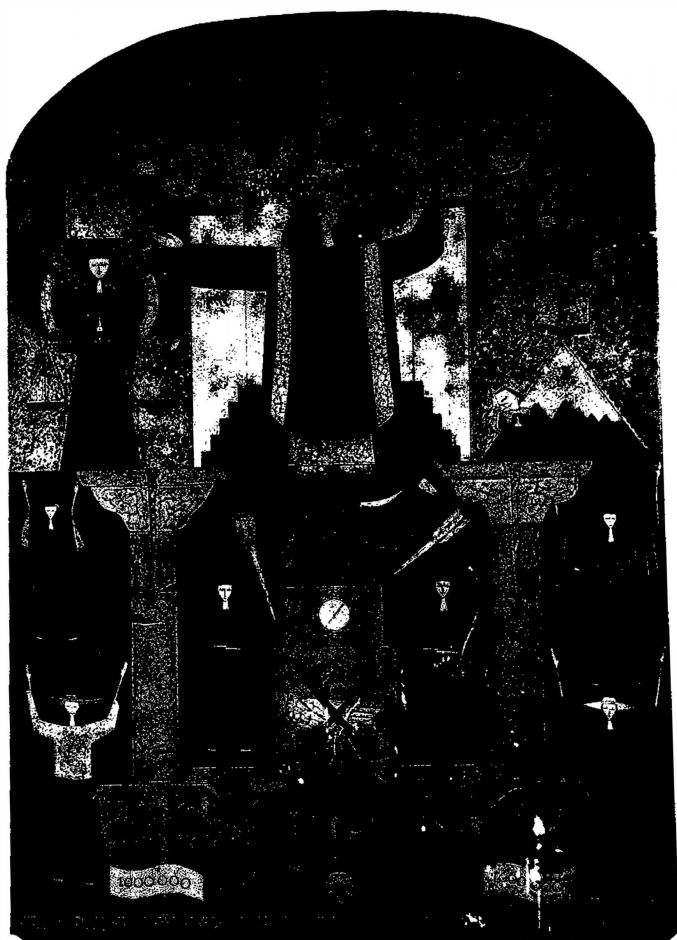


*ROMERO DAYS 2023: Discussion will focus on pp. 204-207 ("The Christian Meaning of the University"). Pp. 177-178 may also provide helpful context.*



*TOWARDS A SOCIETY THAT SERVES ITS PEOPLE:  
The Intellectual Contribution of  
El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits*

EDITED BY JOHN HASSETT & HUGH LACEY

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## 9. Is A Different Kind of University Possible?\*

TRANSLATION BY PHILLIP BERRYMAN

The University of Central America (UCA) was established on September 15, 1965 in order to enhance university endeavors in El Salvador through what might be called a Christian inspiration and energy. For a variety of reasons the typical patterns in universities calling themselves Catholic were not useful as guidelines for this task, nor were there any other models available that were sufficiently detailed and operational. The "no" was clearer than the "yes": no to other ways of being a university, no to other attempts to heal the malaise of the Latin American university—attempts which were proving ineffective. Little by little this path of the "no" understood as a creative process was destined to bring about a new awareness and a new way of understanding the task of the university.

First came facts, admittedly facts that were stammering and ambiguous. Out of facts themselves and out of the new liberating consciousness that began to appear in Latin America during the sixties, a different kind of university began to emerge, or at least the intention of establishing a different kind of university. That intention was officially formulated in a speech delivered on the occasion of the contract signing with the Inter-American Development Bank (*Discurso del BID*, 1971). It was afterwards expanded in the university's organizational manual (UCA, 1972). It was also put into practice in a series of statements by the university's faculty and student organizations, and in a wide variety of research projects.

Now after ten years and with both the achievements and obstacles before us, a minimum sense of critical responsibility demands that we look back at the distance covered in order to see whether in view of the facts—not intentions—we can speak of a different kind of university. Have we accomplished something along this road? Do the real difficulties encountered during these ten years prove that in our situation a different kind of university, one that by its very structure and proper role

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\*Ellacuria (1975d); see the Bibliography in the back of this book.

as a university is actually committed to opposing an unjust society and building a new one, is in fact impossible?

In this essay I am going to respond to these questions under three headings: 1) the attempt to create a different university; 2) an examination of our university with that aim in view; 3) the Christian meaning of the university

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### *Attempting a Different Kind of University*

The criterion for measuring the ultimate significance of a university and what it is in its total reality is its impact on the historic reality within which it exists and which it serves. Hence it should be measured by a political criterion. At first glance this statement might seem to lead towards a politicization that would disfigure genuine university endeavor insofar as it is a theoretical effort to know and then on the basis of this knowing, to lay open the possibilities for doing. That need not be the case, however, and to that end we must look into the university's political dimension very explicitly, for the university unquestionably has such a dimension, and it is very important for giving it direction. What will make such a university different then will not be that it does not carry out its political mission, but that it does so in another way. That is the issue. If we do not face it, besides leading to continual internal contradictions that create tension and ultimately make university work impossible, the university itself is left without a compass, and even worse, it is at the mercy of pressures over which it has no control.

There is no need to insist too much that the university has a political dimension, that is, that the university is a factor in the political situation. We are speaking primarily about the university here and now, in El Salvador in 1975, where there are only two universities. They are in charge of all the higher education in the country. Under present conditions the quantity and quality of resources of all kinds at its disposal make the university an important component of the social structure. It is no exaggeration to say that the university wields the greatest ideological power in the nation, although it finds it extremely difficult to unleash that power and translate it into social awareness. To a great extent the university responds in each case to the greatest social pressure exerted on it and/or pressure from the state, and consequently it is shaped politically by these pressures, while at the same time and with a variety of direct and indirect means it can exert pressure on the power of society and the state. In itself it is a power to be reckoned with, especially if it could be given the cohesion it should have. For example, the UCA has three thousand students, two hundred and fifty professors, and an annual budget of about three million colones [\$1,200,000], and it is unquestionably a very important social force in El Salvador, at least in theory. The

country's universities are also the major source of professional people who, consequently, are the major contributors to maintenance of the social system. They can produce the instruments for national policies in economics, education, technology, health care, and so forth, as well as the people who are to handle those instruments. Finally, the fact that they are a ripe field for the activity of political movements indicates indirectly that the structure and thrust of the university can be politicized.

The political potential of the university is obvious at a glance. Nevertheless, what the university actually is can only be seen through its impact on the social and political situation. Any other approach is abstract in the pejorative sense: it would deny the concrete reality of the university and would amount to neglecting one of its most serious possibilities as an institution meant to serve the public.

However, there are two inadequate and deceptive ways of carrying out this political mission. One of them is to help strengthen the prevailing system by responding positively to its demands or at least by not hindering it, by being devoted to knowledge and technical matters in an ostensibly neutral manner. The other way is to challenge the system head on, especially that part of it that is the state, in the manner of an opposition political party or the popular organizations, whose political activity is determined by their primary objective which is to take over state power. Because of its own critical character, and because of its fundamental need to be rational and ethical, the university cannot be reduced to taking the side of any given political or social system indiscriminately. Nor can the university abandon its proper university approach to dealing with political reality, ultimately because of that same propensity for the rational and the ethical.

It is quite clear that Latin American universities have tended to fall into one or other of these false forms of politicization. In some instances, as a reaction to overpoliticization or worse and with a clear intention of favoring those already favored, universities have striven to anesthetize students, ostensibly in order to attain the greatest degree of impartial scientific rigor, as though social reality did not also need a high degree of scientific rigor. In other instances, in an effort to respond to the most urgent and immediate ethical demands, people have undertaken political action without the proper tools or sufficient power, obviously thus shortchanging their scientific and technical training. Can there not be a different way of fulfilling the university's inescapable political mission? This is the question that leads us to raise the issue of a different kind of university, one that as university and in a university manner responds to its mission in history, one that demonstrates its political effectiveness in a university manner by imparting shape to a new society and to a new form of state power.

