

# A Theology of Liberation

*History, Politics, and Salvation*

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## Introduction to the Revised Edition: Expanding the View

In 1968 the Latin American bishops wrote this description of the new phase of history that was dawning among us:

Latin America is obviously under the sign of transformation and development; a transformation that, besides taking place with extraordinary speed, has come to touch and influence every level of human activity, from the economic to the religious.

This indicates that we are on the threshold of a new epoch in this history of Latin America. It appears to be a time of zeal for full emancipation, of liberation from every form of servitude, of personal maturity and of collective integration [Medellín, “Introduction,” 4].

This was a vision of a new historical era to be characterized by a radical aspiration for integral liberation. However painful the Latin American situation is (and it was painful in 1968), the vision is still valid. During the intervening years much has happened to change the history of the region and bring it across the threshold of which the bishops spoke and into an ever-accelerating process.

All this creates a new challenge for those who are trying to draw inspiration for their lives from him who “dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The perspective given by faith should help us see what is at stake in the present stage of history. In this context the bishops at Medellín observed:

We cannot fail to see in this gigantic effort toward a rapid transformation and development an obvious sign of the Spirit who leads the history of humankind and of the peoples toward their vocation. We cannot but discover in this force, daily more insistent and impatient for transformation, vestiges of the image of God in human nature as a powerful incentive. This dynamism leads us progressively to an even greater control of nature, a more profound personalization and fellowship, and an encounter with the God who ratifies and deepens those values attained through human efforts [Medellín, *ibid.*].

My reason for beginning with these lengthy citations is that they express so well both the historical situation of liberation theology and the perspective of faith in which it interprets this situation. (The name and reality of “liberation theology” came into existence at Chimbote, Peru, in July 1968, only a few months before Medellín.)<sup>1</sup> Ever since Medellín, the development of liberation theology in Latin America has been accompanied by a continual awareness that we have entered into a new historical stage in the life of our peoples and by a felt need of understanding this new stage as a call from the Lord to preach the gospel in a way that befits the new situation. Both of these factors condition the thinking of liberation theology, requiring that it maintain a twofold fidelity: to the God of our faith and to the peoples of Latin America. Therefore we cannot separate our discourse about God from the historical process of liberation.

In the years since Medellín there has been an inevitable clarification of this theological undertaking. Liberation theology has been welcomed with sympathy and hope by many and has contributed to the vitality of numerous undertakings in the service of Christian witness. At the same time it has stimulated an interest in reflection on the Christian faith—an interest previously unknown in Latin American intellectual circles, which have traditionally been cool toward Christianity or even hostile to it. The years have also brought serious and relevant critiques that have helped this theological thinking to reach maturity. On the other hand, the theology of liberation has also stirred facile enthusiasms that have interpreted it in a simplistic or erroneous way by ignoring the integral demands of the Christian faith as lived in the communion of the church. Finally, there has been the foreseeable resistance of some.

There are various reasons for these several responses. But rather than point out the responsibilities of others, let me say simply that it is not easy to deal with sensitive and conflictual themes—like the very reality we are attempting to penetrate with the eyes of faith—and to find immediately and for good the clearest and most balanced formulas in which to express theological reflection on these themes. All language is to some extent a groping for clarity; it is therefore necessary to deal respectfully with other persons and with what they think they find in works written from this theological perspective. Readers have rights that authors neither can nor ought to deny. At every stage, therefore, we must refine, improve, and possibly

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<sup>1</sup> My lecture titled “A Theology of Liberation,” which had been delivered to a national meeting of lay persons, religious, and priests, was published first in Lima and then, a few months later, in Montevideo (MIEC, Pax Romana, 1969). It was expanded and delivered again at a meeting of Sodepax (Cartigny, Switzerland, 1969).

correct earlier formulations if we want to use language that is understandable and faithful both to the integral Christian message and to the reality we experience.<sup>2</sup>

Recent years have witnessed an important debate on the theology of liberation in the context of the Catholic Church. It has meant some painful moments at the personal level, usually for reasons that eventually pass away. The important thing, however, is that the debate has been an enriching spiritual experience. It has also been an opportunity to renew in depth our fidelity to the church in which all of us as a community believe and hope in the Lord, as well as to reassert our solidarity with the poor, those privileged members of the reign of God. The theological labor must continue, but in pursuing it we now have some important documents of the magisterium that advise us about the path to be followed and in various ways spur us on in our quest.<sup>3</sup>

The passage of time has caused essentials to become clearer. Secondary elements have lost the importance they seemed to have at an earlier period. A process of maturation has been underway. But the temporal factor is not the only one affecting the course of liberation theology during these years. There has also been a spatial extension. Within the different Christian confessions and their respective traditions, thinkers have adopted the liberation perspective suggested by the message of God's reign. In this development, theological influences (which in some cases were evidently nonexistent at the beginning) have played a less important role than the impulse given by a situation of fundamental oppression and marginalization that the Christian conscience rejects and in response to which it proclaims the total gospel in all its radicalness.

Black, Hispanic, and Amerindian theologies in the United States, theologies arising in the complex contexts of Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific, and the especially fruitful thinking of those who have adopted the feminist

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<sup>2</sup> I have endeavored to meet this obligation by reassessing my original insights in various forums. I have done so in books—*Beber en su propio pozo* (1983; English translation, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Orbis, 1984); *Hablar de Dios desde el sufrimiento del inocente* (1986; English translation, *On Job. God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, Orbis, 1987); *El Dios de la Vida* (1988)—and in numerous interviews for newspapers and periodicals. I have also taken account of recent discussions in my book, *La verdad los hará libres* (1986).

<sup>3</sup> I have in mind especially the two Instructions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—*Libertatis Nuntius*, 1984, translated in *Origins* 14 (1984–85), pp. 193–204, and *Libertatis Conscientia*, 1986, translated in *Origins* 15 (1985–86), pp. 713–28—and the important letter of John Paul II to the bishops of Brazil (April 1986), translated in *Origins* 16 (1986–87), pp. 12–15.

perspective—all these have meant that for the first time in many centuries theology is being done outside the customary European and North American centers. The result in the so-called First World has been a new kind of dialogue between traditional thinking and new thinking. In addition, outside the Christian sphere efforts are underway to develop liberation theologies from Jewish and Muslim perspectives.<sup>4</sup>

We are thus in the presence of a complex phenomenon developing on every side and representing a great treasure for the Christian churches and for their dialogue with other religions. The clarification I mentioned earlier is thus not limited to the Latin American context but affects a process and a search that are being conducted on a very broad front today.

These considerations should not make us forget, however, that we are not dealing here solely with an intellectual pursuit. Behind liberation theology are Christian communities, religious groups, and peoples, who are becoming increasingly conscious that the oppression and neglect from which they suffer are incompatible with their faith in Jesus Christ (or, speaking more generally, with their religious faith). These concrete, real-life movements are what give this theology its distinctive character; in liberation theology, faith and life are inseparable. This unity accounts for its prophetic vigor and its potentialities.

It is not possible, when speaking of liberation theology, to pass over in silence this broad movement of Christian and religious experiments and commitments that feed reflection. In these pages I must nonetheless deal especially with the Latin American world, for it is the world closest to me and the one in which I have made my own contribution and experienced my own development.

Now that twenty years have passed since the beginning of liberation theology, it may be appropriate to review the ways in which it has found expression and the paths it has followed. I shall not try to rewrite past essays, such as those in this book, in the light of my present concerns and perspectives. I do, however, think it important and useful to call attention to what I regard as the most important points, to anticipate ambiguous interpretations, revise and make more accurate certain formulations I now consider unsatisfactory, leave aside what time has undermined, and point out some of the new and promising themes developed in recent years. The task is an extensive one; it has been begun and is underway. My intention here is to indicate some important points in that program.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See M. H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> I have added to the body of the book a few notes that aim at revising and

The “new epoch in the history of Latin America,” of which Medellín spoke, continues to be our vital context. In the language of the Bible, we are in a *kairos*, a propitious and demanding time in which the Lord challenges us and we are called upon to bear a very specific witness. During this *kairos* Latin American Christians are experiencing a tense and intense period of solidarity, reflection, and martyrdom. This direct, real-life setting enables me to go more deeply into the three points that I have for some time regarded as basic to liberation theology and have also been the primary ones in the chronological development of this theology: the viewpoint of the poor; theological work; and the proclamation of the kingdom of life. I should like to explain here what is permanent in each of these, the enrichments each has received, the development and maturation that time has effected, and the resultant evolution of ideas in the theological perspective that I have adopted.

