

Vol. 24, No. 6 & No.7
Double Issue
15th June - 15th July

SEDOS

bulletin
1992

SEDOS Research Seminar, May 1992

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SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

This special issue of SEDOS Bulletin contains the texts of the conferences given at the SEDOS Research Seminar held at the Villa Cavalletti Conference Centre, Frascati-Grottaferrata, outside Rome from May 19-23, 1992.

The arrival of Europeans five centuries ago in what is now known as Latin America suggested the theme for this year's seminar. We chose three quotations referring to the event as background to the choice of theme.

"The Church wishes to approach the celebration of this centenary with the humility of truth, looking only at the truth in order to give thanks to God for successes, and learning from mistakes in order to be renewed in its approach to the future". *Pope John Paul II.*

"For the *Indios* the commemoration of the so-called 'discovery' cannot be either a motive for rejoicing or feasting. Rather, for them it represents a centuries long tragedy, a serfdom which has already lasted for 500 years, a continual undermining of their life, their values and their culture, a consciousness of being continually marginalized and humiliated." *Mons. Leonidas Proaño, Bishop of the Indios, Riobamba, Ecuador.*

"Above all the Fifth Centenary directs the attention of society and the Church towards settling the, as yet, outstanding account with the indigenous peoples and the Afro-American population. An authentic option for the poor should be made

in favour of these people who are historically the flagellated Christs of the Americas. They represent that hidden world which must be discovered in its whole potentiality, so that a truly new society may come into being, a unique and whole New World." *Carlos Pape, Mission Secretary to the S.V.D. Generalate, Rome*

We were greatly privileged to have Maria Clara Bingemer and Gustavo Gutierrez as our guest speakers. The overflow attendance at the seminar expressed its enthusiastic appreciation of the speakers in no uncertain manner, both in the Conference hall and in the written assessments of the seminar. We, in the SEDOS Secretariat, wish to express, in writing, our deep gratitude to both for their willingness to accept our invitation to speak at the seminar.

The personal encounter with Gustavo and Maria Clara was a memorable experience and a sign of hope from the Latin American Church for all of us. It helped us to approach the centenary with 'the humility of truth' as Pope John Paul prayed. May it also help us 'to look at the truth in order to give thanks for successes and to learn from mistakes in order to be renewed in our approach to the future'!

In editing the tapes of the conferences we have tried to remain faithful to the spontaneity of the speakers. There are many insights scattered throughout the texts. They throw light on key aspects of the contemporary situation in Latin America. What does preferential option for the poor really mean? What is the meaning of martyrdom? Where do Basic Christian

Communities stand today and what is the situation regarding theology of liberation? These are just examples of the very many topical issues addressed by

the speakers. Participants at the seminar were enthusiastic about what they heard. We hope our readers too, will find this report inspiring.

SEMINAR SPEAKERS

MARIA CLARA BINGEMER is Brazilian. She is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and Regional Coordinator of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. She is married and lives with her husband and their three children in Rio de Janeiro. Maria Clara has worked for many years with a Small Christian Community in a Rio *favella*. She is co-author, with Ivonne Gebara of *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the poor*.

GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ is Peruvian. He is Professor of Theology at the Catholic University in Lima. A diocesan priest and pastor, he lives and works with the poor of Rimac. He is the author of many books, among them *On Job, We Drink from Our Own Wells*, *The God of Life*. A 15th Anniversary Edition of his, *A Theology of Liberation*, (Orbis), to which he contributed a new introduction, reached its fourth printing in 1991.

I. THE QUINCENTENARY

Gustavo Gutierrez

The Quincentenary is a very emotional, because complex, historical occasion. Several countries of Latin America are involved, together with Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, Great Britain, Germany and Italy. It is emotional too because of the involvement of the Gospel with the painful events of the 16th century. Many people try to forget the difficulties and present a very triumphalistic view of this evangelisation. It is emotional specially for many Latin Americans because they say they have nothing to celebrate, nothing to recall; for them it is simply a pragmatic occurrence.

The question is very complicated because our continent changed radically after the arrival of the Europeans. It seems to me that the Quincentenary can be a good opportunity to evaluate our history; to evaluate these five centuries from the perspective of our society today, made up of the different Latin American nations; to evaluate the presence of the gospel and the Church in our continent. I know that to speak of evaluation may seem to be abstract, but it is an occasion for those of us who live in Latin America to rethink our history.

LATIN AMERICAN IDENTITY

There are many names for what we now call Latin America. First it was called the New World as distinct from the Old World. It was called the Indies because of a geographical mistake, so we are called Indians. After that we were called Latin America, but this is an expression used to distinguish us from the United States, so, not Anglo-American, but Latin American. Another name used was Hispanic-America, from

the Spaniards, but this is not accurate because many other cultures and races contributed to our identity. We have also been called Ibero-America, which is a little better. At one time, a few decades ago, the name Indo-America was used. Today some speak of us as Amerindians. If you have so many names, it means you are not sure of your identity that none of the names is really good.

I will use the title, "Latin America," but it is not a true description; the continent has large numbers of African-Americans and Latin-Africans. It is all so strange; but it is very important for us Latin Americans to take our history seriously, to reflect on it. In addition, as Christians, we must reflect on the presence of the gospel in our country. The gospel did indeed come with the Conquistadores in the 16th century, but the social, historical price was very high, the cost of the first evangelisation very great.

Early missionaries used one word to describe the first decades - destruction. This word comes not only from Las Casas, but, even before him, from the first missionaries; they spoke of the destruction of persons, cultures and nations.

The demographic collapse of Latin America is one expression of this destruction. It is difficult to get exact estimates of the population before Columbus. Some writers say 13 million, others 80 to 100 million. It is certain, however, that in 1570 there were only 9 million. The greater figure is disputed, but even recent Spanish historians now accept what they refused to accept for centuries, namely that 50 to 60 million people died. Modern census figures give us the present situation. It is clear

that there was a demographic collapse in the first decades of the conquest.

The destruction was not only of persons but of whole cultures. Some have disappeared altogether, for example, the Taino people who lived in La Española, (today's Dominican Republic) Haiti and Puerto Rico. There are now no Taino people, only some words from their culture have survived. The strongest cultures have survived - examples are the Azteca or Quechua in my country, Peru but many cultures have disappeared completely. The best description of what happened is simply destruction. It was a very traumatic experience for the Indian population; it is still alive in their memory today. We need to face this fact.

INDIAN IDENTITY

When the first Europeans (Spaniards and Portuguese) arrived in Latin America they quickly asked the question: who are the Indians?

A First Perspective

Theologically speaking, one of the first to ask and try to answer this question was John Major, a Scottish professor of theology in Paris, a very good and important theologian. He asked because he was looking for reasons to justify the Europeans' presence in the Indies and their occupation of Indian land. He gave several reasons, one of which is very relevant for us. Using a distinction formulated by Aristotle, he claimed that there are two kinds of human beings: those born serfs and those born masters. The Indians are born serfs and the Europeans are born masters, and since the Indians are serfs they are inferior from the human point of view. They are not totally conscious of their human dignity, so they need guidance in order to live in a human way. This guidance is provided by their masters. So Indians need Europeans in order to be truly human beings.

This was a very clear justification for the presence of Europeans. It was the first answer, given in 1508. John

Major was the first, but not the only one, to think like this. Later Spanish theologians repeated the same argument. 40 years later, the famous philosopher-theologian Ximenes de Sepulveda, the great adversary of Bartolomeo de Las Casas, maintained that the Indians needed Europeans in order to be full human beings. But another answer came from the missionaries, especially the Dominicans: the Indians are free persons because every person is born free, and they are persons equal to others in dignity. They are different but equal.

The first answer justified war in order to evangelise, because the people were so inferior they did not know what was necessary for them. De Sepulveda said later that they are like children, or women, having no awareness of their own situation or of what they need. So they need guidance; they must submit to Europeans who will give them the elements of civilisation and the gospel. There was much discussion in the 16th century on whether wars could be justified in order to evangelise. Many theologians, even missionaries, held that wars were necessary in order to announce the gospel. Domination was also justified, because the Indians were so inferior that they were not really the private owners of their lands. Indian lands were a kind of no man's land, thus, the presence of Europeans was fully justified

A Second Perspective

The second perspective led to quite different opinions. If the Indians were free and equal in dignity, as Las Casas, Francisco de Victoria and others affirmed, they were owners of their lands and had legitimate rights to them. Las Casas and many Dominicans, held that Europeans were obliged to make restitution for what was taken from the Indians. This is a very old notion in Christian moral theology; after a robbery, restitution is a duty. Restitution was necessary because Europeans had no right to take Indian property and land. Las Casas went even further. The Indians were free and equal to Europeans; only with the consent of the Indians could Europeans remain. This

was a democratic notion of consent. Europeans never had this consent; so, according to Las Casas, so their presence was illegitimate. Thus, the European and other armies should leave; only missionaries could stay, and even they, without exercising violence. Evangelisation must be through dialogue and persuasion, not war. Two very different answers - depending on the premises: Indians are serfs or free; they are inferior or equal.

I have a great appreciation of John Major and De Sepulveda because they spoke frankly. Today many think in the same way, but will not admit it openly because this position is no longer respectable. In the same way, for women, many men are convinced they are superior to women, but do not say it openly. They keep silent, but the idea remains.

These first answers were arrived at from an anthropological point of view; they answered the question arrived at from a human perspective: who is the Indian?

The Christian Perspective

There is also another perspective, the Christian one. Here also there were two answers. For some, the Indians were not born inferior but became inferior by the way they lived and by their lack of education. They were infidels, pagans, non-Christians. The first duty was to announce the gospel to them, because in the theology of that time if they died without baptism they would go to hell. Outside the Church there was no salvation - a very important point in the 16th century theology of salvation.

The other answer is surprising, and comes only from Las Casas: the Indians are poor in the gospel sense (Mt. 25). Certainly for the missionary Las Casas, the Indians were non-Christians, but prior to that they were poor and oppressed by the Europeans. The consequences are very different. If you say the Indians are poor, then Jesus Christ is present in them; Christians

must find Jesus Christ in this "inferior" people. A first duty is to defend them and their rights. Their first right is to life, and the second to freedom. Wars are against life; domination is against freedom. If Indians are poor, we must defend these two rights, to life and to freedom. This is the central point of Las Casas' defence of the Indians.

NON-INDIAN IDENTITY

Las Casas understood that blacks too had the same claim. At first, like everybody else, he had accepted black slavery, but 30 years later, in 1550, he wrote that he had made a great mistake because the rights of blacks were exactly the same as those of the Indians. Paradoxically, Las Casas was the first person to speak of the injustice of black slavery.

In his last years he went even further. White people too can be poor, he maintained, and so he defended some Spaniards in Mexico. The evangelical notion of the poor is not restricted to one nation. For Las Casas, life comes first. A live infidel is better than a dead Christian. The alternatives are: Christian or non-Christian, alive or dead. Life is more important; you cannot accept death in order to baptise and convert. For Las Casas, the Indian is free and equal, different from Europeans but equal in dignity and poor; for Sepulveda Indians are basically serfs and infidels.

Francisco de Victoria, an important theologian who supported the opinions of Las Casas, held that Indians were free and equal, but infidels. The idea of the Indians as poor is not found in de Victoria; he wrote from a distance, whereas Las Casas lived with them. Las Casas is often presented as a good missionary who put in practice the ideas coming from European theologians like Francisco Victoria, De Soto and others. This is absolutely false. The theology of Las Casas is very different from the academic theology of Salamanca, which was very good, but abstract and not in

touch with the reality of Latin America. There were points of contact, but the two theologies are different.

The great theologians like John Major, for example - had no experience of the Indians. The same is true today; some experts write in ignorance about Latin America. Las Casas was not a lone figure. There were others, like Alonso de la Vera Cruz in Mexico, who were missionaries among the Indians, and whose reflection came from their experience.

THE SITUATION TODAY

This 16th century question of "who are the Indians?" is still present today, but in different terms. In the 16th century the poor were basically the Indians but little by little in the second part of the century the poor were also the blacks. It is false to speak of Latin America as an Indian continent. It was so once, but no longer; blacks now equal Indians. It is difficult to arrive at the exact number, but today there are between 60 and 70 million blacks and the same number of Indians. Mestizos too are very numerous; they are more than mulattos, but neither of these are, strictly speaking, Indian people. Europeans have been present since the 16th century. The situation is very complex today.

In general, it is possible to find any race in considerable proportions in Latin America today - Europeans, Indians, blacks, Mestizos, Mulattos, Asians, Caribs, and others. Here in Europe there is a mixture of races, but not in large numbers; the non-Europeans are minorities. 70 million blacks in Latin America cannot be called a minority. The notion of a so-called minority is a North American one. blacks, Asians and Hispanics may be minorities in the U.S. but they are the majority of humankind.

The notion of the poor is very important. First applied to Indians, then to blacks by Las Casas, it is now a much larger and ever-present reality. It includes all peoples: Indians, Mestizos, blacks, mulattos, Asians. The

face of our continent was radically changed after the arrival of the Europeans and this change has continued for five centuries. Claiming that this continent is Indian today would mean that Blacks in Latin America have no rights. In my own case as a Mestizo, as I am neither Indian nor white, I would have no place.

The reality of this cultural complexity and diversity must be accepted. That is one of the reasons why we rejected one expression in the first preparatory document for the Santo Domingo Meeting. It spoke of "Latin American culture". There is no single Latin American culture; there is a plurality of cultures. The theme for Santo Domingo is the *Evangelisation of Culture*. But in our case there are many different cultures. There are even different Indian cultures; Aztecas are not the same as Quechuas. All are important and relevant.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

What are the lessons to be learned from this situation and from history? How do we evaluate the past 500 years?

The first lesson: we must see the complexity and the traumatic experience of the situation in the 16th century. Pope John Paul II said that we must look at the truth. The truth is the destruction of many people and the destruction of many cultures; we cannot avoid this truth if we are to be honest. At the same time, we must try to understand the great changes that took place through the centuries.

The second lesson: while we must be very concerned about the unjust deaths in the 16th century, we must be more concerned about the present death of the poor in Peru and in - Latin America. Today "the poor are dying before their time," to use the expression of the first missionaries. This is our main concern. There is a danger of limiting the quincentenary to the 16th century. When I speak of evaluation I have in mind not an evaluation of the facts of 500 years ago, but an evaluation of the last 500 years including

today. Let us not evaluate only the history of the past, we must include the present. A real risk in the United States and Europe is to focus on the 16th century, underline the place of Indians at that time, and forget the place of the poor in Latin America today.

The third lesson: in their discussion Las Casas told John Major that if he were Indian his perspective would be different. This is still true. If we were Indians we would see things differently. If we were poor, our point of view would be very different. This is important methodologically: try to take the point of view of the other, to recognise the otherness of people. In order to announce the Gospel, this is of capital importance. We cannot announce the gospel from our own perspective. We must try to understand the life of the poor, of Indians and of blacks.

In the 16th century discussions, only Spain raised this question about the nature of Indians; it was never mentioned in Portugal or Britain. At one point during the debate the most important reason for going to war against and dominating the Indians was the Aztec custom of offering human sacrifices. The Spaniards' main justification for dominating the Indians was to save the victims of these sacrifices. Las Casas refused to accept this argument and put forward his explanation or interpretation of human sacrifices. They were a scandal to Europeans but they had a different meaning for the Aztecs. Las Casas explained that we have the duty to offer to God our best possessions. The Indian people saw human life as the highest good they could offer him. They were objectively wrong, but they were offering the most precious thing they had. It was an effort to understand the reality from within the point of view of the other. Las Casas was a defender of what we call religious freedom today.

We cannot impose our view, not even the gospel. The gospel demands free persons; only through free acceptance is Christian faith possible. The objection was put to Las Casas: if Indians refused faith, they would go to hell.

Las Casas had the same theology as his contemporaries that outside the Church there was no salvation. He admitted he had no theological answer, but he was sure from his pastoral experience they were not going to hell. He believed in the goodness of God, who would provide for their salvation through other ways. For us, we are Christian in our way. For others, we do not know, but we cannot say "no salvation for Indians."

For centuries this theology was not at the centre of missionary work. We see things differently now. The change came only with Vatican II following much serious debate. The recognition of otherness is very important.

A final lesson: in the 16th century John Major and Sepulveda spoke frankly of the inferiority of other people. Today many people think as they did, but do not express it. We need to beware of this mentality, widespread in many sectors of the Church. For example, during the preparation of the bishops' conference of Medellin in 1968, the bishops drafted an outline and sent it to Rome. The document had three sections:

1. look at the social reality;
2. reflect theologically on it;
3. make some pastoral proposals.

The reply from Rome was that it was a good outline. The bishops should try to get some Latin American social scientists to speak of the social and economic realities in Latin America; and Rome would send a theological expert to help with the reflection. The mentality of superiority was clearly shown in this reply.

When Rome sees theological studies from Latin America, it seems as if an attempt is made to relate them to some European theological position, especially German. Why is it necessary to relate to Europe? The same may be asked with regard to theological studies from Africa and Asia. In recent years new theology has been developing outside the classical centres of Europe - in Africa, Latin America and Asia. This is the first time for centuries that this has happened. But since theology is the

reflection of a Christian community about their Christian faith and life, why should it be otherwise?

