CHAPTER TWELVE

CHRISTIANITY IN THE AGE OF ECUMENISM AND THE CRISIS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATION-STATES

12.1. The Social, Economic, and Political Background

The social, economic, and political problems of Latin America reached crisis proportions in the 1960s, causing civilian regimes to collapse and paving the way for military regimes:

In Brazil, Goulart was deposed in 1964, as Vargas had been in 1955; in Argentina, Perón, himself a dictator, was overthrown in 1955, and the military eventually assumed power (1966).¹ In Peru, the military prevented the populist Haya de la Torre from assuming office after the APRA election victory in 1962; a reformist military dictatorship followed in 1968.² In Ecuador, Velasco was removed from power in 1972 by a military regime. Bolivia does not quite fit in this pattern, for the ruling Revolutionary Nationalist movement was overthrown in 1964 by a succession of mostly military dictatorships which culminated in the repressive dictatorial regime of Colonel Hugo Banzer in 1971.³ From 1954 onwards Paraguay

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¹ In contrast to their Brazilian colleagues, most Argentine bishops assumed a pusillanimous and uncritical attitude towards the authorities. On this issue see Mignone, Iglesia y Dictadura as well as Prien, Argentinien. The Argentine journalist Horacio Verbitsky (see his 2005 book El silencio. De Paulo VI a Bergoglio: las relaciones secretas de la Iglesia con la ESMA) calls attention to the close relationship between the Catholic hierarchy and the high command of the Argentine armed forces, which bordered on complicity. In his opinion, the Argentine hierarchy was the most conservative of South America, and the archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Caggiano, played a crucial role in asserting the counter-revolutionary doctrine imported from France; see Mota, “El silencio”: Nuevo Siglo 5/10 (October 2005), 16.


³ See Klaiber, Iglesia, dictaduras y democracia, chapter 7, 201–232: “Bolivia (1952–1989),” which bears the subtitle “strikes, coups, and elections.” On the reactionary policies of the
stood under the dictatorial rule of Alfredo Stroessner, which stood out not only on account of its length and brutality, but also because of its reliance on the *caudillo* system, which had been superseded elsewhere. In the Dominican Republic, the dictator *Generalísimo* Trujillo, who had held his country in a stranglehold for 31 years, was assassinated in 1961. A U.S. intervention in 1965 prevented a democratic development along leftist lines. In Uruguay, army generals deposed president Juan Maria Bordaberry in 1973, having already pulled the strings in the background since 1971. Cuba does not fit in this pattern since the military dictator Fulgencio Batista was overthrown by a leftist revolutionary movement under Fidel Castro at the end of 1959.

With the exception of Costa Rica, the republics of Central America were dominated by military dictatorships with a democratic façade, which traditionally represented the interests of the oligarchy and enjoyed the sympathy and support of the United States because of their anti-communism, something which is particularly true for the family dictatorship of the Somozas in Nicaragua, who ruled for decades. In Panama, General Omar Torrijos catapulted himself to power in 1972 through a coup. In Nicaragua, the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza was toppled in 1978 by the Marxist-inspired Sandinista guerrilla movement, in a development highly unusual for that period. The United States soon began a proxy war against the Sandinista regime from Honduran soil. In Chiapas, an insurrection of neo-Zapatists against the policies of the corrupt government of

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4 See Klaiber, *Iglesia, dictaduras y democracia*, chapter 5, 153–181: “Paraguay (1954–1989),” which is described as “the longest dictatorship”. Like Bolivia, the country suffered enormously under the Chaco War (1932–1935), stoked up by British (Royal Dutch) and American (Standard Oil) oil interests. Up to 50,000 Bolivians, most of them Indians, lost their lives in this conflict. The war marks a deep caesura in the public life of Paraguay and in its church life. The wholesale recruitment of underprivileged rural men into the armed forces unsettled the social order, led to the dissolution of the liberal state, and came to unfortunate fruition in 1936 in the fascist-tainted revolution of colonel Rafael Franco. In Paraguay the indigenous Guaraní language has managed to survive, assuming the character of a national language along with Spanish. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Quechua language, which is spoken by thirteen million Indians in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, northern Chile, Argentina, and southern Colombia, was recognized as the official national language together with Spanish in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, signaling a partial triumph over colonialism, although the practical implementation of this resolution is still leaves much to be desired.

5 On the attitude assumed by the churches and Christian organizations of the United States see Prien, *Der Einfluß Nordamerikas*, 101 ff.