### A NEW PRESENCE

What we have often called the “major fact” in the life of the Latin American church—the participation of Christians in the process of liberation—is simply an expression of a far-reaching historical event: the irruption of the poor. Our time bears the imprint of the new presence of those who in fact used to be “absent” from our society and from the church. By “absent” I mean: of little or no importance, and without the opportunity to give expression themselves to their sufferings, their comrades, their plans, their hopes.

This state of affairs began to change in Latin America in recent decades, as a result of a broad historical process. But it also began to change in Africa (new nations) and Asia (old nations obtaining their independence), and among racial minorities (blacks, Hispanics, Amerindians, Arabs, Asiatics) living in the rich countries and in the poor countries as well (including Latin American countries). There has been a further important and diversified movement: the new presence of women, whom Puebla described as “doubly oppressed and marginalized” (1134, note) among the poor of Latin America.

As a result of all this it can be said that:

The powerful and almost irresistible aspiration that persons have for liberation constitutes one of the principal signs of the times that the church has to examine and interpret in the light of the

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completing, as far as possible, aspects discussed in this Introduction. The section “Faith and Social Conflict,” in chapter 12, is a reformulation of the section “Christian Fellowship and Class Struggle” found at the same point in the first edition.

gospel. This major phenomenon of our time is universally widespread, though it takes on different forms and exists in different degrees according to the particular people involved. It is, above all, among those who bear the burden of misery and in the heart of the disinherited classes that this aspiration expresses itself with the greatest force [*Libertatis Nuntius*, I, 1].

Liberation theology is closely bound up with this new presence of those who in the past were always absent from our history.<sup>6</sup> They have gradually been turning into active agents of their own destiny and beginning a resolute process that is changing the condition of the poor and oppressed of this world. Liberation theology (which is an expression of the right of the poor to think out their own faith) has not been an automatic result of this situation and the changes it has undergone. It represents rather an attempt to accept the invitation of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council and interpret this sign of the times by reflecting on it critically in the light of God's word. This theology should lead us to a serious discernment of the values and limitations of this sign of the times.

#### *A Complex World*

“Dominated peoples,” “exploited social classes,” “despised races,” and “marginalized cultures” were formulas often used in speaking of the poor in the context of liberation theology (there was repeated reference also to discrimination against women). The point of these formulas was to make it clear that the poor have a social dimension. But the turbulent situation in Latin America has caused many to place an almost exclusive emphasis on the social and economic aspect of poverty (this was a departure from the original insight). I am indeed convinced that it is still necessary to call attention to this dimension of poverty if we are to do more than touch the surface of the real situation of the poor, but I also insist that we must be attentive to other aspects of poverty as well.

As a matter of fact, the increasingly numerous commitments being made to the poor have given us a better understanding of how very complex their world is. For myself, this has been the most important (and

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<sup>6</sup> I sought to highlight this connection by dedicating *A Theology of Liberation* to two dear friends: José María Arguedas, a Peruvian writer on Indian culture, and Henrique Pereira Neto, a black priest in Brazil. That same intention was in my mind when I wrote the opening lines of the original introduction: “This book is an attempt at reflection, based on the gospel and the experiences of men and *women* committed to the process of liberation, in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America.”

even crushing) experience of these past years. The world of the poor is a universe in which the socio-economic aspect is basic but not all-inclusive. In the final analysis, poverty means death: lack of food and housing, the inability to attend properly to health and education needs, the exploitation of workers, permanent unemployment, the lack of respect for one's human dignity, and unjust limitations placed on personal freedom in the areas of self-expression, politics, and religion. Poverty is a situation that destroys peoples, families, and individuals; Medellín and Puebla called it "institutionalized violence" (to which must be added the equally unacceptable violence of terrorism and repression).

At the same time, it is important to realize that being poor is a way of living, thinking, loving, praying, believing, and hoping, spending leisure time, and struggling for a livelihood. Being poor today is also increasingly coming to mean being involved in the struggle for justice and peace, defending one's life and freedom, seeking a more democratic participation in the decisions made by society, organizing "to live their faith in an integral way" (*Puebla*, 1137), and being committed to the liberation of every human being.

All this, I repeat, goes to make up the complex world of the poor.<sup>7</sup> The fact that misery and oppression lead to a cruel, inhuman death, and are therefore contrary to the will of the God of Christian revelation who wants us to live, should not keep us from seeing the other aspects of poverty that I have mentioned. They reveal a human depth and a toughness that are a promise of life. This perception represents one of the most profound changes in our way of seeing the reality of poverty and consequently in the overall judgment we pass on it.

The same period, meanwhile, has seen a converging process in which we have become more aware that there is a racial problem among us. One of our social lies has been the claim that there is no racism in Latin America. There may indeed be no racist laws as in some other countries, but there are very rigid racist customs that are no less serious for being hidden. The marginalization of Amerindian and black populations, and the contempt in which they are held, are situations we cannot accept as human beings, much less as Christians. These populations themselves are becoming increasingly aware of their situation and are beginning to claim their most basic human rights; this new attitude carries the promise of fruitful results.

The racial question represents a major challenge to the Christian community, and one to which we are only now beginning to respond.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Some aspects of this world have been discussed at length in my *We Drink from Our Own Wells*.

<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of a year dedicated to calling attention to the plight of the



approaching five-hundredth anniversary of the evangelization of Latin America should be the occasion for an examination of conscience regarding the immense human cost historically connected with that evangelization—I mean the destruction of individuals and cultures. Such an examination will help us define a commitment of the church to races that have for centuries been neglected and mistreated. The bold efforts of Bartolomé de Las Casas and so many others past and present are there to point a way we must follow in accordance with our present historical situation.

I referred above to the conditions in which women live. We in Latin America are only now beginning to wake up to the unacceptable and inhuman character of their situation. One thing that makes it very difficult to grasp its true character is its hiddenness, for it has become something habitual, part of everyday life and cultural tradition. So true is this that when we point it out we sound a bit like foreigners bent on causing trouble. The issue was hardly raised at Medellín. Puebla, however, did initiate reflection on it (see 834–49 and 1134). A growing number of persons are committed to the restoration of women's rights, even as we realize more and more clearly how intolerable the situation of women really is.

The situation of racial and cultural minorities and of women among us is a challenge to pastoral care and to commitment on the part of the Christian churches; it is therefore also a challenge to theological reflection. In this area we have a long way to go, but a good beginning is being made as cultural and racial and feminist themes are addressed more and more frequently in liberation theology. The most important part will have to be played by persons who themselves belong to these groups, despite the difficulties in the way of their doing so. It is not possible for others simply to stand up and effectively play the part of a protagonist. But the voices of these groups are beginning to be heard, and this development is promising. This will certainly be one of the richest veins to be mined by liberation theology in years ahead.

In this whole matter I have found it very helpful to enter into dialogue with theologies developed in settings different from our own. Through direct contacts with Christian groups in other countries and continents (as well as through meetings with those who are trying to

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black population, the Brazilian bishops wrote as follows: "The Campaign of Fellowship 1988 is one more summons to the preferential option for the poor for which the gospel calls. The black community is suffering the consequences of its past enslavement. But awareness of this also makes us aware of other social sectors in Brazil that are not given sufficient attention by the liberating fellowship of Christians and by Brazilians generally in their solidarity with one another" (*Ouvi o clamor deste povo. Texto base*, 1987).

reflect theologically in those contexts) I have learned much about situations different from the Latin American. At the same time, I have gained a better understanding and appreciation of aspects of our people that had been clear in theory but had little or no consequence in practice. As a result, I have come to see with new eyes our racial and cultural world, and the discrimination against women.