QUESTIONS

Q. *What is the real situation of blacks in Latin America?*

A. It is difficult to have exact figures about the Black population of Latin America. Indians are supposed to be 40 to 50 million and blacks 80 to 100 million. In my experience of eight years in Columbia, I think the situation of blacks is worse than that of Indians. Indians are more recognised; they identify with their own culture and history. From the Church point of view, the Pope has often spoken out in defence of Indian culture; but never, as far as I know, has he done so in Latin America in defence of Afro-American culture. In the US he did so, but not in Latin America.

It would seem that what comes from Rome is what goes to Rome; and so we must ask whether the Latin American Church is sufficiently aware of this problem. Two years ago, for the first time, the bishops of Afro-American areas tried to meet, in Bahia, Salvador, but failed; then in Rio de Janeiro, and in Bogotá, but failed again. So far they have not been able to meet and discuss this issue. The Afro-Church in Latin America is neglected compared to the Indian church.

Q. *Are blacks victims of racism in Latin America?*

A. In Latin America we live many social lies. An example is that we have no racism. This is not true. We have no racist laws, but we have racist customs. It is impossible to find blacks in important positions. Actual numbers are difficult to find, because it is difficult to know where racial lines are drawn. The condition of blacks varies according to the country and the proportion of blacks in the population, and the consequent interest in their situation. In the 16th and 17th centuries blacks were

closer to whites than to Indians, because both were minorities; Indians were in the majority everywhere. Now this has changed.

The Latin American Church has not been sufficiently sensitive to the problems of the blacks. In preparing for the Quincentenary the Church needs to take their situation seriously. The Puebla document has a beautiful text about the faces of the poor. In the first version, Indians and blacks were mentioned together as the first faces of the poor, but the later approved text put old people and young children before these two. It is also necessary to distinguish between different types of Indians. In the Latin American Church neither Indians nor blacks get much attention.

Q. *Did Portuguese theologians take any interest in this question?*

A. I am not aware of any great theologians in Portugal discussing the question. Chronologically, the Spaniards were first; Las Casas and others, like Thomas Mercado and Alvernós, spoke about black slavery in 1570. Missionary theologians accepted black slavery in general and preached moderation. A Capuchin spoke quite clearly in the 17th century about blacks. It was the same with Peter Claver; he never preached against black slavery even though he gave his life to help the slaves. His was another perspective and this does not take from his sanctity. The first to speak against black slavery were the Spaniards. Others, including important Jesuit theologians, tried to justify slavery - the system, but not the oppression.

Q. *What were the sources of Las Casas' originality? He was there with the Indians but were there any other reasons?*

A. Las Casas was not original in his theology at the beginning; he accepted the theology and mentality of his time. But little by little, in defending the Indians he came to his theological position. To defend them against

oppression, he insisted on their freedom and equality. Wars were not justifiable. His theology came from his missionary practice. He was first a diocesan priest, then a Dominican; he was self-taught in theology; he read Aquinas and the great theologians, but was never in a school of theology. He read much but it was his experience that shaped his theology. He is the most articulate and best known theologian, but not the only one. Many bishops, missionaries and theologians were of the same mind. For example, the Augustinian, Alonso de la Vera Cruz, a bishop in Mexico and a disciple of de Victoria was a great theologian and close to Las Casas.

Las Casas, as a Dominican was very Thomist. It is simply not right to speak of him as the first liberation theologian. Liberation theology is a modern reality. It is arrogant to point to Las Casas as a genius because he happened to say what we are saying today. Las Casas was a Christian, he read the gospel, and was a good theologian because of his practical experience.

Q. Is Las Casas the main source of our appreciation of the poor since Vatican II? How about other sources, e.g. Mt 25, Lercaro, John XXIII?

A. Las Casas is not the only source. Twenty years ago his influence was not great. Today we are aware of the importance of the perspective of the poor as central, and of the liberation of oppressed people. But if this is underlined as something totally new; if the perspective of the poor is new; if liberation is new, it seems strange that it took so many centuries to discover it as a central point of the Christian gospel. I felt it must have been there always as a central point. I wanted to study history and that was the beginning of my interest in Las Casas. His categories are not the same as ours, but he helps us to see and understand the centrality of the poor. The sources of this theology are in the riches of Christian tradition. Las Casas is one who recognized the sources.

II. PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

One risk about the Quincentenary is to remain fixed on the events of the 16th century. This is too narrow an approach; we need a larger view, including all the 500 years up to the present time. In this context, I want to focus on the well-known preferential option for the poor, because this option is the most important development in recent times in the Latin American Church; it is also a very good contribution to the universal Church.

I would like to reflect on its meaning lest it remain only a beautiful thought, a wish to be identified with the least of the members of our society. Preferential option for the poor is much more than that; we need to underline some other aspects of this option.

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

Vatican II was about the Church and its mission. A basic question is still: What is the identity of the Church? This comes before questions about the presence of the Church in the world, dialogue with the world, service to the world (*Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 40, 45). In recent years fears have been expressed that perhaps some members of the Church have forgotten the real meaning of the Church. When we say that we must learn from the world, we can forget, perhaps, that we have a message to convey to the world. In recent years we have had global presentations of the Church through public interviews, published as books. Examples are those of Cardinal Ratzinger and Cardinal Koenig (and there are others, like that of de Lubac). In some of these, we see great concern expressed about the risk, the danger, of losing the meaning and identity of the Church.

The identity of the Church, however, is not only a question of its institutional aspects. It is much wider. It is a question of the Church's identity as a whole community and our place within it. I wish to present the preferential option for the poor in this context, as a way of understanding the identity of the Church today. Much more than just being committed to the poor (which is also central), it is a way to understand and affirm the very identity of the Church.

It is good to recall an idea of Karl Rahner, one of the greatest theologians of this century and one of the most influential in Vatican Council II. About 15 years after the Council, he wrote an article evaluating the situation of the Church. His central thesis was that at the Council the Church, for the first time, became fully conscious of its true universality. He distinguished three periods in the history of the Church:

- 1 - from Jesus to Paul; a very short period, of Jewish milieu and culture;
- 2 - from Paul to Vatican II - not so short!; in this period the cultural milieu was that of the western world;
- 3 - from Vatican II onwards; a totally new, universal Church, open to other cultural and historical milieux.

This very interesting insight is something new, going beyond the text of Vatican II. While we reflect on the preferential option for the poor it is important to keep in mind these two points: the identity of the Church, and the universal perspective.

POPE JOHN XXIII

In order to understand the meaning of preferential option for the poor, we

must go back to Pope John XXIII. An Italian historian, Alberigo, has written that in Pope John's writings there is an invitation to work for the future, not the past, of the Church.

It is not difficult to find three great insights in the speeches of Pope John.

Openness to the World

Concretely in Vatican II, this was openness to the modern world. A gap had developed between the western world with its science and technology, its industrial and political revolutions, and the Church. A crucial point was the question of freedom - not only religious freedom. Pope John insisted we must be open to the values of the world - an attitude which was very strongly present in Vatican II. The Council was open to the world, not just in *Gaudium et Spes*, but throughout. A concrete example of this is the description of the modern world in the long introduction to *Gaudium et Spes* (one of the most important writers involved in this was Charles Moeller). Notice that the "modern world" was there, but the poor were not present.

The Christian World

The second insight was the Church's presence in another world - the Christian world. The Church must be present with the other churches in the Christian world, hence the thrust in favour of ecumenism. One expression of this was the presence of observers from other churches at the Council, some of them well-known theologians like Karl Barth. The modern world was the world of the majority of the members of the Council. The bishops' conferences and the important theologians all came mostly from this modern world. But also important was the Christian world; this led to their dialogue with other Christians. The Council went further still and spoke of the religious world, not merely the Christian world.

The World of the Poor

A third insight was presented by Pope John in a speech shortly before

the Council. He introduced it with the words *Un altro punto luminoso*, which, in his literary style, indicates a very important point. He insisted that in the face of underdeveloped countries (poverty in the world), the Church *is* and *must be* the church of everybody and especially the Church of the poor. Here we have the idea of the "Church of the poor" expressed for the first time. The idea, of course, is in the Bible, but this is the first time we find this expression as such. Notice the context: the Church of everyone, especially of the poor, in these underdeveloped countries. This idea, however, did not emerge as much as the first two in the Council. Pastorally and theologically the Church was ready to be open to the world and to ecumenism, but not so ready for interest in the poor.

VATICAN II

For decades before Vatican II poverty was seen as a social reality, but there was no deep theological reflection on it. However, in the last two days of the first session, two very important interventions were made on openness to the world - one by Cardinal Montini, the other by Cardinal Suenens. It was here that Cardinal Suenens made the distinction between the Church *ad intra* and *ad extra*. A third very important intervention was made by Cardinal Lercaro, archbishop of Bologna; the full text is available, published by Alberigo.

Lercaro stressed that the announcement of the gospel to the poor must be THE theme of the Council, not just one among others. The other themes must be subject to this basic, central one. It was a beautiful insight, perhaps too good to be true. The interventions of Suenens and Montini were closer to the reality of the time and to the mentality of people. Even the bishops and the few theologians from the Third world did not fully understand. Nor did I; (I was one of the Third World theologians.) During the following three sessions of the Council we had a very active group working in the Belgian College on this question of the poor

and poverty.

This perspective, however, is only barely present in the documents of Vatican II. You find it, for example, in *Lumen Gentium* n. 8 - the Church, like her Founder, must bring good news to the poor - and again, above all, in *Ad Gentes* nn. 1-5, a most important text of the Council. Written mostly by Congar, it describes the missions within the Trinity and the mission of Church deriving from this.

The Church in history must walk in poverty. The situation of the Council and its attitude, are understandable; but let us take an imaginative leap and try to picture what might have happened if preaching to the poor had been the main theme, the central point of Vatican II! It would have been a very different council, but the insight had not then matured. Concluding this first point, I want to quote another significant statement from Pope John XXIII.

Our task today is how to be a Church that can say "Your Kingdom Come." - Say it truly, and mean it.

MEDELLIN AND PUEBLA

The bishops' conference took place in Medellín in 1968, three years after the end of the Council. In Medellín, the question of openness to the modern world was not a significant point of discussion; strictly speaking, the modern world is present in Latin America only in universities, in intellectual milieus, and is only a minority. Neither was openness to the Christian world and to ecumenical dialogue significantly present. It was there, but not as strongly as in Vatican II, because the vast majority of Latin American people are Catholic. But the third point, barely present in Vatican II, was taken seriously by Medellín. How can we be present in the world of poverty through commitment and solidarity? How can we announce the Gospel to the poor and work for liberation? The main themes of Medellín come from this perspective. Lercaro's intervention in Vatican II was fully present in Medellín.

It is important to recognise this simple fact. Medellín is not just the result of some Latin American bishops or theologians working together. It is deeply rooted in the insights of the Pope and the Council; but it goes beyond them. The group working on this question during the Council had prepared the way. Medellín, therefore, is not a surprise, but the result of a process; we are conscious of our roots.

In the last analysis, the idea of the Church of the poor came from the centre of the Church itself, from the magisterium of the Holy Father, Pope John XXIII. Of course we developed this insight from our own particular perspective, with some originality.

It seems to me that in Medellín the Latin American Church tried to answer the question about the identity of the Church discussed in Vatican II. How to be Church? How to say truly, "Your Kingdom Come." - Say it truly, and mean it? In Medellín we came to a kind of answer: the preferential option for the poor.

The expression itself is not present in Medellín; it appeared between Medellín and Puebla. However, the idea is there, and also the individual terms: poor, option, preference. It is quite clear in Puebla. Normally ideas do not surface for the first time in a council or in bishops' conferences; they are already present in theology and Church consciousness. It would be useful to take the phrase "preferential option for the poor" word by word.

THE POOR

In Medellín, in Puebla and in our experience of the Church in Latin America, poor means the real poor. The option for the poor is for the real poor. We Christians love to call them the materially poor because we have a Greek mentality. (We Catholics may be the last Greeks in history!)

The Bible speaks of real, concrete poverty. Poverty is indeed a social, economic and political reality, but in the final analysis poverty is death. It

is physical death due to hunger, illness, oppression. It is also cultural death. When the members of a culture or race are not respected in their human rights, we are killing them; when we do not recognise the full human rights of women we are killing them. Poverty means death - physical and cultural. This is the ultimate meaning of poverty.

The expression of the 16th century missionaries - 'the Indians are dying before their time' - is still true today. The poor are dying before their time; they are dying an unjust and early death. This is poverty. One consequence of this reality is that as Christians we have to announce the gospel of life to people dying an early and unjust death. There is a basic contradiction between the central point of our Christian message and the social reality of the poor. For this reason, poverty is not just a problem requiring dedication in our free time.

One difficulty Vatican II had in understanding the challenge coming from poverty was precisely this: in the mentality of many bishops and theologians poverty is a social question. The origin of the Justice and Peace Commission in Rome, following the Council, would seem to be the idea that in order to deal with poverty we must set up a commission. This commission has done very good work in the Church in recent years. The problem is that poverty was not seen as a challenge to the *whole* Church, but only the Church's social dimension. But this left the very being of the Church outside the challenge.

Challenge for the Whole Church

In Medellín, poverty is a radical and global challenge for the whole Church, in its very nature. Everything must change in the Church in the face of poverty. Remember Pope John: in underdeveloped countries the Church is and must be the Church of everybody - especially the Church of the poor. In this sentence we have a deep theological insight: the Church realizes that poverty is central to our awareness of

ourselves as Church and to our understanding of Church.

Vatican II was a great council - Medellín would have been impossible without it - but it was not ready for this understanding of poverty. Poverty means death; this is contrary to the will of God, which is life. The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of life - not only material, spiritual or religious life, but the fullness of all life. The Bible often describes people eating and walking - the basic expressions of life, of living persons. The great parables to explain the Kingdom are about banquets. When we speak of the Kingdom of God, of life, we use material life as the symbol of the whole of life, as in the Eucharist.

The Non-significant

How do we understand the condition of the poor? We do not have a good definition of it. To be poor is a complex reality; it means many deprivations, but not only deprivations. To be poor is a way to make friends, to pray, to reflect, to speak, to have possibilities; it is a way to be human. A good approach to understanding the poor is to describe them as "non-significant persons", not relevant in our society, nor in our churches, not important persons.

I attended the funeral of Bishop Romero during which forty persons were killed, but we do not know their names because they were poor. We know the names of priests and religious who were killed, but the poor are anonymous, nameless. We know Romero; he was not insignificant. The poor are insignificant, anonymous, nameless. Personally I am not poor, though my family background and my cousins are poor. I am a priest and in my free time a theologian, but I am not insignificant. I am committed to the poor, but I am not poor.

Poverty has indeed its social and economic dimension, but there is more - the experience of being insignificant. Many work for the poor in Latin America; but we seldom know the names of laity who are poor, especially women.

We say God prefers the poor. This presence of God among the poor is one way of establishing equality; through this presence the poor become significant as persons.

PREFERENTIAL

Sometimes people say "I don't like the word 'preferential,' it is much better to keep the strong word, 'option,' on its own." 'Preferential' seems too ecclesiastical. But I think in this word we have a very important point of the Christian message, because we understand preference in the context of universality. No one person can be left outside the love of God, or outside the circle of our concern. If we keep in mind this universality, we can understand preference. Without universality, preference could be a sectarian attitude; without preference, universality could be very abstract. To love everyone is to love no one; the relation between the two is central.

Why should we prefer the poor, the insignificant? Not because we can do a major thesis or work of social analysis (very useful); nor because we feel human compassion (very important); nor because we live in poor countries sometimes people say I speak strongly about the poor because I am Latin American. My answer is always the same. My first reason is that I am a priest; my second or third reason only, is that I am Latin American. It is because I believe in the God of Jesus Christ, because I am a Christian, that I must prefer the poor.

It is easy to take this very important point of the Gospel message and apply it only to a particular region, to Latin America or Africa; but that leaves the rest of us free. Another reason often given for this preferential option for the poor is that the poor are so good, so nice; we can learn so much from them! But that is not a reason to be committed to them. The basic reason is that God loves them, and that we believe in the God of the Kingdom. The poor are human. I would not advise you to visit my parish late at night, because although the poor are poor

they are not always good. Human beings are human. There is no need for a romantic notion of the poor. A central point of our faith is that we believe in God, the God of Jesus; this is the ultimate reason for our preferential option for the poor.

OPTION

Some people of good will say this "option" is something for the non-poor, but I do not agree. The poor themselves must also have an option for their brothers and sisters. Many poor opt for the rich.

Option for the poor is for everybody; all are to be in solidarity with the poor, to be committed to them. Option means freedom, free choice, decision. Option for the poor is an effort to enter into the world of the poor. What does this mean? To be poor is very complex. We are not committed to the poor if we have no friends among the poor, and friendship needs time. It is impossible to be committed to the poor only in vacation time. One can visit poor countries on vacation, and this is good, but to be committed to them means being with them, having friends among them, sharing our lives with our friends. I am afraid of people committed to the poor as a social class, or a race or a continent; it is too abstract an approach. To be committed to the poor is to enter their world.

Like the asymptotic line in mathematics which continually approaches a given curve but never meets it, we can come closer and closer to them even if we never actually become one of them. It is a long process, and according to the Bible, we need a great deal of spiritual poverty and spiritual childhood in order to be committed to the poor; it is also very important that we have a deep humility. Our commitment is only the beginning of a long and slow process. Sometimes one can think: if only I were in a poor continent like Latin America I would make an option for the poor! It is thought that all liberation theologians are committed to the poor, but I am not so sure. We are

quick to understand with our minds, but our actions lag behind. It is very difficult to enter the world of the poor.

