophies’; in other words, the opposite to what one would expect from a believer, so one can understand their astonishment. It is useless to provoke people. When, in many interviews, I was questioned about this, I explained the meaning that it had for me, without denying one or the other.

When I was working at the United Nations in New York, in 2009, I lunched with two economists, members of the group of ‘radical economists’\textsuperscript{13} from the New School. They were with their two daughters, the older one being ten years old and the father tried to explain to her that I was a ‘Marxist priest’. The girl replied,

\textsuperscript{13} Radical political economy was a school of thought with a Marxist orientation that developed after the Second World War around economists such as Paul Sweezy, Paul Baran and Ernest Mandel. They wrote in publications such as \textit{The Monthly Review} and the \textit{New Left Review}. They had great influence on the thinking of the left in the United States and Latin America.
“If I understand correctly, it is like a ‘radical economist’”. She had understood with a lot of humour that in the two cases there was a certain contradiction in the use of terms that could be overcome. However, not everyone has this reaction.

To use the tools for analyzing society proposed by Marx and his hypothesis of the theoretical explanation of the functioning of society never seemed to be contradictory with my religious faith. On the contrary, this meant looking at society with the eyes of someone from below, an attitude that obviously precedes the scientific focus and which is perfectly coherent with the perspective of the Gospel that opted for the poor. Sharing the emancipatory ideas of the future of the classes oppressed by the capitalist system and developing a Utopia as a possible objective never seemed to me to be in contradiction with the search for the values of the Kingdom of God, such as they were expressed by Jesus.

Clearly such a position came into conflict with the position of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, when he was the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. As concerns Liberation Theology, he wrote that the adoption of Marxist analysis inevitably led to atheism. This did not correspond either to my personal experience, or to the reality. It did not worry me unduly as I remembered that Thomas Aquinas, now considered as the most orthodox theologian, had had serious difficulties with the Roman authorities for having adopted the philosophy of Aristotle as a reference for his philosophy.

In a word, I can say that the Christian faith led me to the Marxist analysis and that it was the best way of helping me to keep my faith. The search for an appropriate tool for looking at society through the eyes of the oppressed was a requirement of Christian faith. The critical sociological approach helped me to relativize both the role of the religious institution and the ideological function of Christianity in the history of social class relationships, without accusing the original Christian message for being the cause of these contradictions.

The Vatican Council II was a phenomenon that formed part of the Great Transformation, in the cultural sense. Christianity had marked European culture for some 20th centuries. The Protestant reform was an adaptation to modernity in the 16th century. In spite of various other adaptations in Catholicism, the position of the
Church hierarchy refused modernism as being dangerous for the faith and because of its constant reference to the feudal structures of social organization. Up to the middle of the 20th century, all ecclesiastical functions were conditioned by those with anti-modernist convictions. The Vatican Council II adopted a series of measures (the vernacular language in liturgy, a less hierarchical conception of the Church, the role of the lay communities, etc.) that conformed quite closely to the spirit of the Reform.

Thus this evolution corresponded to the ‘broad cycle’ of the cultural changes that in the religious field meant that they were extended for a longer period because they dealt with matters that were linked with the advantages of salvation that were considered as essential. There was a critical acceptance of modernity, with certain optimism, a strong criticism of capitalism and its cultural consequences (individualism, economicism, social injustice, etc.) but at the same time a firm conviction of the relevance of the faith in the changing world. In the inside, this provoked an institutional resistance that led to a period of 30 years of restoration.
CHAPTER IX: 
THE TRICONTINENTAL CENTRE (CETRI)

Institutionalization of Intellectual, Social 
and Political Solidarity

In 1968 the Flemish student movement made it necessary to establish the Francophone university out of Louvain, which was a Flemish town; it was decided to build a new university town in the Francophone part of the country, at 35 kilometres to the south of Brussels, which was called Louvain-la-Neuve. In the early 1970s, the Catholic University of Louvain had already been re-structured into two institutions, one Flemish and the other Francophone, although with only one rector, who was Monsignor Descamps. Because it was a national institution, the Socio-Religious Research Centre was bilingual; with this change its team of researchers also had to be separated linguistically.

The seat of the Centre in the old town of Louvain had so much space that it was possible to undertake non-academic activities. However, when it moved to the city of Louvain-la-Neuve bringing together its teaching, research and administration, we had only three or four offices. Besides, now the position of the academic administration was very conservative—a reaction against the events of May 1968—and it had no sympathy at all with the kind of para-university activities that were developed at the centre.

For these reasons, in order to continue the work of support for the social struggles in the South, it was necessary to find a place

1 Monsignor Albert Descamps (1913-1980) was professor of theology at the Catholic University of Louvain and also Rector from 1962 to 1968. He was Bishop of Tournai (1968) and President of Pax Christi.
that was independent of the university. This was the reason to develop the idea to create an autonomous institution in Louvain-la-Neuve, which could function as a centre for documentation, research and publications, and could lodge postgraduate students and researchers from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

My father had died a few years previously and I had received part of the family inheritance; but it was not enough to construct the building. Then my mother helped me not only in topping up the funds necessary for the work, but also in a more practical way. She was concerned with the construction and undertook certain aspects of this work, negotiating with the architect and the builders, thus liberating me from the task. She brought some furniture from our house and bought other items. She hired a little lorry and had them transported to the new building. Still today CETRI has some objects from our household.

Thus, with the support of my mother and the help of friends it was possible to construct the building and pay the costs within a few years. Then, in 1976, the Tricontinental Centre (CETRI) was opened. Its name was inspired by the Tricontinental Conference that had taken place ten years previously in Havana.

Activities

Although we did not have much in the way of documentation to start with, it soon started to pile up until we had some 400 reviews and bulletins from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Very shortly we did not have enough space to accommodate them all. Luckily at that time a colleague, Michel Molitor,\(^2\) Dean of the Economic, Political and Social Sciences Faculty at the University was much in favour of our activities and he proposed setting up the documentation centre in the library of his faculty. This was great because, apart from giving us this space, it was a strategic place for meeting with students and other users of our materials.

Many activities took place throughout CETRI’s history. The centre organized its own seminars and also acted as a centre for

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\(^2\) Michel Molitor, a sociologist, was born in Brussels. He became Vice Rector of the Catholic University of Louvain.
other events of international importance. For example, it had been the venue for the first meeting between the guerrillas and senators of the Philippines in the 1970s; as a result of which there was a negotiated accord and the decision was taken not to renew the agreement on the US military bases in that country.

In the 1980s, CETRI hosted for two years the European base of the popular resistance movement in El Salvador. It disposed of a large room and its members could come and go independently, organizing meetings in the greatest of discretion. The presence of foreigners did not attract attention as Louvain-le-Neuve is a very cosmopolitan town.

CETRI was also the headquarters, in 2007 and 2008, of preparatory meetings of a working group on Bolivia’s access to the sea. Academics from universities in Chile, Peru and Bolivia were involved in the final meeting. This project, which was later organized and financed by the University of Louvain thanks to Michel Molitor, produced a significant document entitled *Acta Lovaniensis*. It made various concrete proposals to resolve an old problem dating back to a century ago and which was a considerable obstacle in Latin American integration. I had the opportunity of speaking with Evo Morales\(^3\) in La Paz on the subject and he was very grateful for the contribution of these meetings.

In 1994 CETRI founded a quarterly review, *Alternatives Sud*. Its basic purpose was to transmit critical thinking from the South; for this reason it only publishes writers from Asia, Africa and Latin America. This contrasts with the position of the North that gives the impression that the South is bereft of ideas and initiatives, when in reality the exact opposite is the case. For several years the review has also facilitated the organization of international seminars on the themes that it has featured.

Since it was inaugurated up until 2015, CETRI has lodged almost 400 postgraduate students from the three continents of the South. They include Rafael Correa,\(^4\) President of Ecuador when he was

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\(^3\) Evo Morales was born in 1959 in Bolivia and is of Uru-Aymara origin. He became President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in 2006 as leader of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party.

\(^4\) Rafael Correa Delgado was born in 1963 in Guayaquil, Ecuador. He was an economics student at the Catholic University of Louvain and at the
studying economics; Monsignor Lebulu, Archbishop of Arusha in Tanzania, who was the president of the Episcopal Conference of East Africa; Georges Casmoussa, Bishop of Mosul in Iraq; numerous leaders of social movements in Asia and Latin America; liberation theologians; researchers in various disciplines ranging from sociology to agronomy, future political leaders in Africa and Latin America. The cohabitation among Christians of various churches (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox), Muslims, Buddhists and atheists (communists) has been particularly enriching, a school of tolerance and brotherhood. It was a privilege for me to live among them.

CETRI always had many difficulties in finding the funds for its activities. The Belgian government offered grants with very specific objectives and it was necessary to obtain approval from a committee. From the beginning we tried to get subsidies and research contracts from other institutions and to receive donations. For this reason, for a long time it was not possible to pay for full-time collaborators.

In the 1990s the Belgian Ministry for Cooperation recognized CETRI as a body that contributes to education for development; as a consequence, it gradually started to support the projects being carried out by the centre, especially the documentation and the Alternatives Sud Journal. Thanks to Luxembourg cooperation and its director Jean Feyder, who later on became ambassador to the

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5 Monsignor Jozaphat Louis Lebulu. Born in Tanzania in 1942, he took a degree in sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain. He was Bishop of Samé in 1979 and Archbishop of Arusha in 1997. He became president of the Episcopal Conference of East Africa.

6 Georges Casmoussa was born in Iraq in 1938. He obtained a degree in sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain. Director of the periodical *Christian Origins*. In 1999 he became Archbishop of the Siriac Catholic Church and in 2010 he was transferred to the Siriac Patriarchy in Beirut, Lebanon.

7 Jean Feyder has a doctorate in law. He was a member of the Luxemburg mission to the UN in Geneva. Author of the book *La faim tue (Hunger Kills)*,
UN in Geneva, we were able to obtain three important contracts for the study of the social movements and alter-globalization in cooperation with the World Forum of Alternatives, which I will refer later on. This support lasted at least four to five years and made it possible to create a younger team to guarantee the continuity of the work, a decision I would like to have taken ten years earlier, but which was not possible for lack of funds.

Belgian Cooperation support was very demanding from the administrative viewpoint. When I was director of CETRI I had to spend much precious times just writing reports, responding to questionnaires and attending to many other administrative matters. It is the same, even worse, for Bernard Duterme\textsuperscript{8} who succeeded me as director. The bureaucracy is so heavy that it sometimes seems as if it were swamping the work. However, the advantage of Belgian Cooperation support has been such –at least up until now– that in no way it interferes with the content of our work; in other words, we have had real autonomy in our production. They are rigorous in monitoring the management, but it is a kind of financial administrative control, not an ideological one. Because of this solid basis, we were able to accept other contracts and extend our work to other aspects of the reality of the South, such as the climate, deforestation, agro-energy, relationships with the North and resistance movements. Previously we had not been able to tackle these themes in a systematic way.

For CETRI’s 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, in September 1996, we held a seminar on the concept of ‘Development’, with a first session that took place in the European Parliament. Among the participants there were distinguished personalities such as the Nicaraguan poet and sculptor Ernesto Cardenal, who made for CETRI a sculpture of the Zanate (the Great-Tailed Grackle), the national

\begin{footnote}
he has recently been involved in the campaigns against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States and the European Union. He is also active in the cause of Palestine.
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Bernard Duterme is a sociologist from the Catholic University of Louvain and a member of Entraide et Fraternité (the cooperation body of the Belgian Episcopal Conference) and is particularly concerned with Guatemala and Chiapas (Mexico). Author of a book on the Zapatistas and director of the review \textit{Alternatives Sud}.
\end{footnote}
bird of Nicaragua; the Salvadoran commander Schaffic Handal\(^9\) of the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN); the Egyptian economist Samir Amin; Pablo González Casanova,\(^{10}\) the Mexican sociologist, former rector of the National Autonomous University; and the African theologian Jean-Marc Ela.\(^{11}\)

To have our first session in the European Parliament we obtained the support from Bernard Kouchner\(^{12}\) of the French Socialist Party, who was then President of the Development Committee of the European Parliament. The session was presided over by Marga

\(^9\) Shaffic Handal (1930-2006) was the son of Palestinian emigrants. He obtained a law degree at the University of Chile and was Secretary of the Communist Party. Exiled to Guatemala, he became Comandante Simon in the Salvadoran guerrillas, then participated in the peace negotiations. He opposed Villalabos (another commander) for his social democrat stance. He was leader of the Frente Farabundo Martí at the Chamber of Deputies. There were 100,000 people at his funeral.

\(^10\) Pablo González Casanova was born in 1922 in Toluca (Mexico). He studied sociology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and at Paris University. He exercised various academic functions in his own country and in other Latin American countries. He became Rector of UNAM and director of its Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in the Sciences and Humanities. A believer in the social commitment of scientists, he has written sociological reflections on the fundamental concepts of social sciences and numerous other works, including a study on democracy in Mexico, and is a regular contributor of La Jornada, a leading Mexican newspaper. He actively supports the Zapatistas and Cuba.

\(^11\) Jean Marc Ela (1936-2008), a Cameroonian priest. He studied sociology in Strasbourg and at the Sorbonne. He had a historical approach to sociology and theology and contributed to Liberation Theology from an African viewpoint. He taught at the Catholic University of Louvain. He spent a sad exile in Quebec after the assassination of the Cameroonian theologian Englebert Mveng, S.J. in 1995. In Quebec he taught at Laval University.

\(^12\) Bernard Kouchner was born in Avignon in 1939. A medical doctor; he cofounded Doctors without Borders and afterwards Médecins du Monde. He was a member of the French Communist Party but resigned, joining the French Socialist Party and promoting the concept of ‘humanitarian intervention’. He supported the US invasion of Iraq. Member of the European Parliament. He represented the United Nations in Kosovo. In 2010 he became a member of the Sarkozy government and was expelled from the Socialist Party. He has been described as the 15th out of the 50 most influential Jews in the world.
Alvoet\textsuperscript{13} of the Flemish Green Party (GROEN), a former official of a development NGO with whom we had collaborated. A discreet presence was that of the Minister for Belgian Cooperation, from the Social Christian Party, as well as friends from the European left-wing group. It was an interesting political mixture, revealing something of the European reality, but it did not prevent us from defending radical views.

On this occasion Ernesto Cardenal received the Culture and Development prize, instituted by CETRI, from the hands of Philippe Moureaux,\textsuperscript{14} a former Socialist minister who had been President of the French Community of Belgium at the time when Ernesto visited this country as Minister for Culture in Nicaragua. His sculpture of the Zanate\textsuperscript{15} was inaugurated in front of the building of CETRI in the presence of the Governor of the Brabant Wallon province, the socialist Valmy Feaux,\textsuperscript{16} acting mayor of Louvain Jacques Benthuys, and other participants in the seminar. A Latin American musical event was held that evening in the cultural centre of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve. The rest of the seminar was held in the University of Louvain.

In 2001, for our 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, we organized another celebration, this time with the former president of Algeria, Ahmed Ben Bella,\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{itemize}
\item Marga Alvoet is coordinator of the Green Party in Flanders and member of the Belgian government.
\item Philippe Moureaux, born in Brussels in 1939, is a historian and a professor at the Free University of Brussels. He was a socialist minister and author of the 1981 law against racism and xenophobia. He was president of the French Community of Belgium and Minister of State.
\item Zanatillo is the emblematic bird representing Nicaragua. It is black and Ernesto Cardenal called it the ‘proletarian bird’ as it is not glossy.
\item Valmy Feaux was born in 1933 in the Wallonian Brabant (Belgium). He is a sociologist and was a professor at the Free University of Brussels. He became a socialist minister and he authored a study on the Great Strike of 1960/1961. He became governor of Wallonian Brabant.
\item Ahmed Ben Bella (1916-2012). Born in Maghnia, Algeria. He participated in the Italian campaign during the Second World War and also fought at the battle of Monte Cassino. Co-founder of the national liberation front, he was arrested by the French for his nationalist activities. First president of independent Algeria, from 1963 to 1965, he was overthrown by Boumediène. He was exiled to Switzerland and returned to Algeria in
\end{itemize}
a key figure in the whole liberation process of the Third World; Maurice Godelier, the French Marxist anthropologist who had inspired much of the work of the socio-religious research centre and of CETRI; Dr. Vittorio Agnoletti, organizer of the G8 Counter Summit in Genoa, who later became a member of the European Parliament for the Communist Refoundation Party of Italy.

In May 2016 the 40th anniversary of CETRI was celebrated in Brussels. Some 300 people participated, including Samir Amin, who came from Dakar. The main theme discussed was, *Is the notion of North/South relationships obsolete?* An issue of the *Alternatives Sud* journal coordinated by François Polet had been dedicated to this subject with contributions from Samir and myself among other authors. It was felt that the transversal problems at the universal level –climate change, gender, culture– were more than ever relevant because they affected all humanity.

Two panels were organized. The first had representatives from the continents of the Global South: Aminata Traoré, Marietta

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18 Maurice Godelier was born in northern France in 1934. After studies at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in philosophy and psychology he founded economic anthropology. He was an assistant of Claude Lévy Strauss. He was director of studies at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences and directed the department of human sciences at the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). His anthropological studies were carried out in Papua New Guinea on the Baruya ethnic group. He has published numerous books, including one on ‘the ideal and the real’ and ‘the making of great men’. He is a Doctor *Honoris Causa* at the Catholic University of Louvain.

19 Vittorio Agnoletti was born in Milan in 1958. A medical doctor, he is professor at the Advanced Health Institute in Rome, specializing in AIDS. He was a member of the Proletarian Democratic Party of Milan from 1983 to 1989. Organizer of the Social Forum in 2002 at Genoa against the G8. Member of the European Parliament representing the Italian Communist Refoundation Party.

20 A worldwide movement of struggle against the hegemony of the G8 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United States, United Kingdom) because of their respective economic, political and military powers

21 Aminata Traoré (Bamako, 1947A). She is a Doctor of Social Psychology from the University of Caen (France) and is a researcher on social sciences
Svampa; 22 Shalmali Guttal; 23 Zahri Ali. 24 The second brought together professors and researchers from countries of the Global North such as Christophe Ventura; 25 Geneviève Azam; 26 Arnaud Zacharie; 27 and Guy Bajoit. 28

After hearing the testimonies, the participants were of the opinion that the inequality between the North and the South had not only continued but in some cases it was more intense than ever. Evidently the North/South theory should be made more precise since it is the centre-periphery relationships within the capitalist system that become more acute with the ‘financialization’ of the world economy and have caused a series of wars to control energy resources and raw materials. The conclusions emphasized the cultural colonization that has led the South into following in the footsteps of the North with the destruction of nature and the development of a sacrificial economy which, in the name of economic growth, has without doubt brought about the deaths

as well as qualified in psychopathology. She has worked for different African and international organizations, was Minister for Culture of Mali from 1997 to 2000. She is a professor at the Ethnosociology Institute at the University of Avivan in Ivory Coast and is also an “alterworld” militant.

Marietta Svampa (Argentina, 1961-). She is a philosophy graduate from the National University of Córdoba and a Doctor of Sociology from the School for Higher Studies on Social Sciences of Paris. She is a Full Professor at the National University of La Plata and a researcher at CONICET. She has authored numerous articles and books and is a social movement activist.

Shalmali Guttal: She is an Indian activist and intellectual, and the executive director of Focus on the Global South (Center for the Global South) in Bangkok. She has published papers on development, trade, investment, land and common goods.

Zahra Ali: researcher of Iraqi origin and French nationality. She deals with questions of gender and racism in relation to Islam.

Christophe Ventura: researcher and specialist in Latin America. Journalist of Mémoires des Luttes, from Paris

Geneviève Azam: Ecologist and alterworld militant. Professor of Economy and researcher at the University of Toulouse II, France. Member of Attac France.

Arnaud Zacharie: General Secretary of the National Center for Cooperation to Development, Belgium.

Guy Bajoit (Belgium, 1937A): Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain. Director of CETRI.
of millions of people. Any reflection on North/South relationships cannot avoid tackling the need for a new paradigm for the collective life of humanity and of the planet.

An Exceptional Colleague: Geneviève Lemercinier

Geneviève Lemercinier was very active in CETRI, where she worked on the accounts as a volunteer. She was a good administrator. As a researcher at the university she had specialized in research methodology and in particular in statistical methods like factorial analysis. Together we undertook dozens of studies. These included two for Unesco, one on Energy and Culture and the other, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, concerning the way in which human rights were conceived in non-Western cultures. Geneviève also adopted Marxism as a methodological and theoretical approach in sociology. She was politically totally committed to the liberation movements and social struggles of the popular classes.

She had a strong character and sometimes came into conflict with other people. On some occasions she made the work difficult because she was quite exclusive; she did not like other people working at the same level of collaboration with me. Actually, she was sometimes more realistic than I was in choosing collaborators. We discussed a lot between ourselves; intellectual controversies with her were very productive. She was brilliant and as she had a background in Mathematics, Biblical Sciences and had specialized in Methodology, she complemented my own training, both philosophical and theological, as well as in political sciences and sociology. It was a privilege to work with such a person.

She accompanied me to Asia when I started to work in Bangladesh. We worked together on all the socio-religious studies in Sri Lanka, where she was concerned with the history of precapitalist societies. She helped me greatly when I was doing my doctorate in the field of history and its sociological reinterpretation.

To be able to belong to the research team of Louvain University, Geneviève also needed to have a doctorate. We used the socio-religious studies requested by the Church of Kerala in order that
she could obtain her doctorate. In the same way that she had helped me when I was doing my doctorate in Sri Lanka, so also I helped her in Kerala. I was her tutor and I participated in some chapters of her thesis. It was during this whole process that she too adopted a Marxist perspective.

When she retired from the university she continued to work as a volunteer in CETRI until her death. Even as suffering from cancer she continued her duties. When we carried out our last project together, in Haiti, she was so ill that in the airports she had to use a wheelchair. She worked up until a few weeks before her death, on 11 January 1996, at the age of 76. I was able to accompany her to the end and give her the last sacrament. Her burial was most moving: it took place in the chapel of the Benedictine nuns, close to CETRI in Louvain-la-Neuve. It started off with a presentation of her life by Abraham Serfaty—a Marxist Jew who, after leaving Hassan II's prison in Morocco, spent some months in CETRI. Each of the three liturgical readings was read by students respectively from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The songs of the Peasants’ Mass of Nicaragua that she loved so much accompanied the Eucharist and the ceremony ended with Handel’s *Hallelujah Chorus*, a testimony of the deep happiness given by the hope in resurrection.

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29 Abraham Serfaty (1926-2010) was a Sephardic Jew from Morocco. He was an oil engineer and a militant communist and the French arrested him for his nationalist activities. After independence he founded a radical left-wing party and went into clandestinity. He was arrested and tortured in 1972. Imprisoned for 17 years, he was rehabilitated by Mohamad VI. He was a militant in the cause of Palestine.

30 Hassan II (1929-1999) became King of Morocco in 1962. He studied law at the University of Burdeos. His reign was marked by severe political repression and there were several attempts to overthrow him. Hassan was an ally of the United States. He annexed Western Sahara, the former Spanish colony.
PART THREE
AT THE HEART OF THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION
Before and after the Vatican Council II, I undertook numerous activities in the United States in addition to my teaching and investigation commitments in other parts of the world. I crossed the Atlantic many times, although always for short visits or during university vacations.

For years I had very close links with religious congregations in the United States. There were two kinds: the national and the international. The former depended directly on a local Bishop. The international usually had their headquarters in Europe, but with branches all over the world. Even in a country like the United States the international congregations had a relatively large autonomy vis-à-vis the Bishops in defining, among other things, the kind of apostolate to be undertaken.

Most of the female religious were working in primary schools and hospitals, although a few taught in secondary schools. This was in fact the main work of the religious congregations. Nevertheless, mainly among the superiors, a minority was intellectually and theologically well trained, anxious to revise their activities as soon

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1 The religious congregations of men and women are independent of the dioceses (apart from a few created inside a diocese). There were orders like the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans, etc., and the female equivalents, with many groups having specific objectives in the fields of education, health, social action and other fields.
as the Vatican Council II was announced. They gratefully received the news and were in favour of changes and new perspectives.

I kept contact with the Catholic groups in various parts of the United States, particularly with the progressive Catholics. Often during the Council I had met some of the US Bishops and clergy. Because of this and through my studies in Chicago I had acquired certain knowledge of English and I was often asked to give talks, above all to the assemblies of the women's religious communities, who were particularly dynamic. In general, the sisters in the United States were much more advanced than the priests.

Before the Council concluded, I was invited on various occasions by the associations of female congregations in the United States that each year organized a week of reflection and training to tackle themes like the Church in the contemporary world and the situation in Latin America. Subsequently, the invitations continued to arrive because people were interested in what was happening and to learn the results. Using my texts for these courses and lectures I published two books, *The Challenge to Change*, before the end of the Council and *The Eleventh Hour: Explosion of a Church*, as I have already mentioned, after the Council had finished.

The two books had a certain success among the North American Catholics. Each of them had print runs of some 25,000 copies. At that time it was said that the two most widely read books were those of Hans Küng and mine. Of course, mine were much more modest but they did spread around a public who, although less specialized, was interested in the internal renewal of Catholicism. I also published some articles in various journals. My experience of over a year, between 1952 and 1954, in parishes in different cities of the United States facilitated these tasks, as well as my study on the sociological aspects of Catholicism in that country.

In 1966, together with others who had participated in the Council,

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2 Hans Küng was born in Switzerland in 1928. He obtained a doctorate from the Sorbonne and became a Theology professor at the University of Tubingen. He was an expert at Vatican Council II. He criticized the infallibility of the pope. He wrote numerous scientific and popular works. He was forbidden to teach Theology by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, but he kept his position at Tubingen as director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research. He worked on a global (planetary) ethic with various other religions.
like Edward Schillebeeckx, Henry de Lubac, Yves Congar, Karl
Banner and Monsignor Ligutti, I received an honorary Doctorate
from Notre Dame University in Indiana, a teaching centre recognized
in the United States and which had considerable research facilities.
This enabled me to make contact with various academic circles. I
particularly remember being invited by the National Convention
of the Christian Family Movement in that same university. I gave
a talk about the Council to a public of 5,000 people. Later I
gave talks in other North American universities, especially about
Sociology of Religion and the socio-religious studies in Asia. I kept
contact with the diocese of Chicago thanks to Father John Egan,
who worked in the Archbishop curia on the reorganization of the
parish geography on the basis of my work in the fifties.

An interesting collaboration was established with the American
Jewish Committee\(^3\) and then I started interacting with them
with an ecumenical perspective. On several occasions I met with
the rabbi who was secretary of the organization and one
of their leaders who had been following the work of the Vatican
Council II. Out of these contacts came the idea for a study on
the relationship between Christians and Jews and the possibility
of symbolic gestures of reconciliation. It was decided to study
–in the documents and manuals of the Catholic catechism– the
references to the Jews to see if they had improved since the Vatican
Council II. We made the preparations for this work mainly in New
York but also in Paris with Zachariah Shuster,\(^4\) representative of
the Committee in Europe, who also visited Louvain several times.

In the socio-religious research centre at the University of Louvain
we selected some hundred documents from the Francophone

\(^3\) The American Jewish Committee was founded in 1906 by a group of Jews
who were concerned about the pogroms in Russia. Its mission was the
defence of minorities (also of non-Jews) and for social justice, religious
freedom, the struggle against anti-Semitism, and for tolerance. It promoted
much research in favour of equality and it did not adopt a Zionist position.
It played a role in improving Jewish and Christian relationships and
prepared the document for the Vatican on the subject in 1968. It defended
the status of Israel as a State.

\(^4\) Zachariah Schuster (1903-1986) was born in Poland. He was the director of
the European office of the American Jewish Committee and an observer
at Vatican Council II.
world, in Belgium, France, Switzerland and Canada. They were catechisms, text books, manuals, catechism courses. It was an enormous task, selecting key words, such as *Jew, Israel, Pharisee* and to see the context in which they appeared. There were hundreds of thousands of references that we digitalized, placing the words on a scale of 1 to 10 points, from -5 to +5, according to whether the connotation was positive or negative. We worked with two independent persons who had to agree on the doubtful cases. This all functioned very well. We worked with a Catholic lay person and a sister from the Congregation of Zion, the French religious congregation set up to dialogue with the Jews. At the same time we carried out a study on the image of the Jew among the students of the two last classes of secondary schools in selected countries. The aim was to find out to what extent they had interiorized the new tendency since Vatican Council II. We did the same thing with the parents, to see if they had still maintained some of their former attitudes.

We dedicated ourselves to this work for more than a year. At the end, Geneviève Lemercinier and I published a book entitled, *Les Juifs dans la catéchèse*, which showed that after the Vatican Council almost all of the negative references against Judaism had disappeared from the Catholic catechism. Anti-Semitism had been virtually eliminated, with the exception of some references to figures like, for example, the Pharisees or Judas.

When this book was published, the University of Brussels invited me to give the opening talk at the new Martin Buber Institute of Studies on Judaism, directed by a Jewish colleague, Willy Bok.

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5 Martin Buber (1878-1965) was born in Vienna. He was a philosopher influenced by Nietzsche and a member of the Zionist movement who was however opposed to Theodor Herzl, the founder. He studied the Hasidic Jewish movement and left the Zionist movement. He was professor in Jewish philosophy at the University of Frankfurt and professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He promoted dialogue with German intellectuals after the Second World War.

6 Willy Bok, a sociologist and professor at the Free University of Brussels. He was the director of the Martin Buber Institute for Jewish studies and of the centre for interdisciplinary studies on religions and laicity (CEIRL) of the Free University of Brussels.
a sociologist of religion. A few years after the research, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Arch Bishop of Paris, of Jewish origin, sent me a very appreciative letter about the work.

Nevertheless, something else emerged from the interviews—although not in the texts studied for the book. This was that the negative connotation was being displaced on to the Muslims. It was essentially for different reasons, but religion also played a basic role. The US Jewish Committee did not expect this, but it was a reality. In general, Jewish circles were very interested in this research and reacted positively to it.

**Political Encounters**

Most of the activities in which I participated in the United States were in universities, religious movements and other Catholic bodies. However I also had experiences outside Church circles, including in the political field as from the early 1960s. In Washington, by chance, I rubbed shoulders with Dr. Edgar Bergman, who had made a cardiac transplant on a dog, and who had participated in a strange scientific surgical experiment in Moscow, which was to put two heads on a dog!

Once, after having recently returned from Cuba, I was talking with Dr. Bergman. He was politically linked to the Democrats and was very interested to hear about my experiences in that island in the West Indies. As from 1962 and 1963 I had visited the country several times and I felt sympathy with the way that the situation was developing and impressed by the social and educational changes that were taking place. The Caribbean nation had declared its socialism, but in my opinion this kind of socialism was quite acceptable.

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7 Jean-Marie Lustiger (1926-2007) Born to a Jewish family from Poland who emigrated to France. He converted to Catholicism without losing his Jewish identity. His mother died in Auschwitz. He was ordained a priest in 1954. He was a university chaplain, Bishop of Orleans and then Archbishop of Paris.

8 Edgar Bergman (1920-1987) was a surgeon and an active member of the Democratic Party. He defended anti-feminist positions. He was close to Hubert Humphrey and also his physician. Professor at the University of Maryland at Baltimore.
There were some dubious aspects, but the social changes, the agrarian reform, etc., were all very effective and my impressions of the system were becoming increasingly positive. Dr. Bergman was concerned about the attitude of the United States to the country, especially as regards the embargo. He said to me: “Would you like to talk about this to Senator Humphrey?” I accepted of course. This was how I came to know Hubert Horatio Humphrey\(^9\) personally. He was then Senator for Minnesota and later became Vice President of the United States, from 1965 to 1969.

Senator Humphrey received me in Congress and I recounted the social changes that had taken place in Cuba. He showed great interest and we continued to be in touch. In spite of that, when he became Vice President there was absolutely no change in US policies on Cuba. I was very disappointed, particularly when, in a trip to India, I heard him making food aid to that country conditional on support for the US war in Vietnam.

**Vietnam War**

Around 1965 or 1966, the Belgium-Vietnam Friendship Association was created. Its President was a socialist jurist, Senator Henri Rolin\(^10\) and he named me Vice President, without my knowledge. It was true that I had been quite active on the question of the war and that must have been the reason. As Vice President of this Association, every time that the Vietnamese came to Belgium, I received them. In this way I got to know, among others, Madame Thi Binh,\(^11\) who was a member of the Southern National Liberation Front that negotiated the peace agreements in Geneva.

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9 Hubert Horacio Humphrey (1911-1978). He studied pharmacy and then political science at the University of Minnesota. Mayor of Minneapolis. He fought for civil rights and arms control. He was Vice President to Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

10 Henri Rolin (1891-1973) was a senator of the Belgian Socialist Party and a professor of international law at the Free University of Brussels. President of the Senate.

11 Thi Binh, born in South Vietnam in 1927. She was a teacher, active in the nationalist movement and imprisoned by the French. Member of the central committee of the National Liberation Front (Vietcong). After
In 1967 I was able to assist the second session of the International War Crimes Tribunal,\(^\text{12}\) which took place in Copenhagen. The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre,\(^\text{13}\) the Italian jurist Lelio Basso,\(^\text{14}\) and of course its founder the philosopher and Nobel Prize for Literature, Bertrand Russell,\(^\text{15}\) were members of the jury. On behalf of the Belgian Association I met with the delegates of the South Vietnam Liberation Front who were there to explain their position, the situation of the war and to testify about the crimes. As I had to travel to the United States a few days later, the Vietnamese delegates asked me to contact Eugene McCarthy,\(^\text{16}\) whom I had met at the beginning of the 1960s when he was Economics professor in a Catholic University in Minnesota. Now he was beginning a

\(^{12}\) An international opinion tribunal that judged human rights violations. It was founded by Italian senator Lelio Basso, member of the jury of the Russell Tribunal on the War Crimes of the United States in Vietnam. Since it was created, in 1979, the tribunal has organized over 40 sessions on different themes, such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Eritrea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Iraq, etc., as well as violations of international law, such as Nicaragua, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the multinationals, etc. The basis of the judgements, besides international law, has been the Algerian Declaration of the Rights of Peoples. The Peoples’ Permanent Tribunal is the successor to the Russell Tribunal.

\(^{13}\) Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). French philosopher of existentialism. The companion of Simone de Beauvoir. He refused to accept the Nobel Prize for Literature.

\(^{14}\) Lelio Basso (1903-1978). Italian lawyer who was imprisoned by the fascists. He specialized in the works of Rosa Luxemburg. Founder of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal. An Independent Senator on the list of the Italian Communist Party.


\(^{16}\) Eugene McCarthy (1916-2005). Professor of economics and sociology at the University of Saint Thomas at Saint Paul (Minnesota). Democratic member of the House of Representatives and then senator. He was an adversary of Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1968 presidential campaign on a programme to end the Vietnam War. He fought for nuclear disarmament and in favour of ecological protection.
campaign for his candidature for the presidency of the United States, based on putting an end to the Vietnam War. My mission was to bring to him a document with eight points on future policy that the Vietnamese were proposing. Although this information was not yet in the public domain, they wanted McCarthy to know of and use them in his campaign.

I then got into contact with McCarthy. He replied, “I fly to New York from Chicago the very day of your arrival from Europe, as I am in the Democratic Convention. We could meet at Kennedy airport, have a meal together and discuss the matter”. So I went there and passed him the documents that had been entrusted to me by the South Vietnam delegation.

Social and Capitalist Catholics

At this same time I had some Catholic friends in New York, the brother of a priest in whose parish I had stayed for a fortnight in 1954. In the late 1960s, when I was going to New York, I always stayed at his house. He and his family were very nice, typical of an upper middle class family in the New York suburbs.\(^{17}\) The father played golf with a Republican called John Mitchell,\(^{18}\) who became the chief of Richard Nixon's electoral campaign.\(^{19}\)

As I had been recently giving lectures in the United States on the war in Vietnam, he asked me if I would like to meet John Mitchell. We met one Sunday in the Country Club to eat and talk together. It was during the last weeks of the election campaign. I told him, “You must put an end to this war because it is absolutely unacceptable. Whoever becomes the new president, at the beginning of his mandate he must start taking the necessary steps without waiting any longer. He should end this war within the first three

\(^{17}\) Between 1954 and 1970 there was a political change in this kind of Catholic family who began by being Democrat but, as their economic level of living rose, became Republican.

\(^{18}\) John Mitchell (1913-1994) was a business lawyer in New York. He was director of Richard Nixon's presidential campaign and then Attorney General. He was condemned to 17 months of prison after the Watergate affair.

months of his presidency”. Mitchell replied, “No, in the first month”. Nixon became president in 1969 and the war lasted until 1975!

Mitchell had been the owner of almost the whole of Pine Island, in Cuba, and obviously did not have a good opinion about the Cuban Revolution. He was very anti-Cuban and very anti-communist. In Nixon’s cabinet he was appointed Minister of Justice. Some time later, after resigning from his post, he was imprisoned for trying to cover up the Watergate scandal.20

In those times of struggle against the Vietnam War, I met Phillip Berrigan,21 a Catholic priest who was totally dedicated to non-violent resistance and who was imprisoned several times. It was impressive the way he linked his Christian faith and his opposition to the war. Because his position conflicted with that of the highest ecclesiastical authorities and in particular that of Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York and General Chaplain to the US Army, he and his brother David, a Jesuit with a similar ethical stance, were marginalized in the Catholic Church. Nevertheless their testimony could not be ignored.

During these years I also worked with Monsignor Joseph Gremillion,22 a great friend of Monsignor Ligutti. The former was the director of social work of the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the US Caritas, an organization that had considerable means at its disposal for helping the poor in the United States and also in the Third World. There was still no development NGOs at that time, so the CRS also played this role. Gremillion had his office in the Empire State Building and each time that I visited New York I could count on having an office there. It was on

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20 The political scandal created by the raid and monitoring of the telephone lines in the Watergate building, the headquarters of the electoral campaign of the Democratic Party. President Nixon and many of his colleagues were accused of having committed illegal acts. It concluded with the resignation of Nixon in 1974.

21 Phillip Berrigan (1923-2002). A Josephite priest. He was a pacifist and a militant against the Vietnam War and against segregation. He was persecuted by the FBI and imprisoned several times.

22 Joseph Gremillion (1923-1984) An American priest, active in social works, the struggle against poverty and racism and in favour of ecumenism. He was secretary of the Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission in Rome from 1967 to 1974.
the 65th floor, or something like that, known for having been the floor where, before the war, on a very foggy day, a plane had crashed into the building and several people in this office had been killed. However, it was very practical to be able to count on having this office accommodation. Its telephones and other means of communications greatly facilitated the work and my contacts.

Once I attended a meeting, close to Central Park, in which one of the participants was Peter Grace, one of the few Catholics among the big North American capitalists. If I remember well, we were discussing the visit of Pope Paul VI to New York. After the meeting Peter Grace offered to take some of us in his car to the CRS office. I had never seen anything like it: a car as big as a ship, with a bar and a television set. He said to me, “I want to consult you on two matters. First, I am about to buy the Maurice chocolate factory in Belgium. What do you think about that?” I replied that the Maurice firm was good, but it was not the best Belgian chocolate. Then he told me that his wife was in contact with Cardinal Suenens, as she belonged to the Legion of Mary—a movement of Irish origin, very conservative in its theology, but which the cardinal greatly appreciated. He added that Suenens was a great friend of theirs and when he came to the United States he sometimes used their private plane. Then the second question came, “What do you think of the Legion of Mary?” I replied, “Personally I am not enthusiastic about it. It is a Christian conception that is very focussed on the individual and without a real social vision”. These were the two concerns that the good capitalist consulted me about. He wanted to know if his economic and social or charity investments were sufficiently profitable. Before we had time to talk about Bolivia, where I had visited a mine that belonged to him, we had reached Fifth Avenue and he left us there, while he continued to exploit people with the best conscience in the world.

Later, a US Jesuit who wanted to know more about the social situation of the mines in Bolivia got into contact with me. There were no photocopiers at that time, so that I gave him my only copy of my notes and I asked him to be sure to return it. It never came back to me. I think that when he looked at it perhaps he decided that it was best to make it disappear.
When I was in Belgium one day I received a telephone call. “I am a member of the US Embassy and I am a Catholic. I know Gene McCarthy very well”. He mentioned other names of my Catholic friends, open-minded and progressive people. He then invited me to dinner. I accepted and ate together with his wife and children, who were all very pleasant. After we had eaten he asked me to discuss a matter with him. He started by saying, “You have visited the Soviet Union three times, Poland four times, Cuba, five times. But we know that you are not a communist”. Obviously, I was surprised. He continued, “I am a member of the CIA and my job is to follow the penetration of Marxism within the European clergy. I need your collaboration. I am in contact with the Vatican. All the information that I collect I send to the Vatican Secretary of State in Rome, Cardinal Benelli.\(^{23}\) The favour I would ask you is that I want to meet Cardinal Suenens in order to give him all the information I have about the Belgian clergy. In exchange the cardinal could offer me all that he knows about the influence of Marxism among the clergy.” For him it was a duty to combat communism because of his Catholic faith.

I did not want to serve as an intermediary in this kind of business so I suggested a meeting in the English-speaking parish with the cardinal, who could certainly not object to receiving him. When I returned, it was too late at night to call Suenens; but the first thing I did the following day was to explain the situation to him and the reason for the eventual meeting. The cardinal was pleased to be forewarned about the matter, for he would never accept this kind of exchange.

Afterwards I learnt that this gentleman was indeed a friend of Gene McCarthy. In spite of his function, his perspective on the Vietnam War was critical. He considered that continuing the war was unacceptable because it was unethical. That same evening at dinner he said to me, “There is a colleague at the Brussels

\(^{23}\) Giovanni Benelli (1921-1982) was an Italian who studied at the Gregorian University in Rome. He became a Cardinal and was Archbishop of Florence from 1977 until his death. He was Secretary of State in the Roman Curia at the Vatican.
Embassy who had previously been in the Saigon embassy and he is a hawk. I would like him to meet you and I am going to invite him to discuss the Vietnam War”. A couple of weeks later we dined together and the matter was discussed, with the usual arguments of the official position of the United States. And I continued to be critical, but prudent, thinking that aggressiveness in this case would serve no purpose. I thought it better to convince him that his position was ethically mistaken. When he left, my host asked me, “Why weren’t you more emphatic?”

Some time later I met him again. As director of the socio-religious research centre I had invited a US professor of Sociology of Religion from Boston College, the Catholic university of the Jesuits, to Louvain. I had known him in at the International Conference on Sociology of Religion (ICSR) and he spent his sabbatical year with us. The day of his departure we gave him a little farewell party and this CIA gentleman turned up, without having been invited. During the reception he called me aside and asked, “Don’t you intend to return to Cuba? If so, we could pay for your journey”. Evidently I did not respond and I left it at that. A little later, when a journalist from the Belgian radio whom I knew had been kidnapped in Cambodia, I tried to get in touch with the CIA man again to see if he could do something to save him, but I did not succeed in contacting him. Afterwards I learnt that he had returned to Washington and that he worked at the CIA headquarters.

In 1968 the Catholic movement for liturgical renewal in the United States, which was very strong at that time, invited me to Washington for their national convention. As they knew my books on Vatican Council II, they had asked me to make the opening speech on the Church and Revolution in History. I documented myself on the subject. A French colleague, André Rousseau, helped me in Louvain, seeking historical texts on the French Revolution, the worker movements of the 19th century, the anti-colonial liberation groups, the Cuban Revolution, Camilo Torres, etc. I arrived at the hotel where the meeting was taking place. In the main hall several thousand people had gathered. I started my speech saying “You have asked me to speak about the Church and Revolution

24 Later, a more elaborate version of this material was published in New York by Orbis Books.
in History. But it is difficult to talk only about history when, one
month ago I was in Saigon and met several Catholic priests who
were in favour of the independence of Vietnam. We had to meet
in secret for fear of the CIA. It is difficult to talk only about history
when last week I was in Colombia and three Colombian priests
came to consult with me as to whether they should go and join
the guerrillas in the mountains. So the problems are not only
historical, they are with us today”.

After I had finished and was applauded, immediately some people
came forward to speak with me. The first to reach the platform
was none other than the gentleman from the CIA. I knew that he
had returned to his country but had never imagined that he would
be in this conference. His wife and children were involved in the
campaign for Gene McCarthy against the war in Vietnam and no
doubt their influence caused him gradually to oppose this war.

Invasion of Czechoslovakia

In 1968 I also participated in Washington at a meeting
of another Catholic movement. It coincided with the invasion of
Czechoslovakia by the Soviets and immediately this provoked a
strong reaction. The hosts decided that, at the end of our working
session that day, they would make a protest. When they consulted
me, I answered, “Very good. But there is a war in Vietnam. If we
demonstrate against the presence of the Soviets in Prague, we must
also do it against the Americans in Saigon”. They agreed. So we
made banners with the slogan “Out of Prague, Out of Saigon!”

Without asking for permission from the police, we went out into
the street, about a hundred of us. The objective was the Soviet
Embassy in the centre of Washington and to reach it we had to
pass through black neighbourhoods. We were greeted with great
enthusiasm there and several hundred more people joined us. We
walked for several miles. Of course the police arrived. The Soviet
Embassy had been surrounded so it was impossible to gain access
to it. In the end, no one knew how to end the demonstration
until someone asked me if we could conclude with a prayer. I
scrambled up onto a pillar so that I could address the whole crowd
and said, “Now we are going to end the demonstration and we
shall all recite Our Father to ask for peace in Czechoslovakia and in Vietnam”. And so we did.

In 1972, four years after having known Gene McCarthy in New York—at a time when he was once again standing for president—his wife, who was a well-known intellectual, wanted to accompany him to the Democrat Convention but she had a previous engagement for a talk at the University of New Jersey. She asked me to replace her, so I stood in for her with the students interested in the subject of Vietnam.

Postmodern America

Another curious experience I had during my travels to the United States was a congress of urban planners in New York, organized according to the prevailing ideas in the 1970s, when there was an outbreak of postmodernism. The invitees were very varied: academics from various universities, artists, intellectuals, hippies. We were in a neighbourhood called the Village, which was a centre of artistic life, anticonformist, with quite a lot of drugs around. There was a session for strange experiences, which was typical of the anti-institutional attitudes of that time. At a certain moment we had to jump from a height on to a pile of straw. Swimming around in the straw I found myself beside a Nobel Prize-winner for Physics, looking rather upset. What a mad situation! The idea was to destroy the pride of intellectuals.

Two years afterwards the international event of the Urban Planners and Architects took place in Brussels that they had asked me to organize. It was called ‘Society in Conflict’ and it was held in the Marolles, the poorest neighbourhood in the centre of Brussels. The aim was to make the city known, but also to tackle important national and international subjects such as wealth and poverty, social struggles, the liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies of Africa, etc. It was a meeting of intellectuals, politicians and artists from various countries. One of the activities was an ecumenical service in the Capuchin Church, with Harvey Cox,²⁵

²⁵ Harvey Cox was born in 1929. He studied at Yale and Harvard and became a Baptist theologian of the Death of God current. He authored the books *The Secular City* and *The Future of Faith* about Pentecostalism.
a professor of Theology from Harvard, known for his thinking about secular society and who had written a preface to one of my books. The church was full and when Cox and I arrived, some hippies from an anarchist group in Manchester had set up an enormous plastic phallus beside the altar. I tried to persuade them that it was not the most appropriate place but it was evident that they had put it there on purpose. Of course the capuchin monks were furious. It was a scandal because television channels from five European countries were filming. The following day there was a communication from Cardinal Suenens, Archbishop of Brussels-Malines, condemning the profanation. I had to meet him and convince him that this had not been planned by the organizers of the Society in Conflict event. We published a book with photographs of the event.

In 1974 I participated in another strange meeting, near New York. It, too, was under the influence of postmodernism and followed the fashion for organizing events without plans and leaving everything to the spontaneity of the participants. There were some ten people present and I was the only foreigner. We were given very comfortable seats in a hotel meeting room and told that we had three days to discuss whatever we wanted. There was a US senator, the president of IBM, the vice president of the Teamsters Union (the president, Hoffa, was in prison), a researcher from the Rand Corporation, among others. The Vietnam War was drawing to a close and it was a unanimous decision to discuss this and the post-war future.

I shall never forget the presentation by the Rand researcher. He drew a diagram showing the evolution of the US military budget, from the end of the Second World War until the last years of the 1970s. The figures were very high up until 1944 and then they diminished until the Korean War (from June 1950 to July 1953). Thus there were highs and lows, according to the different conflicts. Of course, during the Vietnam War (from 1959 to 1975) the budgets were also very high. He explained, “This shows the evolution of

26 Jimmy Hoffa (1913-1975) was president of the Teamsters union. He was involved with the mafia and imprisoned in 1967 for ten years. He disappeared in mysterious circumstances, probably killed by the mafia.
the military budget. What were the military interested in? Keeping the defence budget high. This meant a war. The military knew that when the Vietnam War came to an end the defence budget would immediately be reduced. They think of the future. At the moment another war in Asia is impossible because public opinion would be against a new conflict on the same continent. One in Latin America would be too close and thus again would not be accepted. To repress the revolts in the black neighbourhoods in the country (which were in ferment at the time) does not require such a high military budget. So, the idea is to look for a war in Africa.” The rationality of this presentation made a big impact. The main concern was to keep a budget of at least a hundred billion dollars a year. So great was the link between the military and private corporations in the United States, that Dwight D. Eisenhower, former President and Military Commander in Chief, called it the military industrial complex.

At the end of the nineties I was invited to Chicago by the Catholic philosopher (Marxist and Thomist) Anthony Mansueto, son of a union leader of Chicago, who taught a course at St. Paul University and with whom I had been in contact concerning the preparation of an issue on Marxism and Religion for Social Compass. We visited various union leaders and also the headquarters of the Communist party, where they gave me an interview for a press communiqué. He introduced me to the union of the electricians in Washington, with whom he was in contact. There they explained to me how the North American workers movement has evolved. Between 1950s, when I was first in the United States and the 1990s there had been an enormous drop in union membership, to about a third of the original number. This was partly as a result of the changes in work, which became much less involved in production and much more concerned with the service sector, and partly because the system had co-opted the leaders, as well as President

27 Commander in Chief of the Allies in the Second World War who received the surrender of the German troops and later was elected President of the United States (1953-1957).

28 Anthony Mansueto, whose father was a union leader, was born in Chicago. He was a Thomist philosopher and a Marxist. He authored a number of books on justice and the existence of God.
Reagan's\textsuperscript{29} politics which were very aggressive against the workers' movement. The electricians union had adopted a very strong line that enabled it to withstand further decline.

The intellectual position of Mansueto did not help his prospects of work. Very soon the Catholic universities were closed to him and he was forced to accept secondary employment, from Texas to Alaska, always a very precarious basis for living. Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from producing a series of books, remarkable for their erudition and analytical ability. In 2012 he asked me to write a brief comment for the back cover of his most recent work on science, philosophy and the existence of God.

All that I saw and experienced during those years of my visits to the United States constituted quite a lesson. They gave me the opportunity to meet religious, academic and political figures who enriched my understanding of the realities of the country and its relationship with the rest of the world. It was a nation that defends the capitalist system tooth and nail and its cruel imperialism as a result of its awareness of its excellence and 'civilizing mission' in the world. It is an empire that is losing its economic and political hegemony as other poles of power make their appearance. However it still predominates militarily in its role as guarantor of the globalized capitalist system.

The great transformation since the Second World War has certainly been the constitution of the Empire, for its victory without destroying itself internally; its control over the economy by imposing the dollar as the reserve currency for international trade; its right to veto in the international financial institutions; its management of surplus food stocks; its arms trade and all the free trade treaties. In addition, there is its political power in the UN Security Council; its interventions in the countries of the South; the fall of the Berlin Wall and its military power through NATO and the ITRA (Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance); and its wars (Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq). The financial and monetary crisis of

\textsuperscript{29} Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) had a degree in economics and sociology. He was an actor in Hollywood and member of the Democratic Party. He switched to the Republican Party in 1962. He became Governor of California and then US President from 1981 to 1989. He was a neoliberal politician who presided over the rightwing renaissance.
2008/2009 affected its own internal strength and provoked anti-hegemonic and anti-systemic reactions aimed at the construction of a multipolar world. A small anecdote: in July 2016, when I was invited to the Third South-South Forum on Sustainability in the Lingnan University of Hong Kong, the United States denied my transit permit because I had participated in a peace mission in Syria.
CHAPTER XI:
THE SOCIALISM OF EASTERN EUROPE

The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe:
Socialism in Search of a Soul
Political and religious encounters in the Soviet Union

My first encounters with people from the Soviet Union occurred during the Vatican Council II. Among them was Nikodím, the Leningrad Metropolitan, who was responsible for the international relations of the Russian Orthodox Church. I also got to know an observer sent by the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow. He attended one of my lectures and when it was finished came to me, showing interest in the theme of my talk. During the Council we met on several occasions and sometimes we ate together. It was during one of these encounters that he suggested that I visit the USSR.

It was in 1968 that I first journeyed to the Soviet Union, after I had attended a congress on the Sociology of Religion in Sweden. I went to Leningrad to visit the Metropolitan Nikodím and was invited to the Orthodox seminary where there was a meeting with the professors. I also met two Ethiopian seminarians being trained as theologians.

I also visited the ancient cathedral which, at that time, was an anti-religious museum of scientific atheism. I became interested in it because of all the evidence of the complicity between the Orthodox Church and the aristocracy of the Russian Empire, but other expressions of ‘scientific atheism’ were close to being ridiculous. On the wall of one room I was amazed to see a quotation of mine in Russian. It was extracted from *The Church in*
the World, the book of mine that Nikodím had translated. It was a phrase that criticized the political role of the Church, but it had been taken out of context.

I had to travel to Moscow the Monday after the Easter Sunday of the Orthodox Church. Nikodím wanted us to dine together that day because on the Sunday he was taken up with ceremonies. I changed my ticket in order to be able to see him once again. I remember that this time that he told me that the great problem of the Russian Church was its wealth, as it enjoyed a much higher standard of living than that of the people. It had the monopoly over the sale of candles and other products and also the faithful gave it many donations. It did not have to maintain much property because the number of churches had been considerably reduced and there were just a few monasteries to train priests and nuns. The Orthodox Church did not undertake many social activities as the State was responsible for them and there was less need. Thus most of the income received by the religious institution was at the disposal of the clergy. He was very worried and did not see the possibility of an internal renovation such as that which had been brought about in Catholicism by the Vatican Council II.

The following day I flew to Moscow. In the airport there were two waiting rooms, one for the travellers of the country and the other for the foreigners, which was then empty. The clerk checking my ticket remarked that I was very lucky because I would be travelling with the cosmonauts. In fact, soon afterwards, huge cars began to arrive and we heard military music. And there was Yuri Gagarin, together with 11 or 12 other astronauts. When we boarded the plane a stewardess asked me if I, who was the only foreigner, accepted to travel in the same compartment with them. I said I would be only too happy. When we took off, the plane’s loudspeakers were not functioning and a stewardess went all round the plane explaining the details of the flight, the altitude, temperature, duration, etc. She began to laugh at the idea of explaining all this to the astronauts. During the whole journey passengers kept going to ask them for autographs.

1 In 1961 he became the first astronaut in the world to travel in outer space. He died in 1968 in an airplane crash, the year that I met him.
On more than one occasion, thanks to Nikodim I was able to meet with monks in the monasteries and in particular in the Seminary of Zagorsk, outside Moscow, where they invited me for lunch. I was accompanied by a young man from the Academy of Sciences, who served as my interpreter. For him it was a unique experience and I even asked him if he would not like to stay on. The Russian liturgies were very beautiful, but very long and for young people who did not have the necessary training to understand the religious codes, it seemed strange. It was also very revealing to see how the Russian Orthodox Church co-existed with the Soviet system: in spite of the ideological contradictions and the constitutional limitations, there was a respect for power, even a certain mutual complicity, accompanied by unfailing Russian patriotism.

Another time, on return from Bangladesh, where Geneviève Lemercinier and I had been giving a seminar in social training for the clergy and the nuns, we stopped off in Moscow. It was the eve of the celebration of the patron saint of the city, Saint Alexis. That day Patriarch Alexis was celebrating the event in the Cathedral. He was a truly historical figure, having already been a Bishop at the time of the Revolution in 1917. He had been Archbishop of Leningrad and during the war against the Germans he played a leading role in the resistance. For this reason he received the highest Soviet decoration.

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2 Monastery of Zagorsk. It was founded by Saint Sergio in the 14th century and located near Moscow. It is the heart of Russian orthodoxy.

3 Saint Alexis (Russia, 1292-1378). He was the Metropolitan of Kiev and later of Moscow, and also a founder of the monastery of the Kremlin. He was the Patron Saint of Moscow.

4 Patriarch Alexis (Russia, 1877-the Soviet Union, 1970). He was born of a noble family in Moscow. He was arrested and sent into exile to Kazakhstan by the Revolution. He was the Archbishop in Novgorod and the Metropolitan in Leningrad in 1926. He had a meeting with Stalin (see the next note) in 1943 to put an end to the persecutions against the religious. He was active in the Resistance movement in Leningrad and was decorated with the Order of Lenin. He was appointed Patriarch of Moscow in 1945 and maintained difficult relations with the Catholic Church. He was a member of the World Council for Peace, and supported the Soviet Union's policy of peaceful coexistence.
We participated, with Nikodím, in the ceremony at the cathedral. I was presented to the Patriarch Alexis. Geneviève was unable to attend because the meeting took place behind the altar in an area reserved for the clergy. The Patriarch, then aged 92, spoke French very well. He asked for news of the University of Louvain and we talked about the Vatican Council II. It was a brief encounter, but I was impressed. Fifty years of Russian history ran through my mind: Tolstoy, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Orthodox Church, the war against Nazism, the crimes of Stalin\(^5\), the reconstruction that was so bureaucratized and authoritarian. I remembered the Soviet novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky and I asked myself, why had there been this co-existence of mistrust instead of a sharing of objectives, between the Christian cry for liberation and socialism as a project for justice? However, here it was an extremely spiritualized Christianity, invaded by the value of money and a Revolution that had lost its soul.

To accompany us on a visit to various monasteries, Nikodím had requested an Orthodox theologian, Tolstoy’s nephew, who had been a professor at Princeton University in the United States but had decided to return to the Soviet Union to teach Theology in a seminary. At the end of the day we were invited for dinner in the house of Nikodím, in the neighbourhood where the Soviet leaders were residing. The Metropolitan had just returned from the cathedral and he received us very cordially. He proposed a toast and invited us to his private chapel, a kind of museum with beautiful 14\(^{th}\) and 15\(^{th}\) century icons. We went into dinner in a huge dining room with exquisite furniture and candelabras on the table. We were only five diners; he himself, his assistant who later succeeded him in international affairs, Tolstoy’s nephew, Geneviève Lemercinier and me. We were waited on by servants with white gloves. I kept asking myself, “Where am I, in the Soviet Union or in the Palace of Versailles?”

Pope Paul VI had just presented his Encyclical on birth control. Geneviève and I were critical of this document, having just been in Bangladesh, and we started to talk about the demographic problem

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5 Joseph Stalin (Russia, 1878-the Soviet Union, 1953). He was the Head of State of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Secretary General of its Communist Party from 1922 to his death.
and related issues. Nikodím, however, said that if he had to re-write the encyclical he would not have changed a single word.

**Among the Soviet Academics**

On my first journey to the Soviet Union, as I said, I also visited Moscow. I wanted to see that friend of mine at the Academy of Sciences whom I had met in Rome during the Vatican Council II and who worked at the Institute of the International Workers’ Movement. He organized a meeting for me during which we discussed the meaning of the success of May 1968 in France. Most of the members of the Institute were very critical and considered that these events were not a real revolution, but a petit bourgeois movement that concentrated on culture and not on transforming social relations. Others insisted on the importance of this event.

At this Institute there was a specialist and admirer of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French theologian and palaeontologist who developed new thinking about the evolution of humanity. All this gave me a different picture of the Soviet Union to the one we had outside.

Of course, I visited the usual monuments. I wanted also to see the commemorative parade of the October Revolution. As none of the police understood the alphabet of my visit card I was able to pass several control points by simply showing it. However, when I reached the Red Square I could not continue, as I needed a special invitation. The guard stopped me and very kindly accompanied me to a police station in the same street. There they telephoned the Interior Ministry and the Belgian Embassy to obtain an invitation for me. As it was too late they brought me to a corner where I had a very good view of the parade.

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6 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (France, 1881-1955). He was a Jesuit priest and also a paleontologist at the National Museum of Natural History in France. He carried out research work in Chile. After writing an article on original sin, the Holy Faith forbade him to teach and to do research. He continued his research work in China, published *The Human Phenomenon*, a new interpretation of creation. He was condemned again and all his books were removed from Catholic bookstores. He was defended by Henry de Lubac, a Jesuit priest, and was rehabilitated after his death.
The following day my friend at the Institute of the International Workers’ Movement invited me for lunch, but there was such a queue at the entrance to the restaurant that it was impossible to enter. He was very disappointed. But as my visit card had functioned so well up until then I thought of showing it and immediately the doors of the restaurant opened to us.

After this first visit, when Geneviève and I were returning from Vietnam we usually stopped over in Moscow. We had the most enduring ties with the Institute for Asian Studies at the Academy of Sciences, whose headquarters were in the building where Napoleon had slept in Moscow. Of course the room where he had stayed could not be touched. In the 1980s we gave a number of seminars in the Institute.

They were very interested in our work in Vietnam. It was odd that the Soviets were invited to this Asian country to give courses or to participate in theoretical discussions, but they were never given permission to carry out studies in the field. This explained their interest in our work and they wanted to share our results. They were rather envious that they could not carry out fieldwork and that we had been able to do so.

Although there were both older and younger people working in the Institute, in the discussion it was almost always the older ones who talked, while the younger ones never said a word. One day, when coming out of one of these meetings, one of the young researchers approached Geneviève and myself and he said, “You have seen how Soviet democracy functions”. Even so, the meetings were valuable because there was certain openness in that institution.

On another occasion a linguist from the same institute told us, “I am very happy because I can now travel to Vietnam for language research.” The following year we returned to the Soviet Union and he was the very person who received us at the airport. When we asked him about his research he replied that he had still not received his visa.

We occasionally met up with a very brilliant intellectual who had belonged to the Institute of United States Studies. At various times he invited us to dinner and we had very open discussions.
He was critical of the system. Once when we were at his home we were accompanied by the person responsible for foreign relations at the Institute of Oriental Studies, who was drunk. Our host gently pushed him into the lift and then we were able to talk well into the night without any disturbance.

Another night, this same man came to see me at the Academy hotel. Once again he was drunk and in tears, announced that he would be sent to Afghanistan. He cried, “I shall die, I shall die!” I had difficulty in getting rid of him, he was completely shattered.

Another tie that we had with the Academy of Sciences was with a civil servant at the Soviet Embassy in Brussels who often came to CETRI to consult our documentation centre. He introduced himself as the person responsible for cultural affairs and also for contacts with the Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Relations in his country. We were able to have a very enriching exchange with him, as he was an intellectual with a broad culture. Whenever Geneviève and I returned from Nicaragua, he asked us our opinion on the situation in Central America. He bought two copies of all CETRI’s publications and sent them to the Russian Parliamentary Commission. Several times, too, he asked me to send CETRI documents to the UN and to the Organization of American States (OAS). He also suggested making studies on the international situation, for example concerning world armaments. For this purpose he gave us documentation coming from Western sources, mostly from the United States. At that time there were no websites. On the basis of our own documents and on these supporting items CETRI published various analyses on the liberation struggles in the South and on the state of the cold war.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Belgian press revealed that this official was an agent of the KGB in Brussels. Of course when this news came out I too was accused of being a KGB agent. Fortunately this became public the day after I had left for a trip to Latin America, where I remained for three months. When I returned it was no longer a burning issue. Nevertheless, I was interviewed by Belgian security who had not forgotten the affair. In fact, if he had really been a member of the KGB, it would have been very strange if he had confessed that to me!
The last time that I travelled to the USSR with Geneviève Lemercinier, it was during the Mikhail Gorbachev\textsuperscript{7} period. I was invited by the Institute for Latin America to give a talk on Liberation Theology. After my presentation, two of the researchers, Orthodox believers, came to continue the discussion on theology. They expressed themselves very discreetly because they were afraid that their remarks could be misinterpreted. It was clear that ideological control predominated still and that to be a believer and a member of the Academy of Sciences was considered a contradiction.

On that same occasion, some friends invited us to dinner. In the Gorbachev era, it was forbidden to consume alcoholic drinks in public places. When we arrived at the restaurant, our host called a waiter and gave him a bottle of wine that he had brought in his dispatch case. When we started eating they brought us a samovar that, instead of tea, contained the wine.

Unesco had commissioned CETRI to do a study on energy and culture. Geneviève and I carried out 150 interviews in 40 countries on different continents with specialists in the subject and politicians. We took advantage of our stays in Moscow to meet the former Minister for Energy, K.A. Kirillin,\textsuperscript{8} who received us in the Institute for High Temperatures at the Academy of Sciences. It was interesting to hear from him the socialist concept of energy. The priority was to put the necessary energy at the disposal of all citizens. Nevertheless, the system, which was centralized and bureaucratized, was also an obstacle to efficiency, and free access to the service ended up being wasted. The concept needed to be rethought. The book that Geneviève Lemercinier and I wrote, which was published in Paris in 1990, was entitled *Energy and Culture*. It was the beginning of a theoretical reflection on the issue, which was taken further in my book on agrofuels, published in London in 2010.

\textsuperscript{7} Mijaíl Gorbachov (the Soviet Union, Russia at present, 1931-). His family was Ukranian and Russian. He was the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the USSR (1985-1991) and the last president of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1989-1991). He was awarded the Nobel Prize. He is still active in political and climatic matters.

\textsuperscript{8} Vladimir Alekseevich. Kirillin (Russia, 1913). He was a member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and a specialist on thermodynamics in charge of the coordination of the national energy.
I had also known in Cuba the economist Kiva Maidanik, who was a great human being and an intellectual, of Jewish origin and a Marxist critic of the Soviet system. He was very free in his way of thinking and expressing himself. I remember meeting him also in Nicaragua, in a meeting of the São Paulo Forum; in Cuba in a meeting on the world economy; in Brazil at the Tribunal on External Debt; and again, in 2005, at the Russian Social Forum in Moscow, to which I had been invited by Alexander Buzgalin, professor of Economy and Social Sciences at the State University of Moscow. Kiva Maidanik was at the airport to welcome me. Of course we talked a lot about the new situation which, after the collapse of socialism, was going through a very difficult period. He had criticized the rigidity of the Soviet system and now was against the neoliberal orientation of the new regime and all its consequences: a new rich class without any scruples, a mafia, extreme poverty, the loss of social protection, the suffering of the old people. He said, “Now we are civilized. In Moscow we have traffic problems and on each corner of the street there is a casino.” Kiva invited me to his home, a very simple apartment, full of books. He died soon afterwards.

The meetings of the Russian Social Forum took place in the old central school of the Komsomol (Communist Youth), which was now a private university. The Rector, a friend of Professor Buzgalin’s, had been under political pressure not to accept this Forum in his institution. There were various groups present, trade unions, particularly of professors, associations of retired people and veterans. Groups of anarchists were active. The traditional Russian anarchists, who had been silenced during the Soviet period, referred to the history of the 19th century and the influence of the movement on Russian political culture. The other group, of young people, which emerged after the failure of the

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9 Kiva Maidanik (the Soviet Union, Russia at present, 1929-2006). He was a historian and a political scientist, and also a member of the World Economics and Foreign Affairs Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. He was in intense contact with Latin America.

10 Alexander Buzgalin. He is an economist, a professor at Moscow University and a specialist in the economics of knowledge. He is the Coordinator of the Alternatives Movement and the organizer of the Russian Social Forum.
Soviet model, advocated a non-formal society. The two groups participated in the discussion in a very civilized way. I also met Garry Kasparov,\(^1\) the world chess champion, who was clearly trying to utilize the Forum to promote the new right-wing party that he had founded.

During the Russian Forum I participated, in Pushkin Square,\(^2\) in a demonstration in which teachers and veterans protested against the rising costs of living, the reduction of social security and, in general, against the social policies of Boris Yeltsin,\(^3\) which were dismantling the social acquisitions of the past.

Other Countries of Eastern Europe

Poland

My other experiences in Eastern Europe were above all in Poland and Yugoslavia. As I have already recounted, my first visit to Poland was in the 1950s. I went with a priest, Robert Van Der Gucht,\(^4\) who afterwards became professor of philosophy at the Catholic University of Louvain, and Jean Delfosse,\(^5\) director of La Revue Nouvelle, a Belgian journal of left-wing Christian Democrats, as we wanted to meet the progressive Catholics in that country.

We travelled around a good part of the country –Warsaw, Kraków, Lublin and Lvov– and we met with Catholic groups and, later on had discussions with some of their media. Such was the particular case with the monthly Wietz that was run by an

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\(^1\) Gari Kasparov (the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan at present, 1963-). He was the Chess World Champion. He is a member of The Other Russia, a right-wing party and he was a candidate to the presidency, but was defeated by Vladimir Putin.

\(^2\) Alexander Pushkin (Russia, 1799-1837) a romantic poet.

\(^3\) Boris Yeltsin (the Soviet Union, Russia at present, 1931-2007). He was the first president of the Russian Federation (1991-1999).

\(^4\) Robert Van Der Gucht. He is a philosopher and a professor at the Catholic University of Louvain. He is a co-author of the book Balance of the Theology of the 20th Century, and a member of Christians for Socialism.

\(^5\) Jean Delfosse. He is the editor of Casterman Publishing House and founder of the Revue Nouvelle of the left wing of Christian Democracy in Belgium.
intellectual called Tadeusz Mazowiecki,\textsuperscript{16} who became the Prime Minister after the fall of socialism. He was in favour of co-existence with the communist regime, without losing the country’s Catholic identity—a position that the local Church found difficult to tolerate. We also had contact with the team of \textit{Tygodnik Powszechny}, an open-minded Catholic weekly that also defended co-existence with a socialist society. Although this publication was less oriented towards socialism than the former, Catholic conservatives accused it of being communist. The director, who belonged to the Polish aristocracy, was intellectually broad-minded and he was a friend of Karol Wojtyla, who was then still professor in Moral Philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin. He was also a member of that international organization of Catholic intellectuals called Pax Romana\textsuperscript{17} and for this reason came regularly to Louvain.

In this first stay to Poland I visited Chestokova, not far from Krakow, where the feast of the Black Virgin was celebrated by a national pilgrimage. The popular devotion was impressive, not only for its traditional character and the efficient control by the ecclesiastical authorities, but because it constituted some kind of protest against the regime which, in turn, was hostile against a strong and rather reactionary Church. The State used its political power to limit the influence of the religious institution. For example, in the new industrial town Nova Huta, close to Krakow, Catholics were not allowed to build a church, in spite of the demand of the population. In general, relationships were tense.

Karol Wojtyla, first when he was an auxiliary Bishop and later when he was Archbishop of Krakow, invited me to visit the country two or three times between 1958 and 1967. On one of these occasions, when he was still an auxiliary Bishop, I accompanied him on a pastoral visit to the mountains close to Kraków. I remember that after having been transported by car

\textsuperscript{16} Thadeusz Mazowiecki (Poland, 1927-2013). He was an economist, a member of the Solidarnosk and of the Democratic Union, and also the Prime Minister from 1989 to 1991.

\textsuperscript{17} Pax Romana. It is a movement of Catholic intellectuals founded in Fribourg (Switzerland) in 1921. It is a forum for multinational meeting, with its seat in Geneva and its consultancy statute in \textit{ECOSOC} and in Unesco. It participates in the World Social Forum.
to the entrance of a village, we got out and Wojtyla had to mount into a cart drawn by horses, passing underneath a triumphal arch built by the villagers. The secretary of the local Communist Party then gave a welcoming speech and after the ceremony we ate with the local parish priest.

In 1974 I was invited to Warsaw for a meeting that took place in the Parliament and which was sponsored by the World Peace Council. I was there with Isabelle Blume and I gave a speech on Camilo Torres. The mayor of Florence, Giorgio La Pira was also present. He, a convinced Catholic, was in favour of an alliance with the communists in Italy, to ward off the offensive by the right, supported by the United States. In the Duma itself we had a long conversation on the subject. He could not accept the collusion between the Church, the Christian Democrats and capitalism. It was not a question just of words but of hard facts. Genuine popular development, according to him, could not be achieved without a coalition of left-wing forces, in which Christian inspiration had its role. At the international level, the end of the cold war should have meant co-existence and a drastic limitation of armaments. However, he was also quite critical of the Polish situation, for the lack of real popular support.

My contact with the Theological Faculty of Warsaw University was a professor concerned with social ethics, André Zuberbier, who visited Louvain-la-Neuve on various occasions. He believed it was important to understand the reality of the continents of the South, particularly the situation in Latin America. Obviously, Liberation Theology was highly suspected in Poland or interpreted as a theory inspired by Marxism. It was in this sense that John Paul II talked of another Liberation Theology – freedom from

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18 Giogio La Pira (Italy, 1904-1977). He was a jurist, a member of the Constituent Assembly of Italy for Christian Democracy and also a member of the lay branch of Dominicans. He was also the Vice-minister for Labor and the Mayor of Florence. He was in favor of collaborating with the Communist Party of Italy, and also an activist for peace in Vietnam.

19 André Zuberbier (Poland, 1927-2000). He was a Doctor of Theology from the University of Cracow and a professor at the Catholic University of Dublin and at the Theological Academy of Warsaw. He was also an active participant in the dialogue with Judaism after the war.
communism. Prudently, Zuberbier was trying to introduce another perspective in the thinking of Polish Catholicism.

In 1964 I had been invited for the 600th anniversary of the University of Krakow. Vladislaw Gomulka,20 the first secretary of the Communist Party, was present. I noticed that the university still used the academic symbols of the preceding era: crosses and eagles representing the Church and Royalty. It was difficult for the new regime to create new symbols that were not political. Similarly, a song that was sung by the university choir was a hymn to the Virgin and all the communist authorities were participating in the ceremony. It showed the difference in rhythm of changes in society. A political change can be quick; it is enough to take over power. The transformation of the relations of production evidently takes more time, depending on how the economy is reorganized. Renewing a vision of the world and its symbolical expressions requires still another temporal dimension and it is not brought about only by political will. All the revolutions have suffered this experience, from the French Revolution onwards, but it seems that none of them have learned from their predecessors.

Yugoslavia

I travelled four times to Yugoslavia. The first time, together with Geneviève Lemercinier, on a return from Sri Lanka, it was in response to an invitation from Ivan Ivecović, who was the official in charge of international relations of the Communist Party of the country, after having encountered him at the International Conference on Namibia, in Brussels, in 1972. After the dismantling of Yugoslavia, he went to teach political science at the American University in Cairo, where I met him again later, when he was analyzing the influence of Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab countries.

We were also in Yugoslavia to participate in a session of the International Conference of the Sociology of Religion. We stayed in Belgrade and in Ljubljana, visiting various neighbourhoods and also a factory that was managed by the workers. In talking

20 Vladislaw Gomulka (Poland, 1905-1982). He was the President of Poland in 1947. He explored “a Polish way of socialism”.
with them we noticed that they were not very interested in this experience. It was difficult to know the reason, whether it was due to an excess of bureaucracy, little personal motivation or the general political atmosphere at the time.

Some time later, the University of Zagreb published a book of mine on pastoral sociology in Croatia and in this context they asked me to come to speak at a conference. It was an academic journey, but it was quite enlightening as it was still in the time of Josip Broz (Tito).\textsuperscript{21} The Croat Church had been very close to the Fascist regime and, predictably, was against the government. In fact, Cardinal Luis Stepinac\textsuperscript{22} had been condemned and imprisoned since the Second World War because of his political activities. Jean Paul II beatified him later on. Nevertheless, certain lay Catholics, particularly intellectuals, had attitudes that made a certain dialogue possible between Marxists and Christians. This was the case on the university campus.

**The Soviets and the Struggles of the South**

My relationships and activities in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe were above all concentrated on the Church and intellectual circles. I did not carry out any sociological fieldwork. Through my contacts with members of the working class I knew that these peoples were historically socially backward and had suffered greatly from the war. And I saw how, on this basis, a system of social security had been built up and also a real development in science and culture.

My impression of the Soviet Union was both positive and negative. There were great social and scientific achievements, but at the same time I saw the bureaucracy and privileges that the

\textsuperscript{21} Josip Broz, commonly known as Tito. He was President from 1945 to 1980. His government had a communist orientation, but was independent of the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{22} Aloysius Viktor Stepinac (Croatia, 1898- 1960). He was the Archbishop of Zagreb since 1937. He was accused of collaborating with the Nazi Croats and was condemned to five years in prison. He was declared a beatified martyr by Pope John Paul II.
Party enjoyed, which was shocking in view of its doctrines and discourse. Already in the early 1950s, there was evidence of the existence of the concentration camps and the Stalinist repression period, presented as being over. These were revealed in Nikita Khrushchev’s report\(^{23}\) but, even then, it was difficult to know exactly what the current situation was. I also experienced the prerogatives enjoyed by the Orthodox Church. In spite of such contradictions, there had been a project of social transformation in the socialist countries and it had had concrete results.

On the other hand, the international policy of the Soviet Union meant cooperation with the Third World, with support –political, but also economic and military– for the struggles of the peoples, as in the Portuguese colonies and Vietnam. It seemed clear that without this support, these peoples would not have been able to fight as they did.

At the time of the contradictions with China, I believed that the Soviet position was more consistent. In Africa, for example, the Chinese supported organizations opposed to the main liberation movements. In various cases, as in Mozambique, Angola and South Africa, these were the same organizations as those supported by the United States and South Africa. In Asia, they were on the side of Pol Pot\(^{24}\) in Cambodia and they waged war against Vietnam. This kind of policy seemed more concerned with fighting the Soviet Union (perhaps for objective reasons of political autonomy and ideological divergences), than an authentic collaboration with the countries of the South.

In general my relationship with the Soviets was principally concerned with the resistance struggles of the peoples of the South. Even in the Academy of Sciences the themes we tackled

\(^{23}\) When Stalin died in 1953, Krushchev became the head of the central committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (PCUS). In 1956 he divulged a secret report that criticized Stalinism.

\(^{24}\) After several attempts to involve the United Nations, the Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia at the end of 1978 and managed to oust Pol Pot from power the next year. It was this occupation which caused the outbreak of the war in 1979 between Vietnam and China, which had maintained cooperation relations until then. The Vietnamese troops started to withdraw from Cambodia in September, 1989.
were mostly connected with Asia or Latin America. At a personal level, I discussed the negative aspects of the internal situation in the Soviet Union with a number of colleagues. Many criticized the privileges of senior officials and did not hesitate to express their disagreement about the intervention in Afghanistan. A number of them keenly felt the lack of internal democracy. Most, however, were critical of capitalism.

In 1981 Geneviève Lemercinier and I were invited by the Institute for Asian Studies to visit Tashkent and Samarkand in Uzbekistan. It was very interesting for us, having visited the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan, to see the difference in the quality of life of the people on either side of the frontiers. It was definitely better in the Soviet Union. We discussed with Muslim leaders in Tashkent who were at that time undergoing tense relationships with the regime. Although they did not admit it directly, it was clear that they did not like the way in which people of Russian origin were dominating the Uzbek society. They insisted on the Muslim character of the region and on the need for more genuine cultural and religious autonomy. Nevertheless, we could see that they recognized that the Russian Revolution had brought about a significant social and economic transformation for them.

The other side of the Great Transformation was the effort to change the social relations of production to create a socialist society. Two important factors proved to be important obstacles to this project being fully achieved. The first was the concept of modernity without criticism of the cultural model of the 16th century: linear progress on an inexhaustible planet. This was partly because relationships with Nature were seen in terms of exploitation, with catastrophic ecological results. Oversight of the fact that the concept of modernity had been corrupted by the law of the market gradually led to capitalism, as Che Guevara had predicted after his visit to the European socialist countries.

25 Ernesto Che Guevara (Argentina, 1928-1967). He was an Argentinean politician, military, writer, journalist and physician who participated in the Cuban Revolution. He fought in the Congo and in Bolivia, and was captured and assassinated in Bolivia. He was also the author of numerous books, articles and notebooks.
In addition there is the omission in Karl Marx’s thought of the destruction of the equilibrium of the metabolism (exchange of materials) between human beings and nature as the result of the logic of capitalism and the need for socialism to reconstruct it. The second factor was the ‘long cycle’ of cultural changes, particularly in the political field. Models and political practices are deeply rooted, having been moulded over many centuries. In societies that are culturally feudal, where bourgeois democracy had hardly affected the intellectual elite, the rule has been to try and reproduce existing models of behaviour. This phenomenon has been accentuated by the fact that all societies that adopted socialism were obliged to do it in situations of war provoked by opposing regimes, which intensified the vertical and authoritarian character of their political organization and the repression of the participatory and libertarian currents of thinking.

All this explains the two great weaknesses of the socialist experiences: environmental destruction and the lack of a democratic process, which are mainly responsible for the implosion of the project.
CHAPTER XII:
MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Latin American Revolutions, Liberation Christianity
and Post-Liberalism

Mexico

The Mexican world is to be approached as a sacred place, with respect, apprehension and fascination. Respect for a grandiose, multiple culture, apprehension because of fear of being unable to penetrate its secrets, and fascination for the discovery of its unending revolutions.

I discovered Mexico through four main gateways: religion, intellectuals, politicians and the Zapatistas, every one of them clearly living in the shadow of the pyramids of Teotihuacan, impregnated by Toltec, Aztec and Maya history and all claiming to be the Zócalo (the base) in their struggle for hegemony.

Religious Life

In my first visit, in 1954, I came into contact with its popular devotion which had an impact on me; not so much as a folkloric popular culture with roots in the indigenous world, with a racial mix developed over centuries and a re-appropriated Christianity; as much as pervading all this, the expression of a profound, existential and lively faith. It was a manifestation of faith that was as respectable and authentic as other expressions, whether they are the Gregorian chant of the Benedictines; the liturgical Puritanism of the Calvinists; the polyphonic choirs of St. Peter's basilica in Rome or the Holy Week in Seville. For the people involved, the holistic character of religious observance was at the same time a collective and personal reality, a reference for daily life and a
projection towards the future, a root in the past and an immersion in a creation that included the whole living world.

As I have already mentioned, my visits to the old church of Our Lady of Guadalupe was an illumination, not only intellectual; it deeply affected my whole approach, both spiritual and sociological. I shall never cease enriching this first discovery, whether it is in northern Argentina, where the Guarani Indians walk for dozens of kilometres with their misas chicas; or the procession of Jesus of the Great Power in the Ecuadorian capital; or in the religious expressions of the African descendants of Brazil, Haiti and Cuba.

The religious panorama of Mexico was also illustrated by the great figures of the renovation of Catholicism and particularly of some Bishops who were very active in expressing their views on liturgy and pastoral work during the Vatican Council II.

Don Sergio Méndez Arceo, whom I have already mentioned in the context of the Council, was hardly a typical figure in the Mexican episcopate. Very tall and hieratical when officiating and direct and simple in his social contacts, he embodied the opening of the Catholic Church. His liturgy with the mariachis; his contacts with left-wing intellectuals; his position on freemasonry; his closeness to Cuba; his support for the Sandinista revolution; his membership of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal (PPT); his defence of the liberation theologians bore witness to a different vision of the role of a Bishop. He never neglected his spiritual role, nor did he exercise any other kind of power. He knew that reality, besides being spiritual, was also social and political; and that trying to escape this led the church to align with the existing structures of power.

I knew Don Sergio during the preparations for Vatican Council II, as he was a member of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM acronym in Spanish). For forty years we were in close contact, both in Mexico as in Rome, in Nicaragua, as in various PPT sessions. He supported my socio-religious work and invited me for a session of pastoral reflection for his clergy. Each time when I came to Cuernavaca for other reasons, such as a visit to the documentation centre created by Ivan Illich1 or doing some

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1 Iván Illich (Austria, 1926-2002). He was a priest from a Yugoslavian family of Jewish ancestry. He majored in Histology and later in Theology and Philosophy in Rome. He was a parish priest in New York
editing work, we discussed the religious and political conjuncture. Sometimes I accompanied him in visits to places in his diocese in his old Plymouth, where we could hardly get in and he would conduct an unending discussion with a vigour that sometimes conflicted with the Highway Code.

He was very open-minded which led him to accept various initiatives like Ivan Illich’s Latin American Centre and the Benedictine monastery of Father Lemercier, from Belgium; he was the brother of a priest in the diocese of Malinas-Brussels, responsible for pastoral social work in Flemish Brabant. He had founded a monastery using psychoanalysis methods both in training monks and in promoting the spirituality of the community. The experience did not survive its founder, but it attracted quite a lot of attention. Personally, this spiritual approach did not convince me on the various occasions when I discussed it with Father Lemercier, but perhaps it was because I did not know enough about the field.

Monsignor Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of San Cristóbal in Chiapas, was another progressive religious figure. He had many difficulties with the Holy See, particularly with the local nuncio. During an annual seminar organized among the progressive Bishops of the region on this occasion in São Paulo, where he had asked me to present an analysis of the new religious movements in Latin America, he received a telephone call from Mexico, announcing that he had been removed as Bishop of San Cristóbal. Together with Miguel Álvarez and Gilberto López y Rivas, Don Samuel promoted many

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2 Gregorio Lemercier (Belgium, 1912-1989). He founded the Benedictine monastery of Saint Mary of the Resurrection in Cuernavaca, Mexico and also started group psychoanalysis therapy among the monks. In the presence of the reactions from Rome, he requested his remission to lay status.

3 Samuel Ruiz García (Mexico, 1924-2011). He was the Archbishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas (1959); he organized the native diaconate in the diocese and was also a mediator between the government and the “Zapatista” National Liberation Army. He was in favor of the Liberation Theology, was accused of conspiring with the guerrilla and was criticized by the Holy See.
activities in support of the peoples of Chiapas. At the beginning of his diocese tenure, the indigenous deacons who worked with the local communities carried out pastoral and social tasks in line with Liberation Theology. This initiative prepared the ground for neo-Zapatism and its work for indigenous emancipation.

In 1981 I had already participated in another of these annual seminars, this time held in Tehuantepec, in Chiapas, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean close to the Guatemala frontier, together with Don Samuel Ruiz, Don Sergio Méndez Arceo and various Bishops from the continent. One afternoon, after a working session, a nun from Guatemala approached us, accompanied by a young indigenous woman, 17 years of age, who hardly spoke Spanish. With the help of the nun, the girl recounted how her father had been assassinated in the Spanish Embassy by governmental forces, and the massacres of the indigenous people in her country. She was called Rigoberta Menchú: no one could have imagined that one day she would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Intellectual Milieu

It was in the 1980s that I had more systematic contacts with Mexico, which were mostly of an academic nature. They were mainly with Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, whom I had known in Nicaragua where we were both supporting the Sandinista revolution. This sociologist, who was influential on Latin American thinking, had also been rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) where he had founded a Centre for the Humanities that regularly organized seminars to which they invited me on a number of occasions. It was during one of these stays that Geneviève Lemercinier and I also visited Gabriel García Márquez who invited us to lunch with him and his wife Mercedes in their house in Las Piedrecitas. It was at the time when we were both worried about the liberation struggle in Eritrea.

4 Rigoberta Menchú (Guatemala, 1959-). She is a member of the Mayan quiché group and an ambassadress of goodwill of Unesco. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1992.

5 Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia, 1927-2014). He was a journalist and a writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was also a member of the Peoples’ Permanent Tribunal.
The social movements were the theme of the work I first carried out with Don Pablo. He had worked with his team on what were called the new social movements; in other words, those that did not correspond to class interests but that defended other values, like the environment, feminists, the indigenous cultures, sexual diversity, etc. It was, at the time, a new social phenomenon and greatly debated. At his Centre for the Humanities I met Héctor Díaz Polanco and Gilberto López y Rivas, both well-known anthropologists, and Gilberto's wife Alicia.

Pablo González Casanova was also interested in the world situation, and various meetings on the world economy were organized with participants like Samir Amin and Immanuel Wallerstein. He also organized a series of conferences on specific themes, the contents of which were disseminated through booklets and videos. I contributed on the topic of globalization. Afterwards, John Saxe Fernandez continued the tradition and invited me to hold two seminars, one on social ethics and the other on Africa, particularly the conflicts in central Africa. The proceedings of both were published in books by Ruth Casa Editorial.

Don Pablo was also concerned with bringing together the current concepts in the social sciences with the idea of redefining critically the content of a social thinking appropriate for the present time as it confronts the post-modern offensive. I collaborated with him on some of these concepts, such as civil society, social movements and the common good of humanity.

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6 Héctor Díaz Polanco. He is a Mexican anthropologist and sociologist and also a professor at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (Spanish acronym for UNAM). He is the author of a book about the “zapatistas” and a member of the College of Mexico.

7 Gilberto López Rivas. He is a Mexican anthropologist and a professor at the Metropolitan Autonomous University of Mexico. He is an advisor to the “Zapatistas” and the author of numerous studies on the native peoples of Latin America.

8 Immanuel Wallerstein (U.S.A., 1930-). He is the principal theoretician of the analysis of the world system and Director of the Fernand Braudel Center of New York State University.

9 John Saxe-Fernández. He was born in Costa Rica and is a Doctor of Latin American Studies from UNAM, where he is also a professor; he specialized in the study of US economy and its armaments policy.
A great friend of Monsignor Samuel Ruiz, Don Pablo had understood the role that a form of Christianity could play in bringing about social and cultural transformation among a deeply religious population. So that he had the idea of trying to discover in the different world religions the concepts that could be used to transform societies and to construct a post-capitalist world.

As my book *Sociologia de la Religión* had been published in Mexico—by Plaza y Valdés that belonged to Fernando Valdés, a very progressive publisher who later was imprisoned for several months—the combination of Pablo’s academic interests and social concerns resulted in the organization of a seminar on the theme and I was asked to select the presenters. Thus we brought together a Belgian Jewish sociologist, Willy Bok of the Free University of Brussels; a Buddhist from the Chulalongkorn University of Bangkok; a Muslim from Tunisia; Adolfo Ham, a Cuban Protestant theologian, who had been the secretary of the Council of Churches in Cuba; and an indigenous Mexican. After the seminar, I spent a week in Pablo’s house near Cuernavaca to write up the results that were published by the Siglo XX Publishers of Mexico.

My contacts with Pablo were also very personal. We met various times in Paris, where his favourite restaurant was La Coupole, an emblematic place for progressive French intellectuals. We went together to visit a retrospective of Monet at the Grand Palais. In New York, where he had once lived, I spent some days with him and his wife Marianne, in the house of a friend of his in Greenwich Village. He came with her to Louvain-la-Neuve for the 20th anniversary of CETRI. In Nicaragua, I took him, together with his son, a doctor, to see the pictures in the church of Rigueiro, the work of an Italian painter commissioned by Father Uriel Molina,11

10 Adolfo Ham. He is a Cuban Protestant theologian and a professor at the Seminary in Matanzas; he was the President of the Ecumenical Council of Churches.

11 Uriel Molina is a Franciscan priest from Nicaragua. He is a Doctor of Theology from Rome specialized in Biblical Studies. He is an advisor to the Catholic student movement in the field of the Liberation Theology. He is a parish priest in the neighborhood of El Riguero, where he developed a new liturgy after the Vatican Council II. He was forced to leave the Franciscan order.
a Franciscan. They illustrated the great moments in the liberation of the continent. When the Catholic hierarchy threatened to destroy them, Ernesto Cardenal, at that time Minister of Culture, declared them part of the national heritage.

Twice I went with Pablo to Chiapas. And at different times I spent a few days in his secondary home in Teposcan, near Cuernavaca to write some texts and to meet friends like Gilberto López and Ana Esther Ceceña from the College of Mexico. With Pablo we visited the Egyptian pyramids and ate a pizza, with Samir and Isabelle Amin, in front of the Sphinx.

The death of his wife Marianne, who was a French psychologist of Iranian origin and the author of several books, affected Pablo deeply. She was an ideal partner for him, a real intellectual and a supporter her husband's political positions. She left a great void. When I spent a few days in 2013 with Pablo in his apartment near the university, I remembered her attentive presence, her universal conversation, the Belgian chocolates that she liked so much and the monumental salad, mixing all the Middle Eastern ingredients with some Aztec contributions, which was her speciality.

Our contacts with Mexican intellectuals in fact go back several decades. Since the beginning of the 1970s Geneviève Lemercinier and I had taken part in a meeting on the agrarian question in Mexico, which was organized by Luis Leñero, a former student from Louvain with whom we had worked during the socio-religious study of FERES. After this event he lent us his summerhouse in Cuernavaca for almost a month and there we edited a book on the sociological aspects of Christianity in India, using the material we had collected during our research in that country.

More recently I twice visited Guadalajara, once invited by the Latin American Sociological Congress to give a lecture on the significance of the political changes in Latin America for the social sciences. It was an occasion also to participate in the Book Fair,

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12 Ana Esther Ceceña. She was born in Mexico, and is an economist assigned to the Institute for Economic Research at UNAM. She is the director of the journal Chiapas.

13 Isabelle Amin. She is a teacher, a member of the Communist Party of France and Samir Amin's wife.
the largest of the continent, and to speak about the importance of books, on the request of Fernando Valdez. The second time was for the defence of a thesis on the Sociology of Religion of a Cuban, Ofélia Pérez, who succeeded Jorge Cazaldilla as director of the Centre for Socio-Religious Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Cuba.

Ofélia Pérez had made a comparative study on the devotion to San Lázaro in Havana and the popular cult of a virgin in a village close to the city of Guadalajara. The professor who was her director greatly insisted on my participating in the jury, as he feared negative reactions from the academics in this city, which is very Catholic and conservative. Fortunately this did not happen. I was in Bogota at the time and to get the cheapest air ticket to Guadalajara I had to travel via Paris, crossing the Atlantic Ocean twice in one day (a mystery in the pricing of tickets that only God can explain). The day for the defence of the thesis, we learnt that Sub-Commander Marcos had given a talk the previous evening in the Faculty of Literature there, about an erotic novel that he had just written. There is no contradiction between revolution and literature. In fact, in Latin America many of the revolutionaries have been poets and writers, while various literary figures have taken on political roles.

In the University of Barcelona in Catalonia, I was a member of the jury for a doctorate on the social effects of nanotechnology.

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14 Ofélia Pérez. Born in Cuba. Obtained her Doctorate in Sociología at the University of Guadalajara. Author of various studies on Cuban religiosity. Director of the Department of Socio Religious Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Cuba.

15 Jorge Calzadilla. Born in Cuba. Studied at the Gregorian University of Rome. Doctor in Philosophy and History from the University of Havana. Founder and director of the Department of Socio-Religious Studies in CIPS. He conducted a considerable research on the different religions in Cuba. Died in 2008.

16 Sub-Commander Marcos. He was born in Mexico; his name is Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente. He is a spokesman for the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) (“Zapatista” National Liberation Army) and is also an expert in the science of communications. He adopted the struggle of the natives in Chiapas as the place of contradiction with globalized capitalism.
presented by the Mexican Gian Carlo Delgado, who had been a follower of John Saxe Fernández at the UNAM. He invited me in 2013 to a seminar, with some of his colleagues. He also attended the meeting of the World Forum for Alternatives in Algeria that same year and came three times to Quito in 2014 and 2015 to join the WFA working group on the scientific and anthropological criticisms of the development model which Samir Amin had asked me to direct. Meanwhile he received a prize for young Mexican researchers in Social Sciences. Thus the long tradition of collaboration with Mexican intellectuals continued for me.

After collaboration in the writing of the book *Agriculturas campesinas en America Latina* (Peasant Agricultures in Latin America) published in 2014 by the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales which was the result of a seminar in La Paz, two professors from universities in the Federal District, Armando Bartra and Luciano Cocheiro invited me to colloquia on the subject.

In the 1970s and 1980s Mexico was a haven for many Latin American intellectuals who were forced into exile because of the dictatorial regimes on the continent. It was the case of Gérard Pierre Charles and his wife Susy Castor of Haiti, Bolivar

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17 Gian Carlo Delgado. He was born in Mexico and is a Doctor of Environmental Sciences and a member of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Sciences and Humanities of UNAM. He was awarded the Prize for Research by the Mexican Academy of Sciences (2014).

18 Armando Bartra is a Mexican economist and anthropologist, a professor in UNAM at UAM (Spanish acronym for Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana: Autonomous Metropolitan University)-Xochimilco.

19 Luciano Concheiro. He is an economist with a Master’s degree of Social Sciences from the Latin American School of Social Sciences (Mexico), as well as a full professor at UAM.

20 Gérard Pierre-Charles (Haiti, 1935-2004). He was a leader of the Haitian Communist Party and was sent into exile to Mexico for twenty five years by François Duvalier; there he taught Social and Economic Sciences at the College of Mexico. He was a secretary to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and founded the opposition party Organización del Pueblo en Lucha (Spanish acronym: OPL, Organization of Struggling People).

21 Suzy Castor. She is a Haitian historian who was exiled in Mexico with her husband, Gérard Pierre-Charles. She founded the Center for Studies and Training on Economics and Social Sciences (Spanish acronym: CRESFED, Centro de Estudios y Formación en Economía y Ciencias Sociales).
Echeverria\textsuperscript{22} of Ecuador and Enrique Dussel\textsuperscript{23} of Argentina, among others.

Strangely enough, Ivan Illich, then a priest in the archdiocese of New York, was also in Mexico, whence he organized his Latin American activities. Ivan Illich, was of Yugoslav origin with Jewish roots. Brilliantly intelligent, he had a great universal culture. I first met him when he attended Capranica, a seminary in Rome reserved for the ecclesiastical elite. He invited me to stay there for a few days; during this stay I had a strong attack of influenza and he looked after me with great care. After he was ordained priest, Illich was appointed to the archdiocese of New York and then named deputy rector of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico.

Since this period, Ivan had already been very critical of the modern economic development model and of the prevailing Western concepts, both in capitalist and in socialist societies. In our debates, he seemed excessive to me. But with the super-intelligent face of an eagle, his malicious smile and mystical Slav character, it was difficult to contest him. I felt he was partially right but that his emphasis on the individual distanced him from the collective aspects of reality. Highly influenced by Erich Fromm’s thinking,\textsuperscript{24} he had a certain critical attitude towards Marxism, which in fact by then I had adopted in my sociological work. However this did not prevent our having an intensive and fraternal collaboration.

His idea at that time was to build ties between the North American and the Latin American Catholic Church to encourage new ideas in the former and devolve part of its resources to the latter. He

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Bolívar Echeverría (Ecuador, 1941-2010) He studied philosophy at the Free University of Berlin and at UNAM. He was a philosophy professor at UNAM who specialized in Karl Marx and was influenced by the school of Frankfurt (specially by Walter Benjamin). He received the “Libertador” Prize for Critical Thought in Caracas in 2006.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Enrique Dussel (Argentina, 1934-). He is a Doctor of History from La Sorbonne, as well as a philosopher and a founder of the Philosophy of Liberation, closely related to the Liberation Theology. He was exiled in Mexico. He has published numerous works, and received the “Libertador” Prize for Critical Thought.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Eric Fromm (Germany,1900-1980). He was a psychoanalyst, a member of the School of Frankfurt. He absorbed the ideas of Freud and Karl Marx, renewing the psychoanalytical theory and practice.
\end{itemize}
organized, in Puerto Rico, a centre for Latin American cultural and religious training for North American priests and lay people who were interested in serving on the continent. The orientation of the centre did not please the ecclesiastical authorities of the North American Church and he was forced to look for another location. He chose Mexico.

As I already knew Monsignor Miranda, the Archbishop of Mexico rather well, I suggested a meeting with him. The Archbishop invited us to dinner and Illich put forward his plans. They pleased Miranda so that later Illich was able to set up his centre in Cuernavaca in an old hotel in the centre of the city, with the collaboration of Monsignor Sergio Méndez Arceo, the local Bishop.

Meanwhile Illich travelled regularly to Europe and to the United States, where he had a close relationship with Eric Fromm, a North American psychiatrist with whom he worked on new perspectives for education and health. One day Illich and I were invited to dinner in Fromm’s home, where we discussed sociological and psychological approaches and Marxism. It was quite difficult to reconcile all the perspectives; but that evening, which lasted into the small hours, greatly helped me to listen to other points of view.

When Illich travelled to Europe he used to call me. Once he telephoned me from Amsterdam saying, “I am coming from New York, but first I must go to Rome because I did not have enough money for the travel, so I am co-piloting a commercial plane. I expect to be in Brussels tomorrow!” I did not know he had a pilot’s license! We had talked about many things, but never about aviation.

Another time he called me from Paris and suggested meeting in Brussels Midi station to have lunch. When I saw him dressed up as an explorer with a rucksack, I asked him, “What’s this? Where are you going?” He replied, “I’m going to Greece and from there I intend to follow the steps of Alexander the Great to the East, following his tracks.” I was only partially surprised as I remembered the previous year he went to Taramasset and to the Sahara, to enter into the thinking of Charles de Foucauld.

Charles de Foucauld (France, 1858-1916). He was a Saint-Cyr officer who worked in Morocco and published the book *Reconnaissance au Maroc.*
During the preparations for Vatican Council II, Illich took the initiative to bring together informally a group of progressive Bishops from Latin America. He sent me a telegram inviting me and I, after cancelling several engagements, flew to Cuernavaca via New York. When I arrived I was told that Illich was in New York and that the meeting was planned for the following week—he made a mistake about the week when he informed me. I tried to make the best of this forced holiday. When finally we met he explained that he had not been able to find the necessary funds for the meeting and that it was not possible to compensate me for my trip. It was a year before I could pay it off. But it was difficult not to forgive Ivan Illich for things like this.