Perhaps the most important fruit derived from dialogues among Third World theologians (organized principally by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians—EATWOT) and from related activities has been a better and deeper understanding of the world of the poor. Closely connected as we are with our peoples, we brought to these meetings a desire to speak about the world from which we come, with its experiences and its thinking, but little by little we learned that it was more important to listen to what others had to say about their respective situations. Captivated as we are by the life and death of the poor of Latin America and by the riches to be found in the Christian communities that come into existence there and bear witness—even to the point of martyrdom—to the Lord in their midst, we have perhaps tended to focus our attention too much on these things. I must admit, therefore, that from these contacts with these other theologians I have grown in hope and have become more sensitive to the suffering of human groups geographically and culturally far removed from us.

The predominant characteristics of this complex and widespread world of the poor are, on the one hand, its unimportance in the eyes of the great powers that rule today's wider world and, on the other, its vast human, cultural, and religious wealth, and especially its capacity for creating new forms of solidarity in these areas.

All this takes us far from the simplistic position we were perhaps in danger of initially adopting in analyzing the situation of poverty. A fundamental point has become clear: it is not enough to describe the situation; its causes must also be determined. Medellín, Puebla, and John Paul II in his encyclical on work and, more recently, on social concerns, as well as in other writings, have made a forceful analysis of these causes. Structural analysis has thus played an important part in building up the picture of the world to which liberation theology addresses itself. The use of this analysis has had its price, for although the privileged of this world can accept the existence of human poverty on a massive scale and not be overawed by it (after all, it is something that cannot be hidden away in our time), problems begin when the causes of this poverty are pointed out to them. Once causes are determined, then there is talk of "social injustice," and the privileged begin to resist. This is especially true when to structural analysis there

is added a concrete historical perspective in which personal responsibilities come to light. But it is the conscientization and resultant organization of poor sectors that rouse the greatest fears and the strongest resistance.

The tools used in this analysis vary with time and according to their proven effectiveness for gaining knowledge of social reality and finding solutions for social problems. Science is by its nature critical of its own presuppositions and achievements; it moves on to new interpretive hypotheses. It is clear, for example, that the theory of dependence, which was so extensively used in the early years of our encounter with the Latin American world, is now an inadequate tool, because it does not take sufficient account of the internal dynamics of each country or of the vast dimensions of the world of the poor. In addition, Latin American social scientists are increasingly alert to factors of which they were not conscious earlier and which show that the world economy has evolved.

Problems like unpayable foreign debt, to give but one example, are drawing attention, sharpening awareness of what lies behind them, and refining the available analytical tools (it is worth mentioning here that Medellín in 1968 called attention to the dangers of foreign indebtedness; see "Peace," 9d). It is in fact impossible to deal effectively with the poverty experienced in Latin America without following the development of the most urgent problems and without attending to factors that enable us to locate these problems in a broad and complex international context.

All this requires that we refine our analytical tools and develop new ones. The socio-economic dimension is very important but we must go beyond it. In recent years there has been an insistent emphasis, and rightly so, on the contrast between a Northern world developed and wealthy (whether it be capitalist or socialist) and a Southern world underdeveloped and poor. This approach yields a different view of the world scene, one in which it is not enough to focus on ideological confrontations or give a narrow interpretation of opposition between social classes. It also brings out the radical opposition that is the setting for the confrontation of East and West.<sup>9</sup> Diverse factors are making us aware of the different kinds of opposition and social conflict that exist in the modern world.

As far as poverty is concerned, an important transformation is undoubtedly taking place in the social analysis on which liberation theology depends to some extent. The change has led liberation theology to incorporate beneficial perspectives and new sources of knowledge from the human sciences (psychology, ethnology, anthropology) for its study of a reality that is intricate and shifting. To incorporate does not mean simply

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<sup>9</sup> On this subject, see the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, pp. 20–22.

to add on without interrelating. Attention to cultural factors will help us to enter into mentalities and basic attitudes that explain important aspects of the reality with which we are faced. The economic dimension itself will take on a new character once we see things from the cultural point of view; the converse will also certainly be true.

There is no question of choosing among the tools to be used; poverty is a complex human condition, and its causes must also be complex. The use of a variety of tools does not mean sacrificing depth of analysis; the point is only not to be simplistic but rather to insist on getting at the deepest causes of the situation, for this is what it means to be truly radical. Responsiveness to new challenges requires changes in our approach to the paths to be followed in really overcoming the social conflicts mentioned earlier and in building a just and fraternal world, as the gospel calls upon us to do.

If we were simply to adopt the traditional approach, we would be taking the course that has always been taken in the social sciences in their contribution to analysis. But we also know that the sciences and, for a number of reasons, the social sciences in particular, are not neutral. They carry with them ideological baggage requiring discernment; for this reason the use of the sciences can never be uncritical (see the Introduction of *Libertatis Nuntius*). In consequence, both the scientific outlook itself and the Christian conception of the world call for a rigorous discernment of scientific data—discernment, but not fear of the contributions of the human disciplines.<sup>10</sup> We need to make an unruffled but critical use of mediations that can help us to understand better where and how the Lord is challenging us as we face the life (and death) of our brothers and sisters.<sup>11</sup>

### *Opting for the God of Jesus*

Important though it is to acquire a substantial knowledge of the poverty in which the vast majority of Latin Americans live and of the causes from which it springs, theological work proper begins when we try to interpret this reality in the light of Christian revelation.

The meaning given to poverty in the Bible is therefore a cornerstone of liberation theology. The problem of poverty is an ancient one in Christian thought, but the new presence of the poor to which I have referred gives it a new urgency. An essential clue to the understanding

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<sup>10</sup> On the subject of Marxist analysis, *Octogesima adveniens* of Paul VI (1971) and the letter of Father Arrupe (December 1980) provide important distinctions and guidelines for this work of discernment.

<sup>11</sup> I have dealt at length with these themes in “Teología y ciencias sociales,” *Páginas*, 63–64 (September 1984), and in *La verdad los hará libres*, pp. 77–112.

of poverty in liberation theology is the distinction, made in the Medellín document “Poverty of the Church,” between three meanings of the term “poverty”: real poverty as an evil—that is something that God does not want; spiritual poverty, in the sense of a readiness to do God’s will; and solidarity with the poor, along with protest against the conditions under which they suffer.

This is the context of a theme that is central in liberation theology and has now been widely accepted in the universal church: the preferential option for the poor. Medellín had already spoken of giving “preference to the poorest and most needy sectors and to those segregated for any cause whatsoever” (“Poverty,” 9). The very word “preference” denies all exclusiveness and seeks rather to call attention to those who are the first—though not the only ones—with whom we should be in solidarity. In the interests of truth and personal honesty I want to say that from the very beginning of liberation theology, as many of my writings show, I insisted that the great challenge was to maintain both the universality of God’s love and God’s predilection for those on the lowest rung of the ladder of history. To focus exclusively on the one or the other is to mutilate the Christian message. Therefore every attempt at such an exclusive emphasis must be rejected.

During the difficult decade of the 1970s this attitude gave rise to many experiences and resultant theological reflections in the Latin American church. In the process, formulas intended to express commitment to the poor and oppressed proliferated. This became clear at Puebla, which chose the formula “preferential option for the poor” (see the Puebla Final Document, part 4, chapter 1). It was a formula that theologians in Latin America had already begun to use in preceding years. The Puebla Conference thus gave it a major endorsement and importance.

The term “option” has not always been correctly understood. Like every term, it has its limitations; the intention in using it is to emphasize the freedom and commitment expressed in a decision. The commitment to the poor is not “optional” in the sense that a Christian is free to make or not make this option, or commitment, to the poor, just as the love we owe to all human beings without exception is not “optional.” Neither, on the other hand, does the term “option” suppose that those making it do not themselves belong to the world of the poor. In very many instances, of course, they do not, but it must be said at the same time that the poor too have an obligation to make this option.

The expression “preferential option for the poor” had an important and significant predecessor. I refer to John XXIII’s statement, a month before the opening of Vatican II, that the church is called upon to be a

church of the poor. The reader will probably be familiar with the passage: “In face of the underdeveloped countries, the church is, and wants to be, the church of all and especially the church of the poor” (address of September 11, 1962). Let me say only that we have here two aspects of the church’s life that are both demanding and inseparable: universality and preference for the poor.

