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Christianity and the Cultural Identity of Latin America on the Threshold of the 21st Century

La recherche d'une identité latino-américaine a été un effort constant dans la tradition intellectuelle créole. Dans le contexte des mutations culturelles qui ont lieu à l'aube du 21ème siècle, la pensée latino-américaine peut être réinventée avec originalité si la dépendance par rapport à ce que l'on appelle l'Occident moderne est abandonnée et si l'on se tourne résolument vers la sagesse des cultures indigènes et populaires. Le christianisme reste un facteur de première importance dans ces cultures (par son opposition aux visions sécularisatrices), mais n'est pas le "substrat" de leur identité, car cette identité est dynamique, historique et multiple, et ne peut être comprise en termes unitaristes et encore moins essentialistes.

It is not by chance that the search for the cultural identity of Latin America is not only a recurring theme in Latin American literature and art, philosophy and history, anthropology and sociology, but also in theology. It so happens that in the long march of a continent, the 500 years since the beginning of what we know today as Latin America is but a few steps in the course of history. Therefore, when a continent asks questions about its cultural characteristics, historical origins, development and destiny, in the context of universal history, it is a sign that it is slowly waking up and moving towards maturity. Today, more than ever, when the world is becoming a global village and the technological revolution brings closer together realities that only yesterday could barely communicate with one another, the unexpected cultural, social and political mutations at the end of the century foretell a radical shift in the kind of civilization we have known until now. This obliges Latin Americans — by the force of historic challenges — to go back to the old questions that marked the thought of several generations of Creole thinkers since the 19th century.

The Search for Original Thinking in Latin America

If the "originality of the American" or the "essence of being American" tended to be seen in the light of western philosophy,¹ the rise of a new Latin American consciousness, in its theology, sociology and philosophy, points for the first time to the beginnings of original thought that seeks to update

the ancestral wisdom of our indigenous cultures and assume the contemporary wisdom of our popular cultures. This thought is in its early stages, still hesitant and unsure of itself, but nonetheless valuable and passionate. Only at the cost of enormous sacrifices has it been possible over these last two decades to break with the myths about what it means to be Latin American — myths derived from western modernity and reproduced and adapted to our situation of dependence.

The emancipating utopias that Latin Americans embraced during the 1960s were shattered by the crude reality of the repression of the national security regimes of the 1970s. And the situation of the whole region during the 1980s — deep economic crisis and instability; prolonged violence in Central America, Colombia, Peru and other countries; drug trafficking and corruption; external debt that further suffocated weak and dependent economies; the new configuration of international capitalism, and the crisis of socialism in Eastern Europe — contributed greatly to general scepticism and disenchantment. We are witnessing the rise of an intellectual fad: postmodernism, an ideology which is spread from the countries of so-called post-industrial capitalism. But this ideology of scepticism finds fertile ground in a Latin America that has gone through the hard experience of oppression, where frustration is still painful and generates a new and perplexing reality. The popular masses are increasingly disenchanted with promises of secular salvation made by both traditional and revolutionary politics.

This perplexity, transformed into collective uncertainty about the future of Latin America and the world, makes it urgent to rethink this emerging cultural reality and re-establish hope on a new basis. Indeed, the “unbreakable hope” of the 1960s, expressed by the code words of development and liberation, has faded away in the face of a continent which today seems comparatively less developed, more dependent on the world market, and with more conflicts that could have been imagined: greater poverty and social oppression, exorbitant external debt, economic crisis and inflation, violence and drug trafficking. Even so, it must be recognized that the last few decades also taught a lesson and contributed some wisdom. This consists of the growing awareness that it will not be possible to get beyond the impasse in which we find ourselves unless human rights are respected; majorities participate more, especially women, youth and ethnic minorities; closed ideological positions are abandoned; ways are sought to move towards democracy, dialogue and peace; the growing awareness about the need to preserve the earth from destruction is acted upon; serious socio-economic problems are solved by bold moves towards just and equitable structures, and the challenges of the new international order are faced in the framework of a new realism and an effort to integrate Latin America.

Growing Globalization and Diversity

Given the context of growing globalization, it is absolutely necessary to rethink the cultural identity of our continent on the basis of Christianity. The

only condition for a creative rethinking of this problem is to do so in the context of increasing cultural plurality.