What might be the university characteristics of this new way for accomplishing the university's political mission? That political mission has already been defined in the documents cited above. What I would

like to do now is to be more specific and precise about what constitutes the university's way of playing a role in liberation in order to determine whether the university can in fact play that role and to determine the limits proper to such activity by the university. From the outset we cannot admit that the only conceivable way for the university to engage in political activity for the liberating transformation of society would be by ceasing to be a university in order to become a revolutionary political organization. It is certainly risky to claim that one has been unable to do what one has not done because it has not yet been possible or because problems of the moment have prevented it. It may be that what looks like something conjunctural is actually structural, in which case the different impeding conjunctures would only be so many crises masking the same structural obstacle. Before making such an admission, however, we must define clearly the specifically university features involved in the political mission that a different university is obliged to carry out.

Defining these features is helpful in two ways. First it helps the university pursue its own specific identity so that neither pressures nor siren songs can pull it off course. Second, it provides a criterion for judging whether from its own being, that is, without departing from what it is and without disfiguring its own reality, the university can make an effective and irreplaceable contribution to the process of national transformation, even when the dominant social and political structures are opposed to such a change.

In seeking [to identify] the specifically university features of the university's political mission, we are going to inquire into a) the horizon of university activity; b) the specific field of this activity; c) its way of acting; d) its basic disposition; and e) its immediate object.

#### THE POOR MAJORITY AS THE HORIZON OF UNIVERSITY ACTIVITY

In inquiring about the *horizon* of university activity, we are asking about the ultimate standpoint and deepest purpose of this activity. We could answer that it is the national reality or, in more human terms, the Salvadoran people. That answer has the unquestionable advantage of being structural and of going beyond individualistic considerations, but it does not take into account the national reality and the Salvadoran people as presently structured. The national reality and the Salvadoran people are manifest not only in terms of established injustice, institutional violence, and international dependence, but also as a divided society in which the two sides have clashing interests; the dominant minority cannot identify its interests with those of the oppressed majority, for as they confront each other, they are indeed at odds and actively so. That does not necessarily mean that common interests cannot be found between the two sides "materially" or "conjuncturally," but it does denote a fundamental separation, one that makes it necessary to take sides.

A university of Christian inspiration cannot doubt whose side it must take. If at a particular moment it is not possible to overcome the

differences by doing away with them, such a university must take the side of those sectors who are not only a majority—a majority so overwhelming that by its very magnitude it can be regarded as the authentic representative of the interests of the whole—but also an unjustly dehumanized majority. In this sense it is not the ruling classes but the scientifically determined objective interests of the oppressed majority that must be the criterion guiding the university.

The idea here is to make the university take sides, or rather, to opt for one of the inescapable ways of taking sides. Any decision and any action supports a stand "for" one side or the other. This does not occur in an entirely pure manner, since the same action may serve clashing interests, but the horizon ought to be clear, as should the fundamental option, in order that the university be able to play a meaningful role in ongoing history. The matter cannot be viewed statically or mechanically, but must be seen dynamically and historically. That is, the action must suit the present moment, but only insofar as this present moment is preparing one kind of future or another. The future depends on the present, but the present is not merely preparation for the future: it has its own rights and its own needs. That is why interests may coincide at a particular moment, and yet the processes are not thereby identified with one another. When lines cross they are identified at one point, even though they are going in different directions.

It follows that the university cannot take as the fundamental criterion and ultimate horizon for its activity the subjective interests of students and professors, unless these subjective interests coincide with the objective interests of the oppressed majority. The argument that the students pay money to the university does not mean that they have an absolute right over the direction taken by university endeavors insofar as this direction entails an ultimate horizon, for the simple reason that they do not even pay the full cost of their education, let alone the whole cost of university activity. Even if they did pay the full cost, they would still not have an absolute right—not having an absolute right does not mean that they do not have relative rights—since they would not have this ability to pay if it were not as a result of a particular structure of society, and that fact by itself would limit and relativize such a right. A similar argument can be made with regard to the subjective interests of professors and even more justifiably, since they are paid for their work and are not always identified with the broader interests of the university.

A completely different issue is how to discover and pursue the objective interests of the great majority from a university standpoint. Here the contribution of professors and students ought to be decisive, particularly if they can gradually identify their own private interests with those of the unjustly dehumanized majority.

If this horizon of the poor majority is taken seriously, if it is really adopted as an ongoing criterion for how the university is organized internally on all levels and in its activity towards the outside, the university would have an essential component it needs for continuing to

discover the specific character of its political mission. This horizon is by no means exclusive to the university: it should be the criterion of any institution which in an ethical way wishes to move in the right direction in our ongoing history at this particular moment. In the university, however, that criterion will resonate in a particular way and the university will serve it in accordance with its own distinctive nature, whose special features can be noted in the characteristics we are now going to discuss.

#### CULTIVATING THE NATIONAL REALITY AS THE SPHERE OF UNIVERSITY ACTIVITY

The proper *field or sphere* of university activity and its own set of instruments is culture. The term today is not a very felicitous one, since culture tends to be understood as the birthright possession of the cultured classes, that is, of the oppressor classes and of the individuals who are at their service and who are supported and sustained by those classes. Stripped of its class connotations and of its purely contemplative connotations, however, it can and should be retained. The reason to retain culture [in the university] is precisely in order to emphasize the university's identity and prevent it from veering off course in its political task. In a proper division of labor the specific nature of the university should be maintained; otherwise we would regress to an absurdly ahistorical primitivism, which would deprive those who have no voice of one of their basic supports.

Of course, culture must be understood differently in this case. That is not difficult to do. When we speak of culture here we conceive of it in the sense it has in expressions like *agri-culture*, that is, as a cultivating of reality, as an activity of cultivating and transforming reality. What the culture of the university should seek to do is to make its members rational cultivators of reality. Culture has an essentially praxic meaning, insofar as it derives from the need to act and should lead to an activity that transforms both the subject and his or her natural and historic environment.

The material elements of culture include a rigorous *knowledge* of nature and society—neither nature alone nor society alone but both as necessarily interwoven—and it includes a mastery of the *techniques* for transforming nature, human beings, and society. Such knowing how to do and so doing with wisdom are not atemporal, but they should take their orientation from the horizon proposed above. This does not mean any lessening of knowledge or technique, at least not necessarily, but it means simply a principle of selection, which in each instance should be derived from the national reality as it unfolds concretely in history. The study of that national reality is one of the fundamental dimensions of culture, that is of national culture.

Obviously culture requires a rigorous and continual analysis of the national reality, extending from the past which partly constitutes us to



the projected future towards which we must move. If culture is cultivation, the first thing to be known is the reality that must be cultivated in order to know how it must be cultivated. Moreover, the national reality in its present historic fullness is indeed the locus in the fullest sense, and it gives ultimate meaning to everything that is done and everything that happens. Our country's collective consciousness can be scientific only if it is based on this analysis of the national reality. How, therefore, can the awareness of its own reality not be part of the culture of the country? Since culture is here understood as operative, however, what must gradually be sought is a collective consciousness that has been properly prepared and made operational in a fitting way. This position is not one of idealism vis-à-vis ongoing history because the pursuit of a clear consciousness does not mean that consciousness, and especially group consciousness, can be achieved independently of social structures and of everyday collective activity. The point is that doing by itself does not always generate the appropriate consciousness and that there will be no adequate culture unless the nation's consciousness has been made ready.

It is the historic reality of the nation—the dynamic reality of a nation being made and to whose making many factors contribute—that is the bearer of national culture. Culture therefore embraces not only systematic knowledge of the national reality, and not only the anticipation of its future step-by-step—in this sense a five-year development plan, for example, fully belongs to what we here understand as culture—but culture is also tracing the routes and making ready the means for the journey.

In this pursuit of national culture the university is clearly not the only generator: rather it is the critical and technical processing plant. However, the university should certainly strive to amplify the deep feeling of the people, the meaning of their needs, interests, feelings, yearnings, and values. Thus national culture does not mean national folklore, although folklore can express some important aspects of the people's being. An accent on the aesthetic side of national culture may be narcissistic and tranquilizing, when what is required is that it become effective for building a new human being on a new earth. Culture should be watchfulness on the alert, tension towards the future, transformation.

In its active sense, culture should strive to establish new values and towards that end it must unmask present values. It should often be easy to uncover instruments of domination in those values. Certainly few things are as necessary as a cultural revolution in these countries which from pre-Colombian times have not been allowed to be what they are. Such a cultural revolution would entail thoroughly examining the current system of values that has been internalized, destroying it if necessary, and developing new values that really respond to the new possibilities of Salvadorans at this particular moment of history and in this specific geographical context.