I went several times to his centre to give courses on the socio-religious situation of Latin America. He had collected a very rich documentation on the revolutionary movements of the continent: texts, books, original documents, songs—all relating to resistance, both armed and unarmed, to the dictatorial regimes of the region.

On his return from the United States, during the last years of his life, Ivan published various important books that influenced contemporary thinking, particularly concerning education and health. He strongly attacked the technocratic concepts that underpinned the organization of these sectors, proposing a more personalized, participatory and emancipatory approach. The last time that we met was in Louvain-la-Neuve when, taking advantage of his regular teaching activities in German universities, he came to give a lecture, invited by the philosopher Philippe Van Parijs.26

Enrique Dussel was another heavyweight intellectual living in Mexico at that time. He came from Mendoza in Argentina and had studied philosophy in Spain and Germany specializing in Marx whose works he was able to read in the original version, including some unedited texts that he worked on in Berlin. I knew him from

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He became a priest, attracted by the spirituality of the “Trapá” (rebellion) of Cheikhlé in the Ottoman Empire. He lived with the Berbers in Algeria (Taramaset) and studied the Tuaregs. He was assassinated by a band of outlaws and was proclaimed a beatified person by Pope Benedict XVI.

26 Philippe Van Parijs (Flanders, 1951-). He is a professor of Philosophy at the Catholic University of Louvain, and also the promoter of the idea of a basic universal rent.
the end of the 1950s when he was still a student. He had escaped from the intellectual and religious yoke of Françoist Spain and come to Belgium. As he had no means of subsistence, I offered him some work in the recently created Centre for Socio-Religious Research where he undertook statistical tasks. But his vocation was philosophy and a philosophy engaged with social struggles, which was why he left Argentina when the military took over the State. His output was enormous, numerous books with hundreds of references like those of his German ancestors; seminars in many parts of the world, including at CETRI in Louvain-la-Neuve. One theme that he particularly worked on was the Philosophy of Liberation, parallel with the Theology of Liberation, to which he also contributed. In CETRI an African philosopher, Alberto Kasanda of the Congo who had worked in the Dominican Republic as a missionary, translated a summarized version of his book into French. It was published by L’Harmattan in Paris, in a collection directed by Joaquim Wilke, a German philosopher from the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany), who came at various times to Louvain-la-Neuve during this period.

In the 1990s, after the assassination of the Jesuits in San Salvador, the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) organized a seminar in which Enrique Dussel, Wim Dierkxsens and I participated in an attempt to reflect on the social, ideological and religious reconstruction of the countries of Central America since the Esquipula Peace Agreement and the liberation wars. We met on various occasions in Mexico, in a seminar on culture at the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and at his house at

27 Albert Kasanda. He is a Congolese philosopher who worked as a missionary in Santo Domingo. He has written about African philosophies and about the development of that continent.

28 Joachim Wilke. He is a German philosopher who was born in the German Democratic Republic. He is in charge of the Raison Mondialisée Collection, linking thought to the liberation struggles in L’Harmattan (Paris).

29 Wim Dierkxsens (Holland, 1946-). He is a Doctor of Political Sciences specialized in world economy, as well as a professor and the President of DEI in Costa Rica. He has authored numerous books on world economy.

30 The Esquipulas Agreements among the presidents of Central America to put an end to the war of the “Contras” in Nicaragua in 1967.
Coyoacan, in a colonial style patio the walls of which seemed to be composed only of books. I was also present when Dussel ran into controversy with sub-commander Marcos in their agricultural training school in San Cristobal when –in my opinion– the sub misinterpreted a reference in his speech alluding to the limited knowledge of the indigenous peoples. On a trip in a boat across the Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela, to visit a new city built with Iranian assistance, we also had a long conversation about the evolution of the continent, particularly in the progressive regimes.

There is no doubt that Enrique Dussel has had a strong influence on Latin American thinking and that his presence in Mexico has contributed to the enrichment of the intellectual life of the country, of which he has become a citizen.

Many Chileans also sought political asylum in Mexico during the Pinochet\textsuperscript{31} dictatorship. One of them was Gregorio Selser,\textsuperscript{32} a journalist and historian. He travelled regularly to Nicaragua during the 1980s and we met both there and in Mexico. He asked me for some notes on the situation in Nicaragua, as well as notes that I had written on other countries on the continent. He had an excellent knowledge of Latin American politics. However, after spending many years in fruitful investigation and diffusion of his ideas, he was devastated by the failures of the progressive regimes like Chile and Nicaragua and he took his own life, which greatly saddened me.

In 2011, I gave a week’s course at the University of Puebla, invited by Professor Jaime Estay,\textsuperscript{33} in a postgraduate programme on political economy, about the world crisis and its various aspects, and the need for a new paradigm of human development

\textsuperscript{31} Augusto Pinochet (Chile, 1915-2006). He headed the coup d'etat against President Salvador Allende and was responsible for a cruel dictatorship in alliance with the United States. He promoted neoliberalism in his country, and took part in the Operation Condor to fight against the left- wings movements in Latin America.

\textsuperscript{32} Gregorio Selser (Argentina, 1922-1991). He was a historian and a journalist who was exiled in Mexico. He was also a critical Latin Americanist committed to justice.

\textsuperscript{33} Jaime Estay. He is Chilean, a Doctor of Economy from UNAM and a professor at the University of Puebla as well as the director of a postgraduate program on Latin American studies.
for the planet. Among the participants there were a number of intellectuals who were closely related with the social movements and they showed great interest in these themes.

Mexican anthropology has a great reputation. Many researchers around the whole world have come to this country that is so rich in the archaeological and cultural fields. Such was the case of Robert Redfield,\(^{34}\) who had been my professor at the University of Chicago.

For four years, under the guidance of the Austrian anthropologist Leo Gabriel,\(^ {35}\) the Tricontinental Centre (CETRI) of Louvain-la-Neuve participated in a research project on the autonomy of the indigenous peoples of Latin America. Financed by the European Union, this study brought together six Latin American centres (Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil) and four European ones (Austria, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland). Bernard Duterme\(^ {36}\) and I were in charge of the work for CETRI. With his experience of Chiapas, when he was working with a Belgian Catholic development NGO, Entraide et Fraternité, and after having written an excellent book on the Zapatistas, he concentrated on the Mexican part of the study.

Gilberto Lopez y Rivas was responsible for the study on Chiapas, as well as for collecting up all the other studies and having the Spanish version published. He asked me to write the introduction to the second

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\(^{34}\) Robert Redfield (U.S.A., 1897-1958). A lawyer who became an anthropologist after being in contact with the Mexican Revolution. He made a classical study of Tepoztlan in 1926; also combined anthropology and sociology and made several field studies in Central America.

\(^{35}\) Leo Gabriel (Austria, 1945-). He studied political sciences in Vienna and anthropology in Paris with Claude Lévi-Strauss. He is a professor of political sciences in Mexico and a collaborator of Ivan Illich in the cultural center for documentation (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca. He is the Director of the Ludwig- Boltzmann Institute on Latin America in Vienna, and participated in the Sandinista Revolution of Nicaragua as correspondent of several European publications. He founded the Alternative Information Agency (APIA). He is also a \textit{freelance} journalist on world social conflicts for Austrian television and has made documentaries in Chechenia and in Syria.

\(^{36}\) Bernard Duterme (Belgium). He is a Bachelor of Sociology, the director of CETRI (Tricontinental Center) at Louvain-la-Neuve. He has authored several works, among which is \textit{Indios y zapatistas} (1998). He is also the Director of the journal \textit{Alternatives Sud} and the author of various studies on Chiapas and Guatemala.
volume on the concept of autonomy. I also visited the research teams in Nicaragua, Panama, Ecuador and Bolivia. In Panama, it was the Kuna37 who participated in the study. It was a great pleasure for me to meet the leaders of this indigenous group in the building of the former ‘School of the Americas’ where the Pentagon trained Latin American army officers who were carrying out coups d’état during the 1960s and who killed and tortured tens of thousands of people. The building had been abandoned, when the Canal was transferred by President Carter to the Panamanian authorities. The summing up of all this research was carried out by Gilberto, thus confirming the great anthropological tradition of Mexico.

I have always been in contact with Mexican intellectuals. In 2016 I was invited to give the opening speech on the role of social sciences in the changes of society at the Philosophy Congress at the University of San Cristóbal in Chiapas. There were more than 1,000 participants, particularly young students who exchanged the results of their work and research during that week. I also had some presentations about the thoughts of José Martí in the meeting of the Scientific Council of the José Martí Institute of Cuba in the University of Ciudad del Carmen. It was a small university, full of enthusiasm, with students who are very eager to hear new things. However, this city, facing the Gulf and its off-shore wells, has not lost its reputation for having the best gastronomy in the country, in spite of having been economically affected by the oil crisis.

The Autonomous University of Mexico (UAM) invited me to give a lecture on Reconstructing Modernity in its colonial style cultural center at the Federal District, a wonderful place for multidisciplinary intellectual meetings on rich and constructive exchanges.

The School of Social Sciences of the National University of Mexico (UNAM) requested my participation on the crisis of progressive governments of Latin America, and in front of 200 students I developed the idea that this was about post-neoliberal experiences, not post-capitalist ones, a fact which explained the vulnerability of commodity prices to the crisis and the return to more favorable measures to market law, a market dominated by financial capitalism.

37 Amerindian people of “chibcha” origin located in Panama and Colombia.
The Mexican headquarters of TeleSur took the opportunity of my presence there for an interview with the journalist Luis Hernández, in charge of the program *Cruce de Palabras* (Crossing Words). It recorded a 40 minute conversation on the situation in the continent and particularly on the difficulties faced by progressive governments. I defended the thesis that it was not enough to accuse the right and imperialism; that it was also necessary to be self-critical about a short-term political view; of ruptures with social movements; of lack of consideration for cultural and environmental factors; of unreal modernization projects; of rather Jacobinic conceptions of State, without denying the will for social improvements and the achievements in this sectors.

Once more I spent some days at Pablo González Casanova’s house in Tepoztlán, near Cuernavaca, a paradise for anthropologists, facing granite mountains shaped by Nature as monuments to the forces of the universe. Hours of conversation with Don Pablo on dozens of topics, meeting friends and colleagues for typical meals in a patio full of flowers are unforgettable memories. Long live Mexico.

**Political World**

It was in a meeting of the São Paulo Forum in the 2000s, that I met Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the former president of Mexico. At that time he was the leader of the Partido Revolucionario Democratico (PRD acronym) in opposition to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI acronym) but he never seemed able to establish himself as a national leader.

Already in 2007, the authorities of the PAN (Partido de Alianza Nacional) tried to create a series of juridical obstacles to prevent the candidature of Andrés Manuel López Obrador –popularly known as AMLO— for the PRD in the presidential elections. This resulted, in Mexico City, in the greatest march in its history, with more than a
millions of participants. I had come from Europe for one of the UNAM seminars and I marched with the multitude up to the Zocalo, the central square where the cathedral is located. In this march for democracy we met don Pablo Gonzales Casanova—as we knew, his interests were not only academic—and his wife Marianne. It was impressive, this popular turnout and it was not only for the person of AMLO, but because it was defending a fundamental value in the collective organization of society. This was seen as essential for the social transformations and revolutionary perspectives for post-capitalism. When the Mexican Senate refused to apply the San Andrés Agreements⁴⁰ with the Zapatistas, I took part, with Pablo Gonzalez, Gilberto Lopez and Miguel Alvarez,⁴¹ in a protest demonstration in front of the Senate building.

It was also in Mexico that I had my first meeting with La Via Campesina in a continental encounter of which Rafael Alegría⁴² was then president of the Honduran peasant movement. It was the beginning of a friendship that consolidated in meetings of the World Social Forums in Latin America, Asia and Africa and other meetings in Nicaragua and Honduras as well as collaboration with the movement in various continents.

The Zapatistas

The first direct contact I had with the Zapatistas was in the Federal District of Mexico, where a referendum was being organized and signatures collected in the streets of the capital and I was participating

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⁴⁰ San Andrés Agreements. This was an agreement signed about indigenous culture and rights by the government of Mexico and the Zapatista Army for National Liberation in the city of San Andrés (Chiapas) on February 16, 1996. It was never observed by the government.

⁴¹ Miguel Alvarez Gándara (Mexico, 1952-). He is a sociologist and a Communication graduate. He is the President of SERAPAZ (Spanish acronym for Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz: Services and Consultancy for Peace) and also an advisor to Monsignor Samuel Ruiz.

⁴² Rafael Alegría. He is a Honduran rural leader who was persecuted by the local oligarchy. He is also the President of the Rural Way and a member of parliament for the opposition in the parliament of Tegucigalpa. He took active part against the coup d'état in 2009.
in an international seminar with Samir Amin and Danièle Mitterand.\textsuperscript{43} The Zapatistas invited us to meet them the day of the Spring solstice on a mountain close to Xochimilco. They had carried out a sacred ritual on the top of the mountain and then they came down, while we were coming from below, on our way passing rocks engraved with the Aztec calendar, when we met them.

I was asked to act as interpreter for those foreigners who did not know Spanish. They started out by saying, “We are very happy to have the visit from Miss Françoise Mitterand.” which I did not translate literally! They then briefly explained the objectives of their struggle. In the afternoon we were invited to a nearby park, which had been ‘recovered’ by the inhabitants and where it was possible to take boats on to a little lake. Some of the seminar participants got on to one of the boats. To our great surprise at a certain moment we crossed a boat full of Zapatistas, thoroughly enjoying themselves. What is the country where hooded revolutionaries can allow themselves to do that, if not Mexico? It is true that there was a ceasefire at the time.

In December 2007 the Zapatistas invited me to render homage to Andrés Aubry,\textsuperscript{44} a French priest who had been killed in a car accident and who had been close to the movement. Also present were Don Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, Enrique Dussel and the Canadian Naomi Klein.\textsuperscript{45} Each morning for four days, the hooded sub-commander Marcos would explain the orientations of the movement and its significance for the transformation of Latin American societies.

We visitors were invited to speak and in my presentation I took up a subject that was delicate for the sub-commander: his

\textsuperscript{43} Danielle Mitterrand (France, 1924-2011). Danielle Gouze, the wife of President François Mitterrand and a founder of France Libertés. She was also a member of the Resistance during the Second World War.

\textsuperscript{44} Andrés Aubry (France, 1927-2007). He was a volunteer priest in Chiapas, as well as a sociologist and an anthropologist. He was adviser to CELAM (Spanish acronym for Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano: Latin American Episcopal Council) in the Vatican Council II, a collaborator of \textit{La Jornada} and an adviser to the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

\textsuperscript{45} Naomi Klein (Montreal, 1970-). She is a research journalist who specialized in capitalist globalization.
campaign to abstain from the presidential elections of 2008. Only a few more votes gave the presidency to Calderón\textsuperscript{46} of PAN, rather than to AMLO who, for some time did not want to acknowledge his failure and went ahead to create a parallel government which was not, however, recognized internationally. I asked the sub, “Was this the best position? Because the abstentions favoured the right-wing candidate, with a very small majority.” Marcos replied very calmly, first in French and then in Spanish, “How could I ask the indigenous peoples of Chiapas to vote in favour of his \textit{verdugos} (executioners)?”

It was true that the governor of that state was from the PRD and he applied the policies of the government against the Zapatistas, with huge public works to develop tourism and roads across the territory, hotels, etc., promoting the division between the communities and within them, as well as imprisoning Zapatista leaders. Clearly one could understand the position of Marcos, but it meant giving more importance to the local situation than to the national one and for this reason he had lost the support of part of the left-wing Mexican intelligentsia. Pablo González Casanova was aware of the practical situation of the daily struggle of the movement and, nevertheless conscious of the contradiction, decided to give his solid support to the Zapatistas.

After this meeting I was able to visit various communities, talk with those responsible for the \textit{caracoles},\textsuperscript{47} where the equality among the people was evident, as was the rotation of tasks. Those responsible received me in the communal house, underneath the Mexican flag with the Zapatista flag beside it. The Mexicans who think that this is a separatist movement are much mistaken. It is a question of respecting peoples’ identities within the Mexican state. The caracoles, a very ancient indigenous symbol of the evolution of time and the unity of community construction, organized health services and secondary education. They were outside the official administration and therefore received no subsidies. But they were helped through international solidarity. In the town of

\textsuperscript{46} Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (Mexico, 1962-). He is a lawyer and a member of the National Action Party (Spanish acronym: PAN, Partido Acción Nacional). He was the President of Mexico from 2006 to 2012 and is also a professor at Harvard University.

\textsuperscript{47} Administrative units which included several towns.
San Andrés there were parallel juridical systems, the Zapatista and the official one. They had to coordinate some of the activities. Thus, rubbish collection was assigned to the Zapatista caracol. Evidently the question arose as to how long this double structure could last. Whatever may happen, the extraordinary courage and perseverance of the Zapatistas are an impressive testimony of democratic values and confidence in the people.

Sub-commander Marcos was once professor of linguistics at the University of Lower California and he was inspired both by Marxism and post-modernism. The Zapatista rising on January 1st, 1994 was timed with the launching of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) between Mexico, the United States and Canada and it was clearly a protest against the imperialist imposition of the neoliberal principles of capitalism. The subsequent effects on the Mexican peasants have shown that the Zapatistas were right. At the same time, the concern to be in line with the social culture of the indigenous peoples led the ‘sub’ to favour grassroots organization and ‘leading by obeying’. For him to obtain State power is worth nothing if it means using the bourgeois state apparatus to attain revolutionary aims. It is for this reason that he did not accept the invitation of Evo Morales to attend the ceremony when he came to power in Bolivia.

It was the same philosophy that led him to propose abstention in the presidential elections of 2008. He inspired John Holliday’s book Change the World without Taking Power, which showed very well that there were many other factors in social change, but which also promoted the anti-political feelings of certain NGOs and social movements. How can one achieve an agrarian reform, which is a pillar of an anti-capitalist policy, without exercising power? It is true that the concept of the State has to be altered, but political ingenuousness does not take us very far. In the World Social Forum of Belem, I was able to take part in a seminar with John Holloway in the presence of Danièle Mitterand, and I proposed criteria that were different from his, but he accepted it very calmly.

48 John Holloway (Ireland, 1947-). He is a lawyer, a Doctor of Political Sciences, a sociologist and a Marxist philosopher. He is a professor at Edinburgh University and at the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences of the Autonomous University of Puebla (Mexico).
Two years later, the Zapatistas invited me again to spend five days in Chiapas. I gave a talk on the concept of the Common Good of Humanity. I also talked with Don Pablo who defended a thesis about power with great conviction: it was close to anarchism, but based on concrete experiences. Another participant was Majid Rahnema, former Minister for Higher Education in the time of the Shah, who had been living in France since 1979 and had long shared the criticism of capitalism and imperialism made by the Zapatistas and various leaders of the communities. Also present was the person responsible for the youth wing of CONAIE (which coordinates the indigenous movements of Ecuador) and a Shuar\textsuperscript{49} from Amazonia, with whom I was able to talk at length about the similarities and differences with the Ecuadorian situation.

A week earlier, on 21 December 2013, the Zapatistas had once again occupied the five towns of Chiapas, which they had taken in 1994. This time it was a peaceful take-over. Some 30,000 hooded men and women processed in silence through the towns, especially in San Cristobal. This had a considerable impact on Mexican public opinion, which had thought that the Zapatistas had, if not disappeared, at least greatly diminished in numbers and influence. On the contrary, they wanted to show that they were very much alive and capable of mobilizing many people, thanks to their solid economic basis.

On 31 December, the caracol close to the Agriculture School invited us, the speakers at the seminar and the foreign participants, to celebrate the New Year. As the situation was still tense, with the armed forces of the government around, it was prudent to travel by convoy along the 40 kilometres in the mountains. But among the vehicles that were to take us there was a bus that did not have enough petrol for the journey. The driver went round the town, looking for petrol, but it was a real challenge to find it on the last day of the year at 11 o’clock at night. He finally solved the problem and we were able to join the other vehicles that were gathered together outside the town. But by the time we

\textsuperscript{49} The “Shuar” are the native people from the Amazonia having the largest number of inhabitants between the jungles of Ecuador and Peru. They are approximately eighty thousand individuals.
reached the appointed place, the ceremonies had started and the Zapatistas were not there, having given us up.

We then started negotiating with the hooded guards at the entrance of the caracol. They said that they had to consult the community before they could let us in. Off they went and returned 30 minutes later with a positive reaction. All the while we were all standing at the entrance, shivering with cold. Nevertheless it was necessary to have a list of all the visitors, with their nationality, profession and passport number. The operation lasted another 15 minutes. The comrades then took the lists for further consultation and returned half an hour later. This time the gate was opened.

Thankfully we entered the caracol at last and there, several hundred metres below, we met with thousands of Zapatistas—men, women, children—who were participating in the ceremonial rites for the New Year. There was a large Mexican flag on the walls of the secondary school and two musical groups alternated: one of indigenous music and the other, mariachis. Everyone was dancing and up until 4 in the morning we took part in it. They went on until dawn, but we had to attend the seminar that same day and so we returned to town. For a long time afterwards we discussed the implications of our participation and the consultation that we had experienced in our own flesh and blood. More than ever, it seemed very clear that the movement was in no way a separatist movement.

Still in Mexico, there was a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the publication of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels, and the Workers Party invited me to give a lecture at the cultural centre of Coyoacan (a town in the Federal District) to stress the relevance of this document in the contemporary world; to discuss to what extent it was still pertinent in the present epoch, particularly for the Latin American continent. This Party did not have many representatives but enough to be able to receive subsidies and organize events like this.

In 2005 there was a session in Mexico City of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on the US embargo against Cuba. The initiative came from the Cuban Abel Prieto50 and the session was organized by Gilberto López y Rivas, who was also mayor of Coyoacan, and

50 Abel Prieto (Cuba, 1950-). He is the author of several novels, the Minister for Culture (1997-2012) and an adviser to Raul Castro.
John Saxe Fernandez. Gianni Tognoni,\textsuperscript{51} secretary of the Tribunal, was also present.

The activities of this tribunal, which bore the name of Benito Juarez,\textsuperscript{52} the first Mexican president of indigenous origin, lasted three days and took place in premises belonging to UNAM. The organizers asked me to preside over the session. The reports had been very well prepared, with much specific information on the mechanisms of the embargo and its effects. The case was analyzed by various specialists from Cuba and other countries, including the United States. As always the defendant was convened: in this case, the United States, which was represented in Mexico by its embassy. As there was no response, the tribunal designated a Mexican jurist to present its case, justifying the embargo and its prolongation. His presentation was so professional and convincing that there were negative reactions in the hall which, as president I had to calm down.

The sentence, based on principles of international law, condemned the United States and demanded reparations for material and moral damages. This was sent to Inter-American Human Rights Court in Costa Rica; to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, in Geneva; to the International Court of Justice in The Hague; and to the General Secretariat of the United Nations in New York. Some years later, in spite of the resumption of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, the embargo (called the \textit{blockade} by the Cubans) has still not been lifted.

In January 2012 a Social World Forum on Globalization was organized and Mexican comrades invited me to participate. Tents were set up in the Zocalo in the centre of Mexico City. There was a panel on responses to neoliberal globalization, with two

\textsuperscript{51} Gianni Tognoni. He is an Italian Doctor of Philosophy and Medicine, an epidemiologist and the Director of the Pharmaceutical Research Institute Mario Negri at Milan. He specialized in pharmaceutical research and collaborated with WHO (World Health Organization) to establish the list of the 200 essential medications. He is the Secretary of the Peoples’ Permanent Tribunal.

\textsuperscript{52} Benito Juárez (Mexico, 1806-1872). He was a lawyer of Zapotec native origin who was also the President of Mexico on several occasions. He consolidated the nation as a republic.
speakers, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and myself. I was disappointed by his discourse that was exclusively concentrated on the methods of his electoral campaign. It is true that this was impressive as he was going to visit all the towns in the country, but he never referred to the content of his politics.

Under the regime of Calderón, Mexico is now almost on a war footing, with increasing drug trafficking and the militarization of the country. In just a few years there have been over 50,000 deaths and an enormous displacement of the population, especially in the north and centre of Mexico. The hegemony of the oligarchy has been strengthened. The small peasants were greatly affected by NAFTA and there has been an increase in the migratory flow towards the United States. Dependency on their northern neighbour has grown and the country has become part of the integration with the north, together with Colombia, Peru and Chile.

I returned several times to Mexico between 2010 and 2015 for seminars at UNAM and for a collective work of the World Forum for Alternatives (WFA), with Gian Carlo Delgado. In 2015 I was invited by the University of San Luis De Potosi for lectures on the Common Good of Humanity and on the role of social movements. I was able to see the ruins of a gold mine, symbol of the environmental destruction of extractivism. Like coal and oil exploitation, the regeneration of the soil, of water, of forests and the renewal of the countryside are considered externalities. These are not the responsibility of capital and because of this the companies have privatized the profits and socialized the damages, which have to be paid by the public authorities, by the people and by individuals.

This was also the time of the collective assassination of 43 students in a school in the state of Guerrero. This dramatic event expressed the deterioration of Mexican society under the combined effect of neoliberalism and narcotrafficking. The loss of jobs, especially in rural areas; the forced migration, internal and external; the accelerated privatization of public services and the oil industry; the political corruption (well expressed in the film The Perfect Dictatorship) are the result of the rapid destruction of values and escape into individualism. In sum, Mexico is a country that is the victim of the Great Transformation.
My first visit to Nicaragua was part of my first trip to Latin America in 1954. The country was still ruled over by the dictator Anastasio Somoza. At the end of the 1960s—commissioned by the German Catholic Development Agency, known as Misereor—the Socio-Religious Research Centre of Brussels undertook a study on the Catholic universities in Latin America, which included the University of Central America (UCA), run by the Jesuits in Nicaragua. An unexpected conclusion was reached and communicated in a severe report to Misereor, which had intended to support the work financially. I discovered that the fundamental reason for the funding of Catholic universities in Latin America at this time was fear of Marxism. The Cuban Revolution was a negative example, to be avoided at all costs.

To counteract the intellectual influence of Marxism in the public universities, the Catholic institutions were instructed to develop an anti-Marxist and anti-communist position. This earned them the support of the right-wing governments—frequently military ones—and of the local oligarchies, as well as funds from the United States. The UCA of Nicaragua, specifically, was quite closely linked to Anastasio Somoza Debayle and his regime.

I maintained that, from a Christian viewpoint, this was an unacceptable strategy. A genuine Christian approach would be to train intellectuals capable of serving the people, in particular the most vulnerable classes, rather than allying themselves with the powerful classes and using ideological pretexts to resist the claims by the oppressed.

In fact, this engagement of the Catholic Church with the oligarchy resulted in the organizations of the rural and industrial workers taking up an anticlerical stand, although it was not necessarily anti-religious. The prevailing thinking in Catholic circles on the

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53 Somoza was in power from 1937 to 1947 and then from 1950 to 1956.
54 Anastasio Somoza’s younger son. He was president from 1967 to 1972 and from 1974 to 1979.
continent was that the anticlericalism of the liberal bourgeois of the 19th century was starting to be transmitted to the popular classes, the principal social basis of the Church. This was a risk, especially if it resulted in an alliance between young Marxist intellectuals and popular organizations; but dangerous because it assumed that the Church as an institution had to transmit a religious message from a position of power in the society.

A different attitude, which my analysis also confirmed, was the one then expressed by the YCW and, later, by the ecclesiastical Basic Communities and Liberation Theology: the need to identify with the struggle of the poor for justice as a central value in the kingdom of God. In fact, this promoted collaboration between Marxists and Christians in the social struggle and there was a gradual change in the dogmatic anti-religious attitudes of the former. For this reason I advised the German organization not to finance these universities.

After the Sandinista Revolution, which took place in 1979, I kept in contact with the Basque Jesuits who, because they were anti-Franco, had been obliged to emigrate to Central America years previously. Because of their origins, they had strong social sympathies and they played a fundamental role in the whole region, especially in Nicaragua. They completely changed the atmosphere at the university and, with a few other priests, like the Nicaraguan Franciscan Uriel Molina, they had trained many leaders of the Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN) and intellectuals in the fight against Somoza's dictatorship.

With the triumph of 1979, the UCA was reinforced as an intellectual and political support for the Revolution. The Basque Father Xavier Gorostiaga55 wrote on various occasions, asking me to participate in what they were trying to do in Nicaragua. However, because Geneviève Lemercinier and I were still working for the Institute of Sociology in Vietnam during the summers, we were unable to respond immediately. We finished the work in Vietnam in 1981 and in the summer of 1982 we travelled to Nicaragua. As before, we had

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to dedicate our summer vacation to the project, as we could not leave Louvain University during the academic year.

Our Research Work

Our first visit to Nicaragua in this period was very tough because Geneviève had to be operated for a tumour only a few days after our arrival. An excellent surgeon performed the operation, which was successful but her convalescence lasted two months. I could give a few courses and make numerous contacts but it was impossible to undertake our research programme. From then on, we returned each summer until her death in 1996. I continued the work up until 2006.

At the beginning our working conditions were quite difficult. The UCA had been destroyed by the 1972 earthquake and the teaching staffs were located to provisional quarters. Ours was a little cabin on the campus and we gave classes in rooms without glass in the windows during the summers, so that when there was heavy rain all of us, teachers and students, had to take refuge in one corner. We also had to stand in long queues to buy bread because of war restrictions and the US embargo. Those first years I hired a little car but we had no petrol. We often had to ask Father Ernesto Cardenal, at the time the Minister of Culture and for whom we did some work, if we could have some coupons to buy petrol so that we could move about, which was necessary for our research work, as it was not only confined to Managua. It was however an enriching experience.

We were very well received and developed an excellent collaboration with the Rector, Father César Jerez, S.J.\textsuperscript{56}, who was a very good man and close to the Sandinista Revolution, and then with Father Xavier Gorostiaga, S.J., who replaced Jerez as rector when the latter died in Bogota of a lung disease. We also had good relations with the Vice Rector, Segundo Montes,\textsuperscript{57} who

\textsuperscript{56} César Jerez (Guatemala, 1936-1991). He was a Jesuit priest, the president of Universidad Centroamericana (Spanish acronym for UCA) of Guatemala and an adviser to Sandinista National Liberation Front (Spanish acronym for FSLN).

\textsuperscript{57} Segundo Montes (Basque Country, 1933-San Salvador, 1989). He was a philosopher and a sociologist, a Jesuit priest who obtained Salvadoran
later was assassinated in San Salvador, together with the Jesuits of the UCA of that city.

After two or three years, we not only visited Managua in the summer; we also spent our Christmas vacations there. I had arranged everything in Louvain so as not to convocate my students there for exams, replacing them by four papers to be presented each semester. Their results depended on the marks given to these papers. Although I had shown myself willing to examine anyone who requested it, no student ever did. This enabled me to go to Nicaragua even in the testing period. The Rector Pierre Macq, an open-minded and socially committed layman, found out and asked me to return for the oral exams, but I never managed to do so because this happened in my last year as professor at the university.

At the UCA we created the Centre for Socio-Cultural Analysis (CASC), which at the beginning had very little space. Then, with the cooperation of a Jesuit brother, who was an engineer and architect, a house was built in front of the campus. The university financed half the cost and we met the rest with savings we were able to make from our research budgets. For ten or more years when we were in Managua we always stayed in this house, of which half was taken up by the Centre and the other half with two rooms, one for Geneviève and one for me. When, later on, the Centre was integrated into the university campus itself its previous headquarters were converted into a guest house.

Our work consisted of various studies on the kind of religion in the different social groups in the city and in the rural areas, their mentalities and cultural evolution, and the relationships between religion and the Sandinista Revolution among other issues. We published some twelve documents that recorded our findings.

The main content of the research was the evolution of culture (mentalities) in the process of the Sandinista Revolution, which desired to transform the Nicaraguan society from capitalism, mainly agrarian and externally dependent, to a society that was

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nationality. He was also a Vice-Chancellor of UCA (Spanish acronym for Universidad Centroamericana: Central American University) of San Salvador, where he founded the Human Rights Institute. He was assassinated by the Salvadoran army.
more egalitarian and nationalist. The cultural aspect was very important in this process and it could not only be defined in terms of artistic expressions, although these were not underestimated. Someone like Ernesto Cardenal, who was a great advocate of poetry, painting and high quality popular music, was of course open to this. And, as the population was very religious this also had to be taken into account.

We thus carried out studies on the mentalities of various social groups –peasants, agricultural and urban labourers and the middle classes. We could observe the impact of the change in social relations in the agricultural cooperatives and in the economic rationality of the peasants. The literacy and health campaigns were important in introducing new knowledge although, in the short run, they did not change peoples’ visions of the world.

Once again we realized that it takes a long time to bring about cultural change, which politicians often do not understand. Thus, a peasant whom I interviewed about health problems correctly answered that various diseases were caused by microbes. Afterwards he asked me, “But who is sending the microbes?” He clearly thought it was the work of evil spirits. The universities had supported an excellent World Health Organization (WHO) programme against diarrhoea in children, simple to apply, but most of the peasants did not do so. Children were made to drink preventive medicine in order to fight dehydration in the rainy period –which was the immediate cause of the diarrhoea– but there was another, traditional interpretation of the cause of the illness. According to popular belief, this came from the ‘evil eye’ cast over a pregnant girl who did not know the origins of her child. It was a social balancing mechanism in a rural society. Only a gradual social change could make this kind of belief disappear –certainly not decrees and political decisions alone.

In a survey of the sugar cane workers, it was difficult to convince them to form unions. We found that, being only part-time field labourers, they reacted more as the traditional relationship between the peasant and the landowner, who could be seen as their children's godfather, rather than belonging to a social class.

As for religious attitudes, we also came across a great difference between the image of the Church representatives in the political
field and in the religious one. The peasants could be very
critical of the position of Cardinal Obando y Bravo\textsuperscript{58} against the
Sandinista Revolution and at the same time they would receive
him with great respect when he came for religious rites such as
confirmation, or feasts organized for the parish patron saint. The
religious authorities are, indeed, the guarantee of salvation and
one does not play around when that is at stake. Because of that,
the way in which certain religious personalities were treated by
the Sandinistas had politically negative effects.

**Contacts with Sandinism**

Nevertheless Geneviève and I had a lot of contacts with Sandinism.
We took part in training sessions, in conferences and in large
official ceremonies. We thus gradually came to know almost all
the commanders and were invited to their meetings, birthdays and
other more personal celebrations.

We worked particularly with the office responsible for religions.
It was run by Leana Núñez,\textsuperscript{59} wife of René Núñez,\textsuperscript{60} who was
then minister of the president’s office. We had many contacts with
them. Geneviève Lemercinier and I were the godparents of Maya
Alexandra, their younger daughter. At that time René’s health had
seriously deteriorated, due to the years he spent in prison under

\textsuperscript{58} Miguel Obando Bravo (Nicaragua, 1926-). He belonged to the Salecian
order, and he studied Psychology in Colombia and Venezuela. He was
the Archbishop of Managua and defended human rights during the
dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza. He was an adversary of the FSLN
(Spanish acronym for Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional: Sandinista
National Liberation Front). He was appointed Cardinal by Pope John
Paul II, and later approached the Front and presided over the national
reconciliation commission.

\textsuperscript{59} Eliana Núñez. She was born in Leon, Nicaragua, and is a historian at the
University of León and a militant of the Sandinista National Liberation
Front (Spanish acronym for FSLN) who was in charge of relations with the

\textsuperscript{60} René Núñez Téllez. He is an engineer born in León, (Nicaragua), and a
member of the FSLN who was condemned to 8 years in prison by the
regime of Somoza. He was the Minister for the Presidency from 1985 to
1990 and is the President of the National Assembly.
the Somoza regime. Geneviève suggested inviting him to Louvain so that he could receive care in the university hospital, which he did a few months later and he was operated there.

In these years we carried out a lot of research. One study was of a rural village called El Comején, near Masaya, where there were cooperatives. We studied the history of the place over almost a century, the different types of agriculture that were practised up until the Sandinista Revolution, and the evolution of people’s religious mentalities.

In this area, the transformation of agricultural work into production cooperatives had been taking place on the land of Enrique Bolaños, known as El Chorrucó, who was very much criticized for the way he treated his workers. He was a typical agrarian capitalist, although not a member of the traditional oligarchy; later he became the president of the republic. Before the revolution he possessed much cotton-producing land, which was in great demand during the Korean war, when the United States bought huge quantities from him, which was how he made his fortune. His property stretched from the León region up to Masaya and especially around El Comején. Right from the beginning we saw that, in economic terms, the impact of the Revolution –partly through lack of means– had not been as great in these communities as was expected.

The book resulting from our studies was published in Managua under the title *El campesino como actor*, and it represented an important step forward in our sociological thinking. Our project enabled us to have close relationships, for more than two decades, with the local cooperatives. Not only did we carry out our studies but we also found some financial support for their initiatives. The projects were small, $200 or $300 to each cooperative –to be given for several years– enough to buy an ox, or dig a well or build a grain silo, etc. Finally we managed to organize a twinning agreement between Masaya and the city of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve which, together with four other European towns –one

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61 Enrique Bolaños. He is an engineer from the University of Saint Louis (USA) who was born in Nicaragua. He was the president of the East Cotton Growers Association and of the Chamber of Industries of Nicaragua. He was the President of Nicaragua by the Liberal Party (2002-2007). He was succeeded by Daniel Ortega, who was victorious in the 2006 presidential elections.
German, one Belgian, one English and one Dutch— and assistance from the European Union, financed the drinking water to the popular neighbourhoods. During this last period, the aid of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve enabled the cooperatives to be legally registered. The Sandinista Revolution had distributed the land but it did not insist on registration—so that, after it fell, the old owners claimed back their land even if it had been legalized. It should be added that after the fall of the Sandinistas, as from 1990, the cooperatives were in a very difficult situation as the State banks were privatized and they lost their access to credit.

At El Comején the main contact was with José Mercedes González, a peasant and the local leader of the Sandinista Front, who had had political training in Cuba. When we carried out our first health research he had been instructed to help us in organizing the work. We became real friends and year after year we would meet him. He invited us to his house where the floor was partly of earth and animals and humans shared the same space. We knew the whole family. We would arrive in the old Lada Niva, bought second-hand in Belgium and shipped by Oxfam-Belge in one of their containers. And when we turned up, even the dogs would come out to greet us. During our research work the car took us over hundreds of kilometres in the field, sometimes in quite impassable conditions.

José Mercedes’s mother was the president of the cooperative. Through the Sandinista Revolution she had become literate and she had an acute political judgement. Each time we saw her she wanted information about the political situation in different parts of the world: the US intervention in Iraq, the evolution of Vietnam, what was happening in Cuba, the French elections. I was fascinated by the maturity of this peasant woman whose political conscience was more advanced than that of many of my students at the Catholic University of Louvain. For her, the Sandinista Revolution was her whole life. From being a person without many of her own views she had been projected into local political life. With José Mercedes we visited dozens of cooperatives and had

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62 The Unión Nacional Opositora (Spanish acronym for UNO) took power in 1990.
meetings with the peasants; discussing their needs and making plans to obtain small funds from abroad, from the municipality of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve and some NGOs. When the visit took place on a Sunday they would ask me to celebrate mass which I did on various occasions under a tree, with the community gathered together in order to strengthen their faith in their social and political struggles. If it was only for this, it was worthwhile being a priest.

We had many contacts with the Sandinistas concerning agrarian reform. We were in touch with Orlando Núñez, Director of the Centre for Studies and Promotion of Rural and Social Development (CIPRES), and with Jaime Wheelock, Minister of Agriculture.

After carrying out various surveys we discovered that while the cooperatives of the agricultural labourers functioned, those on the large properties belonging to Somoza that had been transformed into State farms were having operational difficulties. We also identified a serious problem. The farmers who owned the land on which they worked had not benefited much from the agrarian reform which was basically oriented towards landless peasants, and managing the property of the former large landowners. Partly this was because of a certain notion that the small peasant is a small capitalist or sometimes it was also for lack of resources on the part of the State. As a consequence, this sector gradually became a social basis of the counter-revolution.

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63 Orlando Núñez Soto. He was born in Nicaragua and studied Sociology in Paris. He was involved in the May 1968 events in France. He was also a collaborator of James Wheelock for the Agrarian Reform, and founded the Center for Social and Rural Promotion, Research and Development (CIPRES: Spanish acronym for Centro para la Promoción, la Investigación y el Desarrollo Rural Social) in Managua. He took an active part in collaborating with social movements.

64 Jaime Wheelock. Born in Nicaragua, he is a jurist and a sociologist from the University of Chile and also of FLACSO (Spanish acronym for Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales: Latin American School for Social Sciences), as well as a member of the governing body of the FSLN (Spanish acronym for Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional: Sandinista National Liberation Front) and a Commander of the Revolution. He was the Agriculture Minister and directed the Agrarian Reform; he later obtained a Master’s degree in Public Administration from Harvard University.
We also investigated the problems on the Atlantic coast. The Sandinistas saw themselves as ‘liberators’ of the Miskito people\textsuperscript{65} but the latter still called the inhabitants of the Pacific coast, ‘the Spaniards’. For the Miskito people, liberation meant recognizing their identity and their territory, not the fall of Somoza. This created considerable misunderstanding. I was present in discussions on the subject in the house of Commander Tomás Borge\textsuperscript{66} and Minister of the Interior from 1979 to 1990. When the Sandinistas realized their mistake they changed the Constitution and gave the region its autonomy but by that time the Contras had taken advantage of the bad relationships and brought over a considerable number of the Miskitos to their side.

We lived through the process of this war instigated and paid by the United States and also as it intensified. Not a day passed without funerals of young soldiers killed by the Contras.\textsuperscript{67} We had many contacts in the parish of Father Uriel Molina and in the neighbourhood of El Riguero, where each week services were held commemorating the fallen.

Although the situation became increasingly serious, the revolutionary spirit persisted and there were close links between the revolution and Christianity. The FSLN had strong support from the basic communities, which had supplied it with sound

\textsuperscript{65} Misquito. A native people town of 200 000 inhabitants on the region known as the Mosquito Coast, in the Atlantic zone of Honduras and Nicaragua. They are a mix of native Latin Americans and African descendants, (particularly from Louisiana and Jamaica). They were opposed to the centralizing policies of the FSLN and largely supported the Contra; they obtained an autonomous status at the end of the Sandinista period.

\textsuperscript{66} Tomás Borge (Nicaragua, 1930-2012). He was a writer who founded the FSLN and was also a commander of the Revolution, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Ambassador of Nicaragua in Peru. He was an exemplary Liberation and very humane revolutionary. Member of the Joined Sandinista Government

\textsuperscript{67} The Contra. The counterrevolution in Nicaragua was begun by former members of the guard the overturned dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, and were supported by the CIA. They organized in Honduras as a paramilitary force and were fed by small farmers and “misquitos”. They waged a cruel war against the government of the FSLN between 1980 and 1990.
leadership. Also the young intellectuals of the UCA and the National University, influenced by priests like Uriel Molina himself and the Jesuit Fernando Cardenal,⁶⁸ had become revolutionary cadres. Three ministers were priests: Ernesto Cardenal, Fernando Cardenal, S.J., and Miguel D’Escoto. There was a strong presence of revolutionary Christians in the Front and there was a dynamic co-existence between the Marxist current of some intellectuals and popular leaders, the nationalist current and the Christian current. Apart from a few conflicts, the collaboration functioned well.

In this sense, compared with what I had observed in Vietnam and in Cuba, the spirituality rooted in Christianity in Nicaragua was very different. It took part with admirable enthusiasm in all aspects of the revolution. This was expressed in parishes like that of Father Uriel, where every Sunday the peasant mass was sung—with words by Ernesto Cardenal and music by Carlos Mejía Godoy.⁶⁹ Don Sergio Méndez Arceo—the Bishop of Cuernavaca with whom I had worked during the Vatican Council II—travelled from Mexico when he was invited to celebrate the anniversary of the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution each year on 19 July. They called him ‘the Bishop of the Revolution’. It was an authentic spiritual experience to see how the revolutionary idea went hand in hand with the religious ideal.

Visit of Pope John Paul II

In 1983 Pope John Paul II visited Nicaragua. I was giving classes at the University of Louvain, but the Front invited me on the understanding that I should exercise maximum discretion. They also solicited the presence of the Brazilian liberation theologian, Frei Betto, as advisor.

⁶⁸ Fernando Cardenal (Nicaragua, 1934–). He is a Jesuit priest who followed the Liberation Theology. He organized the literacy campaign and was the Minister for Education of the Sandinista government from 1984 to 1990. He was forced to leave the Society of Jesus but was reinstated in the nineties.

⁶⁹ Carlos Mejía Godoy (Nicaragua, 1943–). He is a composer and a singer who co-authored the rural mass with Ernesto Cardenal; he also promoted the new ballad, which is linked to the Sandinista Revolution.
I travelled to Nicaragua, with a stop-over in Cuba. In the waiting room at the Cuban airport I saw the whole Cuban episcopate that were on their way to Costa Rica for a meeting with the Pope, prior to his visit to Nicaragua. As I knew several Bishops personally and the Sandinistas had asked me to keep a low profile, I stayed quietly in a corner of the room. Although we took the same plane, they were not aware of my presence. At the Panama stopover Archbishop McGrath—who during the Vatican Council II had been president of the sub-commission, of which I had been secretary—was awaiting the Bishops from Cuba. Luckily I did not have to leave the plane. Then, in San José of Costa Rica, I embarked on a plane with the Nicaraguan Bishops, who had just been attending a preparatory meeting with the Pope in that city. During the journey each passenger received a voucher for a raffle for a free journey. In no way did I want to win because I would lose my anonymity. In fact, the winner was the representative of the Palestine Front to the Nicaraguan Revolution who was travelling to take up his functions in Managua.

The Pope adopted a hostile attitude as soon as he arrived at the airport. Although I had known him well, since his election I had not wanted to maintain contact with him. He was convinced that he had been elected to carry out his concept of the Church, that is, a disciplined and doctrinally sound institution, capable of fighting against the two external dangers, first, communism and second, secularism. All the same, imagining what could happen, I had prepared a report for him about the Christians in Sandinista Nicaragua, which tried to explain that this country was not like Poland. I transmitted this document through Cardinal Etchegaray. However, at the same time, the Minister of Education—brother of

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70 Cardinal Roger Etchegaray (French Basque Country, 1922-). He is a Bachelor of Theology and a Doctor of Canonical Law, and also an expert on the Vatican Council II, the Archbishop of Marseilles, a prelate of the Mission of France (working priests) and the president of the French Episcopal Conference. As the Cardinal of the Curia, he was in charge of the Commission for Justice and Peace in Rome. Pope John Paul II gave him many delicate assignments in China, Cuba, Iraq, Russia, etc. He was Number 3 at the Vatican.
the writer Gioconda Belli\textsuperscript{71}—who was very close to Opus Dei, had written another report stating that there was religious persecution in Nicaragua. His arguments, which I later saw, were based on the communist danger and the need to fight it, which were similar to those of John Paul II. It was difficult to reason against such a position.

The first thing that the Pope said was that he lamented that many Catholics would not be permitted to meet him. However, at his mass in León there were 100,000 people and 700,000 in Managua, huge figures for a country with four million inhabitants. The government had made available an amount of petrol equivalent to one month’s supply for the whole country, thereby enabling the population to travel. What more could be done in a country in a state of war against the Contras financed by the United States?

There was an incident at the airport with Ernesto Cardenal, who knelt before John Pope II to welcome him. The Pope humiliated him by wagging his finger at him and saying, “First you should reconcile yourself with the Church.” It was incompatible to be a minister as well as a priest, according to canon law. The photo travelled all round the world.

In Managua the mass was celebrated in the Plaza de la Revolución, at that time close to the UCA, where three days before there had been a religious service for the 17 young soldiers who had been killed by the Contras. In an area very close to the platform, there was a group of Catholic conservatives—mostly from the bourgeoisie—who had occupied the space from early in the morning. When the pope arrived, they began to shout: “Long live the Pope!” Behind, under a big banner that read “There is no contradiction between Christianity and Revolution!” most of the participants from the popular classes shouted, “We want peace!”

Cardinal Obando y Bravo pronounced some words of welcome, expressing his joy at the Pope’s visit. He recounted an anecdote about Pope John XXIII visiting a prison in Rome, when one of the prisoners said that on seeing him he felt liberated. And the cardinal added, “We, too, on seeing you, we feel liberated.” Then there was the service. The reading from the gospel was \textit{The Parable of the Good Shepherd} which says that the sheep

\textsuperscript{71} Gioconda Belli (Nicaragua, 1948-). She is a poet and a novelist.
know who the real Shepherd is and who the false shepherds are. Evidently, this was an allusion to the Sandinista leaders. Then the Pope's sermon came. In León, he had taken up the theme of the Catholic school, which perhaps was not a priority in that county with so many problems, but in Managua it was even worse, a speech that severely condemned the popular Church and accusing it of dividing the institution. Most of those present understood nothing and when the Pope said the word ‘popular’ the people cried, “People's power! People's power!” Every now and then they shouted “We want peace! We want peace!” The Pope was furious and seven times had to call for silence.

At one time when the audience was crying, “We want peace!”—it should be recalled that the country was in the middle of a war—the Pope interrupted his talk to point out, “But the Church is the first to want peace!” The atmosphere became increasingly tense.

Then the time for the ‘intentions’ came, the request of prayers for particular purposes. The mothers of the 17 young soldiers who had been killed had been invited to participate but when they saw there was no gesture of the Pope towards them, one of them took a microphone and started to say, “A prayer for our Sons.” It lasted for at least 15 minutes. It was incredible. The mass still continued, but participation was about to explode, with some crying “Long live the Pope!” and others “We want peace!” A majority of the crowd had come from all parts of Nicaragua for this event, which most of them were unable to understand.

The climate was such that the choir made mistakes in their songs. There was an atmosphere of disorder and tension. Finally, at the end, someone took the initiative to intone the Sandinista hymn. That ended the Pontifical Mass. I think that it greatly helped to calm people's spirits. The Pope, very cross indeed, abandoned his liturgical vestments and left.

In the end there was absolute silence. People went away, without a word, to their lorries. It was a failed fiesta. They had looked forward to it so much and they did not understand what had happened. Commander Tomás Borge said to me the following day, “But was it a mass or a political function? I was on the point of taking the microphone and saying ‘Let us recite Our Father all together’.”
The President of the Sandinista revolution, Daniel Ortega, was occupied with the farewell ceremony at the airport. Father Fernando Cardenal told me that he had asked the leader “to scold the Pope for what he had done”. Ortega wisely did not do so. After leaving Nicaraguan territory John Paul II once again declared that he was sad because so many Nicaraguans who had wanted to see him were unable to do so.

The following Sunday, in the parish of Father Uriel Molina a mass was celebrated for the mothers of the 17 young men. I remember that their photographs were in front of the altar. Some of the mothers bore witness, one of them saying, “The Bishop (meaning the Pope) came from Rome, but he never landed. He did not understand what was going on in this country”. It was a very sad mass, but very emotional, because it was to ask forgiveness. There was no aggressiveness, only pain; no anger, but serenity. The songs of the peasant mass helped, “Thou Who art the God of the poor…”

After the Pope’s visit, to return to Belgium I took a flight that had a stop-over in Panama. As I knew that once in Louvain I would not have the time to write the report on this experience, I assembled my papers and notes between Managua and Panama in order to be able to dictate the text later on. In the journey from Panama to Puerto Rico I read *El Nuevo Diario*. A gentleman behind me asked if he could borrow it. When he returned it to me he said that it was a horrible newspaper. Confronted by his aggressiveness, I answered that it was not the paper of the Sandinista Front and he answered, “It is much worse.” He wanted to know whether I came from Managua and what I was doing there and, learning of my relations with the UCA he presented me to his companion, Indalecio Rodríguez Alaniz, a former rector of this university during the Somoza period.

I said that I was a professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, which he knew as a great university and added that an uncle of his had studied there. He said that he had studied at Notre

72 President of the Republic of Nicaragua from 1985 to 1990. He returned to power for the FSLN as from 2007.

73 A pro-Sandinista newspaper.
Dame University in the United States and I told him that I had an honorary doctorate from that university. He then introduced himself as Adolfo Calero Portocarrero,\textsuperscript{74} the leader of the Contras and confided in me, showing me documents on their organization and the curriculum of the various officials of the organization, as well as the Belli report on the so-called persecution of the Church by the Sandinista regime.

He told me that they were using the scandal of the Pope’s visit to go to Europe to seek financing. Another part of their delegation was destined for North Europe and they were going to Spain and Italy. It was just as well that I never gave them my name.

In such company I did not want to dictate anything. Luckily there was a vacant seat at the end of the plane and I went and sat there. There was a moment during the night when he passed on the way to the toilet and saw me busy. “You have a lot of work!” he said. In Madrid he gave me a great farewell hug. And when I arrived in Belgium I sent a message to the Front so that they knew about the Contras’ projects. Afterwards I sent my notes to some 50 addresses and they were published in various journals, from the review of pontifical missionary works of Quebec to the weekly paper of the French Communist Party, and translated in various languages.

\textbf{End of the First Sandinista Government}

In 1990, before the elections, Geneviève Lemercinier and I carried out a survey on the opinion polls. Estimates of voter intention showed a majority in favour of the FSLN and 30 \% abstentions. Many thought that the undecided would be distributed in the same proportion as those who held a definite position and both in Nicaragua as in the United States, predicted that there would be a clear victory for the Front. Nevertheless, applying a factorial analysis of the results in each electoral district we noticed that the profile of the abstainers was very similar to those who had declared themselves in favour of the Unión Nacional Opositora (UNO), represented by Violeta Barrios

\textsuperscript{74} Adolfo Calero Portocarrero (Nicaragua, 1931-2012). He was a businessman, the manager of Coca-Cola, and a founder of the Contra, which was supported by the CIA.
de Chamorro.\textsuperscript{75} That meant that those who had declared themselves undecided were in fact untold supporters of the opposition. We came to the conclusion that the FSLN alone would get between 40 and 45\% of the votes and not a majority.

I submitted the report to the person responsible in the FSLN, but they gave it no importance. Perhaps they did not understand and were unprepared for what happened. In the end the UNO won and the Front only obtained 42\% of the votes.

What was certain was that from the elections in 1984 to the elections of 1990 things had greatly deteriorated in Nicaragua, to a large extent because of the damages caused by the war and the embargo of the United States. The people were completely exhausted. Before the 1990 elections the FSLN had announced that they would continue with the obligatory military service, which was widely rejected. We understood what that meant for the people. On Saturday night they did the rounds of the amusement sites to find young people who had not done their military service. The army threw a ring round villages to avoid anyone escaping. For lack of volunteers they obliged young people to enrol. Although this was logical in a time of war, it was extremely unpopular.

In 1990, after the defeat, there was the famous \textit{piñata}\textsuperscript{76} (a container full of presents and/or candy), the private appropriation of the State's assets. Some used their positions to keep houses, cars and various pieces of equipment belonging to the State. They thought that after 15 or 20 years of sacrifice for derisory salaries they had the right—because the new regime was a counter-revolutionary one—at least to keep these goods. Others took much more—properties, land, capital—but they were not numerous.

After the electoral defeat, there seemed to be a militancy fatigue. Many had had children who had grown up; the cost of living was very high and they had few resources. All this contributed to weakening commitment. There were militants who

\textsuperscript{75} Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (Nicaragua, 1929-). She is a journalist and the wife of Joaquin Chamorro, a journalist assassinated by Somoza. After the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution, she was a member of the Government Junta for National Reconstruction and President of the Republic by the UNO (1990-1997).

\textsuperscript{76} A toy puppy full of sweets that appeared in children's anniversaries.
practically passed to the other side. I was able to talk with various commanders. I remember, for example, Víctor Manuel Tirado\(^77\) who was of Mexican origin and who at that time defended neoliberal positions, and others, although more moderate, thought that the only way to achieve progress was to accept a market economy.

During those years, I had the opportunity of participating in various congresses of the Party in Nicaragua, in particular the one that divided the FSLN. It was decided to balance the numbers equally for the members of the various levels of leadership between men and women. For this reason, Sergio Ramírez,\(^78\) the former vice president, whom Geneviève and I knew well, was not elected to the Executive Committee. This caused strong reaction as it meant the marginalization of the currents in conflict with the leadership of Daniel Ortega. It was also at the origin of a much more radical decision –on the part of the intellectuals and the bourgeoisie who had been on the side of the Revolution– to constitute the Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista (MRS) which meant a real class rupture but, at the same time, enabled the emergence of a new, more popular leadership. The FSLN remained a centralized organization, with the rather authoritarian management of Daniel Ortega, although it had a genuinely popular social basis.

I think that the FSLN committed many political errors. It made an alliance with the liberals of Arnoldo Alemán.\(^79\) This was somewhat questionable for several reasons but it was true that without it they could not have gained a majority in parliament. This is what happens in all democracies that have proportional voting.

\(^77\) Víctor Manuel Tirado (Mexico, 1940-). He is a member of the Mexican communist movement and a volunteer in the armed struggle in Nicaragua. He took part in the struggle of the National Liberation Front in Honduras and organized the front in rural areas, having received military training in Cuba. He was a Commander of the Revolution in 1979 and a member of parliament for to the Central American parliament. He broke off with the front to enter the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS, Spanish acronym for Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista).

\(^78\) Sergio Ramírez (Nicaragua, 1942-). He was the Vice-President of the Republic (1986-1990). He left the FSLN and his political life as well. He is an internationally reputed novelist.

\(^79\) He represented the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (Liberal Constitutional Party) and was president of Nicaragua from 1997 to 2002.
The Front functioned in an ambiguous way. There were leaders and militants who continued the popular social and political project and there were also personalities who enriched themselves. There are cases like that of Rosario Murillo, Daniel’s wife. She is an artist with a strong personality, who has much influence in politics, although she was not elected. For these reasons, before the elections of 2007, I published, in the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*, an article that posed the question “Is there still a left in Nicaragua?” My reply was, “No, but the Front is the party closest to the left.” This provoked quite a lot of reactions from old friends of mine who had passed to the MRS and from people like Sergio Ramírez who wrote an article against this thesis in *El Nuevo Diario*.

**Return to power of the Sandinista Front**

Since the electoral victory of the FSLN and its allies in 2009, the peasants have again benefited from getting access to credit. Education and health have once more become free. Literacy work has been made possible thanks to the collaboration with Cuba. A freedom from hunger programme has helped tens of thousands of families. As part of the ‘Operation Miracle’ there have been thousands of eye operations. Managua, because of its cooperation with Venezuela, no longer suffers from the interruptions of electricity that used to last several hours a day. Trade with Venezuela increased the exports of agricultural and livestock products. At the beginning of 2010 I visited the region

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80 Rosario Murillo (Nicaragua, 1951-). She is a professor and a poet and was active in the Sandinista revolution. She is the wife of President Daniel Ortega and is very active in the political activity of the front.

81 Operation “Miracle”. This was a humanitarian project started in July 2004 by the governments of Cuba and Venezuela to provide medical care for the poorest populations suffering from different ocular problems. It was integrated within ALBA (Spanish acronym for Alianza Bolivariana para las Américas: Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas). The medical technology of Cuba and the financing of Venezuela were joined together and millions of persons from the entire continent, including the United States, were cured. At the beginning the patients were sent to Cuba, but later on the program was carried out in different countries. The military who killed Che in Bolivia was cured this way.
of Masaya and the streets of many popular neighbourhoods had been paved and this had happened elsewhere. For the people this was important and relevant.

There were conflicts with some NGOs concerning the defence of human rights, feminists, etc. At least some of these were middle class organizations, close to the opposition. In fact there were situations of human rights violations like the agricultural workers who suffered from the effects of using chemical pesticides (negamon). There were also problems created by the stupidities of some official bureaucrats and judges with bad intentions. For example, Ernesto Cardenal had to undergo a trial because of a property he owned, before the Revolution, on the island of Solentiname. The news went all round the world and the Sandinista government was accused of instigating the process. In the end Cardinal was found to be innocent. But the government was accused of having given in to international pressure. In one way or the other, the Sandinistas were always blamed!

In what is called ‘civil society’ there is much confusion. On the one hand, this concept is not neutral and organizations that claim to defend the freedom of the population are in fact acting on behalf of the interests of specific social groups, the middle classes or the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the social movements, when they come to an agreement with governmental policies, risk losing their autonomy and become instrumentalized for political ends.

In 2009 President Daniel Ortega began to see the possibility of being re-elected, in spite of the fact that the Constitution did not allow it, so it was a question of finding the possible legal mechanisms. He was re-elected in 2012. The same happened in 2016. The need for continuity to achieve change was understood but, at the same time, there was the danger of monopolization of the leadership. These are real contradictions and they are quite traditional in Latin American political culture.

Also, during the ‘long time’ of cultural transformations, populism and caudillism enter political life. Nevertheless, as Ernesto Laclau

82 Ernesto Laclau (Argentina, 1935-2014). He was a political scientist, a philosopher and a writer at Essex University, as well as an adviser to Gino Germani, an Argentinian sociologist. Laclau was a disciple of Eric Hobsbawm and closer to Lacan, Foucault and Derrida. He studied the
has said, in connection with populism, it is not so much the form of political life that counts, but the danger lies in the content of the policies it carries out.

The economic policy of the coalition government is not very clear, corresponding to the conditions in the present situation. In fact, a small country does not have much autonomy. Nicaragua had signed a free trade treaty with North America, has agreements with the IMF and greatly depends on European development assistance (until it was broken off after the municipal elections that were considered to be fraudulent). At the same time it forms part of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA). The country is swimming with contradictions. Some of the local economic capitalist groups that have strong international connections, like the Pellas Group, have taken advantage of them and support the process. Some Sandinistas see the situation not only as a transition towards a socialist project, but something that is quite beneficial for their own interests.

In spite of all this, there have been some steady and concrete advances, which cannot be denied, when possible alternatives are considered. There are no situations without their ambiguities. The problem is to choose among the ambiguities without losing the fundamental aims.

growing pauperization of the working class and the political phenomena of populism in Latin America.

83 Created in 2004 in Havana, as the Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas, ALBA as it is known as, was seen as an arrangement for mutual benefit between the countries involved. When it was founded it included Cuba and Venezuela; in 2006 it incorporated Bolivia; in 2007, Nicaragua; in 2008 Dominica and Honduras were associated (but the latter remained only until January 2010 when the government established by the coup d’etat of the previous year withdrew Honduras from the project). Ecuador joined in 2009, as well as the islands of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbados, and as observers Haiti, Grenada and Paraguay. In 2009 its name became the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América.

84 Pellas Group. This group consists of enterprises from the Pellas family in Nicaragua, which started in the sugar production and later diversified in import activities and in the financial sector. They did not leave the country after the Sandinista Revolution and are considered national capitalists protected by the political system.
In the religious field, since the victory of the FSLN, Cardinal Obando y Bravo has been at the head of the Reconciliation Commission, which covers many subjects, from agricultural property to aggression against individuals. The Front had to pay a political price for this: the abolition of the law on therapeutic abortion, a law almost a hundred years old, which was contrary to the Church’s convictions. This measure was a serious political mistake because it is not up to the State to define moral issues, but to act on behalf of the common good—in this case, public health. In spite of this, from the electoral viewpoint, the Reconciliation with the Catholic Church has been a useful strategy because many of the clergy have given up their aggressive anti-Sandinista attitude of the past. It was thought that this would have a certain influence on the masses, but perhaps the impact was not so significant because, in fact, already in the time of the Revolution, the population had succeeded in seeing the difference between the religious role and the political position of their priests. At least it partly neutralized an opposing group. The right, for its part, has begun to attack Cardinal Obando because it considers him to be a traitor. We must not forget that during these years he has been the most important political actor in Nicaragua, second only to Daniel Ortega. The designation of the Archbishop of Managua, Monsignor Leopoldo Brenes as Cardinal by Pope Francis in 2014 was seen as a sign of his disapproval of Obando.

As for the conversion of Daniel Ortega, that some people question, I think he was always a believer. That does not mean that political objectives do not lead to the adoption of accommodating attitudes towards the Church as an institution. In this sense, the Reconciliation, with Cardinal Obando y Bravo seems to be more arguable. On the one hand I recognize the sincerity of Daniel Ortega when he admits that the FSLN has not always behaved correctly towards the Catholic Church, but it is also undeniable that the Church adopted an anti-revolutionary attitude. Now, in this process of reconciliation the Catholic Church does not recognize any fault of its own, which is quite humiliating for the Front, but perhaps this was the price to

85 Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes (Nicaragua, 1949–). He was the Archbishop of Managua since 2005 and was appointed Cardinal in 2014.
pay for political objectives. During the reconciliation mass in the cathedral, at which I was present, Cardinal Obando y Bravo made a clever sermon as always, but so theoretical that it could have been delivered on the moon. I remember that hardly ten years previously, at the inauguration of this same cathedral, I personally heard its main contributor, a US citizen who was founder and executive director of Pizza Domino, a friend of Cardinal Obando, declare that this precinct constituted the symbol of the victory over communism (which meant the Sandinistas).

During the meeting of the São Paulo Forum in June 2016, I stayed in the same hotel as Orlando Núñez, the Nicaraguan sociologist who has been a friend since the 1980s. I explained to him the work we were doing on peasant agriculture in the IAEN (Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales). He told me about their programme supporting peasant women in Nicaragua and how successful it was. The State provided farmyard animals – a cow, a pig, some chickens – to the mothers of families. They reproduced themselves and contributed to a rapid increase in the household income. There were few losses because the women are more careful than the men. The programme had helped to protect the country’s food sovereignty and to maintain the foreign trade balance and it has also been a structural method of fighting against poverty. I suggested that in 2017, under the auspices of IAEN, we could invite members of his team to be interviewed by skype on the topic.

The canal project in Nicaragua has had a long geopolitical history since the 19th century. Then it was caused by the rivalry between England and the United States. Now the rivalry is between the United States and China. The investment capital would come from China, which would mean that Nicaragua would be economically dependent for more than 50 years. But in 2015, the slowing down of China’s accelerated growth put a brake on investment that could stop the project from going ahead. In the meantime, the Academy of Sciences, presided by Manuel Ortega, who succeeded me as director of CASC at the Central American University, has published a book showing the superficiality of the environmental and social studies that were carried out for the project and emphasizing that the real impact will be much more damaging
than had been forecast. At the same time groups of peasants have been demonstrating against the appropriation of their land and ecological associations are also mobilizing.

As for the government, it has been promoting arguments in favour of the project: the economic benefits, the creation of thousands of jobs, the elimination of poverty while the interests of local groups are also involved. In fact, the whole affair demonstrates the desire to modernize the country without sufficient attention to the externalities—as is the case for most of the megaprojects on the continent. In addition I consider that there is a more general reason to oppose it: the canal will increase useless maritime transport in function of the dogma of the liberalization of international trade. This capitalist logic is based on comparative advantage, as a result of the exploitation of labour, the destruction of nature and differences in the economies of scale that enable low-cost production or the exportation of agricultural surplus—in other words, the domination of exchange value over use value. I am afraid that the same thing could be said about the port of Mariel, close to Havana in Cuba, financed by Brazilian capital.

A week before René Núñez's death, in September 2016, I went to visit him at the San José Hospital in Costa Rica, where he was under intensive care. It was a very moving meeting, together with Leana and their three children who accompanied him with deep affection and much hope. We prayed very much and I gave him the sacrament for the sick. The Bishop of León, Monsignor Bosco Vivas, went to visit him on his way to Rome. After his death, René received national funeral honors and there were three days of official mourning. He was acknowledged by all as a just man.

I returned to Nicaragua for Christmas 2016 to celebrate this religious ceremony with René's family. I also met several friends. Everyone, from any political trend, was critical of the political formula in which Daniel had his wife Rosario Murillo elected as Vice-President. The high level of abstentions in the elections proved that the majority of the people, even the Sandinistas, did not agree. Nobody denied the

86 César Bosco Vivas Robelo. He was born in Nicaragua in 1941. He studied philosophy and theology in Nicaragua and in Rome. He was consecrated Bishop in 1981 and was assistant Bishop to Cardinal Obando in Managua.
intelligence or competence of Rosario, but this way of reproducing personal power and the authoritarian manner characterizing the Vice-President's way of acting did not find unconditional support.

In spite of this and of several other deviations such as corruption, the Sandinista Front still has popular support. The country is the only one in the region which is safe and had a growth of more than 4% in 2016. Several policies have been successful: the program for productive support to women farmers; the extensions and improvement of the road network; the renewal of ports using their own resources or loans, thus avoiding concessions; and the construction of the seafront promenade of Managua and of the Salvador Allende port. However, there are future hazards. The support from Venezuela via ALBA is decreasing; the pharaonic project of the transoceanic canal is on hold due to lack of funds from China; mine exploitation and the development of monocultures at the expense of the woods always finds further resistance. It is the cost of the alliance with international and local capital which will have its social and political cost one day. It is not enough to be post-neoliberal to create a new society.

**El Salvador**

During the 1980s, Héctor Dada, an economist from El Salvador who had graduated from the Catholic University of Louvain visited CETRI. At one time he had been a minister under President José Napoleón Duarte of the Social Christian Party. The Christian Democrats of El Salvador collaborated with COPEI, their brother party in Venezuela, and in charge of the contacts was Arístides

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87 Héctor Dada (El Salvador, 1938-). He studied at the Catholic University of Louvain and is a member of the Christian Democratic Party. He broke off with José Napoleón Duarte and formed part of the Government Revolutionary Junta in 1980. He was an ally of President Mauricio Funes from the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front.

88 José Napoleón Duarte (El Salvador, 1925-1990). He was a civil engineer and the President of the Republic (1984-1989) by the Christian Democratic Party in El Salvador. He was arrested, tortured and was exiled by the regime of Colonel Arturo Armando Molina. As Head of State, he developed a hard line policy against the Left and the Farabundo Martí National Front and he was supported by the United States.
Calvani, who was also a former student of Louvain and ex-Minister for Foreign Affairs in Venezuela.

Hector Dada soon left Duarte who followed a very conservative line, in fact allying with the oligarchies of the country and supported by the United States in the fight against the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLF). But Dada was also against armed struggle. We talked a lot over the years about the experience of Nicaragua. In 2009 Dada was once again economics minister—a position he held for three years, this time under President Funes, the candidate of the Farabundo Martí Front.

While Geneviève Lemerciniér and I were in Nicaragua we were contacted by the Salvadoran economist, Rafael Menjívar, professor at the National University and author of a book *The Primitive Accumulation and Development of Capitalism in El Salvador* (UCA Editiones, 1981). He had ties with the guerrilla forces in his country and was responsible for training their militants. He asked us for a plan for a course on Marxist sociology and particularly on the Sociology of Religion. My book, *Sociología de la Religión*, the content of a course I gave in Cuba, circulated among the guerrilla leaders and Menjívar wanted to organize this course inside his country in an area controlled by the guerrillas. He asked us whether we would be prepared to go there with our eyes blindfolded and we raised no objection. However, in the end the project did not materialize because that year the final guerrilla offensive was being prepared, which did not have the desired results.

Together with Menjívar in Costa Rica I had met Daniel Camacho, professor at the National University and responsible for the Latin

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89 Arístides Calvani (1918-1986). He was a lawyer who studied at the Catholic University of Louvain. He was also a member of Christian Democracy Committee for Independent Electoral and Political Organization (Spanish acronym for COPEI). He was the Chancellor of the Republic and a member of Opus Dei.

90 Mauricio Funes (El Salvador, 1959-). He is a journalist. He was the President of El Salvador from 2009 to 2014.

91 Rafael Menjívar Ochoa (El Salvador, 1959-2011). He was a writer and a member of the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front who founded the Writers' House. He studied in Mexico and published several novels and stories.

92 Daniel Camacho (Costa Rica, 1939-). He is a jurist and a sociologist as well as a professor at the National University of Costa Rica and the President
American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO). As co-author with Rafael Menjívar, Camacho had written a chapter entitled “The popular movement in Central America, 1970-1983” for the book *Movimientos populares en Centroamérica* (Ediciones Universidad Centroamericana, San José, 1985). We talked a lot about the theory of social movements and their relations with the political movements, and the danger of the former becoming absorbed by the latter, as happened in Nicaragua, as well as the contradictions that this posed for continuing the revolutionary process.

At various times I visited El Salvador during the 1970s and 1980s, working with FUNDE, the research centre run by an economist who had studied in Louvain. I visited several social movements, particularly a union of women who worked in the maquiladoras, where the working conditions were very hard, with long hours and unpaid overtime, while pregnant women were sacked. Most of the capital was from Asia. I was also able to make contact with the grassroots communities.

On several occasions when I was at the UCA of Managua I met with Padre Ignacio Ellacuría, a Jesuit from the UCA of El Salvador and an outstanding theologian. He was concerned with many subjects, including social ethics and for this reason he was in disagreement with the governmental policy of the Christian Democrats, although he also had some reservations about the policies of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front. He was one of the seven Jesuits who were later assassinated by the Salvadorian army, together with Segundo Montes, whom I had known when he was vice rector of the UCA of Managua, and Martín Baró, a of the Latin American Sociology Association. He took active part in the defense of human and environmental rights.

Ignacio Ellacuría (Basque Country, 1930-El Salvador, 1989). He was a Jesuit priest, a philosopher and a theologian who studied Theology in Innsbruck under Professor Karl Rahner. He had a doctorate degree from the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, was the director of the journal ECA (Spanish acronym for Estudios Centro Americanos: Central American Studies) from UCA of San Salvador, as well the Chancellor of UCA. He was also an adviser to Monsignor Oscar Romero and was assassinated by the military from the Atlacatl batallion.

Ignacio Martín-Baró (Spain, 1942-El Salvador, 1989). He was a Jesuit priest and a psychologist who studied theology at Louvain and psychology at
psychologist who often came to the CASC in Managua to discuss methodological issues in the human sciences. Only John Sobrino escaped the massacre because he was abroad at the time.

The barbarous act and the assassination of Monsignor Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, increased the bad reputation of the government internationally. The priests were martyred for their Christian faith, in the cause of the people. It is amazing that, for 30 years, the Holy See did not recognize their sacrifice, while the beatification of Monsignor Escriva Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei, took place less than six years after his death. However Pope Francis canonized Monsignor Romero in 2015, a good sign of change of attitude at the top of the Catholic Church.

The political struggle in El Salvador had been very violent. A student from Louvain, who was a member of the FMLF, was killed during the fighting between the guerrillas and the army that trained and financed by the United States. Before his departure, he had given me a machete with a design of five escudos representing the countries of Central America.

A number of members of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front were in Nicaragua and I knew, at least partially, of the existence of internal conflicts. As from the end of the 1990s, after the death of Geneviève Lemercinier, I stayed in the house of René Nunes. It was in that same house that Comandante Marcial had committed suicide. His widow, who lived in Costa Rica, contacted UCA (Spanish acronym for Universidad Centroamericana: Central American University) He was both a Master of Social Sciences and a Doctor of Social Psychology from the University of Chicago. He was the Vice-Chancellor of UCA in San Salvador and a follower of the Theory of Liberation. He was assassinated by the military from the Atlacatl batallion.

95 José María Escrivá de Balaguer (Spain, 1902-Rome, 1975). He was a Spanish priest who founded Opus Dei in 1928, which was an organization of Catholic priests and laymen for spiritual renewal, characterized by secrecy and its recruitment among political and economic elites.

96 Commander Marcial (El Salvador, 1918-Nicaragua, 1983). His name was Salvador Cayetano Carpio; he was a trade union leader and a founder of the Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces and of FSLN (Spanish acronym for Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional: Sandinista National Liberation Front) and also the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of El Salvador (1964). Having been accused of being the mastermind in
me to try and recover his body so as to be able to bury him in El Salvador. I tried to find out, through the Sandinista Front and the Nicaraguan army, to see if this was possible and a few weeks later, the body was transferred from a military cemetery to San Salvador.

Shafik Handal was a real friend. He had been a commander in the Front. Afterwards he became president of the parliament. I got to know him at the São Paulo Forum and he came to the 20th anniversary of CETRI in the name of the Forum. I much appreciated his very perceptive analysis of the Salvadorian situation. He had a good knowledge of Marxist theory but he used it without dogmatism. We met on a number of other occasions, not only in San Salvador, with his Russian wife, but also in Brazil, Nicaragua, Venezuela as well as in Cuba, where I accompanied him to the hospital when he had a serious operation. He died on returning from La Paz, where he had been participating in the celebrations when Evo Morales came to power.

Another leader that I had also known was Villalobos. I first met him in Nicaragua, during the war. He belonged to one of the groups that formed the Front that ideologically were the most radical and he was responsible for the execution of Roque Dalton who was the best poet of the country. He had joined the guerrillas and was treated as a traitor. Some years later I met Villalobos

97 Joaquín Villalobos (El Salvador, 1951-). He founded ERP (Spanish acronym for Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo: People’s Revolutionary Army), a particularly radical branch of the Farabundo Martí Front; he was responsible for the assassination of the poet Roque Dalton. He signed the peace agreements; he studied at Oxford and became a critic of the Left of El Salvador, particularly of Hugo Chávez. He was also an adviser to President Uribe of Colombia on matters related to the armed guerrilla.

98 Roque Dalton (El Salvador, 1935-1975). He studied law at the Universities of Chile, of El Salvador and of Mexico. He was a poet, an essayist, a journalist and an intellectual and a political activist from El Salvador. He was awarded the Poetry Prize Casa de las Americas of Cuba, and authored numerous works. After being accused of being a revisionist and a traitor, he was executed by his own ERP comrades, (ERP: Spanish acronym for Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo: People’s Revolutionary Army) whose guerrilla he had joined.
in Brussels. He had completely changed and was a partisan of neoliberalism and non-violence. I was surprised by this and we had long discussions about it. His position concerning violence could be understood as a reaction to the horror of a war that cost 60,000 lives. He used religious arguments to justify his position, but almost without any analysis or references to the thinking of Monsignor Arnulfo Romero on the matter. His was almost a fundamentalist position. As for an economic model, he had totally rejected Marxism. I was not surprised to hear, a few months later, that he had accepted to collaborate with President Uribe\textsuperscript{99} to fight against the armed struggle in Colombia.

In contrast, the Canadian theologian Hervé Carrier\textsuperscript{100} wrote a magnificent book about the sermons of Monsignor Romero in 2012. This, together with the texts themselves, was a genuine treatise of pastoral theology and social morality, worthy of the writings of the fathers of the Church. Carrier asked me to write the preface. In August 2012 Professor Mira, director of the research centre CEICOM, invited me to a seminar organized by his institution and Lutheran Unity to celebrate in La Palma –site of the first negotiations between the government of José Napoleón Duarte and the guerillas– not far from the frontier with Honduras. It was a group of economists, sociologists and philosophers from the continent and they discussed the alternatives to capitalism. There was a strong reaction from Mónica Maldonado,\textsuperscript{101} commander in the Sandinista Revolution, but opposed to Daniel Ortega and founder of the Movement for the Recovery of Sandinismo. She could not accept the description of “progressive governments”

\textsuperscript{99} Álvaro Uribe (Colombia, 1952-). He is a law graduate from the University of Antioquia and also studied administration, management and negotiation of conflicts at Harvard University Extension School. He is a Colombian politician and a lawyer and was the President of Colombia from 2002 to 2010.

\textsuperscript{100} Hervé Carrier. He is a Canadian theologian follower of the Liberation Theology and author of several books on the Latin American church, and particularly about Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero.

\textsuperscript{101} Mónica Maldonado. She is a Commander of the Sandinista Revolution (Commander Ana). She is the author several volumes on the history of the Sandinista revolutionary struggle, and separated from the lines of Daniel Ortega in order to promote a ‘Sandinism’ that is closer to its ideological origin. She founded the Movement for the Rescue of Sandinism.
for the new political systems in Latin America, especially for Nicaragua. After the meeting we had a day of exchanges with the social movements of San Salvador.

Funes’ government was very timid in preparing fundamental transformation. He concentrated on reinforcing the institutionalization of the State and promoting some social programmes. But he refused to join ALBA. At one year from the elections the atmosphere was pessimistic and a return of the right was thought to be inevitable. This was not the case but there is a great probability that it will in fact happen.

Commander Nidia Reyes, whom I encountered in various meetings –in Bogota, with Piedad Córdoba, and in Caracas with the ‘In Defence of Humanity’ network, invited me, on behalf of the Farabundo Martí Front (FMLN), to participate in the São Paulo Forum. At the beginning I was not so enthusiastic because the ideology of the Forum has been evolving towards social

102 Commander Reyes (Colombia, 1948-2008). He was a guerrilla fighter who joined JUCO (Spanish acronym for Juventud Comunista Colombiana: Colombian Communist Youth) when he was 16 years old. Afterwards, he joined the trade union movement while he was working for a Nestlé milk Factory in the province of Caquetá. During his trade union work he opposed the poor working conditions of workers and this brought about hostility, persecution and threats against him. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party before he joined FARC. He was a FARC spokesman in the failed process of negotiation of 1999 between this armed group and the Colombian government. He died in a Colombian military operation near Santa Rosa de Sucumbios, an Ecuadorian town limiting with the Colombian department of Putumayo, on March 1, 2008.

103 Piedad Córdoba (Colombia, 1955-), She is a lawyer from the Pontifical Bolivarian University of Medellín, and later obtained her degrees of Specialist in Public Opinion and Marketing from the Pontifical “Javerian” University (Bogotá) and of Organizational and Family Law from the Pontifical Bolivarian University. In spite of having studied in very Catholic and conservative universities, Córdoba has been characterized in her political life by her progressive, liberal and anticlerical character. She is a Colombian lawyer and a politician who was a senator to the republic since 1994 until her removal from office in 2010. She founded “Colombian Men and Women for Peace” and took an active part in the liberation of kidnapped persons and the start of conversations with FARC.
democracy, which in my opinion did not seem appropriate for the needs of the continent. I finally accepted, encouraged by Brazilian friends, because the present crisis of the left requires rethinking and perhaps it was an event that could stimulate it.

In fact, in spite of a perfect organization and the extraordinary affability of the Salvadorians, I was profoundly disappointed by the event. There were the same discourses that were made twenty years ago: verbal condemnation of capitalism, absence of self-criticism and endless repetition of solidarity with Dilma\textsuperscript{104} and Lula,\textsuperscript{105} Maduro\textsuperscript{106} and Evo, Correa and Ortega. Only the Cubans insisted on ethics in politics, with a Salvadorian trying to broaden the debate but without much success. Popular participation, the theme of the forum, has been very real up until now for the Salvadorian movement, clearly the influence of the long liberation struggle. Nevertheless, the FMLN is suffering from the same defects as the other left-wing parties in power. When President Funes ended his mandate there were accusations of corruption. The new president made an interesting speech, but it was in very general terms. Various members of the Front expressed to me in private their concern about the increasingly right-wing orientation within their own party.

\textit{Honduras}

In 2008 I met the President of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya.\textsuperscript{107} It was Hugo Chávez who introduced me to him, during the celebration

\textsuperscript{104}Dilma Rousseff (Brazil, 1947-). She is an economist and a politician who was imprisoned and tortured for three years during the military dictatorship in her country. She is the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil since 2011.

\textsuperscript{105}Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Brazil, 1945-). He was the president of the trade union of metallurgical workers who was the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil from 2003 to 2010.

\textsuperscript{106}Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela, 1962-). He is the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela since 2013, after being the President of the National Assembly, the Chancellor and the Executive Vice-President. He is the President of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela.

\textsuperscript{107}José Manuel Zelaya (Honduras, 1952-). He is a businessman, a member of the Liberal Party and a member of parliament who was the President of Honduras from 2005 to 2009.
of the Sandinista Revolution Anniversary on 19 July, in Managua. We were both on the platform of the Plaza de la Revolución, as on that day I received the Rubén Darío Order. Also present was Fernando Lugo, President of Paraguay. The speech of Zelaya impressed me because it reflected a left-wing tendency and a commitment to ALBA. Such clear positions were not what one expected from a Liberal Party head of government.

In July 2009 I returned to Honduras, this time because the military coup against Zelaya had happened less than one month previously. I travelled as part of an international commission created by a human rights group based in Brussels. In the hotel of Tegucigalpa, where our delegation was accommodated, there was also a group that supported the coup, which was organizing its activities.

We divided into various groups to carry out the commission’s work. One evening we were in a place where there were representatives of different social movements —peasants, workers, women, academics and others— and we were able to share the planning of their protest actions. There were a number of people with whom I had coincided in various parts of Latin America. One of them was Rafael Alegría, former president of La Via Campesina, who said to me as he accompanied me back to the hotel that for reasons of security he could not sleep twice in the same place because he was being persecuted by the golpistas.

The following day we went to the Migration Office as we were rather worried, particularly about the young Nicaraguans living in Honduras. For a long time many of them came to the country contracted by companies but very often they had no documents. They had been arrested and the official would not let us visit them. They were not politicized and could not understand why they had been imprisoned. Even though they were well

108 The Rubén Darío Order is a recognition that the State of Nicaragua awards to nationals or foreigners for relevant services and work in the field of political, economic, social, technological, cultural and spiritual activities that redound to the benefit of the nation.

109 Fernando Lugo (Paraguay, 1951-). He is a senator of the leftist party Guasú Front, as well as a sociologist from the Gregorian University of Rome. He was a Catholic Bishop demoted to a lay status. He was elected President in 2008 and was overthrown by a political coup in 2012.
treated by the Migration staff, they were very impatient. With our cell phones we were able to call their families in Nicaragua to give them news, but we did not know how long they had to stay there. We discussed this with the official, a former general who had been appointed three weeks ago, who told us the official position; his function was to maintain order. It was obvious, for someone who defended the coup that the tension between Nicaragua and Honduras was very high and a danger. The fact that innocent people had to pay the price of this policy was irrelevant.

Our group also visited the office of the United Nations and we talked there for a long time. The director and vice director, both of them Spaniards, had a very clear position. “It is a coup d'état and we must do everything in our power to bring the situation back to normal, that is, the return of the president who has been ousted.” The vice director, who had studied in Louvain-la-Neuve, asked me for news of CETRI.

In the office of the European Union, also with a Spaniard in charge, they explained the refusal to recognize and support the golpista government, but that they would maintain help to the municipalities and to the NGOs. We felt that this position was reasonable and fair.

We were also received by Mr. Hugo Llorens,\textsuperscript{110} the US Ambassador who was of Cuban origin. He had been a collaborator of John Negroponte,\textsuperscript{111} who was right wing and hated by all the people of the countries where he had worked as a diplomat, both in Asia

\textsuperscript{110}Hugo Llorens (Cuba, 1954-). He emigrated with his family to the United States and studied at Georgetown University and at the University of Kent in Great Britain. He is a Master of the Science of National Security from the National War College. He worked at the Chase Manhattan Bank and was recruited by the State Department in 1981. He worked in preparing ALCA (Spanish acronym for Área de Libre Comercio entre América del Norte y América Latina: Free Trade Area between North America and Latin America) and was an ambassador in Honduras.

\textsuperscript{111}John Negroponte (London, 1939-). He studied at Yale University, and is a member of the CIA and of the National Security Council. He was the last ambassador of the United States in Vietnam, and also an ambassador in Honduras, where he organized the Contra; he collaborated with Henry Kissinger in organizing the Operation Condor. He is hated by the people of the countries where he worked as a diplomat not only in Latin America, but in Asia as well.
and in Latin America. Negroponte had been the last ambassador in Saigon, he was involved in Irangate and was responsible for the organization of the Nicaraguan Contras in Honduras.

The embassy was huge, at least three times bigger than the one in Brussels. The diplomat, in receiving us, said he was very happy we were there because this coup was absolutely unacceptable and that the presence of international commissions was necessary. He added that the golpistas had no political legitimacy, that he himself had lodged Zelaya's wife for eight days after the coup and that he had just received a left-wing journalist who was in danger. His discourse was almost more anti-golpista than our own! As he perceived the scepticism with which we received his words he immediately added that he was a career diplomat and that he had to defend the position of his government. During the conversation we mentioned the US military base in the country. The ambassador answered that the base contained hundreds of soldiers ready to intervene in the case of an earthquake or a hurricane.

Whatever the case, this kind of discourse seemed a joke or, at least, was not very believable. Afterwards I wondered what it meant. We knew that a number of US circles were in favour of the coup; it was said that Negroponte had travelled to Honduras a few weeks before it took place. At least, it seemed evident that the United States was involved in some way. It was unthinkable that the Pentagon did not know in advance that a military coup d'état was in preparation and that if it had wanted to do so, it could have acted differently.

Finally, it seemed that there was a strategy to put an end to the regimes that altered their relations with the United States. In the case of Honduras, it was possible to hope that the elections of November 2009 might have changed the Honduran situation. According to the Constitution, Zelaya could not present his candidature and there were strong possibilities that the candidate presented by him would not obtain a majority, so that US interests

\footnote{Irangate. Between 1985 and 1986 the United States government, under the administration of Ronald Reagan, sold weapons illegally to the Iranian government, which was then immersed in the Iran-Iraq war, and with this financed the Nicaraguan contra. When this was found out, it was a political scandal.}
could best be restored through elections. Barack Obama’s government may have thought that the golpistas acted in a foolish way by taking the President in his pyjamas in a military plane to Costa Rica, when they could have waited a few months for the elections. This is just a hypothesis but it seems quite logical. Later, documents revealed by Wikileaks included a letter from Ambassador Llorens to the Secretary of State in Washington, affirming his opposition to the coup.

In this visit I tried, unsuccessfully, to contact Cardinal Maradiaga whom I knew well. He was famous, apparently very open and intelligent, speaking several languages. In the pontifical elections of 2005 it was said that he had received the most votes after Cardinal Ratzinger. He had supported the coup, which was not a surprise for the social movements who knew that his apparently open mind and anti-capitalist discourse –as in a celebrated speech that he gave in Miami on this theme– were only words, while in practice he remained linked to the powerful families in Honduras.

On the Honduran television there was a meeting, transmitted live, between businessmen and various ministers, including the minister for the economy and the new president. It was a real caricature of a discussion. The businessmen all expressed their support for the coup and, in their turn, the ministers did likewise. They all showed their enthusiasm and used the kind of words that were typical of revolutionaries. At a certain point the president of the Employers’ Association shouted “Venceremos!” (We shall overcome!). The minister for the economy said, “Our fundamental aim is a preferential option for the poor,” the words of Vatican Council II. It terminated with them all reciting the Lord’s prayer.

In fact, the economic power of Honduras lies in the hands of

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113 Barack Obama (Hawaii, 1961-). He is a law graduate from Colombia University and from Harvard Law School, as well as a professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Chicago. He was a Senator for Illinois and the President of the United Stated since 2009.

114 Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga (Honduras, 1942-). He studied theology and music; he was the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa (1993) and was appointed Cardinal. He supported the coup d’ etat against the people's will and the social movements. He follows anticapitalist lines and Pope Francis appointed him to the Cardinals Council for the reform of the Roman Curia.
some twelve to fifteen families who are very closely linked to US corporations. The deposed Zelaya himself was the son of a member of the landowning class, but he changed his views. This concentration of wealth and economic power was at the basis of the coup and, in a way, also a cause of the resistance.

During this visit I realized that the coup could be converted into an opportunity for the social movements to converge and build a political opposition. It would be an interesting result for it would be a new phenomenon in Honduras. It was not the first time that the country had an opposition or that social struggles had developed, but the emergence of a political consciousness and a truly popular resistance was new. During the ferment of the era of the revolutionary movements in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, Honduras had not been involved. Now, the golpista regime cruelly repressed the demonstrations and the leaders of the social movements. A number of them were assassinated. So the regime was a real danger for the social movements, augmented by the presence of paramilitaries from Colombia and, as had been the case for quite a long time already, the collaboration of Israel with the Honduran secret service, together with the support of the United States. The Honduran resistance did not have many means of social communication at its disposal and so I tried to stir up solidarity and collect some funds in Europe, the United States and Canada.

In 2009, it was proposed that Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga and the former IMF director Michel Camdessus receive honorary doctorates from the Catholic Institute of Paris. I published in the Belgian newspaper *La Libre Belgique* an article entitled “A Perfect Counter-testimony”, in which I expressed my surprise by the decision to confer this recognition on these two persons. For the Cardinal, I stressed that he had supported the *coup d'état* and mentioned the scandal that this had created among the popular movements. As for Michel Camdessus, I recalled his twelve years

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115 Michel Camdessus (France, 1933-). He studied economics in Paris, and is the President of the Paris Club (about sovereign debts of the countries of the south), as well as the Governor of the Bank of France; he was the Managing Director of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) between 1987 and 2000.
at the head of the IMF and the social catastrophes that its policies had caused and adding that if an international court was created to condemn economic crimes, he would be on the bank of the accused. Because of the wave of protests in France, in the end the Catholic Institute of Paris postponed the award of the doctorates.

In 2010 I returned with the UN Human Rights Commission to Tegucigalpa to work with the Truth Commission. The situation was very tense and protection measures were necessary. We were at San Pedro de Huilas to listen to many people, intellectuals and popular leaders, a group of very courageous people. There was strong resistance among the peasants against maintaining the social structures of landed property. The massacre of peasants and indigenous peoples was very common and it was carried out by the militias and the large landowners, with the collaboration of the police. We heard horrific stories. One peasant, who had lost some of his family, said sadly, “Don't these people have a mother too? Why can't we dialogue with them?”

In 2013 the National University, which had a doctorate on development, invited me for a seminar on the subject. I talked about the crisis and the need for a change of paradigm. At the time there was a certain hope for the forthcoming elections at which the wife of the former president was a candidate. But the right won, probably through considerable fraud but they refused a recount of the votes in some of the places were there had been discrepancies. It was a serious defeat for the popular movement and it gave rise to a new wave of persecutions of the left, both among the intellectuals and the social movements. Rafael Alegría, the former president of La Vía Campesina was a candidate for the senate and was elected. But there was fear in the atmosphere and he was constantly on guard, looking apprehensively about him. In fact, in 2014 he was assaulted in the very building of the National Assembly and had to be hospitalized for some time.

At the end of 2014 I met President Zelaya again, together with his wife, at a meeting of the network ‘In Defence of Humanity’ in Caracas. We spoke about the possibility of Cardinal Maradiaga being appointed by Pope Francis as head of a new body in Rome for social action. They were much concerned.
During the work of the Truth Commission I had many contacts with Berta Cáceres,\textsuperscript{116} the leader of the indigenous movement, who had a much broader vision of the situation than many others and had agreed to base her activities on a theoretical analysis that went beyond the frontiers of her country. Honduras was clearly an extreme case, but it followed the general logic. She was also critical of the internal struggles between the human rights institutions that prevented their work from being more effective.

In 2015 we were both in Caracas for the 10th anniversary of the ‘In Defence of Humanity’ network. At this time the Catholic world was talking about the role of the Cardinal of Tegucigalpa, who formed part of the eight cardinals charged by Pope Francis with reforming the Roman Curia. It was said that Cardinal Maradiaga would be in charge of the social action of the Catholic Church, grouping Caritas International, Cor Unum (assistance to development projects) and the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace. Berta Cáceres, who knew his position in Honduras, was very disturbed by the news. She got in touch with Father Molina, S.J., who was close to Chavez\textsuperscript{117} and also a friend of Pope Francis. She explained the situation to him at length.

A few months later, in 2016 in a country that has been increasingly suffering from violence, Berta Cáceres was assassinated by the police inside her own indigenous community, thus adding yet another martyr to those who have died to defend justice.

\textbf{Cuba}

\textbf{Contacts in the Religious Field}

At the beginning of the 1960s I participated, as I have already mentioned, in an informal preparatory meeting for Vatican

\textsuperscript{116} Berta Cáceres (1971-2016). She was a “lenca” native leader (the largest native ethnia in Honduras), a feminist and an ecologist from Honduras who obtained the Goldman or “Green Noble Prize” in 2015. She was assassinated in her house in 2016.

\textsuperscript{117} Hugo Chávez (Venezuela, 1954-2013). He was a politician and a military who was the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1999 to 2013. He was the driving force of the Project for Socialism of the 21\textsuperscript{th} century and of the ratification of the New Constitution of Venezuela in 1999.
Council II with some Bishop members of CELAM, among them the Vice President Dom Hélder Câmara; Monsignor Bogarín\(^\text{118}\) of Paraguay; Don Sergio Méndez Arceo, Bishop of Cuernavaca; its President, the Chilean Monsignor Manuel Larraín; the Ecuadorian Monsignor Leónidas Proaño, among others.

Already then I was informed –although I had not returned since my first visit in 1963– that in Cuba Catholics were living the trauma of the triumphant Revolution of 1959. A large proportion of the practising ones, members of the middle and upper classes as well as professionals, had left the island, especially after the nationalization of the schools and health institutions, which were then considered to be the right of all citizens. The clergy, mostly Spanish, considered the revolution as a repetition of the Spanish civil war. The government, and later the Party, did not consider the Catholic Church that was obviously an anti-communist institution, as reliable. The seminarians were obliged to do their military service in a special brigade, together with delinquents and homosexuals.

On behalf of CELAM I contacted the secretary of the Episcopal conference, Monsignor Bosa Masvidal,\(^\text{119}\) who was also the auxiliary Bishop of Havana. I thought it was necessary to inform the Cuban Church about the preparation of the Vatican Council II and try to mitigate the tensions created by the isolation. A meeting of CELAM was planned in Bogota, some weeks later. Passing through Washington I had asked the North American Episcopal Conference if they could pay for the travel of a Cuban Bishop. They accepted to do so and Bosa Masvidal was able to participate in that meeting.

In 1962, on arriving at Havana for the first time after the revolutionary triumph, I was very happy to see the pretty houses

\(^{118}\) Monsignor Ramón Bogarín (Paraguay, 1911-1976). He was a mechanics engineer in Paris who studied theology in Rome and created in Paraguay, worked with the natives and was a member of Latin American Episcopal Council (Spanish acronym for CELAM). He opposed dictatorial governments.

\(^{119}\) Monsignor Eduardo Bosa Masvidal (1915-2003). He was the Assistant Bishop of Havana and the Secretary of the Episcopal Conference as well as Vice-chancellor of the University of Saint Thomas. He was expelled from Cuba in 1961 and looked after the Cubans in the diaspora from Venezuela.
in Fifth Avenue transformed into schools and full of young people. It was a concrete sign that there was indeed a change of regime. The auxiliary Bishop convened a meeting of the clergy at Havana and asked me to explain how the Vatican Council II was being prepared. There was interest, but also concern; so many changes, would they not be a danger for the Church, at a time when it had to strengthen itself against an external enemy? Such a reaction was understandable among a group that felt defensive but clearly it was not acceptable in a broader context.

Cuba never broke diplomatic relationships with the Holy See; according to tradition, the latter never took the initiative to make a rupture. In fact, Cuba was the only socialist country that maintained the relationship. This was quite exceptional because during the whole period of the Cold War to have relationships with the Holy See meant belonging to the Western bloc, even for Muslim countries. With the passage of time, during the pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II, there had been increased diplomatic recognition, especially on the part of the decolonized countries. Nevertheless, in the 1960s in Cuba, the Holy See diplomatic representation was reduced to a chargé d'affaires, but not a nuncio, although this changed later. As in Rome the oldest diplomatic representative becomes the doyen of the diplomatic corps, the Cuban ambassador assumed this role for a long time. He invited me for lunch during the Council and I understood that he was one of the best Vatican experts, much respected by those who spoke with him and appreciated by his colleagues.

Monsignor Zacchi\textsuperscript{120} was responsible for the Holy See’s affairs in Cuba, an Italian whom I had known when he was councillor to the nunciature of Bogota. He was an open-minded person without prejudices against socialism and he considered his role was to be an intermediary between the local Church and the revolutionary government, which was not always appreciated by certain Cuban

\textsuperscript{120} Cesare Zacchi (Italy, 1914-1991). He had a diploma on canonical law and was the Secretary to the Nunciature in Austria, Yugoslavia and Colombia, as well as a chargé d'affaires and the nuncio in Cuba. He strived to improve the relations between the church and the government in Cuba. He was appointed president of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, a body for the formation of nuncios.
Bishops. Also he knew how to cook spaghetti very well, just as Fidel liked it, so Zacchi was sometimes his host.

The Monsignor explained to me the delicate situation at that time, particularly the desire of the Holy See to put an end to the haemorrhage among the clergy, especially the Spaniards, who were leaving the country. Shortly afterwards the nuncio in Brussels was sent to dam the flow, but it was too late.

At the beginning, the relationships between the local Church and the new government were not easy. During this first visit to revolutionary Cuba, I met the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Archbishop Enrique Pérez Serantes, who had intervened to liberate Fidel when he was imprisoned after the attack on the Moncada barracks. He was very worried about the expropriation of the property of the foreigners which, according to him, was in contradiction to the social doctrine of the Church concerning private property.

There was an incident in 1962 during a procession of la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, the patron of the island, in one of Havana's parishes. As a result the Government expelled 300 members of the clergy, among them Monsignor Bosa Masvidal. He never came back to Cuba and established himself in Venezuela.

I returned to Cuba on the death of Pope John XXIII. As elsewhere in the world, he had been very popular in the island. I participated in a mass officiated by Monsignor Zacchi in the cathedral, together with the Cuban Bishops. The government had declared three days of national mourning. An official delegation was in the first row of the pews. In the cathedral choir stalls, there were –besides the clergy– the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, a lay organization that dates from the Middle Ages and had more social prestige than religious content. They wore huge white capes, with the red cross of the crusaders, and they never stopped talking among themselves during the ceremony, which observed the pre-Council rites for the funeral of a Bishop. It lasted

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121 Monsignor Enrique Pérez Serantes. (1883-1968). He was the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba and he succeeded in obtaining the surrender and capture of Fidel and Raúl Castro in exchange for their lives.