Visitors to Latin America ask me sometimes about this question; their presupposition is that they are speaking to me as a person committed to the poor. I try, but it is a long process. It is almost impossible, but nothing is impossible to God.

We began with the question of identity, the identity of the Church. We

as Latin Americans have one proposal for the universal Church. It is that the concrete historical way to be Church, to be the assembly of the disciples of Jesus, is to take this preferential option for the poor seriously. To be Church, to be able to say, with Pope John XXIII, "Your Kingdom Come," is to take this preferential option. It is an option for the Latin American, African, Asian Churches, for the universal Church, not just for those working in poor countries. This is how we must be Church today; proclaim the Kingdom of God, bring the good news to the poor.

III. NEW EVANGELIZATION - A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH - SANTO DOMINGO

The Quincentenary provides us with an opportunity to evaluate the events of the 16th century and their meaning for us today. Included in this evaluation will be a consideration of the new evangelisation, a theological reflection about the life of the Latin American Church in its ecclesial dimension, and some reflections about Santo Domingo.

Santo Domingo will be the 4th Conference of the Latin American Bishops. The first took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1955 in another time and another world; the second was in Medellín and the third in Puebla.

NEW EVANGELIZATION

New evangelization is a term which acknowledges that we are now at the beginning of a new period in history. Since we are on the threshold of a new era, we need a new evangelization; the ways of the past are not adequate for a changing historical situation. This is the perspective taken by Pope John Paul II in Poland on 2nd June, 1981 during the celebration of the millenium of the evangelization of Poland.

He repeated his words in 1983, and again linked the new evangelisation to a new historical period and a new set of conditions. He acknowledged the link between evangelisation and history. Evangelisation is always an historical issue because the Gospel is announced to concrete persons living at a particular moment in the life of a culture. When cultural conditions change, we need a new vantage point from which to announce the kingdom of God.

Beginning with Medellín in 1968 the preferential option for the poor provides the central perspective, the context of the new evangelisation. This commitment is not only to the social dimension of poverty; it is a commitment to the poor. The poor are persons marked by deprivation, by lack of possibilities, and by a hunger for the word of God. Preferential option for the poor is more than social solidarity; it has a distinct ecclesial context.

The Irruption of the Poor

I would describe the new historical context as the irruption of the poor in Latin America. It is a new presence of the poor; they were absent from our history in the past but they became present during the last 30-40 years. In the last decade the signs of this irruption, this new presence of the poor, were seen as a quest for human and political rights. It is an extremely important decade in Latin America. The poor, who were present but not seen, are now present and newly visible. It is almost impossible to think about any country today in Latin America or to examine any political situation there without reference to the new presence of the poor. This is not strictly speaking an ecclesial fact, but it is essential to our understanding of the preferential option for the poor.

At Medellín the Latin American Church tried, for the first time, to see its historical and social reality as it really was. The Latin American Church made an option for adulthood there, a beginning in the process towards maturity. It tried to see the Latin

American reality and find some solutions for it. It saw clearly the need for change.

Basic Christian Communities

After Medellín, the preferential option for the poor found its expression in Basic Christian Communities. Strictly speaking, Basic Christian Communities began some 40 years before Medellín. But their significance as a real presence in the Church and an expression of the preferential option for the poor, changes with Medellín. We cannot understand them without the preferential option for the poor. They are not fads but an expression of that preferential option.

If we are to become a Church of the disciples of Jesus Christ today then Basic Christian Communities are one expression of this intention. This is not a question of pastoral methodology. They are more than that; they are one, but only one expression of the irruption of the poor. Other forms have developed in the Latin American Church as manifestations of our growing understanding of the preferential option.

There is the danger that we will create a huge myth about these communities. I remember an Austrian Jesuit who came to see me. He asked me how many Basic Christian Communities we had in Peru, I said, "Really I do not know. It depends upon the diocese. In Lima we have quite a few." He did not like my response and went on to tell me that in Brazil there were 100,000. It was so difficult to explain to this man with his need for precision that in Latin America we have a magical sense of figures. 100,000 means many! Maybe very many! More than 100,000. Maybe less! Many is the idea. How many exactly? We do not know! What we do know is that they are an important part of ecclesial life in Latin America.

Martyrdom

Because of the preferential option for the poor other signs are present. One very painful, and at the same time very rich sign is martyrdom. Many people

are giving their lives because of their commitment to the poor. For the powerful in Latin America this commitment is a dangerous choice, dangerous because it threatens their privilege. In Peru, continued fidelity to this option for those who are the least, is not easy; nor is it acceptable to those who hold power. Martyrdom today in Latin America is the consequence of this choice. Many who have made this option have lost their lives.

Martyrdom is not an accident. There have been numerous martyrs on my continent, bishops, nuns, priests and many, many lay people. At this historical moment, martyrdom is one aspect of daily life for the Latin American Church but it was not discussed at Puebla. I hope, that at Santo Domingo, it will be considered as a vital and rich element in the life of the Church. To look for martyrdom is not Christian, but it is integral to the Christian mission. When people struggle to be committed to Jesus Christ, they identify with the oppressed and the exploited. Poverty cannot be explained away with social or economic data. It is a condition which affects people; it is a moral question which begs a response on behalf of people. The effort to respond is a reason for being Church, and it enriches the Church.

The Church comes from the blood of martyrs. This is a classic statement about the effect of martyrdom, but it is sometimes difficult to recognise martyrdom. Some of us are too close to it. We can speak easily about martyrdom in the first centuries; distance makes the word acceptable. But for contemporary people it is harder to understand what we are experiencing in the deaths of those whose choice is a preferential option for the poor. The case of Archbishop Romero is an example of a well known martyr, but there are many faceless and nameless persons who have made the same choice that he did.

Hope

I know my Church, my country, Peru, and I prefer to speak about that which I know. We have, I think a great generosity within the Church there, and

a great hope. There are many committed people, very humble persons. They are never on the front page of the newspaper; they have unknown names; they work with the poor and risk their lives. Sometimes people make the mistake of singling out well-known names as representatives of the Latin American Church, for example, liberation theologians. Because their writings are translated and their names are known, there is a risk that these people are heard as the voice of the Latin American Church. Sometimes this is true, not always! Many people are anonymous; they too, represent the major options of this Church. Daily, humbly, they are committed to the poor, but they are never invited to Europe to speak! Never! This is not a reproach to you who invited me! But we need to recognise this tendency in ourselves. The life of the Church today is richer than a small group of well-known people, even liberation theologians.

Some of my friends describe the Latin American Church today in a very pessimistic manner, but I am optimistic in spite of our great difficulties. Years ago I received a phone call from a journalist in Columbia. "Please try to explain to me why the Latin American Church is going backwards in these last years?" he asked. 15 years ago, he said, we had Medellín, Don Helder Camara, some prophetic voices, now we have fewer and fewer prophets. "My friend," I answered, "your question is not very polite; your first question should be "Do you think the Latin American Church is going backwards and for what reasons? Your question is really a supposition."

We are not going backwards. 15 years ago we had few basic communities on the continent, now we have many. 15 years ago we had Helder Camara, happily we still have Helder Camera; 15 years ago we had Romero, now we have Romero the martyr. There are many difficulties today, but at the same time there are many beautiful things happening, expressions of the vitality and the life of the Church.

In recent times I have had some personal difficulties. You know more or

less about these. But I still believe we are living a very rich, vital, interesting moment at this time, even if it coincided for me with the most painful moments in my life. The global church is very rich. It nourishes my final hope to see this Church in the world and yet with so many different commitments to the poor in my own country and in the Latin American continent. I think we need to change our mentality about these difficulties. I recognise them; I am not naive; I know this Church; I have lived in it for almost 40 years as a priest and before that, as a lay person. I know the difficulties, the troubles, but in spite of this I think we are living a very interesting moment in the Latin American Church today.

A Church Alive

The preferential option for the poor is now one element in the universal magisterium of the Church. It developed in small groups in Latin America even before Puebla. It is now found in many speeches and Church documents and even in the Roman Synod for the 20th Anniversary of the Vatican Council. Since the Vatican Council the Church has become more conscious of the poor, the presence of the poor and the necessity to announce the Gospel to the poor. This preferential option was not part of the Council. We have a very alive Church with a great generosity. Anonymous people, lay people, nuns, priests, are working today in very difficult situations.

In August of last year, three priests were killed in my country by the Shining Path. The three, one Italian and two Polish, were working for the poor. That was the reason for their assassination. Many lay people, many priests and nuns are threatened in my country. Some try to get away for a few months because it is very difficult to keep on doing the same work in the same place in the same danger without a break; but many keep on doing this. It is impossible to convince me that things are going backwards in the Church. Faith, hope and charity are at the heart of Christian life; if we have strong faith and hope, and generous charity all will be well.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH

I would like to move now to my second point - the theology present in this process, this advent, this beginning of creating a new evangelisation.

My starting point is this: theology must always be an answer to a pastoral question. When Bonhoeffer was asked how he could speak about God in the world, it was the beginning of a new theology here in Europe. How do you say to secular persons, "God exists"? All theology is an answer to a pastoral question. A pastoral question is a question coming from evangelisation - how to announce the Gospel? In Latin America the question for us is, "How to say to the poor God loves you?" It is simply that. It seems very simple but it is not so simple because the daily experience of poor, insignificant, oppressed persons is the absence of love. They are insignificant but their oppression is significant. Injustices are expressions of the absence of love in their daily life. How do you say to these people - God loves you? I try to preach this in my parish, but always with a certain doubt, because I know my people well. Is it impossible to preach this? Theologically impossible? Is it a myth? Will a person in my Church come to me after my sermon someday and say to me, "Really you are the greatest humorist I have ever met in my life; every Sunday you repeat 'God loves you' and you know our concrete life. You call this love?" Who is right? That person or me?

It is good to have this love of God concretely in mind when you say 'God loves you' to persons who are suffering, without work, without food for their children. This God seems very strange! But the poor are not simpletons. I do not say 'God loves you' naively to them. Our Church must try above all to make the theological link with persons who are involved in the effort to announce the Gospel. This kind of theology is complex.

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is only a theology. It is no more. It is an effort, a movement to understand my faith and my hope. It is not a new religion. A Peruvian journalist who was also a theologian asked me many years ago, "What is the position of liberation theology regarding the problem of Jews and Palestinians?" He seemed to think liberation theology was a political party and I was the general secretary! As a theologian I do not have an opinion on that situation. As a citizen of this world I have some very confused ideas about it. Liberation theology does not have opinions on every question in the world.

Some years ago again, a Colombian Jesuit who was doing a doctrinal dissertation on liberation theology at the Gregorian University in Rome asked me what were the big issues in liberation theology? I said, "The big points are God, the Holy Trinity, Sacraments, Freedom, Grace, Mary, Redemption." "You are mocking me," he said. But I told him that was not true; there is no difference between theologies; the subject matter of all theologies is persons, and truth. All theologians approach the same things. Liberation theology is not a new revelation. In life few people, only the very holy, ever have revelations. I have only one revelation and it is the one faith. The difference in theologies is in the approach. We all do theology in an historical context.

Concrete Theology

It is possible to have a theology for any situation but we must distinguish between two moments. The first moment is the moment of praxis and this has two dimensions: contemplation and commitment. Contemplation is first because without contemplation there is no Christian life. Commitment is second, because without commitment to other persons there is no Christian love. The first moment places us in the presence of God, contemplating God and putting into practice the will of God. This is the first moment. Only after that comes

the second moment. Only then is it possible to do theology.

Theology is a word about God. But in order to be able to say a word about God, we need to have an experience of God. This is Christian life. This is experience. Being silent before God or putting into practice the will of God, is a matter of encountering God. Only after that is it possible to do theology. Theology comes afterwards - in the second moment. When I say, "comes after" I do not mean chronologically. It is not a question of being a Christian in the morning and doing theology in the afternoon. It is a question of priorities. The first priority is to be Christian and after that comes theology. This is because theology is a reflection made inside the Christian community, inside the Church. Theology is always an ecclesial function. It is not an intellectual exercise or an individual exercise. Doing theology because one is an intellectual is not exactly Christian theology.

Praxis

In the first moment, we must be committed to other persons. It is possible to pray as an individual act or as a communal act, and to be committed here and now in order, afterwards, to reflect. When we speak about theology, we always speak about theology as a reflection on praxis in the light of Christian faith; not only my personal, individual praxis but the praxis of the Christian community and, in the larger view, the praxis of humanity which is always present. Persons are the subject matter of our reflection. They are the link between theology and the Christian community or between theology and pastoral work. This is difficult for some theologians to accept because for them theology is a science, a discipline having some autonomy. A part of my life is committed to theology, but it is always a reflection about the concrete life of persons, Christians.

Prayer, worship, contemplation is one dimension of praxis. Praxis does not only mean to be committed in a very active manner with other persons. To pray is also praxis. It is very concrete.

Remember the old expression: *lex orandi lex credendi*; the *lex orandi* is *lex credendi* because the matter of the prayer of the Christian community is an expression of the faith of the community. This is not an abstract methodological issue. It is a very important question for me.

Spirituality

Our spirituality, our belief, is in question here. Spirituality is a way to be Christian. There are several ways to be Christian, ways of following Jesus Christ. Spirituality is a word coming from the 17th century French school of spirituality; it can be used in a dangerous way in our Church today. I see our spirituality today as a method; it is a way of understanding the Christian life. Within this way of being Christian, there is a place for theology, a way to do theology. We cannot separate methodology from spirituality. Note Chapter 8, verse 27, of Mark's Gospel, the call to Peter's conversion. First question: Jesus asks what the people's opinion is of him. Second question: "You, Peter, what is your opinion?" Peter replies, "You are the Christ, the Messiah." Immediately following that one answer Jesus begins to teach about his suffering and his death. At this, Peter is angry and rebukes Jesus. It was difficult for him to accept the price he would have to pay in order to follow Jesus Christ.

The text has been interpreted for a long time as presenting opposing points of view, Jesus' religious perspective and Peter's political perspective. Opposition between the political and religious perspective is not however, the main point. The text raises a theological issue about the relation between contemplation and the active life.

The main point at issue is the opposition between theory and practice. Peter's answer, "You are the Messiah," was good in theory, from the point of view of orthodoxy. But practically it was very difficult for Peter to accept the consequences. It seems to me that the place of theology is between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. This is the place of the relation between the right

opinion and the right commitment or practice. Theology is between these two aspects.

When Jesus rebuked Peter he said "Go behind me" meaning: that is your position, behind me. Some translations read this text as "Get out of my sight". This is not correct. The expression 'Go behind me' is a technical one meaning 'take your place.' The place of the disciple is to be behind the master, behind Jesus, behind the Lord. "Go behind me" is an expression of discipleship. In telling Peter to go behind him, Jesus is affirming his confidence in him: 'It is possible for you to return to your place as disciple in spite of your mistake. Your place is behind me.'

It seems to me, this is exactly the meaning of a theological reflection. Try to put Christians behind Jesus, is the idea. Theology alone is not essential to be Christian; reflection about Christian revelation, the basis of our faith, hope and charity, places us behind Jesus. This is the goal of our lives.

Orthodoxy and Orthopractice

There is much questioning about the relation between orthodoxy, right opinion and orthopractice, right doing. Liberation theology is accused of putting the accent on orthopractice as against orthodoxy. False! We cannot do this; it is impossible; there has to be a relation. Some people find the relation so complicated that they claim orthopractice alone is relevant for them. This is foolish. We must try to work out the relation between orthodoxy and orthopractice according to the letter of James 1:8 and 4:8. James writes: "Do not be double minded," "Do not have two minds." He alone, in the New Testament uses this expression. This was the main reproach Jesus made against the Pharisees. They were speaking in one way and acting in another. Jesus was dangerous because of the relation between his words and acts. His actions were according to his words. So too, Archbishop Romero was dangerous.

It is often said that preaching is not

enough. This is true. It is very important to preach, but it is never enough. If you preach without a relation with the historical situation in your country your preaching is abstract. Preaching related to your commitment and to your actions has another force. That was why Romero's sermons were dangerous, precisely because they were about the situation at that time. Theology must be an effort to recall the necessity of relating our affirmations and our actions, our orthodoxy and our orthopractice. Do not have two minds. This is the basic reason why theology has to be related, linked to Christian commitment, and linked to the life of Church.

SANTO DOMINGO CONFERENCE

I would like to move now to the third point - the 1992 Santo Domingo Conference, the 4th Conference of Latin American Bishops. Like those at Medellín and Puebla, this one is for the life of the Church in its historical context. The life of the Church in Latin America is more than the Bishops' Conferences. People sometimes say that conditions today are very difficult, so different from those at the previous conferences. Some people expect almost nothing from this 4th conference. For me it is impossible to foresee the future. I heard the same things said before Medellín and Puebla. Surprisingly, among those who made these comments are some very well-known names. They expected little or nothing before Medellín but after Medellín they wrote very beautiful articles about the conference. This happened even more before Puebla. "Puebla is finished," they said to me. "Everything has been arranged beforehand!" Yet Puebla was clearly important for the life of the Church.

My position about this 4th conference at Santo Domingo is exactly the same as it was before Medellín and Puebla. I do not know what the result will be but I do know, it is clear to me that we must work. We must be committed to the preparation. It is very important to be

faithful to my Church and to my people. Furthermore, I must be committed not only to the preparation but afterwards to its realization. I do not like to see history interpreted as everything being decided beforehand. I have some faith in history. A lot depends on our commitment, our action.