By culture we understand the combination of significant collective practices, based on work processes to meet the broad range of human needs, institutionalized in structures of signs and symbols, which are transmitted by a series of communication vehicles and internalized in habits, customs, and ways of being, thinking and feeling.

In so-called primitive societies, the division of functions is based on a fundamental structural homogeneity. In developed societies, the trend to structural homogeneity generates a tendency towards a hegemonic culture that represses diversity. In our underdeveloped societies, on the contrary, which are moving towards more heterogeneity, the diverse and differential insertion of culture-generating groups into global social relations will give rise to cultural differentiation, all the more accentuated to the extent that the structural heterogeneity of society generates institutionalized differentiations of spaces of symbolic and cultural production and reproduction.

Even more so in the dependent societies of the Third World, society in general will be divided culturally because of its structure and unequal development. Indeed, in unequal structures in which the division of labour does not follow technical criteria but rather is determined by differences in access to scarce goods of power, capital, property and prestige, such cultural diversification will separate into dominant and subordinate spaces of cultural production and reproduction.

Contemporary cultural mutations — even in the countries of the developed North that had shown a noticeable trend towards homogenization, imposed by the hegemony of either the capitalist or socialist mode of production — also point to a breakdown of cultural unity. Consumer advertising, as a necessary mechanism for reproducing the markets of transnational capitalism, is spreading to every corner of the planet. It is transforming knowledge and styles of acting and thinking into one homogeneous commercial language. Paradoxically, however, the dialectic of this structurally-rooted homogenizing process has its own limits and seems to be reaching them. New cultural contradictions are arising. That is leading to reconceptualizations of capitalism, culture and modernity, such as those proposed by authors like Daniel Bell, Peter Berger and Jürgen Habermas.²

Modern society speaks a common language, but it is still not possible to speak of monolithic, homogeneous cultures like those that normally characterize peoples, nations and ethnic groups. New movements claim the right to “be different”. Groups that struggle to win a space for their different identities of an ethnic, national type, groups defined by gender and age, religion and philosophy are springing up all over.

The ethnic and nationalistic explosions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; nationalist claims in Canada, Spain, Belgium, Yugoslavia; racial struggles in South Africa, Liberia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and India; religious and nationalist struggles in Ireland, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, to mention only a few cases, are clear signs that should lead us to reflect.

Indeed, Latin American thought in this new context, even though it still understands itself in western universalist categories, can now read the particularity of its tradition, identity and historic destiny only in comparative terms. It can no longer do so in exclusive relation to Western Europe, but only in the framework of a global culture. It must take into consideration all the complexity of the cultural situations of the contemporary world, clearly recognizing itself as part of the Third World, comparing its cultural expressions with those of other peoples of the South in the framework of their contradictory relations with the North, dialoguing with the wisdom of civilizations and trying to solve today's global problems, as Roger Garaudy has frequently suggested.³ If we overcome provincialism and an inferiority complex with regard to Europeans and North Americans, delve into our cultural heritage — in that admirable and millenary pre-Colombian legacy (closer to Asia and the Pacific than Europe and the Mediterranean), in the Hispano-Portuguese (clearly recognizing its Mozarabic heritage) and Afro-American (with deep roots in sub-Saharan Africa) legacies, but especially in the original, multiform and pluralistic mestizo culture — we can detect the sources of inspiration we need to reconstruct our own identity. That identity can also prefigure an alternative horizon for moving beyond the critical transition of civilization that the world is undergoing at the dawn of the 21st century.

The cultural panorama of Latin America is multifaceted. It is certainly more diverse today than it was in the 18th and 19th centuries, despite the fact that the universal culture transmitted by the mass media tries, on the basis of its own rationality, to homogenize whatever constitutes for that culture a potential economic and cultural “market”.