122 The origin of the devotion is a statue of a virgin, located near Santiago de Cuba in the south of the country, in a region of copper mines and where some of the first revolts of negro slaves took place.
an interminable time and was badly coordinated between the celebrant, Monsignor Zacchi, who officiated very quickly and the choristers who did not know how to follow him. As a result it ended in a liturgical chaos. When I returned to Europe, I wrote to some friends describing the scene. The text circulated more widely than I had thought and reached Cuba in ecclesiastical circulars.

Monsignor Zacchi asked me for assistance for a few days as his secretary, a Canadian priest, was on vacation. He had to deal with some correspondence in French, a language with which he was not completely conversant. In the patio of the nunciature there were several large cars (Buicks, Cadillacs, Plymouths) that members of the oligarchy had deposited, expecting to recover them when the revolution was over. Monsignor Zacchi loved to drive these cars and I often accompanied him for a drive in Havana. One day, coming out of the nunciature, we took a street that ran at a right angle to Fifth Avenue. He was very deep in our conversation and did not see a car coming towards us very fast. Luckily, the car braked suddenly and stopped close to our vehicle. It was Raúl Roa García,123 the Minister for Foreign Affairs who recognizing the diplomat gave a big wave and continued on his way.

At the end of the week, we were in Varadero, which was not then the very developed seaside resort that it is today. Zacchi had a doctor friend who owned a house there. As the sea was calm, we went to swim. However, police boats kept passing close to us, which was not very agreeable.

At a certain moment we saw a crowd of people in the next-door house. It was Fidel, who was crossing the beach to go and fish there. He had just come back from the Soviet Union. He recognized Monsignor Zacchi and saluted us. The poor man was quite upset at saluting the head of state while wearing a simple bathing costume and without his pectoral cross!

My contacts with the Cuban Catholic Church were quite limited at that time and it was with Monsignor Adolfo Rodríguez-Herrera,124

123 Raúl Roa (Cuba, 1907-1982). He was a member of the revolutionary youth who went into exile in the United States. He joined the Cuban Revolution and was the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1959 to 1976.

124 Monsignor Adolfo Rodríguez Herrera. He was born in Camagüey. He was appointed the Archbishop of that city in 1964; he was also the President
Bishop of Camagüey, that I had the closest relations. He was a model pastor who had understood that the revolution signified a new stage in the history of the country. When I visited him in Camagüey, at the end of the 1960s, there was much tension between the Church and the authorities. He suffered greatly from the situation, but felt that patience was the only solution. In the 1980s he was named president of the Bishops' conference and I met him in Havana. He told me then that the Bishops had celebrated the birthday of José Felipe Carneado, who was responsible for religious affairs in the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and that they had offered him an anniversary cake. I had several meetings with him about the relationships between the government and the Church, the orientations of the universal and Latin American church and I always much appreciated his great humanity. Since his death I have maintained a fruitful and frequent contact with his successor, Caridad Diego.

I visited the Archbishops of Havana at various times. Cardinal Arteaga y Betancourt, before the Revolution, who had promoted Catholic action in Cuba and encouraged the role of lay people in the Church. But he was also to be the last prelate acting as ‘prince of the Church’. His successors, particularly after the Vatican Council II stressed the pastoral nature of their work. Later, I got to know Cardinal Jaime Ortega. He had been recruited, as a

of the Cuban Episcopal Conference and an important architect in the reconciliation between the church and the Revolution. He died in 2003.

José Felipe Carneado. He is a member of the Communist Party of Cuba in charge of the Department for the Attention to Religious Matters. He has played an important role in the conversations held in the most difficult moments of the relations between the political authorities and the Catholic Church.

Caridad Diego Bello. She was born in Cuba and was a leader of the communist youth. She is the Head of the Department for the Attention of Religious Matters.

Manuel Arteaga Betancourt (Cuba, 1879-1963). He was the Archbishop of Havana and the first Cardinal of Cuba.

Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino (Cuba, 1936-). He was appointed Archbishop of Havana in 1979 and Cardinal in 1994. He played a central role in bringing Catholicism and the government to closer terms. He resigned in April, 2016.
seminarian, into the special brigade of the military service, a hard and frustrating experience, but he survived the various ups and downs in the relationships between the government and the Church. He was convinced that the Catholic Church in Cuba could play a role in the ‘transition’ (post-Castro era), whether it was towards a capitalist democracy or a renovated socialism and for this reason he asked for a larger space in society for the Church as an institution. He always said he was against the ‘embargo’. When Fidel was seriously ill, he wrote a pastoral letter in which he affirmed that all outside interference was unacceptable. He served as a mediator to arrange the liberation of people who were condemned for their ties with the US embassy. However, this role of the Catholic Church, as carried out by Cardinal Ortega, was not always looked upon favourably by the other Christian churches in Cuba, who considered themselves as being barely recognized, even marginalized.

During these years I had numerous encounters with the Ecumenical Council of Churches of Cuba, thanks to the theologian Adolfo Ham, who was its secretary for a number of years. When a book was published in Geneva in honour of Ham’s international action, I contributed my report on the first session of the UN Stiglitz Commission on the Financial and Monetary Crisis. I participated, too, in various working sessions in the inter-denominational Seminary of Matanzas and in meetings with the Reverend Raúl Suárez at the Martin Luther King Centre.

Raúl was a great preacher and for a number of years he was also a member of the National Assembly. We met in many places on the continent, especially in the World Social Forums. In 2008, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Monsignor Leonidas Proaño, we met in Pucahaico, in Ecuador, where the Bishop had been buried. I celebrated the Eucharist before a large

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129 Joseph Stiglitz (the United States, 1943-). He is an economist and a professor at Columbia University. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics (2001) and is the President of the United Nations Committee on World Financial and Monetary Crisis. His position is neoclassic and Keynesian.

130 Raúl Suárez (Cuba). He is a minister of the Baptist Church, founded the Martin Luther King Center in Havana and is a member of the National Assembly. He collaborated with Pastors for Peace from the United States.
assembly of people, many of them indigenous and delivered the sermon. At the moment of communion, Suárez drew closer, feeling—as he later said— in full spiritual unity with that community, celebrating the ‘apostle’ of the Indian people. I gladly gave him the communion, symbol of the body of Christ and of the link that ties us all in the faith. The previous day we had participated in another religious act in the heart of the Imbabara volcano that dominates the town of Otavalo. A Shaman had started the ceremony, paying homage to the four cardinal points, to the mountain, to the Pachamama, to the various natural elements. Then the Catholic priests who were present con-celebrated the mass. Two years later, in 2010, during a moving religious ceremony in the Baptist Church of Vedado in Havana, which had been the pastoral centre of Raúl Suárez, I received a wooden plaque, with an engraved cross in memory of my ties with the Protestant community in Cuba.

**Academic Encounters**

The intellectual contacts with Cuba were the source of many reflections on my part. I met the former collaborators of the journal *Pensamiento Crítico* which had been closed in the 1960s. Not only was the publication suspended, but the building where it was produced was destroyed. It was the time of ideological intolerance. I collaborated with various study centres on the Americas, Asia and the Middle East, and Africa, which were centres linked to the Communist Party. Their intellectual level was high, with researchers of different levels and degrees of independence towards the official truth. However, they could be compared favourably with many other research centres that I had known in other parts of the world. It was worthwhile working with them, discussing methods of research and hypotheses of interpretation of the data.

In the academic field, I published several books in Cuba, thanks to Carlos Tablada and the Casa Ruth Editorial, but also co-editions with Social Science Publishers of the Cuban Book Institute and the Cuban Institute for Cultural Research Juan Marinello of the Ministry of Culture. The subjects were sociology of religion, the sociology of globalization and of the social movements. Several Cuban intellectuals
wrote prefaces for them, like Aurelio Alonso,\textsuperscript{131} deputy editor of the journal \textit{Casa de las Américas} and winner of the national Social Science Award, as well as Fernando Martínez,\textsuperscript{132} who had also received the same prize. Each time we came was the occasion for interesting exchanges, which enabled us to better understand the rich Cuban intellectual reality. Armando Hart,\textsuperscript{133} the former Minister of Culture, asked me to be member of the Scientific Council of the Estudios Martianos Centre, of which he was the director. I got to know a number of writers and poets like Alejo Carpentier,\textsuperscript{134} Cintio Vitier\textsuperscript{135} as well as Abel Prieto who succeeded Hart as Minister of

\textsuperscript{131}Aurelio Alonso (Cuba, 1939-). He is a sociology graduate from the University of Havana. There he was a founder of the Philosophy Department and a member of the board of directors of the journal \textit{Pensamiento Crítico}. He has published more than eighty articles, from press materials to essays, in specialized journals in Cuba and abroad. He is the assistant director of the journal \textit{Casa de las Américas}. He was awarded the National Prize for Social and Humanistic Sciences in 2013.

\textsuperscript{132}Fernando Martínez Heredia (Cuba, 1939-2017). He is a Cuban philosopher and an essayist. He is a law graduate from the University of Havana, where he founded and directed the Philosophy Department and the journal \textit{Pensamiento Crítico}. He was awarded the National Prize for Social Sciences. Among many other books, he has published \textit{El corrimiento hacia el rojo} and \textit{Repensar el socialismo}.

\textsuperscript{133}Armando Hart (Cuba, 1930-). He is a Cuban former reformist student leader, a lawyer, a revolutionary, a politician and an educator. As a leader of the 26 of July Movement he took active part in the Cuban Revolution of 1958-1959. He was the Minister for Education in Cuba between 1959 and 1965 and the Minister for Culture from 1976 to 1997. He is the president of the Cultural Society “José Martí”.

\textsuperscript{134}Alejo Carpentier (Switzerland, 1904-France, 1980). He was a journalist, a musicologist, a novelist and a narrator of Cuban nationality who had an outstanding influence on Latin American literature in its prime, the so-called “Latin American boom”. Critics consider him one of the fundamental writers of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century in Spanish language, and one of the architects of the renewal of Latin American literature. He was awarded the Miguel de Cervantes Prize in 1977.

\textsuperscript{135}Cintio Vitier (U.S.A., 1921-Cuba, 2009). He became a Doctor of Civil Law in 1947. He was an outstanding Cuban poet, a narrator, an essayist and a critic. His work turned to social and political commitment in the sixties, partly due to the influence of Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal. He was a Catholic in favor of the Revolution, a member of the editing board of
culture. I also met with singers like Silvio Rodríguez. Little by little, Cuba entered into my own political, intellectual and religious culture, with many friendly relationships.

Collaboration with the centre for socio-religious studies, founded by Dr. Jorge Calzadilla of the Centre of Psychological and Social Research (CIPS) which belonged to the Academy of Sciences, was particularly rewarding. From the start I was in contact with his work and for almost 30 years I regularly participated in their activities, with seminars on methodology, discussions on research plans, elaboration on the work hypotheses. The themes were very diverse, from popular religion to Catholicism and the new religious movements. We published at Louvain University one of the first collections of their work in the International Journal of Sociology of Religion, Social Compass, dedicating a whole issue on Cuba. Each time that the centre organized an international meeting they asked me to give the opening or closing lecture. The successor to Jorge Calzadilla, Dr. Ofelia Pérez, followed in the same tradition.

the journal Orígenes. He was awarded numerous prizes, among them the National Prize for Literature in 1988, the Juan Rulfo Prize in 2002, the title of Officer of Arts and Letters of France, and the medal from the Academy of Sciences of Cuba. He was President of the Center for Studies on José Martí. He was awarded doctorates Honoris Causa from the University of Havana, the Central University of Las Villas and the Soka University of Japan.

136 Silvio Rodríguez (Cuba, 1946- ). He is a Cuban guitarist, a poet and a singer-songwriter who has written more than five hundred songs. He is one of the Spanish-speaking singer-songwriters of greatest international importance, having published about twenty albums. In the 21st century he received the ALBA (Spanish acronym for Alianza Bolivariana para las Américas: Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas) Prize in 2010, besides having been awarded the doctorates Honoris Causa from the San Marcos Major National University of Peru, the Veracruzan University of Mexico and the National University of Córdoba, Argentina.

137 Jorge Calzadilla. He was born in Cuba and studied at the Gregorian University of Rome. He is a Doctor of Philosophy and History from the University of Havana, and is the founder and the director of the Department for Religious Studies at CIPS (Spanish acronym for Centro de Investigaciones Psicológicas y Sociológicas: Psychological and Sociological Research Center). He did an important work on the different religions in Cuba, and died in 2008.

138 Ofelia Pérez. She was born in Cuba and is a Doctor of Sociology from the University of Guadalajara. She has authored several studies on religiosity
Jorge was a real friend. He had studied Theology at the Gregorian University in Rome so that he knew Catholicism from the inside. Although he was a revolutionary and an atheist, he never adopted hostile attitudes and tried to take scientific positions on religion. He always invited me to his home, where I got to know his wife and children, particularly Dianita whom he called my ‘lay god-daughter’ and who studied sociology; while David, his son, whom I met later in Beijing, was working for the Spanish language programmes for Chinese television.

In 2009 the University of Havana bestowed on me an *Honoris Causa* doctorate for my contribution to the Sciences of Religion in Cuba and because my writings had been used in the teaching of Sociology of Religion in the university. Those present in the ceremony included the Vice President of the Republic; the Minister for the Universities; the Minister of Culture; the President of the Ecumenical Council of Churches; Father Carlos Manuel de Céspedes; the former Secretary of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference; the Belgian Ambassador; my brother Edouard and many friends. I talked about the relationships between the Cuban State and the churches, recalling the different epochs and concluding that only when both sides took distance from absolute certainty was it possible to dialogue. The Belgian Ambassador, in Cuba, and is the Director of the Department for Socio-religious Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Cuba.

139 Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Céspedes (Cuba, 1936-2014). He was a Doctor of Law and Philology from the University of Havana and of Theology in Rome. He was the vicar-general of the archdiocese of San Cristobal, the Secretary of the Episcopal Conference and a member of the Theological Reflection Group and of the Ecumenism Section of CELAM (Spanish acronym for Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano: Latin American Episcopal Council) as well as a member of the Royal Academy of Language in Cuba. He was a direct descendant of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes del Castillo, who started the first war of Independence in Cuba (1868-1878) and was also the first President of the Republic in Arms. He is the brother of the Bishop of Matanzas, Manuel Hilario de Céspedes. He published the books *Pasión por Cuba y por la Iglesia. Aproximación biográfica al P. Félix Varela* and *Érase una vez en La Habana*.

140 Van Marschalk. She was the Ambassadress of Belgium in Cuba at the end of the decade of 2000.
who was much appreciated by the Cubans, was very moved to hear the Belgian national anthem played after the Cuban one.

Visit of John Paul II

The visit of the Pope to Cuba was an important event, the result of an improvement of the relationships between the government and the Church. The Cuban government invited me to come, together with Frei Betto, Giulio Girardi, a Italian theologian who is very close to the popular movements of Latin America, and Pedro de Oliveira, a Brazilian religious sociologist, a former student of mine in Louvain and who had also been present in Nicaragua during the visit of the Pope.

A few days beforehand, Fidel explained on the television that the Pope was not only invited by the Bishops' Conference, but also by the government. He explained why he had a great respect for the pope, who was a man of culture, a sportsman, courageous and with great conviction, however, anti-communist. One must understand the reason why, Fidel said. The Pope was Polish and in Poland communism was imposed from outside by the Soviet Union. In fact, in the history of that country, he said, the Catholic Church had been the defender of the people against foreign invasion, from Prussia, Sweden and Russia.

“As the pope is our guest,” Fidel went on, “he is going to be able to say all that he wants, and if there are things that displease you, do not react because he is our guest. If leaders of our revolution are present in the ceremonies, do not cheer them, because these

141 Giulio Girardi (Lebanon, 1926-2012). He was a “Salesiano” and a theologian from the Gregorian University of Rome and an expert at the Vatican Council II. He was a liberation theologian who worked together with social movements in Latin America. The Holy See forbade him to teach and he was secularized.

142 Pedro de Oliveira. He is a Brazilian sociologist who has a doctorate in sociology from the Catholic University of Louvain and is a professor in the Master's course on Religion Sciences from the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais –PUC-Minas (Spanish acronym for Catholic Pontifical University). Among his most outstanding works are Fe y política: Fundamentos (Aparecida: Ideas & Letters, 2004), Fortaleciendo la red de una Iglesia misionera (San Paulo: Paulinas 1997) and Religión y dominación de clase (Petropolis: Vozes, 1985).
are religious ceremonies. I shall be present at the mass next Sunday in Revolution Square in Havana.” This TV communication had the effect both of preventing dissidents from taking advantage of the Pope’s visit to demonstrate and also of pre-empting reactions from those inside the Party who were critical about the invitation.

During the three days of the visit we were able to follow, step by step, the various events and listen to the speeches. There was no aggressiveness on the part of the Pope, as there had been in Nicaragua. He was older and in weak health. On the other hand, John Paul II thought, as after his visit he declared to a group of Polish pilgrims in Rome, that Cuba was experiencing a final stage of communism. In such circumstances, it was not worthwhile being tough, as in Nicaragua, where the country was at the beginning of the process. In his speeches the pope strongly emphasized the Christian roots of Cuban culture. He made no reference to the Revolution, as if it had been just a parenthesis in the country’s history. He only made allusions to what he considered to be the negative effects in Cuban society, particularly as regards education.

Each evening, Armando Hart, until recently Minister of Culture and Commander Manuel Piñeiro143 (known as Barba Roja), the former Vice-minister of Interior Affairs and at present the head of the America Department of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party —who had been very close to Che on his missions in Africa and Latin America— came to dinner and discussed with us the events of the day. One night Gabriel García Marquez also came.

They were satisfied with the ways things had gone, without any big disturbances. We were more critical about what the Pope had said. When I returned to Belgium, I wrote a text called *The Speech That the Pope Did Not Give in Cuba*. It was written in a pontifical style, recalling the social history of the country, the role of the Church, both pastoral and political, the achievements of the Revolution, the criticism that could be made and the hope for a peaceful future. The text was published in Cuba by the journal of

143 Manuel Piñeiro Losada (Cuba, 1933-1998). Also known as Commander Redbeard, he was a Cuban politician and a military, one of the main figures of the Cuban Revolution in charge of organizing the Cuban security apparatus and the expansion of leftist radical groups in Latin America. He was Che Guevara’s support in his actions out of Cuba.
the Ecumenical Council of Churches. In El Salvador, the auxiliary Bishop of the capital commented on it to his clergy, thinking it was an original speech written by the Pope.

The third day of the visit Manuel Pereira came to see us in the afternoon. He was dressed very formally and we asked him the reason. “I am going to be received by the Pope,” he replied. I knew Pereira well, as he was the husband of Marta Harnecker, who had been a colleague and friend of mine for many years. She was a Chilean psychologist, a disciple of Althusser and she had published a book on Marxism which had been produced in a million copies in Latin America. Some hours after he had returned to the house where we were staying we asked him how the encounter with the pope went. “Very well,” he said, “and the Pope gave me a present.” He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a rosary. We couldn’t help laughing at seeing the old revolutionary with a rosary in his hand. However, he did not laugh. Sadly, he died shortly afterwards in a car accident in the Fifth Avenue of Havana, when he lost consciousness because of a sudden attack of an illness from which he was suffering.

The day after the Pope left, Fidel invited us to dinner to comment on the event. It was 10 o’clock at night and we continued until 4:00 a.m. Those present were his secretary, Felipe Roque, Carlos Lage, Minister of the presidency, those responsible for Latin America and for religions (Caridad Diego) in the respective Party departments, the medical Dr. José Ramon Balaguer, in charge

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144 Marta Harnecker (Chile, 1937-). She is a Marxist-Leninist sociologist and writer, a member of Catholic Action in Chile. She was a scholarship holder in France under Louis Althusser, and has been the director of the research center Latin American Folk Memory in Havana and of Miranda International Center in Caracas. Her books *Los conceptos elementales del materialismo histórico* and *Cuadernos de educación popular* were widely used by communist parties and workers’ organizations to train their militants in Spanish-speaking countries during the sixties and later. She was awarded the “Libertador” Prize for Critical Thought on August 15, 2014.

145 Carlos Lage (Cuba, 1951-). His profession is that of Doctor of Medicine (M.D.). He was the Vice-President of the Council of State between 1993 and 2009. He was removed from office by Raúl Castro due to political imprudence in March, 2009. He is again working as a M.D.
of ideological orientation. Raúl Castro\textsuperscript{146} came by for a moment, but could not accept the invitation of his brother to dine with us because that day was his wife’s birthday.

Fidel was very satisfied with how things had gone. “There were hundreds of thousands of people in the squares, a speech transmitted live, which was not of the Party, unarmed security agents (they didn’t even have a revolver), over 4,000 foreign journalists… and nothing happened”. However, he was very angry by the speech made by the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba about the situation of the country, in the presence of the Pope. It was not so much because the Archbishop was negative (his views were known), but because Fidel believed that it was a violation of the preliminary agreement with the Bishops’ Conference not to create incidents.

Fidel had spent eight hours with the Bishops, preparing for the visit. He thought that the incident was the result of a ‘division of labour’ between the Bishops and that the Archbishop of Santiago had been designated to criticize the government and the party. He could not tolerate what he considered a lack of ethical behaviour. I intervened, saying to the Comandante that I was not quite sure that the incident was the result of a ‘conspiracy’ of the Bishops’ conference. I explained that Bishops were quite autonomous in their dioceses and that the Church as an institution did not function like the Communist Party. In fact, the following day I asked Father Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the former Secretary of the Episcopal Conference, who confirmed that there was no such agreement among the Bishops. He said, on the contrary, Cardinal Jaime Ortega was quite upset about what had happened in Santiago. I passed on the information to the Presidency.

At the end of the dinner Fidel showed us the pile of documents that he had read to prepare the visit of the Pope: the social encyclicals, the writings of John Paul II, the documents of the Vatican Council II.

One year later, when in Cuba I had a telephone interview with Radio Vaticana, who were puzzled that there should be an  

\textsuperscript{146} Raúl Castro (Cuba, 1931-). He is Fidel Castro’s brother, a military, the Defense Minister and the President of Cuba since February, 2008, (after Fidel fell ill).
International Seminar on Religions in Cuba and asking if this was as a result of the pope’s visit. I answered that meetings of this kind organized by the Centre for Socio-Religious Studies of the Academy of Sciences, had been held for more than 15 years and it was the improvement of mutual relationships that enabled the visit to take place.

As from the 1980s my colleague Geneviève Lemercinier accompanied me in most of these journeys taking advantage of the Iberia flights that, before reaching Nicaragua, made a stop-over at Havana. She played an important role in presenting the methodological aspects of our work, particularly with the Centre for Socio-Political Studies that was run at that time by Darío Machado. We often visited that centre, where the data on the national surveys was kept, in a building that was protected against any electronic hacking. Applying factorial analysis on the results of the information kept by the Cuban State on the processes of social change in Cuba was one of the tasks we had and it enabled a qualitative leap forward in the work.

It was in 1986 that Geneviève Lemercinier and I were invited to give a course in Sociology of Religion for the ideologues of the revolution. It was organized in the Institute for diplomats, in the room that bore the name of the revolution’s first Foreign Minister, Raúl Roa García. It lasted a fortnight and there were professors of philosophy, officials from the central committee, even a colonel in uniform. The initiative was the result of some encounters with the Marxist intellectuals who could no longer accept that religion was just the ‘opium of the people’, when they knew about the revolutionary commitment of Christians in Central America and Liberation Theology. I started off the course by saying that if they were real Marxists they could not be dogmatic. It is necessary to analyze situations before making a judgement.

During the course I analyzed many concrete situations in time and space and concerning various religions. Geneviève Lemercier explained the methodology of the research. The conclusion was that in certain situations religion was the ‘opium of the people’, but in others, it could also be a motivation for social commitment.

Darío Machado. He is Cuban, and a specialist in Political Sciences.
There was agreement on this and the text of the course, which had been recorded, was published in 1989, with the title *Sociología de la Religión*, with a preface by Fernando Martínez. At the same time it came out in Nicaragua and afterwards in Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, again in Cuba, in Ecuador and South Korea and in Argentina and Ecuador. The content was similar to my course at the Catholic University of Louvain and it was inspired by research carried out in different continents, trying to construct a theoretical sociological focus of the religious phenomenon.

At that same time Frei Betto published a long interview on *Fidel and Religion*, which circulated right round the world. In Cuba alone the book was published in 1,300,000 copies. There were queues outside the bookshops to obtain copies. The following year, the Party Congress deleted the articles from its statutes that prohibited believers from being members of the Communist Party.

I was of course in frequent contact with Cuba at the political level, particularly after the 1980s. Rafael Hidalgo, inside the Party, was very interested in the evolution of Latin American Catholicism. He was the link between the two fields, just as Aurelio Alonso was at the intellectual level. I had long conversations with Rafaelito, as he was called, at the headquarters of the Party’s Central Committee, and at his home, on Liberation Theology, the social commitment of Christians, the effects of Vatican Council II. When he was designated to be responsible for relationships with civil society in Brazil (San Paulo) and then in Venezuela (Caracas) and again in Brazil where I met him in Brasilia in 2015, we continued these discussions and several times I stayed in his house.

Over a long period of time, I met Comandante Fidel Castro several times. Apart from the beach encounter at Varadero with Nuncio Zacchi, there were other occasions. In the 1980s, during a ceremony at the Palacio de las Convenciones, I met him by chance.

148 Rafael Hidalgo. He is a specialist in Political Sciences within the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba who was a political adviser in the Cuban embassies in Brazil and Venezuela.
in the main hall, waiting for the participants who were late. I took advantage of the moment to give him a new edition of my book on Sociology of Religion. He thanked me, saying, “Yes, I must take this up again”.

During a congress on economics, I talked about Sri Lanka, explaining how the World Bank using all the neoliberal logic tried to force the country to abandon the cultivation of rice, the basic staple for thousands of years, in order to grow export crops. The reason given was that the rice of Thailand and Vietnam cost less than the rice grown in Sri Lanka. The logic of the capitalist market was prevailing over everything else and did not take into account the fate of a million small peasants who depended on it for their livelihood. Fidel, who was in the audience, was very struck by this example of neoliberal policy and often used it in subsequent speeches.

Another time there was an emergency meeting on terrorism, at a time when President George W. Bush149 was being particularly insistent on the subject. I was invited to the event but as I had previous commitments, I arrived only towards the end of the first day. Then I learnt that I had to give the first intervention the following day, in the presence of Fidel. In spite of jet lag, I came to the last session of the first day to know what kind of discussion it was going to be. Realizing the confusion about what terrorism really was, I decided to prepare my speech on the theoretical aspects of the concept to try and reorient the discussion. I spent almost the whole night preparing the speech. The following morning I arrived early in the great hall of the Palacio de las Convenciones. The organizers asked me to come to the other side of the podium to have a coffee. Then Fidel arrived there. Thus we were able to talk about the theme of the day. And he told me, “We must be against all forms of terrorism, from whatever side they come,

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149 George W. Bush (U.S.A., 1946–). He was the President of the United States of America from 2001 to 2009. He was a pilot in the National Guard of the state of Texas, a businessman in the oil industry and the general manager in professional sports of the Texas Rangers baseball team. Bush attended the Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and following his father's steps he entered Yale University, where he joined the Skull & Bones Society, obtaining his Bachelor of Letters degree in 1968.
whether from the Palestinians, the Iraqis or the Chechens. I think I can say,” he continued, “that during the war that we waged, from the mountains of the Sierra until the triumph in Havana, we never killed an innocent person.” And he added, “However, we must also tackle the problem of State terrorism.” I returned to the hall to give my talk, glad that we shared similar views. Nevertheless, I cited Archbishop Romero who said that the violence of the poor, fighting for their survival, could not be considered the same as the violence of the rich who defended their privileges. That night together with some of the participants I was invited to dine with Fidel for drawing up a summary of the discussions.

Shortly before the World Social Forum of Mumbai in 2005, there was a seminar on the topicality of Marxist thinking. Fidel was present. I participate in a panel and took as a Marxist analysis of the World Social Forums as the theme. There were four panellists and we each had 15 minutes to present our contribution. The first speaker was a Chinese. He spent 10 minutes eulogizing Fidel and then spoke for another 15 minutes. Afterwards a Latin American spoke for 20 minutes and he was followed by Isabel Rauber, an Argentinean living in Cuba, who more or less respected her allocated time. Then it was my turn but the time was up. I took the floor and started by saying: “My comrades have eaten up all the time and so, following the example of the Comandante, I shall

Isabel Rauber. She is the wife of Darío Machado from Cuba; she is a Doctor of Philosophy and a philosophy professor at UMET (Spanish acronym for Universidad para la Educación y el Trabajo: University for Education and Work), as well as the Director of Past and Present XXI, an adjunct researcher at the Center for Studies on America, and an adjunct professor at the University of Havana. She has carried out studies on political sociology, situation analysis, historical memory, philosophical essays and anthropological studies of social, district, trade union, native and gender movements. She was a people’s educator in the seventies, and shares her research work with work on training and exchanging experiences with the social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean. She has published articles, reviews and more than eighteen books in Cuba, Argentina, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Colombia, Spain, Italy, Switzerland and Germany, and has authored several excellent books on social movements –one of them, her doctoral thesis, was written during a three-month stay at CETRI (Spanish acronym for Centro Tricontinental: Tricontinental Center).
try to be brief”. Everyone laughed, Fidel first of all. I had hardly finished my intervention, when Fidel raised his hand. “Why have you decided to organize the next World Social Forum in India? At a time when imperialism is carrying out a strong offensive against the Latin American continent and at the beginning of a new political era, you decide to leave Latin America. Why?” I answered, “The answer is easy, Comandante, the Social Forum must really be global and for this reason we must organize it in other continents.” Fidel responded, “No. This was the decision of a few Europeans, with the complicity of some Brazilians.” I replied, “I don’t believe in the conspiracy theory. This decision was truly the result of a desire to be universal. To say that the Forum must remain in Latin America is a Latin-American centric approach.”

There was a wind of revolt in the assembly. How can anyone contradict Fidel? Abel Prieto got up to say, “François, you cannot accuse Cuba of being Latin-American centric. We helped Angola to survive against the attacks of South Africa, with thousands of soldiers. We have sent tens of thousands of doctors to the countries of the South and we have here in Cuba hundreds of students from those countries, in spite of the economic difficulties of our country.” And I replied, “Obviously I am not questioning the extraordinary solidarity that Cuba has shown towards the cause of the countries of the South, but to say that the World Social Forum must not leave Latin America is a Latin-American centric approach.”

Fidel asked for the floor again. “Are there social movements in India?” he asked. I answered, “Obviously, yes—and they have many more members than the Latin American movements.” The discussion became more and more animated, with some disagreeing with my position and others in favour. A Cuban trade union leader supported me because he was a member of the international council of the World Social Forum and he knew how the decision to go to Mumbai had been taken.

The session was planned to end at 1 o’clock for lunch. About four o’clock Fidel looked at his watch and said, “We have physical needs: we must go and eat.” We went below for lunch and at five we started the discussion again. The whole programme was changed. As I had to take the plane that evening to return to Europe, I did not know what to do, because it was not correct
to leave the hall when Fidel was still present and the discussion continuing. Finally, around 6 p.m. the debate ended and I could leave. Some months later, at the end of an event to which I had been invited, Fidel who had seen me in front of the podium started his speech, saying, “This time, I shall be brief,” and he talked for four hours! As concerns the discussion on the World Social Forum, Abel Prieto told me, “Fidel acknowledged that you were right.”

On various occasions I was in Cuba at the same time as visits from Hugo Chávez. Once I was there when he and Fidel together presented ‘Operación Milagros’ in the Carlos Marx theatre of Havana. This operation, aimed at curing the eye diseases of the poor in the continent (including the United States), with Cuban medical technology and funding from Venezuela, had a biblical connotation: “The blind shall see”. Hugo Chávez took out of his pocket a little crucifix, saying that Jesus was his model for promoting socialist values. He turned to Fidel and said, “I am giving it to you.” Fidel, after a moment of astonishment, said: “I accept it.”

The meeting continued merrily and with exchanges of jokes. Chávez said to Fidel that a few weeks previously he had fallen off a platform, “It was planned. One has a protective service that looks after one, centimetre by centimetre, and one still falls”. Fidel replied, “And you, when you fell (referring to the coup d’état in 2002), that too was planned.”

Once, on a First of May demonstration in Havana, I found myself on the platform where Fidel and Chavez were present. While the latter was speaking I was struck by Fidel’s attitude as he was following the words with emotion. Clearly he believed that Chavez represented a continuation of the revolutionary movement that he had started.

During these events and many others there was always a reference to Che Guevara. Sometimes it took the form of a necessary ritual but one cannot forget him when you knew who Che really was, as an intellectual, as a revolutionary and a person who lived up to his ideals to the very death. Carlos Tablada had studied his thinking on economics. Che’s notebooks on Africa were full of political lessons. I was able to meet the person in the diplomatic service who received him in Tanzania and who had taken down his notes from dictation. At that time part of them were not published as
they seriously criticized the leaders of the Congolese revolutionary movement and, particularly—though less aggressively—Joseph Kabila, the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On different occasion I met Che’s wife and one of his daughters, Dr. Aleida, with whom I was attending the Florestan Fernandez School of the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil.

After receiving the doctorate from Havana University I was able to go to Santa Clara with my brother Edouard to see Che’s mausoleum. I was deeply moved by the place, where the comrades who fell in the assault of the Santiago prison are buried too. The Cuban comrade who was accompanying us asked me for a prayer that I gave, not only for Che and the fallen but for all the Cuban people. I returned a second time when I was visit organic and urban agricultural experiments in Sancti Espiritus.

**Fidel Falls Ill**

In the summer of 2006 I arrived in Cuba having been invited to participate in the celebrations of Fidel’s 80th anniversary. To dispatch some work still outstanding, I arrived a week before I was expected and just the day after the Comandante fell ill. At Havana airport, Abel Prieto, Minister of Culture, had sent someone to pick me up, asking me to help with the Cuban chapter of the Network in Defence of Humanity. The aim was to mobilize intellectuals belonging to the Network and to involve them in a collective reaction against the danger of a political intervention from outside while the President was convalescing.

The first task was to prepare a document available for the greatest number of signatures, whether or not they were

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151 Aleida Guevara (Cuba, 1960-). She is the daughter of Ernesto Che Guevara; she is a Marxist and a pediatrician MD who works at the William Soler Pediatric Hospital in Havana and collaborates with the Center for Studies on Che Guevara.

152 Florestan Fernandez (Brazil, 1920-1995). He was a politician and a sociologist who was a member of parliament for the Workers’ Party as well as a sociology professor at the University of Sao Paulo and at the University of Toronto.

153 On 31 July 2006, for health reasons, Fidel Castro delegated his functions as president of the Council of State and Ministers to Raúl Castro.
sympathizers of the Cuban political model. We spent many hours composing it. The whole time I kept reminding them that it was not a text for the Cubans, but for the outside world, which meant an approach that took into account the possible reactions of those to whom it was addressed. Abel Prieto understood this perfectly, but as the text aimed at avoiding external intervention against Cuba the tendency was to adopt a somewhat aggressive style and also rather idyllic. For example the first drafts referred to Cuba as a ‘heroic people’. When the adversaries were mentioned they too had qualifying epithets. I proposed getting rid of adjectives and adverbs to produce a text that was clear and sober.

While we were working on this document, I was struck by the fact that Abel Prieto ate with his staff the food available in the cafeteria in the Ministry of Culture and that the Minister’s vehicle, in which I was driven back to the hotel, was an old Lada, without shock absorbers. Once we had finished editing the final version, we circulated it to hundreds of intellectuals whose addresses we had, asking them to pass it on to others. This all happened on a Friday night and on Monday morning we held a press conference, which they asked me to preside over, to publicize the document already signed.

We very much wanted to get the support of US intellectuals. Noam Chomsky\textsuperscript{154} was one of them. However, he had been critical of various aspects of Cuban politics and had never visited the country. Later on, we met while he was on his first visit and he was very impressed. Finally, he agreed to sign. I was not however able to convince Susan George to do so. She wrote to me in a friendly way but argued that it would be an implicit approval, too uncritical of the Cuban regime. Nevertheless, in general it was a success. Over the weekend we had collected over 400 signatures of intellectuals and artists from various parts of the world, including five Nobel Prize-winners.

\textsuperscript{154} Noam Chomsky (U.S.A., 1928–). He is a linguist and a philosopher from the United States; he was introduced into linguistics by his father, a specialist in the historical linguistics of Hebrew. He studied at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was awarded his doctorate in 1955 with a thesis on transformational analysis, developed from the theories of Z. Harris, of whom he was a disciple. He then became a lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he has been a professor since 1961.
As usual when I visit Havana, on Sunday I celebrated mass in the parish of San Agustín, whose parish priest was Father Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. There they asked me to read the Pastoral Letter signed by the cardinal and Bishops of Cuba. It was an excellent text that asked for prayers for Fidel and for the new government and added that any intervention whatever from outside at this moment would be unacceptable. This was a political position that was to some extent unexpected.

On Monday morning the conference room of the international press centre was full of journalists, with four US television and other foreign channels. Evidently they were waiting for news about Fidel’s health. I read the document and commented on it, mentioning some of the names of the signatories. Then the journalists began to put questions that, from the start, concerned Fidel’s state of health, but I had no details and I said so clearly. Then someone asked what kind of advice to give to the Church of Cuba at this moment. I replied that I had no advice to give to the Church of Cuba because they knew very well how to act. I had the Pastoral Letter with me and, as it was not long, I ended by reading it out.

Fidel’s illness proved that the Cuban political system was genuinely solid. If it were not so, the absence of the leader could have created a serious problem, with contradictory power struggles. However, we experienced the continuity; that is, a certain institutionalization that had strengthened the process. It is true that there are differences between the Cuban process, sometimes too institutionalized, which makes evolution difficult and countries like Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia where numerous changes of ministers mean the breaking up of work teams, for lack of institutionalization.

In 2001 the US condemned five Cubans for spying. They had been sent to monitor the activities of the Cuban counter

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155 He refers to the five Cuban state security agents who were in the United States with the mission of collecting information related to future terrorist actions against the Island: Antonio Guerrero (Miami, 1958-), Fernando González (Havana, 1963-), Gerardo Hernández (Havana, 1965-), Ramón Labañino (Havana, 1963-), René González Sehwerert (Chicago, 1956-). After an irregular legal process which took from the end of 2000 to June, 2001,
revolutionaries in Florida. It was clearly a case of legal abuse and lack of respect for the very laws of the United States. Ricardo Alarcón, President of the Popular Assembly, asked me to preside over a press conference on the matter. We had received, in CETRI, the wives of some of the prisoners. Even the Holy See intervened to get more human conditions. All this had no result, in spite of strong pressures within the United States itself. A few weeks afterwards, in front of the US Embassy in Havana, a night of protest was organized, with thousands of people and the participation of great artists like Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez. During this ceremony I spoke at length with Alarcón, underneath the dozens of black flags that prevented the illuminated advertisements of the embassy from being seen all over the city. These advertisements, among others, invited Cuban doctors abroad to desert and immigrate to the United States, where they would enjoy many advantages. Alarcón recounted to me his struggles as a student against the dictatorship of Batista and the history of the first days of the revolution. Some years later, at an event in Quito, I was moved to meet the Five who had finally been liberated.

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they were sentenced to imprisonment ranging from 15 years (René González) to two life sentences plus 15 years (Gerardo Hernández). René González and Fernando González were liberated and could return to Cuba before their fifteen years sentences were finished. On December 17, 2015, as an initial action in the process of diplomatic approach between the governments of Cuba and the United States, the rest of the group could return free to the Island. This was the culmination of an intense activity which was displayed from Cuba and in multiple international scenarios for the liberation of these antiterrorists also known in the country as “the Five Heroes”.

156 Ricardo Alarcón (Cuba, 1937-). He is a Cuban Doctor of Philosophy and Letters, a writer and a politician. He was a university student leader before the Revolution and also the President of the National Assembly of the People’s Power of Cuba from 1993 to 2013.

157 Pablo Milanés (Cuba, 1943-). He is a Cuban singer-songwriter who is one of the founders –together with Silvio Rodríguez and Noel Nicola– of the New Cuban Song. Milanés' records total more than 40 solo albums, plus around fifteen works and a large number of participations in collective albums and collaborations with other artists. As a firm believer in his revolutionary principles, he has been characterized by having maintained a public critical position of the errors which, in his opinion, have been made in leading the country.
While Fidel was ill, Raúl Castro successfully achieved the transition. He was considered to be a ‘hawk’, both as head of the army and because of his severe criticisms against certain intellectuals. But he turned out to be pragmatic, respectful of his brother but efficiently taking over the role of the presidency. Raúl has a strong sense of humour and is very cordial. He told me that one day in the Sierra Maestra, Che Guevara had tried to teach him French. He lost the manual twice because of the fighting and the displacements. After the second time, the Che told him “that’s enough” and for this reason he never learned French.

In February 2011, during the Book Fair in Havana, where Carlos Tablada, Fernando Martinez and I presented the first edition of this book of Memoirs, a group of foreign invitees was received by Fidel in a hall of the Palacio de las Convenciones. The meeting lasted seven hours, with a short interruption for a coffee. During the presentations, Fidel talked about the hunger in the world, with a degree of information and statistics that impressed me, as I too had been interested in the subject in order to prepare my book on agrofuels. He talked with authority, citing many figures from memory. Afterwards the discussion took up many other subjects, from the situation in Palestine to the North American embargo. Fidel listened carefully to the interventions and answered questions very frankly. The situation in Cuba was brought up, the economic difficulties, the measures that were being prepared. Fidel was clearly worried about the de-politicization of the young. His physical condition was certainly fragile and he needed help to walk, but mentally he was in fine form.

At the United Nations, in 2009, I had met Felipe Pérez Roque, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, whom I had known the first time during a dinner with Fidel after the Pope’s visit, when he was still Secretary to the president. Afterwards we met on several occasions. The ‘ritual vote’ in the UN against the blockade of Cuba obtained, as always, an overwhelming majority, as against

Felipe Pérez Roque (Cuba, 1965–). He is a Cuban politician and an electronics engineer who was a personal secretary to Fidel Castro and the Foreign Affairs Minister between 1999 and 2009. He was removed from office by Raúl Castro in March 2009 due to political imprudence and is working as an engineer at present.
the negative vote of the United States and Israel. For the first time, the Marshal Islands abstained; they had not received the expected subsidy from their mentor the United States and this was their way of showing their disagreement.

Poverty in Cuba

It was obvious that, while Cuba was not the hell as described in some of the Western press, the country was no paradise either. Having known Cuba before the revolution it was not difficult for me to see the difference and the socially revolutionary character of the regime. True, the wages were very low, but the social advantages were considerable in the fields of housing, health, education, culture and sports. I had visited families in the popular neighbourhoods of Havana, friends living outside the capital in residential blocks, peasants from the province of Havana and Santa Clara, students from Santiago de Cuba, parish priests from various towns. I could see that the economic difficulties were very real and poverty was a fact. Nevertheless hunger and real destitution had been virtually eliminated. But in various cases, for retired people without family and people who had illegally migrated to the city, their situation bordered on destitution. The parishes helped with popular soup kitchens to complement assistance from the State.

The hardest time was the ‘special period’ when, after the fall of the Soviet Union and still under the US embargo, the country had to make a radical adaptation of its economy. Sometimes I hardly recognized some of my friends; they had been so affected by lack of food. However this period had almost ended by the 2000s. I also saw that social differences were developing, especially with the introduction of a mixed economy and a double currency. Sometimes I met circles of people who were opposed to the socialist revolution, intellectuals in disagreement with certain methods or marginalized for their opinions, practising Christians for whom a religious identification signified an ideological protest.

Nevertheless, in most cases, there was no talk of returning to capitalism. A large number of those who were most critical of the Revolution recognized many of its achievements, in particular in the social and cultural fields. Others admitted that solidarity had
been introduced into Cuban society through the spiritualism of the revolution and that it was a value that must not be lost. Criticism of bureaucracy was found in all circles, complaints of inefficiency too. Rejection of the ‘grey period’ (the years of Soviet predominance in the seventies and eighties when the work of intellectuals and artists was controlled) on the part of the intellectuals and artists was also widespread. It was true, too, that the youth had new aspirations for consumerism and for external contacts. The de-politicization of a generation born in the revolution and who took its social and cultural achievements for granted, had made them more sensitive to the dysfunctions of the system.

In 2008 the leaders of the Federation of University Students of Santiago de Cuba invited me to give a lecture at the University on the importance of Marxist analysis to understand contemporary society with a critical approach. In fact the Marxist ‘catechism’ of official teaching was not very convincing to them and they asked me to speak on the importance of Marxist analysis in the contemporary world.

**Human Rights in Cuba**

There is much talk in the Western press about the lack of respect for human rights in Cuba. It is evident that Cuban society is not perfect in this field, but probably no worse than in many other societies. Much depends on the conception one has of the concept. If one takes into account the right to life, to health, to education, to culture, it is obvious that Cuba does much better than many other countries. If it is a question of popular participation, it is true that there has been deterioration since the beginning of the project. If we are speaking about individual liberties, there is no doubt that there are limitations in Cuba, both in the communication media and in personal expression in public.

For some, who are more concerned about the right of individuals, this is unacceptable. For others, the achievement of the revolutionary project in adverse circumstances required a self-defence that can result in limiting individual rights if they are used to destroy the process. The former ignore the context and hold the individual as primordial, which is often used as an
anti-revolutionary ideological weapon. The latter forget that the concentration of power brings abuses. These are social processes that are to be found in any kind of society. Critical thinking is the only way of keeping a balance. This does not mean identifying with the dissidence against the revolutionary project, but opposing an orthodoxy that is defined by bureaucratic power. This is why a Marxist analysis of socialist societies is so important.

In the 1990s the Cuban government was denounced by the United States and some other countries in the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. The Cuban ambassador asked me to testify. I did not deny that there were difficult situations but my conclusion was: criticism, yes; condemnation, no. A decade previously I had participated in a debate with the Spanish writer Arasabal on the French television programme of Michel Nova. The Cuban ambassador in Paris, Bosa Masvidal (nephew of the former auxiliary Bishop of Havana) had asked me to make this intervention. In a monologue that was difficult to stop, Arasabal accused Cuba of racism, increasing poverty, an unacceptable rate of infant mortality, etc. I replied that while he was an excellent writer and a courageous man (I had participated in a campaign on his behalf against the Franco regime), he was zero in statistics and, while criticisms could be made against Cuba, it was precisely in these sectors that they were not valid.

In 2003, a Cuban ferryboat was highjacked by three young people (who were black), hoping to arrive in the United States. They were caught, condemned to death and executed. Seventy-five dissidents were arrested and condemned, with long prison sentences. I expressed my disapproval. The day after the execution I was in Caracas, listening to a discourse by Chávez. Carlos Lage was also on the platform and I talked to him about it, ending by saying, “You have shot three delinquents, but you have also shot 10,000 of your defenders in Europe.” He replied, “This must be explained.” I answered, “There are things that cannot be explained.”

In the years that followed I discussed the question of the death penalty with members of the Political Bureau on a number of occasions. I said that its continuing existence in Cuba, put that country in the same category as the United States. They replied that it could not be abolished until the North American threat
ended, but this did not convince me. However, the authorities declared a moratorium on executions.

I also considered that the penalties imposed on the dissidents were exaggerated. In fact, only those who had been directly supported by the US secret services were condemned. The others were freed. It was difficult for the Cuban government to extricate itself from this situation that had caused the suspension of European cooperation and political sanctions. Some years later the government asked the cardinal to intervene. Two years previously the Cardinal had received me, after having had a visit from the German ambassador who at that time had been acting in the name of the European community. Rather upset, he told me that the ambassador had asked for his mediation in order to renew European cooperation, the condition being the liberation of the dissidents. He had told the ambassador, “Obviously it is a problem and I am in touch with their families. But why is the European Union only concerned with 75 prisoners and forgets about the other 11 million Cubans?” And he added, “In the ultimate analysis the responsibility is that of the embassy (of the United States).”

Prospects for Transformation?

It must also be kept in mind that Cuba is an island that has been isolated from the rest of the world for years and years because of the US blockade, causing economic difficulties and the psychological effects that they entail. Clearly this is an obstacle in making changes. However, and Fidel Castro has referred at various times to this, a process that is too institutionalized can prevent transformation. It is a case of a bureaucracy that prefers security and the conservation of values considered as fundamental instead of going forward – the same thing that has happened to the Catholic Church. It is true that a transformation can endanger what is fundamental and it is necessary to conserve what is basic. However, all power tends to identify the defence of its status with the essential and comes into conflict with the groups that want to overcome immobility. This is a constant sociological situation that generates tensions. We see it in Cuba, between the need not to endanger the socialist experience that has lasted for more
than 50 years and the imperative need to adapt to new situations without losing the essential. This is where theory and politics come together, not always without conflict. It is a fundamental issue, not just a conjunctural one. The conservative tendency to maintain norms and forms of the organization of the economy and politics can become an obstacle for the very continuation of the project.

This is a different matter from the case of the dissidents, which was immediately taken advantage of by external forces to construct a myth, but it could become a more serious problem if solutions are not found to the economic and social difficulties. This is no easy task, when one does not want to fall into the chaos of the ‘Russian post-Soviet neoliberalism’, or adopt the Chinese development model that is ecologically and socially unbalanced.

Added to this it has to be said that Cuba’s external communications have not always been of the best. Its insular condition makes for reactions about its own reality, without always understanding the logic of the world outside and being able to anticipate its reactions. The case of the political prisoners is an example, not only for the disproportionate penalties and their external political consequences, but also because of inadequate communication. The initiative of Raul Castro, as a result of discussions with the Cuban Catholic Church and the Spanish government, to liberate all the opponents that had not participated in terrorist activities, shows that there is a willingness to change.

Economic measures were taken at the beginning of 2011 in an effort to re-animate the economy, faced with a paralyzing bureaucratization. There was an effort to develop agriculture, which was inefficient because of the shortage of labour and the rigidity of the State structures, as well as encouraging more initiatives in the small-scale production of goods and services. This does not negate the socialist logic of economic, social and political organization or promote a new process of primitive capitalist accumulation. But some of the measures that have already been taken like opening to external capital and the adoption of a double currency are more dangerous. The great challenges of the future remain; how to develop productive forces without adopting the logic of capitalism and how to ensure the socialist qualities without bureaucratic institutionalization to maintain it.
In February 2012, during the Book Fair, Fidel again brought together a group of people for an exchange of ideas. For nearly nine hours, with two short intervals there was a dialogue between him and the audience. We could all express our views freely. Fidel took notes, asked questions and commented with great attention and was visibly satisfied. Ignacio Ramonet\textsuperscript{159} explained the way in which communications today functioned – information was not bought but the public was. I then intervened to propose the concept of the Common Good of Humanity as an anti-capitalist paradigm that could serve as a basis for the necessary convergence of the social and political movements. The meeting was televised from time to time and Fidel asked everyone for the text of their interventions in order to produce a book.

In different trips to Cuba I have participated in events like the International Meeting of Economists on Globalization and Development; in activities related to social movements; against the Free Trade Agreement for the Americas (FTAA);\textsuperscript{160} in favour of ALBA, among others. All this have been tremendously enriching and has allowed me to establish numerous contacts with Cuban intellectuals and friends.

Debate among intellectuals has always called my attention. I have had the privilege of collaborating with various journals like \textit{Contracorriente}, \textit{Temas}, \textit{Casa de las Américas}, \textit{Marx Abora}, participating in the debate in this way. I have been able to exchange with researchers and specialists in the field like Luis

\textsuperscript{159} Ignacio Ramonet (Spain, 1943-). He is a journalist, a Doctor of Semiology and History of Culture from EHESS (French acronym for École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales: School of Higher Studies on Social Sciences) of París and a professor of communication theory at the Denis-Diderot University (Paris-VII). He is one of the principal figures of the alter-world movement. He has been awarded doctorates \textit{Honoris Causa} from the University of Santiago de Compostela, the National University of Córdoba, the National University of Rosario and the University of Havana. He is a co-founder of \textit{Le Monde Diplomatique} and is in charge of its Spanish edition.

\textsuperscript{160} An attempt made by the United States to extend the North America Treaty for Free Trade, originally between the United States, Mexico and Canada, to the rest of the countries in America, with the exception of Cuba.
Suarez Salazar,\textsuperscript{161} Aurelio Alonso, Fernando Martinez Heredia, Osvaldo Martinez,\textsuperscript{162} among others, which for me has resulted particularly interesting because there is no adaptation or comfort in their way of thinking. I have bore witness to a great wealth of knowledge of the world and of the Cuban experience and an enormous motivation to approach it critically.

In the last years of 2014, the journal \textit{Casa de las Américas} published a speech I delivered in Hanoi in a meeting on South-South relations organised by Madame Thi Binh, former Vice-President of Vietnam. It was a critique of modernity, trying to demonstrate that it had been absorbed by the logic of capitalism –thesis of Bolívar Etcheverría– and that for some time the thinking of the South –in Asia as well as in Latin America and Africa– the tendency was to adapt to this situation, with theoretical essays indication that there was no contradiction between the traditional and modern philosophies. Now criticism is developed from more holistic perspectives, much deeper than a simple condemning the abuses of capitalism. If South-South relationships continue to be done within the spirit of “the great transformation”, without reinserting economy into society, as Karl Polanyi said, we are simply going to reproduce

\textsuperscript{161} Luis Suárez Salazar (Cuba, 1950-). He is an author, a co-author, a compiler or an editor of around fifty books. He is a Political Sciences graduate from the University of Havana (1975), a Doctor of Sociological Sciences (2003) and a Doctor of Science (2009), both from the University of Havana. He was the director and also a researcher at CEA, (Spanish acronym for Centro de Estudios sobre América: Center for Studies on America) of Havana, Cuba, between August, 1984 and March, 1996. He directed the journal Cuadernos de Nuestra América. In recognition of his work he received several national and international awards such as the Prize for Scientific-technical Critique from the Academy of Sciences of Cuba and from the Cuban Book Institute; Special Mentions from the Jury of the Second International Prize for Essays “Crosscurrent Thinking” and for the first edition of the “Liberator” Prize for Critical Thought from the Ministry of Culture of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, as well as the Annual Prize for his dissertation to obtain his Doctor of Science degree. He has published more than 120 articles and essays in diverse periodical, academic or serial publications from different countries in the world.

\textsuperscript{162} Osvaldo Martínez (Cuba, 1944-). He is an economist and the President of the Commission for Economic Affairs of the Cuban Parliament, as well as the director of the Center for Studies on World Economy.
the system. This had certain significance for the internal evolution of Cuban society; that is why the journal published this essay.

Before Pope Francis’ visit to the island, Rafael Hernández,\textsuperscript{163} director of the \textit{Temas} journal –of which editorial board I am a member– asked me for an interview. It was about reflections on the difference between this and other papal visits to Cuba –John Paul II and Benedict XVI– of describing the personality of Pope Francis and expressing some of the expectations with respect to his presence in the country. The interview was published and a video was disseminated by the media.

Even though publications by Ruth Casa Editorial are usually specialized and are not fundamentally directed to the uninitiated audience, in its forum people has been able to discuss openly about Cuba, Latin America, and the possible future. Evidently, not to go back to capitalism; but to elucidate how to guide a process to constitute a fundamental social change that may have various concrete orientations. Obviously, when politics has a greater weight than thought, contradictions arise. As is well known, one thing is thinking and another is implementing strategies.

On the other hand, I think that the political opening that the re-establishment of diplomatic relationships with the United States represents, offers new opportunities for Cuba, but also challenges. Nothing is free in politics.

As we know, Obama’s visit did not put an end to the embargo. There were some changes, like the arrival of more North American tourists. Over the last years economic measures had improved agricultural production and more commodities were available. However this had to be seen in a general context of rising prices. In 2016 there were two parallel currencies coexisting and social differences were increasing. Basic services were assured but the quality of education and health services were diminishing. The world crisis was affecting the country in different ways.

For example, human cooperation, especially in the field of health, began to suffer, limited by the lack of means in various countries

\textsuperscript{163} Rafael Hernández. He is a Cuban sociologist, a philosopher and an academic, as well as an essayist and a researcher. He is the director of the journal \textit{Temas of Cuba}. 

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which had been the object of Cuban solidarity and which had earned the country an income of some 8,000 million USD each year.

And then the cooperation with Venezuela in the framework of ALBA, especially the supply of oil, came to a halt with the fall in the international price for crude. A series of measures to reduce energy were put into effect in 2016. The flight of capital had reached new levels, creating difficulties for certain countries in Latin America, such as Ecuador and Nicaragua.

The situation evoked the spectre of the ‘special period’ after the fall of the Berlin wall. However, Cuba was fortunately in a different position. The economic measures, in spite of their slow application, had improved agricultural production to a certain extent. Cuba was not isolated from the world as it was at the end of the 1980s. Medical research had yielded considerable results and the same could be said about information technology. Joint ventures with European and North American businesses had multiplied.

However, what does all this mean for a socialist country? Evidently, a new integration into world capitalism. In such a context, is it possible to avoid a process of new primitive private accumulation? There are those who doubt it. Even if the official concern is to avoid a double process: the chaos of the brutal change to neoliberalism, as in Russia, and the prevalence of the logic of capital to increase growth as in China and Vietnam.

In these conditions, the party has kept its political authority but lost some of the popular support through peoples' participation, especially among the young generation. The tendency is now towards more authoritarianism. Its main strength is probably nationalism in the more positive sense of the word: to be the bearer of resistance to the Empire and of the sovereignty of the island. The continuity of the process and its internal transformation is very much linked to the success of the economic measures. However, a situation which could lead to a social explosion does not arise in Cuba. The spirit of the Cuban Revolution has deeply penetrated the culture and the society and has constructed a real sense of the common interest. It is of course true that this can be eroded.

When I returned to Cuba in February, 2017, there were quite a few worries with regard to President Trump’s policy and its effects
on the island at a moment in which Venezuela was on the verge of bankruptcy. Reforms advanced slowly. Changes in agriculture advanced little by little, promoting family agriculture organized in the Association of Small Producers (APA) or in cooperatives. Part of the new production was absorbed by tourism, which is in real progress, surpassing the 4 million in 2016. There was a protest movement on the part of taxi drivers due to fares; for the first time this took the form of a sort of strike.

In the intellectual area, certain polarization between two currents was taking place. One was of social-democratic tendency without excluding neoliberal prospects; it was supported by NGO’s from abroad and had written and virtual communication channels. The other was clearly anti-capitalist and was seeking a renewal of socialism. They had no support from abroad and were made up mainly by young intellectuals who were linked with the academy and close to popular media. They referred to the "Pensamiento Crítico" (Critical Thinking) current of the 60’s and were preparing to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the journal of that name. They only had virtual communication. I have had contacts with the latter group at a meeting at the Philosophy Institute of the Academy of Sciences which celebrated the 51st anniversary of Camilo Torres’ death on February 15, 2017. Two days later Josué interviewed me for the virtual journal.

The next day Frey Betto’s biography was presented in his presence at the Hotel Nacional by its Brazilian authors and by Frey Betto himself: a very interesting career of Liberation Theology, literature and political contacts. It was the opportunity to meet many friends of the intellectual, religious and political areas, and also to express my feelings of sympathy to Fidelito, Fidel’s son, for the death of his father. I have also learned that my article on my meetings with Fidel, originally published by Drapeau Rouge from Brussels, was circulating on many sites and networks of Cuba.

**Haiti**

After my first visit to Haiti in 1953, I returned with Geneviève Lemercinier in 1995. We were invited by Suzy Castor, a historian
and founder of the Centre for Economic and Social Development Research and Training (CRESFED), and who was also a member of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal. Her husband, Gérard Pierre Charles, a founder member of the Communist Party and author of various books on the country’s economy had been professor at the National University of Mexico when he was in exile during the dictatorship of François Duvalier\textsuperscript{164} and he had been the secretary of Jean Bertrand Aristide’s party. However, because of the deviations of this organization, he had founded and led an opposition party. I had known Aristide\textsuperscript{165} when he was studying as he once passed through CETRI. Later I met him in exile in Brussels.

Our work on Haiti focussed on culture, the study of representations in the towns and in the countryside. We used the research tools that we had employed in Nicaragua and before that, in Sri Lanka and India. They were questionnaires, with various possibilities of reply which were then processed by factorial analysis, a field in which Geneviève had specialized. In this national-level survey, we had the collaboration of Professor Rémy\textsuperscript{166} of the Ethnology School and several thousand people in the country were interviewed. The study was carried out as part of the research programme of CRESTED and financed by a fund administered by Philippe Dewez\textsuperscript{167} of the Inter-American Development Bank, who was

\textsuperscript{164} François Duvalier (Haiti, 1907-1971). He was a Haitian MD and a politician, known as Papa Doc, who was president from 1957 to 1971. Duvalier made use of both assassination and expulsion to eliminate his political adversaries, and it is estimated that more than 30,000 persons were assassinated.

\textsuperscript{165} Jean Bertrand Aristide (Haiti, 1953-). He is a Salesian priest, a spokesman for the Liberation Theology. He studied philosophy in the Grand Seminary of Notre Dame and psychology at the University of Haiti. Once he completed his studies in 1979, he traveled to Europe and studied in Italy, and then in Canada and Israel. He was the Constitutional President of Haiti (1991, 1995 to 1996, and 2001 to 2004), the first president to be elected democratically in the history of the republic.

\textsuperscript{166} Anselme Rémy. He is an anthropologist and a professor at the School of Humanities of the State University of Haiti.

\textsuperscript{167} Philippe Dewez (1947-Haiti, 2010). He was trained as an engineer at the Catholic University of Louvain from 1965 to 1971 (a Bachelor and a Master of Industrial Management). He was a militant of Oxfam Belgium who
responsible locally for that organization. He was one of the victims of the 2010 earthquake.

What we discovered was very interesting. The city of Port-au-Prince, which had had 150,000 inhabitants in the 1950s, now had a population of nearly two million. As the country was not industrialized, this increase was the result of rural under-development. For this reason, the population remained with their traditional culture, one of symbolic thinking similar to the rural model, with some new elements but not integrated into a system of thought. It meant that the city had been ruralized.

In contrast in certain rural areas, especially where the peasant movements had been active and among members of the cooperatives, we found more analytical cultural models indicating a significant cultural transformation. We also found that the passage from one model to another depended, not on literacy or on primary and secondary formal education, or on skilled industrial work, but only on access to higher education, or through integration into a social movement or a cooperative. We had found this to be the case in Nicaragua too.

This research phase was Geneviève's last work. She was already very ill and, as I have already mentioned earlier, she had to use the wheelchair at the airports. I followed the work for another three summers and also participated in many other conference activities in the social science faculties of various universities and for the training of leaders of social and political movements.

I knew many of the men and women who were involved with politics, leaders of unions, ambassadors, representatives of international organizations, as there was a steady stream of them through the house of Gérard and Suzy where I was staying. As he had suffered from polio, many of his activities as party leader in the opposition had to be carried out at home. I remember various visits from the US ambassador. He came, not so much as to get worked in Bolivia; he was in charge of the Interamerican Development Bank for Haiti. He had been working for a month as special adviser to the Haitian president, sponsored by MINUSTAH (Spanish acronym for Misión de las Naciones Unidas para la Estabilidad en Haiti: United Nations Mission for Stability in Haiti) when he died as a consequence of the earthquake which shook the country and plunged it into destruction.

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information, as to give instructions or to ask the reason for this or that political position of the party. Gérard found this particularly irritating. The ambassador acted like a real pro-consul. This was how the United States behaved in its ‘backyard’.

The contact with the social movements was interesting. On 1 May 2000, the union of the workers at the international airport invited me to make the celebration speech. They took me through the airport between the planes to reach a large hall. The meeting began with the singing of the International. I talked of the struggle of the workers and especially of their fight against the privatization of the airport. The celebration ended with the reading of poems written by several of the comrades.

Some years earlier, in 1998, I had been invited by the Papai Peasant Movement to celebrate the 25 years of its existence. Gérard Pierre Charles and Pablo González Casanova from Mexico were also invited and, together with Geneviève Lemercinier, we travelled in a Russian helicopter belonging to the UN contingent and crewed by the Argentinean military. It was there that I officiated at the inauguration of the ceremony, together with a Protestant minister and a Voodoo priest, who as a member of the traditional religion had to live clandestinely but had come out to participate.

After the earthquake in Port au Prince the country was literally occupied by foreign agencies and UN troops. Gradually there was resistance to recover a minimum of autonomy and to develop another model that did not depend on capitalism. Among those who were thinking along these lines were Camille Chalmers\textsuperscript{168} of PABDA and Jean-Baptiste Chavannes\textsuperscript{169} of the Papai Peasant Movement.

Haiti was the first independent country of the sub-continent, as a result of the slave revolt and it helped Bolivar to liberate South America. It created an original Creole culture and had a

\textsuperscript{168} Camille Chalmers. He was born in 1956 and is a Master of Economics and Planning in Venezuela (1979-1981) and in France. He is a world known socio-economist, specialized in the analysis of integration processes and the formulating of alternative public policies. He has taught in various schools of the State University of Haiti since 1980.

\textsuperscript{169} Jean-Baptiste Chavannes (Haiti, 1945-). He was an agronomist who founded the “Papai” Peasant Movement in 1973. He was also a candidate to the presidency of Haiti in 2015.
social history of internal exploitation by the class of those that the people called, in their very picturesque way, ‘the great eaters’ (les grands mangeurs) and by the external domination –economic and political– of the United States. The real culture, nourished by Voodoo, was marginalized and forced into going underground. Social inequality was established as a natural phenomenon. This was the reaction of François Duvalier, a doctor as well as an anthropologist, who tried to re-establish the original culture, but whose regime ended in a bloody dictatorship. Unfortunately, the project of Jean Bertrand Aristide, who struggled against social injustice, changed after his forced exile through a military coup and he returned from the United States to apply the remedies of the IMF and the World Bank. He ended by being embroiled in corruption, while his followers carried out political assassinations. During this period, I was twice interviewed, once with Samir Amin, by the director of an independent radio who supported the Revolution but was critical of the way it had deviated. The last time he asked me to speak with Gérard Pierre Charles to convince him to approach Preval,170 the prime minister of Aristide who later became president of Haiti –to join forces to stop the disorientation of the regime. A little later he was shot at in the headquarters of his radio station. Then an armed mob destroyed the building of CRESFED and attacked the home of Gérard and Suzy, which was partially burnt down.

Haiti has a very rich popular culture. It produces naïf paintings that give a lively picture of everyday life. In the town of Bois des Bouquêts, not far from Port-au-Prince, the whole population takes part in modelling symbolic figures, inspired by the exuberance of Afro-American culture, out of old petrol cans from the United States: the art of the poor made from the waste materials of the rich! The entrance hall of CETRI is adorned with these figures. I used one of them, a very lively figure with the wind in its hair and a fishtail and stars in its hands, as the cover of my book Haiti et la Mondialisation de la Culture (published in Paris by L’Harmattan

170 René Preval (Haiti, 1943-). He is a Haitian politician and an agronomy engineer from the Universities of Gembloux and Louvain in Belgium, and of Geothermical Sciences from the Italian University of Pisa. He was president from 1996 to 2001 and from 2006 to 2011.
in 2000) as well as for a Belgian TV programme *Au nom de Dieu*. In my book I tried to put together the most essential elements of what Geneviève and I had learnt about the sociology of culture and the rhythms of its transformations. Once again, this was a confirmation of the long time taken by culture to evolve but there was also a struggle to rehabilitate historical thinking, not without ambiguities but as an expression of implicit criticism of modernity, in search of humanity.

The tragedies of the Haitian people are not a punishment from God, nor are they the result of natural catastrophes. In large part they are the result of social disorganization, an odious exploitation and policies that favour those who flaunt their power.

At the beginning of 2017 I returned to Haiti, almost 13 years after my last stay; 7 years after the earthquake; and several months after the storm that affected one third of its territory. I feared this return. In fact, many parts of Port-au-Prince had not been rebuilt, but the city was free of rubble, allowing the usual jammed traffic flow. Certain neighborhoods were more populated than before, giving the impression of having reached their limit. However, I found an active, kind and even happy population with exceptional vital energy.

The program of my visit organized by PAPDA and Camille Charlmers was intense. Giving a lecture to almost 500 students on the social role of the university at the School of Anthropology; meeting with leftist parties on the political circumstances of Latin America and Haiti; meeting with farmers movements on farmers’ agriculture; preparing a session of the Peoples’ Tribunal on the historical effects of the occupation by the United States and the current military presence of the United Nations; radio interviews and also with the “kisquea” television. I admired the convening power of PAPDA. I have also met with old friends: Suzy Castor, Antoine Augustin, Jean Batiste Chavannes, Etienne Sauveur,\(^\text{171}\) Augustin Antoine. He is a Haitian professor in the School of Ethnology at UEH and the general coordinator of CEIS: (Spanish acronym for Centro de Educación e Intervenciones Sociales: Center for Education and Social Interventions) in Port-au-Prince.\(^\text{172}\) Sauveur Pierre Etienne (Haiti, 1959–). He is a Bachelor of Social Communication and Master of Development Sciences from the School of Ethnology in Port-
Franck Saintjean\textsuperscript{173} and several others. Professor Rémy, with whom I had worked on the culture of Haiti, had offered me his house while he was in the United States.

The political situation was hard. President Moisés had been elected with a high abstention level. He represented the neoliberal and pro-American Right. A new wave of repression was feared.

\textsuperscript{173} Frank Saint Jean. He is a Bachelor of Agricultural Science who is a member of Haitian Platform for Alternative Development (PAPDA).
CHAPTER XIII: SOUTH AMERICA

Colombia

In my first visit to Colombia in 1954 I was able to meet Camilo Torres, as already mentioned. Then, in 1960, I spent four months in Bogota to do the summing up of the socio-religious study on Latin America and this started my close collaboration with CELAM (the Latin American Episcopal Council). I experienced the period of violence. The elites of the two main political parties, the conservative party and the liberal party were engaged in very violent armed struggle, using the population as cannon fodder. There were dozens of thousands of deaths. In some places that I visited half the town had been destroyed and its inhabitants killed by the conservatives, while in others it was the liberals who carried out the destruction. The Catholic Church started a reconciliation campaign. I participated at one of these actions in the department of Tolima. I celebrated the Eucharist in several parishes and preached surrounded by armed soldiers.

A new stage of my relationships with the country started in 1992. Father Xavier Girardot, S.J.\(^1\) together with a team of young jurists, including the Belgian Paul Emile Duprêt\(^2\) (who later became the

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\(^1\) Xavier Girardot. He is a Colombian Jesuit who is active in the defense of human rights as well as a member of the Peoples’ Permanent Tribunal. In 2000 he organized a tribunal session on the impunity in Latin America.

\(^2\) Paul-Emile Duprêt (Brussels, 1955-). He studied law at the University School of Namur and at the Catholic University of Louvain. He went to cooperate in Colombia where he spent eight years working together with the Jesuit priest Xavier Girardot, the secretary of the group GUE (French
secretary of the left-wing group, GRUE, in the European Parliament), organized a series of sessions of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal on the dictatorial regimes in Latin American countries.

The sessions took place in Chile, Argentina and Panama. Bolivia should have been included but its government did not allow Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the Argentinean architect and Nobel Peace Prize winner, who was a member of the jury, to enter the country. The President at that time was Jaime Paz, who had been a student at Louvain and he had undertaken a sociological thesis under my supervision. He was a member of MIR, a revolutionary movement and he regularly attended Latin American seminars organized by CETRI. But in order to become president he had had to ally with Hugo Banzer, which was why the tribunal was refused in Bolivia. The Colombian team had nevertheless assembled a solid documentation on Bolivia, in particular what had happened under the dictatorship of Banzer.

A sentence was drawn up in Bogota and sent to La Paz. Enclosed with the sentence I sent a letter to the president a letter, reminding him of his revolutionary past and of the last meeting that we had

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3 Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (Argentina, 1931-). He studied architecture at the national School of Fine Arts “Manuel Belgrano” in the National University of La Plata, where he graduated as a painter and a sculptor and taught at the School of Architecture of that university for more than 25 years. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work in the defense of human rights in Argentina in 1980. He has been awarded around fifteen doctorates Honoris Causa.

4 Jaime Paz (Bolivia, 1939-). He was the president from 1989 to 1993. He entered the Order of the Redemptorists and studied philosophy and theology. Before receiving the sacerdotal order, he retired from religious life. Years later he graduated from Social and Political Sciences with special mention in International Relations from the Catholic University of Louvain. He was a founder and leader of MIR (Spanish acronym for Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria: Revolutionary Leftist Movement).

5 Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR). It is a party registered in the Socialist International, founded on September 7, 1971.

6 Hugo Banzer (Bolivia, 1926-2002). He was a general and a politician who was president between 1971 and 1978, and later, by way of a coup d’etat, from 1997 to 2001.
held in Nicaragua on the anniversary of the Sandinista revolution. I asked him to change his attitude and to be faithful to his past ideals, and not to betray his people. It was an open letter, which was published in the Bolivian press, but it remained without a reply.

The summing up of all the assembled material took place in Bogota. Professor Francis Rigaux\(^7\) of the Catholic University of Louvain and President of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal should have presided but he fell ill and asked me to replace him. Among the members of the jury, apart from Adolfo Perez Esquivel, were the Italian philosopher Giulio Girardi, Mexican Don Sergio Mendez Arceo and the Colombian sociologist and parliamentarian Orlando Fals Borda. The prosecutor was the Colombian lawyer Eduardo Umaña,\(^8\) who was assassinated a few years later. Two weeks before he was killed, we had lunched together in CETRI in Louvain-la-Neuve.

The tribunal took place in the auditorium of a religious college. Each day the jury arrived in a minibus from the hotel, driving straight to the underground parking of the college, for security reasons. Some 800 to 1,000 people attended the proceedings. Father Girardet and his team had prepared an impressive amount of documentation and for three days we heard witnesses from different countries on the continent. The sentence was drawn up in a session that lasted the whole night before being delivered. There was extensive coverage of the proceedings in the Colombian press.

The sentence was sent to the International Court of Justice at The Hague, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica, the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva and the Secretary-General of the United Nations in New York. I accompanied Monsignor Sergio Mendez Arceo to the airport and as I watched him walk slowly towards the customs I wondered whether we had not met for the last time. In fact, he died a few months later.

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\(^7\) François Rigaux (Belgium, 1926-2013). He was the dean of the Law School of the Catholic University of Louvain, and also an international jurist. He is a member of the CA of the International Law Institute and of the Interuniversity Center for Comparative Law and of the Royal Academy of Belgium. He was the president of the Peoples’ Permanent Tribunal.

\(^8\) Eduardo Umaña (Colombia, 1946-1998). He was a lawyer, an intellectual, a teacher, a humanist and a defender of Peoples’ Rights in Colombia.
In Colombia I collaborated with the organization of many other tribunals. One of them, in 2008, was officially sponsored by the Peoples Permanent Tribunal. It was presided over by Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the theme being the activities of the multinational corporations in Colombia. For three years there were studies in the various fields of oil, mining and agricultural activities and this was the summing up session. Some multinationals were upset because it was affecting their image. Thus Nestlé wrote a letter to its employees, telling them not to give any importance to the activities of the Tribunal which, anyway, did not have wide repercussions.

One of the subjects studied was the collusion between these corporations and the paramilitaries. Others were the forced displacement of populations and the destruction of the natural environment. Almost all the corporations studied were involved in such activities and not only those from North America like Exxon and Monsanto, but also Europeans, from Repsol to Nestlé. The Tribunal’s sentence was clear and well documented. It was sent to international bodies, as was the custom and it received good coverage in the media.

Other opinion tribunals were also held. It was Lilia Solano who organized the sessions, including a special consultation on the US bases in Colombia. She had coordinated the Camilo Torres chair at the National University and founded an NGO, Justice and Life. She was also assistant to Alejandro López, a senator of the opposition political party, the Polo Democrático Alternativo, who later became vice president of the Senate. When Clara López Obregón was mayor of Bogota, Lilia became responsible for the human rights office in the municipality.

Lilia Solano (Colombia). She is a graduate of philosophy from the University of Valle and of political sciences from the “Javeriana” University. She has been a university lecturer at the “Javeriana” and the National Universities of Colombia, as well as a researcher and the director of the organization for human rights “Project for Justice and Life” which operates mainly in the marginal sectors of Bogotá.

Clara López Obregón (Colombia, 1950-). She is an economics graduate from Harvard University (1972), of law from the University of the Andes (2006), and a candidate to Doctor of Financial and Revenue Rights from the University of Salamanca (2002). She is a Colombian economist, a
The three tribunals, respectively on the paramilitary, the ‘missing’ and the displaced, were organized in 2007, 2008 and 2009 in the National Congress, thanks to the fact that Senator Alejander López, a former trade unionist in the public services of Cali, was also vice president of the Human Rights Commission. Each time I was asked to preside over the sessions. It was a strange feeling to occupy, for three days, the seat of the president of the National Assembly in such a prestigious place, where the presidents of the Republic take their oath in front of a huge painting of Simón Bolivar. Each session started with the national hymn and was covered by the Congress television channel.

The first session treated the cases of the assassinations of young people by the paramilitary to the south of Bogota in the municipalities of Ciudad Bolívar and surroundings. More than 800 young people had been killed in a period of five years, mostly because they did not want to be recruited by the paramilitary. The testimonies of the parents and brothers were terrifying. For the members of the tribunal, the complicity of the police, the army and in the end the political authorities, was clear.

To ensure the smooth functioning of the tribunal's work I asked that there be no demonstrations or applause, as it was an opinion tribunal and not a solidarity meeting. There were inhabitants from the barrios concerned among the public. A group of young Afro-descendants asked my authorization to sing a song. They did not expect a positive answer but I agreed because this was their way of expressing themselves. They sang in rap music about the suffering of the young people, their anger against the injustice, but also their hopes for change. The employees of the parliament, dressed in their formal suits, could hardly believe their ears and I think that Bolívar turned in his grave. There had never been such a scene in this solemn precinct. But everyone was moved and after the song there was a long silence.

lawyer and a political leader, the President of the Alternative Democratic Pole and was also the mayor of Bogotá.

Alejander López (Colombia). He is a lawyer, a trade unionist, a politician and a member of the Alternative Democratic Pole. He was elected by popular vote to be a member of the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia and is the Vice-President of the Senate.
At the end of the three days, the jury drew up its sentence and I read it out in front of the television. It was very tough, with condemnations that included the presidency. By that time, many of the parents of the young people who had been murdered and the inhabitants of their very poor neighbourhoods were in tears, but they were also glad that the events had been made public.

The other sessions were similar: there were tens of thousands of people who were missing, ‘disappeared’, mostly by the paramilitary, partly also by the guerrillas. Altogether over four million people had been displaced in Colombia. The violence in the country was at the root of the problem, but it was a violence that had social causes.

Since independence the country has had an oligarchy that has dominated society and has never accepted to lose its privileges. Colombia has one of the most intelligent bourgeoisie of Latin America, but also one of the most cynical. It manages to go from crisis to crisis and adapt to the circumstances. It has not rejected industrialization and has integrated the money from drug trafficking into the real economy. It organized violent repression each time that a political leader from the left had a chance of winning an election. This was the case of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, the psychiatrist/philosopher who, in 1948, was assassinated the evening of the voting, which provoked the ‘Bogotazo’ (massive riots). It was this same bourgeoisie that prevented the success of the Popular Unity movement, putting a price on the head of Camilo Torres who had no other solution but to join the armed struggle. And it was this same bourgeoisie that has stopped any serious agrarian reform and continued with the development of monoculture and mining, collaborating with the paramilitary,

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12 Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (Colombia, 1903-1948). He was a Doctor of Laws and Political Sciences from the National University of Colombia, as well as a Doctor of Jurisprudence from the Royal University of Rome. He was a psychiatrist graduated in Italy, and also the Minister for Education and Work, the mayor of Bogotá and the President of the Chamber of Representatives in Colombia. In 1933 he founded the political movement Revolutionary Leftist National Union (UNIR) and its journal El Unirismo. He was assassinated in 1958, during the electoral campaign for the presidency as a candidate of the Liberal Party. He promoted the people’s participation and a radical change in Colombian society.
displacing hundreds of thousands of people and provoking the emergence of the guerrillas.

The presidency of Santos, who belongs to the upper class of Bogota, did not really change the policy of his predecessor Uribe, who came from the middle class of Medellin – only there was a change of style. Still there is no agrarian reform; still national and international capital supports it; still it is the military solution in the civil war against the guerrillas; and still it is for economic integration with the North and the military alliance with the United States. Nevertheless Santos has opened negotiations with the guerrillas: neither side was able to win the war.

Before the tribunal on the missing, there had been local hearings in various parts of the country. I took part in one of them in Arauca, on the frontier with Venezuela, together with a German member of the European Parliament. The situation was very tense. Various witnesses talked behind a screen so they could not be recognized. Some of the testimonies were so awful that it was impossible to continue the questioning. As president of the hearing, I did not have an easy task. At the airport, while we were waiting for the plane, agents of the DAS (security services) asked us for our passports and threatened to expel us from the country. Paradoxically when I was in Bogota, I had to travel about in a vehicle of the same DAS for protection! Peace activists, like Liliana Solano, had to have State protection because any violence against people like her would be damaging for the country. And this was no idle threat. During this session of the tribunal I received a letter with a death threat, signed by the Black Eagles, one of the paramilitary groups of the country.

The consultation on the North American bases in Colombia lasted a day and it also took place in the Congress. Participants included jurists, parliamentarians and representatives of social movements. The conclusion was that the bases were unconstitutional because the government had not consulted parliament, on the grounds that it was only a case of prolonging an agreement that already existed. In actual fact seven bases of the Colombian army had been put at the disposal of the Pentagon. This became important after the decision of Ecuador not to renew authorization to use the base of Manta, from which the AWACS (spy planes) monitored a large
part of South America. Colombia was an essential geo-strategic place for the United States in a region that has been increasingly distancing itself from US hegemony.

A few weeks later, the Constitutional Court confirmed the conclusions of the consultation and declared that the decision of the government on the military bases was unconstitutional. Nevertheless, with its majority in parliament it was not difficult for the government to obtain approval for the military bases.

To further the peace process in the country, the possibility of constituting a Truth Commission was studied, like the one that was organized in South Africa. A meeting took place in Medellín with the Congress representative for the Polo Democrático, Iván Cepeda. After two days of work, a delegation was received in Bogota by the President of the Constitutional Court and two of his colleague judges. They listened with interest to the report on the meeting in Medellín. They said that such a commission should be established by the government after the cession of armed hostilities and so that it was still too early to set it up. However they said it was very important to follow the research work in order to prepare the task of such a commission in the future.

The other institution with which I collaborated was the Inter-Congregational Commission Justice and Peace. Founded by several Catholic religious congregations, the Commission became involved in several dramatic cases of the expulsion of peasants and of Afro-descendant communities, as well as massacres of peoples. In Paris I presided over a session of the tribunal on South Bolívar, a region not far from the frontier with Panama, where a largely black community had been dispossessed of its land by monoculture companies, often belonging to paramilitary.

With the Commission I went to Chocó in 2008 to meet Afro-descendant displaced people and communities. After many kilometres in jeep we reached a ‘humanitarian zone’, which had been retaken by the peasants. We stayed there for two days in

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13 Iván Cepeda Castro (Colombia, 1962-). When he was 19 years old he migrated to Sophia, Bulgaria, where he studied philosophy at the Saint Clement of Ohrid University of Sophia. He is a politician and a defender of human rights in his country. He was a representative to the Chamber between 2010 and 2014, and a senator by the Alternative Democratic Pole.
provisional huts made of wood and plastic that they had built. The region was covered with African palm trees that had been planted over huge areas, destroying forests, biodiversity and peoples. Such was the excessive use of chemicals that there were no longer any birds or butterflies, or fish in the rivers. A village had been destroyed, including schools and churches. Half the cemetery remained, the other half had disappeared under the plantations. One night we had a meeting with the various communities who recounted their suffering, the massacres, the forced migrations. I recounted this visit in more detail in my book on agrofuels.\textsuperscript{14} It has had ten editions, in six languages, including Chinese (published by the Academy of the Sciences in Beijing). The Spanish version, published in 2012, was entitled \textit{El escándalo de los agrocombustibles para el Sur} (Editorial La Tierra, Quito).

In 2009, we also visited Putumayo, a region on the frontier with Ecuador. It was an area where there was an operation against the FARC\textsuperscript{s} (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the army was very active there. In the little airport of San Francisco, helicopters were coming and going, transporting troops. We were in a village in the Amazon where a number of community leaders and catechists had been killed. It was necessary to commemorate them because people were still living in fear. At night, we went in a procession with the whole community, bearing candles, going from house to house where there had been victims up to the little church constructed with concrete and aluminium sheets. Father Alberto of the Commission celebrated the mass. There were many testimonies and also a deep satisfaction that they had been able, for the first time, to commemorate those who were no longer with them. It was a mixed community, including indigenous people. We were very close to the place where, on the other side of the river and the frontier with Ecuador, the Colombian army had killed Comandante Raúl Reyes, the No. 2 of the FARC\textsuperscript{s}-EP, and his comrades a few months previously.

The following day we gathered the testimonies of the families of those who had been murdered. I had to question various people,

among them a 13-year-old girl who had been present at the killing of her father. After a few hours of such work, one is at a loss for words and hopes never to hear such stories again.

On the return we crossed a territory of dozens of kilometres where there was drilling for oil in a forest area. The desolation was spectacular: wells with contaminated land around them, trees hacked down and left there, holes with some poor quality crude oil, kilometres of pipes, a veritable aggression against Mother Earth. The other members of the Commission stayed on another day, especially to visit the graveyards and the anonymous tombs. I took the plane for Cali where I had been invited by the union of the sugar-cane workers.

For one month they had been on strike to ask for a wage increase. They wanted two dollars for each ton of cut sugar cane instead of one dollar, and better working conditions. It was really slave labour, but they were up against a monopoly. It was the first time they had organized a strike of this kind. The meeting was meant to be held in an auditorium of the University (where I had given a lecture a few months previously). At the last moment the rector prohibited the use of the room. A platform was improvised in a courtyard of the university for the use of the union leaders and myself. I explained that this struggle was not isolated in the world and that many actions of this kind were taking place against the power of capitalism. A few days later they were forced, through hunger, to abandon the strike. They had obtained an increase of 10 cents per ton of cane sugar.

Who says that there is no class struggle anymore and that capitalism is not necessarily brutal? Those very days, Lula, President of Brazil and Uribe, President of Colombia met to sign an agreement on the development of sugar cane and African palm for agrofuels (what they call green energy). They had very strong words to say against the movements and the NGOs that were criticizing this project.

I stayed the night in the house of Lilia Solano’s mother, a dedicated union leader. Four other union leaders came to eat with us in her place. When they returned home, some tens of kilometres away, they asked us to remain in contact with them by cell telephones, for reasons of security. Numerous social struggles
were going on. The previous year, the union of the public workers of Cali, of which Senator Alejandro López had been the leader, had invited me to talk about the defence of public services. The municipality of Cali was on the point of privatizing them. I visited various workplaces to meet with them.

During my stays in Colombia I was lucky to meet many very committed people, in spite of the dangers that this meant in a society that is so unequal and unjust. Such was the case of the father of Eduardo Umaña, a very respected jurist who always spoke out very clearly. He was a cousin of Camilo Torres’, whose commitment he much admired. I met Gloria Gaitán, daughter of the leader who had been assassinated and who dedicated much of her time in honouring the memory of her father and spreading his thinking. Like those of Camilo, his remains have disappeared. There are dead people who are more dangerous than when they were alive.

My friendship with Gloria Gaítan developed over the years. Evidently our thinking was along the same lines and she helped me to gain a better knowledge of the ideas of her father, who had refused to be a candidate for the presidency proposed by the Liberal Party –because it was not a peoples’ party. For the first time in the history of the country there was a project which was not linked to the interests of the bourgeoisie and there was a real possibility that it would succeed. For that reason Gaitan was assassinated.

I helped in organizing her stay in Ecuador; together with Gustavo Pérez, the biographer of Camilo Torres and the secretary of the History Academy, and Jorge Orbe of the Instituto de Altes

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15 Gloria Gaitán (Colombia, 1937-). She is a Colombian politician who studied philosophy (1959) and economics (1968) at the University of the Andes, in Bogotá. She was an economics adviser to the President of Chile, Salvador Allende, from January, 1973 until the day of the coup d’etat by General Augusto Pinochet, when she had to seek political asylum in the Colombian embassy in Santiago until she managed to return to her country. She has been an outstanding columnist and has authored several books.

16 Jorge Orbe (Ecuador). He is a professor at IAEN, and an economist from the Central University of Ecuador; he has a diploma in Population and Development from the University of Havana, and is a Master of Management.
Estudos Nacional (IAEN). One year previously, she had asked me to give a souvenir of her father to Rafael Correa. In her lecture to the IAEN she explained that the ‘violence’ of the 1960s was not a struggle between the liberal party and the conservative party, as the official history presents it, but a struggle by the liberal and conservative oligarchies against liberal and conservative people, which gives it another dimension. With her and Gustavo, we spoke with the Academy about the conservation of Gaitán’s archives, which were in danger in Colombia and collaboration was agreed.

In her lecture at the Central University Gloria talked about the concept of cultural engineering. As an economist, author of an excellent book on the agrarian problem in a key region of Colombia, she decided at the age of 70 to take a masters in cultural engineering at a university in Madrid. The idea was interesting because it combined social, psychological and physical aspects of life. With a group of critical thinkers, including –among others– Napoleón Santos,17 Francisco Muñoz18 of Central University and Gustavo Pérez we started work on the subject. Personally I had objections to the term, as it was charged with manipulative meaning by technocrats, if not liberals or for military strategy. Gloria, however, having a degree in the subject, defended it brilliantly. We decided to publish a collective book.

17 Napoleón Santos (Ecuador). He is a Bachelor of Education Sciences from the Pontifical Catholic University. He teaches sociology and psychology, and is the president in charge of the Broad Leftist Front. He accompanied the native struggles in the 90’s and participated in the organization of the Social Movements Coordinator where he was the national spokesman. He was a founder of the “Pachakutic” Multinational Unity Movement in 1996 and a member of parliament (1996-1998). He participated in the removal of Bucaram, Mahuad and Gutiérrez, as well as in the constitution of the Peoples’ Parliament which headed the uprising of January 21, 2000; he took over the Vice-presidency in representation of CMS. He is also a founder and the director of the Democratic Pole.

18 Francisco Muñoz Jaramillo. He is a lecturer and a researcher from the Central University of Ecuador, and the coordinator of the research project: Critical Balance of Correa’s Government. He is the director of the journal La Tendencia.
I also visited, on various occasions, the mother of Ingrid Betancourt, who was a candidate for the presidency, kidnapped by the FARCS-EP. The mother came from the high society of Bogota but over time had acquired a stronger political conscience and she was very critical of President Uribe. In this matter she was different from her daughter who was very grateful to the president when she was liberated. Each morning, at 5 a.m., she talked on the radio, hoping that her daughter could hear her and fortunately that was often the case. Each time I visited the country I met Carlos Gaviria and his wife. He was a former member of the Supreme Court and president of the Polo Democrático Alternativo and had been a great friend of Lelio Basso.

One of the people who most impressed me was Piedad Córdoba, whom I met thanks to Lilia Solano. She was an Afro-descendant and a member of the Liberal Party. She founded the movement ‘Colombians for Peace’ and I participated at various meetings of the organization. She was elected senator and then removed from her office by President Uribe for having ‘betrayed the country’. She spent much of her time in contact with the FARC and the ELN (National Liberation Army) in order to reach peace agreements. She was convinced that the armed struggle had no future and the solution had to be political and not military. The first step was the liberation of those who had been kidnapped and the prisoners (soldiers and police). She was supported by Hugo Chávez.

Aferwards contacts with Piedad followed the same lines. I was often in her house in the centre of Bogota, together with her collaborators to discuss the current situation. We also met in Caracas and Madrid. In October 2011, I recounted to her my experience of the negotiations in the Philippines. In December of

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19 Ingrid Betancourt had been a candidate for the presidency of the Republic and was kidnapped by the FARC. She spent several years in the forests before being freed in 2009.

20 Carlos Gaviria (Colombia, 1937-2015). He was a law and political sciences graduate from the University of Antioquia and attended Harvard University as a special student in the fields of jurisprudence, constitutional law and political theory (Carl J. Friedrich). He is a Colombian lawyer, a university professor, a magistrate and a politician. He was the president of the Democratic Pole and a candidate to the presidency in Colombia.
that year, I participated in a meeting with her and a delegation of women supporting the action of the Colombians for Peace. Among those present was Zelaya’s wife, the deposed president of Honduras, a former commander of the Farabundo Martí Front of El Salvador, Margarita Zapata21 who was the granddaughter of Zapata, an old friend who had fought in the FSLN in Nicaragua and was still active in solidarity work, having been a former president of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. While we were meeting, a message came from the FARC-EP to confirm that, in spite of the death of Alfonso Cano, its leader, killed by the army not long before, they were ready to liberate all those who had been kidnapped.

I saw Piedad on other occasion, at a conference at the National University of Colombia in May 2012 when we had a meeting at her house until midnight with the leadership of the Patriotic March. We talked about the threat by a group of former military, which was announced in the press that day and she seemed not in the least worried about it. The discussion focussed on the opportunity to transform the Patriotic March into a political party with a view to the elections in 2014. I gave my opinion, which was that it would not be a good idea. The Patriotic March coordinated many social movements, especially among the students and it therefore has the support of public opinion, whereas as a party it would be one more, besides the Polo, the party of Gustavo Petro, etc. It would end up by being marginalized. That did not mean that the March could not take political positions, even to supporting a candidate for the presidency.

There were three coordination organizations in Colombia: the Minga, of the indigenous peoples; the Peoples’ Congress which could propose the social reintegration of the ELN; and the Marcha Patriotica, which could offer the same service to the FARC. There was also an agreement body among the three organizations. This is the only path to take for making fundamental, long-term changes,

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21 Margarita Zapata (Mexico, 1950-). She has decades of political experience; her militancy dates back a long time, as she is a veteran of the Sandinista Revolution and a former president of the Socialist International (2000-2008); her life is a struggle in all fields. She was appointed ambassadress-at-large of Nicaragua in 2011. She has great knowledge of Latin America.
confronted by a government that wants the social status quo and a military solution to the conflict. David Flores, the former student leader and active in the Marcha, who had read my document about the Common Good of Humanity, strongly insisted on the idea of bringing together the aims of these different movements around this proposal. The following day Piedad invited me to lunch to continue the discussion on social and political orientations.

In December 2014 we travelled together between Bogota and Caracas to participate in a meeting of the Network of Intellectuals on the Defence of Humanity, in a airplane of the Venezuelan Government, together with Ramón Torres, former ambassador of Ecuador in Caracas, Juan Paz y Millo, economics professor of the Catholic University of Quito and Oswaldo Léon, director of the Latin American Information Agency (ALAI). Piedad Córdoba was most concerned about the conservative trends of UNASUR under the leadership of the former Colombian president, Samper.23

It is obvious that the continuation of the armed struggle makes no sense in Colombia. The balance of power is such that there is no possibility of political success, as happened in Cuba and in Nicaragua. Also, the guerrillas have lost prestige because of their practice of kidnapping civilians and recourse to drug trafficking. However, a serious problem at that time was the attitude of the government as it serves traditional interests and did not really want a political solution. This would involve recognizing that there is a confrontation that is essentially social and not only a fight against ‘terrorism’. But the government believes that, with the support of the United States, it could destroy the ‘subversion’

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22 Ramón Torres. He is a Doctor of Jurisprudence and is qualified in social sciences. He was the ambassador of Ecuador in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2010-2012); he is the ambassador-at-large of Ecuador for strategic issues.

23 Ernesto Samper. He was born in Bogotá in 1950. He is a Doctor of Judicial and Economic Sciences from the Pontifical “Javerian” University and specialized in capital market in the National Financial Company in Mexico. He is a Colombian lawyer, an economist and a politician who was the President of Colombia (1994-1998). He was elected the Secretary-general of Unasur in July, 2014.
militarily. At the same time, the experience of the past has shown that when left-wing groups accept to reintegrate into politics many of them are killed shortly afterwards. This was the case of the Unión Patriótica, with thousands of victims. Unfortunately, this dilemma has already cost many lives.

In Quito, Piedad Córdoba invited Nidia Arrobo and me to a lunch with the prefect of the province of Pichincha to study the possibility of receiving a peasant from Antioquia who was in serious danger. He worked on the estate of President Uribe’s brother and in a TV interview he revealed what massacres had taken place on the estate. Obviously his life was in danger. A solution was found with the UN refugee organization. He could enter Ecuador and lodge at the Fundación Pueblo Indio del Ecuador. During his stay I was able to have long talks with him. Sometimes, in the night he woke me to say that there were people who were looking for him in the street below. His psychological state was obviously serious. But although he had no formal education, his knowledge of livestock was impressive. I learnt a lot of things from him. He loved the animals and spoke about them as if they were human beings. One day he told me that, faced with brutality, a certain breed of cow became very angry and hit out, while another breed seemed undisturbed by it, but there were tears flowing down the cheeks of the cows.

In 2013 the peace movement became very strong. In one month I was invited twice to Bogota, the first to participate in the Peace March. Once more I walked from the Seventh Avenue to Bolivar square, with dozens of thousands of people of all kinds. There were doctors in white overalls, indigenous people in their traditional shawls, young people playing music, black people from the coast—all of them with one demand: the end of the internal war, peace as a condition of justice. The evening before, I had given a talk at the Metropolitan University for the inauguration of the Centre for Human Rights, with Lilia Solano as its director. I was on the march with the rector of the university. At the end there were speeches

24 Nidia Arrobo. She is an Ecuadorian economist who was a collaborator of Monsignor Leónidas Proaño and is the director of the Indian People Foundation of Ecuador.
by Senator Piedad Córdoba and also Mayor Petro, who had taken part in Spain in meetings of solidarity with Columbia some years before. President Santos had the ‘intelligence’ to organize a march of the military for peace which partially followed the same route and he planted, with Petro, a ‘tree of peace’ at the place where the body of Gaitán had been found after he had been assassinated.

The second visit to Bogota was for the Peace Congress, which took place at the National University. Many social movements made speeches. I received a personal message from the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, the guerrilla movement in which Camilo Torres had participated). In fact, in spite of a certain collaboration, the two initiatives were characterized by different political sympathies, one with the ELN and the other with the FARCS.

The peace negotiations were started by President Santos and took place in Havana, after having been prepared in Norway. Former President Uribe was against the initiative of his former minister of defence and this became a major divergence between the representatives of Uribe and Santos in the campaign for the presidency in 2014. In actual fact, these were two different ways of ensuring the same aim, that is, the reproduction of bourgeois hegemony over Colombian society, which has been going on since independence. Uribe represented more the interests of the upper middle class centred in Medellin, while Santos represented the traditional dominant class and the Bogota aristocracy. The former sought to exterminate the guerrilla by military means and the latter by disintegrating them into political life. Nevertheless in the process it was necessary to support the peace negotiations as it was the only way of escaping an armed confrontation without solution. And this in spite of the fact that negotiations were carried out with the FARCS and not with the ELN, because the government avoided joining the two movements.

In Havana there were six meetings in 2013, 2014 and 2015, with members of the FARCS delegation that were involved in the negotiations. I was able to transmit the documentation of the negotiations between the guerrillas and the government of the Philippines, which were quite similar. I also helped to establish a contact with the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, to treat the indigenous question in Colombia and the frontier problems
in indigenous zones. During my visit to Cuba in February 2015, accompanied by Pablo Caller\textsuperscript{25} who was my assistant in the IAEN in Quito, I was asked for a talk on the situation in Ecuador. Their information on the subject was contradictory.

On different occasions (Christmas, elections) the FARCS declared a unilateral ceasefire to which the government did not correspond in the same way. The discussions were tough and long, because the basic political philosophy was different. For example, for the government, an agrarian reform could be carried out on governmental land, the forests and lands that had been recovered from the paramilitary, but not on the estates of the large landowners. Indeed this represented the material basis of the social reproduction of part of the dominant class and also had considerable symbolical value.

We discussed a number of points, some of them delicate; the kidnappings; the link with narco-trafficking; the language that was too dogmatic. The delegation shared my little book on the Common Good of Humanity. Once while talking in the lobby of the hotel of the Palacio de Convenciones, where the negotiations were taking place, a group of three people passed by. They greeted us in a friendly way, calling one of my group by his first name. He told me that they were the negotiators of the government and that they had established good personal relationships in spite of the tough discussions.

When the first stages of the negotiations with the ELN started in Quito, the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, who was made responsible for the proceedings, came to visit me in the Fundacion del Pueblo Indio del Ecuador. He wanted to inform me of what was going on and to present me, on behalf of the president of the movement, with a cup with the badges of the guerrilla organization.

The University of Santander, in the Department where Camilo Torres studied, and the University of Medellin invited me for lectures on his personality and his struggle. I met various groups

\textsuperscript{25} Pablo Caller (Belgium, 1987–). He is a Master of Political Sciences from the Catholic University of Louvain and a researcher at IAEN in Quito.
of young ‘camilistas’ who were very motivated and studying the texts that he had published.

In 2015 I was invited twice to come to the south of the country, the first being in the Department of Cauca, about a hundred kilometres from Popayan and where there had been a lot of guerrilla activities. I participated in a meeting of the local communities against extension of opencast mining, when I gave them a picture of the struggles against the mines in the world as a whole. They asked me to celebrate a mass in the place where Camilo Torres had held one of his last meetings with the United Front. The last day, an indigenous community organized a ceremony where a sacred waterfall was given my name. This gesture moved me greatly; the expression of the brotherly solidarity so strongly linked with the cosmovision of the Indians.