Presence of the Holy Spirit

I believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, not just in miracles. I believe in the Spirit's presence, and in the mystery of the Church. Will a lot of the documents from this 4th conference be very good? I do not know! But I do know I must try to contribute something to this presence of the Spirit. This is clear to me. "Do not be prophets of doom," said Pope John, and he was right. There are always prophets of doom announcing scandal in our Church. There may be scandals but some persons take their own personal difficulties and make them the difficulties of the whole Church.

I can remember some beautiful moments in these last years of my life, moments connected with ideas of liberation theology. I have received many letters and oral expressions of support from good friends telling me that I must be suffering very much. But I think of neighbours in my parish and their poverty. My suffering is nothing, in comparison with theirs. It is the suffering of a person who reflects, makes distinctions, writes; who has very good friends. My neighbours are anonymous. They have never received a letter of solidarity from Europe! They cannot get work. They cannot even get some fruit for their children.

My Hopes

If you ask me for my hopes before Santo Domingo my answer is that I would like to see the deepening of the preferential option for the poor, above all for Blacks and Indians. They were present in Puebla, but only just. And I would like to see a similar preferential option for women. I would like to see Santo Domingo confirm and deepen these major options of the Latin American Church. If that happens, the results will be very good. Will it be so? I don't know! But I repeat again I believe we must be committed to work for this.

To give up the struggle beforehand is not human; neither is it Christian. We must be there at Santo Domingo. We may sometimes lose the struggle for our personal, individual points of view. But it is important to be present and to try.

People were enthusiastic about the texts of Medellín which they said were so beautiful! They seemed to think things were going very well then in Latin America. Nonsense! 1968 was a very difficult year in Latin America. It was particularly difficult in Brazil. It was certainly not a euphoric time, even if people were euphoric about the conference. The documents of Medellín were the result, humanly speaking of the work of many people - bishops, theologians and others. In the end, as Christians, we recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit in our Church, at Medellín, at Puebla and we hope, at Santo Domingo.

QUESTIONS

(In this concluding session Gustavo Gutierrez answered a variety of questions arising from his presentations).

Sendero Luminoso.

Q. *It is difficult for most of us to understand the motivation of the Sendero Luminoso. Last year after the killing of a sister and three priests, we had a number of meetings here in Rome in which we tried to grasp the message communicated to us by these killings and to understand the objectives of Sendero Luminoso. Could you comment?*

A. I understand your difficulty about the Sendero Luminoso. They want to be the only influence active in the milieu of the poor; they see Christians - lay people, nuns and priests who work with the poor, as adversaries. I know this is terrible, but not so difficult to understand in the final analysis. They see those working with the poor as enemies. Ultimately, the Australian sister, the two Polish priests and the Italian missionary were killed for the same political reasons. Assassinations carried out by the powerful are not so different; they too are an exercise of power for the domination of people. *Shining Path* (Sendero Luminoso) will continue to kill in Peru. This year they assassinated Maria Elena Moyana, a leader from a Christian community. Such acts of violence are often a question of rivalry.

The Church and Guerilla Movements

Q. *Is the failure of the Church to be more committed to social action, to train and animate Christians to become more involved in society and to understand the problems of the poor a possible explanation for guerilla activity?*

A. The question has several dimensions; it challenges many living in Latin America and me personally. First, I would like to be clear about one point: I do not agree with, even though I respect, the political commitment of some people in the Church and above all those who are involved in counter-violence. This became clear for me during discussions I had with Camilo Torres, a very close friend and my classmate in Louvain. We talked for hours about his decision and his commitment. Even today, many years after his death, I have great respect for his choice and above all for his generosity. But I personally disagreed with him. 1965 was a very important year in my country because of the appearance of counter-violence and the guerilla movement and because of Camilo's choice to participate in it.

Politically speaking, it is very important to be close to the poor in their struggle and in their revindication of freedom and justice. But I believe in the historical force of the Gospel. I do not have an inferiority complex when I announce the Gospel to oppressed people. When I announce the truth of the Gospel I do not use words which are far from their real situation. On the contrary, I can say that this announcement is a historical force in Latin America today. Neither do I think I can change the situation of my country only by announcing the Gospel. We need a political process; we need to be committed in very concrete ways to the transformation of the present situation. But I do not need to abandon the proclamation of the Gospel in order to be concrete. That is a false solution.

I remember discussing this point with my very generous and good friend, Camilo. Before our last talk, he had

written the following: 'Today, in Colombia, to celebrate the Eucharist is a lie; we celebrate communion, but we do not have communion; we are divided by social injustice.'

When we discussed this in Lima, in the last days of June 1965, I said, 'Camilo, only in heaven is communion perfect; for this reason the Eucharist is not necessary there; the Eucharist is for travellers before they reach the Father. Now, in Colombia and Peru because we are so divided, we need to recall our Utopia'.

Camilo told me then that it was a pity he had written what he did. People today remember Camilo's first position, but not the second. We must be committed to celebrate the Eucharist in an unjust society because it is one way to recall the necessity of communion and equality among all persons.

My second point is that it is impossible for us, as individuals, to play every role in society. A Christian is called to participate in the transformation of society and I have personally chosen one particular way in the Church. I do not see political commitment as my function, but it is very relevant, necessary and important for lay people. For years people in my country have looked upon evangelisation as abstract and political commitment as concrete. I do not believe this. It depends on the way you choose to evangelise. Romero is a very good example. He was a preacher. He was not politically committed. He only spoke, but he spoke the truth and in his preaching he criticised the guerilla movement in El Salvador. For him it was the Gospel that challenged the powerful people in his country.

My third and last point is the question of the effectiveness of counter-violent means. For the moment I will not talk about the ethical aspects but simply about the point that counter-violence is not politically effective. Colombia is a very clear case where guerillas have been active for thirty or forty years. This challenges the argument for effectiveness. I knew some of the priests who were committed to the guerilla movement after Camilo. They too were very generous, but in my personal

opinion they were wrong. In the end they lost their confidence in the historical possibilities of the Gospel. This is the central point and it is a very hard one to hold on to. I love these people very much as people, but at the same time, because they are my friends, I prefer to be clear with them. They are wrong.

The Problem of Fear

Q. My question is about martyrdom. The poor get killed and those who share their lives with the poor often end up the same way. One source of violence is fear; the poor themselves are a source of fear for the rich. How would you address this fear? The Gospel tells us not to be afraid. How can we encourage people, rich and poor, not to be afraid?

A. We are dealing here, with two kinds of fear which are very close to each other. When Jesus said, 'Do not be afraid,' it was a negative way of saying, 'Be confident; have faith.' If you are speaking about fear in the social context you are right. The poor are afraid of the powerful because they have power, even the power to kill. Today many rich people are afraid of the poor because the poor have a new kind of presence. In the past the rich had no fear; they alone dominated the country. Now they have fear. What we call counter-violence is the extreme expression of the reaction of the poor. We may be able to overcome this fear by making an effort to recognise human rights. If the principal rights of the poor are ignored by the powerful, the fear will always be there; the powerful must recognise this.

The Church has a very important function here because it is present among the rich and among the poor. This is one of the Church's difficulties and also one of the Church's advantages. It is very bad that we are living in fear even in the Latin American Church. Many are afraid of the new presence of the poor, afraid of Base Christian Communities, afraid of some theological reflections. When this

fear is experienced inside the Church, it is contrary to faith and hope.

However, fear is only the subjective aspect of injustice. Fear itself is not the problem; the problem is social injustice and one subjective consequence is to be afraid. Fear is present where there is injustice, where there is a society which is divided. Fear is not the basic problem; social structures and customs are the problem. In order to eliminate fear, the subjective aspect of social injustice, the social structures must change.

The Church in Latin America has done much in recent times to overcome this difficulty, but it is only beginning. Some people are even afraid of the Church in Latin America. You may be aware of a very intelligent report about Latin America made by the Rockefeller Commission. It appeared in 1969, a year after Medellín. I disagree with this report. It stated that the Church would be a danger for Latin American society and for the U.S. presence there in the coming years. It warned that the U.S. would have to pay attention to the Latin American Church because after Medellín, that Church was not supporting but questioning the establishment. Read also the Santa Fé document, written by experts for the first presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan. It states that the Catholic Church, especially the liberation theologians, are a great danger to the foreign policy of the United States in its relations with Latin America.

Romero was killed by people outside the Church; they were Salvadoreans, some baptised, but outside the Church. The real dangers are coming from the most powerful people, from political, economical, and military quarters. They are afraid of this Church which is trying to take the side of the poor.

Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis

Q. Even though there is one Church and one Spirit, understandings are sometimes in conflict. How then can we achieve

orthopraxis, right praxis, or orthodoxy, right thinking, when there seem to be so many ways of being right?

A. This is a major question. Poor people have an interesting approach to the main elements of the Christian message. An example is their approach to the Bible. They accept the Bible as a book or as a collection of books written by believers, by people of faith, never as a masterpiece of literature. The poor move from faith to faith. Another way for the poor to approach the Bible is to see it as a relationship between all history and the history of the Bible. There is a third approach: the poor feel that they are very close to the text and this is beautiful. They say, 'I have a feeling for this text.' But it is very important also to point out their distance from the texts because these were written two or three thousand years ago. It is essential for members of a community to have both feelings of closeness and of distance. Otherwise they are not free when faced with the text.

I agree with you when you say there are different ways of understanding orthodoxy, if by orthodoxy you mean theology. We can always interpret the basic points in the Christian message. God loves us, is both *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis*. We can interpret this statement by saying God loves in different ways. This is a fundamental truth of the Christian message.

The modern spirit is diffident about truth today even in the Church. In the Christian message we have truth made life. God loves us, is a point of *orthodoxy* but it must also be part of our daily life - *orthopraxis*. The relationship is important. I do not say this just to avoid difficulties; it is my conviction.

As members of a Christian community we have a message to communicate. This message has many affirmations, but these affirmations are not really relevant if they are not related to daily life. This is the relationship between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis*. We have to look for a synthesis between them.

Signs of the Kingdom and The Irruption of the Poor

Q. What life-giving signs accompany the irruption of the poor today? Can you point to some signs of the Kingdom that is to come, that is coming among the poor?

A. It is not an easy question. I have been speaking about counter-violence but I think also of institutional violence. Institutional violence is not present only where there is a military government. Poverty is institutional violence. Poverty is legal in our countries.

Between Medellín and Puebla we took cognisance of what you ask for - the signs of the Kingdom among the poor. The poor are not only the receivers of evangelisation but also the bearers of the Gospel. Base Christian Communities are an example of this. Our work is not only to announce the gospel to the poor; the poor themselves are the agents of this announcement. In Puebla, this sign of the Kingdom is called the evangelical potential of the poor. The poor possess the power to announce the Gospel.

This idea was not expressed in Medellín. Medellín was more class conscious and the main idea there was that we must evangelise the poor. But between Medellín and Puebla we saw that the poor themselves are bearers of the Gospel. There is no comparison between the situation today and the situation ten or twenty years ago from this point of view. In spite of many difficulties the poor are more and more conscious that they are agents of evangelisation, bearers of the Gospel.

In a personal and Peruvian context I will give just two examples. I got to know Maria Elena almost twenty years ago. She was just fifteen years old, very intelligent, and very shy. In ten years she became a leader in her area of the city and a national leader. Another woman leader is Ingma, whom I met fifteen years ago. She is a housemaid who had no more than four or five years at school, while Maria

Elena went to university. Both of these were formed in Basic Christian Communities in a Jesuit parish and they are signs for me. It is possible to see people change through conscious choices, community involvement and scriptural reflection. I did not see this happening at the beginning of the sixties. It has only been possible to see it in recent years.

The Option for the Poor in The Real World

Q. At the institutional and global levels how can we, in practice, exercise our option for the poor in the context of those global factors that are affecting people in Latin America, Asia, Africa and elsewhere?

A. The most difficult questions are always the concrete ones! I find it difficult to answer your question. We need to analyse it in detail. My next statement is very dangerous. We cannot opt out of our being present in this sinful society. When we drink Coke we are supporting a capitalistic corporation. So - no Coke! Everything can be justified by this approach but it is not my intention to do so. We cannot realistically avoid some aspects of the world we live in, but we can denounce them and refuse to accept the complicity of many corporations in injustice.

Many years ago Helder Camara addressed the banking corporations in Switzerland. He criticised the Swiss banking system and ended his speech with the statement that it was more important to be Christian than to be Swiss. The following day an important newspaper asked for his expulsion from Switzerland because what he said was an insult to the country. It was a very simple statement. It is truly more important to be Christian than to be American, Swiss, or Peruvian.

It is difficult to give a general answer to your question. We must avoid complicity and at the same time recognise the impossibility of being absent from the world of today. When the concrete question arises we must ask what

our attitude should be. Sometimes we can only learn by our mistakes. How can we avoid complicity with injustice and at the same time live in this sinful world. We can denounce major injustices by our words and also by our attitudes and actions as we try to be Christian. I think the Christian churches, not only the Catholic Church, are too present in the capitalistic society, too ready to accept the rules of this society.

Our situation could be described thus. We live as Christians in a capitalistic society; every morning we go to work in a world which is the world of the poor; that world is our place of work. But we are not at home in the world of the poor. We are at home in another environment. We must change this. Let us imagine for a moment that we live in the world of the poor and we go from there every morning to announce the Gospel to the rich. That changes our perspective.

I said yesterday that we need to have friends among the poor. Our close friends are persons similar to us, with similar backgrounds and interests and tastes. But the poor are so often the object of our work, not the object of our friendship. Friendship supposes equality. We cannot love someone if we do not place him or her on the same level. Love presupposes equality. Without equality there is no love or affection. There may be work or commitment but not love. Christians have perhaps accepted too easily the idea of working for the poor. We must change this and because it is a process, we need to begin right now.

Place of Synthesis

This synthesis is evident in the history of spirituality. In the beginning there is a deep experience - for example, St. Francis and the experience of poverty or St. Ignatius and the experience of freedom for decision or election and the love of God. Afterwards theologians reflect on this experience: St. Bonaventure who came after St. Francis, or the Jesuit theologian, Laínez, after Ignatius. We need theological reflection on the experience of God, on

religious experience. We are doing theology all the time; theology is too important to be reserved to theologians; theology pertains to every Christian. When a person says, 'As a Christian I must do this,' he or she is reflecting theologically. In our work with the poor, we must always keep in mind these two aspects of the one reality, this relationship. We cannot elaborate a theology valid for all time in the Church.

Theology of Liberation

The theology of liberation it seems to me, is good at this time for many Christians in Latin America. In twenty years time I do not really know what will happen. Before I was forty years old I never spoke about liberation theology but I think I was Christian. It was possible for me to be Christian before liberation theology and I hope to be Christian after liberation theology. I do not need this theology in order to be Christian but I do need it today in order to be a good Christian, one who is open to many questions about the situation in which I live.

I do not believe in liberation theology. I believe in Jesus Christ. He is the truth, the way and the life. Liberation theology is not a new article of my creed. It is only a means, an instrument to understand my continent, the faith of my people, and my own commitment. It is a very useful instrument, but no more than that. The truth that Jesus Christ is God made man is of the essence of belief. *Doxa* for me, is not something said by a theologian, but some central point in Christian revelation. The relationship is important; we cannot separate the faith affirmation from our daily life.

Power As Service

Q. You said that the question for Latin America is how to tell the poor, 'God loves you,' in the midst of their pain and suffering. How can we, representatives of religious congregations, use the power that we have to get at the root of poverty?

A. My first comment is as a human person and as a Christian. I cannot explain human suffering; it is the biggest mystery in human life. As a Christian I can situate human suffering in a large context in order to be able to live with it. But I have seen people suffering so much that I really cannot explain it and I prefer to say, I do not understand suffering. This is not against my faith. I believe in God. I believe in the love of God, but still many things are not clear for me. Maybe one day I will be able to ask God for an answer. Right now, theologically I cannot explain suffering. I am always surprised by theologians speaking about God's will as if they took breakfast with God everyday! I don't think the Book of Job is an explanation of human suffering. It is an effort to place human life in the wider context of the gratuitous love of God. The central point in the biblical message is God loves you gratuitously. The question of how, to say to the poor, 'God loves you,' is larger than our theology.

Your second point, about the witness of the Church, can be considered within the framework of power as service and power as domination. One example from the Bible is when Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you a king?" He replies, "Yes." But Jesus completes his answer: "My kingdom is not of this world." My kingdom is different from your kingdom. You are a member of the Roman Empire, a kingdom of domination. My kingdom is a kingdom of service, a kingdom for serving the least and through this service, serving God. (Mt. 25).

It seems to me that we cannot change history without power. I know quite well that for nice Christians, power is a bad word. I do not believe in powerlessness. We need power, but in the sense of power as service. You will have observed that in speaking about the poor I have never used the word powerless. The poor may be anonymous, and insignificant, but never powerless.

It is my experience that only the organisations of the poor which have some power can change situations. The poor need power in history, not power in the sense of dominating other people,

but power to bring about change. I can see how difficult it is to draw the line between these two aspects of power - domination and service. It is a daily challenge to us. If we are at the service of the poor, we need to grasp the significance of power in history.