In recent years the central teaching authority of the Catholic Church has issued important documents that echo the outlook of the Latin American church and use the expression “preferential option for the poor.” John Paul II has used it repeatedly.<sup>12</sup> It is also to be found in the second Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on liberation theology (*Libertatis Conscientia*, 68). In addition, the extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in 1985 spoke as follows in its final report:

Following the Second Vatican Council the church became more aware of its mission in the service of the poor, the oppressed, and the outcast. In this preferential option, which must not be understood as exclusive, the true spirit of the gospel shines forth. Jesus Christ declared the poor blessed (Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20), and he himself wished to be poor for us (2 Cor. 8:9).<sup>13</sup>

The experience and thinking of the Latin American church have undoubtedly played a very important role in this growth of consciousness.

At both ends of the spectrum of positions on these subjects, there are those who claim that the magisterium has been trying to substitute “preferential love” for “preferential option.” It seems to me, however, that any doubt on this point has been removed by John Paul II’s encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Speaking of “characteristic themes and guidelines” of the magisterium in the recent years, the pope says:

Here I would like to indicate one of them: the option or love of preference for the poor. This is an option or special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity to which the whole tradition of the church bears witness. It affects the life of the each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42].

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (March 1987), 37, and in his address at Ars, France (May 1987).

<sup>13</sup> Final Report II, in *Origins* 15 (1985–86), p. 450.

In the final analysis, an option for the poor is an option for the God of the kingdom whom Jesus proclaims to us; this is a point that I myself have developed and discussed in depth on various occasions.<sup>14</sup> The entire Bible, beginning with the story of Cain and Abel, mirrors God's predilection for the weak and abused of human history. This preference brings out the gratuitous or unmerited character of God's love. The same revelation is given in the evangelical Beatitudes, for they tell us with the utmost simplicity that God's predilection for the poor, the hungry, and the suffering is based on God's unmerited goodness to us.

The ultimate reason for commitment to the poor and oppressed is not to be found in the social analysis we use, or in human compassion, or in any direct experience we ourselves may have of poverty. These are all doubtless valid motives that play an important part in our commitment. As Christians, however, our commitment is grounded, in the final analysis, in the God of our faith. It is a theocentric, prophetic option that has its roots in the unmerited love of God and is demanded by this love. Bartolomé de Las Casas, who had direct experience of the terrible poverty and decimation of Latin American Amerindians, explained it by saying: "God has the freshest and keenest memory of the least and most forgotten."<sup>15</sup> The Bible has much to say to us about this divine remembering, as the works of J. Dupont, among others, have made clear to us.

This same perception was confirmed by the experience of the Christian communities of Latin America and reached Puebla via the document that the Peruvian bishops prepared for the CELAM meeting. Puebla asserted that simply because of God's love for them as manifested in Christ "the poor merit preferential attention, whatever may be the moral or personal situation in which they find themselves" (no. 1142). In other words, the poor deserve preference not because they are morally or religiously better than others, but because God is God, in whose eyes "the last are first." This statement clashes with our narrow understanding of justice; this very preference reminds us, therefore, that God's ways are not ours (see Isa. 55:8).

There have certainly been misunderstandings of the preferential option for the poor, as well as tendencies, sociological and spiritualist, to play it down, and this on the part both of those who claim to favor it and those who are expressly opposed to it. It can be said, nonetheless, that the option is now an essential element in the understanding that the church as a whole has of its task in the present world. This new approach is pregnant with consequences; it is also, we must say, only in its beginnings.

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<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., *On Job; La verdad los hará libres*, pp. 222–34; and *El Dios de la Vida*.

<sup>15</sup> "Carta al Consejo de Indias" (1531), in *Obras escogidas* (Madrid: BAE, 1958), p. 44.



## THE ROLE OF REFLECTION

The rich, troubled, and creative life that the Latin American church is living as it tries to respond to the challenge set for it by the new presence of the poor calls for a deeper understanding of its own faith in the Lord Jesus. For a long time, as a result of a Latin American cultural tradition imposed by colonization, theology as practiced among us simply echoed the theology developed in Europe. Latin American theologians had recourse to European theology without any reference to its intellectual and historical context, with the result that their theology easily became a set of abstract propositions. Or else they made a painful effort to adapt European theology to a new reality, but were unable to explain the reasons for its themes and priorities or for the development of this kind of thinking, as long as the effort was undertaken in a North Atlantic framework.

The quest for models or guidelines outside itself was long characteristic of Latin American thinking, and indeed still is in some circles. But the urgency and rich resources of the commitment that many Christians were beginning to make to the process of popular liberation during the 1960s raised new questions based on Latin American reality, and they pointed to new and fruitful ways for theological discourse. Liberation theology is one manifestation of the adulthood that Latin American society, and the church as part of it, began to achieve in recent decades. Medellín took note of this coming of age and in turn made a major contribution to its historical significance and importance.

All this reminds us that this theological perspective is explicable only when seen in close conjunction with the life and commitments of Christian communities. This connection was present at the historical beginnings of liberation theology in the 1960s and is still fully operative today. It is the basis for the familiar distinction between the two phases of theological work: Christian life and reflection in the strict sense. The way in which a people lives its faith and hope and puts its love to work is the most important thing in God's eyes and is also, or ought to be, the most important in discourse about God and God's saving will.

I have already pointed out the important role played in Christian consciousness by the irruption of the poor into our history. In the development of liberation theology our awareness of this new presence has made us aware that our partners in dialogue are the poor, those who are "nonpersons"—that is, those who are not considered to be human beings with full rights, beginning with the right to life and to freedom in various spheres. Elsewhere, on the other hand, the best modern theology has been sensitive rather to the challenge posed by the mentality that asserted itself



at the European Enlightenment; it is therefore responsive to the challenges posed by the nonbeliever or by Christians under the sway of modernity.

The distinction between these two approaches is not an attempt to juxtapose two theological perspectives. It tries only to be clear on their respective starting points, to see their differences, and then correctly to define relationships between the two. If we follow this line, we will avoid yielding to a tendency found in some academic settings: the tendency to regard liberation theology as the radical, political wing of European progressive theology. Such a view of liberation theology is clearly a caricature for anyone with a good knowledge of the subject. It is true, of course, that in a world of increasingly rapid communication it is not possible to do theology in a manner free of all contacts and influences; it is, however, both possible and necessary to be clear on the perduring basis and inspiration of our theological thinking. Only on that condition can there be dialogue among the various theologies that share a concern to speak of God in our day.

### *The Life of a People*

One of the first statements of my way of understanding the theological task was that liberation theology is “a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the word of God.” The point of this was not to try to reduce the riches of a quest to a short definition, but rather to point out a path to be followed.

In many and very different ways the Bible shows us that the doing of God’s will is the main demand placed on believers. Karl Barth echoed this thought when he said that “the true hearer of the word is the one who puts it into practice.” In liberation theology I accepted this traditional datum of Christian revelation because I was moved by the witness of those who were beginning to commit themselves ever more fully to the process of freeing the poor from the various servitudes from which they suffer.

This commitment reflected the experience of the oppressed themselves, who were beginning to become the agents of their own destiny. During the 1950s and 60s we saw the first steps being taken in conscientization, and we saw the poor beginning to organize themselves in the defense of their right to life, in the struggle for dignity and social justice, and in a commitment to their own liberation. As a result, they were beginning to play a major active role that would become stronger with the passing years and that is still intensifying today amid advances and regressions. Many Christians played a part in this process. It is therefore wrong to say that theological thinking on liberation originated in the middle classes

and that only years later did it open itself to the experience of the poor themselves. No, this experience played its part from the outset—at the level it had reached at that time. To be ignorant of this is to be mistaken about what happened at that time or even to give an explicitly false picture of it; the facts reject any such interpretation.

The praxis on which liberation theology reflects is a praxis of solidarity in the interests of liberation and is inspired by the gospel. It is the activity of “peacemakers”—that is, those who are forging shalom. Western languages translate this Hebrew word as “peace” but in doing so, diminish its meaning. Shalom in fact refers to the whole of life and, as part of this, to the need of establishing justice and peace. Consequently, a praxis motivated by evangelical values embraces to some extent every effort to bring about authentic fellowship and authentic justice. For faith shows us that in this commitment the grace of Christ plays its part, whether or not those who practice it are aware of this fact.