The cultural mosaic of Latin America today seems to have been shattered. Not only do we distinguish a dominant culture, an imperfect copy of the North Atlantic culture, but that dominant culture itself has become diversified, without mentioning the multiplication of expressions of emerging indigenous and popular cultures — subjugated millenary cultures that are slowly waking from their lethargy; cultures of poor and oppressed classes that are partially shaking off the cultural alienation in which they were living by solving their basic problems of subsistence. The cultural range of the continent has become kaleidoscopic. A blaze of colours is today enlivening the cultural panorama of brown America. Beneath this cultural dynamism are processes leading to structural heterogeneity that make it possible. Its main impetus, however, comes from the characteristics of the cultural producer and his or her mentality: the Latin American popular subject. There is an inexhaustible vitality at the heart of his or her culture that resists domination.

Christianity as the Root of Cultural Identity

In this significant nucleus of Latin American popular culture — beyond the breadth and diversity of its manifestations — one can discern the dynamism of the Christian faith, decisively if not exclusively present.⁴

Therefore, in this panorama of socio-cultural change and enormous challenges in the contemporary world, the question of Christianity once again becomes meaningful. In our case, it is only the old question, now seen from a Latin American perspective, about the validity and contribution of religion to the conformation of society and culture.

It must be said at the outset that the question reveals the conceptual framework of its formulation. The epistemological conditions for the existence of our question are given within a conceptual and cultural universe proper to and characteristic of modernity. Religion only begins to reflect on itself — which theology does when it reflects in its own categories about faith and revelation — with the rise in Western Europe of modernity and the secularization of thought. If we reflect on religion today here and now in our continent, it is precisely because our thought is largely the child of modernity. Not only for that reason, but also because our thought is an attempt to approach abstractly a real phenomenon whose movement undoubtedly reveals a secularization process in the different spheres of social reality. This last argument would appear already to point to a theoretical path to search for the solution to our problem. But this only appears to be the case. What we want to do here is precisely to establish the thesis that religion, and Latin American Christianity in particular, is still valid as a relevant factor in the cultural fabric, *even in spite of our peculiar secularization processes*. These secularization processes in our continent need to be closely and critically analysed, since the term “secularization” is not univocal for contemporary sociology.

The affirmation we are making here calls for two decisive clarifications. The first deals with the need to go beyond concepts — already passé, to our way of thinking — about the relationship between culture and religion in Latin America. The second deepens the sociological critique, in the light of more up-to-date knowledge, of these two concepts.

First, we feel we cannot establish our thesis unless we get beyond at least two interpretations that are currently widespread among theoreticians of culture and religion in Latin America. The first interpretation states that Latin America, although with its own variations, is slowly but inexorably undergoing the same secularization process that modernity imposed on both the countries of central capitalism and those of real socialism. The second interpretation postulates that Latin American culture is constituted by the so-called “Catholic substratum”. This affirmation is based on three presuppositions:

(a) Religion constitutes nothing more and nothing less than the essence of every culture, including of course Latin American culture.

(b) Catholicism has been, is and will be the religion of the vast majority of the continent, which is expressed in other terms when Latin America is called “a Catholic continent”.

(c) Christianity offers a spiritual unity — as a substratum of faith — that makes it possible to speak of one culture with one identity, despite great diversity and the many threats affecting Latin American culture.

The first interpretation is a re-edition with different nuances of the old theory of secularization in Latin American sociology, which, paradoxically,

was developed by two opposing theoretical schools: modernization theory and dependency theory. Even though now found in somewhat different theoretical frameworks, this thesis still underlies the theoretical presuppositions of the majority of Latin American sociologists concerning Latin American culture.

The second interpretation is widely disseminated by theologians and students of culture linked to ecclesiastical spheres, especially in contemporary Catholicism.

The Contradictions of Secularizing Modernization and the Delirium of the “Religious Essence of Culture”

The second clarification we need to make concerns the definition of the concept of secularization, and equivocal concept which should refer to — for analysis, explanation and understanding — a real process of change that has effectively taken place in our countries affecting religion and its analytical linkages with the rest of the cultural manifestations.

It is true that only in modern times does a growing awareness of the autonomy of humankind — based on revolutionary changes in the social forms and production characteristic of medieval society and the resulting functional specialization in systematic thought — lead to the independence of secular thought in philosophy and the natural sciences, gradually abandoning the theological tutelage to which they were subjected. This process has been evaluated positively by contemporary religious thought, since it constitutes a step in the self-understanding of a new, more responsible and autonomous relation on the part of humankind towards the Creator God.