Culture becomes ideological struggle from this vantage point. That may look like a borrowed term but it is not, for culture has been a matter of combat with other dominant cultures from time immemorial. Culture as knowledge, while it has often served as a tool of domination at the service of whoever pays best, has also been, and is inherently, a critique of what is, as well as a jolt to arouse people from tranquil slumber. Creative culture entails breaking—although the first barrier it often encounters is the previous culture that has been fossilized.

It is in this manner that the university can become the critical and creative consciousness of the national reality (Discurso del BID, 1971; UCA, 1972, p. 8). The notion of "consciousness"\* does not mean a movement that is purely ethical, subjective, and volitional; it explicitly denotes 'con-science': there is no university conscience unless there is university science and university method and style, which will be historical and changing, but which have their own specific structure. Finally, both the critique and the operational quality demanded of this science, which deals with things from as situated and in order to transform them, must be drawn from this creative science and consciousness, just as they should themselves be nourished dialectically on the truth that comes from involvement in both natural and social reality" (Ellacuría, 1972e). Culture as critical and operational consciousness is what the university should be required to provide. Knowing how things are and knowing how they ought to be; knowing what is being done and what should be done in the unity of con-sciousness, which is ultimately the operative and historical unity of a people seeking itself with help from all.

We thus come to the crucial issue of the "who" of this consciousness and of this culture. Culture as here understood is a "culture-of!" That is, it belongs to a particular people in history linked in its march through history with other peoples and it is what this people cultivates. If that is the case, the endeavor of the university is obviously not easy, for it risks being an endeavor that is neither of the people nor for the people. That is so, not primarily because the ordinary people do not make up the university population, nor because the university fails to come down to levels that the vast majority can understand in their own terms, but because of the difficulty inherent in promoting a culture of the people without getting away—through the use of the requisite theoretical tools—from the very reality that one is seeking to cultivate and raise to awareness. The difficulty of the endeavor, however, should not prevent us from acknowledging that culture and the people's culture are the

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\**Conciencia* in Spanish denotes both "conscience" (moral) and "consciousness" (awareness) which tend to be conflated. *Ciencia* has a somewhat wider sense than the English word "science," encompassing scholarship and systematic knowledge. P.B.

field and specific set of instruments for university work. Consciousness and culture are not absolute, detached, and on their own. They are always someone's consciousness and culture and in each case we should be very clear who this someone is.

Furthermore, this culture should be fostered at its very roots and within all fields. The history of a people cannot be left exclusively in the hands of those who cultivate the people politically, those who seek power for the people, let alone those of another political stripe who also cultivate the people. Culture is much more; culture is that total condition in which people live, not that for which they die. It should be a culture that breaks with every bond of domination, a culture advancing towards an ever greater liberation, but also a culture truly lived at each step along the way. The final goal affects the paths taken, but does not do away with their autonomy, and naturally does not eliminate the steps taken each day. If the university does something important in this area of cultures it will have made a very serious contribution to the life of the people.

#### THE EFFECTIVE WORD AS THE METHOD OF UNIVERSITY ACTIVITY

The way of acting and the fundamental *method* of university activity might be described as the efficacious word. That might look like very little, and it might seem that our peoples need not words but actions, and that words can do little in a world determined by well established powers and structures firmly in place, and about which science and consciousness and their transmission through the word have little to say. The word and culture made word, might be acknowledged to have some impact on the awareness of individuals, but it is difficult to see how they have an impact on the structural movement of history. Everything depends on what is meant by effective word and how we assess the real possibilities for university activity.

"Word" is here understood as the communication, reception, and comprehension of culture as it is re-elaborated in the university, in the sense described in the previous section. Thus culture and word are inseparable; the culture of the university cannot remain cloistered there. From the outset it is cultivation and activity, or at least the source of activity. Who or what can assure that this word be effective, and that it can do what it says?

To begin with, the word must be powerful. This power will derive support primarily from its degree of rationality, and when appropriate, of scientific validity. Increasingly, knowledge is power, especially if such knowledge is effective by its very nature; it will be effective when it proposes the best and most effective means towards particular ends, and when it proposes the best solutions for pressing problems.

This knowledge communicated and received reveals its effectiveness in various domains. In technical matters, it can be shown to be

unquestionably superior for accomplishing some practical tasks. When it comes to analyzing a situation, then making that judgment the situation demands and determining the means for changing it, it is more difficult to accept such knowledge because interests and ideologies may be interfering. In making an ethical assessment both of overall directions and of particular public actions, a university respected for its theoretical objectivity and for its impartiality towards the interests of the ruling classes and of government authorities can have a major impact on important events.

Speaking more generally, if a culture in the sense described in the previous section is created and this culture is communicated to the nation and to national consciousness, its impact will be unquestionable. Things may move slowly because history has its own pace, which is not the same pace as that of individual lives, but it will make history. Moreover, what does not become history, and more specifically, historic structure, is in danger of being for others merely an evanescent blossom even if it is very important for oneself.

The word made history is the particular way that the university word becomes effective. It entails communication with what, somewhat loosely but with some truth, can be called group consciousness, independently of however such a consciousness might work. It also entails that the word take flesh in historic structures which generate new actions, new attitudes, and new achievements. If something like a collective consciousness is achieved and if that consciousness is gradually embodied in institutions, effectiveness is assured. What I am talking about is not any idealism about history that would prize the autonomy of consciousness above all else. The university must realize that it is just one component in the social structure, and that its role is not so much to implement things technically or politically as to propose principles for such implementation, and understanding by those principles, and the dynamic instruments for accomplishing things—and not simply to propose theoretical formulations.

#### AGGRESSIVENESS AS THE DISPOSITION OF UNIVERSITY ACTIVITY

The fundamental *disposition* for university activity whose horizon is the real situation of the oppressed majority, cannot be one of conformity or conciliation. The university must have an aggressive disposition. In our situation, aggressiveness is an important feature of university activity. In our situation the university is one of the few institutions that can really be aggressive—and it should be.

Reason is inherently aggressive when faced with prevailing irrationality. Confronting historic irrationality, that is, a structuring of historic reality in a flagrantly irrational way, the university as critical cultivator of reason cannot but feel and be aggressive. From this standpoint, its aggressiveness is a matter of condemning the irrationality and

making an effort to overcome this unreality of the irrational. It is not as though the irrational did not exist, or that everything real were rational; the point is that its existence is so false that only a new realization can end its falseness. It is not simply that reason is absent, for that would not arouse a positive aggression; the problem is a positive irrationality, and an irrationality that is shaping society and history, and thereby people's personal behavior.

If besides being irrational, this situation is one of positive injustice, aggressiveness is even more necessary. That is the case in our situation. Very peaceable and highly respected people have repeatedly spoken out about institutional violence and institutionalized injustice. The tiny redoubt of idealism that the university may represent due to the youthful idealism of its student body and the relative isolation of its professors from the directly dominant structures, makes it more possible for the university to be aggressive institutionally as well as personally towards the prevailing injustice. If in addition, it is agreed that the horizon of the university is that of the oppressed majority, and that horizon is not restricted to being a merely theoretical framework but is rather something experienced, an aggressive stance is inevitable.

This aggressive disposition, as we call it, which can be expressed in terms of struggle, is not an invitation to irresponsibility nor to the use of non-university means. We are not defining the means of action but the attitude to be manifest in university activity. The university should be aggressive with regard to culture and by means of the efficacious word. University protest does not require shouting or violent actions to make its protest. But it is quite the opposite of a passive and contemplative attitude; it is active and nourishes hope; it wants to struggle for a better future, knowing beforehand that this future will not come as a gift. It knows that university protest is going to engage it in ongoing conflict with those who defend other viewpoints, and especially other interests, and that it cannot retreat when faced with pressures and obstacles. It is in this context of rebellion against injustice and irrationality and of resistance to those who prevent the university from carrying out its mission that the need for an aggressive disposition must be viewed. We do not live in a society that is disinterested and in equilibrium, but in one that is torn and in conflict, one in which solidarity can be conceived as possible only through a dynamic process that overcomes its polarizations. That can be achieved only by advancing in such a way that objectivity is not at odds with aggressive assertiveness.

#### STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AS THE OBJECTIVE OF UNIVERSITY ACTIVITY

The *objective* around which the horizon and aim of university activity are focussed is the structural transformation of society. That is, the university's activity is not aimed primarily at changing persons but at

changing structures. In principle, changing persons and changing structures are not two mutually exclusive missions, but putting the accent on one of them significantly affects the direction of university work. The proposal here is to put the accent decidedly on the problem of structures.

The reason is obvious, no matter how much it has been taken for granted that the university should be aimed primarily at persons and at educating persons, namely professionals exercising their profession. If in fact what the university is pursuing is ultimately the transformation of the national reality, and if that national reality is formally of a structural nature, anyone who is not struggling to work on those structures will not find that reality. This is true from a general standpoint, if you will, independently of any particular experience, although it is grounded in any and every possible experience. Reality in general is structural, and social reality is particularly structural. This is also the case, however, for reasons that are demonstrably empirical. There is no other way to reach a dimension like that of the national reality except by setting out in pursuit of its structures; the national reality cannot be attained through its parts or through the individuals who make it up, and even if it were thus attainable, it would not be operational.

This point is extremely important for giving direction to each and every university activity, and especially for unifying university endeavors, which is also a matter of structure. The most striking consequence is that it negates the notion that the main objective of the university is to train professional people. In our country there are clear ethical reasons for such a negation; we cannot invest a notable portion of scarce national resources to favor even more the tiny number whom the social system already favors. The only justification for focussing the university on training professionals as the primary thrust of its activity would be with the understanding that only with well trained professionals can the structural transformation of the nation be brought about—but we would thereby be reasserting that structural transformation is primary. Since, however, in the present system we cannot expect that a university oriented primarily towards professional training would make a serious contribution to deep and rapid structural transformation, not even this derivative justification can be considered valid at present (see Ellacuría, 1972d). This does not mean that training professional people is not one of the structural requirements of that university that can and must be directed towards transforming the country structurally.

Another consequence is that the university's research and social outreach, that is, the projection of the university towards society, ought to be guided by this focus on the structural, and on the structural in process of transformation. Obviously transformation here is not limited to transforming consciousness, although collective consciousness also has something structural about it, but that it should include transforming all

kinds of structures, culminating in the transformation of socio-economic and political structures.

This accent on the structural may jeopardize the personal; however, the salvation of the personal cannot be realistically conceived by leaving aside the structural. Hence the question is: what way of structuring society permits the full and free development of the human person and what kind of personal activity should those persons undertake who are involved in transforming structures? The major instruments with which the university works are collective in nature and have structural implications. That is the case with science, technology, professional training, the very makeup of the university, and so forth. To personalize this set of instruments does not mean destructuring and privatizing it but simply pursuing one's own fulfillment in a historic praxis of transforming structures, and by thus objectifying an effective universal love, recovering the real sphere for authentic personal commitment.

If we review these characteristics together (vast majority as horizon, cultivation of the national reality as its field, the effective word as its proper mode of action, aggressiveness as its disposition, and structural transformation as its objective), we can easily recognize a clear political mission and a strictly university character in this definition of the university's activity. If in fact such a university is able to move forward, if such aims are actually embodied in appropriate internal structures and appropriate channels of communication with society, we can truthfully speak of a different kind of university, one that can efficiently fulfill an important political mission.

Historico-political reality is the appropriate place for correctly interpreting university activity. If it is not focussed to the point where it becomes utterly concrete, the university is playing its role thoughtlessly and employing its great potential irresponsibly. Similarly, if it does not firmly strive to be faithful to its very essence as a university, that same charge of thoughtlessness and irresponsibility can be made. That is why we have spent some time sketching what constitutes specifically the work of the university, both in itself and in its political aspects. There is no contradiction between university and politics; indeed, they are mutually necessary and they energize one another. In our concrete situation today it would be suicidal to abandon the possibilities of the university out of a concern for changing the country, and not to use properly the political potential of those possibilities.

The matter is clear in principle. Is it clear in our specific situation? Do the real conditions under which our university is unfolding permit what we have just proposed as a historic necessity and an ethical obligation? Do the conditions exist for making a different university possible or are the issues being evaded intentionally? What can we observe in ten years of experience of the UCA?

## *Can Our University Be Different?*

In talking here about "our" university we mean the UCA, and when we talk about a "different" university we have in mind the university as described in the previous section. Nevertheless, the question is not about a particular case. Although the immediate object of the discussion is to analyze critically whether this university can carry out the mission which is considered proper to any university in Third World countries, the scope of the question is broader and it includes any universities that may be in similar real situations. To focus on a concrete case to support the argument does not necessarily mean reducing matters to a particular case. That is true whether or not the concrete case serves as a paradigm, for the deeper reason that the truth of history can be brought to light only through a praxis within history. What do these past ten years teach us? Have they fulfilled a part of what has been proposed as the proper mission of a different kind of university? If that has not been accomplished or has been accomplished in a mediocre manner, why is that the case? Even under the same present conditions might it be possible to do something different from what has been done thus far? We confront a question that is basically ethical. If the university cannot justify its claims in reality, taking refuge in good intentions would constitute a grave hypocrisy, one that would conceal base interests. If we are not doing what we claim to be doing, even if it be due to outside pressure, the only justification for continuing would be a notion of the lesser evil, but to appeal to the lesser evil as the foundation for committing one's life would be the saddest of justifications.

This next consideration divides: the first section deals with the obstacles and the second section with the real possibilities. Our assessment will derive from the clash between the impediments to and the possibilities for our university.

### CONJUNCTURAL AND STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS TO THE UNIVERSITY MISSION

The aim in this section is to provide not simply a conjunctural analysis but a critical analysis of the real difficulties encountered in the university's endeavors during these past ten years. What has happened reveals a structural framework above and beyond particular conjunctures or moments. The important thing is this structural framework, even though it always wears a conjunctural mask. The nature of the social reality of the university, depending as it must on the society in which it exists, the basic "bourgeois" structure of universities like ours, and our groping "trial and error" efforts, are the three headings under which we can group all of the structural and conjunctural obstacles



which have impeded and continue to impede the university's mission, understood as the struggle for the radical transformation of a people.

### *Social factors shaping the university*

It is utterly obvious that the university is a social reality and consequently is conditioned by the structure of that reality which is society. Any effort to regard itself as outside society, as something immune to the enticements and pressures of society, is affected by ideology and indeed militates against really attaining a certain distance from society when the proper time comes. In a socialist country the university is something essentially different from the university in a capitalist country, even though they have many elements in common and these elements look the same. Among the many factors conditioning the university in our own case, three can be singled out as the most obvious.

*The first conditioning factor:* It is the university's dependence on economic factors which, in our situation is *per se* a hindrance to the university's mission. The university needs a good supply of economic resources. These resources may come from what the students contribute, from the state, and from private financial entities. In all three cases the need for money tends to be a hindrance. In justice we cannot say that during these ten years the sources of our financing, including the Inter-American Development Bank loan, have entailed direct coercion of the university's work, some sort of crude *do ut des*. That might seem to be the case with the students since what they are demanding with their resources is simply professional training so they can find a place in society. However, this pressure from students is not, or has not been, decisive, from this perspective—later on we will take it up from another point of view. Private capital did not lay down special conditions with its initial major contribution, and the failed effort to provide the university with a board of trustees can be seen as a providential failure. Moreover, it cannot be said that the UCA set out to teach anyone. It was opened to provide a service to the Salvadoran people from a Christian viewpoint, and by its structure as a university and its Christian inspiration it could not be made to take orders from capital on how to understand this service to the Salvadoran people. Finally, the state has not tried to exert pressure directly, although on some occasions it has felt "compelled" not to contribute financial aid for the practically indispensable service that our university provides in our country. The university has sometimes felt forced to protest the flagrant discrimination it has suffered, for although it may not have a legal claim to assistance from the goods of the nation it has real claims. The fact that thus far pressures have not been too great does not shed much light on the future. The university cannot function without economic resources, and obviously those who provide such resources are not going to work against

themselves. The rationality of university activity might be explained to them, but their interests need not coincide with reason, at least in the short run. Can a university remain free when it is dependent on economic resources that can be halted at will? Will a university seeking radical change be able to be supported by those who see no advantage for themselves in such a radical change?