This liberating praxis endeavors to transform history in the light of the reign of God. It accepts the reign now, even though knowing that it will arrive in its fullness only at the end of time. In this practice of love, social aspects have an important place on a continent in which socio-economic structures are in the service of the powerful and work against the weak of society. But in my understanding of it, “praxis” is not reducible to “social aspects” in this narrow sense. The complexity of the world of the poor and lowly compels us to attend to other dimensions of Christian practice if it is to meet the requirements of a total love of God.

In saying this I am not trying to make the Christian commitment less demanding and radical, but only to bring out the breadth of vision and the courage needed if we are to enter into the world of the poor and respond to their varied aspirations for justice and freely given friendship. As I have traveled this road, I have learned much in recent years; various experiences of being a part of the world of the poor have brought me to a less theoretical knowledge of that world and to a greater awareness of simple but profoundly human aspects of it, apart from which there is no truly liberating commitment.<sup>16</sup> The struggles of those who reject racism and machismo (two attitudes so deeply rooted in the culture and custom of peoples and individuals), as well as of those who oppose the marginalization of the elderly, children, and other “unimportant” persons in our society, have made me see, for example, the importance of gestures and ways of “being with” that some may regard as having little political effectiveness.

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<sup>16</sup> See *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, pp. 124–26.

In addition, the experience of these years has shown me that generous solidarity with the poor is not exempted from the temptation of imposing on them categories foreign to them and from the risk of dealing with them in an impersonal way. Sensitivity to these and other dangers is part of a human and Christian praxis whose truly liberating effects extend to those also who are trying to carry on such a praxis for the benefit of the poor and exploited. If there is no friendship with them and no sharing of the life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals. Any talk of liberation necessarily refers to a comprehensive process, one that embraces everyone. This is an insight that has been repeated again and again since the beginnings of liberation theology and that in my own case has become much more firmly established and has acquired a much greater importance with the passage of the years.

Christian life is commitment in the form of an acceptance of the gift of the reign of God. It is also, and necessarily, prayer. There is no life of faith that does not have its contemplative dimension. The Latin Americans who are struggling for justice are also persons who believe and hope. They are oppressed persons, but also Christians who, like Mary in her Magnificat, remember their obligations of thankfulness and of surrender to God in prayer.

This outlook is characteristic of the faith of our Latin Americans. They cultivate a form of prayer that the modern mind is likely to regard as primitive if not downright superstitious. But, although it is true that various factors play a part in this way of living the faith, it would be a serious mistake to stop at a superficial analysis and not to discern the profound sense of God that this prayer manifests in ways that are perhaps not very enlightened but that are not therefore any less legitimate. Deeply rooted as it is in this popular devotion, while also drawing nourishment from the wellspring of protest against repression and the demand for freedom, the prayer life of the Christian communities that are engaged in the process of liberation possesses great creativity and depth. Those who have claimed from time to time that Latin America has been losing the spirit of prayer have shown only that they themselves are remote from the everyday life of the poor and committed sectors of our peoples.

Those working at a theology of liberation in the Asian context have likewise tried to bring out the deeply contemplative side of that continent on which ancient and magnificent religions of the human race have left such a profound imprint. Aloysius Pieris, theologian of Sri Lanka, describes the Asian peoples as both poor and religious.<sup>17</sup> Both of these

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<sup>17</sup> "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, V. Fabella, ed. (MaryKnoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1980), pp. 75–95.

conditions point the way to a radical and complete liberation.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, black theology in the United States has drawn fruitfully on the liberating and religious perspectives that find expression in black music.<sup>19</sup> Theology done in the African context has likewise always been open to the cultural riches of the African peoples; religion is an essential element of this cultural treasure.

Prayer is a privileged way of being in communion with Christ and of “keeping all these things in our heart,” as his mother did (see Luke 2:51). The Gospels tell us of various occasions when the Lord went apart to pray. Contemplation was an essential part of his life. At one of the most difficult times in his experience, he rebuked his disciples for having been unable to persevere with him during his final prayer, which had turned into a difficult struggle for him. Luke tells us that he was “in an agony” as he struggled for his life, so that his sweat “became like great drops of blood” (22:44–45). Our communion with the prayer of Jesus must reach this point of “agony”—that is, of combat (that is what the Greek word *agōnia* means). But this requirement is not difficult for those to understand who are putting their own lives on the line as they share the lot of the stripped and impoverished of Latin America.

Those, therefore, who adopt the liberation perspective must have the sensitivity that is needed for understanding and cultivating the celebratory and contemplative dimension of peoples who find in the God of their faith the source of their demand for life and dignity. Nothing could be further from my mind, however, than to defend in this context the kind of spiritualism that serves as a refuge from the troubles and sufferings of daily life. I am referring rather to the desire and determination to live simultaneously, and to the reciprocal enrichment of each, two pursuits that the Western mind often separates. The Western mind persistently applies this dichotomy in interpreting both the more spontaneously unified behavior of other peoples and cultures, and the theological efforts made in that context.

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<sup>18</sup> See the Final Statement of the Fifth EATWOT Conference (New Delhi, August 1981) in *Irruption of the Third World*, V. Fabella and S. Torres, eds. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983), p. 201: “It is well known that liberation (*mukti*) has been a perennial quest of the world religions. Although the emphasis has been on internal and spiritual liberation, their search also includes dimensions with social relevance: the stress on freedom from greed as well as from overattachment to material or mental possessions and to one’s private self. Voluntary poverty, so central to Asiatic religious ideals, and the simplicity of lifestyle it implies, are powerful antidotes to capitalist consumerism and to the worship of mammon.”

<sup>19</sup> J. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues. An Interpretation* (New York: Seabury, 1972).

I am, of course, not speaking of syntheses that are fully successful and without defects, but rather of a process whereby one achieves a diversified presence that is open to a variety of experiences and that progresses only amid setbacks; that develops gradually and deploys creativity. It is a matter of honesty to recognize this fact, as well as of respect for those who bear this witness. We find ourselves, then, in the presence of a process that locates us at a point at which it is impossible to separate solidarity with the poor and prayer. This means that we are disciples of Christ, who is both God and a human being.

What we see here is an authentic spirituality—that is, a way of being Christian. It is from this rich experience of the following of Jesus that liberation theology emerges; the following constitutes the practice—at once commitment and prayer—on which liberation theology reflects. The increasing number of Latin American theological works on spirituality in recent years are not as it were an appendix to works on other themes; they represent rather a deeper penetration of the very wellspring from which this kind of theological thinking flows.

The work done on spirituality will help to develop, more than has hitherto been done, a traditional aspect of theology (one whose existence was acknowledged at an early date in the perspective I am adopting here)—namely, its function as wisdom. Discourse on faith is knowledge that brings with it a taste for its object; it is a spiritual tasting of the word of the Lord, and, as such, it nourishes our life and is the source of our joy.

In liberation theology the way to rational talk of God is located within a broader and more challenging course of action: the following of Jesus. Talk of God supposes that we are living in depth our condition as disciples of him who said in so many words that he is the Way (see John 14:6). This fact has led me to the position that in the final analysis the method for talking of God is supplied by our spirituality. In other words, the distinction of two phases in theological work is not simply an academic question; it is, above all, a matter of lifestyle, a way of living the faith. Being part of the life of our people, sharing their sufferings and joys, their concerns and their struggles, as well as the faith and hope that they live as a Christian community—all this is not a formality required if one is to do theology; it is a requirement for being a Christian. For that reason, it also feeds the very roots of a reflection that seeks to explain the God of life when death is all around.

*The Locus of Reflection*

The historical womb from which liberation theology has emerged is the life of the poor and, in particular, of the Christian communities that have arisen within the bosom of the present-day Latin American church. This experience is the setting in which liberation theology tries to read the word of God and be alert to the challenges that faith issues to the historical process in which that people is engaged. Revelation and history, faith in Christ and the life of a people, eschatology and praxis: these are the factors that, when set in motion, give rise to what has been called the hermeneutical circle. The aim is to enter more deeply into faith in a God who became one of us, and to do so on the basis of the faith-filled experience and commitment of those who acknowledge this God as their liberator.<sup>20</sup>

The major challenges to which theology must respond will come, therefore, from the demands of the gospel as seen today in the development of an oppressed but Christian people. Since liberation theology is a critical reflection on the word of God received in the church, it will make explicit the values of faith, hope, and love that inspire the praxis of Christians. But it will also have to help in correcting possible deviations on the part of those who reject the demands for participation in history and the promotion of justice that follow from faith in the God of life, and also on the part of those who run the risk of forgetting central aspects of Christian life, because they are caught up in the demands of immediate political activity.