The second visit to the south was to Nariño in the city of Pasto, where the two universities, Catholic and State, had invited me. The first was with different indigenous leaders on the concept of the Common Good of Humanity and the second with a group of academics in communication sciences, organized by a professor who had been a student at Louvain-la-Neuve. During these visits I was able to see how violence was still rampant in spite of the negotiations in Havana. There were many military controls, a permanent presence of helicopters, and stories of the horrors perpetrated by the paramilitaries. Clearly it was not going to be easy to establish a genuine peace after all the aggression. Nevertheless the numerous references that I tried to make in my talks and writings during these last months in Colombia, tried to be a message of hope, remembering Camilo Torres who tried to create unity in diversity. This was particularly the case of a collective book, commemorating the 59th anniversary of his death and also to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Professor Jorge Freytter of the University of Barranquilla.

Colombia is a typical case of a situation in the periphery of capitalism and has undergone diverse aspects of the ‘great transformation’. Its dependency is still great, as an enclave economy (oil, mines, monocultivation), but it has also experienced an internal accumulation process by European migrants who integrated with
the local bourgeoisie and reinforced the liberal party. Colombian society has been in a state of intense violence since the beginning of the accumulation process, which prevented the poorer classes in the rural regions, like those in urban industry, to emancipate themselves.

The fiftieth anniversary of the death of Camilo Torres was commemorated in many of the country’s universities. I gave lectures in Bogota at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, the Universidad Distrital and the Universidad Pedagogica Nacional and they attracted an increasing number of participants. At the national university, which took place on a Saturday morning, there were 500 students and the session lasted for three hours. I also gave a long interview to TeleSur. In Ecuador a book was published on Camilo and the efficacy of love, by three authors, Father Xavier Giraldo, S.J., Gustavo Pérez and myself. It was presented at the Casa de la Cultura in Quito and it was also distributed in Colombia. The MST in Brazil asked for it to be translated into Portuguese. The preface is by Monsignor Casaldaliga of Brazil.

I returned to Bogotá at the beginning of February, 2017 for the presentation of the book on cultural change, coordinated by me and published by Desdeabajo Editors. Here Gloria Gaitán presented the concept of cultural engineering, inspired by the work of her father, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, who was not only a political figure, but also a social thinker influenced by his studies on psychiatry. Although personally I was more inclined in favor of the notion of cultural pedagogy, along the lines of Paulo Freire, fundamentally there was no discrepancy. The important thing was to show the importance of culture in the processes of social and political change, and this was also underlined by several colleagues, as the

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26 Paulo Freire (Brazil, 1921-1997). He was a law, philosophy and language psychology graduate from Recife University as well as an educator and an expert in the field of education. He worked above all with the poor who did not know how to read and write. Among other books, he wrote *Pedagogía del oprímedo*. Because of the military coup in his country, he went into exile in Bolivia and Chile; there he worked for the Christian Democratic Movement for Agrarian Reform and for FAO. He also worked in the educational section of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Geneva.
Colombian Gustavo Pérez and the Ecuadorians Napoleón Saltos and Francisco Muñoz, all of them members of the Pensamiento Crítico (Critical Thought) group in Quito.

Venezuela

Venezuela was the only country in South America that I did not visit in the 1950s, as I was obliged to return to Belgium in September 1954. It was in 1960 that I first went there to prepare the study for the International Federation of the Socio-Religious Research Institutes (FERES). I stayed with a former student of Louvain, Aristides Calvani, who later became the Minister for Foreign Affairs for President Caldera, of the Social-Christian Party COPEI. One of Calvani’s daughters worked in the Latin American seminary of Louvain. Later I learnt that he was a member of Opus Dei. In fact we had had rather different views on the social situation of the continent and its religious perspectives. He was killed in a plane crash in Guatemala, with one of his daughters.

I came to know Caldera in the meetings of Chicago that were organized by the Latin American Office of the United States Episcopal Conference. The organizer was Father Bill Queen, the former auxiliary parish priest of St. Gall, where I stayed during my studies at the University of Chicago. They were very interesting conferences on various aspects of the Latin American situation and there was a mixture of conservative views and progressive

27 Rafael Caldera (Venezuela, 1916-2009). He was a Doctor of Laws from the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) (Spanish acronym for Universidad Central de Venezuela) and a lecturer on Sociology and Law in various universities, including UCV. He was also a member of the Venezuelan Academy of Language and of the Social and Political Sciences Academy. He was a Venezuelan lawyer, a sociologist, a writer, a professor, a politician and a statesman from the Social-Christian Party COPEI (Spanish acronym for Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente: Committee for Independent Electoral and Political Organization). He was the President of the Republic of Venezuela on two occasions, from 1969 to 1974 and from 1994 to 1999. He was a devoted intellectual and the maximum representative and the introducer of “social-Christianism” in Latin America. He published tens of books and wrote numerous articles and essays. He was the Secretary-general of COPEI for 21 years.
views. Politically it was Latin American Christian Democracy that dominated and for this reason Caldera was a key person. He seemed to be quite progressive at that time, compared with the very conservative positions of the others. He was a strong supporter of the Church’s social doctrine, he criticized capitalism, but he was also an enemy of socialism. He felt that social justice and private property should go together. In this sense he supported reforms in various sectors — agrarian, banking, etc. However, his presidency, some years afterwards, was conservative and little inclined to make real changes in a society that was living on its oil rent.

Later, but still in the 1960s, I returned for the same study. I stayed in a popular parish where the priest was a Belgian who had been ordained in the same year as me. He was carrying out his duties admirably, both pastoral and social. Another Belgian priest had founded a centre for statistics on socio-religious themes and the studies on Venezuela were carried out in collaboration with this centre. This time I entered the country from Colombia, having visited the Bishop of Cúcuta, President of the Colombian Episcopal Conference and a member of CELAM. I crossed the frontier to the nearby Venezuelan town and went to stay in a parish, arriving rather late at night. At two o’clock in the morning I was awakened by the bells of the church and religious songs in praise of the Virgin Mary. It was the first Saturday of the month, dedicated to the Virgin of Fatima and the parish priest had organized a nocturnal procession with her statue. I don’t know what the inhabitants of the town were thinking but I could see through the window of my room the small group of middle-aged women who were following the statue with their crude singing, awakening the whole town with the noise of the bells. I felt that the symbolic value of this practice was not particularly appropriate and went back to sleep.

After the Bolivarian Revolution I returned regularly to Venezuela, usually for the meetings of the In Defence of Humanity Network, which was founded in Mexico, in 2003, where I met Evo Morales. He was then a local indigenous leader, but with a political discourse that was clearly left-wing. Sub-Comandante Marcos sent a recorded message on a video, in which he praised the Cuban revolution, which many had not expected. The organization of the network was distributed among various capitals, the main one being in
Caracas where there is a permanent headquarters which is run by Carmen Bohórquez, a historian who had written a thesis on Francisco Miranda at the Sorbonne and who later became Vice Minister of Culture and then deputy for the United Socialist Party. Other meetings took place in Caracas, Rome and Cochabamba, in which I participated.

In Caracas there was also a session of the World Social Forum in 2008. Unfortunately, it was not a model of organization but, as always, it enabled many exchanges of experiences and a ferment of new ideas about the organization of social struggles. The organizers of the WSF feared that it would be instrumentalized by Bolivarian political power and for this reason they had decided to carry out the Forum in three places: in Bamako (Mali) and in Karachi (Pakistan) as well as in Caracas. President Chávez understood the problem very well and did not intervene in the organization, or on the themes for discussion. Nevertheless, he clearly indicated the need to take political action and not only to exchange experiences.

In 2009 Chávez launched the idea of a Fifth International. The proposal was, perhaps, premature. About this time the coordination of the left-wing political parties in Europe had invited me to Berlin for an analysis of the international situation. There were representatives from 30 organizations represented, as the result of almost ten years of efforts. They considered Hugo Chávez’s idea not very realistic. If it had taken such a long time to organize in Europe, the results of which were quite feeble, how could it be done at the international level? I explained that the situation

28 Carmen Bohórquez (Venezuela). She is a Bachelor of Philosophy from the University of Zulia, 1969, and a philosopher and a historian, as well as a “Mirandista” a Bolivarian, a “Chavista” and a socialist. She is a Master of Philosophy from Michigan University, the United States, 1973 and a Doctor of History (Iberian and Latin American Studies) from the University of the Sorbonne, 1996. She was awarded a doctorate Honoris Causa by the University of Zulia in 2009. She has published several books and more than 90 articles in the fields of Latin American history and philosophy. She has received numerous distinctions and decorations, and is in charge of the network “In Defense of Mankind”. She is the Vice-Minister for Culture and a member of Parliament for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela.
in Latin America was very different from the European situation. There were progressive political parties in power, although they were dependent on electoral processes, which gave them a greater sense of urgency. The initiatives being taken were vulnerable and, in spite of their successes, they could be changed through an election. Also there did not exist in their region a trauma similar to that of Europe as concerns the Internationals, especially because of the Third International. It was very difficult to fight the Eurocentrism of the European left.

On another occasion some members of the São Paulo Forum, which arranges meetings for left-wing political organizations and was founded by Lula, expressed to me their concern about the linking of the Venezuelan initiative (for a Fifth International) and the Forum. In spite of all these understandable concerns, Chavez was right: a world convergence at the political level was necessary. He had his own style that did not always please people but his political intuition was generally correct.

In 2007 I participated in the first jury of the Libertador Prize, initiated by the Ministry of Culture and to be directed by the Minister, Francisco (Farruco) Sesto.²⁹ It was awarded to Franz Hinckelammert, a philosopher and economist of German origin but who has worked all his life in Latin America (Chile and Costa Rica). He also had great biblical knowledge. The work presented for the award concentrated on law and ‘the return of the subject’. Other books presented included a very interesting work by Luis Suarez of Cuba on the social history of Latin America and one by Claudio Katz of Argentina on the economics of the continent. But the vote for Franz was unanimous, as the jury considered it necessary, in the present situation, to support basic theoretical thinking.

The members of the jury of the Libertador Prize were invited to lunch with the President in the Miraflores Palace. During the meal, we were talking about the forthcoming elections in Peru.

²⁹ Francisco Sesto Novas (nicknamed Farruco). He was born in Spain but obtained Venezuelan nationality. He is an architect, a writer, a politician who was the State Minister for the Revolutionary Transformation of Great Caracas of Venezuela until December, 2013, and also the Minister for Culture, for the People’s Power for Housing and Habitat and for the Revolutionary Transformation of Great Caracas.
Chavez was receiving regular information about the results of the opinion polls and announced that Humala could win. I told him, “Mr. President, I think that your interventions have been counter-productive. Various left-wing Peruvians told me that they considered them to be interference in the internal affairs of the country and they were not in agreement”. Chávez, somewhat disconcerted, answered, “Perhaps, perhaps”. In fact Humala was not elected and it was only in 2011 that he came to power.

During these various activities I met Chávez several times. Once it was on the “Hallo President” weekly television programme to communicate with the country. It was not a presidential speech but rather a communication of news, historical memories, conversations with invitees, contacts with local people and from the rest of the country by telephone or television. The programme lasted several hours. The President asked me to speak. Because of the political opposition of the Catholic Church against the new regime I explained that the policies promoting the poorest of society, such as the literacy campaign, the programmes for health, education, social economy and housing, did indeed correspond to the practices of Jesus in his society. By announcing the values of justice, the equality of all human beings, of love for one’s neighbour, he proclaimed the Kingdom of God. Everything that contributed to this enacted the teachings of Christ and made it easier to live according to the gospel. It was not a question of identifying any political system with the Kingdom of God, but to recognize certain values of its contents. When I had finished, Chávez said to me, “Why don’t you stay more time with us?”

On another occasion the programme took place in Carabobobo, the site of one of Simon Bolivar’s battles, close to Valencia. A priest, who was already elderly and dressed in a black cassock, began by commenting on the gospel of the day. Then there was a discussion on the gospel of Judas, about which there had been much discussion in the press. Chavez asked me my opinion. I replied that there were several gospels that were called apocryphal and that the specialists in these writings tended to wonder to what extent such documents could contribute to a better knowledge about the life of Jesus. Since then whenever I met Chávez he asked me, “François, give me a blessing. I need your blessing.”
In 2008, the World Forum for Alternatives and the ‘In Defence of Humanity’ Network organized a very large international meeting in Caracas. Carmen Bohórquez was in charge of preparing it. Shortly beforehand I also went there to work with the Venezuelans. It was no easy matter to arrange for 300 intellectuals from five continents to get to Caracas. The Asians and Africans had to pass through Europe and needed a Schengen visa. Only a few air companies accepted to be paid in bolivars, a non-convertible currency. Finally, with only a few exceptions, everyone managed to get to the meeting. We worked on the Declaration of Bamako (of the WFA) and took the opportunity of improving our knowledge on various aspects of the Bolivarian revolution. President Chávez explained the main thrusts of his policies and for almost two hours the participants were able to question him. Several of them visited some popular neighbourhoods of Caracas.

During my various visits to Venezuela I had the opportunity of going into the interior of the country. With Eric Toussaint, creator of the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt (CADTM), I visited a worker’s union in Valencia and gave a talk in the cultural centre. The electricity trade unionists were critical of the Bolivarian Revolution as they considered that it was not sufficiently concerned with the working class. Their leader was a Trotskyite and ironically enough his name was Stalin.

I also gave a talk in Barinas state. On two occasions I was in Maracaibo, once to give a lecture on the crisis at Zulia University and another time, in 2011, for the Philosophy Forum on the State and Democracy, which is a central theme in Latin America. How

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30 Eric Toussaint (Belgium, 1954–). He is a Doctor of Political Sciences from the University of Liege (ULg) and the University Paris VII. He is a founder of the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt (CADTM), a member of the Scientific Council ATTAC France and took part in the foundation of the International Council of the World Social Forum in 2001. He has written several books published in ten languages. He was a member of the Integral Audit Commission for the debt of Ecuador (CAIC) (Spanish acronym for Comisión de Auditoría Integral), established in 2007 by President Rafael Correa. In that same year, he advised the Minister for Finance and the President of Ecuador in relation to the creation of the Bank of the South and also the Greek authorities of Syriza.
to carry out a revolution with a State that is still partially in the hands of those against change? The opening of this event, which was organized by Carmen Bohóquez, was attended by the vice president of Venezuela, Elias Jaua and the vice president of Bolivia, Álvaro García, who spoke of the tensions in the revolutionary process. Among the other participants were Enrique Dussel and John Saxe Fernández from Mexico, Marta Harnecker from Chile and Michael Lebowitz31 from Canada.

As we know, the Bolivarian revolution found a solution by organizing a parallel State, financed directly from oil revenue, which was composed of missions, in the fields of health, education, the social economy, agrarian reform, the indigenous peoples, etc. I participated in Caracas in the mission concerned with higher education. It was moving to speak to a public of adults from various social classes who were completing their courses to obtain a university degree. A second step was to recover the State through constitutional processes and the creation of a new political party. Twice the youth section of the United Socialist Party asked me to participate in their training programmes for cadres. The atmosphere was very enthusiastic. It was a question of giving them the tools of analysis to guide their activities.

It must be said that Chávez has a special charisma in large demonstrations. Three times I was able to participate in these impressive ceremonies, where he would speak to tens of thousands of people. In one of these occasions, I met his parents who told me that since he was a young boy, Chávez always read a lot; especially history books. It should be remembered that the President, apart from his military training, also has a university degree in political science.

It is all too easy to describe these great meetings as populism. The meaning of the word differs according to how it is used. In Europe it is negative, especially with reference to the fascist experiences. In

31 Michael Lebowitz (Canada). He is an economics professor at Simon Fraser University in Canada. He worked as an adviser to the program Transformational Practices and Human Development in the Miranda Center in Caracas from 2004 to 2010. He has published several books on Marxism and authored *Marx’s Political Economy of the Working Class* (2003) and *The Socialist Alternative: Real Human Development* (2010).
Latin America, the political culture is different. Creating a symbiosis between the people and the leaders can greatly encourage the starting of changes in society. Clearly this process can degenerate; it all depends on the content of the social project.

In the state of Zulia I visited an indigenous community who lived in houses on stilts in the Limon River to the north-east of Maracaibo, near the frontier with Colombia. They gain their livelihood by fishing and tourism. But, as in many parts of the world, the emigration of the young people to the towns is a great challenge for the future. In the same state, I went with the participants of the Philosophy Forum to visit the other side of the Gulf of Maracaibo, passing between oil wells to the new city being built for 60,000 inhabitants, through assistance from Iranian architects and engineers. They explained the idea behind the project and we were able to see the first achievements and visit model apartments.

This new town is being built as part of the national plan for housing construction close to the new industrial project. There is an effort to avoid the construction of ‘socialist realism’ and to diversify the buildings, with none of them more than four floors and economic, social and administrative services in each neighbourhood.

In 2011 I was in Orinoco, an old industrial region created by the mines of iron, copper and bauxite (aluminium). The Bolivarian Revolution had organized for the workers to control the nationalized industries. However there was strong resistance on the part of the unions, even though they were Chavistas. The conflicts were sometimes violent, even lethal. There was not enough time to study the real situation. It is possible that this process of transition to a different logic of the organization of production came up against a culture of work and of an enterprise that had been deeply penetrated by the logic of capitalism. It also has to be added that corruption has not been overcome and that many of the regime’s cadres still have a political culture influenced by the oil rent.

Together with an African colleague, Professor T. Diop of Dakar, I visited Ciudad Bolívar, the first capital of Venezuela. It still preserves

32 Thierno Diop (Senegal, 1949-). He is a Doctor of Philosophy from the Sorbonne and a lecturer at CESTI (Spanish acronym for Centro de Estudios de Ciencias y Técnicas de la Información: Center for the Study of Science and Information Techniques) at the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar.
many memories of the Liberator. In the state parliament we gave lectures respectively on the crisis and on Africa to a group of intellectuals and students and in particular to a group of Bolivians holding scholarships. In a popular quarter of the same town we had a meeting with those involved in an initiative for communal power: the construction of shops through mutual assistance. We had two hours of discussion with some 30 people about the way that the project was developing and how the work was carried out. The cost of each house was half of what the municipality wasted in social housing of the same kind. It created a solid collective spirit and an ideological basis for the political project.

In the field of culture, the Ministry of Culture has a publication policy with two publishing houses. The first, El Perro y la Rana Publishing Foundation (the dog and the frog are indigenous symbols), has produced books for a wide public readership, in various collections from the classics (El Cid, Don Quijote, Les Miserables) to novels, poetry, natural and social sciences. The prices are very modest. With Ruth Casa Editorial, there have been various co-editions, among others my books on Delegitimizing Capitalism, Reconstructing Hope and The Path to Utopia in a World of Uncertainty. The second publishers are Monte Avila, whose productions are on a higher level. It has published other books of mine, The Sociology of Religion, Religion and the Market, and Agrofuels.

Hans Dietrich, whom I had met in Cuba, had an influence on “the socialism of the 21st century” in Venezuela for some time, but the complexity of his thoughts and his excluding character, as well as the characteristics of the Venezuelan transition did not allow further development of his collaboration. During the meetings of the network In Defense of Humanity I also met Richard Stalmann.

He published Marxism and Critique of Modernity in Africa and Léopold Sédar Senghor, Majhemout Diop and Marxism.

Heinz Dieterich Steffan. He was born in Germany in 1943. He is a sociologist and a political analyst who lives in Mexico, and is very knowledgeable about Latin America. He has published more than 30 books. He is a promoter of the concept of ‘the socialism of the 21st Century’.

Richard Matthew Stallman. He was born in 1953 in New York. He is the programmer and founder of the movement for free software in the world.
a promoter of Linux and an interesting critic of a technology dominated by capitalism.

The efforts made by the Bolivarian Revolution, seen from inside the country, are impressive. In Latin America, it is certainly the most advanced project for extricating itself from the development paradigm of capitalism. However, the difficulties are numerous. First, the wealth of the country has been largely derived from oil income. And it seems certain that reserves hold the promise of a great future. However, this creates a double contradiction: the contribution to the destruction of the ecosystems on a world scale on the one hand; and on the other, the reproduction of a dependency on the capitalist economies of the North, not to mention the cultural effects of the oil rent. To these should be added the vulnerability of the system, in the case of the fall in the price of crude oil, as has been happening since 2014.

Also, the country’s agriculture has been destroyed by the same phenomenon. Reconstructing an agriculture that can satisfy the needs of the country (food sovereignty) is a very difficult task. In fact, it is mostly the Colombian migrants and refugees (4 million people) who provide agricultural labour. It is a challenge that can only be met in the long term by constructing an economy based on local needs, restoring the balance between the system of needs and the system of possibilities – to use these Marxist categories.

It is a slow business dealing with local capitalism which, in spite of the nationalization of various key sectors, continues to control a large part of production, distribution and the financial sector that feeds the opposition to the Bolivarian Revolution. There is the danger that these economic actors can at any time destabilize the existing circuits.

From a political point of view, the necessary institutionalization of the project comes up against obstacles, particularly the numerous changes of those holding responsibility positions and in the teams, which often interrupt continuity. All this constitutes the reality of a transition that has to be carried out among difficulties and contradictions, in spite of the will to bring about a deep change in favour of the poorest. The ALBA project has the clearest principles of a post-capitalist era: integration not based on competitiveness but on complementarity and solidarity. It is true
that few countries on the continent accept this new logic, but even if its achievements are still modest (except in the oil sector), its very existence is worthwhile.

Venezuela has played an important role in the other aspects of Latin American integration without submission to the North (United States and Canada). The constitution of CELAC (Comunidad de los Estados de América Latina y del Caribe) in December 2011 was a decisive step, bringing together 33 countries of the sub-continent and Caribbean America, in spite of tremendous political differences and real contradictions. For this reason it is still a weak institution, a forum, without a permanent secretariat or a precise geographical location. These were the demands of the pro-capitalist countries that are in favour of integration with the North: Mexico, Colombia and Chile. Nevertheless it was a genuine step forward, replacing the Rio Group and it can gradually become linked with other integration initiatives.

At the international level, the revitalizing of OPEC, favouring relations with Russia and Belarus as well as economic ties with Iran, are signs of independence in the face of the imperial power that establishes bases in neighbouring countries and surrounds the continent with its Fourth Fleet. The close ties with Libya led Hugo Chávez to defend Gaddafi and not only to oppose NATO’s intervention. For similar reasons the drawing up of the final declaration of the Philosophy Forum of 2011 provoked considerable discussion between the Europeans and the Latin Americans. The former were very much aware of the indefensible character of Gaddafi, who not only made alliances with all the Western leaders, from George Bush to Nicolas Sarkozy,\(^{35}\) not to mention Silvio Berlusconi,\(^{36}\) but also unleashed violent repression

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\(^{35}\) Nicolás Sarkozy (France, 1955-). He studied law at the University of Paris X Nanterre. He is a French politician of Hungarian, Jewish and Greek descent who was the President of the French Republic from 2007 to 2012. He also held various positions as a minister in several ministries of the right-wing government.

\(^{36}\) Silvio Berlusconi (Italy, 1936-). He studied law at the University of Milan. He is an Italian politician, a businessman, an investor, a lawyer, a sports journalist and a press baron of Italian media who is the founder and the president of Mediaset, the powerful telecommunications corporation. He
at home; whereas the latter underlined the unacceptable nature of NATO’s military intervention, which was geopolitically and economically linked to oil. It was difficult to find a formula acceptable to all.

This kind of episode is normal and it proves the need for exchanges between those with different perspectives. One’s geopolitical situation counts in the viewpoint that one can take about events. Eurocentrism and Latin American centrism are realities that the left must try to overcome. But to see realities with the eyes of the other is not easy. Each time it provides a lesson in humility when faced with facts, and also an effective vaccination against dogmatism, a childhood disease—and not so childish ones—typical of the left.

Once when I was in Europe and had to get to Maracaibo, I took an Air France plane in Paris. At the airport, as they had put a pace-maker on me in Ecuador so that I could support the height of Quito, I asked not to go through the electronic security machines. Usually this was not a problem, but sometimes it caused a series of discussions with the authorities and this happened in Paris. Very politely the policeman responsible, proud to show off his knowledge of English, wrote on my ticket ‘peace-maker’ instead of ‘pace-maker’. I still keep the ticket as a souvenir of an involuntary homage. When I landed in Caracas, after an excellent flight, hardly had the plane touched the ground when it took off again and regained height very quickly. For almost half an hour we circled around. I asked the crew what had happened. They told me that there was another airplane on the runway.

In July 2012, Carmen Bohorquez, who would become deputy for Maracaibo at the National Popular Assembly, asked me to stay for ten days in Venezuela to participate in training programmes for the members of the Socialist Party, as well as for young people and various social organizations, in Maracaibo and in Caracas. The public was very diverse. What impressed me was the level of political consciousness and the quality of the questions. This

has been the Prime Minister on several occasions and the President of the Council of Ministers for the third time. He was condemned judicially in 2013.
was without doubt the result of the training policies of the Bolivarian Revolution. The last day a meeting was organized with the guardians of the public parks of Caracas. There were about a hundred people present in Miranda Park and the subject was political ecology. The meeting lasted for half a day and was very lively because the park guardians knew what looking after nature meant. We discussed the impact of development on the ecology and the defence of the earth, which was point No. 5 on Chávez’s electoral programme. The park guardians were clearly sensitive to the defence of nature and it was enough to show the link between this concern and the construction of socialism, as well as indicating the snare of ‘green capitalism’.

Also in that July I participated in a meeting of the Forum of São Paulo, which was held in Caracas, with more than 800 participants. I met friends from many countries, like Etienne Sauveur, coordinator of the OPL of Haiti; Piedad Córdova of the Marcha Patriótica from Colombia; the Brazilian Emir Sader37 of CLACSO; Rigoberta Menchú from Guatemala; Atilio Boron38

37 Emir Sader (Brazil, 1943-). He is a Brazilian sociologist and political scientist, philosophy graduate from the University of São Paulo, Master of Political Philosophy and Doctor of Political Sciences. He collaborates with national and international publications and is a member of the editorial board of the British journal New Left Review. He was the president of the Latin American Sociology Association (ALAS) (Spanish acronym for Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología) from 1997 to 1999 and is one of the organizers of the World Social Forum, as well as the Executive Secretary of CLACSO (Spanish acronym for Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales: Latin American Social Sciences Council) (2006-2014) He is the author of numerous books; his work subjects are Latin American politics in general and particularly that of Brazil. He is active in PT (Spanish acronym for Partido de los Trabajadores: Workers’ Party).

38 Atilio Boron (Argentina, 1943-). He is an Argentinian political scientist and a sociologist, and a Doctor of Political Science from Harvard University. He was awarded the Ezequiel Martínez Estrada Prize for Essays and the José Martí International Prize in 2009. He has been a professor of social and political theory at the School of Social Sciences in the University of Buenos Aires since 1986, is a senior researcher at CONICET and the director of PLED (Spanish acronym for Programa Latinoamericano de Educación a Distancia en Ciencias Sociales: Latin American Program for Distance Learning in Social Sciences). He is also a columnist in diverse
from Argentina, among others. Also present was Tran Van Loi, assistant of Mme Thi Binh, the former vice president of Vietnam and now responsible for International Relations in the Vietnamese Communist Party. He questioned me at some length about the processes of the progressive governments of Latin America. Other participants included Ignacio Ramonet, Bernard Cassen and Jean Luc Mélenchon, who was the left-wing candidate at the last French presidential elections, who invited me to dinner in the French embassy. Also participating was my great Venezuelan friend, Max Arvelaez, at that time ambassador to Brazil. The French ambassador, Jean Marc La Forêt, who had been closely following the situation in Venezuela, did not hide his sympathy and admiration of the Bolivarian Revolution process.

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39 Tran Van Loi, in charge of the Commission for International Relations of the Communist Party of Vietnam and member of the Central Committee.

40 Bernard Cassen (France, 1937-). He is a university professor, journalist and politician who is the managing director of *Le Monde Diplomatique* (1973 and 2008). He is a co-founder of ATTAC, and also an activist in the first World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre in 2001 and in the following WSF, as well as a co-founder of *Mémoire des luttes* with Ignacio Ramonet.

41 Jean-Luc Mélenchon (France, 1951-). He is a Bachelor of Philosophy, politician and journalist, member of the European Parliament and the co-president of the Party of the Left. He was the Minister for Professional Education from 2000 to 2002. He has published numerous books and was a candidate to the presidency in the French elections.

42 Max Arveláez. He is a Bachelor of Public International Law from Université Panthéon Assas, Paris, France, a Master of Latin American Political Sciences from the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, and he also took cinema studies at the South Thames College in London, England. He is the General Director of International Relations of the Presidency Office of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and Minister Counselor of Venezuela in Brazil and in the United Nations Organization.

43 Jean-Marc Laforêt (France, 1954-). He is a French diplomat, a graduate from National Administration School (Spanish acronym for ENA) who was the Ambassador of France in Caracas in the 2010s.
The last session of this Forum took place in the Teresa Carreño theatre in the presence of Hugo Chavez. I was on the platform with various other people. When the President entered he saluted everyone and he recognized me, calling me by my name and making a praying gesture. A few months later, in March 2013, I understood the deep meaning of his request when his death was announced. At the Forum meeting he addressed the public for three hours standing up, which worried those who knew of his sufferings and that the effort must have been very great for him. However, he seemed in very good shape and the following week he started travelling all over the country in his electoral campaign.

When I returned to Venezuela in 2015 I was in the barracks where his tomb is located. With Miguel d'Escoto we prayed with great feeling, thinking of this person whom we had known, but also of the project of social transformation that he had led.

In the last years of his life, Hugo Chávez was very much aware of the environmental issue. He started to speak more often of 'eco-socialism' affirming that, if nature's capacity to regenerate was not reconstructed, there could be no socialism. Fidel Castro's writings on the theme had impressed him. And it was not just a question of words. In the state of Balinas, a group of agronomist started a long-term programme on recovered land that had been contaminated by excessive use of chemical products. Chavez had a meeting with them and was impressed by their work. It was a multi-faceted plan, dealing with extracting earth that could not be recovered and the renewal of other soils through rotating cultivation and finally the use of organic fertilizer. Obviously it was an experiment, but it proved that it could be done, although it was expensive.

The task of Maduro as successor of Hugo Chávez is not an easy one. He does not have the charismatic attraction of his predecessor. He is very vulnerable in the situation in which he finds himself because of the predominance of the oil rent is in danger from the fall of the price of oil and because the right-wing opposition

44 Teresa Carreño (Venezuela, 1853-1917). She was the most important worldwide Venezuelan pianist, singer and composer. She gave performances in the best theaters in the world: in New York, Paris, Berlin, Milan, etc. The principal auditorium in the cultural center in Caracas bears her name.
controls a large part of the economy. The consolidation of the new social model is far from ensured and the evils of the political culture of corruption have not been eradicated. The institutionalization of the process has shown to be too dependent on the leader. After two years listening to Maduro, I get the impression that he had established a way of governing that was autonomous and closely faithful to the popular project. However, he is not the only actor and the opposing forces are numerous, as has been shown by the attempted assassination and the overly aggressive attitude of the United States and OEA. The internal conflict turned more acute with time, leading the government to accept more dependency on international capitalism and less support of popular forces; there were actions of economic boycott on part of the opposition and an endless legal game of mutual trade embargo.

In conclusion, nevertheless, it could be said that the role of Venezuela was central and still predominant in continuing the social change that was started by the Cuban revolution. Without the latter, many of the events of the continent could not have occurred. And without the support of the Bolivarian revolution, many others would not have been able to develop.

Ecuador

The first of my contacts with Ecuador was when I visited the YCW in 1954. For the first time I met Leonidas Proaño who that same year was appointed Bishop of Riobamba and later on became known as the Bishop of the Indians.

He also became, as from the 1960s, an active member of the CELAM. When I started the socio-religious study of Latin America, in 1958, I made contact with him to include the indigenous dimension in the project. For this purpose he designated a priest, Father Macias, as he had collaborated with the ILO for a similar purpose. This UN agency was preparing a declaration on the indigenous peoples and Bishop Proaño worked with them. During the Vatican Council II, Proaño, who was very close to Dom Hélder Câmara, actively participated in parallel activities, like the group on the Church of the Poor.
After the Council, when he was made responsible for the Pastoral Training Centre of CELAM, which was located in Quito, he twice invited me to give a course on the Sociology of Religion. Once I was at a meeting organized by the CELAM in the Porto Alegre seminary and I had to start the course in Quito the day after the closure of the event in Brazil. I took a plane to Buenos Aires. From there I had to go to Lima, but the travel agency had put me on a cargo plane, which obliged me to change flight and I reached Lima too late to catch my connection for Quito. The airline put me on a flight for Panama and afterwards, during the night, another from Panama to Quito. I arrived just in time to start the course at 9 o’clock in the morning, after having travelled all over the South American continent. This institute became a victim of the ecclesiastical restoration after the Medellin conference, and was closed by orders from Rome a few years later. One of the students in the course was Father Rutilio Grande, S.J. from El Salvador. Upon his return to his country he worked in common neighborhoods and was assassinated, which originated the radicalization of Monsignor Romero.

For several years I had no occasion to return to Ecuador. However, my contact with Bishop Proaño continued. He was supported by the university parish of Louvain-la-Neuve and visited Belgium several times. In the 2000s the reason for my return to Ecuador was the Latautonomy (autonomy in Latin America), a study on the autonomy of the indigenous peoples directed by Leo Gabriel and in which CETRI participated. The research had been carried out by the linguist Eliana Almeida, architect Lenin Oña’s wife, in collaboration with Nidia Arrobo who was responsible for the Pueblo Indio del Ecuador Foundation, created by Bishop Proaño. When I returned in 2005, we revised the research methods in order to integrate the Ecuadorian study with that of the other countries. I stayed at the Oña’s home.

45 Rutilio Grande, S.J. (1928-1977). He was a Salvadoran priest who was assassinated as well as two other Salvadorans whose process of beatification is open at the Archdiocese of San Salvador.
46 Eliana Almeida. She is a linguist trained in Moscow and a professor at the Central University of Quito.
Lenin Oña’s father died during my stay. He had been a very well-known journalist, a dedicated Marxist, who had named his children after the actors of the Russian revolution. His wife, Lenin's mother was a very devout Catholic so that part of the family was Marxist and atheist and the others were practising Catholics. They asked me to organize and preside over the funeral service. The ceremony was organized in the cemetery chapel, facing the Pichincha volcano which could be seen through its large windows. As there was no parish priest responsible for the chapel, I was able to organize the mass so that it was meaningful for everyone. We started with the song of the International, as an expression of the values of justice that had been practised by the deceased and I explained why it had been chosen. Then followed readings from the prophets calling for justice and the gospel of Saint Matthew, Chapter 25, on the last judgement that was based on what had been done for the poor. Various songs of the basic communities were also sung thanks to the collaboration of the little community of the Fundación. It was a ceremony that had meaning for everyone.

I returned to Quito for the Inter-American Social Forum. It was a magnificent experience in which the problems of the continent were tackled and I participated in several working groups, particularly on socio-political change. With Leo Gabriel, I made a presentation of the results of the research on the autonomy of the indigenous peoples. During the march that always inaugurates the Social Forums we passed in front of the United States Embassy, which happened to be beside the large cultural centre where the Forum was taking place. Some young people threw stones against the embassy. The police reacted and this was my first experience with tear gas. My eyes were very painful and I had to take refuge in a nearby park to get my breath back. At the end of the Forum, before 10,000 participants, a shaman performed a religious rite and invited me to take part. It was a homage to Mother Earth and to the elements of the four cardinal points: a moving reminder of our links with nature, the work of Creation.

In 2007 I returned to prepare the Latin American meeting of the World Forum for Alternatives (FMA). I was received by Rafael Correa, the young President whom I knew very well. He had
studied economics in Louvain-la-Neuve and followed my course in the Sociology of Religion. For several months he had lodged in the room beside my own at the Tricontinental Centre (CETRI). When he received me in the Carondelet Palace, he showed me the historical places in the palace and convened some of his ministers and collaborators to give me the chance of explaining the project of the World Forum for Alternatives meeting. There had been quite a lot of resistance to the idea of bringing ‘intellectuals’ together and when I brought up the theme of Liberation Theology, Rafael was rather negative. Nevertheless he assigned one of his best collaborators, an excellent intellectual called René Ramirez, to help us and with him it was agreed that the WFA would be responsible for the travel costs while the government would take care of the living expenses and the meetings. The Ecuadorian branch of the Peace and Justice Service (SERPAJ), founded by Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, helped us to prepare the event and its head, Johnny Jiménez, took over its organization.

At the time the Ecuadorian Constituent Assembly was meeting in Montecristi, the birthplace of the historic leader Eloy Alfaro, who led the liberal revolution at the end of the 19th century and who was assassinated by the conservative and clerical forces. Alberto Acosta, the assembly president, invited me to stay for a few days to give some talks and participate in meetings with political groups. The

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47 Johnny Jiménez. He is an Ecuadorian who is a professor of popular economy and is in charge of SERPAJ, an organization founded by Nobel Prize Adolfo Pérez Esquivel for promoting peace.

48 Eloy Alfaro (Ecuador, 1842-1912). He was the President of Ecuador for two terms (1897-1901 and 1906-1911) as well as the leader of the Ecuadorian liberal revolution.

49 Alberto Acosta. He is an Ecuadorian economist who studied economics at the University of Cologne, Germany; he is the assistant manager for marketing in the Ecuadorian Oil State Corporation (CEPE, Spanish acronym for Corporación Estatal Petrolera Ecuatoriana). He worked at the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE, Spanish acronym for Organización Latinoamericana de Energía), and was also the Mines and Energy Minister (2007) and the President of the Constituent Assembly (2007-2008). He was a candidate to the presidency of the republic (2012-2013) and is also a researcher and a professor at FLACSO, Ecuador. He has authored several books.
plane I took to get there landed at the Manta base, where I was able to see the United States AWACS planes, which monitored all the northern part of the sub-continent. Rafael Correa had announced that he would not renew the agreement that had been made by his predecessors and that expired the following year.

The atmosphere in the Constituent Assembly was very lively. Not only did those who had been elected work on the texts; there were numerous meetings and conferences taking place in the new building that had been constructed for the purpose. Groups were coming from all over the country –unions, indigenous people, students– to give suggestions and meet with the constituents. I gave a talk on the international economic situation and the social movements and I had meetings with various commissions and as well as with the Pachakutik party that represented the indigenous peoples. We talked about pluri-culture and pluri-nationality and the study on the autonomy of the original peoples was very useful in indicating the opportunities, but also the difficulties: urbanization, the loss of the traditional languages, etc.

I was very impressed by the democratic character of the event; it was not reserved to specialists in law, but open to popular participation. This certainly did not make the organization any easier but it gave a broader basis to a constitution that was to serve as the foundation of a new social construction. In Venezuela the process had been similar and Bolivia followed along the same lines. They were markedly different from preceding revolutionary processes, building transformative power through elections combined with popular participation. No doubt this gives a broad basis to the process but it also has the disadvantage of maintaining, within the State itself, pockets of power opposed to the changes and capable of boycotting them. As we have seen it was for this reason that President Hugo Chávez created missions on many aspects of collective life –education, health, agriculture, social economy, housing, indigenous peoples, etc.– that acted as a parallel State, financed by the State budget from the oil revenue, before recouping the various elements of the State apparatus to carry out the changes in society, which was called the Bolivarian revolution. However not all countries have this kind of income, which also has its dysfunctions.
The President of the Constituent Assembly was Alberto Acosta, a high-level intellectual, who was very conscious of this aspect of the constitutional work and he wanted to take the time necessary in order to complete it. However, Rafael Correa had a political agenda to achieve, which was to be carried out efficiently and with fixed deadlines. It was the beginning of a deep disagreement between the two men. Correa decided to end the work of the Constituent Assembly in order to present the Constitution to a referendum and he asked Alberto Acosta to withdraw.

The Latin American meeting of the WFA that had been held shortly before the Constituent Assembly was very fruitful, with the participation of some of the most important intellectuals of the continent: Pablo Gonzalez Casanova of Mexico; the Argentinian Atilio Borón; Theotonio dos Santos\(^{50}\) and Paulo Nakatani\(^{51}\) from Brazil; Monica Bruckmann\(^{52}\) from Peru; Aurelio Alonso from Cuba; Edgardo Lander\(^{53}\) from Venezuela; Wim Dierckxsens, a Dutchman who has worked for 40 years in Costa Rica; José María Vigil,\(^{54}\) the liberation theologian, and others. From Ecuador there was

\(^{50}\) Theotonio dos Santos Junior (Brazil, 1936-). He is a professor *emeritus* from the Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF, Portuguese acronym for Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) and the coordinator of the Chair and Network Unesco-UNU for Global Economy and Sustainable Development (REGGEN, Spanish acronym for Red Unesco-UNU de Economía Global y Desarrollo Sustentable) He is considered one of the creators of the theory of dependency.

\(^{51}\) Paulo Nakatani. He is a Brazilian economist, a professor at the University of Victoria (Espíritu Santo) in Brazil.

\(^{52}\) Mónica Bruckmann. She is a Peruvian sociologist, a Doctor of Political Science, a professor at the Department of Political Science of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and a researcher at the Unesco/ University Chair and Network of the United Nations on Global Economy and Sustainable Development. She is an expert in the management of natural resources for South America. She collaborated in elaborating the National Plan for Good Living of Ecuador 2013-2017 in the field of strategic sectors.

\(^{53}\) Edgardo Lander. He is a Venezuelan graduate from Harvard and an adviser to the Venezuelan commission negotiating in the Area of Free Trade of the Americas, as well as a professor at the Sociology School in Venezuela. He has published numerous works and participated actively in World Social Forums.

\(^{54}\) José María Vigil (Spain, 1946-). He is a Spanish liberation theologian. He was naturalized in Nicaragua and lives in Panama.
Alberto Acosta, still president of the Constituent Assembly, Pedro Páez, Minister of Finance, Mario Santi, the new president of CONAIE (Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador) and the indigenous leader Blanca Chancoso.

It was still at the beginning of the period of the continent’s progressive regimes. There is no doubt that the historic originality of Latin America, compared with other continents, was the influence of the social movements opposed to neoliberalism and political dictatorships, as well as the organization of the World Social Forums in the region. All this created a climate of optimism on the possibility of real social and political changes. However, the ambivalence of the State as an instrument of transformation and the tension with the social movements was already apparent and it was necessary to think through these processes.

The last day of the WFA meeting I lunched with a young Mexican sociologist from the UNAM. He represented a rather radical tendency in the new generation and was linked to the Workers’ Party of Mexico. I learnt later, that the same day he went to the FARCS-EP camp in the north of Ecuador to visit some Mexican comrades there. He left the place about 10 p.m. and at 1 a.m. the Colombian air force bombed the camp, killing more than 20 people, including

55 Pedro Páez (Ecuador, 1964-). He is a Doctor of Economics from Texas University, a Master of Development and Public Policies from FLACSO (Spanish acronym for Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales: Latin American School for Social Sciences) and an economist from the Catholic University of Ecuador. He has held several positions in the government of Ecuador and at present he is the Superintendent for the Control of Marketing Power. He inspired the creation of the common South American coin, the sucre.

56 Mario Santi. He is originally from Sarayacu, of shuar nationality. He was the president of CONAIE (Spanish acronym for Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador: Confederation of Native Peoples of Ecuador) from 2004 to 2008.

57 Blanca Chancoso. She is an Ecuadorian native leader who is a native issues adviser to governments and international organizations. For many years she has been in the leadership of Ecuarunari (acronym for Confederación de Pueblos Quichuas del Ecuador: Confederation of Quechua Peoples of Ecuador), an organization which is part of CONAIE (Spanish acronym for Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador: Confederation of Native Peoples of Ecuador).
Commander Reyes. This brought about a rupture in the diplomatic relationships between Colombia and Ecuador.

Soon afterwards, Rafael Correa invited me to an international seminar to mark the third anniversary of his arrival to power. I talked about the processes under way on the continent and their importance for the other continents of the South. Boaventura de Souza Santos, the Portuguese sociologist was also present, who has been much involved in the World Social Forum. The tensions with the social movements and particularly the indigenous movement were stronger than ever. Correa reacted aggressively and even abusively. This did worry us. At the dinner on the last day, in the presidential palace, we were both at the table close to the president, which gave us the opportunity to express our concern. Correa listened, but he justified himself. As regards the dialogue with the indigenous movement, he said, “It is impossible to dialogue with them. As soon as they have gone down the steps of the palace, they are already saying the opposite to what has been agreed”. Boaventura answered, “But perhaps you need patience. Don’t forget that there are 500 years of history behind all this”. Personally, I intervened to say that while this was not a political danger in the short term, it could be dangerous in the long term, which Correa admitted. We discussed other considerations as well, such as the ecological aspects and the extractive projects. Rafael courteously listened to our questioning, but did not seem convinced of its relevance.

At the end of the dinner, the Foreign Affairs Minister Ricardo Patiño and the Secretary to the President Galo Mora took up their guitars and

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58 Boaventura de Souza Santos (Portugal, 1940-). He is a Doctor of Law Sociology from Yale University and a member of the International Council of the World Social Forum. He is a professor of sociology at the University of Coimbra as well as a poet and the author of numerous books.

59 Ricardo Patiño (Ecuador, 1955-). He is an economist from UNAM, Mexico, a Master of Economic Development from the International University of Andalusia (Spain, 2001) and an Ecuadorian activist and a politician, the Minister for Economy and Finance from Litoral as well as the Chancellor of Ecuador. He has published several books and also participated in the Sandinista revolutionary process.

60 Galo Mora (Ecuador, 1957-). He is an anthropologist, professional musician and composer. He was the director of the musical-literary workshop of the
up until midnight we sang the revolutionary songs from all over the continent –Nicaraguan, Cuban, Argentinian, Chilean– remembering a history which was both dramatic and heroic and now being sung from the very centre of political power. A few weeks later Correa was operated on his knee in Cuba. I was there at the time and I went to visit him. His mother was there. It was a Saturday and from his room in the hospital we followed the televised Saturday programme (the ‘sabatina’) this time was presented by the vice president.61

In October 2010, after the events of 30 September in Quito in a revolt by the police, the president almost lost his life. Boaventura and I decided to write a joint letter to Correa, brotherly but tough, concerning the relationships with the social movements; some methods of the government and the style of leadership, which could endanger the process of political and social change in the long run. A year earlier I had written to Correa along the same lines. At the time I was at Riobamba to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Bishop Proaño and organized by the Ministry of Culture. I accepted the president’s invitation to participate in his Saturday weekly communication. I arrived early in Quito and after the ‘sabatina’, I put the letter into his hands. He was quite visibly disturbed about the attempted coup d’état and it was sad to see him so stressed. He replied with a 4-page letter to explain his positions.

On a number of occasions I happened to coincide with Correa. Once it was at Cuenca (Ecuador) for a seminar on the University to which Michel Molitor, former vice rector of the Catholic University of Louvain was also invited. Correa made the opening speech and I made the closing one. A law on higher education in the country was being prepared to deal with the dispersion of the sector and its lack of quality, due to the multiplicity of ‘garage’ universities, as they are called in Ecuador, which was the result of the neoliberal philosophy on education. At the same time it was important to

Albatross Corporation of Geneva (2000-2001). He has been the personal secretary of President Correa, the Executive Secretary of “Alianza País” and the Permanent Representative Ambassador of Ecuador in Unesco.

61 The President’s communication about his weekly work, which is transmitted on television.
insist on the social responsibility of the university in a time of social change requiring creativity and commitment.

In 2009 Correa was the only head of state who participated in the UN Conference on the Crisis, held in New York. He made an excellent speech on the responsibility of the capitalist economic system for the eruption and extension of the crisis, stressing the need for new paths. He talked in a similar vein when he made an official visit to the University of Louvain in 2010, emphasizing the necessity for a radical change in the economy if the world was to emerge from the crisis. In the letter that Boaventura and I wrote to him in October 2010 we referred to these two speeches that I personally had heard.

The Institute for High-level National Studies (IAEN), which depends on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, when I was in Quito asked me to collaborate with a working group on the country’s foreign policy regarding my analysis on the Common Good of Humanity, from my participation with the Stiglitz Commission. I accepted the invitation and decided to start the work as from the following December. I asked for a room in the Pueblo Indio del Ecuador Fundación, that I had known for several years and which had been the creation of Leonidas Proaño. I carried out several studies with the IAEN on the Common Good of Humanity, at the same time preparing with the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation in Brussels a seminar to be held in Rome, also on the concept of Sumak Kawsay (Buen Vivir) and its application to Latin American integration.

Gradually various institutions asked for my collaboration: the Central University, with a course on the University and Society, for the professors from different faculties; participation with a group called Critical Thinking; and a seminar on this theme in the same university. I gave various talks in Guayaquil, Cuenca, Riobamba, Otavalo, Loja, Canar and Machala on the theme of the crisis and the alternatives. I also participated in seminars with the Fundación Pueblo Indio del Ecuador, with indigenous communities in Pukahuayco, near Ibarra and also in FLACSO (Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences) and in the Simón Bolívar Andean University, the Polytechnic, the Catholic institution of the Jesuits and the Salesians.
Quito is a very interesting place, with much intellectual activity. The historical centre is charming, especially since it has been restored by Unesco. I like to go there on Sundays, when the streets are full of people, after having attended mass in the church of San Francisco and then going to eat with friends in one of the many little restaurants in the Ronda or the Plaza Grande.

It is also an enormous pleasure to take visiting friends to see the ‘Chapel of Man’, the Guayasamín\textsuperscript{62} Museum. The sheer strength of this artist, who first expressed the suffering of the indigenous peoples and then the tenderness of maternal love, encapsulates the history of the oppressed people of the continent. His ashes are scattered around a tree in the garden, a symbol of the ties between the different worlds of above and below. I had known him in Nicaragua because we had both received the medal for the 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution. Some years later Daniel Ortega gave me a signed drawing of an indigenous woman by Guayasamín.

His most impressive picture is the ‘Pietà’, which is in this museum. There is no religious reference (he himself was an atheist), but it is placed in what could be a chapel and expresses the grief for the death of a young man, who could be anyone who had been fighting for freedom and justice and who had a mother. It reminds me of Camilo Torres, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the mothers of the ‘heroes and martyrs’ of Nicaragua and, why not, of Jesus Christ.

Also in the centre of Quito there is the archaeological museum, called the Casa Alabado, a colonial house, with objects and statues of the original peoples, dating as far back as 4,000 years B.C. It is arranged according to the latest pedagogical methods, with

\textsuperscript{62} Oswaldo Guayasamín (Ecuador, 1919-U.S.A., 1999). He is an Ecuadorian painter, sketcher, sculptor, graphic artist and muralist who studied at the Fine Arts School of Quito. He was appointed member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, Spain, and a year later, member of honor of the Academy of Arts of Italy. On October 28, 1992, he was awarded the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa by the School of Architecture and Arts of the Pedro Enriquez Ureña National University (UNPHU, Spanish acronym for Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña). He founded the museum “The Chapel of Man”, which exhibits many of his works.
admirable historical and philosophical explanations. It is difficult to get tired while visiting it and penetrating further into the cosmovision of the indigenous peoples. It also testifies to the drama of cultural destruction and the difficulty of a renewed dialogue.

The political project of Rafael Correa is an attempt at civic and social reconstruction. After the neoliberal disaster, as far as he is concerned it is a question of reconstructing a national State and therefore to make all Ecuadorean citizens, hence the Alianza País and the Citizens’ Revolution. Such an approach, which has its logic, tends to underestimate the differences, particularly the existence of peoples and indigenous nations that the 2008 Constitution has integrated. Added to this political preoccupation, there was the social one: to eliminate poverty through the redistribution of the national product and better access to health, education, housing and transport.

In order to obtain a fairer distribution, according to this view it was necessary to increase the rate of development, the only way for the State to promote new policies. The situation of Ecuador is such that this means using the current oil revenue and, in the future, increasing the exploitation of the mines and monocultures of agrofuels. “I do not wish,” says Correa, “the country to be a beggar sitting on a bag of gold.” To develop a national state also means carrying out large infrastructure works: hydroelectric energy, ports and roads to promote the use of natural resources and start the industrialization of the country. It is basically an economic project, accompanied by social measures. Rafael calls it ‘the socialism of the 21st century’.

Nonetheless the development logic, thus defined, together with the electoral system (that demands elections every four or five years), seems to lead to contradictions. The oil and mineral projects have to be accelerated to ensure the financial bases of the State. Already the law on the mines envisages much opencast mining, with serious ecological consequences, in a country where the concession zones happen to be where the water reserves are (as opposed to Chile, for example, where most of the concessions

63 A group of thirty organizations of various orientations in favour of social change.
are in the desert zones). The zones of oil prospecting are also in areas that are rich in biodiversity, right in the Amazonian rainforest. The project to protect the environment in the National Yasuni Park is in danger for lack of international response and already oil exploitation is being prepared there. National sovereignty is once again in danger because concessions have been awarded to multinationals (and not only service contracts) that the same that elsewhere in the world have devastated the natural environment, expelled communities from their lands, used paramilitaries (Colombia) and promoted local wars (Congo). The law on water foresees facilities for this kind of enterprise. The Government takes measures to protect the environment and ensure advantages for the local populations, affirming that the new technologies make it possible for the exploitation to be much less destructive. But experience shows that this is not very realistic.

On my return from the Philippines, I sent Rafael Correa a report of Alyansa Tigil Mina, the alliance of the organizations that were fighting against mining projects. In this country, the mining companies do not take local laws seriously. They have such technical, financial and juridical power that they can transgress any regulations and not respect agreements; they are able to corrupt the local authorities as well as part of the population. Those who protest are accused of being obstacles to development, if not of terrorism. It is true that in the short term such policies promote a development that brings immediate advantages. Nevertheless, in the long term, it means reinforcing the international division of labour, preparing tomorrow’s ecological disasters and preventing other, more balanced kinds of development.

In fact, the essence is the alternative. Extricating from a capitalist developmental logic requires proposing another model, which up until now has not been experimented, except partially or on a small scale. An essential step is to promote peasant agriculture as the basis of improved local production and encouraging

64 The Ecuadorian government proposed refraining from exploiting an important oil reserve situated in the Yasuni National Park, on condition of receiving from the international community half of the revenue it would have given to the country
activities by small and medium businesses, which means carrying out an agrarian reform suited to each region. National and local activities should be developed, such as services for ecological tourism and local credit, and there should be social control over the main means of production, distribution and finance. On this basis it would be possible to guide a transition process that not only would not be an adaptation of capitalism to new ecological and social requirements, but steps towards achieving a genuinely alternative project.

The opposition to Rafael Correa’s project is composed of various elements. From the old oligarchy and its political expressions like Christian democrats, to the supporters of Lucio Gutiérrez\(^65\) (a military man who has been president); the main indigenous organizations and the old comrades of the Alianza País who gradually left the movement because of personal animosities, political opposition or disagreement about the present model. In this last kind of opposition, which is called ‘the new left’, the only common denominator seems to be more anti-Correa than a genuine socialist project.

There is much questioning about the alternatives, even within the Government. But alternative thinking will remain in the clouds if there are no proposals of solutions at medium and long term, as well as policies for a transition towards a new paradigm, which is not only a problem in Ecuador, but also for the whole world. Of course, it is quite obvious that there have been real achievements here when one looks at the past or sees the situation in certain neighbouring countries, but at the same time, a broader vision has to be developed, not only in terms of time, but also in reference to the collective life of humanity on the planet. The experiences of the indigenous peoples are important, not as a romantic return to the past, but as a criticism of capitalism and a proposal for a different development logic for the life of the planet (Mother Earth) and of humanity.

As part of the work I did for IAEN I published two studies on the concept of Sumak Kawsay (Good Living); one showing its

\(^65\) Lucio Gutiérrez (Ecuador, 1957-). He is a civil engineer and a former military who was the President of Ecuador from 2003 to 2005.
similarity to the concept of the Common Good of Humanity and the other on its validity as a guide to Latin American integration. I have also had several meetings with Humberto Cholango, at the time President of the CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) and with Delfin Tenesaca, President of ECUARUNARI (organization of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra), listening to their views and reading what they have written. Twice I was received in Delfin’s community in Riobamba and we shared the Eucharist together.

My book on agrofuels was produced in Quito by Ruth Casa Editorial, in a co-publishing venture with Ediciones La Tierra and I gave several television and radio interviews on the subject. I have also maintained contact with Alberto Acosta in FLACSO, as I very much admire him as an intellectual, in spite of certain disagreement on the concept of the rights of nature (how can these be translated into juridical terms?) and some of his criticism in opposition to Rafael Correa which are sometimes too personal.

In March 2012, Samir Amin travelled to Quito for a preparatory seminar for the South/South Forum, which he had proposed two years previously in order to reflect on the attitudes in the South faced by the crisis provoked by the North. Among the participants were Bernard Founou from Cameroun; Yash Tandon from Ecuador, 1976-) He is a peasant of Kichwa nationality who was born in Los Andes and is a native leader and a politician. He was the president of the Kichwa organization ECUARUNARI (Spanish acronym for Confederación de Pueblos Quichuas del Ecuador: Confederation of Quechua Peoples of Ecuador) from 2003 to 2009. He participated in the foundation of the Corporation of Native and Peasant Organizations of Cangahua (COINCCA, Spanish acronym for Corporación de Organizaciones indígenas y Campesinas de Cangahua, formerly UNOIN). He was also the president of CONAIE (Spanish acronym for Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador: Confederation of Native Peoples of Ecuador) from 2012 to 2014.

67 Bernard Founou. He is an economist from Cameroon and a colleague of Samir Amin in the Third World Forum in Dakar.

68 Yash Tandon (Uganda, 1939-). He is a Doctor of Economics from the London School of Economics (1969), as well as a politician, a professor and an editor who has authored numerous works.
Uganda; Paul Quintos from the Philippines; Jorge Orbe from Ecuador; Wim Dierckxsens from Costa Rica; Pedro Páez from Ecuador; and Carlos Tablada from Cuba. We worked for three days to prepare a basic document for the forthcoming meetings in Caracas, Cochabamba, Alger and Delhi. Our Ecuadorian friends wanted to take the opportunity of the presence of these intellectuals to organize discussions with bodies, like the Ministry of the Planning, with Fander Falconí, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Thus a number of conferences in various universities, IAEN and the Central University were held.

Rafael Correa called me to arrange a contact with Samir Amin. Three ministers were present: Ricardo Patiño from Foreign Affairs, Fander Falconí from Planning and René Ramirez from Higher Education. We spent an hour and a half together. Amir started off saying that, faced with the systemic crisis of capitalism, the South had an opportunity to react in joint and innovatory actions. He argued that Latin America had produced the only new experiences in this field, which had been started thanks to the action of the social movements. These movements should continue, in an alliance with the new political systems. If this did not happen, it could mean the end of this whole experience.

The president said that the indigenous march that had started those very days was only a question of power, from those who did not form part of the government and wanted to exercise a political role; and that they were financed by the right and sought to defend the ‘freedom of the press’ – what kind of press though! I intervened, saying that this was too simplistic an interpretation and that there was a lot more behind the march – water, mines, the

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69 Paul Quintos. He is an economist from the Philippines who is related to the documentation and study center IBON.

70 Fander Falconí. He is an Ecuadorian academician and a politician, and a Doctor of Ecological Economics from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain. He was the National Secretary for Planning and Development (2007-2009) and the Minister for Foreign Relations (2008). He is also a professor and a researcher in FLACSO, (Spanish acronym for Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales: Latin American School for Social Sciences Ecuador). His research lines are: globalization, ecological economics, trade and environment; he has authored several books.
indigenous peoples– to which Rafael Correa replied, emphasizing that it was a problem of power. I did not wish to insist because the interview was with Samir Amin. He then brought up the situation of the Middle East and, especially, that of Turkey– where the President would be going the following week– which he defined as the Colombia of the Middle East. Amir then went on to describe the meaning of the Arab Spring as an expression of a desire for democracy, but it was not anti-capitalist. As we came out of the presidential palace, we saw in the courtyard a military musical band and some servants installing carpets. It was explained to us that the Turkish ambassador was coming to present his credentials to President Correa. In his weekly talk, the following Saturday, Correa mentioned our visit and recalled the influence of Samir Amin on the students of his era, but as far as the president was concerned the solution of the crisis had to come more from the North than from the South.

It has been an enormous privilege to live in Ecuador and be accepted so fraternally by a very hospitable people, which is a living expression of the current transformation of humanity. Its indigenous peoples have a long tradition of political struggles for emancipation, their profound faith and the testimony of an emancipating Christianity like that of Monsignor Leonidas Proaño: all these and the unforgettable Andean, Amazonian and coastal landscapes make this country extremely attractive and very dear to me.

One of the most important issues is the defence of the Amazonia, which entails both the campaign against Chevron (ex Texaco) and the defence of Yasuni. The government was very active in the former case, and it tried to promote an initiative supporting civil society, particularly the victims of the environmental destruction caused by the US multinational. In order to collect signatures, with the assistance of Pilar Castañedo I brought together the contacts of three different sorts of people: those who had received a prize (from the Nobel to music competitions); former top UN officials; and present and past university vice chancellors. The results were fruitful. However, the reaction of university presidents from the United States was very revealing. A US university friend, whom I
consulted, told me that the presidents of the private universities would not reply because they were too dependent on funds from the multinationals, while those of the public universities would not reply because they closely followed the policies of the government.

In 2015, together with my colleagues Pilar Castanedo and Pablo Callerand a group of students from the University of San Luis Potosi of Mexico, I was able to visit the region of the Amazonia where Texaco had operated. We were accompanied by the lawyer of the victims, Pablo Fajardo. We were struck by the contamination of the soil and water, by the disused wells still today full of fossil fuels. Now, thirty years after the end of the operations of the US Corporation, fish are dying in the rivers, animals are drowning in the wells, and people are dying from cancer. Chevron, which absorbed Texaco, claimed to have carried all the necessary work, covering part of the wells with earth but without resolving the fundamental problems of pollution. They accuse the Ecuadorian government of fraud in the trial under way (demanding 90 million USD in compensation) and claiming moral damage of several thousands of millions of dollars. Texaco won the first amount at the International Criminal Court at The Hague and there are various cases still going on in the United States; Brazil and Argentina. They asked me to bear witness for them at these courts. Meanwhile; Pablo Fajardo is the only lawyer for the victims that come from different indigenous peoples. He receives constant threats and his informatics system is being hacked. His brother was assassinated in 2014. The government carries out its campaign with a limited number of advisers while Chevron employs some 2,000 lawyers with different specializations. Can one imagine greater inequality and cynicism? Apart from this particular case what also strikes me is the meaning of the extension of the oil frontier into the Amazon jungle. In fact the exploitation of crude oil did not stop with the departure of the North American corporation. The national

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71 Pablo Fajardo. He studied law at the Private Technical University of Loja and is also a representative of FDA (Spanish acronym for Frente de Defensa de la Amazonia: Front for the Defense of the Amazonia) which groups around 30,000 persons affected by the contamination of the jungle in the area of Lago Agrio, caused by the Chevron Corporation (former Texaco). He is the main lawyer of the plaintiffs in the Chevron-Texaco case.
company took over, with greater care for the environment but without changing the extracting philosophy. Other private and national companies (Brazil and China) are receiving concessions that penetrate ever more deeply into the jungle and the same thing is happening in Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Brazil.

As for Yasuni, the Yasnidos Movement collected over 700,000 signatures demanding the organization of a referendum that asked for the suspension of oil exploitation. But only half of the signatures were accepted by the electoral commission. Most of those rejected were for very technical reasons like non-recognition of the kind of paper or format used, while other refusals were due to the lack of rigour by the organizers: signatures that were repeated, false names, etc. Thus the signatures did not attain the number that was legally necessary. The government organized another campaign, ‘La Amazonia vive’ (the Amazonia Lives) which also collected signatures. It was supported by a group of mayors in the region, most of them indigenous people attracted by governmental subsidies for their municipalities.

A tribunal was organized on the rights of nature, with a session on the Yasuni. I did not accept to be one of the judges, not because of the subject matter but for the lack of formal procedures that seem to me essential for the credibility of a public opinion tribunal. However, I accepted to be a member of the commission that was to verify the findings of the tribunal –which in the end never functioned. During the session of the tribunal, three indigenous women from the Yasuni region gave their testimony saying, “They say we are poor, but this is not true. We had all that we need, even medicinal herbs. They come for the oil and they destroy everything. Afterwards they claim to be fighting poverty.”

The main focus of Rafael Correa’s second mandate was the New Production Matrix. Vice President Glas was charged with carrying it out. To the extent that imports were to be limited in order to promote local production, it was a good idea. Raúl Prebisch\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{72} Raúl Prebisch (Argentina, 1901-1986). He was a Public Accountant from the University of Buenos Aires as well as a professor in that university. He was also the Executive Secretary of the Economics Commission of United Nations for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL, Spanish acronym for Comisión Económica para América Latina) from 1950 to 1963 and
had already been advocating this back in the 1950s. In fact, an increase of the middle class meant a greater consumption of items produced abroad and thus the model was non-sustainable in the long run. The other aspect of the logic was to promote exports in order to maintain the model both of consumption as well as the ‘fight against poverty’. A policy to change energy resources, replacing gas by hydro-electricity, was also started. Hence the need to produce oil and, as a precaution against it reaching its peak, for mining products and monoculture agriculture (palm, sugar cane, eucalyptus, broccoli). In mining extraction, the Chinese are gradually replacing the Canadian companies and they are also active in exploiting and refining oil. They lend money at a high rate of interest (but in 2015 they reduced it) at a time when the new production matrix required more financial resources. A return to the World Bank and to Goldman Sachs was necessary because of the paralysis in implementing the instruments for the financial integration of the continent and the need for money. Hence the ties with the great oil producers of oil and gas in the Gulf like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, who have considerable financial reserves and also possibilities to invest.

Nevertheless, this kind of policy entails externalities, which according to capitalism logic are not taken into account, or very little. I was able to see this in a study I made on broccoli; 97% of which was produced for export to countries that were mostly able to produce broccoli themselves (United States, Europe, Japan), but that were benefiting from the comparative advantage of the low local wages. I found the production conditions were very poor: monopolization of water; wrong use of chemical products; illnesses of the workers and the local population; no respect for labour legislation; no payment for overtime; ignorance of environmental regulations and the capital of (Ecuadorian) companies being sent to fiscal havens. My conclusion: is it possible to build socialism of the 21st century with capitalism of the 19th? I delivered the report to Rafael Correa and to vice president Jorge Glas, and I published it the Secretary General of the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Jorge Glas (Ecuador, 1969-). He is an electricity engineer specialized in electronics from the Higher Polytechnical School of Litoral. He is the

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in No. 34 of the *Ciencias Sociales* review of the Sociology Institute of the Central University in Quito.

ALAI, the Latin American press agency, asked me for an article for their issue on peasant agriculture in Ecuador. It was evident that agriculture was not a priority for the government. This ministry has one of the lowest budgets of all the ministries (300 million dollars as opposed to 1,700 million for the Defence Ministry in 2014) and that it prefers monoculture. The inequality in the distribution of land is the second highest in the continent, with no prospects of agrarian reform. The fight against rural poverty is based on subsidies and not on improving small-scale agriculture, although the instruments exist for doing so. In the medium and long term this policy will accentuate the environmental destruction and provide no structural solution for the agrarian problem. An increasing number of experts, including members of the Alianza País party, are of the same opinion. This was the reason for the initiative I took in IAEN: the organization of a monthly seminar, with participants of the government, particularly from the ministry of agriculture, the social movements, peasants and indigenous peoples, NGOs in this field and academics, with the hope of presenting concrete proposals for improving the situation. In the meantime the Institute published the acts of the seminar in La Paz (2013) on Peasant Agriculture in Latin America.

When, in July 2013, Evo Morales came on an official visit to Ecuador, Rafael Correa invited me to lunch and put me at the president’s table, with the two leaders and the two ambassadors. It was an opportunity to have a discussion. As always, after an hour, Rafael Correa took the microphone of the musical group and started to sing. Ricardo Patiño, the Ecuadorian Foreign Affairs Minister, took up a guitar and the president of the National Assembly started dancing. Just then Jean Luc Mélenchon, who was a leftwing candidate at the last presidential elections in France and who had also been invited to the lunch, entered the room. He

Vice-President of Ecuador, a position he has occupied since May 24, 2013, having been elected in the presidential elections of 2013-2017. He is also the president of the Solidarity Fund, the Minister for Telecommunications and Information Society and the Coordinating Minister for Strategic Sectors.
was late because he had been visiting the provinces. He came to me and said, visibly disconcerted, “Is it an official lunch? In France this would be impossible!"

I took advantage of the talk with Evo Morales to say, “I am surprised about the fascination for South Korea, both in Bolivia and in Ecuador who see it as a small country that has undergone a spectacular development and is at the cutting edge of science and technology, a model for the Andean countries. It is now 45 years that I have been going more or less regularly to this country and it is one of the harshest societies that I know: unbridled capitalism, the highest level of suicides among the youth in all OECD countries and a total dependency on US imperialism. Would it not be a good idea to invite a delegation of South Korean social movements and to get more knowledge from them about the social struggles and the real costs of this kind of growth?” He said that it was a good idea.

I got in contact with my friends in the workers, peasants and anti-imperialist movements in South Korea and presented the project to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. In March/April 2014 five members from these movements spent one week in Ecuador and another in Bolivia. Contacts were established with the social movements in each country, as well as with universities, sectors of the governments and communication media. I accompanied the group. The message was clear: the Korean miracle was achieved through a capitalist type of agrarian reform (with tens of thousands of deaths) as it aimed to provide cheap labour for industry and indebtedness for the peasants (with an average of three suicides a day, because of excessive debt).

The super-exploitation of labour and military dictatorship lasted for several decades, while for 30 years the national budget was paid mostly by the United States to present it as a showcase of capitalist economic growth, as opposed to communist China. It was a centre of knowledge at the service of big capital, with such importance given to competition that there was a high rate of suicide among students. Thirty thousand US soldiers with nuclear armaments were stationed on its territory, while the country has been integrated with the USA and Japan through political and
military pacts. This is no model for Ecuador and Bolivia, even though the admirable courage of the people and their innovatory capacity cannot be denied.

It was decided to continue the contacts and invite members of the Latin American social movements to Korea. In 2015 Víctor Hugo Gijón participated in a seminar of solidarity with the political party constituted by the Korean social movements which had been suppressed by President Park and to which several of our friends belonged.

As concerns the social evolution in Ecuador and the danger of conflicts in the oil and mining extraction zones, I thought it would be useful to set up an Observatory of Justice for the Indigenous Peoples. Contact was made with indigenous leaders who accepted the idea, and with the Permanent Peoples Tribunal (PPT) in Rome. The Tribunal designated a member of the Collective of Lawyers of Bogota to study the situation and make proposals. The group (of indigenous leaders and lawyers) decided to add the reinforcement of indigenous justice to the first objective. I came in a personal capacity as an observer of the PPT. The Observatory is a de facto association that does not have a legal status and therefore it could be represented by the Foundation of the Indian People of Ecuador. Its first function is to prevent the criminalization of conflicts and to avoid violence. Recourse to human rights bodies, however, was not to be excluded.

In May 2014 I was invited to Macas in the Ecuadorian Amazonia for the installation of the prefect of the Morena-Santiago province (the names of the two rivers crossed by the province). As a member of the Pachakutik (the party that is close to the indigenous movement), he had been re-elected with a very comfortable majority. The Shuar indigenous people, who form the majority in the region, are by tradition a warrior people and they are organized in small semi-nomad groups. I walked with the prefect in the streets of Macas, accompanied by men armed with spears.

74 Park Geun-hye (South Korea, 1952-). She studied at the universities of Sogang and Grenoble (France), and was a candidate for the conservative party Saenuri; she was elected President of South Korea in 2013.
The previous evening we had entered into the jungle, along a very muddy track leading uphill and downhill, until we reached a sacred waterfall, where the prefect had to submit to a traditional ritual by a shaman. On our return, in spite of the fact that our hosts had cut a branch of a tree to help me walk, I was also assisted by three policemen of the prefect’s guard. For the first time I understood what the role of the police could be! I talked at length with the parents of the prefect, who knew all the details of Shuar customs and were proud of its culture. The father, who was 79 years old, was full of life and humour and he told me that he had never consulted a Western doctor, but had always been cured by traditional medicine and herbs.

The prefect had organized a day dedicated to ‘buen vivir’, or sumak kawsai. I had been asked to speak about the concept at the international level, which I did with the help of a power point presentation. Rigoberta Menchu, the Nobel Peace prize-winner from Guatemala, had also accepted to participate but cancelled at the last moment, probably because of a political intervention as the prefect was not a member of the Alianza Pais, the political organization of the government. There were also two professors from the universities of Cordoba (Argentina) and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and the councillor at the Bolivian embassy. Participating in the official ceremonies were the governor (representing the central government and Alianza Pais), senior army officers and judges. The Catholic Church, which is very powerful in this region and run by the Salesian order who had evangelized the Shuar, did not participate. The prefect belonged to the generation that began to emancipate itself from ecclesiastical tutelage and it appeared that he was not well seen by the local religious authorities.

In the same year, 2008, the Defence Ministry and its minister María Fernanda Espinosa,75 whom I had known when she was the

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75 María Fernanda Espinosa (Spain, 1964-). She is a Bachelor of Applied Linguistics from the Catholic University of Ecuador and a postgraduate of anthropology and social sciences from FLACSO of Ecuador. She has held several ministerial offices in the government of Rafael Correa and since the end of 2014 she has been the Permanent Representative of Ecuador at the European Office of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. She was the winner of the National First Prize for Poetry in 1990.
Ecuadorian ambassador to the United Nations in New York, invited me to the House of Culture, to present the first issue of the review of the Defence Ministry, entitled *Patria*. It included an article on Syria that I had written after my visit to that country in 2013 and it was based on the report I transmitted to President Correa. I had never addressed an auditorium of this kind: 350 senior officers from the three military branches (army, navy and air force), all dressed in their uniforms. I explained the complexity of the situation, with its local aspects (the Arab Spring as a reaction against neoliberalism and the brutal reaction of the Syrian government against the agenda of the Islamists), the political-religious interests in those countries that favoured re-establishing an Islamic emirate and the neo-colonialism and Western imperialism in this region that is so rich in energy resources. For Syria, the only solution to the situation is a political one and everything has to be done to put an end to the war.

After the conference there was a cocktail. The first to greet me was the Chinese military attaché, exuberant (in Chinese) and very satisfied. Afterwards the US military attaché came, speaking excellent Spanish (he had studied in Buenos Aires). We talked for 15 minutes and finally he asked me, “If you had something to say to the United States Government about Syria, what would you say?” I answered, “Convince its allies, Qatar and Saudi Arabia not to finance the jihadists any longer.”

Then came the Russian military attaché, who agreed with my position in spite of my criticism of the government’s reaction. The Chilean military attaché also greeted me, but he had no particular views on the subject. His Prussian-type uniform brought back bad memories of the Second World War. The French ambassador came up to me to say that perhaps one could add a few details, such as the fact that France had not many economic interests in the region but political ones, such as its Lebanese allies (evidently with the Catholic right wing). Finally I was contacted by the Cuban ambassador, who was in agreement with me. Various officers came to talk also to say that this kind of analysis was useful, as it did not appear very frequently in their media.

In May 2013 the IAEN appointed me professor and I started a more systematic collaboration with the institution; seminars, lectures; a course in contemporary geopolitics for the civil servants
of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; supervision of theses; and in 2015 a course on the Middle East and the Arab Spring for the personnel of the Foreign Office. Forty people followed the course and carried out studies on the subject. I also continued to collaborate with the Central University, FLACSO (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences) and the Andean University. I sometimes published articles on various subjects in the Telégrafo, the newspaper close to the government; the MST\textsuperscript{76} congress in Brazil; the political engagement of Gabriel García Márquez; the role of Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Césedes in Cuba; Hugo Chávez and religion; Monsignor Romero; the Amazon jungle, etc. My friend Gustavo Pérez published an article on my study on broccoli.

The cultural wealth of Quito and of its institutions contributed to many meetings. One of them was with Armand Mattelart\textsuperscript{77} and his wife Michèle. CIESPAL asked me to present him, because I had helped to bring him to Latin America. Michel Bauwens,\textsuperscript{78} who initiated the People to People program, spent 6 months at IAEN. The same thing happened with David Harvey. I invited intellectuals from Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Brazil within the framework of my chair at IAEN.

Since the end of 2014 the international crisis has dramatically affected the country. The fall in the price of oil, which constitutes 40 \% of the State’s income, had immediate and evident consequences. Unlike Bolivia, Ecuador had invested heavily its income in social work and public infrastructure, without keeping much in reserve. The first reaction was to preserve social policies and to postpone the carrying out of medium and long-term projects. The selection was not easy to make. And it was not even

\textsuperscript{76} An important and well known social organization made up by more than one and a half million Brazilian farmers who want the agrarian reform.

\textsuperscript{77} Armand Mattelart. He is a Belgian sociologist born in 1936. He is a Doctor of Law from the University of Louvain, as well as a specialist on demography from La Sorbonne in France. He has held important positions and has a doctorate Honoris Causa from various universities in the world.

\textsuperscript{78} Michel Bauwens. He was born in Belgium in 1958, and he is a writer, a researcher and a lecturer on high technology, culture and business innovation matters. He is the founder of the Foundation for Peer-to-peer Alternatives.
enough. It became necessary to reduce public expenses, cut back personnel and close several administrative departments. Projects of infrastructure that save public expenditure, such as hydrothermal plants and refineries, were accelerated. As in many places round the world these megaprojects end up by being much more expensive than estimated, in addition to some negative collateral effects. Political problems are also involved as a result of the crisis, such as the decision of Venezuela to withdraw from the financing of the refinery, with China replacing it with new conditions. There was an intensification of the preparation for mining extraction as a future substitute for oil, as well as of agricultural monoculture for export.

The crisis affected the monetary policies of the whole region. At the same time as the value of the dollar was increasing (Ecuador is a dollarized country), neighbouring countries were devaluing their currencies, which advantaged their exports and started up a veritable invasion of Peruvian and Colombian products in Ecuador. To re-equilibrate the balance of payments, it had to reduce its imports and thus gradually changed the consumer patterns of the middle classes. Local production was given priority, which was positive, but insufficient investment and the lack of know-how slowed up the process. The objective of a ‘New Production Matrix’ launched in Correa’s second mandate became important and formed the central plank of economic policy. A number of laws reflected this concern, particularly the labour and land laws, with their emphasis on efficient production, in numerous instances to the disadvantage of the labour force.

Since 2015, the process has been affecting public employment and indirectly the private sector, especially construction. Some public bodies have delayed paying wages to their employees and public subsidies to universities, schools and hospitals have been postponed or unpaid. Money was lacking, not only for long-term investment but also for the daily functioning of the State. Thus various solutions were sought. Allowing the State to use social security funds as a treasury is a mechanism that has been used in many parts of the world. But it caused conflicts with the unions and the retired army veterans. Another mechanism was opening public works to private capital, associating it with State capital.
The need was felt for external loans and the country looked for new creditors –China (which had already been present since the first decade of the new millennium), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand– as well as returning to old creditors like the IMF and Goldman Sachs.

Nevertheless, the rate of indebtedness remains modest compared with those of the European countries (let alone that of the United States), in other words a third of the annual GDP. A good part of the oil production is sold before it is produced which provides a useful contribution to the State budget. Foreign investment, especially in opencast mining, was sought from Chinese public and private capital and from Canadian multinationals, also from the Chilean State enterprise. Fifty-year concessions were given to public and private investment bodies in Turkey, Dubai and China for the construction of three large ports for exportation and this has brought in millions for investment. All this had its effect on agriculture, with a greater concentration of land holdings –difficult to measure as there has been no agricultural census since 2000– as well as an increase in monoculture, the extension of the agricultural frontier and a corresponding loss of food sovereignty. These measures have tended to consolidate a modernization process of the society in a moment of crisis, in the hope that it will be as short as possible.

This economic orientation –which can be called modern capitalism, as Rafael Correa considers it– has been accompanied by a centralizing concept of the State that is close to the vision of the most radical Jacobinism of the French Revolution, adopted in the Latin American continent since the beginning of its independence and which became a tradition in its political history. The concept of a citizen revolution implies the aim of making each person a citizen, with the same rights and obligations, eliminating differences and thus fighting against social inequalities, although also tending to under-estimate regional and cultural diversities. The constitution of 2008 introduced new notions like pluriculturalism and plurinationalism. However these concepts proved very difficult to translate into laws.

To bring about changes, legislative and juridical functions were subsumed by the executive. There were measures to promote
social justice and democracy, like more proportional taxation; communication media separated from financial capital; duties on inheritance and speculation; the law declaring that water was a public good. But they reinforced the role of a State that was very centralized and, inevitably, more bureaucratic.

In this context, despite being considered more like a pyramid enlarging its bases rather than an area for peoples’ participation, regional decentralization has created a certain autonomous space for the provinces, cantons and municipalities, which caused certain conflicts with the central power. The efforts of the government to ensure a more direct communication with the people was logically seen as being from top to bottom but it encountered great difficulty in creating a bottom to top flow.

Relationships with the social movements and organizations that had supported the political project of Alianza País in 2007 rapidly deteriorated. There were many reasons for this, beside the general orientation of the main project. Some NGOs that had important functions during neoliberalism had difficulties in accepting the new role of the State. As the political field broadened and many leaders of the movements were involved in the administration of the new State, the peoples’ organizations were weakened. It was hard to redefine the role of the latter when it was confronted with a political project that purportedly was accomplishing their objectives. There were internal divisions, sometimes power struggles between leaders, but there were also differences of views about governmental policies. The indigenous movement, which had played a key role in the political transformation of the 1990s, was undermined by having collaborated with President Gutiérrez, who changed the project for social transformation into a reproduction of the traditional model and an alliance with the United States.

The political power was conditioned by electoral logic, from the national level to the local. In these circumstances, what counted was the immediate situation as perceived by the voters. Alianza País lost support in the main cities in 2014 –in spite of success at the national level only a few months previously. It had won, with its allies, two-thirds of the national assembly and had a very comfortable result in the presidential election. The
political project of the various social movements and left-wing parties had obtained only 3% of the votes. It showed the need for reconstructing a popular base.

There had already been a strong tendency to use the social movements to support election campaigns and, to a certain extent this was logical, given the country’s history. However, confronted by rising resistance, the government supported the constitution of new parallel movements –indigenous people, workers, teachers, ecologists– that were in tune with its policies. Certain internal divisions were exploited but it was hard to create a real social base and dubious methods were employed, such as material contributions for the organization of demonstrations and marches.

Because of its historical importance the specific problem of the indigenous people merits attention. There are three components in its national representation in CONAIE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador): the Indians of the highlands (the majority), those of the Amazon jungle and those of the coastal areas. Conflict with the government became overt in 2014 when the latter decided to take back CONAIE’s headquarters –a public property conceded for the national role played by the indigenous people– alleging that the contract had not been fulfilled (lack of presentation of a yearly report and no political activities in the building). Already some of the indigenous leaders had been condemned (a few for terrorism) for organizing resistance to oil and mining projects and hydroelectric plants. The recovery of the building was abandoned in 2015, after organized resistance and criticism at national and international levels.

The indigenous movement suffers from the general evolution of the country. On the one hand, rapid urbanization, the deterioration of rural society, loss of the function of its territories and cultural massification, all resulting from the present modernization that is guided by capitalist logic, constitute a growing assault on its way of life and identity. These fast changes have hindered the gradual transformation that would enable an adaptation of the indigenous peoples without the loss of their specificities, which means a different rhythm of time. For them it is not a question of repeating the past in a circular way but, like the symbol of
the snail’s shell, completing a circle that is open to the future. It is a social metabolism of another kind that guarantees the transformation of its culture without destroying it.

On the other hand, the national policy for intensive modernization, with its vision of linear progress on an inexhaustible planet, precipitates a process of cultural dilution and social destruction, even though it is a collateral effect and not necessarily intentional.

This double phenomenon has not been properly analyzed but is deeply felt by the indigenous movements and has generated despair and the impression that there has been no great difference for 500 years. The process continues, in spite of the social and political changes being considered for the indigenous movements as individuals and not as collectives; for example, the appointment of indigenous people in public administration and the reduction of poverty through welfare rather than structural measures.

In this context, and as the subject of the chair bearing my name at IAEN, I took up the topic *Is A Post-Capitalist Paradigm Possible?* We have studied the concept of modernity which inspired all the experiences on change and concrete cases, such as the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam, but also the African liberation movements and their post-colonial governments, the Arab spring, the progressive countries in Latin America, Cuba, not forgetting more theoretical aspects like Gramsci’s and Che’s contributions. I hope it is possible to reach a certain synthesis, to allow an evaluation of the achievements and the reasons for the failures (an acritical concept of modernity, dogmatic collectiveness, authoritarian centralization with war socialism, destruction of the natural environment). We also discussed the concept of transition, especially when it is applied to farmers’ agriculture.

In this sector I have managed to continue my efforts: the publishing of the book *Manifiesto para una Agricultura familiar campesina e indígena en Ecuador*, with Michel Laforge; working with a farmers’ and natives’ movement support groups in order to produce a memorandum for the newly elected in 2017; numerous visits to native, farmer and “montubia” communities in the

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79 Michel Laforge. He was born in Lima, Perú in 1964. He studied agronomy at the Institut National Agronomique de Paris Grignon.
provinces of Pichincha, Imbabura, Chimborazo, Azuay, Cañar, El Oro, Los Ríos, Bolívar; contacts with state institutions and several lectures in universities in the capital city and in the provinces.

Within the framework of the IAEN chair, in January 2017, I also invited three Vietnamese friends: Bu Dinh Ton, an agronomist; Nguyen Truyen, a sociologist; and Nguyen Vuu Tan, a farmer who was a former mayor of Hai Van. We travelled more than 1,500 km in the country, visiting communities and speaking at 6 universities to prove that it was possible to develop farmers’ agriculture. On this basis, Vietnam got to be the second rice exporter in the world.

The Andean University, possibly the most prestigious of Quito as a result of the collaboration of the Andean countries, requested a mediation mission from me, together with Boaventura de Souza from the Universidad of Coimbra in Portugal and Dr. Nila Heredia\textsuperscript{80} from Bolivia, so as to solve the existing conflict between the Ecuadorian government and the Andean Parliament with regard to the appointment of the next university president. I accepted, because the challenge was much deeper than this simple coincidental fact; this was about university autonomy and the public and international character of the university. The three parties accepted our mediation. Since I was the only one present in Quito, I spent dozens of hours in meetings with different university groups (frequently in disagreement), with the Higher Education Council of Ecuador presided by René Ramírez\textsuperscript{81} and with Senator Luis Fernando

\textsuperscript{80} Nila Heredia Miranda. She is a Bolivian Doctor of Medicine and several fields from the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés. She is a militant of PRT-B (Spanish acronym for Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores de Bolivia: Bolivian Workers’ Revolutionary Party) and of ENL. She was arrested and tortured by the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer Suárez, went into exile in Perú and returned to Bolivia, where she held several public positions.

\textsuperscript{81} René Ramírez. He is an academician, an economist, a Master of Economic Development from the Institute for Social Studies of Holland and a Master of Government and Public Policies from FLACSO of Mexico; he has been the National Planning and Development Secretary, the Secretary for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, the President of the Higher Education Council, the President of the National Council for State Modernization, and of the Administrative Council of the International Center for Higher Studies on Communications for Latin America. He has also been a professor in various Ecuadorian universities; he has
Duque, a Colombian who is the president of the Higher Committee of Education of the Andean Parliament. An agreement was finally reached and the two university presidents appointed, a temporary one to organize a consultation and a permanent one, were the ones wanted by the majority of the university community.

There was, in fact, a political problem. The former university president, Enrique Alaya, a political adversary of Rafael Correa, was accused of making use of the university for electoral purposes. On the other hand, the Andean Parliament made use of legal mechanisms to guarantee university control. The struggle of the Andean University did not end with this. The Ecuadorian government rejected the payment of assistance with the argument of having a difference with the treasury inspector's office in the interpretation of the use of public funds. If this conflict is not solved, it will mean that the Andean university must charge fees to the students, thus losing in fact its public character. On the other hand, the Ecuadorian Parliament passed a new law of Higher Education on Christmas Eve, 2016, which reinforces the power of the state over this sector; it was signed by the president on December 28. In case the traditional Right returned to power, it will have all the legal instruments to bring higher education under control with very little effort.

The elections in 2017 demonstrated the political weakness of Alianza País, which lost the absolute majority in the National Assembly and did not win in the first turn. It is true that the hard right of banker Lasso carried out a very strong campaign which was supported by important financial means. However, to attribute the results of the elections to the communication means of the Right and to imperialism is truly insufficient. It is not the hard Right that elected Jorge Glas, not particularly popular and representing the right wing of Alianza País, as the candidate for Vice-President; it is not the opposition of the Right that confronted the academy with state measures limiting the autonomy; it is not this political current that marginalized the farmers’ and natives’ agriculture in several publications on studies about poverty, inequality, the economy of knowledge, higher education, good living, ecologic economy and the use of time. He coordinated and led the National Plan for Development 2007-2010 and the National Plan for Good Living 2009-2014.
favor of a modernization with negative collateral effects, nor the one that criminalized various types of social resistance; it is not they who invented the corruption of Petroecuador either. Indeed, the illusory electoral promises of the Right of decreasing taxes and increasing employment have had real impact on the middle class and part of the young people. Dirty attacks were not lacking either. However, it is important to put each factor in an overall view. International action in support of Alianza País was organized. However, its line was to defend the Left against a return of the Right, without realizing that the project had changed or perhaps had been orientated towards a modernization of capitalism as the only way to development. Lenin Moreno had understood that it was necessary to be more self-critical. In his letter to Alianza País, he wondered if the policies adopted in the relations with the social movements, the natives, the ecologists, had been the best. He did not hesitate to classify the millennium schools as white elephants in another opportunity. But Lenin is not alone.

It is evident that the true danger in a second turn was the return of the hard Right to power and that was why it was necessary to support Alianza País, not as an option for the Left, but as the lesser evil under concrete circumstances. As he did not obtain the necessary 40%, there was a second turn.

The electoral campaign was hard. In an interview with Sergio Ferrari\textsuperscript{82} from Switzerland I stated that the political struggle was between two Rights: an oligarchic one linked to financial capital and a modern one supported by part of the members of the social movements of the nineties. In a seminary organized with Frei Betto by IAEN on the Common Good of Humanity, I added that the last decade had been lost for the natives’ and farmers’ family agriculture. However, I was also very clear in stating that in no case was the oligarchic Right a solution. It was all about redefining the project.

Several initiatives were taken from abroad to support Lenin Moreno, the candidate of Alianza País, but there was little

\textsuperscript{82} Sergio Ferrari. He is an Argentinian journalist who lives in Switzerland. He has been accredited before the Swiss government in Bern as well as the UN in Geneva. He wrote for the independent daily \textit{Le Courrier} (edited in Geneva) and is a specialist on Latin America.
understanding of the internal situation. João Pedro Stédile,83 from
MST of Brazil, sent me a project of a statement from about forty
social movements from Argentina and Brazil supporting Lenin
Moreno’s candidacy. I drew up proposals for corrections so that it
is an alert to confront Lasso’s candidacy, based on the experiences
of Argentina and Brazil, but leaving open options (to vote for
Lenin, null, invalid vote, abstention). The changes were accepted.
It must be remembered that the principal native movements
declared themselves in favor of neither one nor the other, and
those from the Amazonia were in favor of Lasso.

Less than two weeks before the second turn Frei Betto came,
invited by the government. The presidency asked IAEN to be in
charge of the organization of this visit and Antonio Salamanca and
I made suggestions for a program which were accepted. Trying
to limit the connection between his presence and the electoral
campaign to the utmost we suggested a public conference with
the president or the chancellor on the future of Latin America;
a seminary at IAEN on the Common Good of Humanity and a
celebration of the anniversary of Monsignor Romero’s assassination
on the tomb of Monsignor Romero in Pucahaico (Ibarra). Frei Beto
received an Ecuadorian decoration, where the President delivered
a brilliant speech on the Liberation Theology, the social doctrine
of the Church, naming the martyrs of El Salvador.

Rafael Correa invited me for lunch. A group of Nicaraguan
singers sang the Farmers’ Mass and other songs from Nicaragua,
and holding a microphone in his hand, the President sang with
great enthusiasm. Some days before, on March 7, in the middle
of the session of the Chair with 70 persons on the role played
by women farmers in farmers’ agriculture, he had called me to
wish me a happy birthday. At the end of lunch, the musical group
began singing the traditional birthday song, and a person next to
me at the table called my attention to tell me that it was for me.
They had a big cake with candles. Rafael stood up to hug me
and he presented me with a stone sculpture of the Madonna. I

83 João Pedro Stédile (Brazil, 1953-). He is an economist from the Catholic
Pontifical University of Rio Grande do Sul. He did postgraduate studies at
UNAM in Mexico; he is a Brazilian Marxist social activist and a defender
of the agrarian reform. He is also a co-founder of MST.
appreciated this gesture, because he knew very well which my positions were. I had stated them by mail on several occasions, and he defended himself in his replies.

Towards the end of lunch once more I took the opportunity to approach the problem of a visa for Manuela Picq, the wife of Carlos Pérez, the president of the organization of the natives from the Sierra, ECUARONARI. They had a traditional marriage not recognized by the Ecuadorian state and she had been expelled almost two years before. I had requested this in writing twice before, including the signatures of Pablo González Casanova, a former university president of UNAM from Mexico, as well as of Boaventura de Souza Santos, a professor from the University of Coimbra in Portugal, but to no avail. The problem was truly delicate, because Carlos Pérez was a political adversary of Rafael, and Manuela, being a foreigner (French-Brazilian) had participated in public protest demonstrations. He met Carlos’ family, his younger daughter and his very old parents, who had great appreciation for Manuela, who had contributed to keep the family’s balance after Carlos’ first wife’s death from cancer. This separation was very difficult for all of them. Rafael answered, “If you can guarantee that this is a true marriage, I could change my position, because I trust you.” I guaranteed it, and after having a new contact with Carlos, I wrote a letter to confirm it.

Bolivia

Some time passed before I returned to Bolivia, which I had first visited in 1954. In Louvain-la-Neuve I had had contacts with Bolivian students, particularly with some members of the MIR (Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria). We had regular meetings on the Latin American situation at the CETRI and each time we made an analysis in a country, Bolivia being on the agenda several times. One of the organizers of the seminars was a Bolivian who, when he returned to La Paz was killed, together with several of his MIR comrades, by the dictatorship of General Banzer. Later, his wife brought me, as a memento, a terracotta crucifix, with the face of an indigenous person, marked by deep suffering. The sacrifice of these young intellectuals was extraordinary. All over
the continent they opposed the dictatorships, together with the popular struggles and against a neo-fascism supported, trained and financed by the imperial power of the United States.

It was difficult in Europe to understand this issue, because the image of the United States was still that of its liberating role from European fascism. Thousands of young US soldiers gave their lives for this objective. The huge cemeteries, full of white crosses, or with the stars of David, testify to their commitments in Italy, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, not to forget North Africa, the Philippines and other Asian countries. However the United States takes on a different aspect if looked at with the eyes of the people of Central America, who have been invaded so often by the marines, or with the eyes of the Cubans who have been suffering from a never-ending embargo (blockade, according to their term), or from the perspective of the victims of the Operation Condor that supported the military dictatorships in the south of the continent, the families of the missing persons in Argentina and those persecuted by the Pinochet regime in Chile.

In the 1970s, I was invited to comment on the film “State of Siege” by the French/Greek director Costa Gavras84 about the political situation in Uruguay, together with an adviser of the US embassy in Brussels. His thesis was that the resistance of the young intellectuals against the United States in defence of democracy and against communism was caused by the crisis of adolescence (rebellion against the father) that led them to adopt violent behaviour. When it was my turn to comment on the film, I said I was surprised to see so many adolescents in so many Latin American countries express themselves in a violent way at one and the same time and, furthermore, against the military regimes supported by the United States. However, the audience was made up of people from the Belgian Catholic middle class who were thoroughly opposed to violence and incapable of analyzing the social contradictions other than in terms of social groups that should be brought together in a common effort. Curiously, some of them had fought against Nazism and in favour of national independence during the Second

84 Costa Gavras (Greece, 1933-). He is a literature graduate who majored from the Institute for Higher Film Studies of France, has directed numerous films and has received several awards at various film festivals in the world.
World War. Armed struggle seemed to be legitimate in those circumstances. The opposition to Latin American resistance was in large part due to the fear of communism and the perception of the role of the United States as a bulwark against this danger. The Marxist inspiration of the social actors who were resisting in Latin America and the Cuban revolution were seen as the Trojan horse of the Soviet Union in the continent, which contributed to building an ideological consistency in their views. The initiative of Che in Bolivia seemed to be the proof of this project for world hegemony.

There was much discussion in Louvain, as in Latin America, about the revolutionary issue. I came across attitudes that were not very realistic, idealizing situations of struggle or ignoring their concrete conditions. It is true that all revolutionary processes include an idealistic aspect through the self-dedication of the actors. However, dreams cannot take the place of reason.

The results of a revolutionary process cannot be foreseen; for example, why was it successful in Nicaragua and not in El Salvador? If, sometimes, the failures helped to create the future, as in the case of the attack on the Moncada barracks by Fidel Castro, or when Hugo Chávez said the three words “up until now” after the failure of his first revolt, it is nevertheless necessary to measure the costs and evaluate the possibilities of success. It is true that the sacrifices of a Che Guevara and a Camilo Torres have had a global impact and this is without price. But one might ask whether live actors could not serve more? To prolong an armed struggle in inappropriate circumstances can also be problematic for the revolutionary cause. All this has to be thought out in relation through an analysis of the concrete circumstances, not in a moment of idealistic exaltation but in function of the construction of a social and political future.

Bolivia was integrated into a study called Latautonomía, directed by the anthropologist Leo Gabriel. I happened to visit various places that had been studied, including Chapare in Bolivia. The Bolivian anthropologist Oscar Coca was in charge of the study (later he was appointed by Evo Morales as Minister of the Presidency). I

Oscar Coca. He is a Bolivian sociologist and the Minister for the Presidency of Evo Morales (2011-2012).
met him in Cochabamba and we journeyed together to the region. The road went along very high mountains before reaching the plains of Chapare. The traffic was intense because it was one of the main routes between Brazil and Chile. We visited a number of communities, called **sindicatos**, because they were people who had recently migrated from the regions of the copper mines. In spite of the heat, many women were still wearing their traditional woollen clothing and of course the **sombrero**. The people had suffered from violent repression because they were accused of drug trafficking. Along the way we came across several vehicles with darkened glass belonging to the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration), the North American agency tasked with combating drug smuggling.

In the meetings with the **sindicatos** they explained that coca cultivation was important (they were **cocaleros**) as it was used for the consumption of the indigenous people and not for making cocaine. They claimed that the violent repression that they had undergone was the pretext for a fight against the social movement that they represented and, ultimately, against the MAS (Movimiento hacia el Socialismo) of Evo Morales. In fact Evo had lent us his car to visit the region. He was taken up with organizing the ‘Olympic Games’ between the schools of the region. We went to see him when he was acting as the referee in a football match between the teams of two schools. He was clearly an active and recognized popular leader.

The road that crossed the whole valley was a centre of attraction: numerous agglomerations had sprung up, offering all kinds of services, with no planning and with all kinds of traffic, legal and illegal. It was said that drug trafficking was a reality, not direct, but because of the sale of large quantities of coca leaves that left the area, especially for the region of Santa Cruz, where the raw material was processed for illegal exportation.

While we were making for Cochabamba we followed a huge pipeline of natural gas. I could not help noticing the immense natural destruction that it caused, without any consideration for the environment. Trees were cut down and left, while plants became putrefied beside the road: the wounds of Mother Earth.
I took the opportunity of passing through La Paz on my return, where I was able to meet a cousin, Guillaume Roelants,86 an engineer who came to Bolivia as a volunteer for a Belgian NGO and who organized the exploitation of boron in the country. A North American multinational which controlled the sector in various countries tried to take over the business through Chilean affiliates. My cousin was accused of drug trafficking, as boron is used in the processing of coca into cocaine. He was able to prove that all the production was exported, via Chile. However, the corruption of the judges resulted in his being imprisoned in a high security prison. The employees of the factory organized under the control of the workers demonstrated in La Paz for him to be liberated. When I visited him, he was under house arrest, running the business by Internet and by telephone. When Evo Morales came to power, the case was resolved and he was put in charge of lithium production. Believing that governmental policy was too much influenced by the pressures of the multinationals, he later he left the job.

The Catholic University invited me for a lecture and I gave several interviews to newspapers, the State television and a Catholic radio station, run by a Jesuit. He was very critical of the new regime, defending democracy and media communications (in fact most of them were in the hands of big economic interests), but he specially questioned me about Venezuela and Hugo Chavez. He tried to get me to say it was a totalitarian, anti-democratic regime and dangerous for the Church. I managed to avoid falling into the trap.