The *second conditioning factor*: we face the social and political resistance of ruling interests. This is not the same as dependence on economic factors; it is more subtle, if you will, but quite effective. Those who wield power always hold a potential threat over those who can check that power. This pressure can take different forms, ranging from systematic campaigns against the institution and some in it to more directly coercive and threatening measures. There are many ways to encroach on university autonomy\* both institutionally and personally. Under the pretext of avoiding the excesses of university autonomy, the worst excess takes place; namely, the limiting of university autonomy because of either class interest or partisan interest. Under this same heading comes the resistance from students who do not want to be disturbed with regard to their interests, whether present or future, and who prefer technical training that does not challenge them either on their present involvement in society or their future ethical incardination in the country's structure and functioning. We should also keep in mind the resistance from professors, which is more passive than active. Insofar as professors are involved professionally in carrying out their responsibilities in a business that serves the ruling classes, or at least in the present societal structure they become "professional" people of the dominant system—although this is normally not the case of those who work full time in the university. Even when that is not the case, we encounter the same obstacle in another sector of the faculty who, because they teach more technical subjects, either do not become aware of their political responsibility or do not see how to relate it to the technical nature of their own discipline. Finally, another factor to keep in mind is that of the university authorities, who may think that the development of a greater political consciousness among the various groups in the university will jeopardize the smooth running of the institution. In short, the nature of the pressure, coming as it does more from those who have power than from those in need, is one of the most compelling reasons why the university does not take the direction it should.

The *third conditioning factor*: It is the lack of proper resources. El Salvador is not oversupplied with technical capability, and naturally the university cannot compete with those who are able to pay for the most

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\*Latin American universities generally enjoy legal autonomy; for example, the military or police cannot enter their precincts. Hence, even in military-controlled countries like El Salvador the universities have been sanctuaries for ideas that could not be expressed elsewhere. P.B.

highly trained technical people. Our university continually experiences the pressure that private businesses and even government agencies put on our professors by offering higher salaries. In addition, the initial effort to launch and establish the university has hindered us from freeing personal energies and economic resources for what should be our main task. Nor would it be unjust, let alone unfair, to say that the university has not always proved able to get the most out of the resources at its disposal, whether personal (professors and students) or institutional (curricula, material facilities, real possibilities for action, and so forth). Moreover, it is ethically quite questionable that the money spent on the university's physical plant has been put to its best use, if we keep in mind per capita income levels in the country, and the psychological impression these buildings may convey—both on those who connect their own professional image to the physical image of the university and to those who do not have access to this university that claims to be devoted to serving them and which, nevertheless, presents a facade that they can only regard as distancing.

### (1) *"Bourgeois" structure of the university*

It is likewise undeniable that the underlying structure of the university is "bourgeois," independently of its intentions of change or revolution. Bourgeois structure is here understood to mean a structural reorganization required by and oriented towards a capitalist system. From this standpoint, it is difficult to deny that the university's bourgeois structure or that this bourgeois character is to some degree inevitable. Indeed, most of those involved in the university, whether students, including their family circle, or professors and administrators, do not feel that a profound structural change is urgently needed for the sake of their own interests. Indeed, such change would not bring them great material advantages. Secondly, at the university there is little real contact with the oppressed majority. Whatever such identification there might be for university people is with the interests of *another* class and not as the defense of their own. The amount of time the university devotes to making contact with the oppressed and in bringing what the university does to the oppressed has been almost insignificant. Third, the knowledge mastered and transmitted does not originate in the needy real world of the bulk of the Salvadoran people, nor is it even neutral and antiseptic. It is generally the watered-down knowledge cultivated by dominant countries so that they can remain dominant. Here again the university's physical plant exhibits the style of life and thinking of those of us who do their work in it. That plant is in keeping with a bourgeois mentality and at the service of bourgeois mentalities.

### (2) *A trial-and-error process*

The trial-and-error process of searching, although it has been more conjunctural in nature, has been another reason why the university has not been able to become a "different" university over the course of the

past ten years. Although the basic aim was clear very early if not from the beginning, making it a reality had inevitably to be a matter of process, and that entailed an apprenticeship, with some errors along the way. There must be interaction between working out an idea and its embodiment. We had to realize both the idea and the conditions for the idea at the same time, and we had to abandon a previous framework and work out a new one. The obstacles encountered were not purely external. Fears, reservations, and lack of vision from within the university hindered progress. Things had to be this way. This new kind of university activity was being launched from a starting place that truly contradicted it. This was not only another model, but a model that to a great extent sought to depart from the traditional models of both so-called private universities and national universities. Gradually a team of people who believed in the new idea was formed, and the new idea gradually convinced those who had reservations, either because they were working with out of date notions of what a university should be, or because they feared that this university would be a reactionary bastion. Perhaps only now can the university be said to be basically constituted and only now can it devote more energy to getting things done rather than to getting itself going, although it is only in this new doing that the university will gradually become itself in the full sense.

#### REAL POSSIBILITIES OF ACHIEVING A NEW KIND OF UNIVERSITY

The aim in this section is to examine whether it is actually possible to strive for the kind of university we first intended, now that we have seen the hostile factors conditioning it structurally and conjuncturally, as revealed during the university's earnest efforts for past ten years. The procedure will be first to move from necessity to possibility: such a university is necessary; therefore it is possible. Although at first glance such an argument may look purely logical, it is in fact utterly historical. Then we will indicate the various ways this possibility can be made a reality.

##### *The new kind of university as response to a need*

The starting point should be the need for what the university represents and its importance for shaping the national reality. As a tool for training professionals, the university is a necessity in our society. In all likelihood, society is not going to want a university to foster critical consciousness nor to be a force pressuring for change. But a society must want a university to provide it with professional people who will serve the system. Since any society will regard the production of professionals as an enormously important industry, it will invest in that industry a good deal of its most important resources. These include personal resources of professors and students, instrumental resources in the realms of science and technology, artistic expression and communication and, finally, resources in the influence and the prestige that society grants the

university at a given moment. When there are only two universities, as is the case in El Salvador, the need for each one and their particular impact on society is significant from every angle. The university is thus not only a fact but a necessary fact.

Something so meaningful and so powerful cannot be entrusted to those who are technically irresponsible or politically immoral. They would be irresponsible if they left society so unprepared technically that neither now nor in a politically different future would it have at its disposal the resources necessary to develop the country beyond subsistence level. They would be politically immoral if they tended to perpetuate a state of things that favors a minority at the cost of the majority. The university can do a great deal of damage to the country. Given that it already exists and is a necessary fact, merely neutralizing somewhat its potential evils and preventing it from becoming a blatant instrument of domination is in itself an important service, and in a given historic context that may be ethical justification enough. Furthermore, it is also an important contribution to provide technical and professional people with enough knowledge to resolve even indirectly some of the most pressing economic needs of the country and so prevent a serious near collapse from which recovery would be difficult.

An important conclusion follows from what we have just said. For the sake of a profound social change, we must get the most out of something that is necessary and that offers some of the greatest potential for action in our countries. Of course, those who believe that the universities have not contributed much towards liberation in our countries and who judge that what is possible can most realistically be judged from what actually has been done are not entirely wrong. However, it is certainly necessary—ethically necessary—to try to make the most out of something that is already there, something that can become a center of reactionary resistance and which also offers some of the greatest potential for really affecting the nation, not with a view to taking over state power—except indirectly—but certainly with a view to helping shape society. These possibilities are rooted not only in the particular potential of the university, which in the intelligence domain has no peer in any other group or institution, at least in countries like El Salvador and those with a similar makeup, but also in a certain ambit of freedom created within the university. Freedom is here understood in the sense of positive, though only partial, liberation from the “needs” of business and the state, and freedom in the sense of constituting an ambit or an enclosure where some distancing and critiquing are possible.