I have a short anecdote. I was not in Peru when the International Eucharistic Congress took place there, but I listened to a tape. Two very important people in our Church spoke. The first said, 'I come from a very poor country; you Americans are rich; help us!' The second was Helder Camara. He said, 'I come from Latin America. We are very poor. One of the reasons is the presence of the multi-nationals in this country. Please help us by criticising these multinational corporations.' The first request for help did not create a problem. Rich people when they are nice, quite easily agree to help the poor because their own privileges remain the same. When someone addresses a systemic cause of poverty - that is different. We must avoid passing judgement, but if we want to change the situation of the poor in the world, power as service is necessary.

Who are The Spiritually Poor?

Q. As a religious congregation we have made an option for the poor. Some of our members say, the rich are spiritually poor and we must not forget them. What is your opinion on this?

A. Biblically speaking spiritually poor means holy. Often we speak of the spiritually poor as sinners. That is never the way in the Bible. Spiritual poverty is to be ready to do the will of God. Simplistically we hear it said: someone deprived of material goods is materially poor; someone deprived of spiritual goods is spiritually poor. This is too logical to be biblical.

We must avoid the term, 'spiritually poor'. It confuses the issue. It is quite curious to hear people say, 'You are concerned with the materially poor; that is good for you; I am working with something more profound - the spiritual

poverty of rich people.' I am not saying that all rich people are sinners!, but we cannot call their situation spiritual poverty. The challenge which they present to us, as our brothers and sisters, is quite different.

The universality of God's love is very important. It is not Christian to say we will work only with the poor. "Only" is not Christian; God loves everyone and that must be true for us too. But the way we work with rich people is different. We need to recall to the rich the presence of the poor who are the immense majority in my country. If we work with the rich without a word about social justice, about poverty and humanity, we are not really announcing the Gospel to them.

There is no question of treating rich people as bad Christians and sinners. That is not honest; it is an act of aggression. We must keep in mind the privileged situation of the rich in society and say to them, 'Beware!' It is our duty to call them to be committed to the poor, to enter the world of the poor, to abandon some privileges. This is the Gospel challenge. It is not an act of aggression when Jesus says to the rich young man in the Gospel, that he must abandon his wealth; it is a challenge.

It is not Christian to deal with the rich only as sinners and oppressors. They may not be oppressors according to their consciences. Some are objectively oppressors without knowing it. Charity challenges us in different ways in our relations with the poor and with the rich and the powerful.

But never call sinfulness spiritual poverty. Spiritual poverty, a central notion in the Gospel, is to recognise God as Father, or Mother, and others as sisters and brothers. We must be committed to the real poor in order to announce spiritual poverty, spiritual childhood, disposability before God.

We must all be spiritually poor. But today we must be committed to the real poor so that the Church can announce true spiritual poverty. We must also

look for ways to be pastorally with the non-poor. This is a great challenge.

The Latin American Church and The Missionary Mandate

Q. You said that the poor become the subjects of evangelisation. In this context, how would you evaluate the Latin American Church's involvement in the universal missionary mandate?

A. The Latin American Church's involvement in mission is in process. The new presence of the poor within our Church is changing many things; it is certainly changing the missionary dimension. There have been long discussions about the meaning of missionary activity and about the object of mission. Today we have new insights about this. I remember in 1975 speaking in Peru about the poor being the subjects of evangelisation. An Italian priest was so shocked at the idea that the poor themselves must be the bearers of the Gospel that, forgetting to speak in Spanish he exclaimed in Italian, "Allora, che faccio io qui?" What am I doing here? We laugh at his shock but his is a real question. If the poor are evangelisers what is our role?

Missionaries are needed for many reasons: for communion between Churches; for reverse-mission; because of the difficult situation in my country. It makes sense to go on mission to countries like Peru. The problem is not one of nationality, but of option. We need people, Latin Americans or not, who work with the option for the poor. Many North Americans are more committed to the poor than the Peruvians. Many Latin Americans priests, and nuns do not follow the option for the poor. They follow more traditional or classical ways of understanding their function. In Latin America we are only taking the first steps; we are only at the beginning of the process following Puebla which saw the poor as bearers of the Gospel.

Mission is also important for the original sending countries. Many things

can become clearer in countries of the North if their people have an experience of poor countries. Going still further, it seems to me that in spite of our limited possibilities in Latin America, it is an enrichment for us to send missionaries to other continents even if we do not have sufficient pastoral agents for our own needs. Some find this difficult to accept. Why send our people on mission to Africa and Asia? But I see this as a question of fraternity or sorority. Having an experience of the churches in Africa or Asia would be a real enrichment for us. Read again the first five numbers of *Ad Gentes* (written by Yves Congar). Missionary activity is rooted in God. The whole Church is missionary.

Advice for New Missionaries

Q. If you were asked to give a word of advice to a young missionary going to your country today what word would you offer?

A. I have been asked this question several times and I have answered as follows. Many people coming from outside are very committed to my poor people. I see the concrete need for and meaning of people coming to us. Maybe my one word is this, try to work with indigenous people; this means in my country working with Peruvians. This is not easy, especially at the beginning.

Also, you cannot work pastorally with people if you ignore their history, their literature, the way they express themselves, their culture. I try to introduce my friends in the beginning to the works of major Peruvian writers. It is very difficult to really know a people. I have suffered too much from people who arrive in my country and after two weeks tell Peruvians, you must do this and you must do that! After two weeks! So quickly!

To know a people, we need to live with them. There should be an introduction and not only at the ecclesial level, or the level of issues. We need to look at the cultural and historical

levels. We need to get to know the language. Language is not just a question of words. Spaniards think they have the same language as we do. It is not true. Some Spaniards after twenty years in Latin America still say, "vosotros habeis". We do not say it that way. In Spain I would try to say "vosotros" and "habeis" because that is what they say there; that is their custom, and I would respect it. But this is just an example. I have nothing against the Spanish; I myself am half Spanish!

Missionaries must not study only theology and the latest works of theology; to know people you must also read novels and poetry. People are very concrete. They have many dimensions. We need the presence of missionaries. For a long time I used to think in the classical manner that the strong Churches must send people to other Churches. I have changed my view. This is not only a question for the strong Churches, it is a question for every Church. Why not have Africans announcing the Gospel here in this European continent? It would be very interesting both for the people here and for them. In the present situation of humanity this exchange is something normal and enriching. To say that missionaries cannot continue in the Church of Peru is to mis-state the problem. Their presence is important; it is not artificial. Working together is the best way of expressing the universality of our message and of trying to make all people sensitive to the variety of problems.

I have heard it said that poverty is not your concern in Europe. That is false. There are many poor people in this continent so your concern should not be only for the poor in Latin America. The preferential option for the poor is not a national question; it is a Christian question.

Missionary Institutes

Q. What would you say to us about the use of our personnel in Latin America today?

A. I would make two points: first, it is essential for missionary institutes and their members to put an end to a colonial mentality towards Latin America present even in Europe and North America. It seems to me that we need to enter the life of a people, to take the opportunity to distinguish superstition from genuine religious practice if we are to become a universal church. Although we are now looking at the Latin American situation, we must also consider how a colonial mentality

has done violence to Africa and to Asia.

I would ask you also to consider the possibility of making a statement condemning the foreign debt which is such a cruel part of the life of the poor. This would not solve the problems of Latin America, but it could be useful for many reasons. Utopian you may say! But as Christians, we are the most Utopian people in history; we are always constructing Utopias.

I. POPULAR RELIGION AND THE CHURCH: HOPES AND CHALLENGES AT THE DAWN OF THE 5TH CENTENARY

Maria Clara Luchetti Bingemer

INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the 5th Centenary of the discovery and evangelization of Latin America, the Church turns with hope to the 4th Latin American Bishops' Conference at Santo Domingo. The Conference will meet in October to discuss the theme "New Evangelization, Human Promotion and Christian Culture." Much has been thought, spoken, and written about this Conference and the expectations which it arouses. Among the prominent themes to be explored is "Religiosity" or "Popular Religion." It is a theme which can be traced to the very origins of the conquest and the colonization of the Americas. It is a theme which calls us to reflect on the cultural diversity of our peoples and on the growing consciousness of the enormous aggression committed against them.

In these reflections, I will attempt:

- (1) to review some of the effects which the conquest had on the culture and religion of our native peoples;
- (2) to examine how the ensuing cultural and religious conflict brought the popular religiosity of our peoples;
- (3) to pinpoint the place that this form of religiosity has in the recent history of the Latin American Church.

A "CONQUERED" RELIGION

The conquest was not only a political and military event, arising from the voyages of discovery; it was also a religious event. The Europeans brought

their religion along with their culture and civilization. They considered this religion to be the only true religion which had to be given as a very precious gift to the native population.

The voyage of Columbus had as a central objective, the glory of Christianity, its expansion, and the Christianization of the newly discovered continent. The deep religiosity of the Genovese navigator and the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors who followed him furthered this colonial project. The goal of christianizing the continent shaped the conquerors' treatment of the new lands and their inhabitants; it also influenced future evangelization.

Cristobal (carrier of Christ) understood himself to be at one and the same time, a colonizer and an evangelizer. Las Casas saw the Genovese navigator as 'the first to open the doors of our Mother ocean in order to let our Saviour Jesus Christ pass through to those far away lands and kingdoms until then unknown.' Columbus' world-view led him to ignore and even despise the values and the culture of the inhabitants. He ignored the diversity of their languages and wanted to bring some of them before the King of Spain, so that according to him, they could "learn to speak." Not only are their languages and their ways of communicating inferior and unworthy of consideration, worse still, they simply do not exist as such. He had the same attitude to their religion.

Columbus' religiosity permeated his way of thinking, his actions and his

attitudes towards the newly discovered land and the people he found there. Like a new Adam he gave Christian names to the land, totally disregarding the Indian names. By so doing, the conqueror acted as if the land, and the world of the people he *discovered*, were his own.

Columbus and those who followed him did not respect the religious rituals and symbols which belonged to the very depths of the lives of the people. They considered the native religion as magic, demonic, superstitious, or barbaric. They identified the physical nakedness of the indigenous people with a wholistic, cultural, religious nakedness which needed to be covered by their superior religion.

CONQUERORS OR EVANGELIZERS

There is another side to the coin. The conquerors came to bring civilization as well as Christianity to the natives, but they also wanted to take something away - the gold and the riches which they found on the continent. Thus arose conflicting interpretations about whether they were conquerors or evangelizers. If the Indians were human beings, they were capable of receiving the Gospel message and they must at least be considered deserving of receiving it and they must be evangelized. On the other hand, if the objective is to take the Indians' gold and they resist, then they must be dominated. As inferior beings, they had to be subjugated by the superior conquerors. Very soon, these two understandings were superimposed, one on the other. Without judging the intentionality of the conquerors, the transmission of the new religion was irretrievably confused with domination, subjugation and cruelty. This perverse confusion between the colonizing project and evangelizing aims put its seal on how the evangelization of the Latin American continent took place and how it was interpreted.

I do not want to generalise, but in this 5th Centenary year we must recog-

nize what happened, and acknowledge how much it influenced the evangelization of Latin America. The pastoral problems that we experience today and their consequences, can be traced back to the moment of Columbus' arrival on the continent.

THE GOOD NEWS

Neither Jesus nor the apostles who followed him had the arrogance to suppose that the people to whom they announced the Gospel were lacking in culture, faith, or identity. Even though the Gospel as Good News offers a radical vision of God, Jesus did not reject the traditions of the people of Israel. Permeating the entire Gospel message, there is a very fertile and rich tension between tradition and the Good News.

The God that Jesus calls his Father, the *Abba* whom he presents to men and women as the God of life and the God of the poor had much to do with the God of Israel. The *Abba* of Jesus is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is not the God whom the Pharisees have kidnapped and taken from the people by transforming religion into a heavy burden. The *Abba* of Jesus is a liberating God who has freed, and still frees people from captivity. He is the God that Jesus talks about, whom he sees as his Father, whom he presents as the God who prefers prostitutes and publicans to the Pharisees. It is not that the God of Jesus has nothing to do with the God of Israel. Jesus announces a deeper, and more profound truth about God. He also recognizes that the people had searched for that God, dialogued, and walked with him, learned how to praise and adore him and tried to keep their covenant with him.

The same is true of the apostles. The genius of Paul was that he opened the doors of the Church to the pagan world and to the gentiles while recognizing the truth of their past. He did not oblige them to conform to the pattern of the synagogue and the Jewish religion. Recall his speech before the Council of the Areopagus.

"Men of Athens, I have seen for myself how extremely scrupulous you are in religious matters. I noticed as I strolled around admiring your sacred monuments, that you had an altar inscribed: To an Unknown God. Well, the God whom I proclaim is in fact the one whom you already worship without knowing it."

He does not treat the Athenians as people without beliefs, or assume that they are only waiting for him to arrive to announce some sensational news.

This age-old challenge continues to face us today. How do we respect the culture and religion of the other? How can we communicate what we believe is true about faith without doing violence to the cultural values and the religious beliefs that are already present? How can we recognize the seeds of truth in other religions? How can we be open to the Good News, when that Good News does not fit into our institutionalized patterns or religious experience?

LATIN AMERICAN CATHOLICISM BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

In Latin America, the conquerors refused to recognize the identity of the native population. Because of this historical fact, I think that we can see a number of conflicting attitudes towards Christianity.

The first attitude is simply a refusal by some or part of the population to become Christian.

A second attitude, very common to later generations, is that of seeming to accept Christianity but in fact not doing so. Blacks who arrived in Brazil as slaves were strongly constrained to become Christians. They responded by giving the names of Christian saints to their divinities while continuing to worship them as divinities. Later this became what we call Afro-Brazilian, syncretic religion. During their religious services, there are elements of Catholic ritual, the Eucharistic celebration, and the use of the names of Jesus, Our Lady, and the saints.

The third attitude is to accept, assimilate, and create a different synthesis. I think that this expresses the profound originality of what we call popular religiosity. The Catholic religion is lived according to the identity and the experience of the people in a particular time and set of historical circumstances. There are similarities with institutionalized forms of religion, but there are also significant differences. In popular religiosity, celebration belongs to the cultural universe of the people; it is inseparable from their living faith. This is found more commonly in rural areas than in urban settings. But, even when rural people migrate to areas surrounding large cities, they retain a very traditional ritual for celebrating the sacraments and religious feasts.

People retain the custom of pilgrimage to sanctuaries of the Virgin. Needs that are connected with the everyday life of people are celebrated in the context of their Christian faith and in ways that are distinct from those of the official Church. This presents a challenge to the pastoral practice of the official Church, but it also represents a rich potential for evangelization. It challenges the Church to recall and rediscover the message of the Gospel today for people who are being influenced by the processes of modernity and secularization. There is a flame of faith to be protected, a hidden treasure that must be sought out even if the challenge surfaces questions and ambiguities.

In some Latin American countries a very strong element of secularization followed on Vatican II. *Gaudium et Spes* was at times misinterpreted with serious pastoral consequences. Some examples: in spite of the people's great devotion to the Virgin, some priests removed images and statues of the Virgin from the churches; traditional devotional practices were judged to be superstitious. Such actions provoked strong feelings of resistance among the people.

Medellín stressed the richness that is hidden in the experience of our people. The bishops spoke about the

positive value of popular religiosity, while calling attention to elements that called for evangelization. Puebla goes further. It speaks not only of popular religiosity, but also of popular religion. The label, 'religiosity,' is a subtle form of discrimination, which marginalised popular religious experience. Puebla reminds the Church to be attentive to the concrete expressions of popular religion in Christianity. It calls attention to the fact that if the Church is not able to respond to the people's thirst for God, to their real experience of God as present in these religious expressions - the resultant vacuum will be filled by something else.

NEW RELIGIOSITY IN LATIN AMERICA: CHALLENGE TO A NEW EVANGELIZATION

In Latin America, we no longer live in a homogeneous or even a predominantly Christian world. The historical Catholic and Protestant Churches see a growing exodus to sects. New religious movements are now a significant presence in Latin America and Christians have to live their faith in a pluralistic religious world. The process of modernity has touched a large part of the continent. The younger generations live their lives in the midst of modernity. They experience a crisis brought about by belonging to two worlds - one, permeated by the values of tradition and the other, which is in constant flux.

Three years ago, I had a conversation with a well known Chilean theologian, a remarkable man who has lived for more than twenty years in a poor barrio in Santiago. He told me that he could communicate well with adults but not with young people. They are shaped by the mass media, influenced by a global culture, and constrained by oppressive patterns of behaviour. They no longer have the clear sense of identity that their parents and grandparents had. The process of evangelization must take this into account. There must be a different pastoral approach to the young. This is a major challenge as we prepare for Santo Domingo.

SECTS

In Brazil, sects and religious movements are growing in an amazing way. Because of a tradition of syncretism, Brazil provides fertile soil for this kind of phenomenon. New Japanese sects are growing along with the Pentecostal branches of the Protestant Churches. We could argue that because of their extremely oppressive situation, the poor are more susceptible to these sects and find in them a more affective and flexible form of religious experience. But, what we are witnessing today is that the middle class, intellectuals, ex-socialist militants, ex-atheistic thinkers are also joining the sects and the new religious movements.

In Brazil one religious movement began in the middle of the Amazonian rain forest. It has an ecological orientation combined with Christian elements. The fact is that more and more university students, artists, and intellectuals are joining this religion. At the centre of its ritual is a liquid taken from an Amazonian plant. Drinking the liquid causes vomiting which is seen as part of a purification process and is followed by visions and mystical experiences. The National Council for Drugs examined the contents of the liquid to see if it were addictive. They declared it safe.