Together with the network In Defence of Humanity of Venezuela, a seminar on communication was organized in Cochabamba. A charter plane had been arranged in Caracas that left five hours behind schedule. Evo Morales participated at the opening of the seminar at which I had been asked to speak. Vice president Álvaro García Linera,87 a good theoretical Marxist, made the

86 Guillaume Roelants du Vivier (Belgium, 1952-). He is a nuclear physicist from the University of Liege. He emigrated to Bolivia in the eighties and developed the boron industry in Bolivia. He has been in charge of the lithium industry in the decade of the 2010s.
87 Álvaro García Linera (Bolivia, 1962-). He majored in mathematics at UNAM of Mexico between 1981 and 1985. He participated in the natives’
closing speech. Some participants, with Minister Farruco Sesto and Carmen Bohórquez who had organized the event, returned via La Paz to report to Evo Morales on the main conclusions. I seized the occasion to tell him about the meeting that we had held not long before in Louvain-la-Neuve on the question of Bolivia’s access to the sea on the proposal of the Chilean sociologist Jorge Magasich. A year later, in 2009, four Chilean intellectuals, four Peruvians and four Bolivians, who had been invited by the Catholic University of Louvain, had worked for a week on a proposal to solve this conflict that had lasted for over a century and had cut Bolivia off all access to the sea. The result was a document entitled Acta Lovanienses, which proposed access to the port of Arica administered jointly by the three countries plus one hectare of land symbolically under Bolivian sovereignty.

In Evo’s office, with the help of his secretary, we found the final text of the Acta Lovanienses and were able to present it to the president. In 2014 I brought up the matter in a lunch in Quito with Rafael Correa in which there was also the Bolivian minister of foreign affairs David Choquehuanca. They were preparing the complaint to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. On this occasion I also met Judge Estrada, father of Nelson Estrada of the Solidarity Committee with Bolivia, of which I was president in Brussels and who helped greatly to promote this initiative.

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guerrilla of the 90s in Bolivia. Later, he studied sociology while he was imprisoned at San Pedro prison in the city of La Paz. He is a specialist in Marxism, and has been the Vice-President of Bolivia since 2006.

Jorge Magasich (Chile, 1952-). He is a Doctor of History, Art and Archeology from the Free University of Brussels in 2007. He is also a professor at the Institute of Higher Studies for Social Communications in Brussels and a Member of the Administrative Council of the Tri-continental Center at Louvaine-la-Neuve.

David Choquehuanca (Bolivia, 1961-). He did postgraduate studies in history and anthropology in 1990 under the auspices of CIDES-UMSA (Spanish acronym for Universidad Mayor de San Andrés: Major University of San Andrés) in La Paz. Between 2001 and 2002 he took higher diploma studies on the Rights of Native Peoples at the Universidad Cordillera. He has been the Chancellor of Bolivia in the government of Evo Morales.

Reynaldo Estrada. He was a judge in La Paz who was in charge of fighting against corruption in the magistracy. He was assassinated in 2014.
A year later I returned to La Paz with a delegation of intellectuals to support the referendum organized for Evo Morales. The academics included Álvaro García Linera, Ernesto Cardenal, the poet and sculptor of Nicaragua and former Minister for Culture in the Sandinista Government, and Frei Betto of Brazil. The national television organized a programme with three of our interventions. Betto and I left it to Ernesto to start. He talked for nearly 15 minutes almost exclusively in an attack on Daniel Ortega, the President of Nicaragua, accusing him of betraying the Sandinista Revolution, of top-down policies and authoritarianism. We were rather upset, as it was not the right occasion for making this kind of declaration and when our turn came we talked about the Bolivian situation and of the importance of its social and political process for the rest of the continent.

In 2010, after having participating in a meeting in Buenos Aires, at which Adolfo Pérez Esquivel was present, I returned through La Paz to make contacts for the preparation of the Earth Summit that was due to take place a month later in Cochabamba. The topic interested me particularly because of my studies for my book on agrofuels, which was published in 2009. Later on I shall describe this Summit but here I am going to discuss the details as it affected Bolivia.

During the inauguration of the event, in a stadium, Evo Morales gave a speech where he talked of the defence of nature and he made a comparison between the indigenous culture and that of the West. It was not a very fortunate intervention. He referred to the imported chickens which, because they had been injected with hormones as part of their diet, transform men's sexual tendencies, which immediately provoked the ire of the Brazilian producers who exported the chickens. He also compared the baldness of the white men with the abundance of the black hair of the indigenous people. The former French ecology minister, Brice Lalonde, who was completely bald, turned towards me and held out his hand to shake mine, as I did not have many hairs left myself. Of course, the international press took up these passages from the speech, ignoring the fundamental content of the initiative.

I had dinner with Senator Pimentel and his wife (who was English with the title of Lady and had been a photographer of
Queen Elizabeth) and with Héctor Córdoba and his wife, Roxana, both former students of Louvain University. We talked about the political evolution in the country. The Media Luna, a region in the north around Santa Cruz, had strongly resisted the process and organized a revolt, led by some recent migrants from Europe and supported by the large landowners, who could not accept the role that the indigenous peoples were playing in the new political situation. They were supported by the United States. Fortunately the initiative did not receive popular support and it was controlled. According to my companions, a large part of the urban middle class supported Evo Morales, thanks to programmes promoting small businesses. Shortly afterwards Pimentel was appointed Minister for Mines and Héctor Córdoba, Vice Minister. Roxana was later on Vice Minister for Labour.

Judge Estrada had been put in charge of fighting against corruption in the judiciary of La Paz. He told me that the situation was very delicate. In the past, various judges received two salaries, one from the Bolivian State and another from the DEA, the US anti-drug trafficking agency. In fact, the practice of illegal pay to the judges was very common. How to change this? These customs were part of the culture of the professional body. To fight them was even dangerous. Judge Estrada asked me to warn Evo about the corruption in the judiciary up to the Supreme Court and I was able to do so on the last day of the Summit, in a quiet moment. The president asked me how to get information about it and I replied that he should see Estrada. I made my excuses about intervening on such an issue, being a foreigner and he answered, “On the contrary, it is very useful.” Nevertheless, everyone was taking their distances from the government as they did not agree with the new orientations.

91 Héctor Córdoba. He is a Bolivian engineer who studied at the Catholic University in Louvain; he is the president of the association of foreign students in UCL, and was the Vice-minister for Productive Metallurgic and Mining Development. In 2011 he was appointed director of the Mining Corporation of Bolivia (COMIBOL, Spanish acronym for Corporación Minera de Bolivia) at La Paz and El Alto. At present he is a professor at the Catholic University of La Paz.
In 2010 Samir Amin was invited for a series of lectures by Vice President Álvaro García Linera. Amir proposed the organization in Bolivia of a South/South Forum on the response of the South to the crisis provoked by the North. He had also talked about this with Evo Morales during the World Social Forum of Dakar and both replies were very positive. However, Bolivia was not capable of funding such an event. In September 2011 the project had not made progress. I took the opportunity of a visit to Caracas to speak with the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Temir Porras,92 to know if the Government of Venezuela could provide the necessary funding. He replied that the Venezuelan Government was very interested in the initiative and suggested that it be organized in July 2012 in Caracas, at a key moment for the country. I replied that this response was very positive, but it was not possible to ‘steal’ the proposal from the Bolivians. I proposed that it be prepared in Ecuador, with the event taking place in Venezuela, winding up with the conclusions in Bolivia, together with a delegation of the participants from Caracas. In principle it was accepted. I also insisted that it should not be an event to support the presidential elections (of October 2012) but rather a medium and long-term project, with complete intellectual independence, even if coming to Venezuela at this period signified support for the revolutionary process.

Vice President Linera invited me, in February 2012, to present my book El Camino a la Utopía y el Bien Común de la Humanidad, that had been published by the vice presidency in collaboration with Ruth Casa Editorial. It was a series of essays on the changes in society, part of which had already been published in Cuba in a book entitled El Camino a la Utopía desde un tiempo de incertidumbre, together with more recent texts on the Common Good of Humanity and ‘Buen Vivir’. I had read in Le Monde Diplomatique and heard in Maracaibo the speech of Linera on the contradictions of the Bolivian revolution. He talked very openly about the tensions between the short and the long-term, between the social movements and the political movements, between

92 Temir Porras (Guyana, 1974-). He is the Vice-minister for Foreign Relations of the Venezuelan government.
defence of nature and economic growth. It was impressive to listen to a Vice President expressing himself so honestly on the political process in which he was involved. Nevertheless, having seen the various recent conflicts, like the one concerning the TIPNIS highway, I think he should have talked about a contradiction that was even greater; that of the development model. The model of the State is also arguable, which is much inspired by the Leninist concept, as presented in his writings.

My presentation was to be made as part of a seminar on *The World as Seen from Bolivia*. At my stopover in Lima on my way to La Paz I met Ignacio Ramonet and Wim Dierckxsens, who had also been invited. On the first day of the seminar, which was very rainy, we went to the national museum where the event was being held. In the street, close to the presidential palace, handicapped people were protesting against the government, calling for an increase in their allowances, and they had set up stalls. It was a very sad sight to see these people in wheelchairs confronting the anti-riot police with their helmets and shields. Ramonet suggested that I spoke about it on behalf of the international participants at the opening meeting, which was presided over by the Minister of Economy. It was quite embarrassing because it was impossible to ignore the presence close by of the handicapped people, but we did not want to upset the authorities that had invited us, without knowing what the problem was. Quoting the vice president, I talked of the tensions that occurred in the revolutionary process but that could become contradictions.

There were some very interesting presentations, particularly that of Xavier Abo, the Jesuit anthropologist, who talked of the *Suma Camaña*, the Aymara version of *Buen Vivir*. Other interventions dealt with the difficulties of the transformation process. I presented the idea of the Common Good of Humanity as an opposing paradigm to capitalism in the auditorium of the Central Bank of Bolivia.

Guillaume Roelants, my cousin, who was then in charge of the exploitation of lithium came to see me. He told me about the fight he had to keep the activities completely Bolivian because of the pressures by the multinationals. The country had made an investment of more than 900,000 USD and contracts could be made with foreign experts. He was not sure that everyone in
the government had the same view and he asked me to speak about it with the vice president and with Hector Córdoba, the current president of the National Commission on Mines. The latter came the following day to see me, clearly very tired. His work is very tough. There is great pressure from the multinationals. He personally took over the negotiations about the mines with the indigenous communities. The task was to recover the mines for the Bolivian nation. He had just succeeded in retaking an Australian gold mine. I encouraged him to remain firm in sticking to this policy and not giving way to pressures because this is an essential condition for genuine change.

A few weeks later, in the same year, a disturbance broke out among the workers in the lithium mines, who had very hard working conditions at an altitude of 4,000 metres. Guillaume Roelants sent me an e-mail, saying that the workers were completely exhausted and that they were on strike. But the government did not want to recognize the union that they had formed. He asked me to take the matter up urgently with Hector Córdoba, which I did immediately.

The last night of the seminar the vice president invited some of the participants to a dinner. He came late because his plane, arriving from Santa Cruz, had been delayed. From 11 p.m. until 1:30 in the morning we talked with him. Álvaro García Linera is a brilliant intellectual, very well versed in the works of Marx. His record is impressive; having fought with the guerrillas and spent several years in prison, he has published a number of books on the economic and social situation of the Latin American continent.

Línera is extremely pleasant and respectful towards the people with whom he is talking. As I was sitting beside him, I started to talk about the development model and the conflict about TIPNIS. He recalled the tensions of the revolution, according to the thesis of his book on the subject and he recognized that the government had committed many mistakes. He also explained the situation of the indigenous people in this region, dominated by the timber merchants and invaded by new Pentecostal religious movements and NGOs. They are not the original population, fighting for their ancestral rights anymore. There are many interests behind them. The government wants to extricate them from the influence of the landowners of Santa Cruz. In fact, as part of the tourist
route much of this TIPNIS road already exists. Only another 60 kilometres needed to be constructed. An alternative could be to build the road around the national park, but on one side it is impossible because there are floods three or four months out of the year and on the other side it would be too expensive because of the mountains.

I replied that the presence of the cocaleros, now in a majority in this region, could be an element in the decision of the government, because they are in favour of the road. This could be a key factor in the referendum that the government wants to organize. I also brought up the question of the ecological damage in part of Amazonia, which is already so devastated. He accepted the arguments, but did not change his opinion. He said that –as it is a Brazilian company that would do the work– the interests of Brazil in the matter are not a determining factor: Brazil is 300 km away. Afterwards we talked about the lithium and he assured me that the government would support the position of Guillaume Roelants in this matter.

Thinking over this conversation in light of what is happening in Ecuador, I feel that there really are contradictions and not only tensions between the two models of development. Adopting ‘developmentalism’ as a solution on the one hand, and starting a process of transition towards a radically anti-capitalist paradigm on the other. According to the vice president, the capitalism that we must fight still has at least another 100 years of life and that we have to adapt to this concrete situation, trying to improve the lot of the people. This means that the transition is more of an adaptation of the system to new demands than steps towards making a different choice. It is always difficult to summarize viewpoints without oversimplifying them, but sometimes the facts speak for themselves. Clearly, the immense achievement of the Bolivian revolution cannot be denied, nor the importance of the recognition of the indigenous people. At the Latin American and international levels, support for the political regime of Evo Morales in Bolivia is indispensable. The internal resistance is also important; on condition that it is not being corporatist and that it envisages a struggle for a new paradigm.

I returned to La Paz at the beginning of April 2014, accompanying a delegation of five people from the social movements of South
Korea. This was the result of a conversation with Evo Morales, when he came on an official visit to Ecuador. He had approved the idea of such a visit, when I had shown my surprise at the fascination exercised by South Korea, a country that I have been visiting regularly for 45 years and that I considered to be one of the toughest societies in the world. I made contacts with my Korean friends to put a delegation together and the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation financed the project. It was not easy to arrange but it took place.

The Koreans spent a week in Ecuador and in Bolivia, their programme being organized by the NGO directed by Pilar Lizarraga. There were meetings and talks on Korea with the various social movements, NGO groups and university people, in which the situation of Bolivia was also discussed. Interviews were given at La Razón and for a popular radio in the town of El Alto (4,100 metres above sea-level). One member of the delegation had to return because he could not support the high altitude. The Koreans from the worker and peasant movements explained the ‘Korean development miracle’ and the capitalist agrarian reform, which was not to help the peasants. These then became indebted, resulting in three suicides a day, because of forced industrialization; dependency on foreign capital and technology; a place where knowledge was put at the service of big capital. Meanwhile efficiency values had invaded the education system and had also produced a high rate of suicides of young people. In sum, the Korean model was not a solution for Latin America.

During this period there was conflict with the mining cooperatives, with the miners blocking the main roads of the city, particularly those connecting La Paz and the airport of Los Altos. They were demanding the reintegration of two paragraphs into the law on mining, one on privileged access to water and the other about the possibility to subcontract to multinational firms, which the parliament had eliminated. This was thus very important because they produced 60% of the mining wealth of the country. They were not real cooperatives but small and medium capitalists, little concerned with the ecological conditions of production or the working conditions of the labour force, while enjoying the privileges, particularly fiscal ones, of cooperatives. Politically they had supported Evo Morales and represented, together with their
families, several hundred thousand votes—which, in an election year, were crucial. It was not easy to solve the problem but finally the government established conditions, both for access to water and for sub-contracting.

A parallel programme had been organized for me, with interviews with journals and radios, talks with the Research Centre of the Vice-President and with the Escuela de Gestión Pública (the equivalent to the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales, for training state employees in Ecuador). A number of the lectures were recorded for training activities in Bolivia on the concept of the State; on the Common Good of Humanity; on South Korea; also for the other ALBA countries. They told me that a recording that I had made in Cuba on Liberation Theology had been projected during a session of the Bolivian parliament. In the Vice president’s Research Centre, they were talking about the need to change paradigms and the inadequate regulation of the capitalist system, with the danger of an implicit return of the right within the political project of progressive regimes. A recording was made also to serve as the basis for a publication.

I was invited by the Social and Political Sciences Faculty to give a lecture on the role of political sciences in the process of Latin American transformation in front of an auditorium full of students and academic authorities. I insisted on the importance of critical thinking and not only on the role served by the social sciences. The session concluded by an official act of recognition of my contribution to the social sciences of the continent and the award of a commemorative plaque by the university, which I was not at all expecting. The authorities were wearing very formal clothes and I had no tie and wore a simple jacket against the cold.

Various friends of mine who had had important positions in the government and whom I met at mealtimes had left their jobs because of their disagreement on the fundamental orientation of policies, considering that the concessions made to multinational corporations were too great and unnecessary, especially in the mining sector. They had not become dissidents, but were now involved in other activities. They were prudent in their speech in order not to become victims of repression.
To approach Brazil means entering a whole different continent, not only geographically but also socially, culturally and spiritually. The first time that I landed in Rio de Janeiro, at the Santos Dumont airport, the only one that existed in the 1950s, I was dazzled by the sight both of the Sugarloaf Mountain and of the Corcovado, with the immense statue of Christ the Redeemer on its summit. To see the original guardians of the bay was like a dream that had never been quite real for me, apart from seeing them postcards and hearing the stories of travellers. I never imagined that these discoveries would mark the beginning of more than 30 years of travel to this country.

In the south, there are the *gauchos* with their huge herds of cattle and a calm sense of superiority over the rest of the nation. It is a region of hills and valleys, where one could imagine oneself in Bavaria or the Carpathians. A region of plains that have been invaded by plantations of eucalyptus, but where there are still enclaves of the Guarani people. It was at the origin of the great extensions of cultivation, led by the Messianic movements of the 19th century, when capitalism began to eliminate peasant agriculture.

At the centre of the country, there are the great crop rotations of the state of São Paulo such as coffee, sugarcane, citrus fruit, with their respective economic crises. This gigantic metropolis is eating up its surroundings and accumulating shantytowns as annexes to the car industry and commercial centres. Skyscrapers usher in modernity and there is a prestigious university campus.

A little further up, the state of Minas Gerais saw the first primitive stage of mining, which is well described by Frei Betto in his novel *Minas de Oro* (Rocco: Rio de Janeiro, 2011) where Indians and black and poor whites constituted the labour force, reduced to being beasts of burden.

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93 Santos Dumont (Brazil, 1873-1932). He was an aviation pioneer, an inventor and an engineer. He was the first man to take off on an airplane propelled by an aeronautical engine.
In the northeast, plagued by drought, the memory is still fresh of Lampião, the bandit benefactor of the poor, and of Father Cícero,\(^9_4\) founder of towns, venerated by the popular masses and considered a heretic by the Catholic Church. The plantations extend over hundreds of kilometres, and its population, short in height and bronzed in face, suffer from hunger. This is where Julião's peasant leagues started, fighting against a mixture of the rural feudalism embodied by the 'colonels' (large landowners) and capitalist monocultures.

The Portuguese metropolis, before transferring its imperial power to the American continent in the 19\(^{th}\) century, left behind beautiful places like the centre of Salvador of Bahía, Ouro Preto and Olinda. The cultural diversity, including the rituals of the Amazonian Indians and the strong legacy of African traditions, together with characteristics of the Iberian art of living, has created a new humanity, both soft and cruel, rich with sounds and rhythms, sensual and romantic, that culminate both in African dancing and spiritualism, as well as the carnival and football. It is also a heritage of humanity.

The city of Belén, bordered by a lazy branch of a tributary of the Amazonian river, is the link between the North and the mythical jungle or, rather, what used to be the jungle of the original inhabitants. Immensely green, that would take hours for a plane to fly over, the jungle is however increasingly looking like the face of an old Indian that has been destroyed by the years, criss-crossed by the wrinkles of a hard life and with warts all over his dry skin. But it is a face full of a quiet dignity.

The exuberance of all possible greens, dark and brilliant, light and heavy, high like the arrogant chestnut trees and low like the abundant ferns; happy or sad, silent or full of the songs

\(^{94}\) Father Cícero (Brazil, 1844-1934). He was ordained in 1870 and was the parish priest in the city of Juazeiro, where he has had great influence for supposed miracles. He was condemned by the Catholic Church, but was considered a saint by the town people. He made contact with Lampião and the cangaço (a Robin Hood type guerrilla in northeast Brazil) with the aim of legalizing them. The growth of the city was very influenced by his presence and reputation. He was canonized by the Brazilian Independent Catholic Apostolic Church.
of thousands of insects and birds; friendly or terrifying; with immense palm leaves and tiny grasses: it all seems like the fruit of an overflowing creation.

Little by little, the oil exploration in the west has extended southwards from Colombia to Bolivia, passing through Ecuador and Peru, destroying thousands of hectares of forest in Putumayo. It brought about the renunciation of the path-breaking project which was not to use the crude oil in Yasuni Park in Ecuador, as well as the ecological catastrophe of Texaco (Chevron) in the same country, resulting in wars between Peru and Ecuador, and between Paraguay and Bolivia (in the Chaco).

To the south-east and still more to the north of Brazil, creating lunar landscapes in the middle of the jungle, mines continue to be developed, transforming mountains into huge hollows, contaminating the rivers and expelling the original inhabitants from their territories. Railway lines like broad veins stretch for kilometres, resembling an old body that has been consumed by time. It is true that all this has been creating wealth, contributing to the increase in the GNP, transforming the country into the provider of the raw materials for the development of strong and emerging economies. The *garimpos*[^95] (gold-diggers) who quarrel to obtain the tiniest nugget of gold and then waste their earnings on gambling and prostitutes contribute to the consolidation of the reserves of the banks and the states.

From the Mato Grosso do Sul, the monocultures of soya and palm trees have created very wide corridors penetrating into the forests, while the sugarcane pushes the agricultural frontier ever further away. It is said that to save the necessary climate to produce ‘green energy’ and Brazil is ahead in this field. However, meat consumption, a sign of dietary change, requires more feed for livestock at world level. Monoculture is also part of the ‘modern agriculture’ as in other countries like Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia and they enter into the exchange of the ‘productive matrix’.

[^95]: The “garimpos” or “garimpeiros” are miners who live in infrahuman conditions and risk their lives by using equipment such as hydraulic monitors in the search of alluvium, and by using mercury as a substance to amalgamate gold. Both of these uses can seriously damage the environment and health of communities.
In the centre of the Amazonian jungle, the exploitation of timber, legal or illegal, is destroying the great trees at a rhythm that makes replacement impossible. Thousands of trunks float down on rivers or are taken away in huge lorries have difficulty in navigating the various ‘slices’ of the Pan American Highway. Hydroelectric companies are constructing dams on the rivers to produce clean energy by flooding hundreds or thousands of hectares thus displacing indigenous peoples and transforming the landscape.

Envisaged by IIRSA (the Plan for the Integration of Communications in South America) the roads, railways and water transport system were established in the interests of the multinationals, under the auspices of the international financial bodies; this Plan is gradually being implemented. The Manaos-Manta road (in Ecuador) will give Brazil better access to the Pacific Ocean. The road through the TIPNIS national park in Bolivia will help integrate the indigenous peoples into the regions in expansion (particularly the coca farmers of Chapare that are migrating there), but at the same time will reduce the distance between Brazil and Chile.

In sum, each country has ‘its own good reasons’ to use the natural wealth of Amazonia. The multinational corporations, looking to the future, have bought 73 million hectares of land in the Brazilian Amazonia for speculative reasons. FAO stated in a 2014 report that within 40 years there will be no more Amazonian forest, just a savannah with a few woods here and there.

There are forces in Brazil that are resisting this model: intellectuals, social movements, indigenous peoples, political actors. However they are not sufficiently strong to counter the power of the ‘ruralists’ in parliament and the technocrats of the various parties including the Workers’ Party (PT) –not to mention the power and the lobbying of companies like Petrobras, Valle S.A. and Odebrecht. Many people now understand that

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96 A Brazilian multinational company founded in 1942 which operates in the mining, logistics, iron and steel energy and oil sectors.
97 A Brazilian aggregate of businesses in the fields of engineering and construction, founded by the engineer Norberto Odebrecht in Salvador de Bahía in 1944. It also participates in manufacturing chemical and petrochemical products.
it is no longer just a question of fighting dependency, but also of starting an internal struggle against a development model that claims both to have social principles and to develop the productive forces through the capitalist model.

Various experiences have taught me the fascinating reality of Brazil and I confess that I still have a lot to learn. What is important is to go along the paths of its social, cultural and religious life, with wide open eyes and an understanding of the sheer ‘gigantiñha’ size of the country.

I have talked about Brazil in other parts of this book, concerning my first visit there in 1954 and Vatican Council II. Obviously, I shall not repeat these passages here, but limit myself to my encounters with its intellectuals and with its religious actors, ending with its social movements and political actors.

There has been a tradition of humanist and social thinking since its early days, although it was not very radical. The odd thing is that the Brazilian society has been the most unequal of the whole continent. Moreover, Marxism has not had such an impact as in other countries. An urban guerrilla was led by Carlos Marighella during the 1960s and, after the military coup of 1964, radical movements developed, above all by students and landless peasants. However, the general orientation of Brazilian culture has tended to be for compromise.

I was lucky to have had particularly interesting contacts with Brazilian thinkers and social and religious actors. In one of my first visits to Brazil I met with Darcy Ribeiro the anthropologist and educator whose name has been given to the University of Brasilia. In those days, in the sixties, he was particularly concerned with studies on youth and education. He had carried out a survey but he was not very conversant with the methodology for processing

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98 Carlos Marighella (Brazil, 1911-1969). He was a Marxist revolutionary and a writer who belonged to the Communist Party in his country. He was imprisoned and tortured several times by Brazilian dictators. He wrote about Che Guevara.

99 Darcy Ribeiro (Brasil, 1922-1997). He was an intellectual, a politician and an anthropologist from the University of Sao Pablo who worked for Unesco and OIT. He was the creator and chancellor of the University of Brasilia, and authored works on education, sociology and anthropology.
its data, so he asked me to work with him on this task. It was my first direct contact with the social sciences in Brazil. He was influenced by the thinking of the US philosopher John Dewey but he tried to understand the specific situation of the Brazilian society and culture and thus undertook empirical research. He was also interested in studying the indigenous peoples.

Darcy Ribeiro represented a modernizing influence on Brazilian culture—progressive no doubt but linked to the model of the Enlightenment. It was a contribution to cultural progress in Brazil to introduce the great apogee of Western culture. It was a very different approach to that of Paulo Freire’s.

At the end of 2007, I was invited to the department of social policies of the Darcy Ribeiro University of Brazil. It was odd that in Brazil, the Social Services faculties had a good number of progressive specialists, with a certain Marxist training, while those of the Social Sciences were more traditional. The former were making a reflection on social work and they asked me to provide them with an analytical framework.

In my visit on that occasion I happened to meet the Bishop of Aracaju, who was responsible for the YCW in the Northeast region of Brazil. The movement was to play an important role in the country for its potential in renovating Catholicism. However, in the following period, its members took off in almost opposite directions. Some followed a reformist approach to social action and an institutional approach in religious matters, while others were at the origin of the basic ecclesiastic communities and Liberation Theology. The Bishop of Aracaju was among the former.

I also visited Recife and then Natal, whose Bishop, called Eugênio Sales, had undertaken social action around the so-called Movement...

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100 John Dewey (U.S.A., 1859-1952). He was a philosopher, a psychologist and a pedagogue from the Universities of Chicago and Columbia. He has been considered the most important U.S.A. philosopher of the first half of the 20th century.

101 Cardinal Eugênio Sales (Brazil, 1920-2012). He was the Archbishop in Rio de Janeiro, and was created Cardinal in 1969, participating in the sessions of Vatican Council II and in the conclave of 1978 in which John Paul II was elected. He collaborated with the military during the military coup in his country and also condemned the Liberation Theology.
of Natal, which concerned peasants, young people and other groups. On two occasions I was able to participate in their activities and give talks. In addition I participated in research with the São Paulo sociologist Cândido Procópio\textsuperscript{102} on the Natal experience within the framework of a broader study of the Federation of Religious and Social Studies (FERES) on the social action of the Christian Churches in the Third World. On the one hand I was in agreement with Bishop Sales that social work should be well organized and deal with real problems, but on the other, I differed from him on theological issues, as he was very conservative. Also his attitude was mainly concentrated on the fight against communism, without a real questioning of fundamental social structures.

In this period I remember giving a lecture on the social action of the Church to a student group in Rio de Janeiro. They were very sceptical, especially about the Movement of Natal, arguing that it was a strategy by the Church to gain followers and recover the hegemony that they were losing over society. In fact, to a large extent they were right. This strategy corresponded to a specific conception of the role of the Church; it should get power in society in order to be able to evangelize. The creation of the Jesuit order in the 16th century at the time of the Counter-Reformation also had this perspective and in the contemporary period, the most typical case is that of Opus Dei. Dom Eugênio Sales was later made Archbishop of Rio and a cardinal and he became the most reactionary Bishop in the country at that time, allying himself with the military of the coup d'état of 1964. He condemned Liberation Theology and prevented its theologians from teaching. Such was the case particularly of Clodovis Boff,\textsuperscript{103} who had done his doctorate on this thesis in Louvain. Later, in fact, Clodovis changed his position, to the point that his brother, the theologian

\textsuperscript{102} Procópio Cândido Ferreira de Camargo. He is a Brazilian sociologist specialized in the Sociology of Religion and in population studies.

\textsuperscript{103} Clodovis Boff (Brazil, 1944-). He is a Doctor of Theology from the Catholic University of Louvain, as well as a theologian, a philosopher, a writer and a professor. He was separated from teaching by Cardinal Eugenio Sales for adhering to the Liberation Theology. His return to classical theology was criticized by his brother Leonardo.
Leonardo Boff,\textsuperscript{104} wrote him an open letter to reproach him for such a change of mind.

Cândido Procópio, with whom I had collaborated on the study of the Churches in development and who carried out research on the Movement of Natal of the Catholic Church, was a friend of Fernando Henrique Cardoso\textsuperscript{105} –also a sociologist who became president of the Republic between 1995 and 2003– and I was introduced to him. He was part of that group of social scientists who had developed the theory of dependency and which had a Marxist approach. Jean Labbens, the French sociologist, at that time the Unesco representative in Brazil, managed to save from the military dictatorship some of the dependency sociologists and economists, including Cardoso; partly through research centres funded from outside and partly by sending them to France.

I visited Fernando Henrique in São Paulo several times in the 1970s. One day he took me to see an estate near the city that belonged to a friend of his whom he greatly admired. It was a cattle ranch, very well organized, as modern as an industry. For Cardoso it was a real model. I was amazed because I saw that the workers, although they earned more than the poor peasants in the state of São Paulo, were really exploited. This ranch was typical of the productivist capitalist model. Of course I did not know very much about the rural economy at that time but it shocked me that Cardoso thought that this experience was a model for the future. Years later, in 1995, when he became president of his country, not only did he abandon the dependency theory that he had created but he declared that it was necessary to forget everything that he had written at that time. He adopted the vision of the capitalist modernization of Brazil and, particularly, of the rural areas.

\textsuperscript{104} He is considered one of the main sources of inspiration of the Liberation Theology.

\textsuperscript{105} Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazil, 1931-). He is a sociology graduate from the University of São Paulo, as well as a sociologist, a politician, a political scientist, a philosopher and a professor from the University of São Paulo, in the University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne. He was an officer for CEPAL, a senator of the republic (1983-1992), and was also a minister in several ministries and the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil from 1995 to 2002.
In the 1970s I was also in contact with Josué de Castro. It was very enriching to work and discuss with him because it helped me to discover the northeast of Brazil. From him I learnt, not only about the hunger cycle, but also about the regular famines that resulted from the droughts that affected this region, with all their implications.

It was a different kind of encounter with Amoroso Lima, a Catholic intellectual who was concerned about the Catholic presence in Brazilian society that he saw was becoming increasingly secularized and he sought contacts with European Catholic circles. We exchanged correspondence for some time. He had a social concern that was the result of the social doctrine of the Church and he struggled to introduce social Catholicism into Brazil.

I also met the sociologist Florestan Fernandes, an excellent analyst of the structure of society in terms of class but with specific reference to the country. In 2009, I participated with a paper on the role and methodology of a training centre, at the inauguration of the Training School of the MST near São Paulo that bears his name.

**Political Experiences**

A literary contact was made with Conrad Detrez, the Belgian/Brazilian writer whom I had met when he was studying in the Latin American seminary in Louvain. He had participated in the Carlos Marighela armed movement and he had been

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106 Amoroso Lima (Brazil, 1893-1983). He was a writer, a literary critic and a Catholic intellectual leader who was a professor of Sociology at the Teacher Training College of Rio de Janeiro, of Political Economics at the Law School, and of Brazilian Literature at the University of Brazil and at the Catholic University. He was the Vice-chancellor of the University of the Federal District and the president of the D. Vidal Center between 1928 and 1968. He adopted the pseudonym of Trísão de Ataíde in 1919 and wrote under that name.

107 Conrad Detrez (Belgium, 1937-1985). He studied philosophy and theology at the Catholic University of Louvain. Upon undergoing a religious, philosophical and moral crisis, he interrupted his studies and renounced to take the orders. He emigrated to Brazil in 1962, received the Goncourt Literature Prize in Paris, and in 1982 he was appointed the cultural attaché in Managua.
expelled by the military regime. When he returned to Belgium, at the end of the 1960s, he had no means of subsistence and he wanted to write. As I was director of a series for the Vie Ouvrière publishers in Brussels –formerly the Editions Jocistes that later became the Editions Couleur Livres– I suggested that he wrote a book on the revolutionary movements in Latin America. He had somewhat bitter memories of his own experience, partly for his lack of political maturity and partly because of his ethical requirements. However, he had first-hand knowledge and what is called a ‘fine pen’.

Later, Detrez published another autobiography, L’herbe à bruler (Calman Levy, Paris, 1977) which in 1978 was awarded the Renaudot literary prize in France. He received French nationality from President François Mitterand and was designated cultural attaché at the French Embassy in Nicaragua after the Sandinista Revolution. I met him there again. He was very critical of Sandinismo, partly because of the pessimism that he had developed from his Brazilian experience and perhaps influenced by the illness that took his life prematurely. The trajectory of his life impressed me, as he moved from a religious ideal towards a political commitment that left him very sceptical about the human condition, religious faith and political convictions. I talked a lot with him, without being able to rid him of his deep disillusion. His writing talent was his most positive asset but it was not enough to give him a cause for hope.

The first time I learnt about Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was through a trade unionist from São Paulo called Gilberto Carvalho who in the 1970s gave a lecture in CETRI on the situation in his country. Gilberto had studied in France and afterwards became the private secretary in Lula’s government. He was then minister of the presidency of Dilma Rousseff.

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108 Gilberto Carvalho. He is a Brazilian politician and a philosophy graduate from the Federal University of Paraná. He is a trade unionist with different positions in the Workers’ Party (PT: Spanish acronym for Partido de los Trabajadores). He was the head of the Cabinet during Lula’s candidacy campaign for the presidency, and a private secretary to President Lula and a Minister for the Presidency of Dilma Rousseff.

109 In 2003 Lula was elected President of Brazil and Gilberto Carvalho became his private secretary and later on minister of the Presidency of Dilma Rousseff.
Dilma Rousseff. Later on, when I was visiting São Paulo, Gilberto suggested that I meet with Lula and I did so at a political meeting in a popular neighbourhood. Afterwards I would meet him in Nicaragua, in Mexico, in Brazil at the São Paulo Forum that he had founded and where the Latin American left-wing parties met together.

Another friend was Marco Aurelio García. We had met at an event in Brussels and he gave a lecture at CETRI. He was also involved in the setting up of the Forum of São Paulo and as I too participated in its meetings, we met on many occasions up until Lula’s rise to power. After the latter’s victory, he was appointed the Presidential Adviser on Foreign Affairs. I met him again in Brasilia in 2014 at the MST congress. His positions tended to be social-democratic, which led to much debate between us. A man of conviction, the deviation of part of the Workers Party (PT) greatly affected him. He promoted a policy of economic and social dialogue.

In 1994, during Lula’s second presidential campaign, Gilberto Carvalho asked Geneviève Lemercinier and me to analyze the statistics in the election polls, as we had previously done in Nicaragua. We stayed in São Paulo for one month to do this and we saw that there was only 6% of undecided voters, whereas there had been 30% in Nicaragua in 1990. We investigated the data using the factorial analysis method to see if it was advisable to obtain more information on this group. We discovered that 5% were those who were the poorest, the illiterate, and the inhabitants of marginal neighbourhoods which meant that they were far removed from politics. Surviving in destitution does not make for much political analysis. Thus most of this group were probably unreachable in the short term and it was not worthwhile trying to involve them in the electoral process. Training in political awareness requires having an adequate material base, which is not changed by an electoral campaign. Thus, as most of the polls predicted, Lula lost the elections of 1994.

Marco Aurelio García (Brazil, 1941-). He is a professor and a politician member of the Workers Party, and an adviser on Foreign Affairs to presidents Lula and Dilma Rousseff. In 2007 he became the presidential adviser on international affairs.
On the last day of the electoral campaign there was a party in São Paulo for all those who had helped in the campaign. It was a very jolly occasion, with a show in which there was a black lady dancing in traditional dress, with two coconuts on her breasts. As I was sitting in one of the front rows she took me to dance with her. Geneviève, who was seated beside me was worried and said, “No, you can’t do that!” However, in the particular situation, in spite of having little dancing experience, I had no choice but to accept.

Towards the end of his mandate, Cardoso came on an official visit to Belgium and I received an invitation to the dinner offered by the Belgian Government. I hesitated about accepting, but finally went. First, there was a presentation of the 125 people who had been invited who were mostly parliamentarians, bankers and academics. Cardoso remembered me and greeted me affectionately, as did his wife. I told him that I had recently been to his country and when he asked me what I had done there, I replied that I had gone to assist in the campaign for Lula. He was quite astonished.

For the dinner there were various tables and invitees had received a card indicating their places. Strangely enough they had put me at the top table with Cardoso and his wife; Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene and his wife; the Brazilian ambassador in Belgium and his Belgian counterpart in Brazil. Afterwards, the latter, who was responsible for organizing the dinner, told me that when he was a young diplomat in Brazil he dealt with their scholarship holders who were coming to our country, many of whom came to Louvain and some to work with me. He said that he thought that, as President Cardoso had spent the whole day meeting with bankers, businessmen and politicians, for the evening he could have rather a different conversation with a fellow sociologist and for that reason had organized the table in this way.

I was thus able to talk for two and a half hours with Cardoso. Of course we spoke about many topics, politics among them. He stated that he was not a neoliberal and that he had never privatized the oil. (Later, he virtually did so) I was curious to see that a waiter, during the whole evening, kept coming to give notes to the Prime Minister and I imagined it was about some political matter. But when he received the last note, he cried out, “They’ve won!” It was Brujas, his favourite football team.
In 2003, I was invited to Lula’s installation, which took place in Brasilia. It was a very impressive ceremony because there were great hopes of him and all the Latin American leaders were there. It was the first of January 2004. After a meeting in the congress, we were brought to the governmental palace by an underground corridor amidst enormous confusion. Suddenly, among the throng, I found myself beside Fidel. I said “Happy New Year!” and he returned my greetings, while trying to extricate himself from the crowd. After some words by Lula, there was the hand-over ceremony from Cardoso to the new president. I was sitting beside Evo Morales. When Cardoso fastened his presidential insignia on to Lula, I said to Evo Morales who was next to me, “In three years’ time, in Bolivia!” He laughed but, in fact, he was already elected president of his country in 2006. Also with us was Tabaré Vázquez\(^\text{111}\) who became the president of Uruguay in 2005. Before leaving, Cardoso passed in front of us and I greeted him, saying, “Now are you going back to sociology?” He answered in the affirmative. In fact, since that time he has been keeping academic contact with universities in France and the United States.

There was an amusing incident when Lula and his vice president arrived at the Congress building. They were standing up in an old convertible Rolls Royce, which had been a present from the Queen of England to a previous president. A horse of one of the escorts got in front of the car, which had to brake suddenly so that the president and vice president fell back onto their seats. Then, to get the car going again it was necessary to push it. The public and the officials were dying with laughter.

In 2007 Gilberto Carvalho, who was then the private secretary of Lula, put me in contact with Patrus Ananias de Sousa,\(^\text{112}\) who was then Minister for Social Development and the Fight against Hunger. He was a progressive Catholic, inspired by French thinkers of the 1950s, like Jacques Maritain. At the entrance to his office

\(^{111}\)Tabaré Vázquez (Uruguay, 1940-). He graduated as a General Practitioner and later as a specialist in Oncology and Radiotherapy. He was the President of Uruguay from 2005 to 2010 and at present since 2015.

\(^{112}\)Patrus Ananias de Sousa (Brazil, 1952-). He is a lawyer and a politician who was the Minister for Social Affairs during Lula’s presidency, and for Rural Welfare during Dilma Rousseff’s presidency.
in Brasilia he had a crucifix at least two metres high. He had organized family and zero hunger subsidies, among other things, and he did so very efficiently at a decentralized level. I was able to witness how these social programmes functioned in Olinda, one of the old colonial cities that today have become a suburb of Recife. I knew the communist mayor who had integrated these programmes into a general social policy. It is in the cathedral of Olinda that Dom Hélder Câmara is buried.

Patrus Ananias received me very warmly. Our conversation concentrated on these programmes. He explained that he did not consider them as ‘assistance programmes” because they were linked with schooling and regular medical care for needy families. He followed Lula’s orientations and I recalled what Gilberto had told me: to understand Lula, one had to remember that he was a trade unionist in the metallurgical (automobile) industry. For him there were two main values: first, efficiency and second, social justice. Efficiency meant capitalism to produce, and social justice, the redistribution of part of the social product. This seemed an accurate definition of the position of President Lula, who favoured an agro-export model as well as industry and local banks that functioned according to the principle of efficiency and also organized redistribution through social programmes.

I talked for a long time with Patrus Ananias as, although I considered that the programmes were effectively reducing poverty and were also well organized, I wondered about their relevance in a society that was not changing its structures. They produced clients rather than social actors and in this way they did not go beyond social assistance, as they did not bring about a deeper transformation. I felt that he could not understand this, as his vision of society was typical of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church –that is, that all strata of society should collaborate in bringing about the common good. He was not able to see things in terms of social structures and classes. This is what caused the two incidents that I had with Lula at the World Social Forum.

The first was in 2003 in Porto Alegre when we were having a meeting between the international council of the World Social Forum and Lula. The council did not agree with Lula participating at the Davos Forum. During the meeting, before Lula left for
Switzerland, I gave Marco Aurelio García, who was accompanying him, a note that I asked him to give to Lula so that he could read it in the plane. The message said, “Mr. President, do not forget that if there were an international criminal court concerned with economic crimes, at least half the people whom you are going to meet at Davos would be in the dock on trial”.

Some years later, in 2007, the same thing happened again. We were in Porto Alegre in a meeting of the WSF international council with Lula, on the evening that he was leaving for Davos. The council asked me to pose the first question to the Brazilian president. I asked him, “Mr. President, with all respect for your status as Head of State, I would like to ask a rather tough question. In Davos, will you make the same speech that you did four years ago when the richest people in the world gave you an ovation, or will you give them a message from the Social Forum of Porto Alegre? Because it is difficult to serve two masters.” And I recalled the note that I had sent him on the previous occasion. Visibly irritated, Lula’s reply lasted almost half an hour. In essence he said that he always made the same speech, at the United Nations, in Davos and in Porto Alegre, which was about fighting against hunger and that his aim was that, after the four years of his mandate, all Brazilians could eat three times a day. Afterwards he calmed down and he hugged me. Although he was very affable I thought his response was very poor because to put Davos at the same level as the United Nations showed, to say the least, a lack of vision. That same day, before this meeting, the French/German television channel ARTE asked me in an interview what I thought of Lula’s journey to Davos. I had replied that it was politically ingenuous.

At the end of 2009, a film came out, Lula, the Son of Brazil, made by the same TV channel. It was a very interesting biographical documentary. It also showed the arrival of Lula at Davos in 2003 and his intervention in a panel run by a US Republican senator, in which Bill Gates was also present. Lula spoke there of the fight against hunger that could perhaps be financed by a tax on

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113 Bill Gates (U.S.A., 1955-). He is a businessman and a computer expert who co-founded Microsoft Software Company. He has one of the largest fortunes in the world (79 billion USD).
international financial transfers. In this assembly of businessmen there was no reaction at all, just silence. Then Lula suggested that a tax on the sale of armaments could be considered and an elderly gentleman said, “Hmm.” When Lula started to say that he came from Porto Alegre, from the World Social Forum, the US senator interrupted him saying that he did not want to hear anything about it, and he gave the floor to Bill Gates. Lula, who was listening to the interpretation, realized a bit later that the senator had cut him off, thus ending his intervention. This part of the film concluded with the interview I had given them when they asked me about the visit of Lula to Davos and I replied that it was ‘politically ingenuous’.

When in 2008 I was invited to a colloquium at the political and social sciences department at the State University of Montes Claros in Minas Gerais, it was Patrus Ananias who introduced my lecture. For almost 15 minutes, in the name of the Brazilian Government he expressed appreciation of the work I had done in the country, which he recounted, from my relationship with Hélder Câmara to my participation in Lula’s electoral campaign, as well as other more recent events. This really surprised me as I did not expect such remarks made in the name of the Government. I think he was just being kind.

The Landless Workers Movement (MST)

For years, I had been a friend of the economist João Pedro Stedile, who was of peasant origin and one of the founders and mentors of the MST. When I arrived in São Paulo, he often lodged me in his house. In the middle of the 1990s he invited me to the Brazil Forum against the Foreign Debt, to be held in Rio de Janeiro, asking me to talk about the Third World foreign debt. The meeting took place in the Tiradentes Square, named after the hero of the independence struggles, who was a dental surgeon—hence his nickname—and who was executed in the 19th century. This meeting was organized by

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114Tiradentes (Brazil, 1746-1792). Originally registered as Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, he was a Brazilian dental surgeon, a military, a miner, a merchant and a political activist. He is a hero of national independence.
various social movements, political parties and the Land Commission of the Episcopal Conference. We analyzed Brazil’s external debt, the proportion of it that was ‘odious’—according to international law it was not necessary to pay it—and the interest resulting from the fact that the debt had been paid several times. Also participating was Kiva Maidanik, the Soviet economist I have already mentioned.

João Pedro and I arrived together from São Paulo. The night before we left there was a concert of Chico Buarque, whom I met with João Pedro. His songs, that were socially critical, truly expressed the cries of the poorest. He was part of that generation of artists who were engaged with the popular struggles and that contributed to the cultural dimension of the desire for social change. From the Cuban revolution until the Sandinistas of Nicaragua; not forgetting the resistance to the dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile; the armed revolts of Guatemala and El Salvador; and the clandestine movements of Argentina and Uruguay, all of them had their poets, writers and singers that nourished peoples’ souls and maintained their hopes. The religious dimension also played an important role, inspired by Liberation Theology.

That evening, in São Paulo, the public consisted mainly of young people from the middle class and the bourgeoisie and they applauded his songs with enthusiasm. Perhaps it was more for the music than for the meaning. However, it formed part of the Brazilian culture: exuberant, warm, but always ready to find a ‘jeito’ (way) of overcoming contradictions. After the concert, almost at midnight, a football match was organized, discreetly so as not to mobilize a large public, between Chico Buarque and his musicians and the members of the MST with João Pedro Stedile. This, too, is Brazil. That day I remembered that, during Vatican Council II, Dom Hélder Câmara told me that nobody could understand Brazil without knowing about the carnival and football. The sociologist Luiz Ignacio Geiger did his PhD with me at Lovain-la-Neuve, about the origin of MST. He showed its links with the Basic Ecclesiastic Communities, but also its aspiration to establish an institutional distance towards Church.

115 Chico Buarque (Brazil, 1944-). He is a singer-songwriter and a writer.
At the end of the 1990s I supported the candidature of the MST for the prize from the King Baldouin Foundation,\textsuperscript{116} which was given every two years to the best development initiative. A Belgian journalist, Colette Braeckman,\textsuperscript{117} who is specialized in Africa and whose first book on migration I had published in the series of Les Editions Ouvrières in Brussels, went to Brazil with a delegation appointed by the Foundation to study this proposal. They came back with a positive report so that it was given the prize –100,000 Euros– which served to buy the MST headquarters in São Paulo.

The award ceremony took place in the Royal Palace in Brussels, in the throne room, with soldiers dressed in the uniforms of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, military music, in the presence of the king, two queens, Fabiola,\textsuperscript{118} the widow of Baldouin and Paola,\textsuperscript{119} the wife of King Albert II; the presidents of the parliament and senate; the rectors of the universities; governmental representatives and hundreds of other invitees. The peasant who had to receive the prize was living in underground conditions in Brazil and a woman peasant had been designated to take his place. The Bishop from the Pastoral Land Commission, which was very close to the movement, was also present. It was a most unusual spectacle. In his discourse the president of the foundation, a count, regretted that the Brazilian ambassador was not present, although he had been invited. As for the Bishop, he praised the struggle of the peasants. A video on MST was projected, showing its struggles and the repression that it suffered. It seemed just like a solidarity meeting.

After the ceremony there was a reception. King Albert II\textsuperscript{120} called me to him and said, “I am very worried about the possibility of a

\textsuperscript{116} This institution was created on the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the reign of Baldouin I. Born in 1930, he came to the throne in 1951, after the abdication of his father, Leopold III of Belgium.
\textsuperscript{117} Colette Braeckman (Belgium, 1946-). She is a journalist.
\textsuperscript{118} Fabiola de Mora y Aragón (Spain, 1928-2014). She belonged to the Spanish aristocracy and was the Queen of the Belgians from 1960 to 1993.
\textsuperscript{119} Paola of Belgium (Italy, 1937-). She was the Queen of the Belgians from 1993 to 2013.
\textsuperscript{120} Albert II was born in 1934, the younger son of Leopold III. In 1993 he inherited the throne from his older brother, Baldouin, who had no descendants.
diplomatic incident with Brazil. The ambassador refused to come. The president of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, wonders why Belgium is giving a prize to a terrorist organization. My son, Prince Felipe,\(^1\) was to go to Brazil with a delegation of Belgian businessmen the following week and he has been declared a *persona non grata*. I have heard that you are friends with Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Can you not intervene to explain the meaning of the prize?” I answered that I knew the president, but I did not agree with his policies and perhaps I would not be a good intermediary. The king insisted, saying that if we were friends, political differences were of no importance. I said that I would try.

I wrote a letter to Fernando Henrique Cardoso explaining that the prize was a recognition of the values in the Brazilian people and not an interference in the internal affairs of his country. Finally, on a more personal note I expressed the hope that his presidency would not go down in the history of Brazil as “the one that transformed this nation into a path for neoliberalism.” I sent a copy to the king who let me know that the letter had pleased him. Cardoso never replied, but a few months after this episode Prince Philip visited Brazil without any problem. A mystery of the diplomacy between states or, more probably, economic interests were predominant.

I did not lose contact with the MST. I gave a course for them on various training aspects, before the setting up of the Florestán Fernández school, named after a left-wing Brazilian sociologist who had died and whom I had known several years previously in São Paulo. They invited me to the inauguration of this school where I made a speech on the significance of education for a social movement and, in general, on the function and methodology of a training centre. Then I gave a course of several days for some hundred leaders of the social movements of Latin America about globalization, agrarian problems in the continents of the South, and other subjects. I had similar experiences later, from 2011 to 2015, when I was asked to hold courses for the leaders of the movement and also for others from the continent, on the world crisis and the Latin American situation. I also gave interviews to *Brasil do Fato*.

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\(^1\) Prince Felipe (Spain, 1968-). He is the son of the King of Spain Juan Carlos I. He has been King Felipe VI of Spain since 2014, when his father abdicated.
the weekly paper of the Brazilian social movements started by MST. These have always been very enriching experiences, which enabled me to keep in close contact with the local struggles, their specific situations and difficulties.

It must have been in 2008 when the Brazilian Communist Party (PCDB) invited me, as part of the Brazilian Social Forum, to preside over a 3-day tribunal on the then president of the United States, George W. Bush. Other social movements, including the MST, were also involved. As part of the same Forum I participated, together with the local MST leader, in the march at Recife. There was some shooting by the police and some of the demonstrators were injured, among them a member of the Pastoral Land Commission, who was close beside me. For a while there was total confusion, we did not know what was happening. Afterwards it was said that the police were hunting a delinquent and that it was not an act of repression against the demonstration.

I had visited MST settlements in the state of São Paulo that accommodated some 2,000 people and had been impressed by the way they were organized. People were lodged in plastic tents and there were primary schools for the small children, a health centre, etc. There was a representative for every ten families. They were all waiting to establish themselves on non-cultivated land, belonging to some landowner. The organization and discipline of the MST was admirable. Recently, in Minas Gerais, I visited some land occupied by relocated families of landless peasants, who had been living there some time. Before they came there had been hardly any harvests there and now, when I visited them, the land was very well cultivated. It should be recalled that the MST is a protest movement but that it is also concerned with the reorganization of peasant agriculture.

Although in 2005, for the re-election of Lula, the Workers’ Party counted on the support of the MST, for lack of alternatives, in actual fact the MST had many problems with the regime. The absence of more structural policies and the lack of serious agrarian reform on the part of the government created divisions between it and the movement. Thus, when MST held its congress in Brasilia that year, Lula was not invited. Almost 20,000 peasants were present in the city gymnasium for three days; men, women and children, all of
them poor and many without shoes. They slept in tents around the meeting place. It was impeccably orderly and everyone followed closely what was happening. There were special programmes for the children. I had to speak at the opening session about the characteristics of contemporary imperialism. Although I was quite used to speaking to very varied audiences without any difficulties, this time I was quite moved in addressing such an audience. On top of this I had to make an effort of expressing myself in ‘portuñol’ (a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese).

These are the contradictions that led Plinio de Arruda Sampaio to found a party dissenting from PT, which, however, never had important political impact. In several conversations, first with him and afterwards with his son (in Ecuador), we have discussed the possibilities of new political orientations. In the first years, the political hegemony of PT did not allow for a real influence, but as time passed, the line of this party could indicate important renewal clues.

Before the Peoples’ Summit, in July 2012, the MST invited me to give lectures and participate in meetings in Rio Grande do Sul. I stayed in Porto Alegre with a friend of the movement, Itamar de Sequeira and went to give talks in the north of the state at the University of Caixias and in the centre of the state in the faculty of agriculture of the University of Elotas, which is linked with the MST. I also passed USINOS, the University of the Jesuits in São Leopoldo where they gave me a long interview which was recorded and distributed round the country. And I visited the centre for the organic production of seeds, not far from the frontier with Uruguay. In five days I travelled some 1,300 kilometres by car, which enabled me to see the eucalyptus plantations destined for the production of paper. According to the agronomist who accompanied me, this production of paper takes up enormous quantities of water, causing drought in the surroundings and raising the price of land, which obviously created protests on the part of the peasants.

The Peoples’ Summit, which was organized at the same time as the United Nations conference Rio+20, brought together 300,000 people for the ten days of its duration. There were over 700 workshops and meetings in tents in front of the bay of Rio.
In contrast with the official conference, which disillusioned many for adopting a very general discourse and having its decisions rejected, the Peoples’ Summit took up very concrete themes and a large number of specialists were present. The idea of a ‘green economy’ was not accepted as it was considered to be an effort to commercialize nature and was incapable of resolving ecological and social disasters, both current and future ones.

The Summit was a great leap forward in terms of raising awareness. Not only did the indigenous movements of Latin America, but also most of the environmental movements who were present arrived at the conclusion that the fundamental cause of the present economic chaos was the logic of capitalism. In fact, the analysis of various cases showed how the exploitation of nature to make money and, finally, the accumulation of capital, are in contradiction with respect for the earth as the fountain of all life. There was general opposition to the ‘green economy’ based only on the logic of the market. All this was expressed in the final declaration, which talked of the new cycle of global struggles to liberate the world from control by finance capital and the false solutions proposed by Rio+20. The emphasis was on the need to guarantee the access of people to the goods and services necessary for survival and the importance of the initiatives of social economics that aimed at building a new paradigm of ‘buen vivir’ (good living).

It was decided to set up a permanent body to liaise between the environment, worker, peasant, women and indigenous movements present, to disseminate information and common activities. The principle was to coordinate the forces of the main social movements so as to act at the world level.

I took advantage of the presence of the social movements to distribute the text of the proposal for the Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity, and to ask for suggestions and opinions. It was first drawn up in Spanish in Ecuador, with Antonio Salamanca, a Spanish jurist and then, in collaboration with other Spanish, Colombian and Italian lawyers at the seminar on ‘From the Commons to the Common Good of Humanity’, celebrated in Rome in April 2012, under the auspices of the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation. Later it was translated into English and French and
printed in tabloid form—in three columns, one for each language, in Argentina, which I had visited just before the Summit.

The document was presented for discussion in several different workshops. Movements like the CTA of Argentina, the MST and La Vía Campesina reacted very positively to it. In several workshops I coincided with Leonardo Boff, who gave me his latest book on the cosmos, and with Vandana Shiva, the Indian biologist, the great spokeswoman for the movement for the defence of nature. In the blue tent, which was dedicated to water problems, there was an evening of homage to Daniele Mitterand who had died a few weeks previously and I recalled meeting her with the Zapatistas in Mexico.

During the days of this event, I was given hospitality by the San Ignacio Jesuit College in Botafogo, thanks to the good offices of Frei Betto. Each night, on returning to the college I walked along a street dominated by the Corcovado. The statue of Christ, which was illuminated by green light, seemed to emerged from the darkness like a crystallized symbol, to remind us that we were living at a time when the very survival of the earth and of humanity were at stake.

At the end of 2013, MST organized a meeting at the Florestán Fernández school on the social movements and ALBA, to discuss the role of these movements in the new regional integration structures represented by ALBA. Claudio Katz, the Argentinean economist, and Isabel Rauber, the Cuban/Argentinean sociologist were also present as speakers. I defended the idea that the participation of the movements should depend on their stance on the principles of ALBA (solidarity and complementarity and not competition) rather than whether they were in agreement or not with their governments. In the case of Ecuador, for example, the CONAIE, the coordination body of the indigenous movements, was excluded because of its controversy with the government of Rafael Correa on the indigenous issue, in spite of its complete agreement on the principles of ALBA.

Obviously it was a delicate question but it seemed essential to me. In fact governments could follow the line of ALBA at the regional level but contradict it in their internal policies, for many reasons, from relationships with economic forces or short-term concerns. But the logic of political bodies cannot be imposed
on social movements, without endangering their own functions and transforming them into transmission belts of the political institutions. At the same time, the movements must understand that the regional logic can be different from national attitudes that are subject to local pressures.

In March 2014, MST invited me to its 6th Congress in Brasilia. Once again, its power to bring together people together and the strength of its organization were evident. More than 20,000 peasants participated for almost a week in the country’s capital. Most of them had spent hours in buses, coming from all parts of this immense country. There were thematic discussions in the mornings and afternoons, preceded by theatrical presentations from all regions of Brazil. References to the history of peasant struggle alternated with analysis of the current situation.

The discussions were tough. There was no serious agrarian reform; the influence of the lobby of the ‘ruralistas’ (large landowners) in parliament and on the government continued to predominate; ecological destruction continued, especially in the Amazon; there were almost four million peasant families who still had no land. The government of Dilma Rouseff had made no progress on these issues and she had not accepted to dialogue with the MST. Various members of the government, friends of the MST or its leaders, had been invited, like Gilberto Carvalho, Minister to the President, or Marco Aurelio García, Adviser on Foreign Affairs, were obliged to listen to the criticisms. Emir Sader, Professor at the University of Rio de Janeiro, was asked to speak, in spite of his being a strong supporter of Dilma.

The President accepted to receive a delegation of the movement, which presented her with a list of ten demands to resolve the agrarian problem. She solemnly accepted two of them, not the most important and which were already in the government plan but she proposed their rapid implementation. The march to the President’s office, carrying crosses in memory of all the peasants who had been killed in the struggle over so many years, provoked incidents that Gilberto Carvalho attributed to a misunderstanding on the part of the police.

In conclusion, the movement is well aware that for the moment there is no alternative to a government by the Workers Party (PT),
allied with some conservative forces –even if they are not the hard right. MST has decided to continue its struggle, accelerating the occupation of land, acting in solidarity with other protests (concerning the extravagant wastefulness of the World Cup and public services) and exercising political pressure. There was also a meeting between members of the MST and parliamentarians of various parties (PT, Socialist Party, etc.). The political figures were all wearing collars and ties, in contrast with the poor peasants and their leaders in simple shirts, symbolizing the gulf between the political class and the people.

In October, 2016, MST invited me to a meeting of one hundred Brazilian intellectuals on the situation in the country. There were very interesting descriptions about the political mechanisms used by the Right, and a timid beginning of self-criticism. Several economists pointed out the effects of the world crisis on the country, but did not mention environmental destruction, or the Amazonia. In my speech I discussed these issues, insisting on the need for a re-founding of the Left in front of the political disaster of PT and proposing to redefine the project as post-capitalist and to specify transitions. The following week the police intervened and fired in the Florestan Fernández School of MST, thus indicating the social and political tension of the moment.

Two days later I was called to meet Lula in São Paulo. He received me very cordially and was in very good physical and mental shape, well decided to run for president in the 2018 elections. He was very sure that the legal actions against him had no future for lack of evidence. He discussed international issues. The neoliberal wave and the social disasters in Greece and Spain called his attention as to Europe. He was very critical of François Hollande, who has become Merkel's flatterer. As to Latin America, the return of the Right worried him deeply. However, he was very critical of Maduro for not being capable of facing the offensive from the Right in an adequate manner. The political situation in Nicaragua seemed lacking seriousness to him, and as to Ecuador, he considered that the division between social movements and political power was dangerous.

When I wanted to discuss the Brazilian situation, I understood that self-criticism was not in order and that the project was to
return to power in order to do basically the same thing. A defensive attitude against the cynical offensive of the Brazilian Right, in alliance with the imperialism from the North, could be understood, as well as the personal impact of the accusations which soon afterwards contributed to his wife’s sickness and death. However, a political future is not constructed on these bases only and it needs a radically new project.
During the 1960s I visited Argentina several times to follow the progress of the socioreligious study. In Buenos Aires I worked with Father Amato, who collected the data for the research. I was also in Cordoba and one day we went up into the nearby mountains for a barbecue with Monsignor Angellini, auxiliary Bishop of the diocese, and some friends. He was one of the progressive Bishops and, during Vatican Council II we met several times. During the military dictatorship he was killed in a car accident in very suspicious circumstances. From the meetings organized by CELAM I also knew Bishop Toniello, army chaplain, devotee of the rosary and strong supporter of the military coup. The danger of communism was a key argument for the Argentinean Bishops.

Among the more open-minded lay Catholics, the French philosopher Jacques Maritain was the basic reference. He was certainly ideologically close to the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. He was seen as a substitute for Marxism and the possibility of holding progressive positions without adopting either the ideas or the analysis of the philosopher of Trier. Anti-communism was so strong that I remember, in a meeting with Catholics considered as socially open-minded, they opposed cooperatives, because Lenin had praised this form of organizing production.

Years later, in 2012, I accepted an invitation from the Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA), a workers organization that
was created during the period of the revolts in the 1990s. It then split, with a minority in favour of the Kirchner government, while the others were against its domestic policies. I stayed in the union hotel and for a whole day was able to participate in a meeting with the leaders of the majority, as we were discussing the crisis and its consequences in Latin America. It was a very lively discussion in which people from different regions in the country presented up-to-date reports on the subject. The day ended with a barbecue at the CTA headquarters, a building given to the trade unionists by Eva Perón at the beginning of the 1950s. Pablo Michaeli, the CTA president, recounted to me the history of the struggle. His comrades also told me that two years before he had contracted a rare and serious illness and that all over the country there were prayers and even pilgrimages to the Luján Virgin (the patroness of Argentina) for his restoration to health.

During those days, I was also deeply immersed in work on the text of the proposal for a Universal Declaration for the Common Good of Humanity, to which I have already referred. While I was in Porto Alegre I had received the English translation from New York. Antonio Salamanca’s wife Pilar Castanedo, of French nationality (the daughter of Spanish republicans resident in France) offered to translate the text into her language. So it was a question of revising all the language versions and preparing their publication for the Peoples’ Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which was imminent.

The Argentinean sociologist Isabel Rauber, whom I have already mentioned and who has written some excellent books on the social movements (one of these, her doctoral thesis, was written during a 3-month course in CETRI), put me in contact with the typographers’ union, which was located in Mar del Plata. They accepted to print the document and send it to Buenos Aires the evening of my departure for Rio. But the airline did not accept it as part of my luggage as it was too heavy so that Pablo Michaeli, who was also participating in the Summit, took part of the package with him.

My impression in this trip to Argentina was that while its foreign policy seemed to be very positive –continental solidarity, reclaiming the Falkland Islands, resistance against Repsol– domestic policy was disastrous. The country’s economy had brought in
a considerable amount of foreign currency because of the rise in the prices of primary resources. The tendency was typically social-democrat, in favour of capital and the pursuit of economic development, particularly the monoculture of soya and mining activities, as well as practising some redistribution policies of the surplus product. With the inflation and the diminishing demand for primary resources because of the world crisis, as well as the slowing down of the Chinese economy, the social pressures were continuing to mount. The two trade unions (the CGT, Peronist or governmental, and the CTA) united to demand wage increases and organize strikes. Meanwhile, there was much corruption in the regime, with scandals breaking almost every day –to the extent that the vice president, a right-winger, had been brought to justice.

The case of Argentina was, perhaps, a forerunner of what could be called the effects of a world situation. The reduction in demand for primary products from the Latin American economies in recent years had relatively de-industrialized to transform themselves into extractive economies and a new generation of agriculture, thus increasing their dependency on the classic division of labour on the world scale.

During this stay I also had meetings with the Marxist economist Claudio Katz, an excellent analyst of the Latin American continent, and with Colombian students who were working on the memories of Camilo Torres, who gave me a long interview. I also gave a lecture at the University in a popular neighbourhood in the Buenos Aires suburbs, where Isabel Rauber was teaching. I took taxis many times those days. Once the taxi driver was an ex-Trappist. He told me about a spiritual experience he had had and then he refused to let me pay for my fare. Another, to whom I told that I had lived for four months in the Chacarita neighbourhood –where the great cemetery of Buenos Aires is located asked me, “Where, inside or outside?” which was typical of the humour of the porteños (inhabitants of the capital).

The return to the Right, with Macri, was largely due to the result of the separation of the leftist Peronists with their alliance to the large agrarian capital, their internal corruption and finally their lack of credibility in a moment of economic crisis. A very similar process to the one that took place in Brazil some time later.
As in the rest of the continent, I visited Chile various times during the 1960s in connection with the socio-religious study of Latin America. Then, after the Vatican Council II, the Chilean Association of Catholic Employers invited me to come to the country to give lectures on the Council document *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Contemporary World). They took place in the municipal theatre of Santiago de Chile, a prestigious venue. But my remarks did not please the organizers when I talked about social principles and especially about agrarian reform. They hardly allowed me to finish the series of talks. Supporters of a modernization of Catholicism, they were not in favour of applying the gospel to criticize contemporary capitalist societies.

Later I returned to Chile in 2015; I was invited by Urracas, the organization of those who collect discarded furniture to repair and sell it. They are part of International Emaus, founded by the Abbé Pierre of France. They had organized a seminary with the network of Latin American organizations, plus Spain, much more politicized than the French and Europeans. The course I taught in a very old factory for a week, which discussed different topics: the Common Good of Humanity, the Marxist analysis, and the Arab Spring. These contents were published as a book in Santiago.

I spent some days in Concepción with the same organization and I lectured on the Marxist analysis at the university, and took part in a students’ demonstration for the laws on education. Chile is the typical example of the contradictions of social-democracy wanting social improvements without touching the interests of the bourgeoisie and within monopoly market.

I visited Paraguay twice in the 1960s. I knew Bishop Bogarin especially, one of the continent’s progressive Bishops and an active member of CELAM, where he represented the Paraguayan Bishops’ conference. For a long time, Stroessner’s dictatorship cracked down on the organization of the open-minded Christian movement.

It was only some decades later, in a meeting on globalization in Havana, that I met Fernando Lugo, when he was preparing his
candidature for the presidency. He said he would participate in my presentation of the first edition of these Memoirs at the Havana Book Fair in 2011. But at the last moment he was summoned for a meeting with Fidel –with whom I obviously could not compete!

When Lugo was a Bishop and dedicated to defending the poor, his political positions, in my view, were lacking in experience and relatively indecisive. In his situation perhaps that was normal, but he knew how to appoint good colleagues in key sectors. That did not prevent a parliamentary coup which ousted him from power, in favor of a corrupt Right linked to international capital.

Latin American Cinema

I cannot conclude talking about my contacts in Latin America without referring to the cinema which is very important, not only in the cultural life but also in the political life of the continent. I came to know and share views with some of their film directors.

In Nicaragua I knew Miguel Littin, a Chilean film director when he was preparing a film on Augusto César Sandino. During a trip lasting several hours to somewhere in the interior where the 19th of July was being celebrated, he told me about his work and his projects. He wanted to give new life to the memory of the social struggles for the benefit of the new generations.

As for the great allegories of Sanginés, the Bolivian director, whom I knew in his own country, he had a more literary purpose; that of keeping alive the constitutive symbols of Latin American culture and conserving peoples' awareness of its specific nature, as opposed to the cultural invasion from the North.

Pino Solana, the Argentinean film director, whom I happened to meet in Cuba, has shown the topicality of the social struggles in his country. He adopted a Zolaesque style, using valuable witnesses to the events. Parallel with his film production, he founded a left-wing party in order to propose other alternatives to those of the Peronism of the Kirchners. In Cuba I was also present at the showing of a film about José Martí, directed by Solana, which was made using only wooden puppets. He explained that he had chosen to project the personality of Martí in this way as it was symbolically more appropriate for a universal message.
It was in Sri Lanka that I did my work for my doctorate in sociology. In 1968, Father Tissa Balasuriya invited me to come and make a socio-religious study in Sri Lanka. I took advantage of a journey to Asia that year to make a first contact and I returned there a few months later with Geneviève Lemercinier. For 13 years we came back each year for research and training sessions in social analysis. At the beginning we carried out studies on the Catholic Church’s social action, particularly development projects. Our base was the Social Economic Development Centre (SEDEC), a development body of the Church run by Father Joe Fernando. Our task was to assess the real impact of projects, particularly in rural areas and to what extent they changed mentalities and became something more than mere social assistance. The work was carried out in both Sinhalese and Tamil regions. At the same time we studied the Catholic minority in the island, its social and cultural characteristics.

We arrived in Sri Lanka, at that time called Ceylon, shortly after the schools had been nationalized by the government. The Catholic Church had reacted violently against this, causing social and cultural chaos. Ten years later no one thought of returning to the past. In the public schools classes were given in religion—according to the wishes of the parents of the children—and the Christian Church was free to organize schools, which were not subsidized. In fact they were elitist and most of the political class sent their children to these schools. The Buddhists accused the Catholic schools of preparing atheists because the Buddhist
pupils, being exempted from following Christian education, had no courses on religion at all.

It was quite a challenge, working for the first time in a world that was so culturally different, but it was both exciting and disorientating. Understanding the social mechanisms that made the society function took us some time. We gradually made contacts in academic and political circles. We came to realize that castes played a key role, in spite of being taboo in a Buddhist society. The *goygama* (farmers) caste monopolized power in the two main parties, the UNP (United National Party) and the SLSP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party). The latter had seceded from the former and was led by Solomon Bandaranaike, the first post-independence prime minister, who was later assassinated by a Buddhist monk. He was succeeded by his widow and afterwards by his daughter Chandrika in 1994.

When there was a revolt by the young people in 1972, 10,000 were killed. It was evident that they were unemployed young people from the lower classes and from socially-deprived regions. The previous year, three of them came to see me in the archbishop's house in Colombo, where I was staying with a group of priests, whereas my colleague Geneviève Lemercinier stayed in a convent of nuns. The youths asked me to help them to buy arms in Belgium because they had heard that the FAL guns were the best in the world. I replied that it did not seem the best way to carry out social struggle in Sri Lanka today and that therefore I could not do it. Obviously the power relations were such that an armed struggle would lead to a massacre. In fact, the foreign powers, from India to Pakistan, from Great Britain to the Soviet Union, supported the Sri Lankan government. Only the French ambassador said that his country would not collaborate with a government that massacred its youth. Indeed, the reaction of the new government had been very ferocious.

At the end of the 1970s, there was much tension between the Sinhalese and the Tamils and Tamil shops in Colombo were being destroyed. Some people in the North were already thinking of organizing a separatist movement. The ultra-orthodox Buddhists considered Sri Lanka to be sacred territory and that the Tamils, being of Dravidian and Hindu origin (from South India) were
foreigners. Under colonialism the British had used the Tamils as intermediaries, taking advantage of the mutual hostility – and clearly increasing it.

During a trip to Vaivodya, a small town in the Tamil part of the island, Geneviève and I were invited to a meeting with some Tamil intellectuals. They explained that independence was the only solution for them and that they were thinking of organizing a liberation movement. They asked for solidarity and contacts abroad, claiming that they could count on help from China and the Soviet Union. I answered that I sympathized with their social and cultural demands (Tamil was not recognized as a national language), but I thought it was a hopeless project, as no one at the international level would recognize a Tamil state in Sri Lanka.

Unfortunately, the political struggle became an armed struggle and the Tiger movement carried out unacceptable actions like attacking trains of civilians and car bombings. A friend of mine, a Sinhalese who worked for justice for the Tamils, was killed in one of these attacks on a train. The negotiations broke down and the government then embarked on a war of total destruction. In 2009 it massacred civilian populations and assassinated many prisoners.

I presided a session of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal on Sri Lanka, which was organized in January 2010 in Dublin. After having heard many witnesses and examined numerous documents, the Tribunal, which was constituted by eleven judges, including a former member of the Indian Supreme Court and a former UN assistant secretary general, issued a very strong verdict against the government and army of Sri Lanka for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 2014 I took part, in Bremen, in another session of the Tribunal that declared that genocide had taken place.

Another Tamil population in Sri Lanka, without any ties to those of the armed struggle, were the tea plantation workers. They came from the south of India to develop tea production and their living conditions were sub-human. SEDEC organized social action on their behalf and we took part in a number of training sessions in social analysis. It was there that with Geneviève we developed a working method that we later employed in many Asian and Latin American countries. We would work with grassroot groups, not expounding theoretical or abstract ideas but starting with their
own knowledge and experience in order gradually to build up a new knowledge.

Using a blackboard, we asked agricultural labourers to tell us about their social, economic and cultural problems. They obviously knew them very well. Then we would divide up the blackboard into various sectors: economic, social, political, cultural and religious. In the relevant section we would write everything that they told us. As for ourselves, we said not a word. This was the result of their knowledge. It was the ‘seeing’. After that we would ask them if there were any links between the different fields and they themselves indicated what these were. Then we would start reflecting on the logic of these processes: the links between their living conditions, wages, politics, etc. This was the ‘judging’. Finally we were coming to the ‘taking action’, that is, finding solutions and organizing a change of the situations at different levels. It was a very interesting experience because it helped people to build and it strengthened the actors themselves.

As I had to write a thesis to be appointed professor at the University of Louvain I finally decided to choose, as its theme, the function of Buddhism in forming the culture and the nation of Sri Lanka. So many years of work in this society behind me, travelling from north to south, from east to west, gave me an entry into the society and I embarked on this task with profound sympathy for this people. Geneviève Lemercinier helped me by studying the existing historical records. From these I saw how Buddhism served as the social cement unifying the country when the little kingdoms, which had resulted from the organization of irrigation and its control, had to unite after the construction of a complete irrigation network covering the whole island. The ideological role of religion was clear, as well as the link between the political system and the basic mode of production. This was why I was interested in adopting Marxist analysis as a basis for understanding the process. I found this was the only way that allowed me to get to the bottom of the explanations –without falling into the determinism of certain Marxist views– and taking into account the work of Maurice Godelier.

The long period of the tributary kings showed how religion was influenced by the political organization. The four principal
divinities borrowed from Hinduism corresponded to the four main ministers of the king, and secondary divinities protected each locality that was paying tribute to the sovereign. In the latter period, when the exchange between the central and local powers could not be represented as being equal because of the level of wealth extraction, the king became almost divine, responsible for the harvests. Still then, some of the ceremonies date from that period. Thus the Esala Perahera Annual Festival in Kandy organizes a hundred elephants in a procession, carrying Buddha’s tooth. It is an impressive sight, with the statues of the Hindu gods, representatives of the different communities and castes as well as the elephants, each dressed in rich, multi-coloured clothing. At night-time the scene is all lit up with lamps burning coconut oil.

I also studied the impact of the presence of the Portuguese, who established commercial enclaves for pepper, as well as Catholicism; the English colonization; the role of Buddhism during the anti-colonial movement; and finally how it related to political life, as well as its relations with other religions since independence. I published the book under the title of Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka and it was produced in English in Colombo, as well as in India and the United States. Parts of it were included in my book Religion et Sociétés Précapitalistes en Orient.

In later years I worked with MONLAR (Movement for National and Land Agricultural Reform), headed by Sarath Fernando. I had known him in 1973 when he was in prison after the youth insurrection, in which he had participated. There I also met the founder of the movement JVP, a Maoist-oriented movement, which later became a political party, making alliances with the neoliberal government parties and supporting the fight against the Tamils. After coming out of prison, Sarath Fernando came to CETRI in Louvain-la-Neuve for three months. On his return to Sri Lanka, he founded the rural movement. Its originality was that it brought together more than a hundred local initiatives, from organic agriculture to movements against the privatization of a forest. The idea was to constitute a national organization capable of influencing governments and international organizations.

In 1996 the World Bank had decided that Sri Lanka should abandon the cultivation of rice as it cost more than the rice
produced in Vietnam and Thailand. This was a purely economic calculation, part of the neoliberal outlook that takes no account of the cultural aspects of an agriculture that dates back thousands of years. Rice dominates the diets of the local inhabitants and constituted a large part of the rural landscape, inspiring literature and poetry in particular. This is not to mention the fact that a million peasants depended on this crop for their livelihood and that such a decision could mean the end of food sovereignty.

MONLAR organized the resistance to the project and finally it was abandoned. I worked with the organization on various occasions, first concerning the plan of the World Bank, then about an alternative plan for rebuilding after the Tsunami. The World Bank, which was made responsible for reconstruction after this natural catastrophe, had planned a development centred on tourism, with a motorway that would encircle the island, the construction of hotels and the expulsion of the small fishermen from the coastal areas. Instead, we felt the reconstruction should be carried out in the interests of the population and not of foreign capital linked with some local financial groups who wanted to turn Sri Lanka into a second Singapore. It was always the same logic and an offensive of capital against the people! There are, nevertheless, some ingenuous people, who in good faith think it is possible to reform capitalism. All my experiences have convinced me that this is not so and that its logic always leads to the same consequences. Capitalism is unbridled when it can be, and ‘green’ or ‘social’ when it has to be. We must change our paradigm for human development and this cannot be done in the short term. The real challenge is whether humanity is able to take the necessary decisions in time.

India

My first visit to India was at the end of the 1960s, when we were to study, together with the Institute for Social Studies at The Hague, the contributions of the Christian churches to higher education. A national seminar was organized in Madras in the presence of Cardinal Gracias of Bombay, the Secretary of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in India, the Minister of Education and a
hundred or so people working in the sector. The first annual report
of the Christian colleges in India was published on this occasion.

Some years later, in studying the question in greater detail, I
noted that the proportion of Christians in these colleges was very
low. The elite and the middle classes, seeking social mobility,
demanded quality institutions. According to a liberal viewpoint,
this was a service to society but a critical view was that it was
reproducing a class society. The function of the scholarships for
the poorest—as existed in almost all the higher education schools
on the Christian circuit—served, in fact, to introduce bright
individuals into the dynamism of this kind of society, without
promoting the collective emancipation of the subordinate classes.
Thus numerous leaders were absorbed into the system through
personal promotion. From a Christian perspective that supported
the poor, this was a contradiction.

Evidently it was difficult to get this message across in Christian
circles. It was not a criticism of the personal intentions of those
who dedicated themselves to this task, but a social function of their
work. In the fields of education and health, the involvement of the
Church, at the beginning, had the purpose of serving the poor.
History has shown this. As the society evolved and there were
changes in these sectors, a good proportion of these Christian
institutions gradually transformed themselves into higher and
secondary educational institutions and quality hospitals and clinics
serving the highest levels of society. Genevieve Lemercinier and
I analyzed this situation with various female and male religious
congregations in India. One of them, of US origin, which catered
for women (almost all of them doctors with medical diplomas)
decided to leave its large hospitals, including that of New Delhi
(which Indira Gandhi had attended) in order to dedicate itself
to rural medicine, especially preventive medical activities in the
poorest areas of the country. For others it was difficult to adopt
this interpretation of society.

In Calcutta Mother Teresa asked me to give a talk to her novices.
She spoke with much admiration and emotion about the work that
the congregation was doing for the most destitute, especially in the
streets of Calcutta and in the places where it was assisting the dying,
which I had just visited with her. However, I explained that they
were concerned with the victims of a system that others, including Christian institutions, were helping to build and reproduce. Mother Teresa did not like this. She was very concentrated on everyday activities at the grassroots level that were carried out with spirituality, close personal contacts and admirable dedication, but without any social analysis. This is also what enabled rich people from various continents to help her work. It was not dangerous to the existing social order.

In 1968, on my first trip to Asia I had visited my sister Godelieve, who worked with the Damian Foundation in a leprosy centre in Polambakkam in Tamil Nadu. One of the founders of the centre was Dr. Frans Hemerijckx, a Belgian, who was among those who revolutionized the methods for curing lepers at home, rather than collecting them into leprosy centres. Only those who were socially isolated remained in the centre as medical workers or engaged in other activities. When I arrived there I was ill with typhoid fever and I had to stay for a week to recover, being treated by the Centre’s personnel. Afterwards, I visited Bihar where my sister was then working until she finally left for Bangladesh. She spent more than 20 years of her life working in very tough material conditions.

The work that Geneviève Lemercinier and I were doing on the Christian churches in India included their history and we published two volumes on this theme, especially on the history of their social work. We put together the last volume in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Most of the research had been carried out in Bangalore, in the pastoral catechism and training centre run by Father Amalor Pavadass, who was the brother of the person in charge of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, in Rome.

Father Amalor Pavadass was an impressive person, looking like a Hindu sannyasi, dressed in saffron and concerned with the acculturation of Christianity to Indian culture. Its liturgies were admirable, with offerings of flowers and songs of Indian music, and these expressions of spirituality were much appreciated by us. He was rather enigmatic and it seemed hard to get through to him but he received us very cordially. We ended up by becoming very close. However, I thought his viewpoint was too individualistic, as is the tradition in the Eastern religions. We spoke for hours about the spiritual and social contribution of Christianity. As he was very
open-minded, he asked me to offer training courses in his centre, together with himself: he would deal with Eastern spirituality and I with its social commitment. On various occasions I gave talks about the Portuguese colonies in Africa and the liberation struggles.

An All-India Seminar was organized by Amalor Pavadass in Bangalore on the application of the Vatican Council II to the Catholic Church in India. All the three rites of the Catholic Church were present –Latino, Malabar and Malancar– religious congregations, various lay leaders and observers from other churches. I was invited to present the Gaudium et Spes Constitution, the document on the Church in the contemporary world. It was an impressive gathering. The rivalry between the three rites was tackled so as to better understand the differences between each of them. After the meeting, Amalor Pavadass was commissioned to elaborate an Indian liturgy for the Eucharist, which was later prohibited by the Holy See in the post-council restoration that got under way at the end of Paul VI’s pontificate and accelerated during that of John Paul II. The Jesuit Sebastian Kappen was also present at the seminar; he wrote a book on Liberation Theology and Jesus, and had asked me to write the preface.

It was however in the south of India that Geneviève and I worked most intensively. We started in the state of Kerala in 1975, doing research on the Church’s social action. They were evaluations of the results of these activities financed by various European NGOs and this enabled us to make these journeys. We always stayed in local religious houses, which meant fewer expenses and often austere conditions, but very useful for making personal contacts. We published a book on the social action of the Christian church in Kerala. It was the result of a number of studies on education, health and development projects, in collaboration with the three Catholic rites, as well as the Orthodox and Protestant churches. Much patience was needed to overcome a lot of distrust and to obtain the results, but in the end we succeeded.

The idea was to help people understand the real effects of this kind of activity and reflect on how they transmitted the Christian message. We found out that in various cases the construction of a hospital or the opening of a college was more the result of
the rivalry between the various rites in seeking social recognition rather than a real Christian commitment. We had good contacts with the Bishops of the three rites, particularly with the Malancar Archbishop Monsignor Gregorius, the Syriac community that recently reunited with the Holy See and which had many members from the lower castes. The Malabar community also followed the old Syriac rites and was made up mostly of landowners and bankers, large and small, who were rather conservative.

There were also the ‘Latinos’, heirs of the Portuguese colonization, who were generally poor, like the fishermen converted by St. Francis Xavier: marginal groups in the Hindu society which did not permit the killing of animals. Claiming that the fish were dying of old age the Malancar Archbishop wanted to provide the fishermen with more effective boats. The Latin Bishop had a white Mercedes, a status symbol, which upset him a lot, but it was a present from his brother. Once we were driven to the Centre of Development Studies in Ulloor by his chauffeur and we had stones thrown at us as we passed through a popular neighbourhood. Kerala is indeed a very socially conscious state.

Two figures in the Indian Catholic world particularly impressed me. A high-level intellectual whose father was Indian and mother Spanish, Raimon Panikkar had been a member of Opus Dei but broke with the movement and concentrated his studies on Indian philosophy in relation to Christianity. He built a kind of bridge between oriental and occidental cultures, with all the difficulties of having dual marginality in a world that was still very closed, but trying to break down the frontiers confronting the common destiny of humanity. The process of the ‘great transformation’ of culture was proceeding much more slowly than the ‘macdonaldization’ of peoples’ behaviour.

The other person was the Jesuit Lurduswami of the Centre for Social Studies of Bangalore, who had studied sociology at Louvain and since then dedicated himself to work with the ethnic minorities in Bihar State. The struggle for land was very fierce, against the invasion of colonizers, monoculture and huge hydro-electric projects –in short, the penetration of a capitalist economy. Lurduswami took up quite radical positions and fought for them courageously.
I carried out a comparative study on Hindu, Muslim and Catholic fishermen with Nalini Nayak, an Indian sociologist who belonged to the same group of lay Catholics as my sister and who was very active working with the fishermen. We used the same methodology as in other parts of Asia and Latin America and we found out that the Hindus were the most dynamic, whereas the Catholics, considered a minority, were overly concerned with building large churches on the seashore with golden decorations, rather than the improvement of their fishing methods. This was mostly due to their social situation and their desire to affirm their identity in a hostile environment.

As Geneviève Lemercinier needed to write a thesis for her doctorate to continue her career at the University of Louvain, she decided to do it on religion in Kerala, with the same orientation as the work we had done in Sri Lanka. It was extremely interesting work that started with the societies dating back to two centuries B.C. She analyzed, as a sociologist, the sangam literature of the wandering poets that described social conditions of those times up to the religious movements of the 19th century that showed the passing of a caste society to a class society and heralded the birth of the communist parties. She also studied the development of the little tributary kingdoms, based on the foreign trade of pepper and ivory; the gradual entry of Brahmans and Hinduism into a society of tribal religions due to the penetration of Islam in the north of India; the constitution of the upper caste of the Nambudiri Brahmans and their strange matrimonial practices aimed at keeping their lands intact; the special situation of the Syriac Christians from the second century A.D., etc. I helped her with the study of the Portuguese period, the time of the British colony and the contemporary period.

This work brought us into contact with the academic world and we spent two summers near Trivandrum at the Centre for Development Studies, which had been founded by the great social scientist K.N. Raj with whom we established close collaboration. We were also in contact with the Indian Communist Party (Marxist, CPM), the most important left-wing party in Kerala, and in particular the group of its intellectuals and the journal *The Social Scientist*, edited by Jacob
Eapen. I published several articles in this journal, one of them about Jesus in the Palestinian society of that time.

The founder of the Party, E.M.S. Nambooridipad, was still active and to meet this historic personality was really a privilege. As indicated by his name he came from the highest caste in Kerala. He renounced all his privileges to dedicate himself to the anti-colonial struggle, separating from Gandhi in order to link the national struggle with social struggle (We should not forget that Gandhi was assassinated in the house of one of the leading capitalists in the country). Nambooridipad went into clandestine activity to escape the colonial power and founded the Communist Party, which he wanted to be independent of both Moscow and Peking. He developed a Marxist approach to the history of Kerala which greatly interested us for Geneviève’s thesis. His book was clearly more oriented to the training of cadres than with academic concerns but it was interesting as an explanatory hypothesis. Nambooridipad invited us several times to his house. His wife was a teacher at a secondary school. When we arrived at Trivandrum they always sent their car to meet us at the airport.

I returned to Kerala in 2005 for a seminar on globalization with a group of Christian Marxists who published a monthly periodical of social analysis and Christian reflection. They had published texts of mine on various occasions, for example, The Other Davos, in Malayalam. The event took place in the seminary of the Orthodox Malabar Church, where there was the tomb of a friend, also called Gregorius (like the Malancar Archbishop), who had been the Bishop of this Church in Kerala. After having been the chaplain of the Negus of Ethiopia, he discovered the social dimension of the Indian situation and as a theologian had adopted quite an advanced stance. We were both at a seminar on Liberation Theology, which was held in a Protestant seminary in the province of Matanzas in Cuba.

In Tamil Nadu, Geneviève and I carried out a first study on the district of Nagercoil where we specifically studied activities with the fishermen. A Belgian priest, James Tombeur, who had

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1 Official language of Kerala.
founded an ashram (monastery), had been very active there. He had built one of the first churches in the local style. This was not greatly approved by the rest of the clergy who accused him of contributing to a loss of the Catholic identity. In fact, as a minority, they defended the most traditional rites and prayers, contrary to the principles of the Vatican Council II. Gradually the situation evolved, but Indian Catholicism has not escaped the conservative wave of the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Another Belgian priest, Pierre Gilet, who had trained as an engineer, built boats with outboard motors that enabled the small fishermen to venture deeper into the sea and compete with the large bous, which were depleting the fish reserves.

Our second study was carried out with the collaboration of a Jesuit colleague to prepare the division of the diocese of Madurai, which was too large. The new diocese corresponded to the district of Ramnad. We made an in-depth analysis of the various aspects of society, of castes and religions in this area. This was the place in southern India where the tea workers who had been expelled from Sri Lanka had been relocated, creating serious overpopulation problems. On the basis of this study, guidelines for pastoral and social action for the new ecclesiastical circumscription were drawn up. Geneviève Lemercinier and I also gave a course on the methodology of social analysis in the Protestant seminary, at the request of Gabriele Dietrich and her husband, both of them theologians who had become Indian citizens. They published it and used it for training their students. Later it was adopted in the Protestant training centres of India as a whole.

The World Social Forum of 2004 took place in Mumbai. It was a new experience. Thousands of adivasi (tribal and outcasts) and indigenous peoples among them were present; more than 100,000 participants and representing the poorest people in Hindu society. They could not follow the debates, which were in English and in Hindi, but they discussed among themselves and did street theatre. Their very presence spoke for itself and they felt themselves to be part of the process. The Forum took place in an abandoned industrialized zone, a symbol of the effects of the neoliberal

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2 A heavy boat especially equipped for fishing.
policies applied to an Asian country since the 1980s. The Forum was very well organized and it served as a catalyst for some of the movements of India –although not without difficulties.

India, now an ‘emerging’ country had, since its independence, achieved the Bandung dream to some extent. The size of its internal market made it possible to carry out its nation-building project, based on the nationalization of basic industries and intensive educational programmes. However, the process had above all promoted the constitution of a national capitalism. The less profitable sectors were nationalized, the more profitable ones were privatized.

Mainly urban, a middle class developed and finally a market of more than 200 million people was created, able to absorb a large part of goods and services. However this clientele formed hardly 25% of the total population. The ‘greatest democracy in the world’ was being based on a huge social inequality, fully supported by a caste system that had created a fundamental exclusivity, while the ‘green revolution’ accentuated the phenomenon, especially in the north of the country. The introduction of the neoliberal model increased the number of beneficiaries relatively, but without changing the structures. The present quantitative growth has, as its price, considerable ecological damage and still greater social inequality. It will be paid for one day.

Bangladesh

Before this country became independent and was East Pakistan, Geneviève Lemercinier and I had visited it various times to carry out seminars for the training of Christian leaders, from the clergy and from the women’s religious organizations, as part of the post-council dynamic. This gave us the opportunity to travel all over the country, from the north at the frontier with India, to Chittagong, the southern port. A hurricane had destroyed part of the north, and to get to Dinajpur, where a seminar was being held, we took one day a little Red Cross plane. The landing strip was an empty communal field. When we arrived there a Soviet relief helicopter was manoeuvring, its landing guided by an Italian Catholic missionary. There are times when only human solidarity counts.
During the conflict between Pakistan and Bangladesh, the airlines connecting with India were closed down. It was necessary to go by land and this was only possible at one point on the frontier. As we were coming from Sri Lanka, we took the plane to Calcutta. There we took a train up to the border, which was crossed by rickshaw. Then we went by a boat on the Ganges for a day and a night up to the Gulf of Bengal in order finally to reach Dhaka. The density of population was such that on the roads, which were full of people, the cars had to open up a passage among the throng.

We also went to Mymensigh, in the east, to meet with ethnic minorities, who were marginalized, as always. We visited my sister who was working as a nurse in a very poor village close to the sea in the south. The co-existence with some fundamentalist Muslims was not always an easy one for her and her companions. On another occasion, after a meeting in the centre of the country, we returned with some comrades in a small boat on the Brahmaputra. The journey took a whole night and it was enchanting. We were taken by the current down this huge river, illuminated by a full moon and we sang all the songs that we knew, which were sometimes echoed back from the banks. On another occasion a family in Dhaka invited us for the breaking of the Ramadan fast. It was a very joyful moment and people were eating the whole night long.

Bangladesh has a serious problem of population density, greater than in any other country of the world, with more than 160 million inhabitants in a large territory only four times the size of Belgium. It also runs the risk of losing 17% of its land with the rising of the seas as a result of climate change. Fortunately the birth rate is gradually diminishing, but the life expectancy is increasing. Birth control is clearly a necessity, not because of the fears of a rich West, but for the well-being of the local population. In anticipation of migrations due to climate change, India is already building a wall along the frontier of the two countries.

3 A light cart on two wheels, open or closed, which is pulled by someone either on foot or on a kind of bicycle. They are much used as taxis in heavily populated streets.

4 The ninth month of the lunar year of the Muslims, during which they rigorously respect the fast.
Thailand

Thailand has been a country of transit rather than of work for us. However, Geneviève Lemercinier and I carried out a study for women religious congregations on the social culture of their members and we also participated in a seminar on the subject. We were invited on various occasions to the University of Chulalongkorn for conferences and meetings with Focus on the Global South, which is led by the Filipino economist Walden Bello, who wrote the preface to the English edition of my book on agrofuels.

Contact with the Buddhists was established through Sulak Sivaraksa, a layman who is dedicated to the cause of peace and reconciliation. He was interested in my works on the sociology of Buddhism and had translated them into Thai to publish them in a volume to be produced by the University of Chulalongkorn. At the last moment the book was prohibited on the grounds of ‘lese-majesty’. In one chapter, indeed, I had explained that the king, who necessarily was a bodhisattva (a person who, at the last minute, stopped on the way to nirvana to help others), benefited from this status of perfect legitimacy, which was the ideological basis of his power. Sulak decided to publish it anyway. It was one of the reasons why he had to go into exile in Canada for several years.

Nevertheless, he returned to Bangkok and resumed his activities at the centre that he had founded. In 2010 he was a member of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal on Sri Lanka, held in Dublin, where we met again. He had new problems with the monarchy and a legal judgement for having revealed that King Bhumibol had killed his elder brother, whom he succeeded on the throne. It had been an accident and not politically motivated. The king, who is very much respected in Thailand, was ill and in a state of depression and Sulak thought that by showing that it had been an accident could help him. He asked me for an intervention by King Albert of Belgium on his behalf. I did so without much hope –he had touched on a taboo subject.

An organization that combines research work, political influence, activism and promotion of grassroots groups to generate critical analysis and stimulate debate on national and international policies concerning the globalization of large multinationals, neoliberalism and militarization.
When I was expelled from the Philippines, I stayed for several days in Thailand, awaiting the arrival of Geneviève Lemercinier. Friends at the Catholic Church’s Social Action Centre suggested that I accompany them to the north of the country. The guerrillas still controlled part of the territory. We had to pass through a no man’s land between the two sides, the government and the guerrillas, but the latter did not disturb the social projects of the Church. We visited several of these.

In 2002, a Buddhist friend, who had translated the book *The Other Davos* into Thai, invited me for a training seminar with worker, peasant and indigenous leaders. This was taking place in a national park of the south of the country, close to the frontier with Myanmar (that used to be Burma). We went there. In his saffron robe, my friend drove us in a 4 x 4, driving with great speed along quite a dangerous road, while listening to pop music and beating out the rhythm with his two hands. I don’t know how we managed to arrive safe and sound.

In the north I also visited Father Manat Supalak, who had studied sociology in Louvain and had stayed at CETRI for three years. It was in the zone of the Karen. Together with several of their leaders a day seminar was organized. As an ethnic minority, they lived mainly in the mountains. A good proportion of their territory has been declared national parks, which prevented them from extending their cultivation and obliged the young people to immigrate to the cities where they constitute cheap labour for industry. In the Karen village where Manat Supalak was responsible for pastoral duties, Monsanto had developed a transgenic maize crop—which was in fact illegal. The Karen could no longer cultivate rice and depended totally on the company, to which they were indebted.

6 The Karen ethnic group was predominantly Christian during the colonization period, but in fact less than 30% of them are Christians, the rest being Buddhists and animists.

7 A US multinational, a leader in the production of transgenetic food crops. It has been one of the most controversial corporations in the industrial world for having fabricated PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl), devastating herbicides (like the Agent Orange used during the Vietnam War), and the bovine growth hormone (forbidden in Europe).
We visited, too, a Karen refugee camp in the country. They were preparing armed struggle against the military regime of Myanmar. We met with Dr. Cynthia Mong, who had organized medical care for the refugees, an admirable personality with great human qualities.

In other Asian and Oceanic countries Geneviève and I also carried out seminars: in Pakistan with a religious congregation in Karachi; in Rangoon, capital of Myanmar, with the Catholic Seminary; in Papua-New Guinea, with some hundred Christians from different churches, and Papuan intellectuals; in Australia, with religious congregations and social movements. Everywhere there was interest in learning how to better analyze local and international situations and in acquiring the instruments for doing so. It was called structural analysis and in fact it was a Marxist analysis presented in a pedagogical form, without hiding the origin of its inspiration, but without upsetting the sensitivities of those who were not prepared for this kind of focus. In the great majority of the cases the approach was positively received.

**Indonesia**

After a short visit in 1968, I returned to Indonesia in 2009 for a meeting with The Peasant Way (La Via Campesina). They asked me for my views on the place of the peasant movement in the overall struggle against capitalism. I was very interested because at the moment this was the most radical movement at the international level. The offensive against agriculture reflected a concentration of land ownership in the hands of capital.

Agriculture is, together with public services, one of the new frontiers of capital. It is for this reason that for the last 25 years we have been experiencing a veritable agrarian counter-reform. Small-scale agriculture does not contribute, or only marginally to the accumulation of capital. Instead, monoculture, with its phenomenal increase of productivity, thanks to the use of chemical products, brings considerable yields rapidly. The peasants are a social class that is being assaulted by capital in keeping with globalization and is developing a new social consciousness that many Marxists had not foreseen. Hence international coordination was of vital importance.
In 2010 I went again to Indonesia for a study on agrofuels that the Belgian Ministry of the Environment had commissioned CETRI to carry out. We studied various cases: Brazil, Guatemala, Cambodia, Tanzania, Mali and Indonesia. The Union of Indonesian Peasants (UIP) had prepared interviews and meetings with the NGOs that are working in this sector; with the Agrarian University, where I gave a lecture; with the businessmen involved in palm oil and various social movements. I spent four days in the north of the island of Sumatra in the palm plantations, staying the nights in the houses of the workers. It was a shocking experience. The landscape was destroyed and the biodiversity reduced to zero, as nothing grows underneath the palm trees; the fauna had been dispersed; the soil and water polluted by chemicals, with danger to people’s health; working conditions were appalling, without any security; the habitat lost among the plantations; the food sovereignty of the peasants had disappeared; the indigenous peoples dispossessed of their land, with the power concentrated in the hands of a few companies.

The government, which is an accomplice in this policy, envisages the extension of plantations over 20 million hectares, mostly for producing agrodiesel. It is what I had also seen when I was in Colombia. To increase the energy of the consumer-oriented growth model, capital is ready to destroy the very sources of life and reorganize a modern form of slavery. We must react and this is the reason why I wrote the book *Agrofuels: Big Profits, Ruined Lives and Ecological Destruction*.

The friends of The Peasant Way organized a meeting for me with the movement for the renewal of the Ulama (Nahdatul Ulama)\(^8\). This is a very strong movement whose basis is mainly composed of peasants and which promotes Muslim values in politics. It is in favour of a union between religion and the State and is opposed to violence. I met with the president, the Vice-President and their collaborators. They explained the history and organization of their movement.

\(^8\) Ulama: This is a social movement from Indonesia, having a rural base and Muslim inspiration and is opposed to violence. Its main leader was the prime minister after Suharto’s dictatorship.
After the dictatorship of Suharto, the president of their movement was nominated as Head of State and he promoted a progressive social policy. But he did not complete his mandate and was replaced by a neoliberal regime supported by the IMF. Among the members of the movement present was a lay Muslim theologian who had participated in various Social Forums. He told me of a book that had greatly impressed him: it was *A Theology of Liberation* by Gustav Gutiérrez, which had been translated into their language. They had also published books by Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire.