Because liberation theology takes a critical approach, it refuses to serve as a Christian justification of positions already taken. It seeks to show that unless we make an ongoing commitment to the poor, who are the privileged members of the reign of God, we are far removed from the Christian message. It also wants to help make the commitment to liberation increasingly evangelical, effective, and integral. Theology is at the service of the evangelizing mission of the Christian community; it develops therefore as an ecclesial function. Its task is one that locates it within the church, for

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<sup>20</sup> All this is clear for Latin America, but it is also valid for other perspectives adopted in the area of liberation theology, as South African theologian Allan Boesak wisely says in his *Farewell to Innocence* (Orbis, 1977), p. 7: "While we acknowledge that all expressions of liberation theology are not identical, we must protest very strongly against the total division (and contrast) some make between Black Theology in South Africa and Black Theology in the United States; between Black Theology and African theology; between Black Theology and the Latin American theology of liberation. As a matter of principle, we have therefore treated all these different expressions within the framework where they belong: the framework of the theology of liberation."

it is there that it receives revelation and there that it is nourished by the charisms of prophecy, government, and teaching that reside in the church and guide its efforts.

It is clear from what I have been saying that when I call reflection in the strict sense a second stage of theological work, I am by no means saying that is secondary. Discourse about God comes second because faith comes first and is the source of theology; in the formula of St. Anselm, we believe in order that we may understand (*credo ut intelligam*). For the same reason, the effort at reflection has an irreplaceable role, but one that is always subordinate to a faith that is lived and receives guidance within the communion of the church.

The first stage or phase of theological work is the lived faith that finds expression in prayer and commitment. To live the faith means to put into practice, in the light of the demands of the reign of God, these fundamental elements of Christian existence. Faith is here lived “in the church” and geared to the communication of the Lord’s message. The second act of theology, that of reflection in the proper sense of the term, has for its purpose to read this complex praxis in the light of God’s word. There is need of discernment in regard to the concrete forms that Christian commitment takes, and this discernment is accomplished through recourse to the sources of revelation.<sup>21</sup> The ultimate norms of judgment come from the revealed truth that we accept by faith and not from praxis itself. But the “deposit of faith” is not a set of indifferent, catalogued truths; on the contrary, it lives in the church, where it rouses Christians to commitments in accordance with God’s will and also provides criteria for judging them in the light of God’s word.

For all these reasons, a principal task of “reflection on praxis in the light of faith” will be to strengthen the necessary and fruitful links between orthopraxis and orthodoxy. The necessity of this circular relationship between the two is a point frequently underscored in liberation theology; as is always the case in dealing with essential dimensions of one and the same reality, it is not possible to accept the one and belittle the other. More than that, any attempt to focus on only one means the loss of both; orthopraxis and orthodoxy need one another, and each is adversely affected when sight is lost of the other.<sup>22</sup> The polemical manner in which this subject is

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<sup>21</sup> As the Peruvian bishops said in dealing with this subject, “for Christians the supreme norms of truth in ethical and religious matters are to be found in revelation as interpreted by those who have legitimate authority to do so. Every theology must be based on revelation as contained in the deposit of faith. With that as its starting point it can reflect on anything and everything, including praxis, which is always subordinate to revelation” (*Documento sobre teología de la liberación* [October 1984], p. 44).

<sup>22</sup> See *La verdad los hará libres*, pp. 140–47.



sometimes treated (whether for or against the union of orthopraxis and orthodoxy) should not make one forget that fidelity to the message of Jesus requires one not to impoverish or mutilate it by choosing where no choice is possible. In a key passage of Mark's Gospel (8:27–33) he speaks in an incisive way of the necessity of this enriching circular relationship.<sup>23</sup> Theology as critical reflection must make its contribution to this profound unity.

Starting from Christian praxis (commitment and prayer), theology seeks to provide a language for speaking about God. It deals with a faith that is inseparable from the concrete conditions in which the vast majority and, in a sense, even all the inhabitants of Latin America live. Among us the great pastoral, and therefore theological, question is: How is it possible to tell the poor, who are forced to live in conditions that embody a denial of love, that God loves them? This is equivalent to asking: How can we find a way of talking about God amid the suffering and oppression that is the experience of the Latin American poor? How is it possible to do theology “while Ayacucho lasts”?<sup>24</sup> As the church, the assembly of the disciples of Jesus, we must proclaim his resurrection to a continent scarred by “inhuman” (Medellín, “Poverty,” 1) and “antievangelical” (Puebla, 1159) poverty. As I said earlier, in the final analysis poverty means death. Liberation theology had its origin in the contrast between the urgent task of proclaiming the life of the risen Jesus and the conditions of death in which the poor of Latin America were living.

Theology done in such a setting has something in common with all theology: dialogue with the prevailing culture or, in our case, with the various cultures to be found in Latin America. This dialogue has barely begun, and it has a long way to go. In conducting it, we will be greatly helped if we adopt the view of theology as wisdom, which I mentioned above—that is, if we see theology as knowledge shot through with the “savored” experience first of God but then also of the people and culture to which we belong. In the contributions that I myself have been able to make to liberation theology, my frequent references to Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, César Vallejo, José Carlos Mariátegui, and José María Arguedas, among others, have had the purpose precisely of communicating some of this “savor.” These men are all Peruvians who have experienced their own time in depth; they have been deeply involved in the sufferings and hopes of our peoples and have been able to express, as few others have, the soul of the nation, its Amerindians

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<sup>23</sup> See *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, pp. 45–51.

<sup>24</sup> These are questions I have asked in my book *On Job*. (Ayacucho, a city in Peru that has been buffeted by poverty and violence, is a Quechuan name meaning “the corner of the dead.”)



and mestizos. But, I repeat, this is an area in which far more remains to be done than has so far been accomplished.

This approach makes it urgent that we acquire a better understanding of our history. A people that knows the past that lies behind its sufferings and hopes is in a better position to face and reflect on the present. Furthermore, we must learn from the attempts made to understand the faith by Christians who are able to face up intensely to their times and to appeal to the gospel with clarity and courage. These men and women try to see clearly amid the changes of history and, in many cases, try to oppose the interests of the powerful. I am thinking here of the witness given by many sixteenth-century missionaries who did not forget the demands of the kingdom of life when they were faced with cruel exploitation and death being inflicted on the Amerindians. Among those missionaries, Bartolomé de Las Casas was perhaps the one who saw most deeply into the situation and best articulated a theological reflection based on it. He was, however, only *primus inter pares*, for he had many companions who shared his commitment and his hope. The witness of all those persons should feed the life of the Christian community today, for it is one tributary of the great ecclesial tradition within which every sound theology is located.

Although theology is a language for communicating God, in every place it must display the inflections given it by those who formulate it and those to whom it is directed. Every language has a number of dialects. The language of Jesus the Nazarene (like that of Peter, his disciple, to whom they said: "Your accent betrays you": Matt. 26:73) undoubtedly showed him to be a native of Galilee and seemed odd to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Our theological language is subject to the same rule; it takes its coloring from our peoples, cultures, and racial groupings, and yet we use it in an attempt to proclaim the universality of God's love. This accent may not be to the liking of those who until now have regarded themselves the proprietors of theology and are not conscious of their own accent (to which, of course, they have every right) when they speak of God.

This dialogue between faith and culture in Latin America is accompanied by another, which is different in character but highly important and derives its tone from the first. I am referring to the encounter in recent years of theologies springing from human contexts unlike our own. I mentioned earlier the dialogue between the theologies of the Third World, in which the theologies emerging from minorities in different countries all participate on an equal footing. But this further dialogue does not stop at the borders of the Third World. There have also been very profitable meetings with representatives of types of theological thinking that originate in Europe and North America. Then there is the encounter with the feminist

perspective in theology and with the new and challenging contribution this is making.<sup>25</sup> My impression is that the deeper importance of this dialogue is to be found, not in the coming together of theologians, but in the communication established among Christian communities and their respective historical, social, and cultural contexts, for these communities are the real subjects who are actively engaged in these discourses of faith.