#### *Between current realities and new possibilities*

We should realize that we will have to travel some distance until the new order becomes a reality. This journey must be made possible in two senses: we have to gradually make possible the goal pursued and, as long as the new situation does not yet exist, we have to make it possible

to live "in the meantime." This has nothing to do directly with the debate over whether the pace should be reformist or revolutionary. Our concern here is not with theoretical or even hypothetical questions, but with real questions. Given a particular reality and a real process, the question is what demands this reality makes within this real interim process. Only two potential situations would make this question idle: if we could envision either the possibility of imminent radical change or if there were an effort to make such a possibility imminent—which in itself might be remote—by sharpening the contradictions, and by doing so violently. The first possibility looks unreal, and the second raises serious ethical reservations. In any case, university efforts as such could hardly be regarded as decisive in either of these two cases. By its very structure the university should either aim more at training for the longer run or at consolidating a new order already fundamentally just.

Training aimed exclusively at taking political power would leave society broken into pieces during the "meantime"; and it would also leave it in pieces technically and culturally when it came time to establish the new order. These two aspects are both distinct and obvious enough. Only irresponsible people could imagine that it would be possible to restructure a society without technical preparation—a society with enormous real problems that would be very difficult to solve. Here "political idealism" may play a very dirty trick on those who have never had to make anything work, not even as a model, and whose thinking is so reductionist and fanatic that they reduce human beings to purely economic and political dimensions. Moreover, the "meantime" is real and is grinding people in its gears, people who have to go on living and not just dying. Thus it is mandatory that some people work towards making that life as human as possible in basic areas like health, housing, food, and so forth. To believe that people who are exclusively political, just because of their purity or political idealism, can resolve real problems, which are not merely political, is an idealist illusion. El Salvador in particular would not be able to subsist through such a chaos, not a chaos of transition, but a chaos of people in power who lacked adequately trained cadres.

Such training [of cadres] for the "meantime" and for the coming of the new order need not be understood as preventing its arrival by tranquilizing the tensions that propel towards change. That could happen, although a critically alert university need not be intimidated by such a danger.

For the present, university endeavor can offer scope for the action of those who are struggling politically for a structural change in society in a number of very basic ways. It can provide ideological cover so as to inhibit pressure from reactionary ideologies, by showing both the rationality of the new positions and the irrationality of those opposed but currently prevailing positions. From the moment that a position has no rational support, it will be revealed as unjust, and sustainable only

through unjust force and violence. There is so much self-serving obscurantism in our country that a systematic and clear-sighted effort to dispel the clouds could be very helpful on behalf of change. Along the same lines, weakening both personal and professional resistance can be very useful. Between not fomenting the needed changes with all one's might and resisting those changes with all one's might, there is a wide range of possibilities, and the university through its rational analyses can do a great deal to make actual aggressive resistance less virulent. Finally, in countries like El Salvador the university can step directly into various power centers in order to keep repression from being unleashed with impunity. Other institutions like the church—and unfortunately few others—can have a similar influence. Because it is non-partisan, that influence can be very effective at certain moments, and it should be kept in mind.

In a more positive sense, the university can supply the best objective analysis of the overall situation and can discover and begin to organize appropriate techniques for dealing with the various problems in that interim situation, prepare cadres for analytical work, find solutions and implement them. In the area of developing awareness, it can diminish irrational fears precisely when it subjects those fears to reason, and it can make the goals ideally sought reasonable by de-ideologizing attacks against them. The objection against what has just been said—and it is ever valid—is how little has been done along these lines. We thereby come to the question of our university's real possibilities for doing what it says it ought to do.

### *Identifying the real possibilities*

Those real possibilities can be deduced from what has been done thus far and also by studying the real potential at our disposal.

Taking into account the problems involved in launching an effort this ambitious in an unsympathetic environment and with very limited means, what has been done thus far is no little matter. Thus we have some assurance that with financing and start-up problems overcome, we can talk of real possibilities rather than mere illusions. Leaving aside questions of the physical plant and administrative infrastructure, we can note certain aspects which can be regarded as anticipatory of what could be done.\* With no attempt to be exhaustive we may list the following examples of such anticipations: 1) beginning to create among a good number of people a new awareness of what a new kind of university

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\*For example, the fact that the institution is non-profit without being any less efficient, the willingness of many staff members to refuse higher salaries outside the university, pay scales considerably higher than those normal in our country, and accepting ostracism by a social élite who regard the university and its faculty as its adversaries.

should be; 2) proposing, although in an admittedly incipient form, a new model of institution that seeks to move beyond the norms currently proposed by our society; 3) theoretically analyzing some basic issues facing the country and bringing them to public attention; 4) commenting critically on certain serious events in the country on both technical and ethical grounds; 5) confronting very serious developments in the country with an independent voice; 6) providing society with a significant number of upright professional people who are working for deep and rapid change, primarily in education and the public sector; 7) serving as a voice for those who cannot make their own voice heard, although in a limited and sporadic fashion; 8) providing immediate help to the neediest through social outreach programs; and 9) opening a new horizon for the next decade, with the assumption that what has been done thus far should not be simply extended but substantially improved.

These modest accomplishments, which manifest a certain spirit and assure that there is a desire to do better, also raise the question of whether what is proposed can actually be achieved, given both the real potential at hand and the difficulties noted. Rather than proceeding theoretically at this point, the thing to do is to indicate the mechanisms that can make it possible to make the proposed new university a reality.

In principle it does not appear that the change in the university's direction will come about through the simple admission of poorer students. In our situation it is misleading to believe that the university is communicating with oppressed people just because some who do not pay or who pay very low tuition fees are admitted. Statistics prove irrefutably that any university student in the country is privileged since those who get to the university amount to about one percent in El Salvador. Any university student here is privileged and should be held accountable as a privileged person. In terms of the university's mission, the important point about the character of the student body is not *where they come from* but *where they are going*. The university should be very selective on this issue: it should only admit and keep those students who are at least capable of becoming committed to urgent and deep social change in the country. Just as there are procedures for measuring intellectual performance, there should be procedures for determining as unfit for the university those who come with no public consciousness and no social concern and who have proven incapable of acquiring that concern throughout their [previous] education. Admission should be based on an assessment of who will do most for changing structures in the country with their technical training and ethical commitment. The sliding scale in tuition should be regarded as a tentative step towards equalizing opportunity and broadening the base for choosing candidates. Thus it has not been set up in order to favor those less privileged—who as we have just noted are *not* less privileged when compared with the situation of the vast majority—so that they can move



up within the consumer society. It is simply a mechanism to prevent us from losing good candidates, candidates called to carry out the mission the university has set for itself.

The same point should be made even more emphatically with regard to teachers. Although university professors constitute a body and in a body not all members carry out the same functions, certainly in a sound and well organized body there is no room for alien and counter-productive elements. That statement does not in any way entail dogmatism nor any attack on freedom to teach since commitment to structural change in the country does not predetermine what should be taught or how. The only thing ruled out are professors unwilling to commit themselves to the social function of the university in this country. People can fail to meet that commitment because they are not well enough trained technically, but they can also fail through lack of ethical commitment to their own social reality. Professors should be chosen with extreme care, precisely in order to grant them maximum freedom in their work and great responsibility in university activity. It is to be hoped that the university mystique will continue, a mystique in which ideals can spread since the university as a body has both the calling and the means to free itself from society's pressures, because it is not involved or need not be involved in society's oppressive mechanisms.

Students can be selected not to be a set-apart élite, but rather to be universally committed to the oppressed majority, and professors can be selected both for their technical competence and for their mystique of service. But these are not enough unless the university is really autonomous, and not simply in the sense of legal autonomy, although that is necessary. What is needed is real autonomy, independent self-sufficiency. Independent of what? The answer is easy: independent of whatever pressure the dominant society uses in order to domesticate the university. The implication is that the university should depend as little as possible on financing under the control of people who want either to maintain the prevailing situation or to strengthen it with minimal improvements. Unless the university resolves the issue of its funding sources in a structural way, the scope of its independence will be far from desirable. The most radical way to solve this problem structurally is to charge the beneficiaries the full cost of what has been spent on them. Such a suggestion scandalizes superficial demagogues. Why, however, should huge amounts of money be given away to students who constitute the most privileged one percent of the nation? Will they as a rule return the surplus value of their work to the nation? Can we consider it just that in less than a year most of them will recoup with interest everything they invested in their university education? University students should return not only everything advanced to them but even a part of what they will be earning later, which derives not only from their own ability but from the capability the university gave them. This is just as true for so-called national universities as it is for our own. We

cannot continue to bestow further privileges on the already privileged, which will in turn reinforce the system of privileges. The mechanism for resolving the problem may not be easy. How can those who currently do not have the means to pay be required to pay in advance with resources they will only later earn as a result of their university education? Certainly there is no easy, across-the-board solution, given dropouts and so forth. But [a solution] in principle might be that along with their diplomas, the newly trained professionals could each receive a statement detailing the real cost of their education and hence of what they owe the university. They would be morally obliged to gradually pay back to the extent [possible] as they began earning more because of their diplomas. The aim is not to make the university a profit-making institution, but simply to make it [a financially] independent institution that could really be devoted to its university mission and obligation.