In some aspects this is a very rigid religion. Adherents make a vow of chastity. The concept of authority is vertical. People from Rio and São Paulo are leaving the city to live in the middle of the forest. It is an amazing phenomenon and has been one of the main subjects of discussion at recent meetings of the Bishops' Conference. We need to examine this phenomenon with great attention and respect. What is God calling us to as Church through this movement?

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD - FIRST CONDITION OF ALL EVANGELIZATION

Two years ago I wrote an article in one of the Brazilian newspapers. My

position, in that article, one which I continue to maintain, is that we live in an historical moment in which our people suffer massive identity loss. We, as Church, are not responding to them. Our liturgies are cold, our structures rigid. We have an impersonal understanding of the community of faith. Our people do not feel welcomed as persons or received by name when they go to Church. The new movements and sects are more flexible and more affective. They are also manipulative. At times their leaders grow wealthy from the donations of the very poor.

It is necessary to acknowledge that these new religious movements know how to reach people. They respond to a need for affective involvement. Perhaps we, Catholics, are too rational. Rationality affects our way of thinking, writing and praying. We want to organize experience. Reason has a place in life, but we are living in an historical moment in which experience must come first. Karl Rahner, one of the greatest theologians of this century, reminds us that Christians of the future will be mystics or they will not be Christian. I think this recognition of the immediacy of religious experience explains the success of these new movements. People are contacted at an experiential, not a rational level.

One of the problems with liberation theology and even some Basic Communities is that efficiency, action, and the transformation of history may be taking first place. Our desire for liberation, our thirst for justice and for transforming the world must be rooted in our experience of God, the God of life, and not in social analysis. Social analysis is necessary but it cannot be an absolute, because when models fail, everything falls apart.

SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

What are we to do? Where is the pattern that we are waiting for? In thriving Christian communities, celebration, liturgy, and spirituality are central; these communities refine their hope and continue to struggle to realize an

option for the poor. Their struggle is rooted in the God of life. Until recently, theologians in Latin America were usually called on as resource persons to make an analysis of a situation. It is symptomatic that more and more we are now being called to preach retreats, to lead days of prayer, to combine analysis and spirituality. The Bible is more and more central. Something is happening and the religious life of even the most engaged and militant Christian is going through a deep change. Looking towards the horizon of Santa Domingo, the Church in Latin America is living through a special and rich moment in its history.

The Church must rethink its role. This demands a deep spiritual formation in the experience of God and an appreciation of mystery as reflected in the religious life of the people, the pastoral agents, the so-called Marxists, the militants, the marginalized, the poor.

So what must the Church do? I do not pretend to have the answer. We need to reflect together to discover new directions. When the Spirit breathes and people are open, anything can happen. Santo Domingo is still to come so it is not the moment to give answers. However, perhaps it is the moment to draw attention to popular religion, the people's experience of God, the way they have resisted religious oppression during the centuries and kept alive the flame of a living faith.

CONCLUSION

This moment is rich in its call to re-found and to re-discover the ways in which the people of Latin America seek for and experience God. It calls us to celebrate with our people, and to re-discover the very profound gift that is their faith. It calls us to work with this gift, not at the margin of it, not in spite of it, not against it, not by ignoring it, not with suspicion of it, but to work in dialogue with it. We are living out what Las Casas spoke of in the sixteenth century, when he said that even though the Indians did not adore the

true God, the God of the Christians, it was necessary to recognize that their God was true for them.

It would help us as Christians and as missionaries to re-discover how our God is true for us. The way we communicate this and the way we help others to experience God will lead to some common ground - a common ground found in the experience of life. God is always the God of life. Where there are signs of life, then there is a genuine experience of God. Even if the signs of life do not come from our institutions or from our ecclesiastical structures, if they are real signs of life, God is there. I think that this is the great challenge which our complex religious world holds out to us today.

QUESTIONS

Desire and Religiosity

Q. For women it is said that desire precedes reason. Is that insight related both to popular religion and also to the movement towards sects? Is this part of a search for the feminine?

A. Modern society has tried to suppress desire and stress the rational. Because of this, what emerges today is a distorted rationality which is at times a little frightening. I am always careful not to equate desire with the feminine and rationality with the masculine so as to create a radical separation. Women have been taught not to separate the two within themselves. I do not know about Anglo-Saxon countries but in Latin countries it is very common for a mother to tell a boy, 'Men don't cry!' 'Don't cry!' That is to say, swallow your emotion, don't show it; whereas it is acceptable for a girl to cry or to show emotion.

Women have been taught to deal with desire and affection from the beginning of their lives. In this sense, they may have more integrated personalities. And so, in religious expression and celebra-

tion, in everything that has to do with desire, the role of women is very important. Women are not more important than men; this attitude would only lead to reverse domination. Women have a contribution to make and it is significant that in many popular religions and the new religious movements, the leaders are women.

Sects and Dialogue

Q. How can we reconcile the ecumenical dimension of dialogue with the presence of sects in Latin America?

A. The challenge which sects present is a very complex one for us as Church. There are elements in the sects that we have to denounce, for example their manipulation. But they challenge us to re-think our understanding about seduction, which is traditionally linked to sin. In its literal sense, it means to lead in another direction. For many people the most basic direction of life is inevitably towards death. Sects emphasise an orientation towards life.

When we encounter new ways of approaching religion and new beliefs, we should not reject them outright, but rather try to understand what the secret of their attraction is for so many people. Perhaps we will arrive at the conclusion that we know little about proclaiming the Gospel! Jeremiah says, 'You have seduced me. I have allowed myself to be seduced.' To present the Gospel as Good News is to proclaim it in an attractive way so that people will be seduced by it. Perhaps we will discover that the God in whom we believe is a God of seduction. Perhaps the sects have something to teach us. Whether or not we can engage in ecumenical dialogue with them is another question calling for attention and reflection.

Negative Aspects of Sects

Q. The negative aspects of the sects was missing from your presentation. In Brazil, they have

received support from the government and from the United States. They do not see the need to transform society, nor to address issues of injustice. It is true we must dialogue with them and we can learn a lot from them, but we must also take into account these negative aspects.

A. The negative aspects of the sects are very real. They have financial resources outside Brazil which provide access to television. They have a great deal of financial power.

They alienate because they are not connected to the reality of life today in Latin America. Even within the mainline Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, the charismatic movement may foster alienation. Alienation is a rapidly growing phenomenon. We, in the university faculty of theology, have many students who choose the charismatic movement as the subject of doctoral dissertations. Very progressive elements within the Church sometimes accuse the charismatic movement of encouraging alienation, because it is not concerned with the transformation of society.

Even though this is true, we are still challenged to address a major pastoral question. What does the charismatic movement mean for our work of evangelization? I thoroughly agree with the concern expressed by the Bishops at Puebla. If we leave a pastoral vacuum someone else will fill it. We cannot fill every space; we are not that powerful. But we want to be authentic as we respond to people's thirst for mystery, for the sacred and for spirituality that is emerging in response to these signs of the times.

The Role of Missionaries

Q. What is the role of missionaries in Latin America today?

A. Christians in Latin America have moved from the security of a faith which was very clear, to questioning religious belief and practices. In the post-Vatican era these questions produced a process of reflection marked by growing respect for one another and a readiness to listen to the other. But we are discovering now that at this time when the Church in Latin America is less rigid, the children of the Modern Age are being drawn to more rigid religious groups.

What then is your role today as members of religious congregations? You must be facilitators of the experience of the mystery of God for people. Karl Rahner reminds us that people hunger to experience God. I am reminded here of the story of someone who was once very active in the Church. When she went looking for a person who could teach prayer, the priests and religious were too busy doing other things. Her search led elsewhere, to one of the new sects which have sprung up throughout Latin America.

Religious persons, missionaries, and theologians are called today to be masters of the Spirit. This is not said with arrogance, but quite humbly. This does not mean withdrawal into the life of a hermit, a withdrawal which negates a belief in the transformation of the world through the struggle for social justice. It means experiencing the world through Jesus Christ, celebrating justice, and practising love - an active love. This willingness to experience life as mystery is the central priority for missionaries.

II. THE LAITY IN TODAY'S LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH

We are living through a moment in the Church when we are called to pause and to reflect on the essential *otherness* of lay people. I would describe this moment as very rich and very difficult, a conflictive moment. It is a moment when conflicts about interpretation do not touch the eternal and constitutive things of the Church - God, Jesus Christ, the Spirit, the Gospel. Instead they center on understanding Christian identity, belonging to the Church, the place and the role of the laity within the Church.

We experience a number of differing insights and interpretations about what it means to be a Christian today. It seems that we have more questions than answers. That is why I propose first to look at the theological ground for the identity of the Christian lay person; and then focus on Latin America to reflect on that identity in a particular historical and contemporary setting. Finally, I hope to explore some questions and challenges as we look towards the assembly of Santo Domingo.

THE CHRISTIAN LAY IDENTITY

At the center of this conflict of interpretation is lay identity - the lay way of being Christian. Why? Because the Church has understood herself, at least for many, many years from the perspective of non-lay persons. Also, I, a lay person, think of Church as being equated with the Pope, the bishops, priests and religious. Despite Vatican II and the more than 20 years which have followed, we have not assimilated or rooted ourselves in the concept of the Church as 'people of God.'

The identity of the laity was dealt with quite succinctly in *Lumen Gentium* in the definition of Church as 'people of God.' This preceded any description about parishes, ministries or services. Along with this there emerged the treatment of the laity's role as protagonists in the secular world. The Council stressed the importance of their role in building society and their place in politics, economics, and other areas which affect society directly. The Gospel will only arrive, will only be preached in those areas, the Council said, if lay people proclaim it. This is the specific task of the laity.

At that moment in history it was a very positive understanding of the laity. But we have arrived at another moment where in order to be really faithful to the Council we have to be free enough to look beyond the Council and to analyze our reality with great faith. This also asks us to take a certain historical distance from the Council itself, so as to find in the Council and in its writings a clearer understanding of two theologies. One is more communal, based on the concept of the Church as 'people of God;' the other more juridical, more hierarchical and more structured.

This second understanding is very important as we look at the future of the laity in the Church. I would dare to say, this limiting of the place, the role proper to the laity to the secular world is a subtle way of excluding people. It is a conscious or unconscious way of separating lay people from the center of life in the Church. If the laity are defined in contra-distinction to priests and religious; if the laity are defined

by what they are not, as persons who do not have any specific charism, who do not have any specific ministry within the Church, then a lay person is someone who is *only* baptized.

This distinction introduces a profound dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Lay people are charged to inhabit profane space; so politics, society, everything that is not the domain of the holy, the spiritual, the sacred, is the field of the laity. The specialists in the field of the spirit are clergy and religious. This understanding has supported great separateness in our Church.

Christifideles Laici published in 1989 tried to make this separation less rigid. However, the gap remains. The specifics of the laity's role are centered on the secular world. That is the field proper to the laity. I think this is very serious because it takes lay people out of or away from certain roles and services in the Church such as theology. Theology is not specifically secular; it is the study of the sacred; the study of the central mysteries of life. Preaching retreats, helping other people to pray, likewise are not secular services. Lay people cannot do these. On the other hand, religious and priests who want to be in solidarity with the poor to reflect on and respond to political situations, are reminded that their work is to defend the Church and to represent the sacred and the spiritual. Political involvement belongs to the laity, because it is a secular activity.

This impoverishes the whole people of God and relegates the laity to the condition of being second-class citizens. Because their lives are involved with family, children, earning and spending money, shopping - activities considered to be secular, the laity are denied access to the spiritual. For this the Church has its own specialists and these specialists are only allowed to involve themselves in the sacred. The secular is outside their domain.

To be really faithful to the deepest spirit of Vatican II, we are called to move beyond these divisions,

clergy/laity, religious/non-religious, and arrive at a more total ecclesiology rooted, not in opposing positions but in a fertile tension between unity and diversity. There is one ecclesial community, formed and informed by the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who distributes charisms and vocations freely. We do not know from where the Spirit comes or where the Spirit goes. But we do know that the Spirit moves in and through the entire community and constantly surprises us.

I can give a personal testimony about this. I belong to a lay association called Christian Life Community. Our life is based on Ignatian spirituality. One emphasis is the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. I, as well as other men and women, have been called to help in giving retreats. In Brazil I have been invited to give retreats to the clergy of some dioceses. The first time it was to a group of priests in the interior of São Paulo. They said it was a new experience for them to hear a lay person and a woman speaking about relating to God and about the place of the Gospel in daily life. This was a rich experience for both them and me.

When the secular and the sacred are placed over against one another, giving a retreat would not be part of the role of a lay person. The evidence of the Spirit, however, teaches us that what we call sacred is not the domain of the privileged few. The gifts of the Spirit, by the grace and the will of God, are distributed according to the needs of the community. One way to enrich the Church is to go on developing a theology of the laity which flows from a renewed theology of baptism. Baptism is the central point of Christian identity and the point of departure of Christian life. We can then explore and deepen our understanding of the Church, the Gospel, the Christian life, the priesthood and the role of the bishops. A renewed consideration of the centrality of baptism will enable us to focus on the basic question of Christian identity.

It amazes me that with all that is done in sacramental theology we do so little with the great reality of

Baptism as it is proclaimed in the New Testament. The Baptist's call to new life extends to everyone - gentile or Jew, woman or man. This is so different from the narrowness of the Jewish ritual. The ritual for John the Baptist is not a sexist ritual. It does not suppose that the masculine anatomy is a prerequisite for baptism. It does not pre-suppose Jewish identity or a particular place in society. Baptism moves aside all the frontiers of our world. It rejects all compromises and inaugurates a new way of being in the world, a new way of life.

Baptism, in the New Testament, inaugurates a new set of relationships, a new way of sharing life with one another. It proclaims a new creation, a way of being reborn. The choice then of a state of life, the choice of vocation within the Church, the choice for ministry comes *after* Baptism. There are different ways of expressing this baptismal engagement, for the Spirit provokes different responses from the 'people of God.'

THE LATIN AMERICAN REALITY

I think that all of these considerations can enlighten what we have been saying about Latin America, the story of the involvement of the laity, and the arrival of Christianity on the continent. It contributes to a description of the face of the laity and of how that face is to be seen in the light of the coming conference in Santo Domingo. Of course in speaking now of Latin America, I am speaking from a Brazilian perspective. It is the situation of the Church in Brazil which I know best, because it is mine. But I also think that my reflections can be applied to other countries and realities as well.

During the first evangelization, there was little separation between laity and clergy. Lay associations, fraternities, and third orders were very important. Lay people had great freedom in organizing themselves, leading their own liturgies and meetings, and writing a register of memories of their own stories. Some common sayings from the

period which seem to capture the ecclesial spirit of the times are:

*'A lot of saints, very few priests.
A lot of devotions, very few Masses.'*

The role of the laity changed during the Romanization Period when the focus moved to the clerical identity of the Church. Formation of the clergy became more uniform; the clergy developed a very strong and separate identity. The choice of educating clergy with clergy and laity with laity introduced a very serious break in the organization of the Church and its role in the organization of society. But this break did not succeed in destroying all hope. In rural areas, in the interior of Brazil, the Romanization of the clergy and subsequently of the Church, did not succeed in shaping ecclesial organization. Popular devotions to the Saints and to the Virgin Mary flourished under lay auspices. There were not a sufficient number of priests and so lay organizations remained very strong; that explains in part the strength of Base Ecclesial Communities in rural areas.

I worked for five years in a *favella*, a slum in the south of Rio de Janeiro. The population of the *favella* is about the same as the whole city of Petropolis. We worked in only one part of it. During the month of May the devotion of the people to the Virgin is very beautiful, very genuine. During the entire month of May, the statue of the Virgin was taken from house to house. People said the rosary and had other popular devotions including a bible reading. On the last day we organized a celebration at the Church and every group, every biblical circle was there. There was Mass and hymn singing, in praise of Mary, of old and very traditional songs which originated in the interior of Brazil. These songs spoke to the hearts of the people.

This type of lay community organization makes it easier for Base Communities to function in a country like Brazil. These communities are in fact lay communities. They are a contribution to the faith of the universal

Church from the people of Latin America. The emergence of Base Communities also challenges our understanding of adult lay Christians. Usually this conjures up middle-class, literate professionals, who exercise a certain influence in society and shape public opinion through the mass media. Also in Latin America entirely new concepts of the laity are now developing. Laity are growing and being formed through new lay movements which are in some ways conservative. But there is also the other lay reality, the poor and the simple people who live in the rural areas. These people are coming to a clearer sense of their own identity and of their role in the life of the Church.

I had a very strong experience of the emergence of the poor when I participated in the regional meeting of Latin American Christian Communities in July 1989. I was just one among 2000 people and 100 bishops from 9 Latin American countries. Leadership in each group belonged to a lay person - a man or a woman. It was he or she who allowed the bishop to speak. It was really an experience of being Church, of being community. Everyone shared the joy of being together as 'people of God.'

The emergence of the poor as historical protagonists in Latin America coincides with the emergence of a new laity; a laity with a new face, new features, with new problems and new questions. They are not new because once they were not there and now they are. They were always there, but they were not active in their own historical and ecclesial process. This active involvement can neither be halted nor reversed. Of course authority structures and oppression can cause great damage, but the growing consciousness of the laity cannot be destroyed. A whole generation of laity in Latin America has had a new experience which in turn, has expanded their horizons of Church.