During my visits to Sumatra, I was invited by the Agricultural University for a talk on the Common Good of Humanity and particularly on relationships with Nature. I also visited the office of the federation of the palm plantations. They offered me publications about their contribution to the defence of Nature and particularly tropical animals, as well as to the schools built for the children of peasant families. It was not very convincing propaganda for one who had visited the region. The president told me about an agency that ensured respect for Nature and the social responsibility of palm production. When I saw the list of its members I noted that they were representatives of the palm producing companies and the banks that financed them, plus two NGOs that had been co-opted. One of the latter, whom I contacted later, told me that it was a way of influencing the process from within. During discussions with the Belgian government about the supply in Belgium of agrodiesel from the South, this argument was also used. The first business to receive the certificate has increased its profits by 10% on the international market.

*Philippines*

In my first visit to the Philippines in 1968 I met with the YCW leaders. As in other parts of the continent, working conditions were very harsh. It was the beginning of the great wave of the de-localization of the textile industry. A meeting in Sri Lanka, a few years later, with Bishop Labayen, who was responsible for the social action of the Philippine church, led to a series of other journeys round the country to train personnel who were involved in social analysis as a basis for action by Christians.
The main event was the organization, in 1996, of a 3-week seminar in Bayo in the north of the island of Luzon, where the capital Manila is also located. There were a hundred participants: fifty from various Filipino Christian churches and fifty from other countries in Asia, such as Korea, Japan, India and Bangladesh. The training included some social analysis which was taught by Geneviève, a German sociologist and me; another part was theological and given by two Jesuits, an Indian and a Filipino, who were concerned with Liberation Theology.

The seminar had a great impact. The analysis methodology was printed and distributed in dozens of copies, circulating among the country’s movements of workers, peasants and students. At the time Marcos –the dictator supported by the United States– was still in power and the social movements were violently suppressed as part of the war on communism.

The following year a similar seminar was organized, dedicated to social analysis, for the superiors of the women’s congregations in Asia. This was an unexpected opening, due to the obvious social concern and influence of Bishop Labayen. Geneviève Lemercinier arrived before me at Manila from Hong Kong, where we had organized a seminar with the YCW. I had travelled to Korea for the event organized at the International Buddhist University on *Buddhism in the Modern World*.

I took the plane from Seoul to Manila but when I arrived in the Philippines I was not allowed to enter as my name was on a *persona non grata* list. Geneviève Lemercinier was waiting for me with a Filipino priest. They obtained permission to come into the transit lounge and we tried to call the Belgian embassy but it was a Saturday afternoon. Finally, the police chief who had the order to make me to return in the same plane on which I had come told us that he could not wait any longer. Fortunately, he agreed not to put me on the plane for Seoul as I did not want to return there, but on a plane for Bangkok which was my next destination. The plane for Seoul had been waiting. Two policemen took my luggage and accompanied me to the plane headed for Bangkok. I protested and told them I was not a terrorist. One of the policemen, when we reached the ladder of the aeroplane said to me, “Father, very sorry!”
One month later I learnt from a newspaper in Malaysia, where we had come for a training seminar in social analysis, that the Filipino defence minister, Ponce Enrile, had explained his decision. He considered that I was dangerous because I used false names: sometimes people called me Father and other times Monsieur l'Abbé (which means Father in French); that I had participated in the guerrilla warfare in Colombia (he was confusing me with Camilo Torres); that I criticized the Pope and that my writings were the Bible of subversive Christians.

The representative of the Filipino revolutionary movement abroad was a former priest, Louie Jalandoni, who lived in the Netherlands. He learnt from the press what had happened and he came to see me several times at Louvain-la-Neuve to explain the situation and to discuss solutions. His was a movement with a Maoist orientation, linked to the armed peasant movement, the New People’s Army (NPA) that was fighting against the dictatorship of Marcos to defend the land. They were seeking international recognition and, particularly, a condemnation of the violation of human rights by the regime of President Marcos at the UN Human Rights Commission. We went together to Geneva for that purpose.

When Marcos fell, Bishop Labayen invited Geneviève and me for a new seminar in 1986, this time on the cultural aspects of social transformation. By chance this coincided with a month’s truce between the NPA and the government. We met Louie Jalandoni who was there for the negotiations. Various seminars were organized in the island of Negros and also in Cebú.

In the 1970s we visited the island of Negros. Sugar cane had invaded the island after the nationalization of the plantations belonging to US capital in Cuba. The working conditions were terrible and the wages miserable. Genevieve and I were lodged in a peasant house on stilts. The residence of the Bishop who defended the workers on the plantations had been burnt down and he received us in rooms that were still to be renovated.

Each time that Geneviève Lemercinier and I went to the Philippines we stayed in seminaries or religious houses. The negotiators of the NPA, at the national and regional level, also stayed in the same places, as it was only there that they felt secure. This enabled us to have long talks with them; in particular in Cebú, where we
met two members of the national executive of the revolutionary organization. They explained the conditions for their eventual transformation into a political movement. As we had been invited in the following days to Manila for a peace conference, organized by progressive senators whom we knew well, they asked us to inform them of the NPA's positions, and we told them.

There was an incident in Cebú. In spite of the truce, two young men from the NPA were assassinated by the army. They were two brothers. The participants in the seminar decided to attend their funeral. The city was deserted, under military control. We reached the Redeemer Church. There were hundreds of people there, including members of the NPA who had come down from the mountains with their faces masked. The Redeemer seminarians sang a mass in Tagalog (the local language), the equivalent of the Nicaraguan peasant mass.

Several times helicopters flew over the church. The first reading was done by a young guerrilla commandant, who was assassinated the following month. At the beginning of the mass the father of the two assassinated young men put the flag of the NPA in front of the altar. I shared in officiating at the service, together with two Filipino priests. At the end, the two coffins were put on the lorry of the cooperative of ‘Our Lady of Perpetual Help’ (to whom the Redeemers are particularly devoted) and covered with red flags. A funeral procession brought the bodies to the cemetery. With red flags and signs calling for agrarian reform, several hundred poor peasants, many of them shoeless, walked in total silence. It was an impressive sight. The ‘exploited of the world’ were a reality. After that we returned to Manila and described this to the senators. However, at the end of the month, the negotiations broke down.

A few years later the process started up again. A meeting between the Filipino senators and members of the revolutionary movement took place at CETRI in Louvain-la-Neuve. There was a first agreement, with the resistance asking, as a precondition, for the non-renewal of the agreement on the US military bases, which supported the ‘anti-terrorist’ struggle. This was communicated to Manila. There was a vote in the senate and a majority voted for the closing of the bases.
As the violation of human rights continued under the regime of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, there was a session of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal in The Hague in 2009 that I agreed to preside (ten years before I had participated in a similar session in Antwerp). There were many witnesses. Some of them were interrogated through the internet, accompanied by their lawyers. The verdict was severe: violation of human rights and crimes against humanity. The conclusions were sent to the International Court of Justice at The Hague, to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva and to the UN headquarters in New York. During the presidency of Mme Arroyo, the neoliberal model of economic development became very strong in the Philippines. The local elite, allied with multinational corporations, had organized a system of land ownership and wealth concentration. Justice demanded a change. No one was in favour of violence but this resulted naturally in such circumstances. If one is to extricate from this infernal logic it means fighting for a change of system.

After 25 years of absence, I returned to the Philippines in 2011, invited by IBON, a study centre linked to the social movement in the country. I could see that the social conflicts had flared up again, as well as the armed struggle of the New People's Army. The Filipino president was Benigno Aquino III, son of President Corazon Aquino who succeeded the dictator Marcos. He had made an electoral campaign based on social justice. So I wondered whether there had really been a change, because I recognized many of the traditional names in politics. Thus, Marcos's former Defence Minister, who had expelled me 35 years previously, was president of the Parliament. I met old friends from the popular movements, who had followed different paths since.

One evening I had dinner with Joel Rocamora who, with the rank of Minister, was responsible for the government’s ‘Struggle against Poverty’. The programmes that he was promoting were large-scale and he tried to give some of them a wider application so that they were not just social assistance. We discussed similar programmes in Latin America.

The following day I had lunch with George Aseniero, an economics professor at the National University and another friend, who was now the No. 3 in the armed movement. He told me about
the state of the struggles and the negotiations that were going on with the government. A few days later I dined with another old friend, Ed de la Torre, a former priest, who had founded a movement in opposition to the dictatorship of Marcos. He had had to leave the country and spent almost a year in CETRI. He had just been named Rector of the main State University of the country.

Fortunately the negotiation process was under way. The government had cancelled the armed movement from the list of terrorist movements –in opposition to the stance of the United States. The two sides had established an agenda for 18 months of discussions on various aspects of the government’s plan. They did not want to repeat what had happened in Nepal when everything was negotiated in a month and which finally broke down. The last negotiation was to be on disarmament. They were also discussing the external debt and I suggested that they consult with Eric Toussaint, who had helped the decision of Ecuador to reduce its debt after an audit. Both parties seemed interested.

IBON (a Study Centre linked to social movements in that country) organized a People’s Festival that took place in the National University and they had asked me to open with a conference on the crisis. There was strong international representation, from movements with a Maoist orientation. They were also present in the seminar that followed with many young people who were very interested and committed, but with an ideological discourse that recalled the epoch of triumphant Maoism in China. It seemed to me important not to be disturbed by this but to help the energies of the young to analyze situations rigorously and ensure there was consistency between their speeches and the reality. For this reason I tried in my various interventions to make the most serious analyses possible, without using stereotypes and making concrete proposals for change. This was well received by them; above all the youngest were very enthusiastic.
My relationship with Vietnam goes back a long way. The first step was in the sixties when I received an invitation from the Belgian communist senator, Jean Verstappen, to participate in a conference on the war in that country. Of course I was already against that war, but without having any political commitment. Verstappen was trying to build a broad spectrum of support, not only among the communists. I accepted the invitation and participated in various meetings. I also met the Vietnamese resisters who visited Belgium, most of them coming from the South, because it was difficult for those of the North to get visas. Then I went to meetings in Paris, where I had exchanges with many more Vietnamese, also from the North. They even invited me to stay in their embassy. In this way I gradually collected direct information about the war situation so I could form an opinion.

I began to give dozens of conferences on the war, in parishes and in cafes, in Belgium, in other European countries and in North America. I tried to de-legitimize the war from an ethical point of view, explaining the real causes, the horror that it wreaks on the ground and the just claim of the people for their independence and the social system that they desired. It was not always easy as the general opinion was that it was a war to protect the West from the communist peril. It was seen as a ‘crusade’. While he was visiting the US troops in Vietnam, Cardinal Spellman of New York declared that they were the soldiers of Christ. All this created a much distorted picture of the situation.
For example, for my work in FERES at that time, about once every two months I had a meeting in The Hague with its President, Mme Marga Klompe, who was also Minister of Culture. She was a wonderful person and it was an enriching experience working with her. We could not talk about Vietnam as her position was that of the United States, “We must continue the war to support the boys”.¹ I saw it as a colonial conflict for the autonomy of the people. I understood with greater clarity than I did about the war in Korea that the Vietnam conflict was a clash with the capitalist world.

Finally I had the opportunity of visiting Vietnam. In 1968 I had been invited to give talks in various Canadian universities. With the honoraria I received I decided to return to Belgium via Asia, with stopovers in various countries. It allowed me also to accept the invitation from Father Tissa Balasuriya to carry out socio-religious research in Sri Lanka. Thus I travelled to Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and Indonesia.

I took advantage of my stay in Japan to ask for a visa for South Vietnam. In Belgium it had been very difficult to obtain, because the embassy of that country –allied with the United States– already knew me; on the death of Senator Rolin, I had become the president of the Belgium-Vietnam Friendship Association. In Tokyo the Vietnamese embassy employees did not know who I was and gave me the visa immediately so that I was able to enter Saigon.

During the Vatican Council, I had worked with the Vietnamese Bishops and since then I had known the Archbishop of Saigon, Archbishop Nguyên Van Binh. When I visited that city I met Belgian, French and Vietnamese lay members of the International Women Auxiliaries, whom I had known in Brussels and Chicago. I was also friendly with a Belgian priest, Jean Frisque, who worked regularly in Vietnam as a member of the missionary group SAM (South American Mission). I had collaborated with him in the 1950s in an editing project that published the book Bilan du Monde. Encyclopédie Catholique du monde chrétien. He worked in the French mission and facilitated various contacts for me. I spent

¹ The ‘boys’ were the soldiers in the US Army. At this stage of the war, planes were bombarding the North to protect the South from a military debacle.
nearly a week in Saigon and had meetings with priests who were against the war. We had to take precautions not to be detected by the police or the CIA.

It was not long after the Tet Offensive of 1968, at the height of the war. Planes and helicopters flew over the city the whole day. Once there was a bombing by B-52s, what they call carpet bombing. It was 25 to 30 kilometres away from Saigon and the whole city shook as though there had been an earthquake.

On my departure the airport was full of military planes and helicopters that were coming and going all the time. There was some shooting against the civilian plane that I took to go from Saigon to Phnom Penh in Cambodia. We flew over the area that the B52s had been bombing and I could see the ‘carpet’: a rectangular zone that had been completely devastated. That was the way that the United States fought against the Vietnamese guerrillas.

I did not stay long in Phnom Penh. I was received at the home of the Bishop, who was French. I visited a Vietnamese Catholic community on the other side of the Mekong River. Almost all the Catholics were of Vietnamese origin so that the character of the local Catholic Church was not very national. The concrete cathedral looked like a church in a Parisian banlieue. I also visited the Angkor Wat temple, discovering this immense old city, the seat of a tributary society in which the control of water had played a central role. At this period, the political regime was rather strange; King Sihanouk promoted ‘royal socialism’, probably to express opposition to the policies of the United States in the region.

I tried to travel to North Vietnam from Cambodia. There was a Red Cross plane that flew weekly from Phnom Penh to Hanoi, but one had to wait several days for it and afterwards another week before returning. So, for the time being, I was obliged to renounce contact with the North.

Back in Belgium, I participated in many meetings, first with members of the communist party and increasingly with lots of people from various parties and social movements. We organized

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2 The French word for the suburbs surrounding the cities. They consist of massive buildings of twenty floors sometimes of over 50 apartments on each floor, mainly lived in by workers and immigrants.
numerous demonstrations in the streets of Brussels. It was rather
new for a priest to participate in a public demonstration and it was
not approved by everyone. For this reason, one day Monsignor
Descamp, Rector of the Catholic University of Louvain, called me
to his office and said, “I ask you never to mention that you are
a professor at this University when you talk about Vietnam”. I
explained that this was something I could try to prevent, but I
could not control it because the radio and TV journalists presented
me in this way. For an hour I explained to him my motives for
supporting the cause of Vietnam and he listened to me very
attentively. But at the end he said, “I understand. But between
Johnson\(^3\) and Ho Chi Minh\(^4\) my chromosomes are more inclined
to Johnson.” This was the level of political analysis by a University
Rector: an excellent person and a good administrator but not very
critical of the dominant political ideas.

After 1968 and the division of the university, there was a change
of rector and Monsignor Edouard Massaux took on the job of
running the Francophone university. He was a great administrator
and presided most efficiently over the move to Louvain-la-Neuve.
However he created real difficulties for me –also under pressure
from the Holy See– as he was quite opposed to my religious and
political views. Thus, in spite of my many years of teaching (since
1958) I was not appointed professor until 1974, when the President
of the Administrative Council of the University, M. André Oleffe,
who was also the President of the Christian Workers Movement,
insisted on my nomination, to the point of being ready to resign
his post.

The argument of the Rector was that I did not have enough
teaching hours to be nominated. However, every time that I
applied for a vacant course it was refused. Once, being the only
candidate, the rector contacted someone outside the university so
as not to be obliged to appoint me. Nor was I ever appointed full
professor, even though a number of my contemporary colleagues
had been.

\(^3\) Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States from 1963 to 1969.

\(^4\) The outstanding figure in the struggle for the independence of Vietnam
and Secretary-General of the Communist Party. He died in 1969. At the end
of the war, in 1975, the city of Saigon was renamed as Ho Chi Minh City.
I should add that, of course, in the social milieu of my family my activities against the Vietnam War and in general, my political and intellectual positions were not particularly approved of. My mother, on the other hand, supported me. During the Vietnam War, the representative of the National Liberation Front of the South came several times to visit me from Paris where the movement had an office. My mother received him for lunch in her house.

In 1973, while the war was still raging, I was invited with Jean Verstappen to North Vietnam. On this first occasion of visiting the North, we made an official visit to the tomb of Ho Chi Minh to lay a wreath of flowers and we had meetings with different bodies of the State and the Party in charge of external relations. However, we were also able to visit rural communes. And since then I dreamed of carrying out sociological research in Vietnam. As I had worked in various Asian countries, I was interested in comparing them with a socialist country. I was invited, as president of the Association on two more occasions, in 1975 and 1976, when finally the war was over.

Journeys in a Devastated Land and Sociological Cooperation

At the end of the 1970s, there was a debate in Belgium about the creation of a state institution for cooperation and a friend of mine, who was a member of parliament and involved in the project, asked me for advice. I strongly insisted that the future body should not form part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or of Foreign Trade, but that it should have a life of its own. After a lot of discussion it was decided that it should be an autonomous ministry. The first Minister for Cooperation was Lucien Outers, who was a member of the Belgium-Vietnam Friendship Association and I presented him with a plan for cooperation with this country in the field of sociological studies.

During my travels, indeed, I had learnt that in Vietnam they were thinking of organizing an Institute of Sociology, but that they had no specialists or books. I proposed that the University of Louvain-la-Neuve collaborated in the setting up of this centre, train Vietnamese specialists and offer scholarships in Belgium. Of
course the fact that a Catholic university could promote sociology in a communist country and that a priest would be in charge of it was not considered very normal. However, the person designated for the direction of the institute, Professor Vu Khieu, was a very open-minded, cultured man and a philosopher, and the Vietnamese political authorities knew me from my activities with the Belgium-Vietnam Friendship Association. The Belgian Minister accepted the plan and guaranteed a considerable budget in order to carry out the programme, inviting those in charge of the institute to come to Louvain-la-Neuve for a month; financing the organization of a course in theory in Hanoi during the summer; the library and a number of scholarships for training the institute’s researchers.

I also put as a condition to the Vietnamese institute; that its theoretical basis should be Marxist, which could seem a strange demand for a socialist country. But I did so based on my experience in the Soviet Union and Poland, where US structural functionalism was being used to resurrect sociology. This only served for the functioning of the system and did not develop critical thinking. There were no objections in Vietnam and indeed there was real agreement.

The first step was the visit to Louvain-la-Neuve of four people who were to be in charge of the future institution; Vu Khieu himself; Bui Dinh Thanh, a historian; Do Thai Dong, another philosopher and Dang Bich Thuy, a linguist. The purpose was to learn about European sociology and they stayed in CETRI for one month. We discussed the conception of training courses and travelled together to Paris to meet with the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Touraine. It was a very positive experience and they returned to Vietnam completely reassured that it was not an operation of ideological infiltration.

Two or three months later, at the end of the academic year, Geneviève Lemercinier and I were preparing to leave for Vietnam. However, in the meantime there was a new Minister for Cooperation, Mark Eyskens, an economist, who had been Secretary-General of the University of Louvain and later he became Prime Minister. He was a member of the Flemish Christian Democracy Party and quite anti-communist. And it so happened that there had just
been the intervention of Vietnam in the Cambodia of Pol Pot. Five days before our departure for Hanoi to start the course, the new minister decided to cancel all cooperation with Vietnam, in retaliation for its action against Cambodia. He did not inform the Vietnamese but just suspended everything.

So we were in a delicate situation. For five days I contacted friends I had in Catholic development organizations –in Germany, Holland, Canada, France and Belgium– to try to salvage the project. They all accepted to participate. Of course, it could not be at the same level as the official Belgian cooperation, but they financed the essentials at least. Thus we were able to travel to Hanoi and carry out the programme.

It was a long journey. We had to fly from Brussels to Berlin and change airport to take an Interflug plane from Eastern Germany. The flights were exhausting, with stopovers in Moscow, Tashkent, Karachi, Vientiane, before arriving in Hanoi. In Vietnam the situation was very precarious, materially speaking. It was summer with a temperature sometimes reaching 40 °C. We were staying in a little hotel, with just five rooms, in a very bad condition because of the war, with fans that functioned only when there were no electricity cuts, which were frequent, and a great number of impressively large rats were our companions. One day the ceiling of my room gave way –fortunately I was in the Institute of Sociology at the time.

We gave the courses on the top floor of the Institute, just beneath the roof, so that it was even hotter. At night-time, the students who were not from Hanoi slept on the tables as they had nowhere else to stay. The conditions were unbelievably tough, but the atmosphere was excellent. We ran these courses for four years.

It was not very easy to combine these activities with university life in Louvain, especially because of the ideological opposition.

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5 Head of the Government of Cambodia as from 1975. At the end of 1978, after various attempts to involve the United Nations, Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia and at the beginning of 1979; they expelled Pol Pot from power to put an end to the genocide and the bombing of Vietnamese territory. In 1979 it provoked the outbreak of the war between Vietnam and China, which up until then had maintained fairly good relations. The Vietnamese troops started to withdraw from Cambodia in September 1989.
The university also created obstacles for the work of Geneviève Lemercier, who was a member of the scientific body, with limited time for vacation. Professors had almost two months between the two sessions of exams. When we were working in Vietnam Geneviève had to take time from her vacation, while our colleagues who were working in the Congo, which was at the time ruled over by Mobutu, received almost twice their salary. When she and I had to stay in Vietnam for a longer time than her vacations, she was obliged to take leave without pay. This affected her when she reached the age of retirement, as she lacked only a few weeks before being able to obtain a pension as a researcher and could only receive one as an employee so I helped to make up the difference. That was the price to pay for our political commitment.

On various occasion Geneviève and I took advantage of our work in India and Sri Lanka to go to Vietnam. It was possible to reach it through Thailand. But because of the warmongering between Thailand and Vietnam, the official communication between the two countries was suspended, so it was necessary to go by train from Bangkok and then take a car or collective taxi to a river port. There we had to take a small boat to cross the Mekong River, then a car again to the airport of Vientiane in Laos, where we could take a plane for Hanoi. The same trip had to be undertaken on the way back.

We had numerous anecdotes to recount from these trips. In one of them, on our return, we took the boat in Laos to cross the Mekong and arrived in Thailand. At the frontier they would not let us enter the country. Normally with a Belgian passport it was possible to enter in Thailand but the officer said to us, “You do not need a visa if you come by plane or in a ship of more than 10,000 tons”. There was no doubt that our transport did not meet either of these requirements. As our visas for Laos had just expired we could not go back and now we could not go forward. On top of this, the relationships between Thailand and Laos were also tense because the latter was allied with Vietnam. The police telephoned to Laos and said, “Here we have two people who cannot enter into Thailand. They will have to return to Vientiane
to obtain a visa.” However, it was Saturday and the Thai embassy was closed. Luckily Vientiane agreed to receive us without a visa.

The following day we were at Sunday mass in the cathedral in Vientiane and we interviewed the Bishop. Many Catholics in Laos were from ethnic minorities and had been used by the United States to fight communism. The relationships of the Bishop with the government were difficult, with mutual misunderstandings. On the following Monday, through the intervention of the consulate, we were finally able to enter Thailand.

On another occasion, on the route between the little town in Thailand, where the railway ended and the Mekong River, we met a secretary from the French embassy in Laos. It was extremely hot and we were in a collective taxi, bursting with people. The French civil servant was encased in a tight grey suit, with a tie, clutching the diplomatic pouch like a holy sacrament. Another time we were flying back from Hanoi to Vientiane in a Soviet plane belonging to the Vietnamese airline, full of peasants. Some of them were carrying dried fish which made the almost two-hour journey quite disagreeable.

In 1979 Vu Khieu proposed travelling to Ho Chi Minh City by car. We had to give part of the training course in that city. A group from the Sociology Institute packed into two cars. During the war almost all the bridges in the North had been destroyed by bombing. Only a few had been repaired and to cross from one side of the rivers to another it was necessary to use rafts. The journey took four days. We were able to visit various provinces on the way and speak with many people about what had happened during the war and how the reconstruction was being organized. Along our way we also met Cuban doctors and experts in the sugar industry, who were working as coopérants in Vietnam.

It also happened that, in a moment of truce in the war between Vietnam and China, on the initiative of Vu Khieu we approached the border between both countries. It was striking to see the two opposing armies, each on its own territory and to view the damage wrought by this conflict on the Vietnam side. Although it was a terrible war, with tens of thousands of deaths, the Chinese were able to penetrate barely 30 kilometres into hostile territory. The
Vietnamese halted them with the provincial armies alone. It was very sad and scandalous to see two socialist countries, for political ideological reasons, causing so much destruction. At the same time groups of solidarity with Vietnam, thousands of people were making great efforts to send modest amounts in aid of various kinds. It was difficult not to be discouraged. At the same time it helped to understand that social and political processes are not linear; that one can never assess the weight of history; and that confidence in people is an indispensable condition for human progress. For believers, this is greatly strengthened by faith in a liberating God.

Vu Khieu belonged to the National Social Sciences Committee as well as being Director of the Institute of Sociology. For this reason he had many contacts in the political field and introduced us to personalities such as the Foreign Minister Nguyên Có Tặc, who was a friend of his. We met several times. On each of my visits he invited me to the Ministry to talk. I was also called to the Ministry of the Interior, particularly the department dealing with religions, to discuss the subject. The tensions between the State and the religions were real, to the point of conflict. The anti-communism of certain Catholic and Buddhist groups and religious leaders was implacable, especially in the South (sometimes because of unfortunate experiences with local authorities). On the other hand, the lack of knowledge about religious realities and the dogmatism of many of the cadres were alarming. In fact one could not do much, apart from trying to smooth relationships for greater mutual understanding and the adoption of more appropriate behaviour.

Professor Vu Khieu and Minister Nguyên Có Tặc were very interested to know more about John Paul II, whose papacy had started not long ago. They were afraid that the Catholics could be a subversive force to destabilize the regime. I had to explain the very different historical contexts of Poland and Vietnam as far as Catholicism was concerned. The Catholic religion was part of Polish culture and also of the national identity. It was quite different in Vietnam where it was in a minority and had difficulty in integrating into the traditional culture, in spite of recent efforts. However, there was some cause for fear, given that the two
presidents of South Vietnam, who were allies of the United States, were both Catholics.

As I have already mentioned, I had some experience in this field, having known Ngô Dinh Diệm in Chicago, before he became president of South Vietnam. Clearly his political position was influenced by his Catholicism. As a universal rule in the Catholic Church in the 1950s, any Catholic who openly collaborated with communism was excommunicated. Diệm was the brother of the Archbishop of Huế (the old imperial capital). Monsignor Ngo Dinh Thuc was particularly virulent in his anti-communism. His nephew was later appointed by the Holy See as Auxiliary Bishop, with the right to succeed Monsignor Binh, Archbishop of Saigon.

During the Vatican Council II I went to Rome airport to welcome Monsignor Luigi Ligutti who was arriving from the United States. There I met Mme Ngô Dinh Nhu, Diệm's sister, who had come to meet the Bishop of Huế, another brother of hers. President Ngô Dinh Diệm had been assassinated and Mme Nhu harshly accused the US secret service of his death. According to her, he had not been sufficiently servile, following a nationalist Vietnamese policy that could have led to negotiations with the North. She was extremely aggressive, particularly against President Kennedy. Monsignor Ngô Dinh Thuc, her brother, who was very conservative, did not accept the orientations of the Vatican Council II. Afterwards he left the Roman Church and joined a schismatic sect based in Spain, but it never had much impact.

One day Vu Khieu organized for Geneviève and me an audience with Pham Van Dong, who succeeded Ho Chi Minh. We were received in the Presidential Palace and had a long interview with the President. We talked about the Catholics of Vietnam and their concern for the future. He thanked us for maintaining relationships with them in the South, where the situation was tenser.

Occasionally I also talked with the cardinal of Hanoi, after the Sunday mass in the Cathedral. The Bishops of North Vietnam were not able to participate in the Vatican Council II because of the tense situation between this country and the West during

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the war. Therefore the Cardinal was very interested to talk about the Council. On his own initiative he had renewed the liturgy, translated the biblical texts into modern Vietnamese and composed hymns and songs that were very popular in the parishes of the North of the country, although unknown in the South. We kept in contact until his death and he sent me a telegram when his mother died, asking me for prayers.

I had a number of meetings with the president of the Association of Patriotic Catholics. This group had fought against French colonialism in the North and its president, a jurist, had been very close to Ho Chi Minh. The ties between this organization with the Catholic hierarchy were relatively cool; however, not to the extent of the situation in China where there was an ‘official’ Church, close to the communist power, and a ‘clandestine’ Church. The association described itself as part of the Catholic Church, in spite of a certain degree of mutual mistrust between them and the hierarchy. The president recounted to Geneviève and me how the Catholics had participated in the revolution and the important role that some of them had played. He asked us if we could let him have a Bible in French as he participated in the Sunday mass in the only church in Hanoi where, because of the foreigners, the liturgy was in that language.

In the library of the seminary of Ho Chi Minh City the theological books were very out of date. As most of the priests and seminarians could read French I collected recent books in this field, particularly of Liberation Theology, for their library. I sent them as unaccompanied luggage which was much cheaper than bringing them with me. But the airline sent two suitcases of theological books to Peking, in transit for Hanoi. Fortunately they were not opened and arrived at their destination. In Vietnam, neither the customs nor the airport police ever opened our luggage but I informed my friends in the Institute of Sociology that we had brought new theological literature for the clergy in the South, which the strict bureaucrats could probably not have tolerated.

When we went to Vietnam we always gave a course in the section of the Institute in Ho Chi Minh City which was rather shorter than the one we gave in Hanoi. I also visited Monsignor Binh. He invited me to give talks to the priests on various
aspects of the Vatican Council II. He was a very open-minded man—prudent, too. It was a question of changing the mentality of his clergy. Between 1954 and 1960 half of the Catholics of the North had come down to the South, to Saigon and its surroundings. For this reason the clergy of Ho Chi Minh City were radically anti-communist, with two-thirds of their membership composed of former refugees from the North. For them, the Church had to face a new situation with the reunification of the country under the orientations of the North that had the power and did not make concessions. The clergy did not accept the limits imposed by the new regime, like the restriction of entries into the seminary, the taking over of education by the State and other such measures. Nevertheless, some social work remained in the hands of the religious congregations, such as orphanages and the rehabilitation centres for drug addicts. The diocese was publishing a weekly bulletin.

On the one hand, the new administration did not expect the collaboration of the Catholic minority, mistrusting it at a time when there were still a few pockets of armed resistance in the South. On the other hand, composed mainly by refugees from 1964, the Catholic group was afraid of religious persecution from a communist regime.

M. Bà, who had been the representative in Paris of the National Liberation Front of the South, was designated secretary of the Party for Ho Chi Minh City. As I had had contacts with him in Europe, I sought him out and he told me that he would like to meet Monsignor Binh. The Archbishop accepted and the three of us ate together, with Geneviève Lemercinier, at the Hotel Caravelle, the former property of the Catholic Church, which was now nationalized. During the dinner, M. Bà, very enthusiastic, explained the plans of the Party to improve the social situation of the city. Monsignor Binh listened very attentively, without saying anything. At the end, he said, “That’s all very well, but I wish that the communists would believe a little more in original sin.” There was no aggressiveness in his words. It was only the expression of a commonly shared feeling, by a wise man, with a lot of experience. M. Bà understood it in this way.
I have other memories. Monsignor Binh invited me to give a talk on the occasion of some diocese event. A special menu had been prepared for lunch. The first course was a dish considered to be truly excellent, chicken eggs in their embryos. I tried hard but I could not eat it, although I was afraid of offending my fellow diners.

On another occasion Geneviève and I arrived in Hanoi, coming from Europe. It had been a very long journey, with stopovers in the Soviet Union and other countries. We arrived in Hanoi one Saturday, very late. I remember that the plane had been rather uncomfortable, an Ilyushin of the Interflug, with sausages and beer for breakfast. We were quite exhausted. The airport, which was still a military one, was full of bomb craters. Our friends from the institute of sociology came to take us the 35 km to the city, along very narrow roads that were still in a bad condition. On arriving at the hotel in Hanoi, they told us that the following day they would come at 5 in the morning to take us to the mass in the cathedral. We replied, “We are Catholics, but we are not fanatics. It would be just as good if the car could come for us for the mass at 11 a.m.”. They had thought that their initiative was a mark of deference, however they agreed to our request, a little surprised.

More than once, in the section of the Institute of Sociology of Ho Chi Minh City I was asked by groups of researchers to supervise their fieldwork. Agreeing to do so, I travelled to the Mekong Delta. It was very different from the delta of the Red River in the North, with huge tracts of agricultural land that had been, before the reunification, the property of individual owners. Afterwards, with the agrarian reform and the creation of cooperatives, there had been serious difficulties. The authorities had asked the institute to study the problem. To achieve all these changes with ‘voluntarist’ policies, without sufficient support from the people, was evidently an impossible task. Forcing through social measures generally leads to failure and, in spite of a few exceptions that is what happened in the South of Vietnam during the short period before the Doi Moi.\footnote{Known as the Renovation. These are economic reforms that Vietnam started in 1986. They introduced changes based on a market economy, but they maintained a socialist orientation.}
The institute had given us the opportunity to travel throughout the whole country, from the northern frontier with China to the Mekong River to the south. So we could visit in the centre the 17th parallel, which demarcated the North from the South; the treeless forests, destroyed by Agent Orange during the US war; the coastal area next door to China; the frontier with Cambodia and the territories of ethnic minorities; and not forgetting the famous Ha Long Bay.

We had many exchanges with the members of the institute who were doing research in Hanoi and who were our students. A group of them asked our help in carrying out a study on the workers in the Eighth of November factory, the largest industrial textile plant in the country. It was working, among other things, on the production of uniforms for the German Democratic Republic army and it employed 8,000 people. I accepted on the condition that we could visit it first, before starting the work.

A Dantesque spectacle met our eyes when Geneviéve and I entered the factory. The 500 machines, made in China in the 1930s, produced an infernal noise. The heat was appalling because the ventilation system had been destroyed by US bombing. As the factory was part of a Chinese cooperation project, the plans were in that country; and because of the war between the two countries it was not possible to get hold of them in order to repair the cooling system. Instead they had installed some fans that increased the noise even more. I was astonished. I wondered, “For these workers, especially the women, what is the difference between capitalism and socialism?”

There were in fact some differences. The working day was seven to eight hours and not twelve to fourteen as I had seen in South Korea and Hong Kong. There were facilities for eating, crèches for the children, etc. But the work was carried out in very difficult conditions. It made me think of what Maurice Godelier had said: “The drama of socialism is that it has to start walking with the feet of capitalism.” In that industry it was not possible to change the way of producing simply for lack of means. It was a typical case of transition.

Another example of this situation was that at that time numerous Vietnamese were going to Eastern Europe to make up for the lack of labour in countries like Hungary, Poland, the Soviet Union and
above all in Eastern Germany. A good proportion of their wages returned to Vietnam as remittances. The experience of those who returned served as know-how for the later development of local industry. However, it also reproduced the model of relationships between the industrialized nations and the undeveloped ones that provided cheap labour. It is really not possible to change a mode of production over night.

We also visited ethnic minorities to the west of Hanoi, where we lodged in houses on stilts. The Vietnamese government made a big effort to safeguard the culture and traditions of dozens of these minority groups. Many cultural activities have been organized in the towns; anthropological studies have rescued tradition from French ethnology; museums house objects and cultural souvenirs. However, the general perspective was more of a folkloric approach than recognition of minorities with rights to their ways of life. Various problems concerning the land use and political ideology affected the relationships between the Kinh majority, the government and the minorities. In various regions there have been conflicts. At one time the anti-communist opposition tried to use the indigenous peoples for political ends. In Laos, the CIA used them direct during the war, which provoked a mass migration of thousands of them to Thailand.

Hai Van, a Rural Commune

The main sociological work that Geneviève and I accomplished in Vietnam was the research we carried out on the commune of Hai Van, situated in the delta of the Red River in the province of Nam Dinh and the district of Hai Hau. After two years of theoretical and methodological training of a team of new sociologists, we had said, “Sociology is not practised in offices; we must go to the field.”

The Institute chose a medium commune that, according to economic and social indicators, was neither the best nor the worst. It had about 5,000 inhabitants and was a rural commune not far

8 Kinh: the Vietnamese ethnic group, also called Viet, consists of some 65 million people. They are to be found in all provinces, but particularly in the delta areas and in the urban centres.
from Hanoi. Some 30 of us researchers went there in the height of summer. The first week the thermometer was never less than 40° C. After three days, three girls could take it no longer and had to return to Hanoi. The rest remained, staying with the local inhabitants, while Geneviève and I were accommodated in the headquarters of Hai Hau District in austere rooms, beds without mattresses, just with a simple mat, and water only in the patio. I used the room that General Vô Nguyên Giap,9 the victor of the battle of Diên Biên Phú,10 had occupied a few days previously.

The commune consisted of five small traditional villages (langs). As it was close to the South China Sea, whence the first Spanish missionaries came to the Philippines, there was a considerable Catholic community in this region. They were grouped together in small marginal villages along the coast.

When we arrived we asked the researchers of the Institute to divide into five groups to apply the questionnaires that we had prepared in Hanoi on the economic, social and cultural aspects of each section of the commune. The interviews were carried out in one of two or three houses. Some of us contacted the administration to collect all available statistics. We also noted down what we had seen to complement the information obtained.

There was a supervisor from the Party with us, responsible for making an administration report on the research. But as the group dispersed he was totally lost, in crisis because he did not know whom he should accompany. I approached him to explain the methodology being used and to reassure him about what was going on. I told him that all the information would be available and that we would help him in writing up his report. The head of the Institute also intervened; it was the only way to calm him down.

9 Vô Nguyên Giap (Vietnam, 1911). He was the military strategist who led Vietnam to its victory against the Japanese, the French and the U.S.A. He is considered a hero in his country.

10 The battle that liberated Vietnam from the French at the end of 1953. It is considered to be one of the most outstanding triumphs in the struggle against colonialism, with a kind of prolonged guerrilla warfare against a powerful enemy. General Giap is esteemed a hero in his country for having carried out a military strategy that brought victory against the Japanese, the French and the United States.
It was particularly interesting to observe the mechanisms of social transformation. The agrarian reform was also a key factor. Before the commune came into being a large landowner was someone who possessed ten hectares. This has to be seen in the context of the population density in the delta of the Red River. The Vietnamese land reform was inspired by China. Popular tribunals were set up, largely to de-legitimize the landowners. There had been a lot of abuses, a fact that was later recognized by the authorities. In Hai Van, four families were considered as large landowners. Their lands were confiscated, their houses transformed into public buildings (schools, communal halls, etc.) and their civic rights suspended. When we were carrying out the survey, they all lived in the commune, had recovered their civic rights and were members of the cooperative.

Twenty-five years had passed from the agrarian reform to the organization of the socialist cooperative. During this period the peasants kept the right to recover the ownership of their land and, each year, some of them would return to their plots with a buffalo. At the same time, the peasants in the cooperative received various advantages for their productive activities and the sale of their produce to the State. Gradually individual practices disappeared and gave way to collective production.

As already mentioned, the commune was mostly Catholic, which was exceptional in Vietnam, as they formed only 5% of the total population. The local history of the relationships between religion and the new regime was an interesting theme for the study. As we saw earlier, almost half of the Catholic population in the North took refuge in the South at the time of the French defeat. The navy of the former colonial power supported the process, putting military boats at the disposal of the refugees. During the colonial time, France had protected the Catholics. Thus they had the support of a group, which although it was a minority, played an important administrative and political intermediary role vis-à-vis certain local activities.

I knew the parish priest of Hai Van, who had been an official in the French army. During the colonial war his church had served as a place of detention and torture of the fighters in the liberation army. After the victory, the new Vietnamese authorities
had condemned him to death, but President Ho Chi Minh had pardoned him. He returned to being the parish priest. A little later there was a conflict with the population: they accused him of living with a young woman. When the parishioners went to protest to the Bishop, he answered that he could send him to another parish but then they would be without a priest because he did not have another one to assign to them.

As the Catholics of the commune were quite traditional, for them it would be a misfortune to be without a priest because it was he who held the keys to salvation, the sacraments, the baptisms, etc. Thus they preferred to keep the priest. Nevertheless, they made a demonstration of protest outside the church. The priest became angry and in revenge he declared he would refuse the religious burial rites to those participating in the demonstration. For them it was the equivalent of sending them to hell. They spoke to the secretary of the Party who told me the story. He had visited the priest and warned him, “You have no right to refuse burial rites to Catholics. If you persist, we shall cut your rice ration.” And so the conflict ended.

When the survey was finished I discovered a very significant decree. It was a document signed by the secretary of the Party, the parish priest and the Buddhist monk of the nearby pagoda, to fight against ‘superstitions’, magical practices which were quite common in the rural areas. The convergence of interests was remarkable. The secretary of the Party was against superstition because it interfered with the rationality of production; the priest, because he did not accept the continuation of superstitious religious beliefs among the Catholics; and the Buddhist monk because, inter alia, the document prohibited the veneration of a female Buddhist, which was widely practised in the Vietnamese popular religion, but not approved by official Buddhism.

The Study and its Publication

After ten days we returned to Hanoi to start work on the report. As we had had several teams working at the same time we had collected an enormous quantity of material. Geneviève and I took it back to Louvain to conclude a first report and submit
it to the colleagues at the Vietnamese Institute, to specialists in rural questions and to some intellectual friends in order to receive complementary information and criticism before preparing the report for publication. It was a very interesting experience. Viet Kach Vien, a great Vietnamese intellectual and linguist cooperated closely with us. Later on he came to spend some days in CETRI.

Finally we published the work. Still today, this study is considered as the first step in the new Vietnamese sociology. We used a theoretical approach that specified the notion of the mode of production and its historical development in the pre-colonial times. Our hypothesis was that the socialism of Vietnam was a ‘tributary’ socialism, with a certain autonomy of the local cooperatives vis-à-vis the central power; with the organization of new social relationships of production with a historical basis that took tradition into account, without destroying the past. Thus the old langs were at the basis of the organization of the work brigades in the rice fields and they also formed the limits of the jurisdiction of local councils. In practice this greatly ensured the strength of the system.

The agrarian reform, based on a reorganization of the irrigation system by the State made it possible to have three harvests a year (two of rice and one of vegetables). Rice production rose from one tonne per hectare to nine tonnes, in spite of the war and that there were no chemical fertilizers or mechanization. The use of a small plot of land near the house to rear chickens, ducks, small livestock or fish provided about 45% of the family revenue.

Primary education was generalized and the health system had a dispensary, medical personnel and the pharmaceutical workshop that using medicinal herbs covered up to 60% of local needs. Nevertheless, there were several problems. The organization of work, with a complicated system of points to calculate compensation, multiplied the bureaucracy, which risked discouraging the peasants. When Ernest Mandel, President of the Fourth International, whom I met from time to time in Belgium, read about this it was for him a confirmation of the Trotskyite thesis, a result that he had not expected.

On the other hand, the work on the plots was almost always carried out by the women, which meant they were really exploited.
They had to participate in the collective work in the rice fields, look after the plots and also see to the education of the children. The authorities accepted the report very well. The Union of Vietnamese Women used it in their campaign for women’s rights. Of course we recommended that there be sociological studies on other aspects of the collective life of the country. The book was published in Vietnam by the Institute in Hanoi, distributed in French by L’Harmattan in Paris and published in English by Zed Books, London, in 1984. It was an important step forward in my work, in collaboration with Geneviève Lemercinier, which made it possible to extend an analysis of the social, political and religious processes to a socialist society.

Academic and Political Exchanges

In 1980 Gabriel García Márquez (Gabo) made a brief visit to Vietnam for reportage in a Spanish journal. I knew him, as we had both been members of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal. Before being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, he had been in Brussels for a session of the Tribunal on the dictatorships in Latin America. He was present, together with two other Latin American writers, the Argentinean Julio Cortázar, with whom I had really friendly relationships until his premature death; and the Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano, with whom I continued to have regular contacts concerning solidarity activities.

Gabo had very little time, and as I was in the country he asked for my help. We made an appointment to meet in Hanoi, in the Party hotel, where he was staying. By chance, the following day, some senators from the United States were expected; making their first visit to Vietnam after the war was expected. They had sent ahead information to the hotel about what they needed to eat to the hotel, including their own bottles of water, which caused us both much merriment. We were together for almost a day, talking about the situation in the country, especially in the rural areas, with Gabriel taking copious notes. Then, with the information he had collected and his own observations, he wrote a text that was, as always, brilliant.
The social sciences committee had a section that studied religions, created by the anthropologist Le Trung Vu. Geneviève Lemercinier and I had various working sessions with them and this collaboration resulted in the publication of an issue of Social Compass dedicated to Vietnam. There were articles on Buddhism, Catholicism, the religions of ethnic groups and also new religious movements like Hoa Hao and Cao Dai. These last two groups had interested us particularly because they were created in the last phase of French colonialism, between the two world wars. They constituted pockets of resistance to the new socialist regime after reunification.

During our visit to the Mekong Delta we met some of the Hoa Hao groups. It was a religion based on nature, started by a Vietnamese engineer on his return from France. Its members were confined to small rural communities situated around the rivers.

The Cao Dai was quite different. They had a central location, which some called ‘the Vatican’ because it was composed of a number of buildings and a large basilica. We visited it when a collaborator at the Institute of Sociology accompanied us to the frontier with Cambodia. By chance it was the day of a big religious feast. We were received by the ‘Pope’, dressed in white. When he heard we were Belgians, he asked us to take a letter for his nephew, who was studying at the University of Liege. The interview was brief as he was preparing to celebrate the service, to which he invited us.

Cao Dai was a syncretic religion based on Confucianism, Buddhism, spiritualism and Catholicism. At the entry to the basilica we passed a door over which there was a bust of Victor Hugo who, like Auguste Comte, was considered an important medium of spiritualism. At the beginning of the ceremony, there was a procession of cardinals, dressed in red, and of archbishops and Bishops, in various colours. They walked slowly, stopping at regular intervals following a strict rhythm, marked by the ringing of a bell, as in the Confucian rites. As we had to return to Ho Chi Minh City that same day, we were unable to stay until the end of the ceremony.

There is little doubt that this religious movement has a certain success among public officials and traders in South Vietnam. It
was a cultural adaptation of the co-existence between Vietnamese tradition and Western influence. Typically, its greatest success was among the social group that had served as an intermediary between the public administration of the colony and the economic agents of the new system.

At the end of 1980 I travelled to Cambodia, accompanied by Geneviève Lemercinier. It so happened that our visit coincided with that of Nguyễn Có Tắc, the Vietnamese Minister for Foreign Affairs who, during an official meeting, presented us to the Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen. Together with a member of the Institute for Sociology we visited villages that had suffered the massacres by Pol Pot’s supporters. There were still mounds of human bones in the fields and the conversations with the peasant families showed the trauma they had experienced only four months previously. In Phnom Penh we also visited the school-prison, where people had been tortured. Various meetings were organized in the university to formalize exchanges and start solidarity activities with Belgian organizations.

In the plane returning to Ho Chi Minh City, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister came to sit beside me and we discussed various matters. He asked if I could intercede with Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb, his Belgian counterpart in order to resume cooperation, especially to improve the railways as almost all the Belgian engines were out of action for lack of spare parts after inter-governmental cooperation had ceased. He wanted to take advantage of the United Nations General Assembly in New York to re-establish contacts. The Belgian minister was a friend of my family and my brothers knew him well, although I had met him only occasionally. His father, Pierre Nothomb, a writer, had been very close to my paternal grandfather, Henri Carton de Wiart.

When I returned to Brussels I got in touch with his office to ask for an interview. I wanted to inform him of the situation and in particular about the origin of the conflict in Cambodia. In fact, I had travelled along the frontier between Cambodia and Vietnam during the summer, before the Vietnamese intervention.

I saw the traces of the bombing in the Vietnamese fields that caused the evacuation of the peoples living within ten kilometres from the frontier. For a while I talked about this with the Belgian
Minister and of course I brought up the need of rehabilitating the train engines and the problems that they were encountering. The Minister replied that Belgium could not change its position because the trains could serve for transporting Vietnamese troops to Cambodia, the Vietnamese occupation having been condemned by our country. I explained that between Vietnam and Cambodia there were no railways and he did not know how to continue his argument. Only two or three years later it was possible to bring the two ministers together. In the meantime, I tried to intercede with the European authorities to change the situation. For ten years the West continued to recognize the Pol Pot regime at the United Nations, which hindered the normalization of relationships with Vietnam.

A Parenthesis
after a Decade of Collaboration

In the summer of 1981 Maurice Godelier, the French Marxist anthropologist, was invited by the Institute of Sociology of Vietnam through CETRI for a seminar on the Asiatic mode of production, one of the fields in which he was a specialist. A great anthropological researcher as well as being trained in philosophy and economics, he had received an honorary doctorate from Louvain University. He had carried out important work on Papua-New Guinea.

A good group was gathered to discuss with him about the Asiatic mode of production. The Institute invited university historians and post-graduate students to participate. Godelier made a theoretical presentation. I made another on Kerala, using the work of Geneviève Lemercinier, who also participated in the seminar, to present another mode of Asian production, not linked with the control of irrigation, but with international trade. We also brought up other studies, made outside Asia.

The historians present had been trained in the Soviet Union where the idea of an Asiatic mode of production was not accepted. Their historical-theoretical vision was a succession of modes of production, from the primitive to the socialist, via slavery, feudalism and capitalism. They cited examples from the history of Vietnam and Godelier replied, “But that is typical of the
Asiatic mode of production.” In fact, it seemed to me that it was not logical to talk about an Asiatic mode of production, when it could be found among the Incas of America and in Madagascar. I preferred to talk about a tributary mode of production; that is, an economic organization characterized by exchanges between local bodies and a central power to which tribute was paid.

The Vietnamese historians were angry and called on Lenin to support them. Godelier answered, “Very well, if little father Lenin said that, he was mistaken.” His remark detonated an ideological battle. Maurice Godelier was an excellent intellectual and very consistent in his thinking. The catastrophe could have been foreseen. The younger generation of researchers were somewhat in agreement with us while the professors of the Faculty of History had lost face, which in a Confucian society was unpardonable.

The historians immediately complained to the Central Committee of the Party. The seminar on the Asiatic mode of production ended, but we were able to continue the curriculum of the general training course on sociology. For Maurice Godelier there were no problems as he was going to leave, but Geneviève Lemercinier and I had to remain until the course was finished. It was prohibited for all those who did not belong to the Institute, including the wife of General Giap who was a historian, and we remained only with the sociologists. The course at Ho Chi Minh City was suspended.

The Director of the Institute, Vu Khieu suffered greatly from this episode. In the Central Committee there were accusations against us. It was said that I—who the previous year had received the Friendship with Vietnam Medal—was an agent of the Vatican and that he, as Director of the Institute, had infiltrated me into his circle. I did not know what to do. One day he called me, practically in tears, and suggested that I go to see Nguyên Có Tắc, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to explain the situation. I asked for a meeting with the minister, who received me and said, “Be patient. Nothing much can be done for the moment, only wait.”

Fortunately there was a culture of consensus in the Vietnamese Central Committee and until consensus was reached they did not take decisions. There were two positions concerning our problem: some defended us and others were against us. This disagreement slowed down the decision-making process—and it was for this
reason that the minister said we had to wait— and we were able to continue the course in Hanoi until it was finished.

The evening before our departure from Vietnam, the private secretary of Pham Van Dong called me and said, “The Prime Minister sends you his best wishes and hopes you have a good return journey.” I knew immediately what that meant, “I am sorry for what happened, but I could not change the situation.” It was a very positive action on his part. With this incident, our work on training sociologists in Vietnam was concluded, but luckily we had accomplished an essential phase. I knew that I could not return immediately and in fact, it was ten years later.

Back in Belgium I did not recount this episode. I applied the advice of the foreign minister: to wait. Vietnam did not have an embassy in Belgium and the Vietnam House that we had created in Brussels, thanks to the work of Jean Verstappen, had practically become their embassy. When a new Vietnamese ambassador was sent to Paris (this happened twice during those ten years), he also visited CETRI to greet me in my position as president of the Belgium-Vietnam Friendship Association. I understood the meaning of these visits, which meant that it was not yet time to come back, but that they maintained their trust in me.

Relations between the Catholic Church and Vietnamese Government

Only a few days before the reunification of Vietnam, the Holy See designated to Saigon (which was soon to become Ho Chi Minh City) Monsignor Nguyễn Văn Thuấn, an auxiliary Bishop with the right to succeed Archbishop Binh. This right to succession was quite unusual and it showed Rome’s concern with the new political situation. The newcomer was a conservative, close to Opus Dei and a nephew of Ngô Đình Diệm, the president of South Vietnam who had been assassinated a few years previously. This provoked strong reactions. Various Catholics organized a demonstration. There were disturbances and victims, but the designation was a fact.

Then the reunification took place. The local authorities came to Monsignor Binh to ask him to take steps to change the situation
but he explained that he had no power to change a decision of the Holy See. A little later, the two Bishops were convened to a building in the new administration and received in separate offices. After a while, Archbishop Binh received the information. “The problem has been resolved. We have sent the auxiliary Bishop with right to succession to his native village.”

The Bishop had been accused of having contacts with opposition groups in Vietnam, particularly with some who were carrying out armed resistance. He was arrested, which created a scandal: “Bishop Imprisoned by the Communists in Vietnam”. At the end of the 1970s, one of his sisters, who was a refugee in Australia, wrote to me in Belgium asking me to intervene with the Vietnamese authorities to obtain his liberty. I promised to discuss the case, which I did when I returned to Hanoi. Finally he was freed and sent to a parish in North Vietnam. Later I heard that during his imprisonment he had translated into Vietnamese the book entitled *The Way* by José María Escrivá de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei. Some time later, as a result of an agreement with the Holy See, Bishop Nguyễn Văn Thuán was called to Rome to be a collaborator with Cardinal Etchegaray in the Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission. He ended by becoming a cardinal and successor of Etchegaray, but he died relatively young.

On another occasion I was called to the office responsible for religious affairs in Hanoi which expressed concern why the pope had canonized some Vietnamese and foreign missionaries who had been martyred in past centuries. The Vietnamese interpreted the papal initiative as an action of the Vatican against Vietnamese culture and indirectly against the communist regime. The newly beatified and the saints had been persecuted and finally executed for belonging to a religion that was alien to tradition and linked with foreign colonizing powers. I had to explain that, in my view, it was not a case of anti-Vietnamese attitudes, because Pope John Paul II had designated hundreds of people for beatification and canonization, all over the world (personally I did not agree with this which seemed a kind of Roman triumphalism, based

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11 Vietnamese martyrs that were beatified. Among them were 11 Spanish and 10 French missionaries.
on ambiguous criteria). In fact, many in Rome sincerely believed that it would be an honour for Vietnam if their local saints were recognized as they would then be venerated internationally. I could not convince the Vietnamese authorities, however the matter was taken no further.

Some years after the beatification of the Vietnamese saints, when I could finally return to Vietnam, the new Catholic saints were accepted and I could celebrate a mass in their honour with Monsignor Binh. It was moving, not only because it was carried out with local rites, with traditional instruments, the bell as it was used by Buddhists, songs with local music, but also because I was aware that it would probably be the last time that I would be sharing a celebration with Archbishop Binh, who was already very ill.

When he died the Holy See, as mentioned before, ratified the same Bishop who had the right to succession. When the government opposed it, Rome proposed Monsignor Huynh Van Nghi, responsible for the Vietnamese Caritas, whom I also knew. Although he was politically moderate, he was not accepted by the government, but they admitted him temporarily. Finally the Holy See designated Monsignor Pham Minh Mân, who had studied theology in the United States, and he was accepted by the government. He was created cardinal but not the Archbishop of Hanoi, as had previously been the custom.

In 1989, Cardinal Etchegaray travelled to Hanoi as the special representative of Pope John Paul II. A very good person, sincere and human, he had deep faith. He was always sent to places where the relationships with the Church were difficult –Iran, Irak, China, Cuba, among others– and everywhere he was always greatly appreciated. On this occasion he visited ten of the twenty-five Vietnamese dioceses. He returned in 1990 with a delegation to negotiate with the government and gradually relationships improved.

Doi Moi and its Repercussions

Twenty-two years after the first study, the Institute of Sociology asked me to take up research again in Hai Van to gauge the effects of *Doi Moi* (renewal); that is, the introduction of the market at
the local level in a rural commune. Unfortunately, Geneviève Lemercinier was no longer with us and the Institute did not have sufficient means to repeat the previous project exactly. Nevertheless, with the collaborators of the institute and the help of the commune, we were able to collect enough data to undertake a comparison with the past. The peasants had the right to work the land of the State with contracts from 20 to 30 years, which could be transmitted to descendants. Besides the use of chemical fertilizers, this had increased productivity to 12 tonnes of rice per hectare. The cooperative had been changed into a service unit and was no longer concerned with production. The village now had 8,000 inhabitants. The young people were mostly engaged in non-agricultural activities in various places or they had immigrated to the cities.

The income and consequently the purchasing power had increased and enabled most of the village to renovate their houses and equip them with furniture and electrical appliances. More than half had changed their bicycles for motorcycles. However, the social differences had become greater, some 20% of the population had difficulties in emerging from relative poverty and only a few could build houses of two floors and, perhaps in one case, buy a car. Some of the public services, such as the maintenance of the irrigation canals, had become inefficient for lack of manpower. The school was no more totally free: the purchase of exercise notebooks and books etc. was not possible for the poorest so a little solidarity fund had been set up for this purpose by the villagers. Obviously the difference between the rich and the poor was not as visible as it was in the cities, particularly in Hanoi, but it existed.

The new study was published by the Institute, in Vietnamese and in French. The publisher in Paris was Les Indes Savantes and the book included the two studies, the first one at the beginning of the 1980s and the second one in the year 2000. Its title was *Hai Van. La double transition dans une commune vietnamienne*. This study made it possible to better understand the concept of transition, which was applied afterwards in Latin America. It helped to discover some of the mechanisms of the return to the logic of the market.
In the same period the World Bank published a report on poverty in Vietnam. It said that the country was a ‘success story’ in its elimination of poverty that had been over 50%; and after ten years, it was less than 25%. The Bank attributed this to the adoption of the market economy. However the report remained silent about what had happened before the Doi Moi.

How to explain that regions that had always been oriented towards the market economy, as in Latin America and Africa, had not had similar or better results? What the World Bank did not say was that the socialist option had made it possible to virtually eradicate destitution, creating what could be called poverty in dignity, with the minimum necessary for life, with basic education and health care for everyone. True, before the reform people lived with less than two dollars a day, but this poverty was quite different from that in other parts of the world. The Doi Moi made the economy more dynamic and soon a good proportion of these ‘poor’ had risen above the 2-dollar barrier. It was too simplistic or dishonest to attribute the improvement only to the market economy (capitalism, in other words).

As from 1992, I went almost every year to Vietnam. There were various reasons. For one, the Institute of Sociology, through cooperation with the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, organized a number of training sessions. The subject was qualitative methodology; with Professor Edmond Legros presenting factorial analysis while I was treating text analysis. We had dictated these courses together during the two previous summers, respectively at the Universidad Centroamericana of Managua and at CRESFED (centre for research and economic and social training for development) at Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

I was also invited to give courses and seminars in other universities: the University of Hanoi, the Trade Union University, the Agrarian University and the National Ho Chi Minh Institute, which was the school for training Party cadres. When the first sociological congress was organized in Vietnam I was invited by Professor Nguyễn Âm Lich to give the inaugural speech. I was frank with my colleagues. I recalled the achievements of sociology in Vietnam, but I also warned of present dangers. Most of the research depended on external funding: international
organizations, US foundations, European governments. All were for precise programmes and not for fundamental reflection. Many served as a basis for neoliberal policies. Even the finance coming from the State was generally destined for very concrete projects. Thus the critical function of sociology and its essential contribution to the progress of society was being lost. Obviously part of the data collected very professionally could serve as a base for reflection, but the researchers did not have time for it, nor did they ask for it. The external contracts also served to compensate them for their very low salaries.

Not long afterwards the sociology review published an article by Professor Bui Dinh Thanh, the historian of the battle of Diên Biên Phú, who had been the vice-director of the Institute of Sociology. He described the contributions of CETRI and the University of Louvain-la-Neuve in setting up the institute in Vietnam.

But I had another reason for returning so often to Vietnam: the contact with the commune of Hai Van. Going back there was always a joyful occasion. They were very proud of having become known nationally and internationally, thanks to the study. A film was made of the commune and was shown on the television. On a table in their administrative centre they conserved copies of the book in various languages. Thanks to the French Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), to Belgian cooperation and the municipality of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, various contributions had been made to the commune to improve the dispensary; construct new classrooms in the school; create technical training workshops for young people; starting a micro-credit programme with the local section of the Women's Union; and most recently, launching an IT training centre.

When I celebrated my 80th birthday, I was invited to Hai Van. The celebration took place, according to the tradition in this Asian region, nine months before the actual day of birth and the ceremony took place in the commune’s centre for peoples’ power. Various groups brought me presents; the girls, a shirt; the boys a model of a fishing boat (Hai Van was close to the sea). The elderly ones, represented by the old secretary of the Communist Party (from the time of the first study) offered me a carefully wrapped parcel ‘the fruit of their work’, a kilo of beans. The president of
the commune gave me a mural tapestry two metres high, with embroidered motifs (the mythical bird of Vietnam) and a boat, as a symbol of my travels, and with inscriptions in Vietnamese to celebrate my anniversary. We shared a large cake with candles. The Institute of Sociology of Hanoi had been invited. Its director, Trinh Duy Luan and the former vice-director, Bui Dinh Thanh were present together with more than ten researchers. During the event, Luan read out a document declaring me an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences of Vietnam. A better celebration could not have been imagined.

The following day, a Sunday, was a festival for the Catholic parish. The priest invited me to celebrate mass, with various priests from the neighbourhood. We entered the church in a procession accompanied by a typical French fanfare and beneath the pelting rain. Inside the huge church, which had recently been constructed, there were 1,500 of the faithful and a chorus of Vietnamese religious music.

Two days, two commemorations, two worlds – but one reality. Life cannot be divided up. Only dogmatisms can reduce it to that state.

I remembered with amusement my former stay in Buenos Aires and thought that, as in the Argentinean song, sometimes God and the Devil dance the tango together.

On the 60th anniversary of the Revolution, Mme Thi Binh, the former Vice President, invited me to a seminar on the fight against poverty in Asia. I presented a paper on the conception of the World Bank, particularly using the work of Francine Mestrum, a member of CETRI’s Council, as well as a study on Vietnam by the Bank. Our thesis was that the socialist revolution had been the basis of the war on poverty and not the introduction of the market. I took part in the ceremony organized in front of the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh. Among those present was General Vô Nguyên Giap, who was nearly a hundred years old.

Changes in Mentalities

In 2000 I spent Christmas in Ho Chi Minh City. It was very enlightening to be in contact with different ways of expressing spirituality. The same day, in the morning I visited the Great
Pagoda, the main Buddhist temple of the city. I was friendly with an economist, Minh Chi, who years ago was my translator when I had courses in Hanoi, and now, already retired, he had returned to Ho Chi Minh City. He dedicated himself to helping his brother, the Venerable Tich Minh Tam, who was the head of the city’s pagoda. I had already visited him before. He was a savant who regularly travelled to Sri Lanka in order to translate the Buddhist writings in the Pali language into Vietnamese.

On this occasion I met him, suffering from Parkinson’s; but he received me warmly. We spoke about the adaptation of Buddhism in this moment of the country’s history. In Vietnam, Buddhism was going through an intellectual renewal, at the same time there was a spectacular increase in devotion among the masses. It had impressed me in Hanoi, seeing a temple that was much frequented, where there were offerings, to the statue of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas,\textsuperscript{12} of piles of paper imitating dollars and dongs\textsuperscript{13} in order to obtain economic benefits. The passing to a market economy could also be seen in the field of religion. The figure of the happy Buddha was common and it was a new symbol of success in these circumstances.

Similar phenomena were also to be found elsewhere in Christianity. In Manila and Colombo, devotion to the Virgin of the Seven Sorrows, promoted by the Redeemer Fathers, had grown a lot in the last few years, partly due to the vulnerability of the growing urban middle classes in the market economy. In Sri Lanka Geneviève Lemercier and I had collected written petitions, deposited by the faithful in the church of the Redeemers. They movingly expressed the anxieties of citizens worried about unpredictable economic results, about educational success, about love affairs, as well as about illness. The increase in the demands was a symptom of an increasing urbanization that did not have a solid material basis.

In Ho Chi Minh City I stayed in the hotel of the Communist Party, as it was the cheapest. One night, I heard Christmas carols being sung in English. I went down to see what was happening and saw

\textsuperscript{12} A term to describe those seeking the supreme illumination and who stop to help others along the way.

\textsuperscript{13} The Vietnamese currency.
two people from the United States who were teaching songs in their language to about a hundred young Vietnamese in the hotel lounge. They were the students of an English language course, organized by the United States/Vietnam Friendship Association. The scene was a bit of a shock for me. I thought of what had gone on in that city, less than 30 years previously. I remember thinking that the ability to forget was perhaps a condition necessary for the continuation of life and that we must not be too severe in judging such situations. However, memory is also an essential element in social construction. Forgiveness is not the same as forgetfulness.

The Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City invited me to celebrate Christmas mass with him and his clergy. The Vicar General of the archdiocese, Father Minh –who had been a collaborator of Monsignor Binh– was an old friend of mine and he was also invited. After the mass we had lunch together. During the meal the Archbishop said to me, “I would like your advice. A fortnight ago I received a visit from a delegation from the US Bishops’ Conference who explained that, for lack of vocation, there were not enough priests for their parishes. As in Vietnam our seminaries are full, we cannot accept all those who have a vocation; also the government has established a limited number of registrations. So the Bishops came to propose sending seminarians to the United States who could then become parish priests in that country. What do you think about it?” I expressed to him my total disagreement.

The Archbishop was surprised and asked, “Do you think that the Vietnamese could not adapt to living in the United States?” “On the contrary, my view is that they adapt only too well.” I replied. “If the main objective of this offer would have been to seek ties between local churches and exchanges with an ecumenical vision, I would have been fully in agreement, but it was clear that it was only a question of filling in gaps. It is the same as in Belgium.” I explained. “Most of the parish priests in Walloon Brabant, which is part of my own diocese, now come from the Congo and from Poland, but not in an international spirit, but because there are not enough vocations among the Belgians. It is a question of filling vacancies. But this prevents the Church from finding its own solutions for local pastoral work. I know that for the moment it is not possible to ordain married men or women, as this has the veto
of the Holy See, but your proposal is not the solution. In accepting you would prevent the local churches in the United States from finding their own response”. It was obvious that he disagreed with me but he asked my opinion and I gave it to him. However, our conversation continued to be friendly. In the following months, Vietnamese seminarians left for the United States.

The Vietnamese Catholic Church, as the situation became more normal, did not seem to have learnt many lessons from the past. The whole concept was—consciously or unconsciously—one of power, symbolical or institutional. In the North they built enormous churches. Thus, in Hai Van, the new central church of the parish (there were another three in different neighbourhoods) had been paid, one-third by the parishioners, one-third by former inhabitants of Hai Van who now lived in the South and one third by relatives living in the United States. There was a certain rivalry between the parishes, as to who could construct the best building or the highest tower. In the South they erected huge statues of the Virgin or of Christ, to show the importance of the Catholic minority group.

All this showed a conception of evangelization linked more with social influence than with the values of the Gospels. It is clearly the price of institutionalization which is, as always, partly necessary and partly paralyzing. However, with the marginalization of critical theological thinking in the universal Church, such a phenomenon is being reinforced. During this stay I visited the former director of the Institute of Sociology of Ho Chi Minh City, my friend Nguyễn Quang Vinh, who had spent three years in CETRI, when he was studying at Louvain-la-Neuve. That night he invited me to share Christmas dinner with his family. Everywhere in the city there were plastic Christmas trees, figures of Father Christmas, records with Christmas carols.

This was also the case in the house of this member of the Party and of his brother, both of whom were communist militants. At a moment during the evening we started talking with his son, a very brilliant young man, with three jobs in foreign companies. He said that he was thinking of sending his little boy of four to a school in the United States. His father and I both reacted, “Do you want to turn your son into a monster?” I asked him. He answered,
“Here the schools do not educate the children in the values needed for the contemporary world: the value of competition.” The father, who had fought during the war against by the United States, listened horrified to the plans for his grandson. It was a clear sign of the transformation of the culture.

In one of my most recent trips it struck me that the intellectuals hesitated to speak in public about the Iraq war because it meant criticizing the United States. At the time, Vietnam greatly needed the support of this country to be able to enter into the World Trade Organization. It is difficult to criticize the United States when one seeks success in the context of ‘globalization’. However I, as a foreigner, could speak on the subject, even in public discussions.

The Future of Vietnam

In 2009 Mme Thi Binh invited me again. She and her collaborators had organized a very full programme of contacts, visits and conferences for me. Obviously I spent a day in Hai Van. The former ambassador to Paris, Hai Hoang Thai, accompanied me. Also with him I visited a province where there was new industrialization surrounding the international airport. The vice governor told us about the practices of the foreign companies, most of them Asian. They paid only a minimum wage –and not always. They were polluting the rivers and the underground water. The workers could not easily organize protests because their leaders were immediately dismissed and the right to strike was not recognized by law. In the discussion I talked about the legal protection of union delegates to avoid this happening.

I had discovered that in this industrialization process, the workers were badly exploited and they lacked the means needed for social struggle. The unions were conceived, in a socialist regime, as transmission belts for the thinking and initiatives of the Party and the government, rather than as representatives of the interests of the workers. They were not prepared for taking action in this new situation and the legislation was inadequate.

Water and soil pollution, a result of the new development model, not only in industry, but also in agriculture –using massive quantities of chemical products– was having serious consequences.
In a meeting at the National Institute of the Natural Environment, Pham Quang Ha, the agronomist who was the director—and who had spent four years in CETRI while he was studying—told me that fishing was beginning to be affected by the pollution in the rivers of the Red River delta. According to him, in 2020, Vietnam, at the moment the second largest exporter of rice in the world, would not be able to export even one kilo because of the degradation of the soils and the loss of land due to rising sea levels.

The programme set up for me by Mme Thi Binh included a meeting with the commission of the Party central committee responsible for preparing the development plan up to 2020. The idea was to make Vietnam an emerging, semi-industrialized country by that date. They asked me to talk about the crisis and its effects on a world scale and, in a second meeting, they asked for information about the progressive countries of Latin America. There was also a discussion about the evolution of Vietnam.

In preparing for these meetings, I could see that they were using the instruments of capitalism to establish the parameters of the plan: GNP, exports/imports, the centrality of the financial system; and they ignored externalities like the ecological impact and the rapid growth in social inequality. The argument was that, at the present stage, Vietnam, in a capitalist ocean at the world level, had no alternative for developing its productive forces than to take this road. This did not seem to me to be the best way for moving towards socialism, even though their political responsibilities required certain realism. Finally the commission asked for a third session to record what I had said with a view to putting it on the website of the Central Committee.
It was in 1968 that I first discovered this world: Japan, and then the Little Dragons. In Japan I visited my friend Mateo Anzai, a sociologist of religion, who taught at the Sofia University in Tokyo. He invited me to give a course on the subject, which I did for several days. However, my visit coincided with a revolt of the students. The University had given me a room on the campus and from my window I saw the ‘revolutionary’ students taking over the campus. They had organized themselves in ‘tortoise’ formation, like the Roman soldiers, with shields over their bent heads. When they reached the entrance, defended by another group of students, they lifted their shields to reveal that the front line was made up of girls. For some seconds the defenders hesitated and the attackers took the opportunity of storming the door.

Thus, as in other parts of the world the occupation of the university started. The demands were relatively corporatist but they were also a reaction against a model of material development that was destroying many cultural values. It was the first time that triumphant capitalism came up against worldwide opposition. Material growth was not the only objective for human beings. The cry for freedom swept up indiscriminately many elements in its wake and it lacked an analytical basis. However, it was an important cultural turning point.

With Anzai I visited several of the sacred places of the country, Shinto and Buddhist, and I had contact with the Sogagakai, a
new movement inspired by Buddhism, with a solid middle class basis and politically important. Then I met people among the Catholic minority, in particular a Bishop from a Tokyo suburb whom I had known from the Vatican Council II and who was a progressive religious leader in the Japanese Church. An earth tremor made us hurry out of his house while we were in the middle of a conversation. Japanese Catholicism was established by the Portuguese and was then fiercely repressed, but it had a certain success in the post-war period. In Nagasaki, a large number of the victims of the atomic bomb had been Catholics. However, the halogenous character of Catholicism was still felt. Thus, Tokyo Cathedral, an attractive modern building, was called the German Church, because it had been financed by gifts from the faithful in Germany.

The Asian Little Dragons

South Korea

The first ‘Little Dragon’ that I visited was South Korea, in 1968, and I contacted the Young Catholic Workers. It was at the beginning of the strong industrialization wave in the country. I was moved by what the young workers recounted to me: 12 to 14 working hours a day, no social or medical coverage, the prohibition of trade unions (it made me think of the working conditions in 19th century Europe). Again, ‘progress’ was being paid for by the exploitation of the working class, showing up the ‘sacrificial’ nature of capitalism. Other social groups were also repressed: the students and social Christians. A military dictatorship had been installed as in Latin America, the Philippines and Indonesia and to ensure capitalist economic growth, social and civic rights had been suppressed. Those who maintain that market freedom is the primary condition for the other freedoms have never studied history or have never talked with a worker from these regions, or with a victim of neoliberalism.

I returned several times to Korea. Once it was in winter to lead a retreat for the US missionaries of Maryknoll, a relatively open-minded Catholic group, close to Liberation Theology. With a
temperature below 30 °C it was too cold to carry out many other activities. I collaborated with the Catholic University to draw up a plan for studying Catholicism in the country, proposing the methodology and participating in the interpretation of the results. The Catholic minority was quite dynamic and strongly supported by US Catholics.

In 1984 I was invited by the Confucian University to a seminar on the situation of Confucianism. I was asked to make a contribution about Christianity in the Confucian geographical area. Geneviève and I took part in a religious ceremony, celebrating the summer solstice of Asia. On the last day the Rector of the university invited the speakers to a dinner in a hotel in the city. The first dish was a sea caterpillar with all its feet and I did not know how to eat it. Finally, after tasting a morsel, I hid the rest in my napkin. The Rector, who sat beside me, saw my empty plate and asked the waiter to bring me some more. The trials of officialdom!

The following year the International Buddhist University invited me to a seminar on Buddhism in the modern world and they asked me to speak about Buddhism in South and South-East Asia. When I arrived, I realized that there was a highly political purpose behind the seminar. The military regime had been trying for some time to use Christianity as an ideology in its fight against communism. As this did not work and many Catholics and Protestants were actively opposing the dictatorship, the regime turned to Buddhism. The Rector of the university was a general. The meeting started with a speech from the Minister of Interior Affairs and he was followed by other authorities. They all talked in the same way: Buddhism as a basis for anti-communism. I was the first speaker in the afternoon, after the inauguration. As there was translation into Chinese, Japanese and Korean, I had to give the text of my speech to the interpreters.

During lunchtime I changed everything I was going to say, highlighting the part of my speech in which I was to describe the failure of the Thai Government to use Buddhism in its fight against the Marxist guerrillas. The Rector was presiding over the session and there were over 200 participants, including monks from the main Buddhist pagodas and various officials. After a while the Rector rang a bell. I thought it was because I was talking too fast
for the interpreters, but in fact it was to stop me from speaking. However, I continued normally and the Rector was furious.

The following day I went to visit Cardinal Kim, Archbishop of Seoul, whom I had known during the Vatican Council II. I knew that, as an opponent of the military regime, he had to be careful. As the cathedral and the archbishop's house were in the centre of the city, I took advantage of a market to walk through many little streets before arriving at my appointment. I rang the bell and the cardinal himself opened the door for me. The first question he asked was, “Do you think they are following you?” I said that I thought not, because I had been careful. Then he asked me to follow him into his bedroom, as he was not sure that there were not microphones in his office. He talked to me of the situation of the Church in the country and particularly of the difficulties with the military government. Various Catholic leaders were in prison. Also, more than half of the national budget was paid by the United States and there was massive Western investment in the country.

In 2007, the IFRACM (International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements) invited me to their congress, which was taking place in Korea. Leaders from various continents were participating. I was interested in contacting the Koreans. The president of the Catholic Movement, Chung Ki-wam, was also president of the National Peasant Federation. He had been one of the main leaders of the protest in Hong Kong during the WTO meeting. Agrarian reform had mainly served to transfer labour from the fields to Korean industry, started by the public authorities and then privatized when it became profitable. The small peasants were vulnerable in the new policy of the re-concentration of the land to promote monoculture. Their struggle was hard and their positions were radical. A short while afterwards he was chosen to be vice president of the new political party formed by the social movements.

Invited by the Institute for Korean Studies of the 21st Century, linked with the opposition Marxist-oriented party and the trade unions, in 2012 I came back to Seoul. We were to discuss the situation of the country in the world context. Also Bernard Cassen, former director of Le Monde Diplomatique; Jean Salem, professor
of philosophy at the Sorbonne; Birgit Daiber of the German office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, among others, were invited. I presented the project for a Declaration on the Common Good of Humanity. During the seminar we met two groups of resisters. One was the Union in an automobile spare parts factory Sangyong Motors that was occupied by 3,000 workers. Another group, led by an elderly Catholic priest, was protesting against the expropriation of the land of the peasants in the south of the country because of the construction of the largest US base outside the United States (envisaging conflict with China) on the island Jeju. We also met a woman peasant whose husband had lost his life in the hands of the police and whose son was in prison. These were two demonstrations that were very typical of the South Korean situation: the first showed the social vulnerability of the economic system, and the second, the dependence of the country on the geostrategy of the United States.

The Institute organized a meeting for me with progressive Protestant ministers. Half of them had been in prison in the time of the military regime and were still very active in social action. South Korea is indeed an example of unbridled capitalism, quite efficient economically, but with very hard working conditions. The city of Seoul was developed without any planning and is the best expression of such a system.

**Hong Kong**

In 1968, when I visited Hong Kong for the first time, I contacted the YCW groups there. They told me about working conditions that, like South Korea, were total physical and psychological exploitation. The main factories were textiles and electronics. Hong Kong was a British territory at the time and unions were not prohibited but, according to the law, to be a member you had to work for six months in the same field before joining the union. As most of the work was not specialized, every six months the jobs were changed so no one could be unionized.

I also met a Belgian banker, M. Frère, a friend of my family, who was in charge of developing the activities of the Belgian bank, the Société Générale in Hong Kong. He was one of the
first to organize bank credit for the local population and had set up a number of neighbourhood agencies. The bank had received considerable Belgian capital, as Hong Kong was experiencing strong economic expansion. He told me that the condition for Belgian capital was to recover their investment in less than three years, because of the risks. Evidently this meant a high rate of profit and maximum exploitation of labour. The young workers with whom I had been in contact were paying for this with their health and living like slaves. When I asked him to think about this, Frère answered, “If I don’t abide by this rule, they will not keep me here for one day longer and someone else will replace me.” It is the logic of capitalism.

Geneviève and I visited Hong Kong again, sixteen years later in 1994, for a seminar with the YCW. I was interested in applying the social analysis method to help them to ‘see’ and analyze the mechanisms of their society. In spite of a certain improvement in the material situation, thanks to the pressure of the social movements, the hours of work were still long and the housing conditions were particularly inhuman. While we were in the seminar there was a violent typhoon which killed several people around the city, broke my window and soaked all my papers.

Ten years later the Lingnan University in Hong Kong invited me to give some lectures on globalization. I also worked with the Asian Human Rights Commission, run by two old friends from Sri Lanka. One of them was Philip Setunga, who had done his doctoral thesis with me in Louvain-la-Neuve.

But the person with whom I worked most in Hong Kong was Lau Kin Chi, professor of cultural studies at the university. She had been the co-chair of ARENA (Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives), an organization of Asian intellectuals working with the social movements. I got to know her at a meeting of this group in Penang, Malaysia, to which I had been invited. ARENA used to have its headquarters in Hong Kong, but it was later transferred to Seoul at the Sungkonghoe University. Lau Kin Chi was very active in mainland China, together with intellectuals in the social and economic sciences and she also had ties with social activists in Taiwan. Latin America interested her and she had contacts with various social movements in Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela and
Cuba. As vice president of the World Forum for Alternatives, she participated in various World Social Forums. We always shared a common view in analyzing capitalism and orientations for the future, bearing in mind the pros and cons of the socialist experiences. We both felt that a renewed socialism was the path to follow, based on sound analysis and a critical commitment, but responsible in social and political construction. Lau Kin Chi organized the production in China of various CETRI publications and in particular my book on agrofuels.

**Singapore**

Contacts in Singapore came from two sources. A religious congregation had asked for an analysis of its work in this city-state and for some lectures on the results. It was the classic situation of a group founded to help the poor and that ended by serving the rich through their schools, clinics, etc. How to rethink the functions of a religious congregation and redefine its work so they conformed to its original objective, in function of a Christian perspective? It was not easy, because of the weight of the institution, pressures on the group and the necessary adaptation of the people involved. Strong motivation was indispensable and a number of the religious were so motivated.

The other contact was with the workers’ movement in which a number of Christians were involved, which was difficult for them because of political repression. Unions were virtually forbidden. Singapore was in full economic expansion: it needed a docile labour force. So our meetings were semi-clandestine to discuss the situation and share the social analysis methodology. One of the participants, Paul Lim, had been in prison and then spent a year in CETRI while taking a course at the University of Louvain, before becoming part of the international organization of the Christian trade unions.

**Taiwan**

In 2009 I visited Taiwan for the first time. I came from New York, where there had been a meeting of the UN Commission on the crisis. I was invited by the Hao Ran Foundation at the University
of Tainan in the south of the country. It was a training seminar for a group of young Taiwanese who were going abroad for a year, some with the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) in Brazil, and others with the People’s Science Movement (PSM) of India. Also present was João Pedro Stedile, founder of the Brazilian movement. The founder of the Indian movement, Doctor M. P. Parameswaran, had been one of the leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and being a nuclear scientist, he had felt it necessary to put science at the disposal of the people to avoid it being dominated by a small minority at the service of power. He developed a pedagogical methodology for this purpose.

Obviously, this seminar in Taiwan was not fortuitous. The president of the foundation, who was an open-minded person, organized it against the views of her own executive board. For three days there were analyses and information sessions about Brazil and India and also contemporary globalization. A year later at the Cochabamba Climate Summit, I met one of the Chinese students who had been sent to Brazil with the MST and we discussed the experience. It had not been easy for her to adapt at first, but the final results were very positive.

I also met in Taipei the Minister for Relations with mainland China, Madame Ma. She had founded a Socialist Party to the left of the Social-democrats, which had failed in the elections. Nevertheless the new government at that time had changed its attitude towards mainland China and was trying to increase its economic, cultural and tourist contacts with it. For this reason she was put in charge of the new relations. She invited me to her office and reminded me that when she was at the University of Sussex in Great Britain she had used some of my texts. She had received Samir Amin a few months previously.

The economic relations with mainland China, she explained, had grown considerably and soon they would be restoring regular air flights. Thousands of tourists went back and forth. It was taboo to talk about politics, but –like good Chinese people– they started with practical steps. In fact I met many mainland Chinese who were visiting the extraordinary museum created by Chiang Kai Shek, who transferred an important part of the cultural wealth of China to Taiwan when he sought refuge there.
The island is one of the tigers. The workers, too, were cruelly exploited, although they gradually acquired some labour rights. The ecological destruction was evident. The countryside between Taipei and Tainan in the south was depressing. One factory after another, between rice fields, with no apparent order. The only logic was speculation. The atmosphere in the area was intensely polluted; often it was impossible to see the blue sky. How can one talk about the quality of life for those living and working in such an environment? To enclose beauty in a museum is not enough to save a civilization. The cost of primitive accumulation also includes nature.

China

At the end of the 1970s, Geneviève Lemercinier and I decided to go to Hong Kong from Vietnam, passing through mainland China. From Nanjing, we went to Guangzhou and from there we took a train to Hong Kong. It was a short visit, but an interesting one, in a country that had overcome endemic destitution using traditional agricultural methods. It was then experiencing incipient urban growth, and the political regime was severe. The Cultural Revolution era was just over and comments on it were quite negative. When I returned to the country some 30 years later for a seminar on Sociology of Religion at the Jiaotong University of Shanghai, the situation had totally changed. It was already the China that we know today, with a terrifying urban development. The university where I gave the talk had 30,000 students, with a building for each faculty, a central library, an artificial lake and accommodation for the students: the whole complex was built in three years. I thought of Louvain-la-Neuve, where it took 30 years to build a campus for 15,000 students and a small town. But it has to be admitted that a more human environment was created.

On this occasion I went to Beijing, where I was in contact with the Catholic Church recognized by the government. There was a more clandestine Church, recognized by Rome. It had a greater number of members but no longer had seminars and had been seriously persecuted. The government promoted the constitution of the ‘official’ Church, whose Bishops were nominated by the
local clergy and approved by the Episcopal Conference, and not designated by the Holy See. I met Liu, who was responsible for relations with the government and vice president of the Political Consultative Conference of the Chinese People (CPPCC). They had received a visit from Cardinal Etchegaray, who had been sent by Rome to start discussions. He had made a very positive impression on Liu who found that he was ready to listen and to understand. Shortly afterwards, in Rome, I lunched with the Cardinal, who had been a friend since the Council. He gave me a book that he had written about Christianity in China: he was optimistic. We had continued the conversation in his little Fiat, as he drove me from Palazzo San Callisto in Trastevere to the Lelio Basso Foundation close to the Senate building.

Liu asked me to give a lecture in the Seminary in Beijing on the Church in Latin America. The building was still in the process of construction, with donations from the Catholic Chinese in the diaspora. About a hundred young priests of the official Catholic Church had studied in the theological faculties in Europe and particularly in the United States of America. All the priests wore the Roman collar and it was clear that they were quite traditional clergymen.

On my second visit I met Liu again. He had had contacts with delegates of the clandestine Church. In fact many of its members would attend the official parishes as they were not allowed to have their own places of worship. He lamented the level of training among the clergy, saying that they “don’t know the existence of canon law”, as if this constituted the essence of Christianity. In fact, neither the one church nor the other had participated in the Vatican Council II and traditional Catholicism dominated them both. A little later a Bishop was nominated by the Episcopal conference and recognized by Rome, a practical way of reaching an agreement. I participated in the Easter mass in Shanghai Cathedral, where the choir of Swiss Normandy sang works by Bach and Handel.

I returned to Beijing in 2006 for a seminar on globalization organized by the French Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD) with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. It was interesting to see how the European and the other
Asians were very critical of globalization, while the Chinese saw it as very positive, an important step forward of humanity towards progress. They defended the development model initiated by Deng Xiaoping, considered at that time in China as a necessary step. We visited Xi'an in the centre of the country, the home of the famous terracotta warriors, a World Heritage site. There was enormous unemployment in that area because of the delocalization of the industrial textile production towards the east of China. I also participated in a discussion with the authorities on the struggle against poverty. They were guided by the documents of the World Bank in finding solutions. They saw a future for micro-credit.

In 2007 I came back again, invited by Professor Wen Tiejun of the Renmin University of China. This university was once the headquarters of the training centre for the Chinese Communist Party. Now it is a university where you have to pay to get your degree.

Responsible for a seminar on rural economy, Professor Wen was one of those Chinese intellectuals who were critical of the prevailing model as he considered it was too capitalist oriented, with disastrous ecological and social consequences. He asked me for a lecture on developments in Latin America. Professor Wen had participated in the World Social Forum several times. After my lecture a postgraduate student approached me for some clarifications. I had projected a diagram showing the structure of incomes in Cuba compared with the rest of Latin America, showing that there was a much more egalitarian distribution in Cuba. She said she did not understand my diagram. “Isn’t Cuba part of Latin America?” I answered that it was. “Then why are there such differences?” “Because there had been a socialist revolution in Cuba.” I replied. She then asked, “What is a socialist revolution?” The question was quite revealing of the outlook of many young Chinese.

During my stay, I lodged in the apartment of a researcher of the university who was at that time in the United States. It was one of the new buildings of 25 floors. There were no 13th or 14th floors, as these numbers were unlucky.

In the suburbs of Beijing I also visited a neighbourhood of the ‘floating’ population. It was inhabited by peasants who had
immigrated to the city to look for work, but they did not have a residence permit. They were unable to send their children to school. But they had transformed an abandoned factory into a school and they themselves paid the teachers. The discipline was exemplary. I also met a group of young people who did street theatre and played pop music to teach people their rights. They gave me a CD of their work. On returning back to my lodging, as I was passing through a popular neighbourhood, there was a demonstration of peasants, protesting about the loss of their land. It did not last long. The police intervened to disperse them but it was done without violence.

Thanks to Professor Wen I was able to go into a rural area, some 100 kilometres east of Beijing. We saw an agricultural cooperative that used organic cultivation methods. It was a historic place, one of the first cooperatives in China, founded long before the Maoist revolution. I visited several peasant houses in the village and noticed the difference between those who had colour television and a refrigerator and those who still had earthen floors and shared their housing with their animals. They told me that the Cultural Revolution had disorganized peasant life and caused a number of deaths in the village. Their memories of this period were not pleasant. A process that was intended to fight against bureaucracy had turned into a real nightmare.

Once, when I was visiting Hong Kong, I went to Shenzhen, the new city close by. In just a few years, millions of people had been attracted to this industrial city. The first buildings had become derelict and the shops were concentrated according to their wares. There were ten shops selling cell phones, one next to the other and the same number of TV sellers. They gave the impression that the city had developed purely in function of its economic growth and, as in other great cities, there was intense atmospheric pollution. Without doubt, China had spectacularly developed its productive forces but it had disregarded the externalities, the ecological and social damages incurred.

In November 2010, Professor Wen Tiejun and I held a seminar in Beijing on peasant agriculture in Asia. We had discussed this project at the beginning of that year in Mexico during a meeting of the international council of the World Social Forum. It was
partly an international seminar, sponsored by CETRI in the name of the World Forum for Alternatives and the Centre for Agrarian Economic Studies of Renmin University of China, with participants from 11 Asian countries (South Korea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Nepal, Mongolia, Vietnam and China) and partly another meeting on organic agriculture in China, with 200 participants from the country. Both groups participated on the first day when Professor Wen and I gave the inaugural speeches. We were to study in what economic, social and cultural conditions peasant agriculture could be effective.

We visited an organic farm, affiliated to the university and which was called ‘the Little Donkey’. The donkey, their mascot, had been named ‘the Professor’ by Wen’s wife. The inhabitants of Beijing can cultivate there a piece of land and the products of the farm workers are sold at reasonable prices in the city. In addition we visited a rural commune of 800 people who were producing organic vegetables and fruit and who were self-sufficient in bio-energy. They also organized eco-tourism for the people of Beijing. The annual income of the commune was 50 million USD. During these days I also met with the translator and editor of my book on agrofuels.

Taking advantage of my trip to South Korea, in 2012 I came back to Beijing to give talks in the top three universities of the city: Peking University, invited by Professor Dai Jinhua of the Literature Department; Tsinghua University, invited by Professor Wang Hui, an economist; and Renmin University of China, invited by Professor Wen Tiejun. In two of them the theme was Latin America, and in Tsinghua, the crisis and the necessity for a new paradigm. The audience was made up of post-graduate students. The discussions were rich, in great measure because the three professors had developed critical thinking. In all three talks I brought up the problem of the development model and possible alternatives.

Before my departure, the director of the Latin American Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences organized a lunch with several of her collaborators in a Muslim restaurant of the town (her husband was from the west of the country). We talked about the evolution of the country. The director asked me to make contact with Frei Betto in Brazil about reproducing a film in which he had
participated. The interest in new experiences on the continent was very great, as was the desire to establish more contacts.

I also visited the main Taoist temple in the centre of the city, beside the new museum of the City of Beijing (which contains a permanent exhibition of ancient statues of Buddha, which I also saw). Once inside the temple life changed – from the agitation of the great city to the contemplative serenity of a sacred place. People talked in hushed voices. Monks were offering incense to the gods. I was received by the young head monk, who also represented the Taoists in the Assembly of Peoples and Religions. There is a renewed interest in this religion, the most ancient one in the country, and for Tao as an orientation for living. Its holistic vision, linking nature with human beings, is also one of its attractions. Spirituality close to physical life, meditation in search of equilibrium, silence instead of noise: all these have meaning in a world oriented towards material progress, competitiveness and consumerism.

It is true that there is a certain lack of solidarity in this view which is concentrated on the well-being of an individual. Socialism developed this kind of values but, with the logic of the market oriented towards the development of productive forces, it has become reduced to the status of shadow play.

The Future of Asia

It is possible to identify three different tendencies in Asia. First, there are the nations like China and Vietnam, which experimented with socialist regimes and are now oriented towards a regulated capitalist model, which could be considered as the closest to the so-called Third Way. Then there are the Asian Little Dragons, which early on adopted the capitalist model. And there are all the other countries, especially those in the South East and also Philippines, that are following neoliberalism but without the drive of the Little Dragons.

Among the old socialist regimes, it is obvious that the Chinese model is the most successful, followed by the Vietnamese in one way or another. Socialism made it possible for China, as also Vietnam, to eradicate hunger and destitution and to bring up the
level of living to a more or less dignified standard – although, logically enough, still more needs to be done to create better conditions. There were two possibilities: to increase and adopt fundamental socialism; or to adopt, at least partially, the capitalist model that in the short term is the most effective way of producing goods and services (developing the productive forces). The second option was chosen, on the understanding that a strong Communist Party could control the market. This is the reason why I liken this experience to the Third Way, which they themselves call the Socialist Market Economy and others, jokingly, Market Maoism.

In essence, this socialist market economy, which is logical and foreseeable, means in fact more market control over politics than political control over the market. It is relevant to mention however that China and Vietnam have far greater means of regulating the market than the other Asian countries or regions like Latin America and Africa. Although they intended to keep certain acquisitions of the previous system, they are increasingly finding it difficult to do so because they find themselves forced to open their markets, to be competitive, to reduce State expenditure. In order to enter the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO they have to adapt more to the capitalist logic. In addition, to provide for the future of the model, a country like China is developing policies specifically to ensure its future supplies in raw materials, energy and agricultural products. This is the meaning of its economic policies in Africa and other countries of the South, doubtless avoiding getting involved in their internal affairs, as the Western powers are doing, but introducing ecological and social practices that are not very compatible with socialist ideals.

At the time when the new tendency was adopted in China and Vietnam, it was thought that socialist islands could not be preserved in a capitalist ocean. The Chinese and the Vietnamese are quite objective and pragmatic. Except for a few moments in their history, they tend not to be bound by ideology. They work extremely hard and they achieve an admirable efficiency but they do it to produce, to organize themselves. Their peoples are prepared to sacrifice themselves so at least the next generations would be in a better situation.

One cannot predict the future, but one can doubt that their
current policies are sustainable. The ecological and social costs are so high that at a certain moment these countries will tend to reorient themselves, decrease the growth of production, reduce the exploitation of nature and try to resolve the unemployment of hundreds of millions of peasants. This could bring about either a return to socialist values, or greater subordination to world capitalism.

As for the Little Dragons, they have fully entered into the capitalist project and successfully so far. Enormous resources have been employed there, although it should be emphasized that Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea represent only 5% of the Asian population and are not really significant in any general panorama of the continent. For three decades, to prevent the extension of communism they received plentiful foreign aid. South Korea, for example, received from the USA more than 50% of its national budget for 30 years. The role of the State has been absolutely central and it organized the development model, always carrying out privatizations as long as the profits seemed assured. Thus these countries entered the capitalist world with concrete economic results, but with very relative benefits for the subordinate classes, who were ruthlessly exploited. In general their societies suffer from pollution and serious psycho-social consequences. In some of them, strong resistance has emerged: the social movements in South Korea are a good example.

Then there are the countries like Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines, as well as small ones like Sri Lanka that, in general, as from the 1980s began to adopt the neoliberal system. This includes India, which resisted for a long time but adopted it in the 1990s. The results were classic: inequality reigns. Only a minority of 10% to 15% of the population has developed economically and culturally, with a system of values and style of life very similar to those of the West. Because of its huge population, this continent possesses a considerable market, from which capital can rapidly benefit. However this would ignore the great majority, who live in a state of poverty and destitution, especially in India.

For the future, it seems that in opposition to the orientation persistently followed in China and Vietnam, there is a reaction in the respective countries, with some new thinking and internal
critical positions among certain groups especially intellectuals. They do not have many opportunities to express themselves strongly or publicly, but they are ingenious and they manage to exist. New social movements run the risk of being repressed, in contrast to the traditional organizations of women, youth, peasants and others. In the socialist regimes these had the function of transmitting the orientations of the Party to the masses, rather than defending their respective interests.

Nevertheless incipient changes can be seen. Thus, in Vietnam, the women’s movements were the first to put forward new kinds of orientation. These were not only expressed intellectually but proposed concrete actions to solve the local effects of the market. Also the intellectuals, even if they experience difficulties and certain mistrust by the powers that be, some of them participate in the World Social Forums.

In the same spirit of promoting new thinking in Vietnam, they have published, in the Vietnamese language, five of CETRI’s titles, including *The Other Davos* and a volume of the review *Alternatives Sud* on globalization. Madame Thi Binh, the former Vice-President of Vietnam, came to visit us in Louvain-la-Neuve. She said that our books were important for them because they gave another conception of globalization at a time when the government and party leaders in Vietnam were not very critical about it or about the market. Her position was in the same line as that of General Giap who had recommended the publication of our texts. They are persons who at one time had a certain international experience and a broader view of the world, which was required for political work. *The Other Davos* was the first book produced by the Communist Party publishing house that did not emanate from the Party itself. In the annual meeting of the Vietnamese National Assembly a copy was distributed to every participant.

In 2005 we published an issue of *Alternatives Sud* entitled *The Chinese Miracle Seen from Inside*, (2005, vol. XII, no. 4) with articles by authors only from the country. We could not be sure what would happen in the country. Sometimes, the government would adopt stronger regulation measures. But the great problem in these countries is that it is precisely these regulatory bodies –of the State and of the Party– that are more or less corrupt, so that their
measures are only partly effective. In fact, day after day in the Vietnamese press, cases of corruption were denounced, including those involving high-level officials; but the phenomenon is so widespread it has almost become a system. It is not probable that China and Vietnam are going to make a change in the short term; but in the medium term an eco-socialist generation could emerge that will try to resolve problems like this. It will not happen unless there is a rupture in the current line, which will be more or less peaceful according to the degree of resistance of the institutionalized interests.

In the so-called Little Dragons during the last few years the rate of economic progress has been slowing down. They are suffering from internal social contradictions; but for the time being, they are not going to change their policies because they still have a very competitive production capacity compared with the United States and Europe and they continue to export. For them the real rival is China. Finally, the remaining Asian countries will be experiencing increasingly strong social contradictions, that will force them to transform their model into something more social, but it does not seem that for the time being there will be much change.

As for Japan, the country is going through the difficulties typical of the countries in the capitalist centre affected by the crisis. Within the so-called Triad, it is the first one to enter into such a deep crisis, even more than that of the United States. The latter has other means to counteract its problems because it dominates the international currency and can therefore attract capital from outside. However, Japan does not have this possibility and it is trying to organize the social basis of its own internal capitalism with the collaboration of a much disciplined workforce; and to reactivate its hegemony over the rest of Asia. It has very few chances of succeeding in this latter objective because of China. Thus we do not know if Japan can at least neutralize the havoc caused by the crisis or whether it is going to enter into a permanent and very acute one. However, as a whole, Asia is on the way to becoming the future centre of the world economy.
The first time that I visited Africa was in 1954, on return from my 6-month stay in Latin America and I did not return until 1959, when I stayed for a month in the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi with Joseph Laloux, a priest who had been my collaborator in the diocese of Namur in Belgium. Although all three countries were interesting from the viewpoint of the Sociology of Religion, we concentrated on the Congolese situation.

Congo had not yet attained its independence, which happened in 1960, and Kinshasa was still called Leopoldville. I looked into the history of King Leopold II’s colonization, about which I learnt relatively late. For many years I had absorbed the glorious version, in which the king was presented as he who had brought civilization to this land, but nothing was said about the horrors and the consequences of colonialism.

We made contact with the local Church. I remember talking with a chaplain from the Belgian army who explained the situation in the country in this way, “We are here to contribute to the maintenance of order, but if they fight between themselves it facilitates our task”. It was a way of saying “divide and rule” and it upset me considerably, above all on the eve of the country’s independence.

We met a Congolese priest called Joseph Malula who was later appointed Archbishop of Kinshasa and who had adapted his parish’s liturgy to African culture. We talked about the possibility of socio-religious research with him and the Jesuits, who were the
intellectuals of the missions. They were interested but there was nobody trained in this field. There were philosophers, economists, anthropologists, but no sociologists. The question was to train the researchers. The decolonization process during the following years did not permit much progress in this direction.

Near Leopoldville we visited the main seminary, run by the Jesuits. The building had been financed by my great uncle, who had been the private secretary of Leopold II and afterwards the director of the main Belgian bank. His bust was at the entrance of the seminary. At the time I did not realize what a contradiction this was.

The training of the young clergy was intellectually solid, with competent and very dedicated professors, but somewhat removed from local reality. We could also travel to various regions, like Elizabethville (at that time Lubumbashi) in Katanga. There we visited some copper mines, next to the frontier with the future Zimbabwe. We saw the effects of the hegemony of the Union Minière\(^1\) over the life of the whole population: the exploitation of labour, with social paternalism. A few missionaries there were already critical and in particular the Benedictine Archbishop, Monsignor Van Cauwelaert.