In addition to this way of assuring real autonomy, we should consider another way: namely, working hard for the greatest independence from all those who favor the present system because it favors them. In our country, the system's ability to apply pressure beggars description. Its methods of pressure are more crude than those that Marcuse critiques in countries where the consumer society is in full swing, but they are no less real. Only a constantly refocused critical vigilance can prevent such pressures from undermining the university's resolve—whether these pressures cajole or threaten. I am not talking about failing to do what must be done out of fear and caution, but rather of more subtle temptations, which can turn university autonomy into a mere game that society can easily handle. Indeed society can simply regard criticism as proof that the system provides freedom, or have it as a "vaccine" immunizing it against any ideological structure that might challenge it. Only contact with the poor majority and with the poverty of the majority can be an effective fundamental for the university's independence from the social elitism prevailing in the university "milieu." Only if this critiquing becomes an efficacious awareness of the oppressed majority will it no longer be a kind of preventive medicine against change; only if this critiquing is impelled by real pressure from the oppressed will it become something authentic and truly efficacious.

Only on the basis of such real autonomy will the university be able to be a university in the sense outlined at the beginning of this lecture. Autonomy is not sought for any other purpose but to enable the university to be what it must be from an ethical standpoint here and now.

Whether the new mission of the university is fully carried out, however, will depend primarily on what it is prepared to do in its own proper sphere of activity. The university must embody and implement its professed dedication to changing social structures in its threefold functions of teaching, research, and social outreach.

It should do so especially in research for it is there that the independence and relevance of university endeavor is rooted. It is research that

will enable the university to know the situation of the country, what it needs and what means can address those needs. This is one of the points that reveals most clearly the historic character of universities. It is commonly said that poor universities cannot be devoted to research and that at best they are in a position to gather the results of research by others and pass it on to their own clientele. But one can ask: is not the national reality strictly an object for research? Cannot the national reality well researched provide essential guidelines for further research? Can institutions foreign to the country be more capable than a university committed to getting to know the national reality, what its requirements are, and the most apt ways to fulfill those requirements? It is impossible to move a university in the right direction without first determining what the national reality is, where it is going, the forces at work in it, what goals are attainable, and adequate means for achieving them. Hence research should be political and historical, not because it should be reduced to what is usually understood as politics and history, but because the political and the historical provide us with the framework needed for economics, technology, culture, and science. All these dimensions, and others as well, are part of what constitutes the national reality in its historic process, and it is out of that national reality that they must be interpreted.

If that is the case, the university should unite the whole thrust of its research around establishing and implementing what can be called a "national project" [*proyecto de nación*]. The term is intended to be understood not simply in a theoretical or idealist sense, but as a project which, along with its ethico-political dimension, necessarily entails investigation of the clearly structured aspects of how it is to be achieved. The political situation, the socio-economic situation and potential solutions (along the lines of agrarian reform, banking reform, tax reform, and so forth), the educational and cultural situation are all areas where the issues must be analyzed, criticized, and condemned when necessary, but they should also be taken up with a view to solutions. Together with the overall problem of the general direction the country should take, and an appropriate structure for it, there are the particular problems into which that overall project can be divided.

Unquestionably, therefore, research should have a political thrust to it, namely the same political thrust that the university itself has. That is why the university itself should take charge of research and not be at the mercy of demands made by others. Thus it would be a good idea to unite in their ultimate aim all research projects undertaken in the university. Isolated they might not seem to amount to much, but organized as an overall project, they could become quite important. It would then be possible to use research done for master's and doctor's theses, which ought not to be left entirely to the discretion of the students, but which should be made to fit in with the real overall interests of the country. If the university were to make a priority out of research work in this sense,

it would have a unique impact on society. And whether it was working could be verified by looking at the resources devoted to it, at the overall research plans, and at the results of current research. Other institutions can carry out partial research, but it is not likely that any can combine the conditions that the well conceived university can offer. Neither all professors nor all students are equally fit for this kind of work, but there is such a variety of specialization, ability, and resource-hours that taken all together they might produce unimaginable results. What is required is the right kind of leadership to organize and move things along in order to assure that resources are used properly.

Research understood in this fashion would make it possible to undertake a profound reform in teaching. That may seem exaggerated, but what is an apparent exaggeration turns out to be a great illuminating principle: what should be taught and what should be learned is the major subject matter of the national reality—what that reality is, as seen from the standpoint of economics, history, philosophy, literature, engineering, psychology, political science, and so forth. That does not mean that politics, psychology, or engineering need lose any of their true specialized character. But if such major disciplines do not contribute towards understanding the national reality better and transforming it, they do not deserve to be in the university, for such a university would be an intolerable luxury in a poor country. The university must radically reshape its teaching on the basis of what the national reality is, and be oriented to what that reality should become. Along with its activities, the teaching university should strive to create a new human being. But this new human being, this new professional person will only be new if his or her whole course of studies is completely re-worked. The newness will not necessarily be found in new techniques employed but rather in the way that such techniques are handled—all aimed at creating something new intellectually that the country really needs. This all requires that degree programs be carefully chosen, not on the basis of the claims made by society as it is, but on a rational calculation of the claims of the society to be established. It further requires that programs be restructured and that professors be re-educated, and of course it requires both greater productivity and greater quality on the part of all who work in the university. The reform of teaching is not primarily a problem of pedagogical methods but, far more serious, it is the revolutionary problem of understanding teaching from the standpoint of the national reality and in terms of radically changing the national reality. What each teacher in the university needs is not so much pedagogical methods *per se*, but a mastery of one's own discipline. From that mastery it is a short step to relate the discipline directly to the social structure and to the course of history. All subject matters do not allow this to the same extent, but that must be the thrust of them all and what unites them.

This is also where that other stepchild of university endeavor, *social outreach*, finds its rightful place. In our university neither research nor

social projection is what it should be, and that shows how far we are from what we claim we want to be. Social outreach should be understood in the strict sense as that part of university activity that reaches society directly, or more specifically and assuming the proper horizon of this university, what directly touches the vast oppressed majority in the way of "culture," or more understood generally, the university's direct impact on the social structure. Given the particular characteristics of this structure, social outreach requires an aggressive involvement in our divided and polarized national reality: not by simply preparing ever better analyses of what is wrong in the process, and not by simply letting the concrete cry of the people resonate through avenues that make their claims truly present in the university, but by becoming directly involved in the national reality.

Such social outreach should be understood primarily in terms of consciousness. Utilizing its own specific means, the university should try to be one of the major elements shaping collective consciousness. Something like collective consciousness already exists and is an important element in the activity of society as a whole. The university should utilize the power of knowledge in order to shape this collective consciousness; that is, if knowledge is understood in operational terms as transforming power and not as sheer uncritical repetition. If we could unmask their situation for the masses, make them aware of their rights and obligations in establishing a more just society, persuade them that they have power, provide them with an analysis of their reality and show them ways out of their present situation, that would all constitute a great deal of progress on the way towards national transformation. It is possible for the university to do all that if it carries out the needed research and makes use of popular means of communication. So-called "university extension" should not be conceived simply as bringing the university to certain groups that normally do not have access to it, but as a way of reaching the collective consciousness of the nation directly. There is no apparent ethical reason why the university should not have access to mass media (newspapers, radio, television) when such access is granted to private companies which are motivated by profit and gain. The irresponsible activities of others cannot annul the university's obligation to put itself at the service of the people and at the service of a popular project towards which all forces of proven good will should be summoned. The university should sow its seed over the fields of the nation and not only in cloistered gardens.