THE CHALLENGE OF SANTO DOMINGO

Puebla called the Church to be attentive to the laity's growing sense of

identity and self-determination. It also called for a solid doctrinal and spiritual formation. And it was right. Today we, the Church, are experiencing a crisis because of the militancy of the laity in areas of social justice and political involvement. There is a sense of loss in the centrality of the liturgy, loss in the traditional communitarian life of the Church. But, I would raise the question: "Whose fault is it?" I think that part of this is the fault of militants within the laity, but could it not also be the fault of the Church as a whole? The fault of a Church that was incapable of following, of accompanying these militants when they started throwing themselves heart and mind, body and spirit into the struggle. I do not have an answer, but I raise the question for all of us. Let me add that I do not think that we can only blame the militants or the ideologists. We have to blame ourselves and examine our consciences so that we may learn a lesson for the future.

In the preparatory document for Santo Domingo, the place given to the laity is very important. The proposed schema lists the permanent options for the Church of Latin America. The first of the new options is the option for the laity. The Church in Latin America knows she has to come alive to the identity of lay people in order to strengthen her identity as a Church. The document mentions that lay people are a pastoral priority for the Latin American Church. It comments on the importance of lay people during the early evangelization of the continent and their role in the deepening and expansion of Christianity. It also raises a warning about the temptation to multiply ministries *ad intra*.

This calls attention to a particular discomfort on the part of the hierarchical Church when lay people want to act within the Church. Of course there is the argument that just as there are priests who are not comfortable with their identity, there are lay people who want to be mini-priests or mini-religious. But the fact that the Church raises a warning about the role of the laity is a symptom that the distinction between the sacred and the profane is still there. These have not yet been

integrated into the total life of the Church and this affects our sacramental theology. The document addresses the question of the family; the vocation of the Christian family to be a domestic Church; the importance of the family at the beginning of the evangelization of the continent; and the importance of the family now.

From my perspective as a married woman and a feminist, who tries to build a Christian model of the family, I believe that other problems remain. In all the Church documents, the description of the family is romantic and idealized. Ideals are essential, but they obscure the cruel and very painful reality of the Latin American family yesterday and today. The documents do not mention anything about incomplete families; or about families that cannot be real families because of social or economic oppression. In the economically depressed northeast Brazil, children are starving and their fathers must travel to São Paulo for work. No one knows if the father will ever return; if he will be able to send for his family; or if he will begin a second family. Meanwhile the mother is left to cope with her situation. The ideal presented by the Church is that of the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in Nazareth, and not the cruel and crude reality of family life.

The document omits the pervasive values which invade Christian families today. Modernity, the media with its anti-values and countervalues, introduces competition between Christian values and those of modern life. Even at the dinner table, television interferes with dialogue. Parents want to communicate ethical values to their children; television and the *novellas* communicate an opposing set of values. The Latin American family was a victim of the cruelty of the conqueror from the beginning. Indigenous families suffered violence and destruction; children were taken from the arms of their mothers; mothers killed their children rather

than give them up to a life of slavery; husbands and wives were forcibly separated, and rituals of love and sex were denied couples. Today the violence continues.

I believe that the Latin American family, the Christian one, is still a victim of the rigidity and the incomprehension of the Church as demonstrated by its documents; rigidity about the image of the family, more idealized than real; rigidity about human reproduction and sexual ethics. More steps need to be taken to arrive at an honest and integrated view. This is a basic condition for successful pastoral work with families. And it is precisely here that the contribution of lay leaders is important, for they live in their flesh and blood the tensions and the reality of family life.

CONCLUSION

This moment of the laity in the Latin American Church is a moment of hope because the Latin American Church is recognizing her dependence on the laity and their role in actively building-up the Church. It is a moment of hope because we are beginning to see the true face of lay people, of Basic Ecclesial Communities, the emergence of women, and diverse lay associations. All of these features are merging to give the laity a new face in Latin America.

It is also a difficult moment; we feel there is still a lack of confidence in the laity in many sectors of the Church. Lay people are called to holiness. This is the universal call of all Christians. They are called to be producers of moral and spiritual goods, not just consumers; not just receivers of the Gospel, but also announcers and communicators of the Good News. The development of a deeper theology of Baptism is necessary if lay people are to be fully integrated into the life of the universal Church.

III. THE DIFFERENCE IN THE WAY OF KNOWING AND SPEAKING ABOUT GOD

(WOMEN AND THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION)

*"Captain Alonso Lopez de Avila had seized a young 'Indian' during the war, a beautiful and charming woman. She had promised her husband, fearing that he would be killed in the war, never to belong to anyone else, and so she chose to give up her life rather than allow herself to be touched by any other man. And that was why they abandoned her to the dogs." (Diego de Landa, *Relação das coisas de Yucatan*, 32)*

Quoted as an epigraph to T. Todorow's *"La conquête de l'Amérique: La question de l'autre."* Paris, Seuil, 1982; dedicated "To the memory of a Maya woman devoured by the dogs."

The history of women in Latin America has been hidden and concealed as it has always been in the history of the western world and, in a very concrete and special way, in the Church. Humanity is a sexual reality. If one of its halves is not integrated and visible in human creative and productive processes, the result will be a sick humanity marked by serious pathology. On the theological level, a Church that prescind from the visibility and audibility of this 'other' and 'different' half, is an impoverished Church, limited in its potential to announce the Gospel in today's world. These new understandings emerged even more recently in Latin America. The process of women's emancipation started in the North. The news of it echoed south of the Equator, awakening women to see that a new road had been opened to them. The way women chose to walk that road has led to attitudes and priorities different from those of our northern sisters. That does not mean however that we are not united in the struggle for the right to our difference, our history, our visibility.

During this reflection we shall see how the situation of women in Latin America has been marked by oppression since the very beginning of the Conquest. Women's radical otherness, inscribed in their very bodies, made them the first victims of the cruelties of the conqueror. Their subsequent domestication and their continuing state of subjection has continued throughout these 500 years of history, interrupted by isolated accounts of visible resistance.

Now, as we approach the 4th Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Santo Domingo, the presence of women in the Latin American Church and society is more than just visible. Theirs' is an audible, organized and well qualified voice. Today it is a clearly developed theological voice, articulated in a new and original systematized fashion. It has destabilized, both internally and externally, a great deal of the homogeneous security of a Church with its almost exclusively masculine face. On the other hand it has also enriched the people of God

with a joyful announcement of the creative and enriching Good News. My present reflection will try to point out the process by which the presence of women became more evident, and how the theology developed by women influenced the Latin American Church.

TELLING ANOTHER STORY

The conqueror set foot on a land that was new for him; but it was the Latin American Woman's home, her country. This event marked the beginning of a very cruel story, a story also of heroic resistance. The epigraph I quoted gives witness to one woman's heroism but she was not unique. The conquerors used the bodies of women to satisfy their desires and their lust. In some cases, the physical strength of the conqueror defeated the woman. She had as her only weapons, her cries, her nails, the stiffness of her body; but often, as with the land, the culture and the religion of her people, she succumbed before a brutal strength.

As indigenous women, they were doubly inferior beings from the viewpoint of the conqueror. They provided the white man with the pleasure of seeing them dominated. And thus became for his eyes and in his hands the object of a double violation and a double violence. When Montezuma addressed the Spanish leaders of the expeditions in order to convince them to leave the country, he not only offered them gold, but offered them women. Women then became an additional justification for the conquest.

The succession of massacres that stained the conquest of America with a flood of blood is one of the clearest and most painful records of mankind's cruelty. Women were the first victims of this explicit demonstration of power on the part of Europeans who seemed to find pleasure in showing off their ability to subjugate them. Indigenous women were made pregnant so that a higher price could be asked for them at the slave market.

In keeping with the mentality of 16th century European civilization and Christianity, women were removed from the public space they had access to prior to the conquest. The conquerors suppressed every sign of the cult of the mother goddesses which had been common among the indigenous people. It is evident in the early days of the conquest, that the plan of the colonizer and the plan of the evangelizer were superimposed one on the other. It was only later on that evangelization can be seen as something not only distinct from the aggressive conquest, but even contrary to it, especially after a Bartolomé de las Casas began defending and denouncing the activities of the conquerors.

From the very beginning contradictory approaches generated different ways of understanding evangelization and of recognizing the presence of the Church in the new continent. It is the women who assume an important role in the prophetic and liberating models associated with the cause of the indigenous peoples. It is the women principally who, from their wisdom and their experience of life often marked by suffering, kept alive the memory of the native peoples. They were the ones best equipped to select those essentials of the evangelical message which coincided with the richest elements of the symbolic and cultural world of their ancestors. They thus created mechanisms of cultural resistance which they transmitted to their children. In time this became a kind of subterranean cultural layer which preserved ancestral values. At the same time it incorporated central elements of Christianity, ensured over the passage of time, by the presence of Europeans in Latin America.

The experience of struggle and resistance became deeply rooted over the centuries. Today it enables Latin American women to "tell another story," not just the beginnings of their oppression and their struggle for liberation, but also the history of their faith and of creative and new ways of living it in the context of Latin America. They

have invented new ways of being Church.

THE CHURCH AND WOMEN

The life of the Church in Latin America during the last 25 years has engaged the whole people of God and the whole continent. Its various segments and levels have been caught up in a real renewal and an opening of new horizons. This is so true, that the Latin American continent has been seen as a place of hope and renewal for ecclesial communities in other parts of the world. Although the issue of women was not a main concern of this renewal process, it is present in the two official documents of the conferences of Medellín and Puebla.

Medellín

At a first and superficial glance the document of Medellín might appear frustrating and meager in what it says about women. But there can already be found in it, and possibly even more in the events that led up to it, the turning points that would soon be articulated by the theological and pastoral reflection of the Christian women of Latin America. These were incorporated into the renewal process. Instead of delaying the liberation process of women they invigorated it. They helped to form a deep consciousness about the specific vocation of women as co-participant subjects of the construction of history and the renewal of the Church.

The essential commitment of the Latin American Church assembled in Medellín - a commitment to fight for justice and solidarity as constitutive of faith - is meant to include all those who are deprived of their rights, justice and dignity. Women are foremost. They normally live in extreme economic poverty. Very often this may be due to their race, *Indian* or *Black*, but always due to their sex, which keeps them at a permanent disadvantage in a society predominantly ruled according to masculine patterns.

If the explicit mention of women as historical and ecclesial subjects is still meagre in Medellín when it speaks of the poor, it does speak *de facto* of women. Among the immense majority of the poor of the continent, 50% are women. The profile of the poor in Latin America is fundamentally a feminine profile. Medellín committed the Church of the continent to work for better human conditions for the millions of Latin American men and women who were poor. Women, more than others, have known the dehumanizing oppression of the poor.

Puebla

The official text of Puebla repeats the options proclaimed by Medellín, deepens and widens them; the option for the poor becomes the central perspective. The Puebla document is permeated by expressive statements on equality between men and women. The condition of women, doubly oppressed and marginalized, is admitted. It is stated that the Church has not always been sufficiently in solidarity with the poor, especially women. Criticism is expressed regarding the double working-day of women, the inequality of salaries, the social-economic structure that often pushes them into prostitution or abuse of their bodies for experiments in new techniques of sterilization. The document recognizes the need for women to organize themselves in order to claim respect for their rights. It states that the Church must contribute towards and collaborate in this process. The Church recognizes and praises the participation of women in the process of evangelization, and criticizes itself for not having promoted a greater participation of women in pastoral initiatives.

Puebla reaffirms the full dignity of women as human persons, without any restriction or confusion. Woman is an image of God, called to continue the work of creation and, together with man, to be co-creator of this work. In the view of Puebla, woman is a full member of the people of God. She participates in the gifts of Christ and is called to fullness of life in the strength

of the Spirit. Puebla calls the entire Church to a renewed conversion, one which fosters the liberation of women from all forms of servitude.

More than twenty years have passed since Medellín, and more than ten since Puebla. Many things have happened in Latin America and its Church. The role of women has become relevant. That which was but a fragile seed at the time of Medellín, was already a vigorous reality at Puebla. It is now a big tree, rich in branches and fruit. The women of Latin America have made a consistent and noteworthy contribution of their own ideas. With their own special word, they have been part of the growth of the theology of liberation. They have enriched theology with their special insights arising from the epiphany of God on the face of the poor. They have been active and creative subjects of these developments.

WOMEN DOING THEOLOGY

The theology produced by Latin American women has tried from the very beginning to address the issue of poor women. It takes the life and experience of simple and poor women as a point of departure, and as the basic content of theological thinking and doing. From the depths of their own oppression, women theologians are organizing themselves and participating in the process of liberation of their brothers and sisters. They feel the strong need to be present in their struggles and at their meetings and assemblies. They try to understand, to receive and to accept their stories, to hear their songs and lamentations, and to translate these subsequently into articulate, rigorous, theological discourse.

The theology done by women in Latin America during these last twenty years, does not originate from generic and theoretical questions. Instead it comes from the very ground of reality, the body, the mystery, the struggles of poor women. Beaten down by suffering and oppression, they weep their sorrow,

but continue to sing their hope and fight their battles. They are witnesses to and victims of the captivity of their people. It is they who praise their people's victories and defend the slightest signs of life. Starting from the experience and practice of poor women, building on biblical reflection, women theologians are organizing a coherent theological discourse to bring the voice and the struggle of uneducated women into books, courses, and conferences of theology and into churches and cathedrals.

This starting point is not always understood by men theologians. Some tend to despise the peculiarities of women, revealing their androcentric presuppositions and their biased studies. Traditional theology identified humanity with masculinity and considered women as a category on the periphery of the human interpretation of reality. The new fields of study done by women not only try to present woman and her activity as a key category of interpretation but also attempt to transform the androcentric approach into a fully human investigation. This means the obligatory inclusion of the feminine perspective.

Women doing theology in Latin America today, first of all want to touch their own mystery: the mystery of being woman, the mystery of being the keeper and custodian of life, the mystery of being femininely human. It is the mystery of living, as women, their experience of destructive poverty and the marvel of their struggle for liberation. This leads them to touch the mystery of God, to think and express God in an organized way in a theology at the same time mystagogic and pedagogic.

Mysticism and Mystagogy

Women in Latin America undertake the adventure of walking the roads of theology with this *other* experience of God, *feeling God in a different way*. This feeling is characteristic of an experience of the mystery of God that is becoming determinant for the way

Latin America women do theology. As the experience is affirmed and becomes consistent, it will question and interpellate theology on the continent. The feminine mysticism which flows from the writings and sayings of women theologians becomes a powerful force of synthesis and integration, internally coherent and correctly articulated. It integrates experience and praxis, the felt and the lived, the passionate love and the strongly felt need, to dedicate oneself to the service of the Kingdom encountered primarily on the faces of the poor and oppressed, the majority of whom are women.

This mysticism is uncomplicated; it is indissolubly united with a mystagogy that serves at the same time as its channel of expression. This mystagogy means to live in the midst of the world, to seize and interpret the experience of God of the poorest women silenced by society. It means facilitating for others the experience of God which is granted as a grace. It means, prior to ratiocination or mental theorising, to let our own desires speak so that our speaking might encounter and kindle the spark of desire asleep in other peoples hearts and bodies.

This integration of mysticism and mystagogy makes possible a pertinent and truly theological reflection. Mystagogy is not the same as theoretical clarification. On the contrary, the illumination that comes from it originates in the very contact with the reality of mystery. Without mystagogy, the truth that one wants to clarify risks remaining obscure. In this sense, true theology is fundamentally mystagogic, since it means an introduction to the reality of God as a mystery which is near and not subject to manipulation.

The theology of women in Latin America today is a mystagogic, affective and effective theology that arises from an experience of loving and attentive listening. At the same time it helps to bring about such experiences and expresses itself in a practice that is as effective as it is tender and loving. It is not, and cannot be, a theology

merely designed by rationality; instead it is moved and interwoven in the whole of its course by the flame of desire.

Desire

If in the past theology was generally marked by the primacy of the rational and rationality, the theology done by women, precisely because it starts from concrete experience, is closely and indissolubly bound to desire. The primacy of rationality is replaced by the primacy of desire. The cold seriousness of pure science gives place to a new systematization which arises from the impulse of desire dwelling in the profoundest depth of the human person. Sensitivity and rationality, gratuitousness and efficiency, experience and reflection, desire and rigour are brought together in a new synthesis.

The presence of women in the world of theology brings to the stage of Church life the primacy of desire that purely rational concepts do not take into account. Desire is a totalizing force which pervades all the dimensions of the woman theologian. Doing theology is realized with her body, her heart and her hands as much as with her head. The ripe fruit that begins to emerge from her fertile womb is the result of a slow and patient reflection about profound and intensely lived experiences. This compares with past tradition and the normative road-signs that guided the people of Israel on their journeys and the people of the Church today.

The Spirit, divine desire poured out over history and over humanity, is the origin and mover of this desire. The Spirit finds fertile and favorable soil for divine creativity. While pointing constantly and faithfully to the past, to Jesus of Nazareth as the ultimate and definitive norm, the Spirit opens the future to infinite possibilities of inventiveness and new ways of expressing the Christian mystery. Poetry and symbol, which reach to the heart of matter and touch the edges of Spirit and of Beauty, are brought back to the center of theological reflection and discourse.