In my view, the fact that any understanding of the faith has its roots in the particularity of a given situation should not cause us to neglect the comparison of what we are doing with efforts being made at the level of the universal church. Particularity does not mean isolation. It is true, of course, that each type of theological thinking cannot, and ought not, be applied mechanically to situations different from that in which it arose; whence the foolishness of attempts to do just that with liberation theology, as if it resembled a pharmaceutical prescription. But it is no less true that any theology is discourse about a universal message. For this reason, and to the extent that it springs from an experience that is both deeply human and deeply Christian, every theology also has a universal significance; or, to put it more accurately, every theology is a question and challenge for believers living other human situations.

Authentic universality does not consist in speaking precisely the same language but rather in achieving a full understanding within the setting of each language. The book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that the reason for the astonishment felt by the speakers of different languages who were gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost was not that the apostles all spoke in a unique tongue but that “we hear, all of us in our own native language” (Acts 2:6–8). The goal, then, is not uniformity but a profound unity, a communion or *koinōnia*. One element in this Christian *koinōnia* (which extends far beyond mere intellectual dialogue) is the understanding that the various forms of theology exist within a profound ecclesial communion and give a richly diversified expression to the truth proclaimed by the Only Son.

## FRIENDS OF LIFE

Christians are witnesses of the risen Christ. It is this testimony that calls us together in a permanent way as the church and at the same time is the very heart of the church’s mission. The realization that life and not death

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<sup>25</sup> On undertakings in this area in Latin America, see *El rostro femenino de la teología* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1986), which is a collection of the position papers read by various women theologians at the “Reunión Latinoamericana de Teología de la Liberación desde la perspectiva de la mujer” (Buenos Aires, 1985).

has the final say about history is the source of the joy of believers, who experience thereby God's unmerited love for them. To evangelize is to communicate this joy; it is to transmit, individually and as a community, the good news of God's love that has transformed our lives.

Theology is at the service of this proclamation of the reign of love and justice. Nothing human falls outside the purview of the reign, which is present in history and is transforming it, while also leading it beyond itself. Liberation theology made this perspective its starting point as it attempted to show the meaning of the proclamation of the gospel for the history of Latin America. This is indeed the most important point in this type of theological thinking—namely, that its major concern is with the proclamation of the gospel to the peoples of Latin America. This concern gave birth to it and continues to nourish its efforts.

The major achievement of the Latin American church from 1968 to 1988 was that it renewed with unwonted energy its mission of evangelization and, ultimately, of liberation. It is in this context that we must understand what the preferential option for the poor means. As a result, throughout Latin America (including sectors that used to regard themselves as estranged from the church) and on the international stage, the church has acquired a presence it never had before. Various factors have played a part in producing this result (which is in fact an ongoing process); one of them is liberation theology, which has in large measure articulated the way in which the Latin American Christian community now proclaims its message.

The witness given by Christians has, of course, inevitably elicited resistance and painful hostility. One thing is nonetheless certain: the commitment made by a church that is conscious of the necessity of proclaiming and building a peace based on justice for all, but especially for those who today suffer more from despoliation and mistreatment, has left its mark on the history of Latin America during these years. The Latin American church has made this commitment in many forms throughout the length and breadth of the region, and it has even begun to make its voice heard outside its own borders. Echoing the gospel itself, the Second Vatican Council called on the entire church to make such a commitment. It is the special characteristic of the Christian community that it goes out into the world to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:20) and is therefore never satisfied with successes already obtained. It must continually go out of itself and look forward in expectation of the Lord's coming.

*To Liberate = To Give Life*

The historical process in which Latin America has been involved, and the experiences of many Christians in this process, led liberation theology to speak of salvation in Christ in terms of liberation. This approach meant listening to the “muted cry [that] wells up from millions of human beings, pleading with their pastors for a liberation that is nowhere to be found in their case” (Medellín, “Poverty,” 2). Puebla added that this cry “might well have seemed muted back then” but today it is “loud and clear, increasing in volume and intensity, and at times full of menace” (no. 89). In speaking thus, the two episcopal conferences were displaying a manifest fidelity to the message of the God who acts in history to save a people by liberating it from every kind of servitude. Continuing in the line of Medellín and Puebla, Pope John Paul II addressed these strong and sensitive words to the bishops of Brazil: “The poor of this country, whose pastors you are, and the poor of this continent are the first to feel the urgent need of this *gospel of radical and integral liberation*. To conceal it would be to cheat them and let them down” (letter of April 1986; emphasis added).

The combination of these two factors—the message that is at the heart of biblical revelation, and the profound longing of the Latin American peoples—led us to speak of liberation in Christ and to make this the essential content of evangelization. Something similar has been happening in other sectors of the human race and in the Christian churches present in their midst. There is a longing for liberation that wells up from the inmost hearts of the poor and oppressed of this world and opens them to receive the saving love of God. This longing is a sign of the active presence of the Spirit. The various theologies of liberation to which I have referred are meeting the challenge and giving expression to the experience and its potentialities.

From the outset, liberation was seen as something comprehensive, an integral reality from which nothing is excluded, because only such an idea of it explains the work of him in whom all the promises are fulfilled (see 2 Cor. 1:20). For that reason I distinguished three levels or dimensions of liberation in Christ, and Puebla made the distinction its own (nos. 321–29). First, there is liberation from social situations of oppression and marginalization that force many (and indeed all in one or another way) to live in conditions contrary to God’s will for their life. But it is not enough that we be liberated from oppressive socio-economic structures; also needed is a personal transformation by which we live with profound inner freedom in the face of every kind of servitude, and this is the second dimension or level of liberation.

Finally, there is liberation from sin, which attacks the deepest root of all servitude; for sin is the breaking of friendship with God and with other human beings, and therefore cannot be eradicated except by the unmerited redemptive love of the Lord whom we receive by faith and in communion with one another. Theological analysis (and not social or philosophical analysis) leads to the position that only liberation from sin gets to the very source of social injustice and other forms of human oppression and reconciles us with God and our fellow human beings.

This idea of total liberation was inspired by that of integral development that Paul VI set down in *Populorum progressio* (no. 21). With the help of this concept the pope showed how it is possible, without confusing the various levels, to affirm the deeper unity of a process leading from less human to more human conditions. Among the “more human” conditions he listed “finally and above all: faith, a gift of God accepted by human good will, and unity in the charity of Christ, who calls us all to share as offspring in the life of the living God, the Father of all human beings.”<sup>26</sup> The pope was obviously speaking of human possibilities in a broad sense, not disregarding the gratuitousness of faith and love.

There is no slightest tinge of immanentism in this approach to integral liberation. But if any expression I have used may have given the impression that there is, I want to say here as forcefully as I can that any interpretation along those lines is incompatible with my position. Moreover, my repeated emphasis (in my writings) on the gratuitousness of God’s love as the first and last word in biblical revelation is reliable evidence for this claim. The saving, all-embracing love of God is what leads me to speak of history as profoundly one (in saying this, I am not forgetting the distinctions also to be found within history). What I want to say when I speak of history has been expressed with all desirable exactness by the Peruvian bishops:

If we mean by the “history of salvation” not only those actions that are properly divine—creation, incarnation, redemption—but the actions of human beings as they respond to divine initiatives (either accepting them or rejecting them), then there is in fact only one history, for the uncertain endeavors of human beings, whether they like it or not, whether they even know it or not, have their place in the divine plan [*Documento sobre teología de la liberación*, October 1984].

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<sup>26</sup> Translated in J. Gremillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice. Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976), p. 393.

History is, after all, the field where human beings attain to fulfillment as persons and in which, in the final analysis, they freely say yes or no to God's saving will.<sup>27</sup>

Liberation theology is thus intended as a theology of salvation. Salvation is God's unmerited action in history, which God leads beyond itself. It is God's gift of definitive life to God's children, given in a history in which we must build fellowship. Filiation and fellowship are both a grace and a task to be carried out; these two aspects must be distinguished without being separated, just as, in accordance with the faith of the church as definitively settled at the Council of Chalcedon, we distinguish in Christ a divine condition and a human condition, but we do not separate the two.