We went to Stanleyville (now Kisangani) and to North Kivu (Goma) and South Kivu (Bukavu). In this last town there was a day of heavy rain and we took refuge in a church, full of people. The assembly sang a hymn to the Virgin Mary with great conviction and it included the following line, “Extend your blessed hand over Belgium.” Just a few months before independence this seemed particularly badly timed!

Although we had some contacts with Congolese intellectuals who had a social Christian political orientation and who were in favour of independence –some of them were to belong to the first government– these encounters were very brief. Our interest was in a very specific proposal: to help the new Church, the Church of the independence era, to acquire the tools for socio-religious research in order to get a better understanding of the reality of the country and consequently adapt appropriate pastoral and social activities.

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\(^1\) A Belgian holding company in non-ferrous minerals.
After our stay in the Congo—which I would not visit again until 2008—we went on to Rwanda and Burundi. Joseph Laloux and I travelled in a car belonging to a missionary friend. The tension between the Tutsis and the Hutus was quite palpable. The Tutsis had the monopoly of the local authorities and counted on being able to continue this minority hegemony after independence. Various missionaries (particularly the White Fathers) felt this to be unfair and were in favour of the Hutus. For many there was a striking similarity with the situation of the workers in Europe and they did not want to repeat the identification of the Church with the powerful. The situation was delicate because the Tutsis were relatively numerous among the clergy.²

An Interlude in the Holy Land

On the way back to Belgium, we visited a colleague and friend, Father Alfred Delmée—former secretary to the archdiocese of Malines and now responsible for pastoral work among the Catholics of Israeli nationality, and we spent a week in the Holy Land.

We visited the sacred places of the three religions based on a Book: Judaism (the Bible, Old Testament), Christianity (the Gospels, the New Testament), and Islam (the Koran). It was a remarkable experience both from the spiritual viewpoint as well as the sociological. Will it one day be possible to think of a harmonious co-existence as a sign of peace for the world? It was already dubious.

The Palestinians whom we met in Belen and Nazareth were somewhat sceptical about the behaviour of a State that did not really recognize them. The division of the Christians around the holy places was also patent and rather sad. And the little group of Israeli Christians (generally through matrimony) had enormous difficulties in being accepted in the country. In spite of that, they took the part of Israel in the political field—an understandable reaction in their desire to be integrated.

² The group had converted to Catholicism en masse in the 1930s and Pope Pius XI spoke of “a torment of the Holy Spirit”. The motivation had socio-political aspects, given that the Hutu population was mostly Catholic.
We were also interested in the experience of the State in Israel and in particular of the kibbutz. Not far from Nazareth we spent several days in one of them, trying to understand this experience, with its socialist orientation, where physical labour was shared by everyone, including the intellectuals, the meals were taken all together and children educated collectively. We discovered a very different situation from the usual prejudices: a deep human goodness, a high cultural level and very close relationship between parents and children because they spent much time together and they were free from material preoccupations. Perhaps this experiment was too close to utopia to be a social model shared by many.

African Inputs to the Christianity Encyclopaedia

After this first experience in 1959, at the end of the 1960s I returned to Africa to visit Cameroon and Tanzania for a study that we were carrying out on the three continents of the South, together with the Institute for Social Studies of The Hague.

For a certain period I visited Uganda several times because I was involved in the preparation of an Encyclopaedia of Christianity, an initiative that was proposed as a result of the publication of Le Bilan du Monde and the Encyclopédie Catholique du Monde Chrétien, between the 1960s and the early 1970s. There was already a yearbook of the Protestant Church, which was carried out by an English aristocrat and an important lay member of the Anglican Church, Sir Kenneth Grubb. He was an open-minded man as well as being a conservative, who had a strange history. He had been an adviser to the Queen of England and in Brazil was made prisoner by Lampiao, the famous rebel in the North East. He was already an old man and he decided not to continue the work. We met several times, in Geneva and in Louvain-la-Neuve and then sought the collaboration of an Anglican priest, Rev. David B. Barnett. As for some time he had been designated professor at the Anglican seminary of Kampala, I had to go there to work with him.
In England, where I met him for the first time, before he had been ordained in the Anglican Church, he had been an aeronautical engineer and he had also worked in an armaments factory. Later, because of pacifist convictions, he was converted and abandoned everything to enter the seminary. He was an extremely meticulous person. At that time there were no computers, but he used sophisticated calculators that had memory. He was passionate about statistics and thus we divided the work. He would be concerned with the situation of the various Christian churches in each country of the world; and my collaborator in Louvain, George Deroy, with the socio-political context of religions.

In those years I twice gave courses at the Pastoral Centre of Uganda before an audience of Anglophone Africans. In fact, I was in the country when Idi Amin Dada carried out a coup d’etat against Milton Obote, in January 1971. I was in the airport when President Obote left to attend the Commonwealth meeting in Singapore and I remember thinking, “He must feel very sure of his power to be away for a week”. As advantage was taken of his absence to make a military coup, he never returned to his country.

The project of ‘Christianity in the World’ required an enormous amount of work that lasted almost ten years. It was published in 1982 by the Oxford University Press, as the World Christian Encyclopaedia. It has served as a reference for many later works because, apart from the historical and current information and the numerous photographs, it included statistical projections up to the year 2000.

The basic idea had to been to bring together data that was as precise as possible about the situation of Christianity in the world, in a social and religious context and in a period of crisis in the traditional churches (‘historical’ in Protestant language) and the growth of the charismatic movement. My Anglican colleague saw in this phenomenon a new role of the Holy Spirit in the crisis of civilization. Personally I was inclined to think that as a result of an economic system based on the value of exchange, the deep social and cultural transformation had created such a social upheaval and loss of meaning that the search for communion, meaning and ethics had become existential. Later, the fall of ‘actually existing socialism’, which has been defined as a more effective way to achieve the same ends, confirmed this hypothesis.
Another theme, this time unrelated with Sociology of Religion, was the struggle of the Portuguese territories against colonialism. Shortly after the Council there was a moment of conflict with Cardinal Suenens on this issue. I had drawn up a protest and collected signatures against the visit of Pope Paul VI to Fatima in Portugal, at the height of the colonial war. The following day there was a communication from the cardinal saying that it was unacceptable that a priest opposed the Pope. Its publication coincided with a terrible incident in Brussels. A fire had broken out in a supermarket (L’Innovation) that caused 300 deaths. Overshadowed by this very dramatic event, the communication was almost ignored.

During the campaigns against the war in Vietnam I had met the Angolan Mário de Andrade, who during his sociological studies in Paris had coincided with Amilcar Cabral, who was studying agronomy. He told me that when he was studying in Paris they were trying to find how to apply Marxism to Africa and to determine who the bourgeoisie (the national bourgeois, the buying bourgeois), the proletariat and the sub-proletariat were. After a while they realized that it was ridiculous and that the first step must be an analysis of the African society. This brought about a change in thinking in Amilcar Cabral, who completed studies in anthropology.

In 1969 I received an invitation to go to Khartoum to participate in a meeting of solidarity with the struggle of the Portuguese colonies and South Africa. Isabelle Blume, Senator of the Belgian Communist Party strongly insisted on my presence. I was a bit doubtful because I wondered whether it was going to be too political and if it would not be in contradiction with my religious role. After thinking more about it, I concluded that this was a legitimate struggle for justice and that there was no problem.

3 Founder member of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (PMLA) in 1956.
4 Founder of the PAIGC and the nationalist leader of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, from the 1950s until his assassination in 1973.
for me, as a priest, to take part in it. I wrote a text explaining this at the time. Christianity was an option for justice and against all forms of human oppression so that to declare the relevance of this for the clergy should not be an obstacle. As I saw no conflict between my conviction and that meeting I decided to participate.

It was a question of armed struggle and this could be another objection. However it was not a question of supporting a war but of acting to terminate it. During the meeting, a few months later, Agostinho Neto, President of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (PMLA) said to me, “We have not chosen violence. It has been imposed on us and we are the first victims”.

Mario de Andrade had a brother who was a priest and was exiled in Portugal. He was considered one of the great figures of the resistance to colonialism. When I was visiting that country for a meeting on the Sociology of Religion, I tried to meet him. It was not easy as his residence was under observation. I knew that each morning he went to a church to celebrate mass, so I went there and spoke with him in the sacristy. I explained that in ten days I was going to Khartoum and that I would meet with his brother, who would participate at the meeting as a representative of the Liberation Movement of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (the PAIGC-Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde), together with Agostinho Neto and other leaders of the anti-colonial struggle. I said I would be glad to take a letter, which he gave me the following day.

The Khartoum meeting was very interesting because of the presence of Agostinho Neto and Amilcar Cabral and members of the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), as well as Eduardo Mondlane, its founding president and chief organizer, with Marcelino Dos Santos. I also met Mário de Andrade, whom I have already mentioned, and Aquino de Braganza who, from Algeria, was the coordinator of the movements of the countries colonized by Portugal. There were also members of the ANC (South Africa) and of SWAPO (Namibia).

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5 First president of Angola. He was in power from 1975 until his death in 1979.
6 Vice president of FRELIMO when Samora Machel was president of this organization.
I remember that during the discussions there was a lively debate because the Soviets argued that the resistance of the Africans was a class struggle while they replied that, yes, there were classes but that for the moment what they were aiming at was national liberation. In the end, to please the Soviets, Mário de Andrade, who was the rapporteur, had to recognize that it was a class struggle.

The last night Eduardo Mondlane invited me to dine with him to talk about the future of the Catholic Church in Mozambique –I was the only priest present in the meeting. It was symptomatic that while Catholicism was the majority Christian religion in the Portuguese colonies, in the various liberation struggles their leaders –like Eduardo Mondlane, Agostinho Neto, Samora Machel–7 all came from a Protestant background. Mondlane, who was a very religious person, was worried about the future of Catholicism and he wondered what would happen after the liberation of Mozambique because of the very close ties that the local Catholic Church had had with colonialism. There had been a Bishop in Nampula who was the only one opposed to colonialism. It was a Portuguese who was finally expelled by the authorities to his country. Afterwards I visited him in his exile in Portugal.

The following day after this conversation in Khartoum, on returning to Tanzania, Mondlane was assassinated with a letter bomb. I could say that I shared with him the last night of his life. Some years later I wrote an article about our conversation for the journal of the National University of Mozambique which bears his name.

After that meeting I was interested in visiting these countries. At the beginning of 1970, I took the opportunity of an invitation to the Episcopal Conference of South Africa, to make a first visit to Mozambique. I stayed in the seminary there and in talking with the seminarians I saw they were very nationalistic and thus in contradiction with their teachers who had mostly been trained by the Portuguese. As a result there was a lot of tension between them.

On this occasion I also visited an exhibition of the weapons of the Portuguese army. There were French, British, Belgian

7 First president of Mozambique. He was in power from 1975 until 1986, when he was killed in an aeroplane that exploded.
armaments. It was very striking to see the almost hidden support that the West gave to Portugal. Although NATO was forbidden to intervene in Africa, because it should only operate in the North Atlantic, it was clear that the army was using armaments from the countries that belonging to NATO. The main argument of Portugal was that it was fighting communism. This also gave it religious legitimacy and hence the support of the Catholic Church. The devotion to the Virgin of Fatima was a strong expression of this position.

From Mozambique I travelled to Zambia, where I encountered some of the MPLA coordinators of the struggle. They received me and asked me to talk on their radio about colonialism, the Church and the Christian attitude to colonialism.

Finally I was in Tanzania, where I visited the main headquarters of the MPLA and FRELIMO. I also visited Agostinho Neto, who lived with his family in a house outside Dar-es-Salaam and from then on I felt very close to him, his wife and children. I still have, in Louvain-la-Neuve, a mask that he gave me as a souvenir of that encounter.

During this same journey I met Marcelino dos Santos. I brought him a bottle of South African wine, remembering that his wife was from that country. After independence, he became President of the Mozambican Parliament. In these visits I was able to see local colonialism at first hand, which enabled me to write articles and participate in various events organized on the subject.

I remember, in particular, when participating at a solidarity meeting in Norway, I once again encountered Agostinho Neto, Aquino de Braganza and a few others leaders of the movements. Also, in Brussels, in 1973, a year before the end of the colonial war, I participated at the first meeting between Neto and Mario Soares, future president of Portugal. The meeting was organized by Paulette Pierson-Mathy, professor of law at the Free University of Brussels.

Obviously, to be in contact with these leaders was not simple. Being a Catholic priest was not the best passport to meeting with these revolutionary African leaders who were also fighting against the local Church. It was thanks to Mario de Andrade and my European friends, that they soon gave me their confidence.
Towards the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, I had been invited by Monsignor Hurley, Archbishop of Durban and President of the Episcopal Conference of South Africa, whom I had met at the Council, to spend three weeks in South Africa to advise him about social policy for the Catholic Church. He organized visits for me to the most important places and meetings with important personalities.

I was in a plane that made a stop-over in Angola, where I had a strange encounter. The auxiliary Bishop of Luanda, Eduardo Muaca, who would soon become Archbishop of Luanda, was a former student of mine. He had participated in a summer course on Sociology of Religion, which had been attended by priests who were studying in Rome. I had written to him about the trip and he came to see me at the airport to explain his situation and what was happening in his country.

He was rather desperate because on the one hand he had been rebuked by the Portuguese and had been appointed by Rome without asking the opinion of the government of Portugal. On the other hand, the nationalists reproached him for having accepted to be Bishop under the Portuguese colonialism. The poor man was completely shattered and I remember that he burst into tears while we talked. I tried to cheer him up and I promised to explain the situation to the MPLA leaders.

After Angola had been decolonized, when Agostinho Neto had invited me to the country, I met Muaca again. At that time the conflict between MPLA and Jonas Savimbi was very violent. There were Catholics on both sides. While the official policy was in favour of peace, the local cadres did not pardon the Catholic Church for having been compromised with the colonial power and were extremely vengeful. All this did not facilitate his task as Archbishop and the mutual misunderstandings were serious. I talked with Agostinho Neto about the situation, explaining that Archbishop Muaca was not against the new political power, but it was true that among the Catholics there was an important group of people who feared the ideological orientation of the Party and the Soviet and Cuban presence. When Muaca renounced
his mandate for health reasons, the Holy See appointed as his successor, Archbishop Alexandro do Nacimento, who afterwards became Cardinal.

Once in South Africa, I went to Soweto. Foreigners were not permitted to enter the town but I was able to go illegally, thanks to local missionaries. I also had the opportunity of visiting some Bantustans, particularly the Transkei. Officially autonomous, they were intended to concentrate on traditional development but were barred from all industrialization; however, this did not prevent the inhabitants working as cheap labour for the industries that were established on their borders.

I accompanied Archbishop Hurley to a meeting with the local YCW in a seminary at Bloemfontein, one of the rare places that allowed black and white people to meet together. A few days later I took a plane from this town and saw at the entrance to the airport a board saying “For whites only” which I was able to photograph. Similarly the aeroplane staffs were differentiated. Thus, each day I experienced a different aspect of apartheid. It was the only country in the world where, at times, I wanted to leave in the first plane; the atmosphere was so heavy.

In Cape Town I visited the poor and marginal neighbourhoods with the Cardinal. He was a conservative man, but he had a feeling for social justice. He saw the role of the Catholic Church to mitigate the situation of the Blacks and the Coloureds and he was against apartheid. Nevertheless he thought that, as the Catholic Church was in a minority in the country, it was necessary to be prudent, which did not allow him to take up strong positions against the government. It was true that the Church was the only place where Whites, Coloureds and Blacks could meet. But the Cardinal did not identify with the African National Congress (ANC) which he considered to be under Communist influence.

I had contacts with various universities, in particular in Cape Town where, with an anthropologist friend, we decided to publish an issue of Social Compass on religions in South Africa. One night,

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8 Territories in which, as part of the racial segregation policy, South African black people were located, according to their different ethnic groups. They were created at the beginning of the 1950s and eliminated in the mid nineties, with the end of apartheid.
while at dinner in the residence of the Archbishop of Durban, I met Mangosuthu Buthelezi, a history graduate from Oxford and the Zulu chief and founder of the Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party. In spite of being against apartheid, he was also an opponent of the African National Congress. We corresponded for some time afterwards, but in the end did not agree about the political development of the country. After the end of apartheid, he became Minister of the Interior in a coalition cabinet with the ANC of Nelson Mandela.

I also visited Gandhi’ daughter, who lived in Durban; i visited her together with the archbishop. She recounted the work of her father in South Africa when, as a lawyer, he defended the sugar cane workers, who were also victims of White exclusion. I went to Lesotho, an enclave within South Africa where the monarchy had organized an almost feudal political system, based on a marked hostility between Protestants and Catholics. The local Catholic Bishop was a member of the South African Episcopal Conference. Finally I reached Pretoria to meet a priest, Mangalicio Mchamka, a professor at the seminary who had been arrested and tortured by the regime for having founded a non-violent anti-apartheid movement. Later he went to study theology at the Flemish University of Louvain (Leuven).

After these three weeks, I wrote a report for the South African Bishops. I insisted in this report on the need to bear genuine witness against racial policies, without giving priority to institutional interests. Monsignor Hurley agreed. The rest of the Bishops were more prudent, worried about the danger that this could represent for the social and cultural work of the Church (schools, hospitals, etc.), as well as persecution of the Catholic minority.

The leader of the ANC who replaced Nelson Mandela while he was in prison, Oliver Tambo came to Brussels from time to time and we would meet. The Congress had no confidence in Father Mangalicio Mchamka because he had not allied with them and he favoured non-violent action, whereas the ANC was fully involved in armed struggle. This opposition between two movements fighting for the same objective seemed counterproductive to me.

I organized a lunch between him and Oliver Tambo, in the restaurant of the central station of Brussels, where there were many people and we could be less noticeable. They explained
their respective positions and understood one another. After the end of *apartheid*, Father Mangalicio Mchamka was appointed Vice Minister for Education. I met him in Johannesburg and we talked about the past. He explained to me the efforts of the government to promote the education of the poorest classes, especially among the black people. On the same occasion I dined with Langa Zita, a trade union leader whom I had encountered in Dakar in a seminar organized by Samir Amin. The criticisms by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) of the neoliberal policies of the government were very strong.

In 1972 I had participated, with Professor Paulette Pierson Mathy, in the organization of an international meeting, with the United Nations and many solidarity organizations, on Namibia, which at that time was under the control of the South African Government. The event, which was held in the congress building of Brussels, was a real success. It gave me the opportunity of meeting or re-encountering not only Namibian leaders, but also people from the rest of Africa, like Salim Ahmed Salim, the future minister for foreign affairs of Tanzania, and Sam Nujoma, who became the first president of Namibia. The latter had collaborated in preparing the conference and had lodged with me in the seminary of Louvain where I was living.

I remained for various years in contact with the Namibian movement (SWAPO, the South West Africa People’s Movement) to organize meetings and contacts. After the meeting, King Baudouin, with whom I went to talk about the situation, asked me, “What is Namibia?” Like many people, he did not know that the country had changed its name to distance itself from its colonial period.

This was the time that Africa was recovering its political identity. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, economic domination was able to continue because it had built a neo-colonial order, corrupting many of the local leaders. Neoliberalism imposed itself as a development model, even among those liberation movements who had adopted left-wing positions. The failure of these policies has led to social movements taking up critical positions and it is to be hoped that there will be a future awakening of a new collective consciousness.
Among the African struggles for liberation the case of Eritrea was unique for being the only one in Africa that was not supported by the socialist countries and this, essentially for geostrategic reasons.

Eritrea had been annexed in 1962 by Ethiopia, after it was decolonized. Contrary to the principle that guided other such processes, the existing frontiers were not respected and the annexation was accepted. Ethiopia, an important ally of the Soviet Union, was situated close to the Indian Ocean and to the naval and air bases of the United States on the island of Diego García.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) was fighting against Ethiopia, which was also supported by Cuba, with military and medical advisers. A number of leaders of the Eritrean liberation movement had been trained in Cuba. Because of this contradiction, the Cubans never supported the military operations in Eritrean territory, concentrating on the invading troops of Somalia, and even withdrawing its doctors from this region. Fidel Castro tried to mediate between the Ethiopians and the Eritreans in a conference in Yemen, but with no success.

Various EPLF representatives abroad passed through CETRI regularly and brought information about what was happening. We accumulated a considerable amount of documentation that served as a broader data base. I wrote an article in the development review of the University of Louvain and proposed a session of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal on the theme. This took place in Milan in 1980, with CETRI and the solidarity committee based in Brussels preparing the documents and contacts with the witnesses. Ruth First was a member of the jury; her situation was not easy, as she was the wife of the secretary of the South African Communist Party, close to the Soviet Union. The verdict, which she accepted, condemned the Ethiopian Government for its military operations and for its war crimes, as well as the Soviet Union for supplying it with armaments. However, the Tribunal recognized the geopolitical aspects of the question in the context of the cold war. The acts were published.

Later on, when I was visiting Moscow, I took advantage of a meeting with the institute for Oriental Studies of the Academy
of Sciences to ask for a rendezvous with the Centre for African Studies, which was linked to the Communist Party. It was run by the son of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Andrei Gromyko. I was received by two of his assistants as the director was not in Moscow. I explained the work of the Tribunal and offered the book of the proceedings on Eritrea. I strongly insisted on a political solution to put an end to the war, saying that otherwise it could end up in a similar situation as in Palestine. We talked for a long time and the discussion was difficult, because they defended the Soviet thesis that the United States was using the Eritrean cause as an instrument. My argument was that to continue the war, apart from the horrors it wreaked upon the population, in fact provided arguments for US policy. True enough, the USA had tried to utilize this cause, but the EPLF never accepted it.

Seeking solutions, the leaders of the Eritrean movement, asked me to try and establish contact with Cuba again. They wanted to send a delegation there for discussions. As I had no travel plans in view, I made contact with Gabriel García Márquez, who lived in Mexico, but who regularly journeyed to Havana. He accepted to transmit the message at the highest level. For several weeks we were in contact by telephone. The negotiations were proceeding well, but the situation was precipitated by the fall of the Berlin Wall and in little more than a year later, in 1991, the EPLF took Asmara and Eritrea won its independence.
CHAPTER XIX:
THE DIFFICULT BIRTH OF INDEPENDENCE
IN AFRICA

Former Portuguese Colonies

_Angola_

Agostinho Neto, at the head of the Angolan government, invited me to his country to spend the celebrations of the end of the year 1978 in Luanda. He was already ill with cancer. One day I dined with him and his family and his elderly mother was there. Neto recounted to me that she, as a fervent Protestant, was very moved when the first congress of the MPLA became a Party and everyone sang. It seemed to her exactly as if it was in her church.

In Angola I was also received by Joaquim Pinto de Andrade, the brother of Mario, who had stayed in Guinea Bissau where he was Minister of Culture. Joaquim had left the priesthood and had got married. After having been president of the MPLA, he came into conflict with Agostinho Neto. Joaquim told me about an opponent of colonialism, a poet whom he had known, but for some reason he had been imprisoned and, it seemed, badly treated. He showed me the prison where he was kept. As far as I could understand, his situation was quite lamentable. I talked with Neto about it, saying that these were situations that were not acceptable for a revolutionary regime. I remember how he replied, “Unfortunately, when one comes to power one had to do things that one would never have imagined, like putting a comrade in prison.” He agreed to free the person from prison and put him provisionally under house arrest.
During this stay I was in a hotel where a Soviet admiral was also staying. He was very small, but dressed in a uniform that was too large. I suppose he had had to have one made especially for a hot climate. With all his medals he looked so ridiculous that I was sorry for him. It was impossible to talk to him as he knew only Russian. There was also a Japanese businessman who, every night, sent a telex to Japan (at the time Internet did not exist) about his business transactions of the day and received the following day the responses from his headquarters. It was a strange world of contrasts.

President Neto suggested that I visit the eastern part of the country. The MPLA had pacified it, after tough fighting against the supporters of Jonas Savimbi, head of the UNITA. This was a movement armed by the apartheid regime of South Africa (as well as receiving support from the United States and before that by the Chinese) and it had ferociously combated the MPLA, supported by the Soviet Union. This showed the strategically imposed submission of the liberation struggle to the world geopolitics of the cold war and which was taken advantage of by internal divisions of the movements. It also happened in Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia, as well as Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

We arrived at a small regional airport and travelled in a minibus to the diamond mines, close to the frontier with Katanga. The chauffeur drove at an unbelievable speed—people called him the ‘Boeing’. I heard that not long after he died in a car accident.

On the way we encountered a military column led by General Jean-Pierre Bemba of the Katanga rebellion who had taken refuge in Angola and who was an inconvenient ally of the MPLA. At the mines I was received by a representative of the collective who explained how the mining production worked and what had been the conditions of the workers during the colonial era. It was truly appalling to learn the level of exploitation and the cruelty of the working conditions. The nationalized mine had reorganized production and given a share to the workers.

When I returned to Luanda, friends of mine there contacted me to say that in the main bookshop of the city the sale of books by Antonio Gramsci had been forbidden, as the official theory was very close to Soviet thinking. Afterwards I talked about this with
Lucio Lara, who was responsible for ideology in the Party. And he replied, “How come? In fact Gramsci was for us the person who initiated us into Marxism! We cannot accept that the sale of his books be hindered”. I never knew if this was really so.

At the New Year celebration, I made contact with some of the MPLA leaders who were responsible for oil. It was very shocking for me to find that they were frankly neoliberal. I never knew if their jobs had changed their ideology or if was through opportunism that they approached the Party. It is true also that nationalism is not the same as socialism, as history has taught us in various African and Asian countries since Bandung.\footnote{The Bandung Conference was held 18-24 April, 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, with the aim of promoting economic and cultural collaboration between Asian and African countries, in opposition to the colonialism and neo-colonialism that had been imposed for years on the regions. This was basically the start of the Non-Aligned Movement}

I was at the airport to return home when I received a call from the president’s office. It was Neto and his wife Eugenia to say “Goodbye”. She asked me, “Pray for us”. Agostinho died of cancer the following year in the Soviet Union.

\textit{Mozambique}

In this period I travelled again to Mozambique where I met Aquino de Braganza. We travelled in a plane to Nampula to visit the Bishop who had returned from exile and to discuss with him the future of the Catholic Church. The conflicts were multiplying and the Bishop was quite severe about certain episodes. Aquino tried to find solutions. It was difficult for the Bishop of Nampula to understand the new situation, in spite of his courageous stand during the colonial period. The intolerance of certain members of FRELIMO was certainly due to the past involvement of the Catholic Church with colonialism, but also because of an ideological training that was sometimes over-simplistic. Aquino, an intellectual, suffered because of this situation. We spent the night in the archdiocese and the following day we returned to Maputo. Some months later, the prelate was replaced by an African. After this visit I had a conversation with the Archbishop of Maputo about
the relationships with the new government. He was of African, Mozambican origin, wise, prudent and beset with worries.

In 1983 I was invited by the Eduardo Mondlane University for a seminar in Maputo, sponsored by Unesco and organized by Ruth First, the wife of the General Secretary of the South African Communist Party (who later became Minister for Housing). At the time she was a political refugee and she ran the Anthropology Faculty of the University. I could not accept the invitation because I was working during that summer in Nicaragua. I had already met Ruth First in the Permanent People's Tribunal. We both participated in various sessions, particularly in one on Eritrea in Milan. After the conclusion of the seminar she returned to her office, accompanied by Aquino de Braganza, and she received a letter-bomb that exploded in her hands. The death of Ruth First was a veritable drama because she was a person of great intellectual and political importance. Aquino de Braganza did not die, but his physical health was greatly impaired. That was our last encounter.

In 1986 the plane of the Mozambican president Samora Machel was hit by the South Africans before landing in Maputo. Aquino de Braganza was travelling with him. Both of them died. The last journey that I did with Aquino, just a few months previously, was to participate in the ceremony of homage to Amilcar Cabral in Cape Verde. On the return, we took the same plane between Praia and Lisbon. He had hearing difficulties and his eyesight was also affected by the attack on Ruth First. The political divisions of the left had greatly concerned him, particularly the conflict between the Soviet Union and China. This had consequences as far as Mozambique. FRELIMO was battling against RENAMO (the Mozambican National Resistance), a really reactionary movement, created with South African support but also backed by China, while FRELIMO was backed by the Soviet Union. I saw that Aquino was rather sad, partly because of his physical state.

Some years later I returned to Mozambique for a seminar on culture at the Mondlane University. I arrived on the anniversary of the deaths of Aquino and Samora Machel. I went to the cemetery, together with the professor who had invited me, the president and various ministers, including Joaquim Alberto Chissano, the President, and Marcelino dos Santos, President of the Parliament.
Also present at the cemetery was Samora Machel’s widow Graça (who later married Nelson Mandela). I was much moved thinking about Aquino who had dedicated his life, without ever seeking after glory, to the cause of the liberation of peoples, peace and reconciliation. The Western press called him a ‘terrorist’, but he was one of those people that, on his death, only God could recompense.

I met with Joaquim Chissano who had been the first person I had encountered in Dar-es-Salaam during the liberation struggle. He had opened the door of the FRELIMO office for me, after prudently having asked who was ringing the bell. After the death of Samora Machel, Chissano was elected president of Mozambique and he adopted a neoliberal political economy.

Marcelino dos Santos had just retired from the presidency of the Parliament. He came various times to see me at the hotel and he asked the staff of the hotel to look after me very well as I had done much for Mozambique. I always admired the recognition of these people for the simple support that had been given to them for their struggle from outside. On my last day he invited me to the birthday of his mother, who lived not far from Maputo. I found an extended family who was celebrating the occasion with traditional dishes cooked over fired clay. The feast was so convivial I almost missed my return plane.

On another occasion, some years previously, I had been invited to give a seminar at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania by a Guyanese historian who was working there, Walter Rodney. He had written an excellent book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, in which he analyzed the whole African society since slavery up until decolonization. Later he returned to Guyana where he belonged to an opposition party. There he died, as a consequence of an explosion of a bomb that it was said he was carrying.

Years later, thanks to an invitation from the peasant movements and the Transnational Institute based in The Hague I visited

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2 Nelson Mandela was a political prisoner for 27 years. From April 1974 to June 1999, he was president of the Republic of South Africa, the first black African to hold this position. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1993.
Mozambique again in 2009 to participate in a seminar on agrofuels in Africa. The representatives of organizations were also present like MST of Brazil and other regions of the African continent. As we were able to see during the event, there was already under way a plan to dedicate millions of hectares of African land to guarantee eventual production of ethanol and agrodiesel destined for Europe. We received information on Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and other countries where foreign corporations, sometimes with the agreement of the governments, were starting to produce fuels based on plantations of sugar cane, palm and *jatropha*.

Before the seminar started, a group of participants visited the Mozambican province of Tete where, with the consent of the government, 30,000 hectares had been earmarked for growing sugar cane for a British company. Although it was defined as unoccupied land, there were five villages in the area. That they were not sporadic settlements was proved by the fact that each had its own post office. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people were going to have to leave their homes for this foreign project.

Together with another group I visited a plantation of *jatropha*, a little over 100 kilometres to the south of Maputo, the home of a very poor peasant community. They gave us an amazing welcome and we went to see the crop. There were 80 hectares of poorly irrigated land, that had been devoted to this crop. The Prime Minister had tried through a radio programme to convince the peasants to produce it because it was a solution to help the country resolve its energy crisis and obtain foreign currency for development. Two years later, at the time of our visit, the *jatropha* had ripened and they showed it to us with great pride. At the same time they admitted that they didn’t know what to do with it. In our group there were some peasant leaders from Kenya, Ghana and other countries that had had the same experience. One of them commented, “With your *jatropha* you can play football. It would be better to abandon it as soon as possible and to produce maize.” The expression on the faces of those poor people was really pitiful; they could not understand.

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3 Jatropha is a plant of the Euphorbiaceae family, which grows in arid areas and it is possible to produce oil from its seeds
I made the unfortunate suggestion, “Perhaps with their jatropha they could make oil for their own needs.” Only later did I realize that I had spoken too quickly to console them, as the oil of that variety was not edible and only useful for engines. But they had no motorcycles, no tractors, nothing that could use it. We left the place with heavy hearts after seeing people in such need with that useless jatropha. Since then the country has stopped promoting this kind of plantation as they have realized it is dangerous for the environment and not as profitable as had been thought. During the seminar I gave a talk on the implications of agrofuels in general and there were various testimonies as to what was happening in several countries in Africa.

When I visit Mozambique, I had always a meeting with my friend Marcelino Dos Santos. He received me warmly in his house, with his family, as he was now retired. Because he is a wise man and a very humane person many people come to him to ask advice. Marcelino remains faithful to the project of local socialism and very critical of the neoliberal orientation that FRELIMO has adopted. We talked a lot about agrofuels and their meaning in Africa. I also recounted to him my visit to Vietnam and the development project of the Party’s Central Committee up to 2020.

**Guinea Bissau**

In September 2009, in Montreal, I took part once again in the annual national conference of Entraide Missionnaire Internationale, a body that organizes various projects in the South, being the expression of the missionary institutions of Quebec. On this occasion they had asked me to talk about the crisis. I met another participant who invited me to come to Guinea-Bissau in December of that year, to speak about agrofuels in the context of the Earth Week. In this country it was planned to grow jatropha on 500,000 hectares, a seventh part of the national territory, with all the consequences that we know: the destruction of the forests and of biodiversity, the exclusion of the peasants from their land, etc.

4 It covers a total of 36,125 square kilometres.
There were seminars, conferences and meetings of small peasants at the event. Also, each evening in Bissau, which still bore the marks of the clashes of the coup d'état that had taken place earlier that year, there were concerts and singing, theatre and dancing competitions with nearly 40 groups from all over the country.

Among the public conferences that took place there was one, for which I was responsible, on agrofuels and the plan to extend the plantation of *jatropha*. The investment was from Macao. Mr. Stanley Ho, a director of casinos—a Chinese but he had the advantage of speaking Portuguese—had set up banks that provided finance in Lusophone African countries like Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique. The main shareholder of the bank in Guinea-Bissau was the Prime Minister. The project had political support from the former president of the Portuguese parliament, a socialist, and from the Duke of Braganza. The project was thus supported by both the Portuguese left and right and had important local backers. It was in this context that the peasant movements went into action and organized the meeting to which I was invited.

I spent a good part of the week with the peasant movements, but I also met members of the government. The fact that I had known Amilcar Cabral made it impossible for the political leaders to avoid receiving me, as the party in power was founded by him. I was able to see several ministers and the president of the parliament and, in spite of some differences of opinion, the meetings were cordial. I discovered that most of the ministers were against the *jatropha* project. Even the prime minister, a businessman, had publicly expressed his disagreement with the project and indicated that he was able to see the difference between the interests of his bank and the interests of his country. Nevertheless, the government had already approved a first lot of 15,000 hectares although, as the prime minister told me, they were considering the possibility of revoking the agreement.

In general it was very revealing for me to see how such an extension of land can result in subordination to a private economic power. It is true that it is not a new phenomenon. In

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5 Between 1640 and 1910 the Portuguese royal family came from the duchy of Braganza, (so-called for the city in which it was based).
fact this country was already suffering the consequences from the production of cashew, its main exportation, taking the place once held by Mozambique. Cashew has been detrimental for the peasants of Guinea-Bissau as in order to harvest the cashew trees many had abandoned the cultivation of food crops. As a result, now the country has to import rice from Thailand. Cashew is very profitable as from two or three years, but after 14 to 16 years its productivity rapidly diminishes. For lack of labour power to cut down the trees and plant new ones, those that no longer produce cashews continue to occupy the land—and the same could happen with jatropha.

The only minister who was not immediately in agreement with me was the Minister of Economy, a very nice woman who came from the World Bank and was thus following its line. She said to me, “What can we do? The State has no means at its disposal. We can hardly pay our employees and we cannot finance projects—where would the money come from?” She was in favour of cultivating jatropha because she saw it as a possible source of foreign currency which could eventually help to support more socially-oriented short-term projects.

During our long conversation I suggested, “Clearly the State lacks means and this is a way of earning foreign currency that improves the country’s situation in the short term. However, there are two more issues that perhaps should be taken into account. The first is not to direct the economy towards exportation. This might take more time and bring in less foreign currency, but it would alleviate the living conditions of the population. The second is that yours is one of those countries where more than 50% of the national budget has to go to pay interest on external debt and this is absolutely unsustainable.” She replied that the following year, that is, in 2010, her country would re-negotiate the debt and everything would be more or less resolved. I ended the discussion by dedicating my book on agrofuels to her, at her request.

My discussion with the minister helped me to understand better the issues to be debated in these African countries, confronted as they are by a tremendous offensive of business all over the continent. On the one hand, using 500,000 hectares to grow agrofuels; on the other, all the problems that this creates in terms
of food and the expropriation of peasants from their land, in order to satisfy international economic interests.

Guinea-Bissau has also become the platform of drug trafficking between Colombia and Europe. Laden planes arrive from Latin America (particularly Colombia) in uninhabited islands that belong to the Guinean territory, where landing strips have been constructed and the goods also come by ship. From there people called ‘mules’ carry the drugs in their luggage and even in their stomachs to Europe. All this has had a terrible effect on Guinea, to the point that the coup d’état of 2009 was the result of a deadly fight between two drug-trafficking mafias, one involving the president and the other the army. The head of the army was killed by a bomb that exploded in the barracks. The following day the soldiers killed the president and set fire to the presidential palace. When I visited it in December 2009 the city was still partially destroyed.

It is indeed difficult for a small State, without resources, after hundreds of years of colonialism, dependent on the World Bank and the IMF, to battle effectively against drug trafficking, when important power circles are using the country for this purpose. Capitalism cannot resolve this because capital is the fundamental cause of these problems in making profits without taking into account the ethics of life. The solution lies in putting forward a radical solution by organizing a post-capitalist society.

Cape Verde

I first visited Cape Verde invited by some friends who had lived in CETRI. Before being assassinated, Amilcar Cabral wrote me a letter asking if a scholarship could be given to Antonio Mascarenhas so that he could study in Louvain. As it was too late to obtain an official scholarship, my mother gave the money for the first year of his studies and he remained three more years to do post-graduate studies in law. In 1991 Mascarenhas became President of Cape Verde.

I was also invited in 1983 to Cape Verde to an event to mark the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Amilcar Cabral. Among the delegates there were militants from the leftwing communist parties
in the world: from the Soviet Union, the rest of Europe, China and Latin America. The opening speech was given by Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor. Together with Geneviève Lemercinier I had prepared a paper on Amilcar Cabral and Culture. All the time there was a climate of tension because it was evident that the Soviets and the Chinese were in disagreement. In the end, they asked me to give the closing speech, to avoid asking it to be given to the representatives of either party or their respective followers in Africa and Latin America.

In 2001, two days after Antonio Mascarenhas left the presidency, I visited Cape Verde again, taking advantage of a seminar being organized in Dakar. He was waiting to receive me at the airport, remaining at the entrance like any ordinary citizen. He did not ask permission to come and receive me at the plane which I much appreciated as it showed his integrity. The following day his son was returning from Brazil where he had been studying. The young man had become a member of a very famous musical group. He flew with some 100 kilos of luggage, most of them musical instruments of all kinds, some of which were very large: guitars, drums, trumpets (he confessed to me later that he had to resort to all kinds of tricks to be able to travel with such a weight). Thus we went to meet the boy at the airport. We waited for him outside the customs and each of us took a trolley to transport the instruments. At the end, the former president, his long-haired son and I crossed the airport with all that stuff –the three of us must have been an unusual sight! Our relationships were very close and on another occasion I visited the daughter of Mascarenhas, who was studying medicine at the University of Coimbra in Portugal.

Cape Verde is a very poor country with few economic resources. The country survived for the most part on the remittances sent by the numerous compatriots who had emigrated (who totalled more than those who lived on its different islands) and on foreign aid. It received a certain amount of aid, as the country had the reputation of having largely avoided corruption. Because of the pressure from international financial organizations and many of the donor countries, Cape Verde then adopted a neoliberal policy. I had long discussions with Mascarenhas about the consequences of this policy for the countries of the South in the long term. I got
together with a group of former CETRI residents, one of them being the Minister of Health, and I was also received by the new President.

It is difficult for a small country in the South to carry out an autonomous policy. Fortunately, after several decades of drought, the rain returned and an efficient reforestation campaign had had positive results. One night I went to a concert of Cesária Évora, the magnificent expression of Cape Verde mixed race groups, where the former slaves of Africa appropriated Portuguese culture, transforming it brilliantly into a message of hopeful melancholy.

**Congo Kinshasa**

Twice I returned to the Democratic Republic of Congo and gave lectures at the National University and in the Catholic faculties. The first time it was after the World Social Forum in Nairobi in 2008, to prepare the Congolese forum. A year earlier we had organized a preparatory meeting in Louvain-la-Neuve, with Congolese coming from the Congo and others from the Diaspora, to reflect on the experiences of the world forums and the themes to be taken up in the Congo.

Some months later the Congolese national forum took place in the old Botanical Garden of Kinshasa; in spite of enormous transport difficulties, there were participants from all over the country. It was indeed a sign of hope, the opportunity to exchange information and build national networks throughout the Congo, which is 80 times larger than Belgium and which had just come out of a series of wars that had caused over four million deaths. I was asked to give the first speech, explaining the spirit of the forum; and the last speech, giving some of the conclusions.

I had a nephew who was working in the Belgian Embassy. The first day I arrived he invited me to dinner at his house, with the ambassador, who was very interested in social affairs and in the World Social Forum of Nairobi. He invited me for a lunch in his residence, which would take place two days later to discuss the future of the Congo after the elections. As I knew how formal these kinds of meeting usually were, I replied that I did not have
the appropriate clothing for the occasion. He replied that it was not in the least important.

When the day arrived there were some 30 people present, all with suits and ties. I was the only one wearing just a white shirt. Apart from the ambassador, there was the representative of the United Nations, William Swing, who was almost the governor of the Congo. The country had been profoundly disorganized by warfare and the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies were omnipresent, particularly MONUC, its international army. Swing had been none other than the former US ambassador in the Congo and spoke excellent French, as well as Lingala. Also present were representatives of the international financial institutions, the Belgian minister for development cooperation, Armand de Decker, and a dozen Ministers of the transitional government and future government.

The Belgian ambassador very soon opened the discussions. William Swing considered that the most important thing for the Congo was to re-establish security and for this it was necessary to reinforce the army and the police. The Belgian Minister thought that the reorganization of the judicial apparatus was a priority, otherwise the foreign investments would not return. The discussion centred round these themes. I was beside the future minister for agriculture, François-Joseph Mobutu, son of the former president, but he had broken off relations with his father. He had interesting ideas on the subject. Almost at the end of the meal, I could not resist asking to speak, as it all seemed to me like a caricature. The ambassador kindly gave me the floor, although this had not been planned. I began by saying that I knew almost nothing of the situation in the Congo, but that I would like to make three comments. The first was that, in my view, the priority if the country was to recover sovereignty over its natural resources, which at that time were being completely pillaged. The new government could be advised to send, as soon as possible, delegations to Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador to learn how to do this.

The second consideration was about the external debt: a country that had to pay over 60% of its budget to serve the debt (as I had learnt from Minister Pierre Lumbi the previous day) could not develop. Most of this debt should be abrogated, after serious audits.
The third comment was about foreign investment. As everyone knows, these investments are not aimed to help develop a country, but to make money. For this reason the country was going to need strict legislation to avoid the gains from these investments going mostly to foreign interests.

There was a long silence. I did not know whether it was discomfort for the lack of respect for the place, or perhaps because of the agreement of some people. As we left the dining room I was beside the Minister for Foreign Affairs who said to me, “But you are a revolutionary!” Since then I realized that the concept of Revolution simply meant common sense.

During these two visits I also met Father Malumalu, who had brilliantly organized the elections. He was concerned about the training of the leaders of the nascent social movements in the Congo and wanted to set up a centre for this purpose. The same day I attended a meeting in the parliament with those elected to a political party that came from the grassroots movements. They were about 25 of them and they constituted the third largest party in parliament. The discussion focussed on the difference between the objectives of a social movement and a political party, as well as the danger of utilizing the movements as instruments for political objectives. I defended the idea that these were two different, but complementary tasks. If they are to be achieved both must be mutually autonomous.

At the National University, which is situated on a hill overlooking the city, I was received by Professor Gaston Mwene Batende, whose doctoral thesis I supervised at Louvain. Its theme was the Kitawala, a religious movement in the Kisangani region, started by Jehovah’s Witnesses among a population that had been displaced by forced labour during the Second World War. He introduced me in the main auditorium of the university, full of students from various faculties, to talk about the concept of development. There was a very lively discussion. The following day, I arrived very late at the Catholic faculties situated in the centre of the city, because of the urban traffic and I dealt with the same theme with reference to the Christian message.

That night, together with some friends, I looked for the post office to buy some stamps for the postcards I wanted to send
to my brothers and sisters, my godchildren and my neighbours in Louvain-la-Neuve. We were in a car and I asked a passer-by if he knew where the post office was. Immediately he asked me, “Are you Louis Michel?” (The Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, considered as close to President Kabila, when the people of Kinshasa were mostly in favour of the opposition). I hurried to deny it, especially as we were in a neighbourhood that was poorly lit and full of people. So we went elsewhere to find the stamps.

Other African Countries

In recent years I have returned to Africa on various occasions. I visited Dakar several times, particularly to take part in meetings organized by Samir Amin in the Third World Forum. I have also travelled to Nigeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Kenya, as well as participating in Social Forums in Mali and Nairobi. On two occasions I gave courses on development at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. I passed by Gabon and Congo Brazzaville. Twice I returned to the Democratic Republic of Congo and gave lectures at the National University and in the Catholic faculties.

General Context and Future of the Continent

The African Context

Africa is an amalgamation of many nations: over 50 countries with great differences between them. Like some of the Asian countries, the African continent liberated itself from colonization in the 1960s, but without the political, social and cultural cohesion of the Asian nations, who had an organized culture, religious systems with an elaborate philosophical base and hundreds of years of tradition.

6 An international association composed of various specialists in social sciences and intellectuals from developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Its main concern is to help the promotion in these countries of the principles contained in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Africa remained completely much segmented after years of slavery and rarely related to the pre-colonial existing societies, with artificial states created at the Berlin Conference of 1885. Independence meant the entry of the continent into a new political era, without a well-defined economic basis and with extremely young nations.

In spite of these inconveniences, over the following forty years, genuine feelings of belonging to their respective nations have been achieved. The continent entered into neoliberal globalization, in essence as the provider of raw materials and some agricultural products and, ultimately, of capital, in particular for Europe. At the beginning of the 2010 decade, a growth of the GNP has been the product of higher prices of raw materials and agricultural products. However this is quite vulnerable.

Up until now this situation prevented an authentic development of Africa, even within a classic neoliberal model. It remained in conditions of dependency on a centre that is far away. In the first decade of the 21st century, the increase in the prices of primary materials and certain agricultural products enabled African countries to build up considerable reserves. It was a situation that led to an enormous amount of corruption. It also caused an increase in the new middle classes but at the same time an increase in the import of consumer goods.

The countries of southern Africa and Senegal took an initiative called the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) that tried to unify their economies and create a socio-economic and political group that could eventually face the other centres of world power in the current globalization. However, NEPAD was established with a neoliberal economic perspective, which is the orientation of South Africa, with the ANC in power, as well as of Senegal. Thus NEPAD is not a project of renewal vis-à-vis the dominant logic; it is an intrinsic part of it.

It is encouraging to see the interesting reaction of nationalism, the defence of rights over their natural wealth and the sovereignty of the State and of the population. Even if the continent was divided in such an artificial way, in a few years there has developed a genuine national feeling, that constitutes an indispensable basis for
making proposals and solutions; to start with to defend themselves and afterwards to construct a new reality.

However, it is difficult to see a change for this continent in the short term. When one sees what has been happening in the Congo, it seems that the systematic organization of pillaging natural resources, through African intermediaries –in this case, Uganda, Rwanda and, up to a point, Burundi– serves British and US interests, as well as some countries in the Gulf; and finally, a series of multinational corporations. Through these intermediaries the most powerful control the natural resources of the region which, in turn, provides indispensable raw materials for the space industry, cellular telephones and the latest high tech products, to name a few.

While some countries, like Nigeria, the Congo and South Africa have enough demographic weight to be able to reaffirm themselves, there are numerous small states. In the future there has to be a convergence of these states to overcome exclusively national limits. This could happen within the Union of African States or other mechanisms and bodies like the Southern African Development Community (SADC), or other institutions that could emerge.

What can happen in the future? For the moment Africa will probably continue to be a dependent continent, with few possibilities of reacting on its own. However, there are signs of an African consciousness that will be able to develop on objective bases of genuine development and mobilize against economic exploitation.
CHAPTER XX:
THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East and the Arab World: Imperial Control, Cultural and Political Fundamentalism and Social Emancipation

Afghanistan

As a result of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan,1 the Peoples’ Permanent Tribunal decided to take up the matter. Two sessions took place, the first in Sweden, in which I acted as a member of the jury. There were two questions. One was whether the intervention was justified. The other was to find out if war crimes had been committed. As in this first session it was not possible to prove that there had been such crimes, it was decided to hold the second session, which took place in Paris.

As Geneviève Lemercinier and I were about to travel to India, members of the Tribunal asked us if we could pass through Afghanistan to obtain information. Before leaving, in the name of CETRI, we prepared quite a full report about the situation in Afghanistan. Genevieve studied the ethnic and religious groups that constituted the nation. She made a synthesis of anthropological works to show the complexity of Afghan society and the artificial construction of the modern State upon a reality that was above all characterized by tribal diversity. I studied the political developments of the last decades.

With the help of Soviet colleagues from the Academy of Sciences, we obtained visas at the Afghan Embassy in New Delhi and on our return journey we stopped off at Kabul. It was quite an experience.

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1 The Soviet Union intervention in Afghanistan took place in December 1979. The troops were only withdrawn between May 1988 and February 1989.
to be in that city which was of course living under war conditions. We stayed in a little hotel from which, at night-time, we could hear the whistle of bullets, although we never found out which camp was shooting. The daytimes were spent in meetings.

The first meeting was with the Minister for Foreign Affairs. He explained that there were conflicts between the two branches of the Communist Party, the pro-Chinese and the pro-Soviet. The former had been planning to massacre the leaders of the latter, as had happened in Cambodia. There had already been various assassinations and the Government had asked the Soviets to intervene to prevent more massacres. We asked the Minister if they had proof that we could show to the Tribunal, but he admitted that all communication had taken place by telephone and that no documents existed.

Then we had meetings at the Law Faculty of the National University and a jurist who had been Minister of Justice was also present. He explained that they mastered Roman law and they knew word for word the Napoleonic Code, as well as the British Common Law. They had started to learn Soviet law; however, they were ignorant about the customs of the different tribes. It showed the distance between the political and intellectual class and the reality of Afghanistan. As we both, but particularly Genevieve Lemercinier, had worked on this issue a fruitful discussion ensued.

 Afterwards we were invited to visit the training school for the cadres of the Afghan Communist Party. Their library contained only a few copies of the complete works of Lenin in Parsi. We offered them a copy of the document that we had prepared at CETRI but as it was in French they asked for permission to translate it. I do not know whether they managed to do so. It was very typical of the political class, this lack of interest in their own history and the situation of their people.

They also explained the difficulties of the agrarian reform, to which the peasants were opposed. In fact the owners of the land were the heads of tribes and to touch the property of the chiefs would constitute an aggression against the whole group. The peasants reacted as members of a tribe and not as members of the peasant class.
In the past I had travelled through the Gulf countries, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and spent a few days in Iran a Shiite but not Arab country, which was then under the Shah’s regime. But I never had the opportunity of visiting Iraq. Nevertheless, I had participated in various public opinion tribunals on the war in Iraq. The first was the session of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal, which took place in Brussels in 2004. It was the initiative of the Flemish Catholic University of Louvain (Leuven), where a philosophy professor, Lieven De Cauter, had studied various texts of the North American neo-conservatives. These were very influential in the administration of President George W. Bush and were envisaging plans for domination, even military, of the Middle East. The philosopher felt that these ideas, which were very dangerous for world peace, should be denounced.

An impressive jury was brought together, with Denis Halliday, former Under Secretary of the United Nations; Hans von Sponeck, former Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance to Iraq; Samir Amin; Armand Clesse, Director of the Centre for European and International Studies of Luxembourg; and other personalities in the Arab world.

For three days we listened to terrifying testimonials, both from Iraqis and from the United States. The horrors that these witnesses recounted, based on documents, photographs and videos, could never be justified. The neo-conservatist texts from the United States were frightening, based on nationalist arguments expressing universal superiority and an unconditional Messianic sense concerning the role of the United States in the world. It seemed that we were back in the Nazi era. Nor was there any lack of biblical arguments to justify an elected people. However, the decision was severe, with juridical arguments from international law. It concluded with the opinion that it was a case of war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as ideological aggression. The verdict, as always, was sent to the international juridical courts.
Other tribunals were held, two of which I presided over, one in Barcelona, which focussed on the cultural and religious aspects, and one in Rome, on the responsibility of the media. A year after the verdict of Brussels, an opinion tribunal was presided over by the Indian writer Arundhati Roy in Istanbul. Once again there was a succession of witnesses recounting what they had seen or experienced, each one worse than the other. A young US soldier, a deserter son of a Nicaraguan friend, came to testify on the way in which the US army trained people to kill, using highly ideological arguments.

This war lasted ten years. The deaths can be counted in hundreds of thousands. An almost racial and religious division of the country was introduced, the intelligentsia was decimated by assassinations and exile, while the huge North American monopolies took over the oil resources. Muslim inter-religious hatreds followed, resulting in hundreds of victims and the Christian minority was reduced through emigration. Never have the US Generals, President George W. Bush or Prime Minister Tony Blair been interrogated by an international law court.

In Barcelona, in 2005, I had to preside over a Tribunal on the invasion of Iraq. There was a rather unusual witness, a Shiite imam who was an engineer and rector of a university. He was also the chief of the second mosque of Baghdad and president of a group of non-governmental organizations that were opposed to the presence of the United States. We organized with him, on the eve of the tribunal, a discussion on dialogue between Islam and Christianity.

It was held in one of the oldest churches of Barcelona. The Shiite imam and I were seated in front of the altar, interacting with the public. He expressed very courageous views: in his opinion, for example, the conflict in Iraq had nothing to do with religion but was between North American imperialism and his country. I took a more sociological position, talking about the conditions for a dialogue between the different religions and expressed the need for both the political and religious camps to be independent of each other, and he was in agreement. Unfortunately it was an event that was all too rare. He presented me with a copy of the Koran in English and in Arabic.
I was in Istanbul three times, twice for Unesco and once for the Iraq tribunal. The city is an enchanting mixture of the East and West and fascinates for its geographical situation and its bridge over the Bosporus as well as for its religious monuments; its exuberant Eastern market; its narrow alleys from the time of the Ottoman Empire; and its modern avenues. The famous, controversial square was the centre of the demonstrations against the neoliberalism of the regime that is close to the Muslim Brotherhood of President Erdogan.²

My first visit took place in 1994 during the preparations for Unesco’s year of tolerance (1995). The Director-General, Spanish scientist Federico Mayor Zaragoza, accompanied us. We were received by a Turkish businessman who had recently become enriched by his monopoly of the trade in cars and other sectors. He had put the auditorium of one of his towers in the modern city at the disposal of Unesco. One evening he invited us to dinner in his mansion, full of modern Turkish paintings, some of questionable taste, which he had collected. They were everywhere, even in the bathrooms. A few months later he was assassinated in a sinister business of economic interests. The Belgian consul had said to me during the dinner in his house, “One does not accumulate a fortune so quickly without a few dead bodies in the cupboards”.

I took advantage of the meeting to visit the Blue Mosque and the Saint Monica Basilica that had been transformed into a mosque. When I was visiting the former I met a young person who offered to guide me and I accepted. He did so very competently and at the exit I wanted to give him some money, thinking he was a student who was trying to finance his studies. He took the money but he invited me to visit his boss, who was a carpet seller in the square in front of the mosque. I accepted, though I told him that I had not the slightest intention to buy a carpet. I entered his shop that was full of wonderful multi-coloured materials of all kinds. The boss received me very kindly, with a cup of coffee.

² Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkey, 1954). He is a politician and an economist who was the mayor of Istanbul, the Prime Minister since 2003 and has been the President since 2014.
In our conversation he told me that he had studied sociology in Germany and worked for ten years with Caritas, for the Turkish immigrants in that country. Our exchange soon took another course. Forgetting his carpets, we started to talk about social issues and religion. “I don’t understand why the imams recite the Koran in Arabic.” He said to me, “when here we speak Turkish, as if God did not understand all languages.” There was a moment of silence. “No,” he said, “there is a language that God does not understand: English.” It was at the beginning of the Iraq war.

An incident, to which I will refer later, took place on this occasion with the French philosopher Jean d’Ormesson, a former director of the newspaper Le Figaro, who was also invited by Unesco.

In the other Unesco meeting, the religious issue was more explicitly discussed as part of the culture. The great Rabbi of Paris; an African cardinal of the Roman curia; Muslim authorities; the Swiss theologian Hans Kung; a professor at Tubinga University in Germany; and the vice-mayor of Jerusalem, André Chouraqui, the author of a French translation of the Bible, were all there. I went with André Chouraqui to the Blue Mosque, not only to visit it, but also to pray together; he, a Jew; I a Christian, in this sacred place of Islam.

In our group there was also an intellectual from the Soviet Union and Unesco official who was my neighbor at the hotel. The second day we met was Sunday, the day of the Orthodox Easter Sunday. Upon leaving his room in the morning, he greeted me very kindly, saying, “Christ has resuscitated”.

I went to visit the Greek-Catholic Patriarch of Constantinople with Hans Kung. With a limited number of faithful, his situation was delicate. The Ottoman Empire had been tolerant both with the Christians with and the Jews. The lay regime of Ataturk accepted the presence of diverse religions on condition that they did not act in the public sphere. The new Turkish political orientations tended to reestablish Islam, if not as the religion of the State, at least as a hegemonic cultural element.

André Chouraqui. He is a former vice-mayor in Jerusalem and he is the author of a French translation of the Bible.
All these situations presented the ever ambiguous situation of religious institutions in society, a topic which I had discussed in my book on the Sociology of Religion. Being necessary to guarantee the continuation of the religious message over time, the institutions become a contradiction with the latter when institutional interests prevail, ending in games of political or economic power. Political Islam is evidently the clearest example, but the pontificate of John Paul II was also characterized by many unholy alliances, and the Queen of England, head of the Anglican Church, is a sad relic of the old union between the throne and the altar. The military dictatorships of America celebrated the alliance between the cross and the sword, and the authoritarian regimes of Sri Lanka, of Thailand and of South Korea relied on Buddhism to legitimize their actions. This sociological norm is only overcome with spiritual references, ethical protests and prophetic actions.

Syria

In 2012, my friend and colleague Leo Gabriel, the Austrian anthropologist, decided to organize an action to promote peace in Syria. He planned to bring together a group of individuals from ‘civil society’ to complement what was being done by the political bodies. Adolfo Perez Esquivel from Argentina and a Nobel Peace prize winner accepted the idea. For months, Leo made great efforts to meet the different parties involved in the conflict, travelling to various countries and even to Aleppo, a city controlled by the armed opposition.

The contacts with the authorities of Damascus took some time but finally they authorized the entry of a delegation of a dozen persons to the country. Besides Leo Gabriel and his Austrian colleague Wilhelm Langthaler, there was the former Bishop of San Cristobal, Monsignor Raúl Vera; a Dominican and successor to Samuel Ruiz; a Mexican journalist; Jacqueline Campbell; Alejandro Bendaña, a Nicaraguan with much experience in conflict resolution and who had worked as UN Representative in Somalia; Evangelis Pisias, a Greek who organized the flotilla to Gaza; Mireille Mendes-France, daughter of Franz Fanon; Voudouris Odysseos, Greek representative to the European Parliament; the German
writer Christiane Reymann; an Italian activist for solidarity with Palestine, and myself.

We spent a few days in Beirut to meet people from the Syrian opposition living there and some Lebanese personalities, including the Director of Caritas who was very active in helping refugees, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the President of the Arab Council. We also met various journalists. In fact, the conflict had extended to the whole country and was increasingly involving foreign interests.

At the time, not only were there about 100,000 deaths, but also millions of displaced people and refugees in neighbouring countries. Three intermingling factors were at play: the internal contradictions, which had become more acute with the Arab Spring of March 2011, with protests against neoliberal policies and its social consequences, as well as against the authoritarian character of the Baathist government; the interventions of the conservative Arab countries, Sunnis and strongly anti-Shiites, also allied with the United States; and, finally, the Western oil interests that had followed the colonial occupation of Great Britain and France.

We went to Damascus by the motorway, crossing over the Al-Jabal Mountains. There we had several meetings with various governmental ministries, with the Great Mufti, with the President of the Parliament and with various parties of the internal opposition. During the daytime we could hear explosions in the city suburbs. Finally we were received by Bashar al Assad.

He explained the official position, recognizing that the protests of 2011 were legitimate; but he believed that there was also another agenda at the very beginning shaped by the Islamists and by foreign interests, which forced the government to harden its reaction. In 2012 a new constitution confirmed the re-establishment of party plurality, the broadening of the range of the communication media, social measures in favour of the poorest. He confirmed that he would present himself for the presidential elections of 2014 and invited the international community to observe them.

On our side we insisted on the need for a political solution and meanwhile measures to humanize the conflict. We presented the idea of a conference of the Syrian civil society, which was not rejected. During our visit to the Great Mufti, he confirmed
his position on the relations between religion and the State: separation, as a guarantee of the peaceful existence between the various religious groups.

There was obviously a tendency in the government to be harsh, almost extreme, which is pushing for a military solution, and another, more open to a political solution. Representing various tendencies, the internal opposition, from the two communist parties to the liberal parties, was in favour (and not without criticism) of collaborating with the government in the search for peace. The Christian religious movements, which have been ostracized by political Islam, were inclined to favour the official line. No political party really represented the lower classes. It would appear that the foreign interventions, the horrors committed by the jihadists and their military progress on the terrain, favoured the position of Bashar al Assad.

On our return we met at the frontier a Tunisian lawyer, one of the organizers of the World Social Forum who was accompanying a group of the family members of young jihadist volunteers who had been captured by the Syrian government, which had authorized their visits. He said that he estimated that there were more than 2,000 volunteers from Tunisia alone. They came here, he said, not for political reasons, but to die and to gain heaven. He quoted the case of a young man who was in a wheelchair and who had enrolled.

Many months went by with the Geneva 2 conference being often postponed and which, in the end, did not produce any genuine solutions. In March 2013, after obstacles of all kinds—with the Austrian government cancelling the visas; the Syrian government refusing permission for certain invitees to enter the country; opposition groups that did not agree on certain names—the consultation was able to take place in an old castle some hundred kilometres from Vienna. Representatives from the various tendencies and the different resistance groups and the government dialogued for three days, sometimes vigorously but respectfully. That alone was a positive outcome. Leo Gabriel asked me to moderate a session. The need for a political solution was fully recognized and for more concrete proposals it was decided to meet again within six months. However, with the daily increase in the number of victims this seemed rather inadequate.
When I returned to Ecuador, the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales (IAEN) organized a seminar, behind closed doors, on the Arab Spring and the Syrian problem. The ambassadors of Russia and Iran spoke and I made a short speech about my visit to Syria. The Russian ambassador had participated in the negotiations for the Esquipulas Peace Agreement in Central America in the 1980s and he was in favour of a political solution. The Iranian ambassador recognized that an authoritarian regime was at the origin of the conflict.

I made a more detailed analysis of the complexity of the Syrian situation that I sent to President Rafael Correa, who replied, saying that he had immediately sent it to Chancellery. A few days later he invited me to lunch. The Ministry of Defence, who had prepared the first issue of a new review, called *Patria*, asked permission to publish my analysis and proposed presenting it on the occasion of the launching of the review. I was the only speaker with the Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa, before a public of more than 300 high officials in the three military arms and various official invitees.

Soon after we had finished, but still in the hall, the French ambassador came to greet me, saying that my presentation was very good, but a few details could be added, such as the fact that France did not have only economic interests in the region, but also political friends in the Lebanon, for example (clearly he was referring to the Lebanese Catholic right).

During the cocktail party that followed, the first person who came to talk with me was the Chinese military attaché who was very enthusiastic but only spoke Chinese. Through an interpreter he said that the Chinese embassy was my home. Then came the US military attaché, speaking perfect Spanish (that he had studied in the military school of Buenos Aires) and we spoke for 15 minutes. Finally he said, “If you had to make a recommendation to the government of the United States, what would you say?” I answered, “Just one thing, to convince its allies in Saudi Arabia and Qatar to stop arming the jihadists.” Then came the Russian military attaché, who appreciated the fact that I had taken a balanced position vis-à-vis the need for a rapid peace. The Chilean military attaché, in his Prussian-type uniform, that brought back bad memories of the Second World War, came nicely to congratulate me, and to tell
me that he had learnt a lot. Finally, the Cuban ambassador, whom I had already met, greeted me with pleasant comments. Various Ecuadorian officials also came to say that this global perspective had helped them to understand better the political dimensions of the Syrian conflict.

In the meantime, the hostilities continued. The government adopted a military approach, because most of the fighters were jihadists coming from outside. At the same time there developed a war within the war, between the opposition of the Syrian Free Army and the radical Islamists close to Al Qaida, but among them there were also two branches, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and the Nusra Front. Most of the external opposition demanded the departure of Bashar el Assad as a condition for a political solution.

The external interventions were, however, determinant, with the West supporting the Syrian Free Army and Qatar, the Muslim Brothers, and Saudi Arabia the most radical elements (in spite of condemning terrorism). Russia gave military support to the Syrian government, through long-standing bilateral agreements and at the same time was active diplomatically in favour of a political solution. This was not to mention the role of Turkey, Jordan, the Arab League, nor the positive position towards the Syrian government on the part of Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah volunteers to defend their co-religious Shiites from their Sunni adversaries in the radical opposition.

Another country that I visited was Lebanon. I went there four times; the first was in 1968, on returning from Asia. I stayed in a Catholic religious community and I gave a lecture at the University of St. Joseph in Beirut. I returned in 2006 for a meeting organized by the left-wing movements. On that occasion, I visited Monsignor Grégoire Haddad of the Maronite Church, who was very socially committed and highly regarded there. He worked hard for better understanding between Christians and Muslims. I was interviewed by Al Jazeera TV on this issue.
I was also able to meet Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, the most important Shiite in Lebanon. He received me in his residence and we had an excellent conversation. He explained that he was in favour of a separation between religion and the State, and he also said that he felt the way women were treated in contemporary Arab society was not acceptable. He was against all terrorist methods. He recalled how the CIA had organized an attack against a mosque only 200 metres away from his house. He had arrived at the mosque rather late and just after a bomb had exploded, killing almost a hundred people. The Ayatollah had published several books, most of them in Arabic but he gave me one in English, which was on Islam and women. It made a big impact on me to know this man who did not correspond to the stereotype of Islamic religious leaders.

In 2009, I returned to the Lebanon for a Social Forum on the Middle East. Day after day we saw horrific images of Gaza on the television produced by the Al Jazeera teams and these generated a tremendous hatred of Israel. In the Forum there were leaders from Hezbollah, who did not seem very tolerant but in the circumstances one could understand the hostility against Israel and also against the West.

The peace mission to Syria was the fourth occasion of a visit to Lebanon and it is recounted under the section on that country.
My relations with the North African countries and with the Arab world in general have not been so intense, especially in comparison with Latin America. The contacts have been in two main fields: religious issues, concerning Islam, and political questions. My first trip to North Africa was in 1955 when I passed through Tunisia and Libya. Then, when I came back from the Congo, in 1959, I made a quick visit to Egypt and since then I have returned there for meetings with the Africa Asian People’s Solidarity Organization and seminars with the Centre for Arab Studies, of which Samir Amin is the president.

Morocco

On two occasions I visited Morocco. The first was in 2001 as I was invited to the colloquium *Give a Soul to Globalization*, which ran parallel to the Fez Festival of Sacred Music. In my speech, rather than giving a soul to neoliberal globalization I proposed getting rid of it. Also participating in the seminar was Dominique Strauss-Kahn, member of the French Socialist Party. We did not agree because he defended a way of thinking that was more neoliberal than socialist. Our positions were quite different and I was not

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1 Dominique Strauss-Kahn (France, 1949). He is a politician who was the managing director of the International Monetary Fund from November 1, 2007 to May 19, 2011.
surprised, some years later, that he accepted the presidency of the International Monetary Fund.

Each night we would go to the Festival, which was being celebrated in the courtyard of a military barracks of the 16th century, all painted in white, with its marvellous Arab architecture. There were seats to accommodate 4,000 people. The event included music from many countries, African, European, Asian, North American—but, particularly, the Arab world. I remember a Lebanese Catholic nun, Sister Maria Keyroux, well known for her songs and psalms, who was accompanied by an orchestra of some 30 musicians, half Muslim and half Christian. It was an unforgettable spectacle, as in a pastel painting, all lit up by the light of the full moon. I was sitting beside the French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin, an atheist Jew, who was in tears with emotion. The Catholic nun, the Jewish and atheist philosopher, in these Muslim surroundings: it was almost surreal. Perhaps this is the utopia of the Kingdom of God!

I had had links with several Moroccan political prisoners to whom I sent reviews and books, especially on the Sociology of Religion. One of them was Abraham Serfaty, who belongs to the Jewish minority in Morocco, whom I have mentioned before. Thanks to him I was able to get to know several Arabs who were involved in politics and acquire some knowledge of the issue of Arab nationalism and what was happening in the present Arab regimes. Through his mediation it was possible to translate into Arabic some of our publications, such as issues of Alternatives Sud on water and the globalization of resistance, which were very well received and various Arabic newspapers mentioned them.

On my return from Fez I visited Abraham Serfaty who had returned to the country, this time as adviser to the king on oil affairs. Abraham, breaking with the traditional Communist Party, had founded another left-wing party called Ila l-Amam. For his activities he was arrested and kept in prison for 17 years, where he was cruelly tortured. He was destroyed when he came out, he could hardly walk normally. When he was liberated he got in touch with me and we arranged for him to live for three months in CETRI so that he could rest and write in peace. He was writing a book about the horrors that he had suffered. When I saw him
back in Morocco he was in a wheelchair as a result of all the tortures that he had undergone in the king’s prison, but he now seemed happy.

In 2008 I visited Morocco again. I took advantage of a visit to the Spanish enclave and went to Kenitra, where I had a friend who was an agronomist and rural economist who had been a student at the University of Louvain. We talked about the agriculture in his country, which was developing along neoliberal lines. The destruction of peasant agriculture was also a reality in Morocco, as was the massive use of chemical fertilizers.

**Algeria**

My first visit to Algeria was in 2001 at the invitation of Ahmed Ben Bella, the former president. I had already met him, in Switzerland when; in 1998, a Belgian historian friend, Jules Bérard, was writing the history of the rebel movements in Africa and he needed information about the activities of Che Guevara. I put him in touch with Cuban institutions and afterwards helped him meet another Belgian friend, a doctor called Jean Pierre Papart, who worked in Geneva and who knew Ben Bella. This was very useful because he had met Che several times and assisted him in his African mission.

Thus Ben Bella and I had a first encounter in a bar at the railway station of Geneva. He told me that he had sent arms for Che’s guerrilla activities in the Congo. In addition, he said that at various times President Bourguiba of Tunisia had protested because Algerian planes overflew his country to get to Tanzania, through which they passed to reach the Congo. He also told me that he had received Soviet tanks from Cuba which had not been given by the Soviet Union direct to Algeria for the army because of the USSR’s geo-strategy of that period. They were transported in ships under shipments of sugar cane.

After this meeting, Ben Bella and I had other encounters, also in Geneva. He invited me to some meetings and participated at my talks. He was interested in the *Alternatives Sud* journal which he bought regularly in a local bookshop and, on the basis of
the themes it featured, we had very fruitful debates. Thus close relationships were developed.

When, in 1999, we organized the *Other Davos* in Zurich, the Belgian friend through whom I had met Ben Bella convinced him to participate. Already at that time, Ben Bella had a certain influence in the Arab Foundation North-South 21, in Geneva. He was trying to find a way to take action against neoliberalism at the international level. Certainly when he was president of Algeria he could not have been called a revolutionary leader, but one who was independent and nationalist. However, in recent years his thinking had evolved, becoming increasingly radical against capitalism and in favour of a socialist perspective.

In 2001 we invited him to celebrate the 25th anniversary of CETRI and to participate in a discussion panel on the countries of the South and the struggle for national liberation. When the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre was created, he participated twice. He could not attend the Mumbai event for health reasons but he was able to take part in various meetings of the Network of Networks in Defence of Humanity, which were held in Caracas.

In 2002, after a Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Emir Sader, the Brazilian sociologist, invited him and me to the University of Rio de Janeiro. Ben Bella talked about Che and I, spoke about the real meaning of capitalist globalization. He was enthusiastic about the orientation of the work of the World Forum for Alternatives (WFA).

In the meantime he had been nominated president of the North-South 21 Foundation, an institution that had been run very badly and had hardly enough means to pay the rent of its headquarters. For a while, the Foundation contributed to the costs of sending Arab intellectuals to participate in the World Social Forum.

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2 It was in 2003 that Pablo Gonzalez Casanova and various Mexican intellectuals started a movement that consolidated in the World Encounter of Intellectuals and Artists “In Defence of Humanity”, which took place in Caracas in December 2004. The Network is made up of writers, artists, academics, lawyers, teachers, economists, clergymen, students, social movements, alternative media and others. It now includes other networks and various kinds of fronts, movements and organizations that are prepared to participate in concrete actions.
We both came to the first European Social Forum in Florence. I remember that we were on the march for peace in Iraq, which mobilized almost a million people. By mid-day we were hungry. He asked if we could go and find a snack somewhere. However he was a Muslim and in Italy it is difficult to find sandwiches that don’t contain pork sausages or ham. However, we finally found one without these ingredients and were able to eat, installed on the bonnet of a car parked in a street in Florence, because there was nowhere else to sit. He was already 84 years old at the time. After our snack we felt reinvigorated enough to continue the march.

As I already mentioned, it was in 2001 that Ben Bella invited me to great celebration of his retirement, organized by the government of his country. I visited his native town Maghnia, near the frontier with Morocco. That night the population assembled in a stadium and various folklore groups had assembled in his honour. There were three invited guests: the person who received him when he went into exile in Switzerland; an Algerian who had saved his life during the Second World War when he was fighting with the allies at Monte Casino; and me. It was a memorable occasion, with groups coming from all over the country and performed amid popular rejoicing.

Ben Bella also invited me to the Abou Bekr Belkaid University in Tlemcen, where there was an official event. He asked me to speak at his retirement ceremony and to talk about globalization. I had no idea that this was to be the key conference to mark his return to Algeria, with a thousand people present, professors and students, but also Muslim religious authorities and Algerian and foreign politicians. Among them was Jean-Claude Van Cauwenberg, the socialist president of the Walloon region of Belgium.

After the visit to celebrate Ben Bella’s retirement, in September 2005 he invited me a second time, together with Pierre Galand, to his country. This time it was to inaugurate the chair bearing his name at a university near Oran to speak to an audience of the professors and some intellectuals.

In 2009 I returned to Algeria, this time on the invitation of Ali Boukrami, who was in charge of the country’s economic planning. Like me, he had been designated by Father Miguel D’Escoto, President of the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly as a
This time I gave a talk to the professors and students of the economics school and participated in various meetings in the Planning Office. The theme was the effects of the financial crisis. I appeared in interviews on the television and in *El Watan*, the French-language newspaper there. They took me to visit Roman remains some 50 kilometres from Algiers, with a military escort for security reasons as the activities of the Islamic movements were still a danger. I was also received by the person responsible for relationships between Islam and the Government, a lay philosopher who knew the Koran very well and interpreted it strictly. He did not share the views of the Sudanese Mahmoud Mohamed Taha on the two sources of the text, from Mecca (as prophet) and Medina (as Head of State) (see section on the sociology of Islam).

In 2010, Samir Amin, Ali El Kenz, professor at the University of Nantes, and I were invited to Algeria by the *El Watan* newspaper. The crisis of the capitalist economic situation was the theme of the conference that they had organized and 400 people were participating. Neoliberalism had also invaded Algerian society and the lack of political democracy had prevented much discussion. There was a lot of questioning about the meaning of the current crisis and *El Watan* wanted to open up the debate, considering it best to organize the conference with people from outside the country. There was a good discussion and the newspaper published our exchanges.

In September 2013, the Algerian Ministry of Culture invited the World Forum for Alternatives to organize a seminar on South-South relations, as it had not been possible to organize it in Venezuela because of the illness and then the death of Chávez. Samir Amin had taken the initiative to invite some 30 intellectuals from the three continents of the South to meet in the country’s capital. New perspectives had opened up, which enabled Samir to propose a plan for future work, with five specific themes, including the world financial architecture, the situation of the

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3 The UN Commission on Reforms of the Financial and Economic System. It was called after Joseph Stiglitz, president of the Commission and Nobel Prize-winner for Economics. It took place in 2008, during the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly.
military apparatus and armaments, criticisms of the development model, among other things.

Algeria has recovered certain tranquillity; but the cost of the internal war, in which thousands of lives were lost, was a high price to pay to avoid an Islamist regime under the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF). The military has been established in power for years and were preparing the re-election of Abdel Aziz Bouteflika, although he was in poor health. Many Algerian intellectuals expressed their disappointment with their country’s neoliberal economic policies, paralyzing bureaucracy and corruption. However, they saw no alternatives in the short term, especially within the general panorama of the Arab world.

Egypt

In February 2011, I took part in the demonstration of almost a million people in Tahrir square, Cairo. It was peaceful, demanding the establishment of democracy, while we heard cries for social justice. That night there was an attack on the Israeli embassy, with four deaths and almost 1,000 wounded.

To celebrate Samir’s 80th anniversary in early September 2011 I visited Egypt again. It was eight months after the ‘revolution’ and nothing had changed, with the army maintaining its power. Its presence was very discreet, but very real, with tanks stationed at various strategic points. The economy was largely paralyzed, especially tourism. Elections were being prepared. The group of Samir’s Egyptian and international friends met in Cairo and took the plane for Aswan. Among them were Luciana Castillana, Italian member of the European Parliament; Sandeep Chachra, director of Action Aid in India; Loi Tran Dac of the Vietnamese Communist Party; Pedro Paez, an economist from Ecuador; Bernard Founou from Cameroon; and a few others. We visited the dam constructed on the Nile with the assistance of the Soviet Union. We also passed in front of the Coptic cathedral that had recently been built and which was burnt down by extremist Islamists the following day after our visit.

As the political situation was tense, tourism had virtually come to a halt. The boats were lined up, tied to the piers. Only a few
Chinese tourists were seen visiting the monuments and they looked as though they were living out of time. All this enabled us to hire a boat, equipped like a 4-star hotel, for a very cheap price and to organize a seminar on Samir’s latest book on the Law of Value. A strict timetable was observed, from morning until evening for four days, on the bridge of a boat that sailed quietly between the two banks of the Nile. An original and far from an unpleasant way of organizing an intellectual event, it was the idea of Mahmoud Habachi, one of Samir’s colleagues in the Centre for Arab Studies, and he could not hide his satisfaction.

Obviously, we stopped to visit the main monuments on the way, particularly the Valley of the Kings, admiring the centuries of history that they represented, showing the influence of Africa over the Egyptian kings, the colonial type of contacts between the Egyptians and the Hebrews and the later hegemony of the Christian Copts, as well as many other little known aspects of the political and cultural events in this region of the world.

The Arab Spring was a surprise. Those who knew the societies from the inside, like Samir Amin, knew that the aspirations for democracy and social justice would one day be expressed, but no one could foresee exactly when it would happen. When it did, in Tunisia, the whole world became conscious that a new era was opening for this region. And in fact, similar events took place in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrein, Syria and Libya. Samir Amin wrote a book, published in 2012 by the Pambazuka Press and entitled The Peoples’ Spring: the Future of the Arab Revolution. It analyzed the phenomenon, showing the differences between the various processes, to contradict the mixed-up versions produced in the West and that were intended to cover very precise interests, as was the case with Libya.

The book on the Common Good of Humanity was published in Cairo in 2012, during the political campaign of the socialist party. Unfortunately we did not find enough funds to be able to translate more documents and to deepen mutual understanding. All that can be done to help the rapprochement between this world and the West, between Christians and Muslims, is of vital importance for the future of humanity. We have enough in common in order to overcome the warmongering of NATO for the control of natural
resources, as well as the terrorism of Al Qaeda, the consequence of cultural fundamentalism.

**Tunisia**

In the 1950s I had visited Tunisia, recently become independent and I spent a few days with the person in charge of the Catholic diocese, who explained to me the challenges of a new Christian presence in a Muslim country. On my way to Libya, at that time still an Italian colony, I stopped for a day in Kairuan where I was impressed by its marvellous mosque as well as the religious devotion of its (exclusively male) faithful.

I returned to Tunisia for some work for Unesco on human rights at the beginning of the 1990s, which gave me the chance of visiting more thoroughly the ancient city of Carthage, so prominently featured during my secondary school studies on Hannibal’s wars and then in the seminary with Saint Augustine. Together with an international organization member of the UN, we were received by President Ali, who read out a speech on human rights. He had just been welcoming President Mobutu of Zaire and we were able to hear the military music that accompanied the event.

The following day I wrote a letter to President Ali asking, in the name of the principles that he had developed in his speech, the liberation of a lawyer, the main leader of the opposition whom he had imprisoned not long ago. In fact, the regime was really dictatorial; the portraits of the president were all over Tunis, his wife and daughter always in the forefront of the pictures.

In March 2013 the World Social Forum was organized in Tunis, on the campus of the national university. In this context, the World Social for Alternatives held various seminars and I participated in each of them, trying to develop the concept of the Common Good of Humanity as a basis for the convergence of the social movements. It was the first time that the World Social Forum had been organized in an Arab country. Tens of thousands of young people from Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine and, obviously, Tunisia, took part.
I distributed copies of the draft Universal Declaration for the Common Good of Humanity. Chinese comrades, Lau Kin Chi, Wen Tijun, Dai Jinhua and a few others assisted me. They had asked me during a working session one night why the Chinese were not popular in Latin America. I explained that it was because the Chinese were very much linked to extractive activities that provoked negative reactions among the local population. They were seen, in many cases, as being associated with the exploitation of natural resources without much concern for the natural environment, or for the rights of the indigenous peoples.

During the Forum, I had stayed in the medina (city, in Arabic) in the home of Kacem Gharbi, researcher at the Philosophy Faculty, whom I had met in Louvain-la-Neuve, when he was looking for material for his doctoral thesis. He had spent eight years in the prisons of Ben Ali and he was studying Enrique Dussel, being very interested in Liberation Theology. It was a delicate subject and to some extent dangerous in the present environment, but his director had accepted. I helped him find Enrique’s texts.

Each night I returned through the labyrinth of the tiny streets of the urban centre, happy to prolong the day with long discussions with Kacem on the situation of the Arab world that had started its ‘Spring’ in this same country; on Islam and its different currents; on the political future of Tunisia, where a left-wing leader had recently been assassinated. My sister Monique and her daughter Céline also participated in the Forum. Kacem’s mother invited them for a couscous in her house in the colonial quarter, but it was impossible to accept because of the intense rhythm of the Forum programmes.

It was the Muslim Brotherhood that was exercising political power in the country. Many intellectuals did not accept the political-religious influence that they imposed. It demanded a strict discipline from its members, harking back to past times when, in the 1930s, the recently founded movement in Egypt had expressed its sympathy for the European fascist movements. One evening I met a young intellectual who was studying in Tehran and very attracted to Shiism, which would seem a potential counterweight to the Sunni reactionary orientations of the Brotherhood.
The Sociology of Islam

When I was still editing the Social Compass review I was interested in publishing something on the sociology of Islam, although it was difficult to find collaborators who knew the religion and also had a sociological perspective. We got into contact with Cairo University and published an article by a professor of philosophy there, Hassan Harrafy, as well as the sociologist of Islam in Paris, Mohammed Arkoun. Later on, we were also able to feature the theme of Islam in issues of the journal dedicated to Lebanon and Indonesia.

In 2000 we prepared an issue of CETRI’s publication Alternatives Sud on Liberation Theology, and I made contact with some young Tunisian Muslim intellectuals, who had created a group that was interested in Islam and Liberation Theology. However, it did not last long because it was violently repressed and they had to go into exile.

One of them wrote an article for our publication. Samir Amin prepared another article for the same issue, summarizing the book of Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, a Muslim engineer who, towards the end of the 1960s became increasingly interested in philosophy and theology. He maintained the theory that there were two different traditions in Islam, that of Mecca and that of Medina. According to him the Mecca tradition came from Mohamed as a prophet; and that of Medina, of Mohamed as Head of State. He affirmed that the Koran had mixed the texts coming from these two periods and argued that they could not be read in the same way.

According to his thesis the real Islam was that of Mecca —prophetic Islam. He started to preach this in the streets of Khartoum and he also founded a socialist party, convinced that socialism was the socio-political theory closest to his religion. He was in favour of peaceful negotiation with the black peoples of South Sudan. For all this he was arrested, condemned to death and hanged in public in January 1985. He was 76 years old.

Samir Amin, who discovered Tahar’s book in Egypt, thought that we should do more than just an article and publish a translation of the whole book. I contacted Mohamed El Baroudi, a Moroccan who had been a professor at a Belgian lycée and was in exile for having been a member of the Moroccan Communist Refoundation
Party. He was a friend of Abraham Serfaty and he offered to do the translation into French, together with a Belgian woman. We published this new book, with my introduction and a preface by Samir Amin, as part of a collection on Religion and Human Sciences that I directed at that time for the French publisher L’Harmattan. We were convinced that, both for the Western world and for the new Muslim generation, it was important to spread this text because it helped to know Islam and the views that differed from Islamic fundamentalism, which was what most people knew.

The Arab World
and Latin America

Thanks to these contacts I remained rather fascinated by the Arab world, in spite of the fact that I had been unable to work direct in any of these countries, as opposed to Sri Lanka, South India, Vietnam and the Latin American countries, and I did not know the language.

The Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales of Quito asked me to prepare a master’s degree (or part of it) on the Middle East and the Arab World. Enthusiastic about the idea, I made several journeys and seminars to contact Arab institutions, such as the School for Political Science of Algeria, the University of Tunis, the Centre for Arab Studies at the Catholic University of Louvain, the Arab Institute of the University of Paris and various friends from Morocco, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria. They all reacted positively, ready to collaborate in the initiative. Unfortunately, administrative problems in the IAEN have prevented a quick implementation of the project, but it remains in the pipeline.
In spite of my work in various continents, it is in Europe where I have lived most of my life. However, through early contacts with the JOC International I already began to see my continent with the eyes of the South. It was not easy to get rid of the conviction that Europe was the source of culture and the moral conscience of humanity. My Greek and Latin training in the humanities led me to believe that it was at the origin of human thought. References to Egypt and China were like parentheses in history and the Punic wars had a virtual enemy that had never been analyzed in terms of a real people. It was only when I began to work in India that, for the first time, I heard about Asoka and his empire.

Likewise the continents of the South were considered as territories for missions, where evangelizing heroes sacrificed their lives in service to the truth. They were indeed heroes, most of them, as I later experienced in a very different context than I had imagined. And we also learnt that the King of the Belgians, Leopold II had undertaken an admirable civilizing work in the Congo and in an act of generosity had left his African possession to his country.

Europe was compared with the United States. True, the latter was seen as a liberator after the Second World War, but it was also considered as compensation for all that it had received from Europe. The universal superiority of this continent was above discussion. The French Revolution was presented as a model in human values, dissociated from its social context and orienting
European democracy. In contrast, socialism, the Commune, the October Revolution were presented as works of the devil.

All this now seems an exaggeration, but this is what I was brought up to believe. My maternal grandparents were more moderate in their attitudes and taught me to relativize some of mine. Also a Jesuit, Father Jean Marie de Buck, who was quite critical of the bourgeoisie and its myths, started to weaken my social convictions.

Nevertheless, it was only when I started fieldwork in the continents of the South, beginning with Latin America, that my views changed. The supposed moral superiority of Europe as opposed to the United States and its imperial policies can be considered just a difference in terms. The people of the United States talk about defending ‘their interests and their values’, and the Europeans ‘their values and their interests’. Nonetheless, the practices of the European multinationals in the South are not very different from those of the North Americans and when negotiating treaties on free trade, the sovereign requirements are similar. The logic of capitalism has made them twins.

Looking at it from a historical viewpoint, one cannot forget that the origin of capitalism was in Europe and that, in its mercantile form, its expansion resulted in accumulation through the expropriation of the natural wealth of the South; the prohibition of its productive activities and exportation; the cultural and physical destruction of numerous peoples of America; the colonial wars in Asia with millions of victims; and, particularly for Africa, slavery and its long line of victims. In the eyes of the South it was no laudable civilizing mission or ‘an encounter of civilizations’ as was said on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the ‘discovery’ of America. It was a brutal and deadly conquest.

In its industrial phase, the domination of capital followed the same lines, stressing some aspects, particularly the sale of products from the North to the South. The colonial era was replaced by a neo-colonialism that, at a time of the globalization of capital, no longer required territorial occupation. An international division of work was organized under the auspices of the international bodies of the system: the World Bank in the United States, the IMF in Europe.
Nor should it be forgotten also that the two ‘world’ wars were above all European wars, where economic interests and nationalist attitudes conflicted, bringing the rest of the world into the conflagration. How many Indians and Africans died for the well being of the United Kingdom and how many Vietnamese, Algerians and Moroccans for the glory of France? Not to mention the Congolese for the independence of Belgium and the Indonesians for the economic survival of the Netherlands? The shoah and the six million deaths of Jews is also part of European history in which many others, not only the Nazis and fascists, were involved. Resistance to the maintaining of the colonial relationships with Indonesia, Algeria, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau cost millions of lives.

Mental colonization was no less important, inducing the new elites of the South to believe that the European culture as superior and indispensable for development. As from the 19th century, the Indian phenomenon of the brown sahib (the coloured master, that is, the Anglicized Indian) or, in the 20th century in Haiti, the concept of the ‘white negro’ (white, because Westernized and rich) were transformed into a cultural model. In Abya Yala (America for the indigenous people of the continent) the infantilization of the original cultures reduced great civilizations into things of the past and obliged the Indian peoples to adopt alien symbols in order to survive culturally, especially in the field of religion. Nowadays it is mainly the consumerism model of the United States that is imposed both on the Global South and on Europe.

When the text of the European Constitution was discussed, the Holy See demanded a reference to the Christian origin of Europe. Fortunately, the idea was rejected for various reasons. While the historical fact of the Christian influence cannot be denied, the dramatic contradiction between the values of the Gospel and the policy of the European nations is all too evident. The first boat to transport the African slaves to America was called The Jesus, and dozens of pontifical bulls authorized the Portuguese in the 16th century to reduce the African populations to slavery during the mercantile penetration towards the south of the continent.

The contemporary period of the European Union is no exception, with the imposition of internal neoliberalism expanding social
inequality, with economic neo-colonialism, and with imperialist complicity and arms production within NATO. In fact Christianity was often instrumentalized politically, used as a tool of legitimacy. On the other hand, one only has to go to Granada, Cordoba and Seville to see the Jewish and Arab contributions to European culture.

It is true that Europe has made an essential contribution in various aspects of universal culture and the social transformation of the world. The century of the Enlightenment enabled an important development of science, providing the human race with new possibilities for knowledge and changing its surroundings. At the same time new contradictions appeared, with the loss of a holistic vision of reality and the hegemony of the market which imposed its logic on the whole of society, as Karl Polanyi remarked so perceptively.

It was in Europe that the French Revolution took place, the workers’ movement, the Commune, socialism, as expressions of political and social emancipation. In the same continent the ecological movements developed particularly political ecology and eco-socialism. It is from there that solidarity with the South came into being, both intellectually and in practice.

Important currents of thinking originated in modern Europe, from the German, French and Anglo-Saxon philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries down to Marx, Freud, Einstein. It is not necessary to insist on this reality. One aspect impressed me particularly: the renovation of Christianity with the lay movements, the liturgical changes, the biblical studies, ecumenism and finally Vatican Council II. Without doubt, Liberation Theology, the main change in this field, was born in Latin America and developed in the South but its first thinkers studied in Europe, in the critical faculties of France, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Nevertheless these changes took place very often at the same time as the loss of a dialectic perspective, with progress being seen as linear and nature as inexhaustible. Science tended to transform itself into Messianism; Marxism into dogma; socialism into domination by the bureaucracy; modernity into the hegemony of technocracy; development into an irrational exploitation of the environment; post-modernism into a refusal of all socially constructed thinking and into the ideology of neoliberalism.
This constitutes the main lines of the framework of my work in Europe. It was very gradually that I became aware of the social conditioning of my social, cultural, religious and political attitudes. Sociology helped me in this way to weigh things up. I started with a functionalist approach, moved to a Weberian one and finally a Marxist critique. My involvement with the workers movement and with the anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles gave concrete content to my theoretical thinking. A new religious interpretation inspired by Liberation Theology contributed consistency to my whole approach.

I have been able to work on urban sociology with Paul-Henry Chombart\textsuperscript{1} de Lauwe; on contacts with Islam, with Louis Massignon;\textsuperscript{2} on cultural views with Johan Galtung;\textsuperscript{3} on international law with Francis Rigaux and Lelio Basso. André Gortz,\textsuperscript{4} the ecologist of the first hour came to CETRI several times.

\textsuperscript{1} Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe (1913-1998). He studied philosophy, anthropology and fine arts. He is a French sociologist considered to be one of the precursors of urban sociology in France. He is the author of numerous works.

\textsuperscript{2} Louis Massignon (1883-1962). He was a French-Arab who is considered one of the great experts on Islam of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. He was a professor at the School of France, the director of studies on religious sciences at the Practical School for Higher Studies of Paris. He was also the director of several publications, the founder of various associations and committees, a professor pro bono of immigrants from Magreb in Paris, a member of all the language academies of Arab countries and of multiple European academies, a regular participant in the Eranos Colloquiums of Religious Sciences promoted by Jung, president of the Institute for Iranian Studies.

\textsuperscript{3} Johan Galtung. He was born in Oslo in 1930; a sociologist and mathematician from the University of Oslo. He is one of the founders and key participants on the research about peace and social conflicts. He was the founder of the first research institute on peace, the International Peace Research Institute. He founded the Journal of Peace Research in 1964, and he has been a professor in several universities in the world. He received the Alternative Nobel Prize and the Gandhi Prize and has authored more than 50 books and more than 1,000 published articles.

\textsuperscript{4} André Gorz, the pseudonym of Gerhart Hirsch (1923-2007). He was a philosopher and a journalist from Vienna, who was a disciple of the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. He was a theoretician of political ecology and the alter world and a co-founder of the journal Le Nouvel Observateur under the pseudonym of Michel Bosquet in 1964.
Evidently it was in the Catholic University of Louvain where I carried out most of my teaching and my research, together with my colleague Geneviève Lemercinier and various other collaborators. It was a privileged place. Both at Louvain and in Louvain-la-Neuve the university ambiance was really international. Many of the students were from the South and of all the doctoral theses in the Sociology of Religion that I supervised, only two were from Europe and one of them was the thesis of Geneviève Lemercinier on Kerala. Most of those doing graduate studies were students from the three continents of the South. Close ties were established with the sociological institutes of Vietnam and of the UCA in Nicaragua. They sent members of their institutions to train in Louvain. As we always went to the South during the vacations, there was continuity in our concerns, information and exchanges. I invited various colleagues to teach in Latin America and in Vietnam, which they did with much interest and generosity. All this made Louvain a place in Europe where the South was very much present.

We received numerous visits from academics, social leaders, even important political figures in the South. The presence of CETRI (Tricontinental Centre) in the university town helped considerably and other academic initiatives, like the Institute for Development, also contributed in creating a continuing bridge. Faculties like Theology, Institutes like Philosophy, not to mention the Faculty of Economic, Social and Political Sciences, had a long tradition of welcoming students from the South and were able to establish fruitful collaboration with them.

My courses in sociology were focussed on the study of religions (three courses and one seminar) and most of the empirical material came from my work in Latin America and Asia. For four years I gave a course on the Islamic revolution in Iran. I also gave a course on Qualitative Methods in Sociology (particularly the analysis of discourse), using material from the South.

As in other European universities, I was visiting professor to a number of them. First it was the Free University of Brussels, when they awarded me the Francqui Chair for a term to give a course on the Sociology of Religion. Also at the universities of Tilburg in the Netherlands (Sociology of Pastoral Work), Birmingham
(Urban Sociology), the Sapienza in Rome (Sociology of Religion),
the Pablo Olavide University in Seville (Analysis of Globalization
and its Effects on Human Rights). Everywhere there were students
from the South and my courses were considered as a reference to
the situation in the South. It was the same for lectures in dozens
of universities on the continent. I also served as a member of
the jury for doctorates in a number of universities: Paris, Geneva,
Utrecht, Dijon, Seville, Barcelona—almost always for students from
the South.

The two universities with which I collaborated the most were
the University of Burgundy (Law Faculty) and the Pablo Olavide
University of Seville. At the former, Jean Claude Fritz and his
brother Gérard had developed a link between law and the other
human sciences.

The work and the theses were inter-disciplinary, sociology and
anthropology being well to the fore. Each year they travel to one
of the continents of the South, sending their French students into
the field and receiving candidates from the South. Those defending
their theses often asked me to preside over their presentations
and it was a real intellectual pleasure: hours of theoretical and
empirical exchange, sometimes forgetting the academic exercise
that had brought us together.

In Seville it was the law philosopher Joaquin Herrera Flor who
had organized a postgraduate course in Human Rights, also with an
inter-disciplinary approach. The official support of the European
Union enabled most of the participants to be Latin Americans.
Here the level of intellectual discussion was also high and much
focused on Latin America.

Europe has also been an important place for my publications. In
France, I published various books with L'Harmattan, particularly
the study on Culture in Haiti and, with Geneviève Lemercinier,
Culture and Energy. The review Alternatives Sud, which I founded
in 1994, was first published by L'Harmattan and then by Syllepse.
Its pages were reserved for authors from the South as its aim
was to transmit the thinking and analyses from the South to the
North on the problems of the contemporary world. It produces
four issues a year and, as it has been going since 1994, this adds
up to a significant number of monographs and a considerable
amount of specific knowledge about relationships of the South with the North, especially with Europe. Again in France, Les Indes Savantes of Paris published two of my books on Asia: the study of a Vietnamese commune and the book *Religion et Sociétés Precapitalistes en Orient*. Earlier I had published books in Paris with different publishers: Les Editions Ouvrières (on North American Catholicism), Le Cerf (the Church and the world) and Mame (two books on the Sociology of Religion, in collaboration with Jean Remy).

In Brussels, Couleurs Livres published my book on agrofuels and another on The Common Good of Humanity. In Italy, Punto Rosso of Milan published five of my books on the South. In Spain, IEPALA in Madrid published three books and another two were produced by a publisher in Barcelona. In England, Zed Books and Pluto published respectively the books on the Vietnamese commune Hai Van and on agrofuels. The Oxford University Press published the *Encyclopaedia of Christianity*, and Sage followed by publishing *Social Compass*, the international journal of the Sociology of Religion, when I retired from the University of Louvain. There have been other editions in the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Portugal and Croatia, and articles in some 50 European journals and publications.

For all these reasons I do not reject my European roots that provide me with a sound base of intellectual and material support. Most of the financing of these activities comes from European sources, governments, organizations supporting development, volunteers, friends and family members. Sometimes it was difficult, but it was possible. Nevertheless, it was always necessary to look at Europe with the eyes of the South in order to be faithful to the fundamentals.

The Anti-Systemic Struggles and Where They Are Taking Place

*Confrontations with the Actors in the Capitalist System*

While from the beginning of my social commitment, capitalism had seemed to me to be at the origin of the contradictions, it
was only gradually that I discovered the mechanisms that made it function. My university training about the economy was liberal and neoclassical and my reactions had been against the injustices that the system produced. But, step by step, reading contemporary authors initiated me into Marxism as an economic science. My perspective was sociological and I never claimed to master the economic discipline but rather to try to understand the logics that drove it.

On various occasions I was confronted by actors of the system. One of the first was the French philosopher Jean d’Ormesson, who had been director of the *Figaro* newspaper in the 1970s. It was at a meeting on tolerance, organized by Unesco in Istanbul in 2000 that was attended by Unesco Director-General Federico Mayor; the Bible expert who had also been deputy mayor of Jerusalem, André Chouraqui; and the Great Rabbi of Paris. In CETRI Geneviève and I had carried out various studies for this international organization on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the first Declaration of Human Rights. We then conducted a study on Energy and Culture, with more than a hundred interviews from different parts of the world. Meanwhile another study on Violence and Culture was carried out, in the name of CETRI, by the Colombian sociologist Jorge Bula, at that time a post-graduate student in Louvain-la-Neuve and who afterwards became a professor at the National University of Bogota.

Jean d’Ormesson presided over the meeting that discussed the final report which I had been asked to draft. I had stressed the degradation of tolerance because of the extension of neoliberalism, together with its destruction of social protection and the concentration of economic wealth, which particularly affected the societies of the South. D’Ormesson interrupted me, almost shouting from the platform from which he was chairing. He declared that the text was unacceptable, that neoliberalism had nothing to do with intolerance. A Moroccan senior official from Unesco had to calm him down. It was decided to write a new text, and that my text was to be appended in annex.