Almost all Latin American countries have undergone a process of capitalistic modernization, which secularizes politics and ideologies. However, despite the changes produced by modifying the forces of production, the passage from “traditional” society to “modern” society, with all the baggage of rationalization and “disenchantment of the world”, to use Weberian terminology, only affects the most superficial layers of Latin American cultural diversity, primarily the culture of the elites and dominant groups, precisely that “educated” and “enlightened” culture characterized by a high degree of permeability by the instrumental rationality of modern capitalistic consumer society.

The rapid modernization of society and the economy during these last few decades in almost all the countries from Mexico to Patagonia has led to seemingly dynamic and secularized societies. But that is only one side of the coin. Modern buildings, glossy, shiny skyscrapers and bright urban landscapes hide millions of gloomy, dirty, dark, poor, miserable slums and shacks in the cities and rural areas of our countries. Structural processes leading to heterogeneous societies imply not only an increase in the tertiary sector of the economy, unbalanced poles of local and regional development, a broad diversity of technical development among firms, very different levels of labour productivity in the economy, but also the growth of informal

economies and their marginal, semi-legal and illegal submarkets. "At the grassroots", all these processes generate conditions for *unmodern* social practices. This is not due to automatism or determinism derived from a "reflex theory" (already out of date), but rather to the dialectic of everyday and historic practices of production and reproduction of subordinate subjects who escape from the market and its logic of exchange value.

Modern sociological theory no longer identifies modernization with secularization. It accepts — in the light of the resurgence of new movements and religious energies in societies that were considered irremediably secularized — that secularization in a society is not linear but reversible and even contains contradictory tendencies.⁵ The prophet of the "secular city" himself, Harvey Cox, now recognizes that the religious dimension has returned with force and continues to be charged with values, energy, festiveness, even craziness, which can be transforming.⁶

It is a sociological fact that a dialectical relation exists in modern society between secularization and sacralization, in so far as secular goods are converted by modern cultural industry into new myths, thus sacralizing the areas of functionality introduced by scientific and technical rationality itself. The most advanced products of science and technology are used and represented by the immense majority of the population with more or less the same attitude they have towards sacred objects of a magical nature. If the false gods of the beyond have died in this "secularization" and the "polytheism of values" is imposed, as Weber prophesied,⁷ then cults to the new false gods of the here and now emerge everywhere. Goods are enchanted, and fetishism is no longer limited to commodities — analysed in detail by Marx — but now science and technology themselves become fetishes. The culture industry assumes the task of reviving symbolic and ritual fantasies, magic and mystery, in sum, the mythical background of humanity, now functional to the logic of change. But the human mentality in this modern environment rebels and turns its gaze to the old gods in an unending spiritual search.

This is in no way to say that, according to our definition, religion is the foundation upon which culture is constituted. Religion is one manifestation of the symbolic and semiotic texture of culture, but the question of culture can no longer be approached by going back to the idealism of the 19th-century German romantics. Culture has no "essence" or "spirit". Whoever says so runs the risk of once again reifying a social reality by transforming it into a transcendent entity. Culture, we said, is historical, a social product of historic collectivities, the texture of human subjects, not trans-historical entelchy. Thus to speak of a cultural substratum, using that false geological analogy, is highly dangerous.

The problem is not found in the fact that the analogy inverts the Marxist theory of the material base determining the superstructure. The real problem is raised because hidden under the geological metaphor is an essentialistic, static and fixed concept of culture that forgets precisely the subject producer of culture. This concept also conceals the conflict and dialectic that this subject both produces and is enveloped by; it conceals as well the historical

and social determinants of all culture that make it a human enterprise and not something above or below that determines humankind.

Therefore, the theory of secularization that sees progress and the loss of the sense of God as indissolubly linked is just as false as the other theory that identifies religion as the true essence of culture.

Modernization entails more than what the word implies; it is also a new form of ritual and mythology. It is true, as some authors hold,⁸ that when the economic functions of the Temple in tributary societies became independent, a “secularized” market was generated, but we cannot forget that now capitalist markets also function on the basis of their own sacrificial rites, with their own victims that are immolated to the new gods of the market, a rite performed by the new priests of the temple–market and legitimated by the new “wise men” and “prophets” of the corrected perfection of the market, in what we know as contemporary neoliberalism and consumer society.