Of course this is a difficult task, one with an ideal, but it is not impossible, and hence it is obligatory. It will be attainable only if a university community which really proposes to do so is established. Such a university community will be conscious of its real possibilities and of its obligations towards society and will know how to consolidate the real strengths and the potentialities that are currently being neglected. This cannot be achieved through pressure from above, but must be achieved

through the ever richer contribution of people who are convinced and committed. Although there are numerous channels for serving others, that of the university provides an exceptional possibility. It is not the channel of action by the government or of political or state power, the channel of political parties, whether they are opposition or not, it is not the channel of popular organization, nor the channel of the church's mission, nor the channel of private enterprise. It is a different channel which has its own peculiar features, which it need not give up in seeking to wield effective power towards transforming the nation. Why not make the effort? Why not take advantage of its relative autonomy in order to widen the scope of national freedom? In the liberation process of Latin American peoples, the university cannot do everything but what it has to do is indispensable. If it fails in this endeavor it will have failed as a university and betrayed its historic mission.

### *The Christian Meaning of the University*

Legally the UCA does not depend on anything or anybody. It stands by itself. It does not depend on any church hierarchy, nor does it make obligatory any religious confession or even any kind of religiosity. It sets its own objectives in accordance with what it wants to do and not on any outside orders that might coerce it to follow any particular pattern. What does it mean then, to speak of Christian inspiration as our university has done many times? Can such Christian inspiration really help the university move forward instead of being a hindrance? What is this business of the Christian meaning of a university, which must first of all be a university, and which does not acknowledge any imposition by a religious confession?

Both the university and Christianity are realities in history. As obvious as it might be, that observation is significant when the consequences become apparent. When we inquire about the relationship between the university and Christianity we cannot proceed by way of fixed concepts, that is, by seeing whether the concept of university can mesh with that of Christianity. Such a procedure moves from reality to playing with fantasies. We have to inquire about the real possibilities of a specific university and the concrete way Christianity is understood here and now. It is not difficult to perceive the deep harmony between what has been proposed here as the aim of the university, and what Christianity seeks, if Christianity is understood out of the most vital reality of Latin America and is interpreted by a Latin American theology. The issues of how a First World university ought to be a university and how Christianity ought to affect it do not concern us here for the moment. Our concern is to show how Christianity can energize our university endeavor without impairing it in any way.

A university's Christianity cannot be measured in terms of doctrines defended, sacraments distributed, or piety practiced. Universities do not

exist for such things, and to be involved in them is a waste of time for a university. The university has its own structure and here and now it ought to have its own ends and its own very specific means. The important thing then is to show how its Christian inspiration can promote and energize those ends and means, even without imposing any religious obligation. The university can certainly ignore the old stereotypes that a Christian vision of humankind and reality are "unscientific" as well as those that seek to keep Christianity from having an impact on structure and history.

The Latin American vision of Christianity leads to an understanding of the historic process of salvation as a liberation of history. The notion is not that salvation history is limited to salvation within history, but certainly that its liberation is through salvation within history. This liberation is a process embracing the whole of the human being and the whole of history in pursuit of the freedom and fulfillment of all human beings. However, as a historic process it comes out of a particular situation: those who take a "scientific" approach to ongoing history will call that situation oppressive and dependent, and those who take a "theological" approach to history will call it structural and historic sin. Those who refuse to undertake an analysis of reality as it is, and who ignore the structural roots of this reality are deliberately closing their eyes for self-serving reasons, that may be obvious or concealed. Likewise, those who refuse to become engaged theologically and make the assessment that this reality merits on the basis of the sources of revelation, are shutting out the light of the gospel for self-serving reasons; they thereby refuse to follow the redeeming path that that light shows us in the midst of what is a reality of sin. A university like ours, precisely as a university, cannot forget the "here and now" situation in which it exists and from which it must separate itself in its striving for change. A university that claims to be of Christian inspiration, because of that very fact, cannot ignore that this situation is deservedly judged to be one of injustice, institutional violence, and structural sin. For different reasons and from different angles, the university and Christianity, understood in historic terms, here and now offer a common starting point and a common direction: injustice and sin should be abolished through a process of liberation.

Liberation has to do with both structures and persons, both the requirements of nature and options in history. By its very character the scientific analysis of reality tends to focus on structural evils and reform of structures. By its very nature the theological analysis of reality, without ignoring the structural character of evils and their solutions, focusses more on the relation between person and structure. The two viewpoints are complementary, and hence Christianity can and should offer to university endeavor a clear concern for the personal dimensions, because it is aware that mere change of structures does not thereby necessarily bring about a deep and total change in personal reality. To state the same point in more positive terms, we must seek simultaneously to

build a new human being and a new earth, although the newness of the new human being will not attain fulfillment realistically and collectively except through active participation in striving to build a new earth. However, the formal standpoint from which Christianity projects its liberating work is not that of power or domination but that of service. Certainly as university it shares in a certain power, but that is the power of hope, of affirmation in the future, and of struggle against evil. The university of Christian inspiration is not a place of security, selfish interests, honor or profit, and worldly splendor, but a place of sacrifice, personal commitment, and renunciation.

In our particular situation, given the present phase of the historic process of salvation and of liberation, both university work and Christian work are matters of struggle and combat. Long ago Saint Paul said the same thing in another context, but he certainly insisted that the struggle entailed by Christian activity in a world of sin was real. Christianity seeks the salvation of all and the liberation of all, but it does so primarily through the liberation of the oppressed. In the realm of persons, it seeks their liberation from oppression of any sort whether from within or without; it seeks in the realm of "social classes" to do away with classes, not by eliminating persons but by eliminating the oppressive role they play in belonging to a particular class. An oppressor class must be forced to cease being oppressive since that is the source of all kinds of injustice. Injustice must be combatted, not supported.

Correctly understood, Christianity defends and promotes a series of fundamental values which are essential to our current process in history and therefore very useful to a university endeavor committed to that process in history. In one fashion or another Christianity regards the poorest as both the redeemers of history and the privileged of the reign of God in opposition to the privileged of this world. Christianity struggles against those things that dehumanize, such as the yearning for wealth, honors, power, and the high regard of the powerful of this world; it strives to replace selfishness with love as the driving force in human life and in history and it is centered on the other, on commitment to others rather than in demands made on others for one's own benefit. Christianity seeks to serve rather than to be served; it seeks to do away with unjust inequalities; it asserts the transcendent value of human life, and the value of the person from the standpoint of God's son, and hence it upholds solidarity and kinship between all human beings; it makes us aware of the need for an ever greater future and thus unleashes the active hope of those who want to make a more just world, in which God can thereby become more fully manifested. Christianity regards the rejection of human beings and of human kinship as the radical rejection of God and, in that sense, as the rejection of the source of all reality and of all human actualization. Since all these values are not merely professions of ideals but fundamental demands that must be lived out and implemented, the university finds in its Christian inspiration an energizing principle that little needs to be spelled out in confessional terms.



A university inspired and shaped in all its activity by these values is a university of Christian inspiration, and it will be un-Christian or anti-Christian whenever it ignores or violates these values. This is not a matter of intentions but of verifiable deeds. If in its activity the university does not proceed by starting from our actual world as institutional sin, it is ignoring the real foundation for salvation history; if it does not struggle against structural evil, it is not in tune with the gospel. The university's Christian character cannot be measured by professions of faith, adherence to the hierarchy, or explicit teaching of religious topics—although in our countries a center for theological reflection and publication is very necessary—but by its concrete direction in history. The university is measured by which master it serves, fully aware that one cannot serve two masters, and that one of the masters one cannot serve is wealth, understood as a god opposed to the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

A university is a Christian university when its horizon is the people of the very poor who are demanding their liberation and struggling for it. [Thus, it is] a university whose fundamental commitment is to a change of both structures and persons with a view towards a growing solidarity; a university which is willing to engage in dangerous struggle on behalf of justice; a university whose inspiration for making ethical judgments of situations and solutions and for the means to use in moving from such situations to solutions is the inspiration of the gospel. It is also—some of us believe—the different university that our country needs.