It was in Washington in 2000 that I met Michel Camdessus, who had concluded his second mandate at the head of the International Monetary Fund. Pax Romana, an organization of
Catholic intellectuals, organized a seminar on globalization there, so there was an opportunity of a contact with the IMF and the World Bank. One evening Michel Camdessus declared, “The IMF is part of the construction of the Kingdom of God”. This was an unacceptable declaration but at the time there was no discussion about it.

The following day, Camdessus received us in the meeting room of the IMF executive board on the top floor of the building. He gave us a brilliant presentation on the principles and achievements of the institution. He then offered us sandwiches in the same place. I took advantage of the opportunity to talk to him, saying, “How do you explain why a logic that is as well constructed as we have heard in your presentation ends up, in the field, in social catastrophes? Would it not be because you do not recognize the market as a social relationship?” With a sandwich in his hand, he stopped for a moment. Then he became angry, saying very aggressively, “No, you are mistaken. The market is not a social relationship,” and started to talk to another guest. From that moment, I understood that if the market is not a social relationship it is necessarily a fact of nature. As it was impossible to go against its laws, the market was transformed into a dogma, which gave rise to the pensée unique.

In the visit that we made to the World Bank, we had a discussion about the external debt of the countries of the South, which did not seem to worry the institution unduly. According to the World Bank official this was only a normal process of re-absorption of invested capital. We were also received by the officer responsible for evaluating the World Bank projects. Since the creation of this office, in only one case has there been a rectification. It must be remembered that all the members of the evaluation commission were nominated and paid by the World Bank. At the entrance to the building there was a large white wall on which you can read, “We have a dream, a world free from poverty”. This allusion to a quotation by Martin Luther King, inappropriate in such a place, was clearly aimed at legitimizing the institution. I wanted to add, “And, thanks to the World Bank, it remains a dream.”

My first contact with George Soros was via television during the Second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002. He used
the habitual metaphor of the cake that has to be made before it is distributed, ignoring the social and ecological conditions in which capitalism makes the cake and how it distributes the surplus value. The second time was with the Stiglitz Commission in New York when Soros acknowledged that speculation was a cause of the financial crisis, affecting the foundations of the economy, without hiding the fact that he was an international speculator.

Some years previously, when Professor Bert de Vries, director of the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague and I carried out a study on the development role of the Christian churches (in Asia, Africa and Latin America), we were invited to dinner by Prince Bernard of the Netherlands. He was interested in the role that the churches played in the societies of the developing countries. He had also invited an Austrian who had some ideas on the subject. Afterwards we learnt that he was working for the CIA. Obviously, the concern of the prince was to know how efficient the churches, with their social and educational work, could be as a counterweight against communism in the Third World. Our responses were rather evasive and happily there were no other encounters. It was Prince Bernard who founded the Bilderberg Group, one of the major right-wing think tanks of the world, bringing together political personalities, heads of large multinational corporations and members of European royal families.

The confrontation with Pascal Lamy took place in Louvain-la-Neuve in 2004. He had received a *Honoris Causa Doctorate*, together with Joseph Stiglitz and Muhammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, who originated micro-credit. The students had protested, demanding a debate between Lamy and Stiglitz, but the latter did not come as he was undergoing an operation. The vice-rector of the university, Gabriel Ringlet, called me at Porto Alegre, where I was attending the World Social Forum to ask if I could replace Stiglitz. He had already asked me to organize the liturgical ceremony, which would be presided over by Cardinal Archbishop Danneels of Brussels-Malines, and to prepare the sermon, that is, the commentary on the selected passages from

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5 Pascal Lamy (Paris, 1947). He is a politician and the managing director of the World Trade Organization since 2009.
the Bible. I therefore accepted reluctantly because Pascal Lamy, as European Commissioner for Trade, was certainly much more competent than me to talk about Europe. I thought I would tackle the more theoretical aspects of North/South relationships.

It was Friday evening and the debate was programmed for Monday morning. At the airport of Sao Paulo, the Air France plane could not take off because of some technical defect. We had to stay in a hotel until the following day. There I began to read the Brazilian press. The papers were full of criticisms of Pascal Lamy, who had spent a few days in Brazil to negotiate the economic relationships between the European Community and Mercosur. Eight of the ministers of Lula, who had been elected only a few months previously, wrote criticizing the European requirements. I thought I had the appropriate material for the debate on Monday morning. It was Saturday evening. During the flight to Paris I made a synthesis of the information I had collected.

The main auditorium of the university was full of students. Many had not been able to enter. Yunus explained the principles of the Grameen Bank and then Pascal Lamy explained the broad lines of European policy concerning international trade. When it was my turn I explained that Brazil was trying to recover its economy and why it was important to assist its efforts, after international capital had withdrawn billions of dollars on the eve of Lula's election. Then the question came of the conditions imposed by the European Union and the reactions of the Brazilian authorities, who were talking about neo-colonialism. I ended by saying, “This is the message of Europe to the changes in Latin America.” There was an ovation in the auditorium. The time was limited and Pascal Lamy could barely respond. I was really sorry for him because he was the guest of the university. I met him later in the buffet that followed and he said to me, “But I had a mandate.” I answered, “This is precisely why we reproach you.”

The mass took place in the parish church, celebrated by the Cardinal of Brussels-Malines and the high chancellor of the University. The theme was Christian reflection on globalization. The first text read out from the Prophet Isaias denounced the injustices of his society and announced “a new land, new skies.”
The passage from the Gospels was from Matthew, Chapter 25, about the Last Judgement, saying that the ones giving food to those who are hungry, drink to those who are thirsty, clothes to the naked would enter the Kingdom, because God lives in them. I had been asked to deliver the homily and as I mounted to the pulpit, I saw Pascal Lamy in front of me. The text that I had prepared was fairly severe against an economic system that accentuated social differences and the gap between the North and South. The Christian message was clear on this point, if we wished to adopt the same attitude as Jesus did towards his society.

The ordeal of Pascal Lamy did not end there. For half an hour the students delayed the official procession on its way to the great auditorium, before the awarding of the *Honoris Causa Doctorate*. The problem was not Pascal Lamy himself, but that a member of the French Socialist Party could subscribe to a neoliberal economic policy, sometimes trying to lessen certain effects, but not questioning the logic of the system.

The same thing happened with Dominique Strauss Kahn in Fez at a seminar about giving globalization a soul, as I have already mentioned. We were in the same panel and he defended the idea of a happy globalization –with a few regulations. My position was that the capitalist system had effects that even regulation was incapable of controlling and that we had to go further. I quoted from Polanyi, saying that capitalism had dis-embedded the economy from the society and it was necessary to re-embed it. He quoted the same author to justify an adaptation of capitalism. In fact this controversy was not new. It started at the end of the 19th century and particularly at the beginning of the 20th in Germany, with the rupture between the social-democrats and Rosa Luxemburg. However, how can we accept that a party calling itself socialist provides both the WTO and the IMF with its directors-general?

On The Side of Justice: On The Left

At the same time there were confrontations with various personalities in the capitalist world, like Baudouin Velge and Karl Vinck in Belgium; and Christophe de Margerie, president of Total in France, among others. I was able to participate in various bodies which,
in one way or another, were coming into conflict with capitalism. Such was the case of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunals. Founded by the Italian senator Lelio Basso, who was a member of the Russell Tribunal on the US war crimes in Vietnam, the Permanent Tribunal was very active during the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and the dictatorships in Latin America. I participated in sessions on the Portuguese colonies, Eritrea and Namibia in Africa; El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia; the Cuban embargo; the military dictatorships on the Latin American continent; the European multinationals in Latin America; but also, in Asia, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sri Lanka; as well as more general themes like international law. They were of course public opinion tribunals, with no juridical value, but with some political and socio-ethical influence. Each time the conclusions were sent to the international juridical bodies and the intention was also to contribute to the evolution of international law. The perspectives were global, showing that the main violations of law were caused by the general logic of the system.

For four years I presided over the International League for People’s Liberation, also founded by Lelio Basso to support specific peoples’ struggles. The headquarters was in Geneva and its secretary was Verena Graff. The basic idea was to contribute to a peaceful solution to these struggles with more appropriate forms of self-determination or social justice. We treated cases like the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Basques in Spain, the Karabash in Armenia, the Colombian conflict and various others. Lack of funding prevented this institution from continuing and it was dissolved in 2009.

The São Paulo Forum, founded by Lula, brought together the left-wing parties of Latin America. I participated in various sessions, in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Porto Alegre, Mexico and Caracas, and each time I had the opportunity of meeting many of the political parties of the continent. With Father Miguel d’Escoto, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua, and Olivio Dutra⁶, from

⁶ Olivio Dutra (1941). He is a Brazilian politician who has been the mayor of Porto Alegre, the governor of Río Grande do Sul and a member of the Brazilin PT (Workers’ Party).
Brazilian PT, we organized a workshop on Christians and the struggle for socialism, which put forward orientations that were generally more radical than those of many of the movements that were present.

Apart from the big parties, like the Brazilian Workers Party, the Sandinista Front for National Liberation, the Farabundo Martí Front of Salvador, the Mexican Party of the Democratic Revolution (PDR) and, obviously, the Cuban Communist Party, there were several small Marxist parties. Their discourses were generally declamatory and in inverse proportion to their real representation. One day, a representative of the Cuban Communist Party who was sitting beside me said, while we were listening to one of these discourses, “I prefer listening to a priest of a rural parish because at least he has a social basis.” In this Forum the differences of orientation were marked among the left-wing parties of Latin America.

It was in the San Salvador Forum that I met Hugo Chavez for the first time. He had recently been freed from prison. There was a certain mistrust towards a putschist military man, whose ideology was not well known. There was an incident between Shaffic Handal, former guerrilla commander of the Farabundo Martí Front, who was presiding the session, and Chavez. For unknown reasons, the latter was not on the list of those who had asked to speak and the president would not give him the floor. Chavez became extremely angry.

Ten years later, I met him at the reception for Lula’s inauguration in Brasilia. We remembered the incident and both of us laughed a lot. After this meeting in Salvador, Shaffic was designated by the São Paulo Forum to participate in the 20th anniversary of CETRI in Louvain-la-Neuve, of which I have previously spoken. Afterwards he described to me in detail all the marches in which he had participated, many of them being in the framework of the Forums.
PART FOUR
THE SEARCH FOR A POST-CAPITALIST PARADIGM
OF THE COLLECTIVE LIFE ON THE PLANET:
THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY
In 1996, while celebrating CETRI's 20th anniversary, the need became clear for an international association in opposition to the World Economic Forum, which every year brought together the richest countries in Davos and oriented the world's economy. In my view this was imperative in order to show it was possible to conceive the future of humanity in a different way. Thus it was decided to create the World Forum for Alternatives (WFA).

The Forum was officially established in 1997 in Cairo. Among those present there were Pablo González Casanova, the economist; Gustave Massiah, the French urban planner; Bernard Founou of the Third World Forum (TWF); Helmi Sharawi of the Centre for Arab Studies of Cairo, which was headed by Samir Amin. Samir became the president of the WFA and I was the executive secretary until 2009 when Rémy Herrera, Economics professor at Paris University replaced me. He was later assisted by Padmadabhan Balaram, a social scientist and activist from India.

We had already reflected on the so-called old and new social movements with Pablo González Casanova at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Also at CETRI we had had many contacts with the social movements, particularly in Asia and Latin America, as we were very much involved in this field; and it was felt that it should play a central role in the social and political transformations.

Our first activity was the Other Davos Forum, in Zurich, which took place in the last week of January 1999, at the same time
as the World Economic Forum of that year. The Other Davos brought together some 50 participants, with representatives of the social movements from the five continents: the Landless Workers’ Movement of Brazil; the Workers’ Trade Unions of South Korea; the Women’s Movement of Quebec; the Peasant Associations of Burkina Faso and the French Movement of the Unemployed.

International analysts of world repute were also invited, such as Susan George, Riccardo Petrella, Samir Amin, François Chesnais, Bernard Cassen, Wim Dierckxsens, and Carlos Tablada. On our last day, not without difficulty, we succeeded in entering Davos to hold a press conference to say, “Enough! It isn’t possible to continue destroying the world on behalf of the interests of capitalism.” Later, with the materials from our meeting, we put together the book, *The Other Davos*, which has had a great success. It has been published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Swedish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Thai, German, Sinhalese, as well as French.

To organize this forum in Zurich we had to overcome the hurdle of finding the necessary finance. We were so immersed in the work that we did not have the time to look systematically for funding. Nevertheless, we succeeded in this first meeting, with the support of various European NGOs. Later, thanks to Luxembourg cooperation we were able to develop further research on the social movements, as well as various publications.

In a later seminar at CETRI we drew up the work programme of the WFA. The first item proposed was to create a world directory of social movements and to publish a book on the globalization of resistance.¹ Then we elaborated a work plan based on certain key fields of action at the global level, especially in the peasant world. Gradually we were able to move ahead and define our work as the work of a ‘think tank’, an epithet usually reserved for the neoliberalism partisans. It became necessary to reflect not only on anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, but also to search for alternatives that went beyond a mere adaptation to capitalism and the application of neo-Keynesian regulations.

Throughout this period, participation in other forums and meetings with social movements proved fruitful for the WFA. In the Zurich meeting, the Landless Workers’ Movement of Brazil had been invited, as mentioned. The following year, a group of Brazilian movements were attending a special meeting on poverty parallel to the UN General Assembly in Geneva (Copenhagen+5) and they presented a proposal to organize in Porto Alegre a simultaneous forum to that of Davos. Thus it could be said that the WFA was one of the creators of the World Social Forum.

Our first important meeting was that held in Bamako in 2006. We met one day before the World Social Forum to draw up a document on the fields that we considered fundamental for a critical analysis of the contemporary situation of the world: labour; the agrarian question; women; the State; the natural environment; culture and the communication media, among other topics. It was a first elaboration that functioned as a basis to continue with other analyses. In the context of the WSF of Nairobi, in 2007, we also held specific WFA activities. In other forums, like that in Brazil in 2009, we participated as the WFA in various thematic discussions.

At the same time we organized meetings that were not linked with other events to constitute, little by little, a group of intellectuals (in the broader sense of the word); in other words, with all those who could take a critical distance vis-à-vis daily life. We had a first Latin American meeting in Quito at the beginning of 2008, to prepare the meeting of Caracas the same year. Then, in this capital, thanks to the support of the Venezuelan Minister of Culture, the Network of Networks in Defence of Humanity and the valuable collaboration of the historian Carmen Bohórquez, we could work for almost a week with some 200 people from all parts of the world on the themes that had been defined in Bamako.

In February 2005 the website of the WFA (http://www.forumdesaltérnatives.org) had been established, conceived as an international window promoting access to analytical texts and perspectives for the future from the viewpoint of alternative thinking. The site follows new initiatives that include alternatives such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, the Shanghai Group, which are experiences with different philosophies, but which also contribute to a different kind of economic and political integration. It enables consultation.
of the documents of the various WFA conferences, such as those at Bamako (2006), Quito (2008), Caracas (2008), Brussels (2009), Caceres (2010) Quito (2011) and Algiers (2013). Now this site uses eight languages –English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Chinese, German and Russian. We have also published a number of books in Spanish with Ruth Casa Editorial, in French with the publishers L'Harmattan and Syllepse, and in English with Pluto Press and Zed Books.

As the WFA has no funding of its own, each new meeting means finding the necessary finance and this is only possible in association with other groups that share similar views. Sometimes this is not very easy because, as is logical, each institution has its own aims.

A first objective of the WFA has been to produce documents that can be useful for reflection and action of the social movements. Of course, it has essentially been a criticism of the logic of the capitalist system and an analysis of the weaknesses and the achievements of socialism to clarify how to proceed in the current situation of the hegemony of capitalism.

The World Forum for Alternatives has always participated in the International Council of the World Social Forums. Both forums are complementary. The World Social Forum serves as a meeting place that helps to construct a world collective consciousness and is a basis for the construction of networks. The World Forum for Alternatives is a more specific body, able to think, discuss, publish and in general carry out the intellectual task of building more long-term perspectives.

We have not formally discussed within the WFA the creation of a so-called Fifth International, on which subject Samir Amin published a book in 2006. However, some are in favour of such a constitution, with a view to collaboration between political actions at the international level which, up until now, has only happened occasionally. The original idea is to think in terms, as Samir Amin proposes, of an International similar to the first one, but not to the subsequent ones. This would mean creating a democratic mechanism that is not centralized, open not only to movements and political parties, but also to other organizations, as an instrument for common action, pressure, negotiation, and struggle at the international level –something that the WSF is not
in a position to undertake. If the coordination of action is not being achieved visibly, respecting the autonomy of each of the parts, it will never be possible to achieve such an International.

In 2009, as we saw earlier, Hugo Chávez launched the idea of a preparatory meeting to form the Fifth International. The proposal aroused quite a lot of interest. Various political movements from Europe and Latin America thought, however, that the initiative was premature. Soon after the announcement in January 2010 I was invited to present a paper in a meeting of the European left in Berlin. Some 30 political organizations were present. The subject was discussed. Many did not understand why Chávez was in such a hurry, when it had taken them almost ten years to achieve certain coordination at the European level.

During the Berlin meeting, we commemorated the anniversary of the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg. Thousands of people went to the cemetery where her tomb lies ‘empty’ (those responsible for her death got rid of her body). I mused on the importance of this symbol and of the bodies of Eliecer Gaitan and Camilo Torres that have also disappeared. They ended by being more dangerous dead than alive.

The empty tomb is a symbol of resurrection, of life. It seems that in the case of Rosa Luxemburg, people see it in this way. Otherwise, why is it that so many people visit her tomb? In the metro and in the streets of Berlin red roses were being sold. I bought one and after a long silent walk in the snow that formed an immaculate white blanket over everything, with thousands of others I placed the rose on the tombstone that bore her name. I prayed for her and for those who all round the world are fighting for social justice and peoples’ emancipation. I thought, too, of my grandmother who had known her in this same city.

Returning to the WFA, after the meeting in Algeria, Samir Amin asked me to organize a work group on an aspect of South/South relationships: the progress in the natural and social sciences that make it necessary to rethink the development model. I asked Victor Hugo Jijon of Ecuador, Wim Diereksxens of Costa Rica and Gian Carlo Delgado of Mexico to be part of the group that would draw up a first working document. We met twice in the IAEN and in the Foundation of the Indian People of Ecuador to discuss this proposal.
Collaboration with Samir Amin

For many years I had known Samir Amin through his writings before I met him personally in the 1970s, in a meeting of the Lelio Basso Foundation in Rome. Lelio Basso and I had become friends in the last years of his life. He had been a member of the tribunal organized by the English philosopher Bertrand Russell—in which I had participated as a witness in Copenhagen—and when he founded the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal I was invited to participate.

Samir is a well-known intellectual. At that time we did not share the same ideas, particularly as he was close to the position of China. As president of the Belgium-Vietnam Friendship Association and working in an Asian country, I had been able to see the Chinese aggression towards Vietnam and its impact on the border with Cambodia. Nonetheless, we agreed on the need to accelerate the process of fighting against capitalism and neoliberalism as a function of the logic of the system, without being afraid to make alliances with those who did not radically condemn it, but who could act effectively against it. Samir had been invited to Vietnam, Russia, Cuba, among other countries. A universal man.

Because of our respective responsibilities in the WFA, I started working intensively with him. As he is an economist and I a sociologist, we complement each other. I don’t claim that I am on his level, because he has an exceptionally vast store of knowledge. But for me the relationship has been very enriching because I was able to go into greater depth on economic aspects and I was able to consult with him when I was writing about them. On his part right from the beginning, Samir has been open on cultural issues and he came to understand the importance of issues such as, for example, Liberation Theology and how religious thinking could be involved in social change.

Having put together several publications and collections, we coordinated numerous meetings and activities too. He wrote the preface to my book Délégitimer le capitalisme. Reconstruire l’espérance (Colophon Editions, Brussels) and I wrote the introduction to a long interview with him about his thinking, which was published in Buenos Aires and Havana, by Ruth Casa Editorial. When I go to Paris I generally stay in his apartment, where we have
had very fruitful discussions. I appreciate his wife, Isabelle, a tireless Communist militant. When there was the tragedy that resulted in the death of his daughter, I took part in the funeral.

I thought it was important to collaborate in this way. At first sight it would not appear evident that we would be in agreement, he being an atheist and I a priest; he an economist and I a sociologist; he supporting China and I, Vietnam. Nevertheless we have succeeded in becoming very close and, apart from our working relationship, we have developed a real friendship.
CHAPTER XXIV:  
THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY  

At the United Nations  
with the Stiglitz Commission  

It all began with a discussion I had with Miguel D’Escoto in Nicaragua in July 2008, a month after he was elected as president of the 63rd session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. He asked me to work with him when he took up his duties that September. At the end of that same month, the financial crisis exploded.¹ Already in office, D’Escoto phoned me in Cuba, where I happened to be at the time, and asked me to participate at the end of October in a working session on the crisis at the UN General Assembly. I immediately accepted, but added that we had to tackle the crisis with a broader perspective, not just from the financial viewpoint. It was, after all, a crisis with multiple facets concerning food, energy and climate, which together had caused a serious social crisis that affected the whole world.  

Later on in October, he telephoned me again, this time in Caracas, where I was attending a meeting of the WFA. He told me that it had been decided to create a commission for the reform of the financial and monetary system, presided by Joseph Stiglitz,² the Nobel Economics Prize-winner and he wanted to discuss this. The focus was again on the financial crisis and we talked

¹ Many sources mark the start of the crisis in September, 2008. Others, among whom is François Houtart, think that it is possible to determine the outbreak in August, 2007.  
² Joseph Eugene Stiglitz (Indiana, 1943). He is an American economist and a professor who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2001.
about this on the telephone for nearly half an hour. I insisted that
the work could not be really rigorous if it concentrated on this
aspect only: it was necessary to broaden the scope of the task.
Miguel D'Escoto was impressed by this argument but he could not
change the fact that the commission was to be on the financial
and monetary crisis and that it had already involved Joseph Stiglitz
who was to be the president.

I gave my speech at the UN General Assembly on October 30,
2008. I stressed that to deal with such a serious crisis it was not
enough to impose regulations. I also stated that the crisis was
not only economic and that it was necessary to approach it by
taking into account the various aspects that, together, had brought
it about. And I added that, as they all depended on the same logic
of capitalism, it was necessary to conceive of alternatives and not
just adaptations. I recommended a few of them, especially that
of rethinking the paradigm of the collective life of humanity on
the planet. After my presentation at the UN, D'Escoto decided
to appoint me, together with the Algerian Ali Boukrami, as his
personal representatives on the Stiglitz Commission, which was
officially established in November.

In January 2009 the Commission met in New York to draw up
the main lines of work on the Reform of the Monetary and Fiscal
System for the UN General Assembly. The meeting took place in
an Episcopal Seminary, a building in the worst neo-Gothic style,
although considered a historical monument in New York City
because it was built in 1900. Part of the building had been adapted
as a 5-star convention centre. It had an impressive refectory
with stained glass windows, chairs like miniature cathedrals,
background classical music; a location worthy of Harry Potter—in
fact, we later learnt that one of his films had been shot there.

At the panel on the first day, in this same place, Robert Johnson
—a US financier, ex Democrat senator and former director of the
Soros Foundation—³ and I were invited to give brief presentations.
I put forward the same ideas that I had presented to D'Escoto and

³ A foundation presided by George Soros (Budapest, 1930), a Hungarian-
U.S.A. financial speculator who is considered to be among the one
hundred wealthiest persons in the planet.
I also suggested that the Commission propose a UN Declaration on the Common Good of Humanity that integrated the four main themes that I had been analyzing recently. These themes concerned the fundamentals for the collective life of humanity on earth: relationships with nature; production of the physical, cultural and spiritual bases of life for all human beings; social and political organization; and the representation of reality and the ethics that, in the end, constitute culture.

This was just a presentation, there was no discussion. I participated in the debates, although not on technical matters as I was the only non-economist in the Commission and I had no competence in many of the fields that were debated. At the beginning, when I had put forward an approach, it seemed just a parenthesis because it was difficult for the president to extricate the meeting from a financial and monetary logic.

One evening Stiglitz invited George Soros to an informal meeting in the same dining room. Soros explained that the crisis was the result of the explosion of a super-bubble that he said he had foreseen ten years previously. When I asked him whether speculation had played a role in the crisis he said that it had, as it affected the fundamentals of the economy. What I did not say was that, in the meantime, he had been able to profit from it. He had that cynicism typical of those who recognize what had happened and try to exonerate themselves by creating foundations.

After this meeting in January, we met in different places, in New York again, but also in Geneva and The Hague. The Commission had difficulty in finding the necessary finances as the UN covered only a small part of the costs. Once, for example, it was envisaged to have a meeting in Doha but the government of Qatar cancelled the invitation at the last moment, probably because of pressure from the United States. The Dutch government decided to invite the commission to meet in The Hague.

Generally speaking, the Commission worked in a technical manner. The discussions were very interesting. Most participants made neo-Keynesian proposals. Many of them were former ministers of finance or the directors of the central banks as was the case of Ecuador, Tanzania, Nigeria, Malaysia and Brazil –to mention a few. The Commission proposed regulation measures such as suppressing
tax havens and bank secrecy; greater control over the rating agencies; the re-foundation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; as well as the creation of new international bodies to monitor and intervene in the world economy.

All these were relatively radical for liberal thinking, but in my view they did not tackle the essential problem and they could only be effective in reconstructing the financial and monetary system. It was therefore necessary to re-define the objectives. What, indeed, would happen if the situation that had prevailed previously was re-established to ensure a ‘robust development’ again, as expressed by the Commission? In other words, this would mean the continuation of the destruction of nature and very serious social costs, among the other factors that had helped to create the present crisis. In this case, within ten years another commission on the same theme would have to be reconvened. It was the development model that had to be revised. I felt these questions were only partly heard.

As the text of the commission was being finalized and it came to writing the last chapter it was decided that it should take into account these observations. Thus the climate dimension was introduced and it was also said that the work of the commission had been very specific so that other reflections were needed to respond to the magnitude of the general crisis. In a way this affirmation signified an opening, but it was not a change of perspective.

When the work of the commission was presented, I was asked to make another speech to the UN General Assembly. I took advantage of the opportunity to make a critique. It was not an attack against the Commission. However, it emphasized the need to approach the crisis more in depth and stressed the need for alternatives that would enable a change of paradigm, in order to rethink the fundamentals of the organization of collective life on the planet.

In June 2009 there was the International Conference on the Crisis, for which the final report of the Stiglitz Commission was the preparatory document. This conference was boycotted by the Western powers, like the United States and various European countries. A serious conflict developed and it ended up in the event being postponed for several weeks. As a result the two
facilitators—the Ambassador of the Netherlands, representing the North and the Ambassador of St. Vincent and the Grenadines as representative of the South—had succeeded in composing a basic text that, however, was unacceptable for the President of the General Assembly, given the gravity of the situation.

For this reason, Miguel D’Escoto decided to produce another text corresponding more closely to the preparatory work of the commission. He left for meetings in the Middle East, after which he was scheduled to travel to Russia. But as the existence of two texts had provoked a serious crisis, he was obliged to return immediately and abandon his trip to that country. The Dutch ambassador wanted to withdraw. His compatriot, the Minister for Cooperation, a socialist who had worked in Nicaragua during the Sandinista era, intervened as mediator. It was decided to try and combine the two versions to prepare a third one for the international conference.

Although the re-edited document kept part of the conclusions of the Stiglitz Commission, it was relatively mild and it was approved by consensus. It took up the idea of continuing the analysis of the crisis over the coming period during the sessions and to institute a UN body for monitoring the world economy. However it ruled out the initiative of creating a Permanent Council at the same level as the Security Council. The proposal for the reform of the IMF and the World Bank was also agreed, although with no precisions about how this was to be done.

The positive role played by Stanislaus Lumumba, Ambassador of Sudan to the UN and spokesperson for the Group of 77+China\textsuperscript{4} should be mentioned. He made an admirable defence of the South, using appropriate language for the UN but remaining firm on his positions. An amazing personality with that fateful name, he is a black man from South Sudan, a Catholic educated by the Jesuits who then obtained a Ph.D. in PPE at Oxford and he spoke perfect English. We saw much of each other because he was very close to Miguel D’Escoto.

\textsuperscript{4} Also known as the G-77. This is a group mainly of ‘developing’ countries that seek mutual support at the United Nations. When it was created it had—as indicated by the title—77 members, but now it has 130 members.
In spite of the fact that the Conference was organized for the Heads of State, only Rafael Correa was present. He made a very articulate speech on the incapacity of the capitalist system to provide an appropriate response to the present crisis. Evo Morales, who was to have come, had problems with his plane. Some Vice-Presidents were there, as well as ministers for foreign affairs, like those of Russia and China. Belgium sent a cabinet chief! It was clear that the idea of Miguel D’Escoto that the solution of a crisis of such dimensions was not the task of the G8, nor of the G20, but of the G-192 (the 192 countries of the United Nations) did not please most of the Western countries who boycotted the conference. The others, particularly from the South, did not think that, in these circumstances, it was worthwhile being present at this level to plough in the desert.

As is the rule in the United Nations, once the final text was approved, each country had to express its interpretation. The first to ask for the floor was the US ambassador, who had agreed to the consensus. He probably did so as not to be the only country against because at the beginning it seemed he had decided not to approve it. In explaining his position, he presented his interpretation in ten points, which virtually negated the content of the document. For example, he said that the United States was in agreement with a reform of the IMF and the World Bank, but this matter was outside the bailiwick of the United Nations, as its institutions had their administrative boards and they are the ones who have the right to implement any modifications.

On the last day of his presidency of the UN General Assembly, Miguel D’Escoto referred in his speech to the idea of a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of the Earth and of Humanity. However, it concentrated on the problem of nature and relationships with it, hardly touching on other aspects. I thought it was very positive to launch the idea, as it implied an integral analysis of the capitalist system and how to overcome it. It needed, of course, to be elaborated in more explicit terms in the future.

Thus my work with the United Nations ended, which had involved ten visits to New York in 2009 –sometimes with stop-overs during my travels for other matters. Miguel D’Escoto had provided me with an unexpected experience. Many meetings, official and
informal in his office where there was a procession of people from all over the world; encounters and meals with representatives of countries from all continents; conferences with NGO observers to the Specialized Agencies of the UN; sharing the lift with the likes of Ban Ki-Moon⁵ or Romano Prodi⁶ and occupying an office in the Le Corbusier building on the East River.

 Truly, the United Nations has something of the ‘grand machin’, to use the phrase of General de Gaulle. It is a bureaucracy, a place of many intrigues and hypocrisies, a body that is used as an instrument by the great powers. None the less it is also an exceptional place where the whole world can meet and dialogue. Miguel D’Escoto said, “The United Nations is un-reformable but at the same time it is indispensable. For this reason it must be re-founded.” Its future lies in greater democracy and the participation of the peoples.

Spreading the Concept

In the first session of the Stiglitz Commission I had proposed the drawing up of a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity, arguing that perhaps it would be relevant for the Commission to show that the crisis was not only financial and economic and that it required reflection on a new paradigm that took into account the four main themes for human life on the planet.

Miguel D’Escoto accordingly consulted Leonardo Boff, the Brazilian theologian of liberation, who as a Franciscan had a special concern with our relationships with nature and who had also worked hard in recent times on a theology of ecology and the concept of Mother Earth. He made D’Escoto enthusiastic about the idea of insisting on the theme of nature and he once again took up the idea of a Universal Declaration, this time for the Common Good of the Earth and Humanity, as mentioned earlier.

⁵ The present Secretary-General of the United Nations.
⁶ Professor at the University of Bologna, Italian Prime Minister from May 1996 to October 1998, President of the European Commission between 1999 and 2004 and President of the Council of Ministers of Italy between 2006 and 2008. Since 2008 he has been the President of the UN-African Union Working Group.
In fact, Leonardo wrote to me saying that he felt very upset that he was cited as being the promoter of the idea, rather than me; but I replied that the most important thing was not its origin but the impact it had in promoting such a perspective. In any case, my perspective was not concentrated principally on nature, but rather rethinking the future orientation of humanity based on four themes at one and the same time. Obviously, this meant a fundamental criticism of the principles of capitalism and the need to go much further than regulating the system, which Miguel D'Escoto did not contest, but his project concentrated only on one aspect.

Since in the Commission the idea of a Declaration on the Common Good had no follow-up at all, I began to spread it around in publications, in presentations at the Forums and at opportunities in other circles. I gave talks to different social movements that showed interest. My aim was to provide a certain intellectual coherence to the activities of these movements that have carried out thousands of initiatives that correspond, in one way or another, with the four themes of collective life on the planet; and are manifest, explicitly or implicitly, in their criticism of the canons of capitalism and their search for a new paradigm.

When, in November 2009, I received the Madanjeet Singh Price for Promoting Tolerance and Non-Violence awarded by Unesco, I began my acceptance speech by saying I was in favour of tolerance, but for all those who, in spite of philosophical, religious or political differences, were struggling to transform the world because of situations that were intolerable. As for non-violent actions, I pointed out that we cannot forget that we live in a violent world. At the end I once more took up the idea of a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity and hoped that Unesco could also play a role in supporting it.

Of course it was not that I thought that a Universal Declaration was going to transform the world, but that it could be a pedagogical instrument to guide a struggle and make it much more concentrated. It could link struggle with intellectual theory and serve as a basis for identifying common strategic objectives between the social struggles; but without developing into a forced unity, with the movements losing their identity.
Such convergence could avoid the current dispersion that makes it impossible at the moment to accumulate forces against the world hegemony of capitalism, because even if Latin America has made some advances of a revolutionary kind, the strength of capital continues at the global level.

Only a common effort could gradually form a new historical subject that was plural and democratic, without an enlightened or messianic avant-garde, and change the system. It is certain that some aspects—climate change, exhaustion of natural resources and the sources of energy, among others—will prevent capitalism from maintaining itself for much longer because of its fundamental logic. This is, for example, why Immanuel Wallerstein talks of the end of capitalism and Samir Amin, of senile capitalism. However, at the same time, we know that capitalism will not fall by itself and that situation cannot basically change unless there is social struggle.

After D’Escoto had made his final speech at the UN, I came to see him in Managua in February 2010 and he showed me a preparatory document for the Climate Summit that was to be held that April in Cochabamba. It stated that the United Nations, with its present structure, was incapable of bringing about a change in the world situation and that it had to be reinvented. As far as he was concerned the basis for this transformation must be a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of the Earth and of Humanity.

When I received an invitation from President Evo Morales and from the Bolivian ministry of foreign affairs to participate in the Cochabamba Summit, I took up D’Escoto’s document again and sent him my observations, as it seemed to me that there was not enough balance in the vision of the different bases of the collective life of humanity on the planet. I understood that in a document for a summit on the climate the emphasis had to be on this theme and on nature in general. However, I insisted again in my idea that a Universal Declaration must explicitly mention the economic logic of the capitalist system and the non-democratic character of global political action, with reference to the militarization imposed by capital and finally, culture. I proposed that the four great themes be spelt out in the preamble, even if the Cochabamba meeting would logically concentrate on the relationships with nature and the climate problem.
Miguel D’Escoto prepared a new version of the document. The Summit, besides dealing with the climate and presenting a proposal for a Universal Declaration, had to discuss more in depth ways of action, particularly the creation of a tribunal and an outline of its sanction mechanisms. A declaration is not worth much if it does not spell out ways of achieving it. I accepted the request of Pablo Solon, Bolivia’s Ambassador to the United Nations and organizer of the meeting, to concentrate on this issue at Cochabamba. I described the history of the international tribunals, their different versions and their attributions, so that this information could serve as a reference. There were also a number of questions of a juridical nature: for example, the subject of law –because the Earth was not a person, except in a symbolic way– and which bodies would be able to apply sanctions.

As already mentioned, one month before the Summit, I passed by La Paz after a seminar in Buenos Aires. I was worried about some policies of the progressive countries on the continent that were continuing development projects that were destructive of the environment, particularly monoculture and mining. I got into contact with ecological and indigenous groups who intended to voice their concern about the contradiction between the protection of the rights of the Earth and of the indigenous peoples and the extraction policies (oil, gas, mines) of the progressive governments of Latin America, who were using these resources to finance policies of economic, social and cultural change.

The Bolivian government tended to prohibit any discussion on this subject. I thought this was a mistake, because it was a real problem and that such an attitude could be used to de-legitimize the initiative. In the Solon Foundation I met Pablo Solon’s wife, whom I had known in New York and who was responsible for the event’s organization. As he was out of the country at the time, I spoke to her, saying that it was a mistake to avoid discussing the subject –which was bound to be brought up anyway. The compromise reached – not a very happy one – was to organize another commission for this purpose (there were 17 official commissions) but outside the university grounds where the Summit was taking place.
The Earth Summit was a huge event. Some 15,000 people were expected at Cochabamba and 35,000 turned up, mostly members of the indigenous peoples of the continent, particularly from Bolivia. The campus of a private university just outside the city was an ideal place for the meetings. In my speech about the possibility of organizing an international tribunal on crimes against nature I brought up the concept of environmental justice to arrive at the conclusion that it was possible to set up such a permanent tribunal. It was necessary as well as to adopt the concept of justice, on the condition that it was based on the idea of responsibility for nature, rather than on its rights. Those assisting at my presentation included Miguel d’Escoto, Leonardo Boff and Alberto Acosta, who was no longer president of the constitutional assembly of Ecuador, but they were all somehow involved.

During the event, the Venezuelan delegation asked me for some suggestions for Chávez’s speech. I spent part of the night drawing up a document, particularly on the concept of transition from the extraction period and other products for export to an economy mainly concentrated on internal needs and respect for nature. In fact, Venezuela could not be asked to stop its oil production, from one day to another, or Bolivia to cease producing gas, or Ecuador to close the mines, even if these activities were destructive for nature and the society.

The transition would mean first to plan moving from an economy based on exporting primary materials to activities concentrating on the internal market. But this could only happen in the medium and long term. In the short term strict ecological and social rules could be drawn up concerning the exploitation of these raw materials. The third point was to ask the consumers for whom the raw materials were being extracted to support the cost of these measures. Finally, in order to avoid the indirect effects of ‘comparative advantages’, international legislation should be proposed concerning the conditions of production with effective sanctions. Chavez spoke at length and with conviction but on another aspect.

At the official opening lunch of the event I was talking with friends when someone came to ask me to join the president’s table. The Vice-President of Cuba, Esteban Lazo, a Cuban of
African origin, Miguel d’Escoto, Leonardo Boff and Frei Betto were also present. When Evo Morales spoke he started by saying that only he and his Cuban guest were not officials of the Catholic Church! Fortunately the Nuncio was not present because it would have considered that, as ‘representatives’ of the Holy See, better persons could have been chosen. I gave Evo Morales the document on transition and then I sent it to Rafael Correa (who was unable to come) through his representative, a Minister who had been a student at Louvain.

The discussions on the theme of Mother Earth were extremely lively. The massive presence of the indigenous people set the tone and several of them played a very active part in the process. There were documents circulating that emphasized the indigenous people’s cosmovision in which the Earth had its personality and its elements were brothers and sisters. Even The Peasant Way participants were uncomfortable with these formulations and even more so, many of the Europeans and North Americans. I intervened several times in the discussion, saying it was necessary to recognize and respect the indigenous people’s cosmovision but it could not be imposed as the only way of defending nature. We had to move the whole world in this struggle, even the inhabitants of Shanghai. Each group has its culture. The challenge was to respect cultural plurality.

Some of the intellectuals present criticized Western modernity for its anthropocentric character, feeling that the defence of life meant much more than the possibility for humanity to reproduce itself. Thus we should defend the life of all sentient beings: they all had a right to live. I had several discussions on this with my great friend Leonardo Boff, who comes from the Franciscan tradition of love for nature –remember that my patron saint is also Saint Francis of Assisi– and who defended positions that I considered exaggerated. It was he who convinced Miguel d’Escoto to talk about the Common Good of Mother Earth and of Humanity, instead of Humanity alone.

My position was that the common good applies to Humanity –the conscious part of Nature, as said by the indigenous people of Chiapas– but not Nature itself. Even if we refer to Mother Earth, which is a strong and positive symbol (the origin of all life), it is
not conscious of having rights or of the existence of environmental justice. Only human beings who are capable of destroying the planet through their activities can act to protect it. In fact, the first aspect of the Common Good of Humanity refers to respect for nature, which is essential for humanity’s survival.

Apart from my concern that the draft Declaration was too unilateral and concentrated exclusively on the relationship with nature, there was a problem of terminology. The document introducing the Summit used concepts that some cultural and social circles would find it difficult to accept. When there was a reference to Mother Earth and the rights of the Earth, while the content was excellent, it specifically referred to the cultural expression of the indigenous peoples of Latin America. Not only did they have the right to express it, but it was a real contribution to alerting the world about the issue. However, it could not be expected that other cultures adopted the same conceptual world. What could it mean for the inhabitants of Tokyo or for the European working class?

Everyone had the right to express the relationship with the Earth in their own culture and the principle should be plurality, on the condition of declaring the need to refrain from irrationally exploiting it. Miguel D’Escoto, in a conversation I had with him in Nicaragua afterwards, expressed his agreement and Pablo Solon said the same thing, including it in the document presented to the UN climate conference at Cancun in December 2010.

Much work remains to be done on the Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity. What was its meaning in the history of philosophy? What did it signify from the economic viewpoint? How should the relationship with nature be expressed in the Buddhist, Confucian, Islamic and African religions? How is it understood by the peasant, worker, women’s and indigenous movements?

Scenarios and Challenges of the Contemporary World

It is difficult to make exact forecasts of the future, but based on the logic of the current world trends one can point to various possible scenarios.
There is the catastrophic one that assumes that humanity is destroying the planet and within a few years, everyone, capitalists and others, is going to disappear. This is certainly too apocalyptic. However, it is a fact that the ecological aspect has fundamental implications and the moment will come when it creates objective obstacles to the future of humanity, so that it should not be underestimated. We do not know when, without mentioning other socio-economic aspects, but at some point the ecological situation is going to make it necessary to revise the paradigm of the capitalist project.

An apocalyptic vision does not lead to responsible action but rather to myths about the end of the world, or messianic movements of various kinds, from the salvation of a small number of the elect to the return of a divine being able to transform the world. As for the prospects of solutions, apart from continuing the current model of capitalist development, there are two main orientations.

The first apparently believes that humanity is going through and suffering from immense difficulties, injustices and contradictions, but that they can be solved within the logic of the market economy. To avoid its negative effects it is a question of limiting its inconveniences and regulating against abuses, a world neo-Keynesianism will be able to establish certain equilibrium. However, such a scenario does not contest the very logic of the system which produces such infamous results, both for nature and for human beings. Paraphrasing and extending Schumpeter’s concept, one could say that the destructive character of capitalism has overtaken it to the point of programming its own annihilation.

The other scenario is the building up of post-capitalism on the basis of a new paradigm, which will probably increasingly emerge, given the growing social inequality and irrational exploitation of the earth as a source of wealth. Obviously it is not a simple return to the socialism of the 20th century but rather a renewed project, which takes into account both the experiences of the past and the present dynamics of the social movements and the numerous initiatives that work against the logic of capitalism.

The relevance of culture must not be under-estimated in this process. However, it cannot be reduced to a confrontation between cultures but rather dedicated to an effort to resolve the more general
problems. It is probable that the system would use the argument of the conflict between civilizations in order to aggravate the contradictions that exist between nations. Sometimes this is not a totally open strategy, but the consciousness of the superiority of the North is implicit, with a discourse about its capacity to produce wealth, as opposed to the inability of the South to do so, particularly the Arab world and Africa. Nevertheless, the Asians are marching towards the same instrumentalized culture and in Latin America there are areas of enormous material development side by side with others of poverty and destitution.

They also talk of the emerging countries. Of course the South cannot be seen as a culturally homogenous region and different from the North because development has been defined as capitalist Westernization. The confrontation today is between different development models in which culture as a vision of the world and as ethics plays an indisputable and indispensable role, but only as part of a whole. For the same reason it is increasingly less of a North/South conflict, even if the power relationships at the international level and in the military field are still in favour of the Triad (United States, Europe, Japan) in any confrontation of an imperialist model of human development.

Reaction against the contemporary situation is above all to be seen in the Social Forums where a convergence of resistance is visible. It faces two unknowns. First, how can we transcend resistance and arrive at a concrete proposal that “another world is possible”? This means to overcome the present functions of the Forums; i.e. from the transformation of the collective consciousness and the constitution of networks to initiating common actions that are capable of transforming this resistance into a plural social subject and not only into ‘multitudes’, as described by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Karl Marx posed the issue about the working class in the 19th century: how to stop being a class in itself and become a class for itself? I think the same question is applicable today.

Then there is a second challenge: how to stimulate the collective awareness not only to regulate the system but to change it.

The confluence between the ecological destruction and the fact that social groups in the world are increasingly conscious that the common enemy is the capitalist system, strengthens the ability to
respond to these two challenges. A characteristic of neoliberalism is that it has plunged groups that used to be far away from each other into the logic of the law of value. Consequently, not only has it brought together those who live in real or direct ‘submission’ to capital—in other words, the wage-earners—but all the human groups that were formally subjected to capital by other means—juridical, financial, etc.—rather than in the production process itself.

These include the women, who are the first victims of the privatization of the public services; the peasants who have been expelled from their lands by speculation on the price of agricultural products; the indigenous people who have been expropriated through juridical processes serving private interests; the millions of people affected by the structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This explains the convergence of the different social movements in their protests and the encounters in the Social Forums.
I was born and grew up in a religious family household. I then studied in a Jesuit college, where I was very interested in the missions. From an early age I was strongly attracted by the mystical. I loved the liturgy and prayers, to remain in the church after mass, in the presence of God. Then, in the seminary, we were very devoted to the Virgin Mary. No day was complete without the nightly prayer concluding with her hymn, *Hail Holy Queen*.

My faith inclined me to the worship of Mary, as reflected in my notes of this period. For me, she mediated between Christ and human beings who, through her grace, would intercede for everyone.

In the seminary it was obligatory to practise at least half an hour a day of meditation. With the Friends of Jesus, the association of priests that I joined just before my ordination, we did one hour of meditation every day.

However, at the same time, my priesthood training had quite a ‘scientific’ basis, which changed my perspectives. In the seminary we were provided with a critical intellectual apparatus that enabled us to accept that there was no contradiction between faith and science –just that they were different orders. If, at times, this caused some conflict, it was not for fundamental reasons. Not only did we have courses in religious subjects, but also in philosophy and the sciences. Even in exegesis (Study of the Bible) the teachers used linguistics, history, the principles of archaeology and other scientific disciplines. The history of the Church was taught with
a critical approach, which was the tradition at Louvain University and it was passed on to the Malines seminary. The two subjects, philosophy and the sciences, were very demanding from a rational viewpoint.

Our professors were open-minded and advanced in their views: several of them obtained the status of experts at the Vatican Council II. They already understood the need to make some changes and to bring about an evolution on the various forms of expression of the religious message. The fact that at the seminary we received lecturers each week –usually in subjects that had nothing to do with religion, like science and literature– also showed that a co-existence with faith was possible in the modern world. With this background my faith continued to be more critical. I did not accept literally all the conceptions and deductions that were presented to me. It was, in a way, a more rational faith and that gave me a certain security.

When I began to exercise my priesthood I was not exactly a proselytiser, but I felt the urge to transmit my faith. Such was the function of the priest, I felt. So I applied it in the YCW and also in other circles. I tried to propagate the faith in contexts where its presence was not very meaningful: for example, among workers or young people. It was, however, a different kind of faith from the one I practise today. I was much oriented towards the sacraments, participation in the mass, confession, communion, religious matrimony. My concern was to motivate people to performing religious practices because they were the exclusive channel for supporting and developing the faith. It is not that today I believe that these practices are unimportant but, at that time, in general, they were given such weight that almost all pastoral work was concentrated on them.

Faith was also very linked to certain definitions that inside the seminary were seen as natural, but for people outside were quite strange. For example, the Eucharist Christ, the transubstantiation, the real presence of Christ in the bread and the wine, hell and paradise. The conceptions of ethics and morality were very narrow. For example, any sexual act outside marriage was considered a mortal sin. A mortal sin meant going to hell for eternity. As time went by I began to reflect on this and I asked myself: how could
one say and believe things like this? But that was how we believed at that time. Hence, our eagerness as young priests to help as many people as we could to avoid eternal damnation. This meant going to confess at least once a year, among other practices.

When I started to be interested in the Sociology of Religion it was mainly because of pastoral concerns. That is, I wanted to study the towns to better understand the de-Christianization process and its causes, particularly the state of religious practices—such as how many people went to mass every Sunday, or took communion in the parishes of various cities in the different countries; and to compare everything in order to produce statistics that could be used as a basis for pastoral work.

As can be seen, the objective of the pastoral work at this time was to conquer the world for Christ and to conquer meant to convert. For this reason the missionaries played a central role in the life of the Church as they were seen to be the vanguard in transmitting this faith—that we believed to be the only truth—to the ‘heathen’ or to those practising religions that we considered to be wrong. Our confidence in our faith was such that it seemed unthinkable that it could be otherwise. We believed that the best gift one could give to someone who was not a Catholic was to convert him or her to Catholicism or, in the case of a Catholic who had lapsed, to bring him or her back to the faith. This conception lasted all my youth and during my first stay in the United States.

In the diary that I kept in the Chicago parish I noted, on the one hand, my enthusiasm for religious ceremony—celebrating morning mass every day, as well as Sunday mass, going to conferences and other activities—and, on the other hand, my interest in interacting with people, especially with the youth in the city. I rubbed shoulders with the young rebels in the neighbourhood who were not serious criminals; but as elsewhere in the United States, they joined youth gangs that stole cars, fought with other gangs and sometimes organized orgies. I tried to reach them through confession, communication and religious practice in general. Such sacramental practice functioned very well in North American Catholicism, even though I sometimes felt that many local priests did not know how to do this. The fact that a foreign priest—and I believe it was precisely for this reason—managed to establish good
relationships with the youth in the neighbourhood astonished my colleagues but it did not provoke any conflict, on the contrary they were pleased about it.

As for myself, my experiences with the YCW soon had a great influence on my way of looking at religion. For example, when I got to know the French worker priests and left-wing working class militants, I increasingly realized the social dimension of the faith. I gradually understood that it was not enough to emphasize religious practice while avoiding a commitment to change the causes of de-Christianization, which seemed to me to have reached scandalous levels and affected all of society. I began to glimpse the obstacles created by the lack of information in understanding the causes of this de-Christianization and that it was necessary to reconstruct the history of this process. For this reason it was also necessary to adopt a critical attitude to part of the ecclesiastical institution.

On my first visit to Latin America I was guided by these two main principles: extending the faith and the need to study how it was practised. However, I used the tools of sociology to develop social commitment and I arrived at conclusions that were more radical. This was because I discovered, through experience, the contradiction between the Gospel and the socio-economic situation, and that the Church as an institution benefited from its important position in a society that was so unjust and socially unequal.

I then started to explore in greater depth the significance of the Gospel from the viewpoint of human dignity and already at that time my condemnation of capitalism was unequivocal. From my earlier contacts with the European working class and my knowledge of the social doctrine of the Church, I already thought that a Christian should struggle against capitalism. After spending so many months in the United States and Latin America, my opinion was strengthened even further. My travels confirmed my thinking on themes that were very concrete and specific such as agrarian reform and uncontrolled urbanization, for example.

Later on, I developed my studies of the Sociology of Religion and in this more empirical period I began to observe the function of the Church as an institution. I had already noted that through the way it was structured, its clergy, its lack of adaptation to modern
life and above all to urbanization, was an enormous obstacle to evangelization. The European Church, for example, had a strong presence in the rural world and was rather absent in the cities. It was very typical and symptomatic, that the institution found it much easier to organize in the rural society than in the urban areas.

I remember an anecdote that showed the esteem that the peasants felt for the priests. When I celebrated my first mass in a village two kilometres away from the house of my family, a really popular feast was organized. My grandparents came to be with us. From the village there was a delegation that accompanied us to the church. There was also music and they had put flowers and arches of plants all along the way. I had not lived much in the place because when my parents set up house there I was already in the seminary. In spite of the fact that I was always in that institution or during the vacation in some country in Europe with the YCW and I only stayed at home to study for exams, people considered it to be an event to have someone from their own village become a priest.

On the other hand, in the cities the priest was quite looked down on in various social milieus and there were many jokes about them; they were known as ‘the crows’. The urban space constituted a world in itself. Peoples’ lives were spent not only in the neighbourhood in which they lived. They studied in another place, went for walks in other areas and there were collective activities (work, leisure) from which the Church was totally absent.

I began to give lectures on Urban Sociology to the clergy –especially in Belgium, but also in Spain, France and other countries– posing the question of how to evangelize an urban world, which was so different from the rural one, where the parish was the centre of everything. I did not then speak about ‘new evangelization’, which was an expression specifically used by John Paul II, but that was what it really was. I was adopting increasingly a functionalist sociology, which was mainly the approach of US theory and it guided me into making more empirical research. I realized how the Sociology of Religion could be useful for a better functioning of the institution. For this reason my studies concentrated on the need of a ‘religious planning’ of the cities; i.e. to decide where to locate the churches,
schools, hospitals and other institutions the better to correspond with the urban organization of the contemporary world.

For a long time I lived in parishes. This enabled me to carry out pastoral work, although not with great intensity, as my research work and later on my doctoral studies required much of my time. Hence the emphasis on the practical aspect of Sociology of Religion. Although it was not my fundamental objective, it deserved all my respect, even if I studied how to put it at the service of disciplines such as the development of the faith and of the Church.

For this task my team and I at the Socio-Religious Research Centre developed many studies to prepare the regional missions. However, the work in Europe and in Latin America was creating increasing difficulties for me with the institutional Church when my analyses and the conclusions of the studies did not conform to their wishes. This also made me reflect on the relations between faith and the institution because, at a personal level, up until then I had almost always assumed that they were one and the same thing. When one enters the priesthood, one lives in another world, but as a result of my experiences in travelling, human relationships and my studies I came to understand that the institution could also be an obstacle for the faith.

Often I have said that if I still maintained my faith it was because I was a sociologist. Studying the history and the concrete situations and attitudes of the Church in various societies, my profession helped me to understand that the institution is a sociological fact and to relativize the contradictions that I observed and suffered from. For example, I learned that up until two or three centuries ago, when the State did not guarantee education, the Catholic schools concerned themselves with the poor. However with the social change and the recognition of the duty of the State to ensure school for all children, the social role of Catholic schools changed. They became private institutions, which meant that most of them in many countries served the richer people. It was therefore clear that this transformation was not through bad intentions, but simply the result of social and political evolution.

Sociology enabled me to understand that any structure produces some kind of conflict between values and aims, and that the institutionalization of religion constitutes already an
objective potential contradiction, because this process in some way ossifies. As cultures and mentalities continue to evolve, the institution becomes a brake on evangelization. Since I saw that to avoid this block it was necessary to ‘institutionalize the change,’ I directed my energies into making the Church more dynamic in its evangelization activities in general and, first of all, among the poorest and the oppressed.

Social Commitment

In the 1950s, Christians felt the need for a social commitment, but not to the point of going deeply into the significance of the gospel for society and how to behave in that society. There was a general link but it was not systematic. On a personal level, there was a change in my attitude towards the faith, above all after the Vatican Council II. I saw this as a transformation of the Church into being more open-minded. The document on which I worked in the Council, *The Church in the World of Today*, observed “The joys and hopes of the people of humanity are the joys and hopes …of the Church.” With such a project I could collaborate with the more advanced Bishops and I felt very optimistic.

As a sociologist I already had a certain sensibility to this dimension of the reality. I felt that the institution could recover the weight that it had lost and for this reason one month after the Council, I began to write a book entitled *The Eleventh Hour: The Explosion of a Church*. I said that as the Council had not changed the central structure of the Church there was the danger of backlash from the Roman curia, that is, the institution of the faith. Even so, the Vatican Council II had been an extraordinary source of hope because it responded to my concern as to how to convert the institution of the Church into one that was more appropriate for faith and evangelization –that is, to put the Church at the service of humanity and define itself as the people of God and not as a hierarchy.

In those times of social struggles all over the world and of national liberation struggles (political and economic) in the South, I saw the possibility, as did Dom Hélder Câmara and the progressive Bishops, of drawing up texts of committed social
doctrine, especially against the wars waged on the developing countries. It was stimulating because, immersed as we were in the Vatican at that time we had evidence that the progressives were gradually opening up the way and becoming more relevant.

I had not then yet adopted the Marxist perspective in sociology; I was more of a functionalist. However, from a political viewpoint my position was more radical. My concern was how to reconcile the efforts towards human, political and social liberation with the message of the gospel; and how to build a bridge between the latter and the working class to reinforce this message and open it up to a transcendental dimension. I wondered why this message was considered as hostile by a class that had struggled for its own emancipation, when the gospel was indeed a message pursuing that objective.

The same applied to the struggles of the peoples who had been colonized or neocolonized. But I also saw the application of Marxism as a real danger. I remember on my first travel to Latin America one of my worries was how to shape a fairer world in order to avoid Soviet communism: how to fight against this while responding to the same problems that this ideology tried to resolve, but in another way.

Before, I had had a strong social-Christian approach, but this was beginning to change. It was in no way planned, it happened naturally. I found many political contradictions among the social Christian parties, against which I had to fight; and for this reason I increasingly came into contact with the socialist and communist parties. I did not try to convert people, but to show my conviction and my commitment with the struggles such as that of Vietnam and against colonialism, among others, and to demonstrate that it was possible for a believer to adopt this kind of solidarity.

I recognized that the political organizations with which I now had contact had a valid anti-capitalist stance. I had not analyzed the socialist societies very much, but I saw that many of their social responses were legitimate. My attention was also drawn to the political and material support that the socialist countries gave to the efforts for national liberation in Africa and the revolutionary movements in Latin America. This was fundamental for me.
As I said earlier, I realized very well that being a Catholic priest was not the best visiting card for entering into contact with these organizations. It was a question of being respectful and conscious of ideological conditioning; to be close, but not to antagonize; to be patient and maintain an attitude of sincere admiration for the social and cultural transformations achieved and not to attack directly those aspects that I did not like. It was not infiltrating or appearing like a moral body from outside, but rather being one more comrade, without renouncing what one was. This did not mean refraining from being critical and, at times, very critical, but without considering the effort to overcome contradictions as antimony.

Networks and Marches

I was lucky to form part of a number of networks. First the religious network, which was made up both of the hierarchy and of those who were seeking a social commitment. The fact of belonging to the Catholic Church opened many doors on to the entire world. When I was in Asia, for example, I had no difficulties in getting into contact with the social movements in any country. Also the World Council of Churches constituted an extensive Christian network of Protestant and Orthodox churches, with which I could work. Another network was the academic one: being a professor at Louvain enabled me to cross many frontiers, particularly in the university world.

Another network was political. After his abdication, Leopold III, who had always been very interested in the natural sciences, fell in love with Amazonia. He studied the indigenous peoples and the natural wealth of that region. He was a friend of the Brazilian sociologist/anthropologist/physician and geographer Josué de Castro, author of books like *The Geography of Hunger* (1946) and *the Geopolitics of Hunger* (1952), whom I met on various occasions. The king much appreciated these works, particularly in the way that they recounted the cycle of hunger in the north of Recife. He wanted to organize an international colloquium in Brussels on safeguarding the Amazon and he asked me for my collaboration. I remember that he said, “I hope that you will not tell me that
in that period you will be in Australia.” In fact, I was unable to participate. The event was in the summer and I had always dedicated this season to Latin America. Nevertheless, at least for this reason, we talked about these subjects.

I kept up a correspondence on development issues, with Prince Charles, the brother of Leopold III, who was in charge of the inter-regnum for 3 to 4 years after the Second World War, while the king was in Switzerland and could not return to Belgium. I got to know Albert II when he awarded the first King Baudouin Prize to the Landless Workers Movement of Brazil and I also met Prince Philip (who, in 2013, succeeded his father) in several meetings in Brussels on Belgian development cooperation. In the course of these Memoirs I have recounted my contacts with various Heads of State and political figures in other countries and continents.

Just as I did not particularly foster close links with the higher ecclesiastical structures, these relationships with the monarchy were not the result of a strategy or a search for space. My main concern was in another direction: to work for greater justice in the world through bringing together my religious faith and my social commitment. In fact, I considered that the monarchy –apart from the persons themselves– was an antiquated form of government and my political tendencies were more republican. Besides I was very well aware of the ideology of the European monarchs and their complicity with politics (the Bilderberg group) and their ties with big capital.

The network of the left-wing parties that I linked up with, from the time of the resistance to the war in Vietnam to the African liberation movements, the São Paulo Forum and the European left, has played a fundamental role for me. I have had immense luck in being able to bring together the possibilities of each one of these networks, even when, at least theoretically, they were not always compatible.

The different networks also functioned in the organization of many marches as forms of protest. The first ones were against wars and invasions. Vietnam was the first objective, against the aggressive politics of the United States in the sixties. On many occasions I marched against this war: in Brussels, Copenhagen and Washington. In the last city it was also against the Soviet
intervention in Prague. Afterwards it was against the war in Iraq, in Florence, with almost a million people on the occasion of the European Social Forum; and in 2008, in New York, with North American veterans, between Times Square and the headquarters of the United Nations. We had the satisfaction of blocking Fifth Avenue and creating an enormous traffic jam in the city.

I also remember in Brussels in the 1970s, a march of 300,000 people with the pacifist movement against the establishment of missiles. Beside me was Willy Claes, a leader in the Flemish Socialist Party, who later became the secretary general of NATO (a curious trajectory!). Another time I participated in blocking the air base of Florenne in the south of Belgium, where the US missiles were stocked.

In Andalusia I took part in a march against the North American base to the south of Seville and was a member of the delegation that was received by a Spanish colonel. One of the organizers presented him with a card “for his employer” (President George W. Bush) and another offered the colonel a bouquet of red flowers. He did not know what to do with them!

In Managua I went on various marches against the wars of the Contras in the 1980s. In the city of Cebu in the Philippines, as I have said, Geneviève Lemercinier and I accompanied to the cemetery the bodies of the two young men of the New People’s Army—who had been killed by the army during a truce— together with an immense crowd of poor peasants. In Trivandrum (Kerala), we marched with young people, preceded by an elephant.

Each social forum—world, regional and thematic— started with a march. In Porto Alegre, hundreds of people paraded to express the views of the alternative world movement. At the World Forum at Bamako, we were accompanied by camels. In Nairobi we passed in front of one of the largest destitute neighbourhoods in the world and primary school children were saying in chorus “How are you?” In Belém, in northern Brazil, a tropical monsoon rained down on the participants, leaving us all soaked to the skin. During the Mediterranean Forum of Barcelona, I walked with Samir Amin. In Paris, on the occasion of the European Forum, there was a march in the main streets of the capital.
In Quito, on the occasion of the Forum of the Americas, a march was organized that was to pass in front of the United States Embassy. Some of the marchers threw stones at the building and the police responded with teargas. Breathless and with stinging eyes, I had to take refuge in a nearby park. In Moscow, during the first Russian Social Forum, the participants marched to Pushkin Square to protest against the neoliberal policies of the government of President Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s.

Another theme of the marches was human rights. In Louvain, at the beginning of the 1970s, there was a demonstration with the slogan “We are all foreigners!” In Brussels, in 2008, there was a march on behalf of the migrant workers, with tens of thousands of Moroccans and Turks who live crammed in the urban agglomerations around the capital.

In Mexico, with a million people, I participated in the march in favour of López Obrador, the leader of the opposition who had been prevented by the PAN (acronym in Spanish for National Action Party) then in power from presenting himself for the election. On another occasion, I was with Pablo González Casanova in front of the Senate to protest against the violation of the San Andrés Agreements with the Zapatistas in Chiapas.

In August 2011, I took part in one of the massive demonstrations of Tahrir Square in Cairo, with a million people who were protesting against the power of the army since the beginning of the ‘Revolution’ eight months previously. On October 15 that year there was a World Day of Protest against Capitalism, which was proposed by the World Social Forum and supported by the Indignados (Indignant) of Spain, and I was present in the demonstration in San Francisco Square of Quito. There were not many people there; the social movements and political parties had not mobilized and the right-wing opposition took the opportunity of the occasion to criticize the government of Rafael Correa.

In June 2012, on the occasion of the People’s Summit, there was a march in Rio de Janeiro to defend land. It was the only rainy day during the week of the Summit. Nonetheless, more than 80,000 people processed along Getulio Vargas Avenue and I accompanied them, with my red Chinese umbrella and my
green cap with the logo of La Via Campesina (The Peasant Way). There was much typically Brazilian enthusiasm mixing political demonstration and carnival music. In 2014, in the town of Macas in Ecuadorian Amazonia, I was with the indigenous prefect Marcellano Champi in his march to mark the taking up of his assignment, with an escort of Shuar Indian with spears.

Marches are a peaceful way of expressing disagreement: indignation caused by unacceptable situations. They have a symbolic importance, often carried out in places full of historical significance. To walk in them is an action of collective participation, based on a solidarity that helps to fight against weariness even when there are many kilometres to walk, in the heat or under the rain. They can also be of a commemorative nature, as in January 2010, when I participated, in deep snow, with scores of people in Berlin to pay homage to Rosa Luxemburg, each of us depositing a red rose on her empty tomb.

Nor can I forget the religious character of the pilgrimages and processions. I remember, in the 1950s, the night walk of students from Louvain to Notre Dame de Scherpenheuvel, a town 25 kilometres away from the university town, as well as the procession of men in the town of Malines, both expressions of the spirituality of that time, accompanied by statues of saints and the Sacred Host.

Research, Theoretical Elaboration and the Spreading of Knowledge

The first inspiration for my research and sociological reflection was, as I have said, the YCW methodology: “see, judge, act”. Of course, my main concern was to “act”, but I later discovered the importance of theoretical reflection. The “seeing” was the sociological analysis, but not forgetting other aspects, such as the psychological and philosophical, including theological.

Little by little, in my collaboration with Geneviève Lemercinier, we posed three fundamental questions in tackling any aspect of society. They concerned origin, structure and function. We applied these particularly to the analysis of religious phenomena. From a sociological viewpoint, no aspect of society can be understood out of context. For us, the way the conjuncture was seen formed
the basis of understanding and thus the study of religion must always be socio-religious. This helped me, forty years later, to understand easily the holistic concept of “buen vivir” (good living) of the indigenous peoples of the Andes.

These were the main orientations in the methodology at which we finally arrived. The first was to elaborate a hypothesis explaining the three elements –origin, structure and function– that determine how the groups being observed organize the material basis of their existence. It was not materialist determinism but rather an understanding of the conditioning of this material basis of life in order to identify the range of possibilities for social and cultural phenomena to emerge. The last stage of the hypothesis was based on this, although the intermediary stages were not excluded.

Our experiences as researchers led us to affirm that, unless we answered the question of how life is materially organized, we could not really understand the reality of what corresponds to the “judging” of the YCW pedagogy. Of course the Marxist approach helped us greatly here, in spite of the huge obstacle created by dogmatic and simplified Marxism described as reductive determinism in manuals. A fundamental contribution to our work was made by Maurice Godelier, who explained that the “ultimate analysis” was not a question of institutions but of functions; and that at every level of society the function of the organization of the material life of a social group, like political bodies (in tributary or feudal societies) or even religious ones when the religious agents exercised a political role (theocracies). It was only with capitalism that the economic functions and institutions coincided, giving great strength to logic and to economic bodies through the orientation and organization of social, political and cultural life.

The second methodological aspect was the historical one. One cannot understand anything without knowing the evolution of phenomena over time. Many cases of institutionalization, for example of religious beliefs or cultural expressions or roles could only be understood in this light. It is in this way that the dynamism of societies is recovered, taking into consideration the importance of collective and individual actors but always mindful of how they are conditioned by the material bases of life and the permanent exchange between actors. For this reason dialectics
introduces an essential methodological element: actors are always in interaction and there is no such thing as unilinear history. This prevents falling into the dogmatism of a simplistic social explanation, which is the temptation of the powerful.

It is evident that, according to this perspective, culture is not “the cherry on top of the cake” as Maurice Godelier says, or the superstructure, but an integral part of the construction of social relations. This is the viewpoint that Geneviève Lemercinier and I developed, both in our research and theoretical elaboration work.

Lastly, there is the need to “act”; that is, to put the knowledge at the service of social action with a view to turning social groups into genuine actors, not only in practical situations or as clients for political parties. This was a major concern for me. Hence the close ties with the social movements, with the YCW at the beginning at the international level, particularly in Latin America, and more recently with La Via Campesina (The Peasant Way). My contacts with Paulo Freire, the Brazilian pedagogue, helped me to deepen the communication aspects of the work. Always start at the level of knowledge of the group and use it to construct a higher level of knowledge and the understanding needed for social commitment.

On these bases I built a tool to raise awareness that I used for the first time with the tea workers of Sri Lanka, one of the poorest groups that I have ever known. I thought that if this pedagogy works with them, I could use it with any other oppressed or excluded group.

In fact, we practised this method with oppressed social groups in almost all the Asian countries: Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Hong Kong, South Korea and with different groups –industrial workers, peasants, women, various religious groups. The point of departure was what they knew of reality in order to make their own knowledge systematic –economic, social, political and religious problems–and to show the logical linkages between them.

1 The European languages used were French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Flemish, Russian, Polish, and Croatian; the Asian languages were Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese, Malay, Tamil, Sinhalese and Arabic.
In the socialist countries like Vietnam the methodology was adopted in function of the project to change society, but also in function of the political situation. The socio-political effectiveness of the method was confirmed by my being expelled from the Philippines after it had spread across the country.

From a pedagogical viewpoint, Cartesian thinking also influenced me: organizing the material in the clearest way possible, with a very structured hierarchy of chapters and paragraphs. The different experiences in the groups of various levels of knowledge proved that this structuring was efficient. To be clear is no luxury when one wants to communicate.

Eduardo Crivisqui (originally from Argentina), Emeritus Professor at the Free University of Brussels, has admirably performed the task of making a bibliographical systemization of my writings, which can be consulted at http://www.citeulike.org Almost all the publications are to be found in the Archives of the Catholic World (ARCA) at arca@uclouvain.be of the Catholic University of Louvain. He has digitalized all that it was possible to do. Following there is a more detailed description of the various fields covered in this documentation.

Sociology of Religion

The first works had a pastoral perspective –that is, they focussed on action that was religiously oriented. They aimed at increasing knowledge about social groups in order to be able to respond better to peoples’ religious needs. This work started in Europe, particularly in Belgium, and it served to form the Catholic Action leaders and their creed.

The socio-religious research on Latin America from 1958 to 1962 was carried out with this purpose. This knowledge was necessary for a renewal of the Catholicism on that continent, as was well understood by the Bishops of CELAM. As I explained earlier, the synthesis of this work was distributed to the Bishops of the different continents at the beginning of Vatican Council II during which I worked as an expert of the Latin American episcopate. The studies also served as a basis for pastoral, sociological...
and theological reflection on applying Vatican Council II to the
continent and to prepare, four years later, the CELAM conference
in Medellin that promoted Liberation Theology and the basic
ecclesial communities.

Between 1968 and 1981, Geneviève Lemercinier and I were
immersed in the work in Asia. At the beginning it was pastoral
work on the situation of the Christian churches, which were in
a minority on that continent, and particularly on their social
commitment. However, very soon our attention was concentrated
on the Asian religions, which we studied in our doctoral thesis
–she concentrated on the sociology of Hinduism in Kerala and I
on that of Buddhism in Sri Lanka– the work being continued in
subsequent years through various studies in Thailand and
Vietnam.

The book Social Functions of Religion in Pre-Capitalist Societies,
which was the result of a course at the Free University of Brussels,
contains the most essential part of our work. It adopted a Marxist
approach, which seemed the most appropriate for understanding
the cultural and socio-political role of the great Asian religions in
pre-capitalist societies. There followed many other publications
at various levels, from sociological specializations to pastoral
communication. In the bibliographical list there are 194 entries,
including books, translations chapters from books and articles.

Urban Sociology

The development of Urban Sociology that motivated me to take a
degree in Urban Studies in Brussels and then a 1-year course at the
University of Chicago was also geared to my concern for pastoral
work. My first steps took the form of socio-historical studies of
the pastoral structures of Brussels to find out why the working
class was relatively neglected by Catholic pastoral work and why
the church was seen as a class enemy. Subsequently there were
studies in Chicago and the large Latin American cities.

This Urban Sociology perspective featured in a number of
works: the geography of social classes or of immigrants, the
experience of the ‘new towns’ in England, the specific nature of
urban culture, among other things. There are 36 works recorded on this subject.

**Rural Sociology**

It was in Asia that Geneviève Lemercinier and I started to work on rural sociology in order to study the development projects of the Christian churches in Asian countries. We did the same in Latin America, particularly in Nicaragua and Haiti.

These experiences resulted in two works that stand out as fundamental. One of them was the study of a commune (Hai Van) in the Red River delta in Vietnam, close to the South China Sea. In its latest version the book is divided into two parts: the study carried out at the end of the 1970s and the other, 22 years later in 1992, with the opening up of the country to the market. It was published in 2001 in the Vietnamese language, and in French, *Hai Van socialisme et marché. La double transition d’une commune vietnamienne* (Hai Van Socialism on the March. The Double Transition of a Vietnamese Commune) (Les Indes Savantes, Paris).

As for the study on the Nicaraguan region, of El Comején, near Masaya, it was published as *El campesino como actor: sociología de una comarca de Nicaragua, El Comején* (The Peasant as an Actor: Sociology of a Region, El Comejen) (Ediciones Nicarao, Managua). The two projects were quite experimental, looking at the economic, social, cultural and political aspects of these societies. This made it possible to develop an approach closer to that of anthropology and they raised the issue of the future of peasant society on the one hand in a world dominated by capitalism, and on the other, within a socialist experience.

The theme of agro-energy started to interest me as from 2005, when I witnessed the problem of the extension of the African palm into Choco, Colombia. I discovered not only the ecological dimension of the problem, through the destruction of the eco-systems, but also the disasters and social crimes that they entailed.

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2 *The title was Xa hội bộc về một xã ở việt nam. Tham gia xã hội, Các mô hình văn hóa, Gia đình, Tôn giáo ở xã Hai Van. Nha xuất bản khoa học xã hội (Hanoi).*
This is why I decided to write a book on the subject. I took advantage of my travels and contacts to see what it involved in other Central American countries and in Brazil, but also in Africa, in Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Mali. And a study undertaken for the Belgian Ministry of the Environment, which was entrusted to CETRI, enabled me to research on the African palm on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. This book has been produced in various editions in Europe, Latin America and China (L’Agro-energie: solution pour le climat ou sortie de crise pour le capital? (Couleur livres, Charleroi, Belgium, 2009); Agrofuels: Big Profits, Ruined Lives and Ecological Destruction (Pluto Press, London, 2010); La agroenergía. Solución para el clima o salida de la crisis para el capital (Ruth Casa Editorial-Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, Panama/Havana, 2009), as well as other versions in different languages. In these recent years I have also given a number of lectures on the subject.

However, the problem is now a broader one than that of the planting of crops to produce agrofuels. Capitalism is searching for new frontiers for accumulation and one of them is agriculture, through monoculture with its attendant ecological and social disasters. It seems essential that peasant agriculture be reviewed to make it more productive on a large scale.

With the funds from the Madensheet Singh Prize for promoting tolerance and non-violence that was awarded to me in by Unesco in 2009, a seminar on peasant agriculture in Asia was organized in 2010 at the Renmin University of China, with the participation of 11 countries. Together with Professor Wen Tiejun of the university, I compiled the work that was presented and it can now be found in the e-book Peasant Agriculture in Asia (Ruth Casa Editorial, 2012). In collaboration with Francisco Hidalgo of the Central University of Quito we organized, together with CLACSO, another seminar on the same theme in Latin America. It was held in 2013 in La Paz (Bolivia) and its proceedings were published in Quito by the IAEN in 2014.

All this work led to more intensive collaboration with La Via Campesina (The Peasant Way) which, as already mentioned, is the world coordinator of the peasant movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as participation in several of its meetings to give lectures and seminars. By 2012 there were 42 publications on the subject.
The last phases of the anti-colonial struggles became internationally important in the 1960s and 1970s. There was the Vietnam War and the struggles against Portuguese colonialism and apartheid. Having travelled to the areas of conflict and having had personal contacts with various leaders, as I was involved in solidarity action with these struggles, I also tried to reflect on the meaning of the phenomenon beyond the immediate events. Similarly, I did the same with my involvement with Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and other Latin American countries, particularly Colombia, with Camilo Torres. Under the heading ‘Sociology of Development’ as well as that of liberation struggles, the theme is featured in 25 publications.

Culture has a central place in much of my work, both in the Centre for Socio-Religious Research at the Catholic University of Louvain and in CETRI. It was essential in tackling the theme of religion, but also in other contexts. I approached culture as the interpretation of reality (cosmovision) and as the ethics of social construction. This field demanded the development of specific research methods. Geneviève and I specialized, as I have said, in factorial analysis, which makes it possible to obtain qualitative perspectives based on quantitative elements (cultural models) and also the study of myths that reveal the social structures of pre-capitalist societies.

I developed a study on discourses, using structural methods (Roland Barthes, Jules Gritti, and others) and published a methodological instrument, which was inspired and adapted from Gritti and that could be easily applied. These were very useful tools for all of my studies and I developed them in my university courses.

Of particular importance on this theme was the book on culture in Haiti in the context of globalization (see reference). How to approach a traditional culture inspired by voodoo and what are the mechanisms of globalized culture and of the resistance of popular culture? In this area, too, my long stay in Ecuador since 2010 and at the request of IAEN, has allowed me to work on the concept
of *Samak Kawsay (Good Living)* in the Andean region and on its political importance. There are 62 references to this topic.

**Sociology of Development, The Liberation Struggles, Alterglobalization and The Common Good of Humanity**

The study of development projects and their impact on populations was a first step in coming to grips with subjects like organic agriculture, the social economy, education, health, among other aspects. However, the conclusion was soon reached that it was impossible to understand them separately, out of context. Since the fall of the Berlin wall, this context has been the neoliberal model that has now been extended on a world scale.

Such is the origin of the various studies linked to the creation of CETRI’s review in 1994 on the effects of the Washington Consensus and the different publications based on empirical material which had been collected earlier and to which theoretical dimensions were added. The result was the compilation *The Other Davos* and other books that brought together articles on the same theme, such as *Delegitimizing Capitalism. Rebuilding Hope; Market and Religion* and *The Road to Utopia from a World of Uncertainty*.

The last step was to develop the concept of the Common Good of Humanity as the content for the socialism of the 21st century, as a synthesis of everything that had preceded it. The fundamental question was: How to transcend critical analysis by a renewed proposal of alternatives, bearing in mind the new context of monopoly capitalism and the destruction of nature? Thanks to Development and Peace, the organ of the Canadian Catholic Church for Development and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Brussels, a series of research and seminars have been held on the subject. A first book, a collective work, was published by Ruth Casa Editorial and coordinated by Birgit Daiber of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and myself under the title *A Post-capitalist Paradigm: The Common Good of Humanity*. Another book containing more theoretical reflection is in preparation. Meanwhile a booklet, *The Common Good of Humanity*, has come out in French, Spanish and Arabic versions. Altogether there have been 70 titles published on this subject.
These ideas have been disseminated through various channels. In the academic world, logically enough, I have given courses on the Sociology of Religion and Qualitative Method at the Catholic University of Louvain, as well as acting as visiting professor to half a dozen other universities in different continents. In another hundred universities I have given lectures. Likewise I have supervised fifteen doctoral theses carried out in Louvain for students from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe and I have participated in dozens of public opinion tribunals at this level. I have also tutored over a hundred graduate and postgraduate theses. This all helped to spread the word in the academic world, as have the publications and reviews on the subject.

The general distribution has been assured by many works and seminars organized both by small groups in coffee lounges and large meetings of thousands of people. For each lecture I drew up notes, sometimes written very quickly. Some 2,000 of them have been recorded.

In the publishing field I trained part of a dozen editorial committees of reviews on religion and social themes in Europe, Asia and America. Furthermore, I have been responsible for several series that have been published by L’Harmattan of Paris. Editing the international review on the Sociology of Religion, The Social Compass, for thirty years gave me the opportunity of promoting, in the Western world, the work of researchers from the Global South. Also the creation and editing of CETRI’s Alternatives Sud made it possible to present thinking from the South about the globalization of capital.

When Carlos Tablada created Ruth Casa Editorial, with its administrative headquarters in Panama and collaborators from different parts of the world but especially from Cuba, he asked me

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3 The Netherlands (University of Tilburg), United Kingdom (University of Birmingham), Belgium (Free University of Brussels), Italy (University of Rome La Sapienza), Canada (Montreal and Sherbrooke), Vietnam (Hanoi), Mexico (Spanish acronym for UNAM), and “Benemérita” Autonomous University of Puebla; Colombia (National University); Ecuador (Central University and IAEN), Argentina (National University).
to be president of the institution and it was with great pleasure that I accepted.

This project has no capital and only the sale of books enables it to publish other, new books. The board of Ruth Casa Editorial gives no salaries; most of the authors do not demand royalties for their publications; and the team of intellectuals and specialists involved in the work dedicate a considerable part of their time to contribute their knowledge with enthusiasm.

The editorial policy has been to publish works that analyze the effects of world capitalism, but also on the course taken by socialism, in order to help reflect on the socialism of the future.

By 2014 already over a hundred books had been produced on paper and others as e-books – among them several of my own. Of special interest are the volumes produced in the Ruth collection Cuadernos de Pensamiento Crítico (Notebooks on Critical Thinking): each number is dedicated to a theme and has several sections. It starts with a dossier consisting of a critical vision of so-called ‘really existing socialism’, after which others follow on topics such as the events of May 1968, the situation in Africa, the social movements, feminism, the Arab world, climate change, among other topics.

Also there is the web page of Ruth Casa Editorial (www.ruthcasaeditorial.org) which includes a window of Free Books, in which books are uploaded to be distributed free. Agreements have been made with publishers in a number of countries, including Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina and Cuba for co-publication on the continent, which has a highly segmented book market, as well as with European countries. Contracts have been made with the Cuban Book Institute to market the literature of that country with various Cuban publishers as well as record producers to promote music.

All this, together with the implementation and management of the WFA website, is what Carlos Tablado calls the Ruth family. Together we have overcome many difficulties, from the technical limitations of IT in the South, some of which are connected with the North American embargo to the political measures being taken by the US that impede international commercial and financial activities with Cuba.
CHAPTER XXVI:
MUSING ON THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE

How to Profess One’s Faith?

Although I still believe that in professing a specific faith, one’s environment —where one was born and the education that one receives— plays a fundamental role, I think that it is a more complex phenomenon than cultural determinism can explain. Later, obviously, the problem is to pass —though this is not an expression that I like very much, but it is true— from a socially-based faith to a personally-based faith; that is, moving from that which comes from the family and social surroundings to that which is the discovery of a challenge to oneself. As the French philosopher Blaise Pascal said, “Belief is a wise wager.” One is never going to have scientific certainty; first of all, because it is of another order and this type of reasoning cannot be used. On the other hand, one takes it on, as of one’s own choice. Even then, it is not definitive; it must always be in process of construction.

Today my faith is less linked to religious practices. Before, I used to think that for a priest not to celebrate mass every day was scandalous. Now I see the priesthood more as a service to a community than as an expression of personal spirituality, even if this is also a way of nurturing one’s faith.

At the beginning what motivated me most was the religious vocation, pastoral service, social work. For this reason I wanted to be a missionary. It was a utopian desire which later evolved into a social and political commitment directed towards struggling, creating or collaborating, in one way or another, to build a society based on the values proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth and on the objectives of the Kingdom of God: justice and love of one’s
neighbour, and the fight to preserve them. Christianity is not only a religion, it is also a project. I believe that this has been at the base of the different types of my commitments, according to the opportunities that have been presented to me.

Today what motivates me is to continue my social commitment and try to find what can be done in function of the reference to the gospel. When I feel coldness in the faith, I turn to the figure of Jesus whose spiritual message was oriented toward the concrete society of his times, with an orientation that is valid for all societies in the world.

The priesthood has been a very deep experience of life because it has helped me in making certain commitments. Of course there were moments when I wondered if some of these commitments were compatible with priesthood. I remember when I was invited to a solidarity meeting in Khartoum with the liberation movements of Africa, I wondered to what extent this was compatible with the priesthood.

I therefore always believed that if priesthood was an obstacle to a commitment to justice, then something was wrong. In spite of being a partisan of non-violence, I believe that there are situations where armed struggle is the only way out—but not without conditions of course. Thus I did not hesitate to be a member of the armed resistance against the Nazis when they were occupying my country during the Second World War and to support the African resistance movements. However, I think that, in recent years, the RAFC of Colombia has not met these conditions, because of changes in that particular context.

Of course there are contradictions between a political function and priesthood, because the latter involves service to the people of God and if a priest charged with pastoral work takes up a precise political position he could find himself in opposition to other Christians who perhaps belong to his own community. It could create a delicate situation. For this I agree that Camilo Torres and Miguel D’Escoto had to abandon exercising their priesthood while they were exercising political roles. However my stance is very different from that of the Holy See, who expelled them from the priesthood and, in the case of Miguel D’Escoto, does not allow him to return to it for ideological, social and political reasons.
My personal situation does not create this kind of problem because I was a professor at the University of Louvain and, as such, I did not have a direct pastoral responsibility. Even so, I was greatly criticized in some Catholic circles by people who considered my activities as political. I can consider myself fortunate because my two successive Bishops, even though they were not always in agreement with my positions, had understood them and sometimes supported me. They had been ‘liberal’, because the message from Rome was different. If I had belonged to Latin American dioceses, which are much more dependent on Roman power, most probably I would have had to be more respectful.

The way I exercised my priesthood has changed considerably since the YCW days when I carried out more pastoral work, to more intellectual work and commitment with social and political movements, as I have done in recent decades. Nevertheless, I never saw my social commitment as a contradiction, but rather as another definition of priesthood.

I believe that instead of seeing the priesthood as a sacred function and seeing the person who exercises it as almost superhuman, the priest must be at the service of the people of God, as it was beginning to be understood at the Vatican Council II. This for me signifies that it can be a definitive or a temporal function, also exercised by a married man or by a woman. I do not see why a celibate man is necessarily better, or less of a sinner, or more holy than others.

Personally, once I used to consider myself as a priest, being a sociologist. Now I consider myself as a sociologist, being a priest. It could be objected that priesthood involves belonging to the religious institution that defines it, which is certainly true and this inevitably creates ambiguity. To experience a tension does not necessarily mean bringing about a rupture. Perhaps, in Luther's time, I would have joined the Protestant Church, but Sociology of Religion taught me that the processes of institutionalization affect all religious groups, constructing similar ambiguities. In an era of ecumenism one tries to live with these ambiguities, while continuing with the essential evangelical work.

It is true that human reality consists of ideals and actual existence. At the end of 2010 it appeared in the press and on the internet an
incident of the past. At the beginning of the 1970s, I was staying in the home of a cousin, after having given a talk in the south of the country. In order to reach my bedroom, I had to pass through the bedroom where the 12 year old son of the family was sleeping and I touched his private parts, which were somewhat uncovered. It was an irresponsible and unacceptable act that profoundly upset me. The following days I had contacts with his parents, concerned by the psychological reaction of the boy. I begged pardon for it. I was worried about the damage caused and aware of the contradiction with the values of the gospel and the meaning of priesthood. I told them I was ready to abandon the priesthood, but they advised me not to precipitate things and to consult a professor from the main seminary in Liège, who was a friend of theirs, a priest and a psychologist. He suggested that I should continue in the priesthood and dedicate myself to university work.

At the end of 2010, the Belgian parliamentarians studied the report of the Adriaensen Commission on the behaviour of the clergy of the Catholic Church. It included a denunciation by a sister of my cousin, who did not give a name but a professional description that could identify me. I was in Ecuador doing a study for the Institute for Advanced National Studies and I was interviewed by telephone by a journalist. I sent a letter to the newspaper, acknowledging the fact. It was only after I sent the first letter that I was able to read the testimony of the twin sister of the boy. She had suffered a particularly brutal rape at the age of 8 years and was still suffering from the consequences.

Her testimony, written some 40 years after the facts, was wrong in many aspects: date, place, circumstances, my declarations, etc. These could be considered details compared with the basic act, but they constituted an amalgam with what she herself had gone through, alluding to events that had never taken place, either before or afterwards. The mistakes could be understood because of the time that has since elapsed and the fact that she had sprung to the defence of her twin brother, which was also understandable. Nevertheless this denunciation was far from reflecting the real situation. If I had been twenty years younger I would have sued the Adriaensen Commission for publishing an indirect testimony
without verifying it and in circumstances that did not allow me the possibility of contesting it legally or morally.

In one month I received over 500 emails and letters from many parts of the world. Apart from three, which were very aggressive, the others regretted the fact, asking me to continue my work and not to abandon the intellectual and social struggle. I was surprised by so many signs of friendship and understood them as expressions of compassion. However, I drew two other lessons from the whole affair. I recalled the book by Edgar Morin, *Rumour in Orleans*. When a rumour is repeated 100 times it becomes a truth and published 10,000 times on the internet, as a media certainty. The right-wing press made other amalgams, with my supposed ‘support’ for the Khmer Rouges in Cambodia (which has been denied many times); with the petition to remove Hamas from the list of terrorist movements (in order to promote a peace process), interpreted as anti-Semitism; with my participation in the Justice Commission in Honduras; with my presidency of the Peoples, Tribunal on the repression of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, among other things.

I also learnt how most of the media functions: the need for sensationalism in order to have more markets, choosing the most spectacular, publishing titles that do not correspond to the content of the articles and similar elements. I met journalists that were very respectful and others who no longer knew what it meant to be human. I did receive, too, a dozen offers of residency, by very good friends from China to Canada, not forgetting Sri Lanka, Nicaragua, Cuba, Spain and –obviously– Belgium. My brothers and sisters, in spite of the suffering that this caused them, showed a fraternal spirit that moved me deeply. Obviously, I did not want to present myself as a victim in a situation in which I had been at fault. My collaborators at the Tricontinental Centre asked me to renounce the last responsibility that I had on the Council of Administration, which I accepted to do so as not to hinder their work. I understood this because they were the first ones to have been contacted by the media. They were also worried about the continuation of CETRI’s work, which was playing an undeniably positive role in Belgium and is operating with a competent team.

As I had been involved in Latin America for a long time before these events, I continued to work in that continent, thanks
to the magnificent response of my friends and colleagues, who asked me not to change work plans. From Ecuador I have been able to go on with many tasks around the continent, as well as in Asia and the Middle East, as well as Europe, to which I returned at least once every six months, for the defence of theses, seminars and various meetings.

The Meaning of Life and Death

For me life was always an open, dynamic concept which had to be oriented towards others. I think I was particularly influenced by my mother and, in general because many members of my family had been believers and living their faith not only privately but publicly.

It is necessary also to take into account that to be born in a bourgeois family, where survival was never an existential problem, except perhaps during wartime when it had sometimes been difficult to obtain enough to eat. It is of course much easier for those who do not have to struggle daily for their livelihood to devote their life as a service to others, than for those who must fight constantly to survive. This is the difference between working for the poor (a bourgeois concept) and practising solidarity (a popular concept).

Since I was an adolescent I wanted to be a missionary. Also in the seminary the role of the priest was presented as a service to the community and not as a closed spirituality, so that this period reinforced still further my urge to take part in initiatives and activities that did something for others. The essential meaning of human existence is being able to carry out a human project, not only physical or material, but also cultural and spiritual. I have been lucky in being able to do this to a considerable extent, largely for the circumstances in which I have been able to live.

Death has not been a great problem for me, a worry or a cause for fear. I see it as part of a natural series of events for everyone and I believe that its meaning is determined by the life that each person has led. Of course when I was younger I had a simpler faith, in which there was no discussion about the meaning of death and the afterlife. Later, this has gradually evolved. Beyond a certain stage one no longer has a physical, logical or spiritual
certainty about death. Consciously one lays bets about what can happen and faith helps to have confidence.

An experience that impressed me very much in this sense was the death of my maternal grandfather. I was present in his last moments. He was 82 years old and he behaved so serenely, totally conscious that he was dying and without any fear, holding my grandmother's hand. Two days earlier, he had written a poem dedicated to the 1st of May. I was profoundly moved to witness how a death could be a normal event, a transition.

The only thing that worried me are the conditions that bring about death; in other words, whether one can live until the last moment with a certain dignity that makes it possible to be responsible for one's end; or if one is going to experience a diminishing of one's capacity to be conscious; or undergo undue suffering. For this reason I support certain forms of euthanasia in order that a person can die with dignity. I know all the dangers and problems that this can involve, but I am not against this decision when there is no hope for a decent survival until the end.

I think that a life does not end with death and, for this reason it is a transition, one more stage, the achievement. What the future holds after this is a great mystery about which no one can bear witness. As far as I am concerned what the future could be is a wager: perhaps it is a spiritual continuation. Anyway, it is perhaps of no importance. I have always tried to live in the present as intensely as possible and, for this reason I do not feel that the end is something dramatic. Death is part of life and we must experience it in the same way as we have always experienced life.

All religions give philosophical visions of about life and death and every interpretation depends on the kind of perspective that is adopted. What is fundamental is only the existential aspect; that is, that we have to die and so we must live each moment in the best possible way, with our limitations and failures, our yearning for continuity. But as we have no certainties, only hopes about the future and each philosophy represents it in its own way, what is essential is that one's death is consistent with one's way of living with a project. This is the meaning that the Christian faith gives us. Thus a trajectory of faith helps to live to the full and to have hope at the moment of death.
François and six of his brothers and sisters.

With his parents, 1949.
With his Carton de Wiart grandparents, walking to his first mass in Meer, 1949
His first mass in the church of Meer, 1949.
A conference in Hanoi, 1980

With the Archbishop of Saigon, Monsignor Binh, 1980
Audience with Pham Van Dong, Prime Minister of Vietnam, Hanoi, 1981.

In the house of a peasant at Hai Van (Vietnam) with Geneviève Lemercinier.
At the 17th parallel in Vietnam with Professor Bui Dinh Thanh, Deputy Director of the Institute of Sociology.

First meeting of the author, with François Houtart and Rosario Navas, Cuban Ambassador in Brussels, 1993.
In the home of Johanna Tablada, with Giulio Giraldi, Italian theologian of Liberation Theology, 1998.

François with his cat, 2007.
With Osvaldo Martínez, Director of the Centre for Studies on World Economy in the author's house, Havana, 2007.

The closing of the Social Forum of the Americas, with a Shaman, Quito, 2006.
At the 16th International Book Fair in Havana with Aurelio Alonso and the author, 2007.

In the Aula Magna, receiving the Honoris Causa degree from Havana University, 2008.

A toast in the office of the Rector of Havana University at the same event, 2008.
At the World Social Forum in Nairobi, with Samir Amin, 2008.

A mass with his family for the 60\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of his ordination as a priest, 2009.

With Maria Tablada, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009.
A floral tribute on the tomb of Amilcar Cabral, Guinea Bissau, 2009.

In Guinea Bissau, 2009.
In a conference in Brussels on the five anti-terrorist Cubans, prisoners in the United States, 2009.

In Cienfuegos (Cuba) with his godson Dorsan van Wassenhove and the Bishop of Cienfuegos, Monsignor Domingo Oropesa, 2010.

With Rafaël Correa, President of Ecuador, and god-daughter Eleanor Houtart in Louvain-la-Neuve, 2010.
World Social Forum at a panel on China Experience, Tunis, 2013. From left to right, Wen Tiejun, François Houtart, Samir Amin, Lau Kin Chi, Dai Jinhua, Chen Xin.

Third South-South Forum on Sustainability, Hong Kong, 2016. From left to right on front row, Jin Peiyun, Teng Wei, Dai Jinhua, François Houtart, Lau Kin Chi, Pedro Paez, Lee Jung Ok, Chan Shun Hing

Peasant Agriculture in Asia Workshop, Beijing, 2010.
Peasant Agriculture in Asia Workshop and visit to Little Donkey Farm, Beijing, 2010.

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A GENEALOGICAL RÉSUMÉ OF THE HOUTART FAMILY
Originally from the village of Houte, in Gesves, in the county of Namur, the Houtart family dates back to the 13th century. They were originally called de Hourt, and later became de Houte.

I. Nicolás de Hourt, cited as a witness in 1223 at the sale of some manorial lands ion Spinoit-sous-Gesves.

II. Massart de Hourt, tithe farmer of Hoyout, cited in 1330 and 1334.

III. Jean de Hourt, said to be from Vaux, who died before 1375.

IV. Jean de Hourt, owner of the forge of Gesves and of an allodial property, consul of Gesves in 1383 and 1387.

V. Massart de Houte, ‘a man of law and lineage’, cited in 1418.

VI. Noel de Houte, ‘a man of law and lineage’, cited in 1468.

VII. Nicolás de Houte, Consul of Gesves and of Spinoit-sous-Gesves, cited from 1503 to 1527.

VIII. Mathieu de Houte, Consul of Gesves as from 1541, died in 1567.

IX. Nicolás de Houte, with property in Houte, Consul of Rendarche, Loyers and Gesves, burger of Namur, died towards 1578.

X. François de Houte, ‘a man of law and lineage’, Consul of Gesves and of Spinoit, died in 1611.

XI. François de Houte, called Houtart, owner of 17 pieces of land in Houte, died in 1634.

XII. Pierre de Houte, called Houtart (1617-1684), left Gesves and settled in Saint-Gérard, where he rented the mills of the people of Brogne.

XIII. Henri Houtart (1663-1733), Consul Burgomaster of Jumet.

XIV. Henri Houtart (1714-1794), master glazier, who exploited coal mines in Jumet. It was he who inaugurated the family line of glaziers which lasted until the 20th century in Hainaut and in the north of France.

XV. Emmanuel Houtart (1764-1836), master glazier and adviser to the French bank in Jumet.

XVI. François Houtart (1802-1876), senator, master glazier in Jumet and in Aiseau-sur-Sambre. His brother, Baron Jules Houtart (1814-1902), was the grandfather of Baron Maurice Houtart (1866-1939), banker, senator, Minister of Finance and of the Colonies, State Minister and Member of the Heraldic Council XVII. Franz Houtart (1851-1922), president of the glassworks of Sainte-Marie d'Oignies. He had three sons:

1st) Baron Francis Houtart (1882-1965), lawyer, ambassador extraordinary to the Holy See, President of the forges and foundries of Haine-Saint-Pierre;
2\textsuperscript{th}) Baron Paul Houtart (see below);
3\textsuperscript{th}) Baron Albert Houtart (1887-1966), deputy to the Attorney-general at the Court of Appeals of Brussels and Governor of Brabant

XVIII. Baron Francis Houtart (1884-1966), business administrator, president of the Brotherhood of Former Trench Artillerymen of Yser (1914-1918), married Gudule Carton de Wiart, daughter of Count Henri Carton de Wiart, man of letters, State Minister and Prime Minister. They had 14 children, six girls and eight boys:

1\textsuperscript{st}) Baron François Houtart, born in 1925, canon, Emeritus Professor from the Catholic University of Louvain and founder of the Tricontinental Centre (CETRI)

2\textsuperscript{nd}) Baroness Pierre van Zuylen (Geneviève Houtart)

3\textsuperscript{rd}) Madame Yves Schmitz (Marie Thérèse Houtart)

4\textsuperscript{th}) Baron Édouard Houtart, born in 1928, Lawyer and Former Municipal Councillor of Ixelles

5\textsuperscript{th}) Baron Christian Houtart, born in 1930, lt. Colonel in the Armoured Cavalry Honorary Reserve

6\textsuperscript{th}) Thierry Houtart (1932-2008), business director

7\textsuperscript{th}) Baroness Stanislas de Vinck (Martine Houtart)

8\textsuperscript{th}) Dominique Houtart, born in 1935, Former Financial Director, Municipal Adviser in Crainhem and Former Provincial Adviser in Flemish Brabant

9\textsuperscript{th}) Ms. Godelieve Houtart

10\textsuperscript{th}) Marc Houtart, born in 1937, doctor of Law and Financial Director

11\textsuperscript{th}) Madame Didier Legros (Monique Houtart)

12\textsuperscript{th}) Madame Dominique de Wasseige (Beatrice Houtart)

13\textsuperscript{th}) Baudouin Houtart, born in 1942, Technical Engineer and Business Director

14\textsuperscript{th}) Michel Houtart, born in 1944, technical engineer and former Vice-President Sabena (Belgian airline).


**Jean-François Houtart**, Anciennes familles de Belgique, in Recueil de l’Office généalogique et héraldique de Belgique, Bruselas, 2008, t. LXI, p. 45.
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Born in Brussels in 1925, the eldest of a family whose participation in the political, economic and cultural life of Belgium dates back to the 14th century. François Houtart has been a man of the world. Bestowed by the UNESCO with the Mandanjeeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence in 2009; writer of over fifty books, among them pioneer works on Sociology and Theology. Houtart had a long and fruitful life, always on the side of the needy and the humble. In this book you will find the complete biography of this Belgian priest and sociologist. Anecdotes and stories about his family, his childhood, his travels around the world and their impact on his research on sociology and the role of religion; his relationship with the Church, the Vatican authorities, the Belgian monarchy; academicians, scholars and savants; leaders and Statesmen of many developing countries; guerrilla fighters and priests who also devoted their lives to the wellbeing of humanity disregarding their origin and creed. He was in the midst of most of the battles for justice around the world. His interviewer has presented us with a vision of this shining spirit, a fighter for the Common Good. His achievements and experiences. He had no certainties, but hopes for a better future. This and more can be found in this fascinating personal history.

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