The crises proper to “modern” western society reveal that this new sacralization of the secularized market bears within itself the limits of its own horizon. It has no place to go beyond its golden calves and bursts asunder in the ultimate failure to meet vital human needs, including the deepest desires of human beings today.

Dominant modernization entails a destructive sacrificial process. By removing sacrifice from its traditional societal framework, it takes away its vital meaning. Sacrifice in traditional society was performed in order to guarantee the reproduction of life, to appease and ward off threats to life (sickness, drought, plague, war, etc.). Contemporary sacrifice renders sacrifice to modern Baals without obtaining more life and at the cost of oppression, misery, repression, torture and death for millions of human beings. Modern culture involves the destruction not only of “traditional” culture but also of its own capacity to survive. For that reason, and only that reason, modern culture opens the way to a resurgence of religion.

On the other hand, ideologies that attempted to overcome the alienation of capitalism have also, in their historic reality, failed to do so. In its non-ascendent but rather dialectical journey, with its comings and goings, we observed how in one form of applied modern rationality — Eastern European orthodox Marxist-Leninism — religion, which was so militantly fought against, now reappears as a dominant factor in the culture of those peoples. This is no reason, however, for integrism to rejoice, since this is a different kind of religious revival, one that needs to be closely observed. In developed, sophisticated, technotronic capitalism in Western Europe and North America, there is talk of “new religious movements” that constitute a phenomenon worthy of attention and even concern.

Popular Christianity: Something Original as Opposed to Tired Modern Reason

We are witnessing the crisis of ideologies, not the end of all ideology and even less the end of history, as Fukuyama holds.⁹ The collapse of socialism is

not necessarily the triumph of capitalism, and even if it were, we still have no guarantee that history has ended in that boring paradise described by Fukuyama's simplistic reading of Hegel. The truth is that the crisis of totalitarian ideologies, the introduction of pragmatism and the ethic of freedom understood as the right to be indifferent are all symptoms of a crisis of civilisation.

The revolution of the forces of production, from the industrial revolution that replaced manpower with machines, is now seen in the replacement of labour by robots and automation, and even the replacement of thought by artificial intelligence. These changes could be promising since, together with revolutionizing the bases of future social life, they can certainly expand humankind's possibilities — on the condition, of course, that current social structures be radically changed, which would entail a mutation of our civilization¹⁰ and potentially lead to a civilization based on co-operation and solidarity.¹¹ That future, however, is not assured.

It is true that the Cold War is over and that a new era of peace among nations has begun. Conflicts tend to be limited and there is more awareness of the limits of human progress. But the future is still hopelessly uncertain, since many of the threats of self-destruction arising from misuse of nuclear energy, microbiology or an ecologically poor concept of development have in no way been eliminated. The future is even more uncertain today for the poor countries of the Third World (including Latin America) which are being left behind, somewhat abandoned to their own fate, by a First World now concerned about the Second World. Together they are planning for a future of relations and trade as the basis for stable and lasting peace.

The contemporary crisis, in the last instance, is the crisis of a style of thought that constituted the nucleus of dominant Western European culture, a nucleus that spread to the rest of the world with the expansion of mercantile capitalism, then manufacturing, industrial, financial and now transnational and technotronic capitalism. That same logic also underlies — with different contents — the historic rise of the incarnation of the alternative model of society, namely socialism. It is not a crisis provoked by the materiality of scientific and technical advances with their clear benefits, nor by the sound autonomy of thought from old myths and superstitions. It is a crisis because of the way the dominant modern mentality develops in its relationship with nature, and because of the way people relate to one another, to objects and to the transcendent. It is the crisis of instrumental reason brought to its ultimate expression, that is its definitive tediousness. As it advanced dialectically, reason found itself trapped by the immanence of its own logic and now turns to other expressions and dimensions of human existence. That is the rationality at the basis of consumerism, accumulation and exploitation, authoritarianism, corruption and drug addiction, a variety of expressions of a logic that plunders humankind and nature. It is a sacrilegious and perverse conception, even though apparently irreligious, since it raises up reason as the goddess of the intellect in order to legitimate actions directed towards ends with no consideration for the morality of the means. This definitely leads to the unscrupulous self-destruction of