Liberation Theology

All this is equally true with regard to the theology of liberation. The desire I speak of is not an aseptic impulse that merely obeys aesthetic, barren and preserved patterns. To speak of desire is to speak of human beings in their ultimate depths, their most profound truth, their energetic vital impulse. In one word, it is to speak of their most authentic and legitimate aspirations. It means to speak of what makes their bodies vibrate and shake with pleasure and to speak of their vulnerability. When the most basic and vital needs of human beings are in danger; when they are deprived of the essentials that constitute their lives and that give consistency to what is most fundamental to them, then it is desire, their most primordial, true and vital impulse which is suffering aggression and violation.

Within this perspective, Latin America is a continent that has systematically suffered aggression in its vital desires. It is a continent where the poor, who are the great majority of the population, experience daily the weight of domination, a domination which lessens and atrophies their bodies and confines them to utter poverty and hopeless oppression. It lessens and atrophies their potential for desire and for knowing themselves to be desired. It destroys their possibility for living and affirming themselves fully as human beings. The process of liberation starts when the poor become conscious of the desire repressed within them. Liberated, they let it emerge almost like a shout, as a power propelling them to struggle. Theology is called to say its word in this process of liberating desire. Concretely, in our case, it is theology by women.

A Latin American woman, a victim of violence since the first days of the conquest, knows a great deal about repressed desires. She knows that if her desires are true, nothing can deter or extirpate them. They emerge later in new and fruitful cultural, religious, and theological syntheses. A challenging and promising road has been opened for the woman doing theology within the context of the theology of liberation. The

challenge is to restore the primacy of desire within theological discourse. Her goal is to be led towards the kingdom where liberation will be fully realised.

Women also know that the strength of their theology is to be found in the fact that it is not done alone. When theology is done in solidarity, in a communion that does not isolate, it produces life. They acknowledge that they are heiresses to an entire tradition of women generating life. The people of Israel, the nascent Church, the women who were victims of the cruelties of the conquest continue today as the heroines and martyrs who give their lives on the Latin American continent.

This unity of bodies and desires, of minds and hearts is not easy; it is a long-drawn out achievement. It presupposes acceptance of difference and of the other. Women understand something about unity in diversity; about being different, being other! Their voices resound in a choir of voices having the same quality, or timbre. The 'difference' of their presence questions the univocal structure of a stern and clerical Church. The presence of women brings to the Church a totally new challenge, at times uncomfortable, but certainly fascinating. Their theology comes with a new perfume, a new way of looking at the wonder of the good news. It is like the perfume, rare and expensive, that the woman, Mary of Bethany, poured on the feet of Jesus (John 12:1-8). It conflicted with the usual domestic odours but it was legitimated and its value confirmed by Jesus himself.

SANTO DOMINGO

In the process leading up to Santo Domingo, women have appeared only in an obscure and secondary manner. The papers prior to the document of consultation seemed not to recognize their importance in the Latin American ecclesial process. Some references appeared in a few paragraphs but these did not correspond to the richness of the Puebla document.

The second synthesis of contributions to the document of consultation, leading

up to the *Instrumentum Laboris*, does take some steps towards more reassurance and cause for hope. The emergence of women is acknowledged as well as their need to find adequate channels to express themselves. Besides the classical and much praised role of a woman in the family, there is positive mention of women's organizations and of the struggle for their rights. But, notwithstanding all the steps already taken towards liberation, the constant marginalization of women is acknowledged, above all on the level of decision making in the Church. Something quite new is the explicit admission on the part of the Church that *machismo* is an evil, something to be fought against. This is seen as an intrinsic component of new evangelization in the continent.

The synthesis recognizes the vital contribution of women, especially women in religious life, in the process of the liberation of the Latin America continent. It seems to me that this touches a vital point, very often neglected by the official Church, as well as by liberation theology. Women who have discovered a new form of religious life through their humble, radical and devoted insertion among the poor are laying the foundation stones of a new society and a new Church, a Church more communitarian and more committed to the poor. Their work, so often anonymous and obscure, has been little recognized and scarcely mentioned. It only shines through when crowned with the palm of martyrdom, as in the case of Sister Adelaide Molinaro, inserted among the Brazilian *Indians*, or when a woman gives herself to theological studies to prepare a university thesis.

The second synthesis calls this feminine presence "one of the newest aspects of the Latin American Church, which gives this Church a feminine, joyous, festive and welcoming face." Nevertheless, the same document sadly states that "the Church has not yet acknowledged the full potential of women with regard to the formation of the family and the Christian community, evangelization and the acts of Christian charity. Women are still valued not by

what they are, but by what they do and how they serve."

In the process of preparation for Santo Domingo, women seem to be recognized for their place and their importance in the journey of the Latin American Church. Their vocation, according to the above mentioned document is to be the memory of humanity, transmitter of culture, conceiver of the future, keeper, custodian and nourisher of life. The future of the Christian community, not only in Latin America but in the whole world, is thus linked intimately and indissolubly to the fate of women. This recognition is an important step in the process of women's liberation and may lead to its becoming a reality.

CONCLUSION: WOMEN AT THE BRINK OF THE MILLENNIUM

The crisis of models and paradigms which is being felt in the whole western world, is also a reality for the Latin American Church. As with all moments of crisis, this calls for discernment. What will be the role of liberation theology? What will be the role of women within this theology? What is needed initially is a serious effort at revision and self-criticism. The moment we are now living in can be one of life or death; the future of more than one generation is at stake. It is not enough to simply continue repeating the same things, clinging feverishly to the same themes, the same terminology, with the same fear of criticism. It is much too easy to call what is new or different, simply bourgeois, capitalist or anti-revolutionary. The seriousness of the circumstances calls for courage to admit that we all find ourselves challenged by the same dream, the same marvelous utopia of the Kingdom of God. But we do not have concrete patterns to follow and we do not have secure models to enable us to concretize it. Admitting this would already be a first and unavoidable step.

Another one would be the absolute necessity of broadening horizons and perspectives. This would admit at least

as an hypothesis, that oppression and the struggle for liberation reaches levels beyond the social-economic-political ones. There are many oppressions, cultural and planetary, which are denounced today by other movements and segments of society. These must be taken seriously by all who are willing to commit themselves to struggle for justice and equality of rights.

Widening the horizons will bring new challenges and new themes, new subjects of theology. The poor will be seen with new faces and identified from new angles. Woman is one of these new faces; her concrete contribution to the search for a better world and a happier humanity offers to liberation theology the opportunity to come closer to Jesus and his message about the Kingdom.

Women are called today to go beyond their early struggles and to initiate a discussion about themselves, their identity, their place in society and Church in collaboration with other circles and groups. They are called to resist the temptation to succumb to the fear of insecurity about the unknown which openness to the new provokes; not to do so would make feminine discourse and theology unattainable for women and for the ecclesial community. The task of the theology of liberation is not only to stimulate the hope of those who are victims of any kind of discrimination and oppression, but also to revise the lessons of history. Theology done from the viewpoint of women contributes with love and hope to this revision and to the overturning of the paradigm of conquest which Diego de Landa recorded.

QUESTIONS

Q. Can you comment on the place of Mary in a Latin American context?

A. Let me begin by saying that our people have a deep seated devotion to Mary. During the month of May, elaborate ceremonies are held on a daily basis. In the *favella* where I worked these May devotions were a living expression of the popular religiosity of the people. The spirituality expressed was different from mine but beautiful; as the priest I worked with reminded me, this spirituality deserved respect.

On a more personal note, I have always been concerned about the way women relate to Mary. To be honest, I have had some problems with her. Gradually I became more aware of the clash between the image of Mary which was communicated to me - a woman always silent, virgin and mother, someone who always said "yes" - and my maturing Christian faith as a woman. It was only later, that I found another Mary in the Gospels. I also made the discovery of how much idolatry is expressed in the way that Mary is presented to women. As a woman she responded to the will of God in her body; we must reflect more on this free and complete act of faith.

When I gather with the women in a *favella* to reflect on scripture, I see that once they start to share their problems and concerns, and their deep seated desires as women, their love for Mary does not diminish. Instead they discover, really discover, the double dimension of Mary/woman. She is seen as a prophetic woman, the first participant in the mission of Jesus. She is experienced as a woman whose concerns were not limited by her roles of wife and mother. She was truly a woman of and for the people. Like her they are moved to address oppression and to work for the liberation of their people.

MCCJ	JOSEPH DAVID GLENDAY GIUSEPPE FILIPPI	VIA LUIGI LILIO, 80 00143 - ROME
MFIC	HELENE BYRNE MOYA BYRNE NOELA LEAMY	VIA LORENZO ROCCI, 64 00151 - ROME
MHM	WILLIAM TOLLAN	ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE LAWRENCE ST., MILL HILL LONDON NW7 4JX, ENGLAND
MM	BERNICE RIGNEY	BOX 21452 NAIROBI, KENYA
	BOB GOLISH THOMAS MARTI	MARYKNOLL SOCIETY HOUSE VIA SARDEGNA 83 00187 - ROME
	JOSEPH LANG LEO SHEA	MARYKNOLL N.Y. 10545, U.S.A
MMS	RITA SYRON MARY ASHE TOBIN	41 CHATSWORTH GARDENS ACTON, LONDON W3 9LP ENGLAND
MSC	DARIO TAVERAS	VIA ASMARA 11 00199 - ROME
MSC(H)	KLARA SIETMANN	VIA MARTIRI DI VIA FANI, 22 01015 - SUTRI (VT)
MSHR	CORA RICHARDSON	23, CROSS AVENUE BLACK ROCK CO. DUBLIN, IRELAND
MSOLA	BEATRIX DENZEL ARLENE GATES	VILLA VECCHIA VIA FRASCATI 49 00040 - MONTE PORZIO CATONE
NDA	THERESE CONTOZ MICHELLE JEANNEROT CAMILLA MARTIN	VIA GHISLIERI, 15 00152 - ROME
OCARM	CHRIS O'DONNELL	TERENURE COLLEGE TEMPLEDORE RD DUBLIN 6W, IRELAND
	MICEAL O'NEILL JOHAN STENEKER	VIA G. LANZA, 138 00184 - ROME
OFM	OSWALD GILL	VIA S. MARIA MEDIATRICE, 25 00165 - ROME
OFMCAP	LINUS FAH	VIA PIEMONTE, 70 00187 - ROME
OMI	MICHEL COURVOISIER LORENZO ROY	VIA AURELIO, 290 00100 - ROME

OSA	DECLAN BROSNAN MELCHIOR MIRADOR	VIA S.UFFIZIO, 25 00193 - ROME
OSC	JIM REMMERSWAAL	VIA DEL VELABRO, 19 00186 - ROME
OSU	TERESA MARY FREDERICKS MARIA DOLOROSA SASMITA STEPHANIE WILSON	VIA NOMENTANA, 236 00162 - ROME
PME	FRANCOIS LAPIERRE	180 PLACE JUGE DESNOYERS VILLE DE LAVAL QUEBEC, CANADA
RGS	CAROLINE PRICE	V. RAFFAELLO SARDIELLO, 20 00165 - ROME
RNDM	LOUISE DUNPHY CLAIRE HIMBAULT MARGARET McINERNEY	VIA DI BRAVETTA, 628 00164 - ROME
RSCJ	KEIKO IWAI	VIA A. GANDIGLIO, 27 00151 - ROME
RSCM	VERONICA BRAND PATRICIA CONNOR ROSEMARY LENEHAN MARIANNE MURRAY ROSA DE LIMA PEREIRA MARY ALICE YOUNG	VIA ADELAIDE RISTORI, 26 00197 - ROME
SCJ	ADRIAN BORST	VIA CASALE S.PIO V, 20 00165 - ROME
SFB	MARY LOUGHRAN JOSEPHINE MENDIS SOPHIE SEBASTAMPILLAI	VIA DEI C.SANTOVETTI, 58 00165 - ROME
SHCJ	MARY ANN BUCKLEY MARGARET LORAN	VIA DELLA MAGLIANELLA, 379 00166 - ROME
SJ	MICHAEL AMALADOSS	BORGIO S.SPIRITO 5, CP 6139 00195 - ROME
SM	CONSTANCE DODD MARY MAGDALENE SMYTHE	VIA AURELIA, 292 00165 - ROME
SM	SEAN FAGAN JOHN JAGO	VIA ALESSANDRO POERIO, 63 00152 - ROME
SMA	PAUL CHATAIGNE(SPIRITUS)	40 RUE LA FONTAINE 75781 PARIS CEDEX 16 FRANCE
SMSM	MONICA COONEY (WCC)	150, ROUTE DE FERNEY P.O BOX 2100 CH - 1211 GENEVA 2 SWITZERLAND
	MARY ANN FAUCHER	VIA CASSIA, 1234 00189 - ROME

SND	JAN BOHN ELLEN GIELTY EMILY MULLIN MARNA ROGERS KEIKO SUZUKI	VIA MONTE ALTISSIMO, 23 00141 - ROME
SSND	HENRITA FROST	VIA DELLA STAZIONE AURELIA, 25 00165 - ROME
SSC	CHARLES J. DUSTER WILLIAM HALLIDEN	CORSO TRIESTE, 57 00198 - ROME
SSPS	CRISTEL DAUN SESILINDAH BLIKOLOLANG	VIA CASSIA, 645 00189 - ROME
SUSC	MARIA TERESA ANDANT JACQUELINE BUCHERT MARY PATRICIA DALY HELEN RYDER	VIALE AURELIO SAFFI, 28 00152 - ROME
SVD	PHILIP GIBBS GARY ROCHE	VIA DEI VERBITI, 1 00154 - ROME
SX	STEFANO BERTON FRANCESCO MARINI	VIALE VATICANO, 40 00165 - ROME

LAY MISSIONARIES

CSI	FRANCOIS DROUIN	CARREFOUR DE SOLIDARITE INTERNAZIONALE 555 SHORT ST, CHERBROOKE QUEBEC, CANADA J1H 2E6
VC	KATHLEEN DENNEHY	VIATOIRES CHRISTI 39 UPR GARDINER ST. DUBLIN 1, IRELAND

GUESTS

USCMA	CAROLYN McMANUS ALLEN SCHEID	U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSO. 3029 FOURTH STREET N.E WASHINGTON D.C, 20017 U.S.A
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NEWS

NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Bill Jenkinson, C.S.Sp. will be ending his 12 years of service as Executive Director of SEDOS on December 30th, 1992. The SEDOS Executive Committee has initiated the search for a new Executive Director. The President, Patricia Stowers, Superior General of the Marist Missionary Sisters has written to the heads of all SEDOS member-institutes asking for nominations for the post. Nominations should be sent to the SEDOS President, c/o SEDOS Secretariate, if possible, by October, 1st, 1992.

CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

Fr. Paul Jackson, SJ gave an inspiring talk in the series Christian-Muslim dialogue on June 3, 1992. His topic - SUFI: PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION IN ISLAM. He has edited *The Muslims of India: Beliefs and Practices* which was published in Bangalore, 1988, for The Islamic Studies Association of India. He has also translated *Sharaffudin Maneri: The Hundred Letters*. Preface by Syed Hasan Askari. Fr. Jackson was awarded his doctorate for his thesis on the life and teaching of Sharaffudin Maneri at Patna University. Born in Brisbane, Australia, he now lives in Patna and has Indian citizenship.

SEDOS MEMBERSHIP

Applications for membership of SEDOS have been received from the Sisters of St. Louis, The Bons Secours Sisters, and the Marianists.

AMERINDIA

This highly successful video is now available in English at - VERBO FILMS, VERTRIEB, KLEIKAMP 13, 44 00 MUNSTER, GERMANY (Tel. 0251-786716. Fax. 0251.787201) It is produced by the Society of the Divine Word in São Paulo, Brazil.

BOOK EXHIBITION

An Orbis Books exhibition of their recent publications was much appreciated at the Villa Cavalletti SEDOS Research Seminar. Participants were able to avail of considerable discounts when ordering books.

We draw your attention also to two other books which were on display there:

Carrier, Hervé, SJ. *Lexique de la Culture: Pour L'Analyse Culturelle et L'Inculturation*. Desclee, 1992. Fr. Carrier is at present Secretary to the Pontifical Council for Culture in Rome. This book is the result of ten years study and research.

Suenens, J. Cardinal. *Hopes and Memories*. Fayard, 1992. English translation by Elena French, who was one of the translators at our SEDOS Seminar. Cardinal Suenens is the only surviving member of the four moderators at the Second Vatican Council. This collection of memories brings us back to the days of the Council and tells us about the hopes the Cardinal still cherishes.

COMING EVENTS

DATES TO NOTE

October 5, 1992

THE THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND TO INCULTURATION

Speaker: Michel De Verteuil, CSSp

SVD College, via dei Verbiti, 1

A full-day session : 9.30 - 18.00 hrs.

November 5, 1992

ECOLOGY AND WORLD DEBT

1) The Religious Dimension

2) The Economic Dimension

SVD College, via dei Verbiti, 1

A morning session : 9.00 - 12.45 hrs.

December 1, 1992

SEDOS ANNUAL ASSEMBLY:

A LOOK BACK TO SANTO DOMINGO

also

SEDOS GENERAL MEETING AND PLANNING

SVD College, via dei Verbiti, 1

A full-day session

May 18-22, 1993

AFRICA: QUESTIONS AND PROPOSALS TO THE CHURCH

VILLA CAVALLETTI