humankind and its cultural and natural environment. Modern humanity is in crisis because of its relationship with itself and its ecosystem. Humanity is split and has broken its original harmony. The universe of values and categories that sustained a whole era of Promethean dreams has collapsed — values and categories that served as the basis for conservative, liberal, developmentalist and even historical socialistic utopias. We are witnessing the collapse of the framework of ordered and coherent understanding of the cosmos and of history as an ascendent, progressive and lineal course.

The tragedy of contemporary ideologies opens the way to irresponsible, sceptical, licentious and hedonistic searches. But it also opens appreciable spaces for new spiritual searches that lead to a re-encounter of humankind with a truly free and liberated self. In the context of this crisis, modern humanity seeks some symbolic handle which returns meaning to its life and reorients its efforts. Here religion regains its force. This explains the resurgence, even in societies that were only recently fairly secularized, of new movements and expressions of faith. This takes place because the offer of religious meaning is not only at the conceptual and rational level but also touches the profound fibre of the symbolic and ritual, corporal and mystical dimension of the integral needs and demands of the human being.

The Christian faith, in the whole range of its manifestations among Latin Americans, in the plurality of their languages and wisdom, in its pathos and the syncretic structure of its mentality, offers alternative meanings in the context of a cultural transition. It is true that the strengthening of religious expressions in Latin America and the world could be ambiguous. The plurality of religions on the continent, once monopolized by colonial and oligarchical Catholicism, with the expansion of the sects, eastern cults, and fundamentalist, integrist and unincarnated charismatic movements, in sum, a variety of superstitious and even satanic practices, which appear to revive the embers of magic of the popular mentality, can lead to new alienations. But it is also true that, as several studies have shown, the popular mentality preserves its rebellious base, a healthy resistance to the onslaught of a dominant culture that constantly threatens the integrity of its culture and even human existence itself.

But it cannot be said that the religion of the people consists of everything that enlightened elites once questioned in any symbolic and ritual manifestation whatsoever. We think that underneath the religious mentality of the Latin American people, in the code that structures its multiform plurality, lives a kind of vitalistic anthropology that is an alternative to Promethean anthropology of western modernity — a maternal anthropology derived from the great intuitions of pre-Colombian cultures, as opposed to a dualistic, patriarchal anthropology derived from the western Greco-Roman world-view; an ecological and holistic anthropology as opposed to one that separates subject from object and compartmentalizes the human person by function.¹² We are talking about an integral person, not a primitive person immersed in nature without having developed her or his cultural rationality, not of the modern western person, drowned in instrumental and privatistic rationality, but about the Latin person, pre- and postmodern at the same time.

We seek a modern anthropology, certainly, but one that is an alternative to western modernity. We seek the multi-faceted, holistic person — the person who with ancestral wisdom harmonizes feeling and reason, thinking and acting, petitioning and waiting, celebrating and mourning. Ultimately, we seek an anthropology of a different praxis, centred in the fecundity of love understood as the basic popular category of solidarity, fertile with new life and joy, and not the ascetic rationalistic praxis of efficient love understood as self-disciplined commitment to a specific cause (be it in the framework of bourgeois asceticism or proletarian militancy). At the heart of this integral concept of the popular Latin American person, the Christian faith fulfils an essential function by providing a transcendent dimension. God the Father, the God of life, God who by his intermediaries (the Virgin, saints, souls) grants health and food to body and soul (simultaneously and not dualistically), God who favours the humble and despised, God who is present at every stage and in every circumstance of life (birth, puberty, marriage, crisis, death) with its pain and joy. A God who accompanies people in their search for a healthy, joyful, pleasant and carnival-like well-being — an individual and collective well-being that from the outset has no category of accumulation nor worldly “success”.

We seek an indigenous utopian conception that in other times different peoples and ethnic groups expressed in Andean utopias, in the “land without evil” of the Tupiguarani, in the “black republic” of Palmares, in the movement of the Canudos and Contestados in the indigenous Mapuche republic, but one that is also reflected in an alternative way of understanding humanity itself and its world, in popular medicine, popular handicraft, dance, song, the fiesta with its inversion of the world, in the different forms of popular self-management in societies today.¹³ It is not a question of believing in moralistic God, and even less in a rigid, stoic, punishing and repressive divinity. The popular mentality definitely sees God as liberating, but not, of course, in enlightened terms, but liberating in the categories of popular wisdom; not in rationalistic terms but in terms of that “other” rationality of popular Latin otherness.

Underneath bourgeois egoism, universalized under the form of a utilitarian secular ethic taken from rational natural law — replacing religion and philosophy, secular and scientific¹⁴ — lies an anthropology (a vital synthesis of popular wisdom, faith and philosophy) that reinvents the utopian aspects of traditions and takes up again the conceptual constructions that justify a more balanced and harmonious interaction in social relations and with nature.

There is here, in the heart of the Christian religion of the vast majority of Latin Americans, in their popular and communitarian wisdom, an emerging project, a new indigenous utopia, in which the encounter with the other, in that connatural solidarity of the poor, in the daily ritual of gift giving and receiving, is the forerunner of a new culture of solidarity. Christianity thus understood as a cultural factor could well be the new horizon for constructing a new Latin American civilization for the 21st century — the horizon, but not the substratum of the project to transform civilization in non-western terms. But Christianity is not only a cultural expression. It is a global

phenomenon, a faith in the Christian God and a praxis — ritual, real, effective, symbolic, affective, efficacious in love and solidarity. Thus it can be said that Christianity is the root and horizon of the new Latin American culture. In the heart of the culture that is dying, cultural Christianity, understood abstractly and ahistorically, is dying with it. In the heart of the culture that is being born out of this crisis, popular Christianity, understood as a vital synthesis, is the dynamic source of new relations of human beings with one another, nature and God.

NOTES

1. See Leopoldo Zea, *Filosofía de la Historia Americana*, Mexico: FCE, 1987.

2. See Peter Berger, "El capitalismo como fenómeno", *Estudios Públicos* 38, 1990: 245-265; Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, London, Heinemann, 1979; Jürgen Habermas, *Problemas de legitimación en el capitalismo tardío*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Amorrortu, 1975.

3. See Roger Garaudy, *Comment l'homme devint humain*, Brussels, Editions JA, 1979.

4. See Luis A. Gomez de Souza, "A utopia nao estará surgindo no meio de nos?" *Presença* 10: 70-82; idem, "O novo e a novidade no 'Mundo das Creenças' ", *Sinais dos tempos, igrejas e seitas no Brasil*, pp. 43-51, Rio de Janeiro, ISER, 1989; and Christian Parker, "Mentalidad popular y religión en América Latina", *Opciones* 11, 1987: 52-92.

5. See M. Hill, "La secularización, diversidad de significados", in *Sociología de la Religión*, pp. 285 ff., Madrid, Ediciones Cristianidad, 1976.

6. See Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Urbanization and Secularization in Theological Perspective*, New York, Macmillan, 1965; *La seducción del espíritu: usos y abusos de la religión popular*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1979 (Eng. *The Seduction of the Spirit: Use and Misuse of People's Tradition*, New York, Simon & Schuster).

7. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

8. See Pedro Morandé, *Cultura y modernización en América Latina*, Santiago, Instituto de Sociología, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1983.

9. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History", *National Interest*, 1989; see also Helio Gallardo, "Francis Fukuyama y el triunfo del capitalismo burgués", *Pasos* 27, 1990.

10. Adam Schaff, "La crisis de la civilización industrial", *Leviatán* 29/30, 1987: 115-126.

11. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, AAS 73, 14 September 1981.

12. For the new, holistic metaphysics and anthropology that is replacing the metaphysics and anthropology born of the scientific and technical development of the Renaissance, see Morris Berman, *El Reencantamiento del Mundo*, Santiago, Ediciones Cuatro Vientos, 1987.

13. See Diego Irarrázaval, *Utopía autóctona, progreso moderno, reinado de Dios*, *Tópicos* no. 1, 1987: 183-208.

14. See Habermas, op. cit. note 2, p. 102.

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