This christological truth enables us to determine what gives unity and what creates duality in the process of liberation—that is, in the saving work that God calls us to share. Puebla makes the distinction in carefully worded language at the end of its lengthy section on the three dimensions or levels of liberation:

We are liberated by our participation in the new life brought to us by Jesus Christ, and by communion with him in the mystery of his death and resurrection. But this is true only on condition that we live out this mystery on the three planes described above, without focusing exclusively on any one of them. Only in this way will we avoid reducing the mystery to the verticalism of a disembodied spiritual union with God, or to the merely existential personalism of individual or small-group ties, or to one or another form of social, economic, or political horizontalism [no. 329].

The very complexity of the concept of liberation prevents us from reducing it to only one of its aspects.

In this view of the matter, a key point—not always assigned its proper value—is consideration of the “second level,” that of human liberation. I myself have always emphasized its necessity in my writings. This emphasis reflected an effort to avoid the narrow approach taken to liberation when only two levels, the political and the religious, are distinguished. The political and the religious are certainly basic aspects of liberation, but exclusive attention to them often led to a simple juxtaposition of them, thus impoverishing both, or else to an identification of the two, thus perverting the meaning of both. From the theological standpoint, emphasis on the mediation of aspects of the human that are not reducible to the socio-political made it easier to think of the unity of all the aspects without confusing them; it

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<sup>27</sup> On this point, see my *La verdad los hará libres*, pp. 180–202.

also made it possible to speak of God's saving action as all-embracing and unmerited, without reducing it to a purely human set of activities, as well as to interrelate the political and the religious dimensions while also incorporating the needed ethical perspective. Inertia, however, caused some to interpret the three dimensions distinguished by liberation theology and later by Puebla in the more common, but theologically different, perspective: the relationship between only two of the levels or dimensions.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* Paul VI made this very careful statement:

We must . . . say the following about the liberation that evangelization proclaims and endeavors to bring about:

- a) It cannot be limited purely and simply to the economic, social, and cultural spheres but must concern the whole person in all dimensions, including the relationship to an "absolute" and even to the Absolute, which is God.
- b) It is based, therefore, on a conception of human nature, an anthropology, which can never be sacrificed to the requirements of some strategy or other, or to practice, or to short-term effectiveness.<sup>28</sup>

As a matter of fact, in the measure that we acquire a more complete vision of the process of liberation, its humblest level—the second—helps us understand better the process in the light of faith.

All that has been said shows that liberation, understood as an integral whole (as it is in liberation theology and in the Medellín documents), is the central theme of evangelization. It is at the heart of the Lord's saving work and of the kingdom of life; it is what the God of the kingdom seeks.

### *On the Way of Poverty and Martyrdom*

It is general knowledge that, inspired by John XXIII, Cardinal Lercaro and other fathers of the Vatican Council wanted to make the evangelization of the poor the main focus of their discussions. A passage of the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*), a document that bears witness to this desire, says that the church, like its founder, lives "in poverty and oppression" (no. 8). And one of the richest documents issued by the council says that the church, like its Lord, must walk the "way of poverty" (decree *Ad gentes*, on the Missionary Activity of the Church, 5).

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<sup>28</sup> *The Pope Speaks*, 21 (1976), p. 19.



Living as it does in a part of the world marked by massive poverty and by the premature and unjust death of multitudes, the Latin American church made its own the outlook of Pope John and pleaded at Medellín that “the church in Latin America should be manifested, in an increasingly clear manner, as truly *poor, missionary, and paschal*, separate from all temporal power and courageously committed to the liberation of each and every person” (“Youth,” 14, emphasis added).

Evangelizing means proclaiming, by word and action, that Christ has set us free, but evangelization is always an ecclesial task. The church must be a sign of the kingdom within human history. Medellín saw that the sign must take the form of being poor, missionary, and paschal. Puebla thought that what Medellín wanted was beginning to come about: “Bit by bit the church has been dissociating itself from those who hold economic or political power, freeing itself from various forms of dependence, and divesting itself of privileges” (no. 623).<sup>29</sup>

John XXIII, whom we can never forget, called the church “the church of the poor,” and John Paul II has forcefully repeated the phrase on various occasions. The church is to be a poor church at the service of all, but paying special attention to the lowly of this world. The base-level ecclesial communities, which Paul VI greeted as “a real hope for the church” (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 58) and which Puebla described as “an important ecclesial event that is peculiarly ours” (no. 629), are a manifestation of the presence of the church of the poor in Latin America. These communities are a major source of vitality within the larger Christian community and have brought the gospel closer to the poor and the poor closer to the gospel—and not only the poor but, through them, all who are touched by the church’s action, including those outside its boundaries.

This entrance into the world of the poor has had numerous consequences for the mission of the Latin American church. Among others, it has made it possible to discern new dimensions in the part to be played by the poor themselves in the work of evangelization and in meeting the challenges that this raises. This has been a foundational experience that has nourished reflection within the framework of liberation theology and to which Puebla referred in an often cited passage:

Commitment to the poor and oppressed and the rise of grassroots communities have helped the church to discover the

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<sup>29</sup> Still echoing Medellín, Puebla would say at a later point: “We opt for . . . a church that is a sacrament of communion . . . a servant church . . . a missionary church . . . that commits itself to the liberation of the whole human being and all human beings” (1301–4).



evangelizing potential of the poor. For the poor challenge the church at all times, summoning it to conversion; and many of the poor incarnate in their lives the evangelical values of solidarity, service, simplicity, and openness to accepting the gift of God [no. 1147].

On the other hand, if we view the church as the people of God—that is, as the sum total of Christians—we must acknowledge that the effort to see the Lord's features in the faces of the Latin American poor (see Puebla, 31–40) has also brought difficulties within the church itself. Some have felt their interests adversely affected by the challenges the bishops have issued, and they have tried to draw a curtain of silence around these alerts. Others have gone further: from their positions of power they have openly violated the human rights defended in the documents of the church and have struck hard at Christians who were trying to express their solidarity with the poor and oppressed. These latter cases have led bishops (in Paraguay, Brazil, and Chile, for example) to adopt means not often used in our day, such as the excommunication of those who claimed to be Christians but disrespected the most basic demands of the gospel message.

Others have claimed to be in solidarity with the poor and oppressed but have acted impetuously, not respecting their slower pace or making them uneasy, and have therefore often met with rejection.

The various forms of de facto opposition are typical in periods of difficulty and change. At such times it becomes even more urgent to try to strengthen the unity that is the church's fundamental vocation. Such is the commandment and prayer of the Lord: that we may be one as the Father and the Son are one with each other and in us, in a unity that we must live out while not withdrawing from a world in which the forces of evil tend to divide us (see John 17). This communion—common union—is at once a gift of God and a task set for us.

The growing solidarity of the Latin American church with the poor and oppressed has at times raised concerns about the religious outlook at work in this movement. Is this commitment causing the church to lose its identity? The matter is important because the preservation of identity by each partner in a dialogue is undoubtedly an indispensable condition for the authenticity of dialogue itself. The church's *raison d'être* is to be found in the mission that Christ gave it: the mission of preaching the gospel. Only if the church maintains this identity can it engage in a dialogue that is fruitful for salvation.

Today, perhaps more than at other periods, certain tendencies within the church make it necessary to strengthen our ecclesial identity in fidelity

to the Lord and in the determination to serve those to whom we preach the word. But a proper involvement in the world of the poor by no means detracts from the church's mission; rather in such involvement the church finds its full identity as a sign of the reign of God to which all human beings are called but in which the lowly and the "unimportant" have a privileged place. Solidarity with the poor does not weaken the church's identity but strengthens it. Paul VI gave memorable expression to this truth in his address at the close of the council, when he answered criticisms of its alleged excessive humanism.<sup>30</sup>

It is true, however, that we must pay a high price for being an authentic church of the poor. I am referring not to the cost entailed in the manner of life and action proper to the church, but to that inflicted by the hostile reactions that the church meets in its work. In present-day Latin America this means frequent attacks on the church and its representatives and, more concretely, the determination to hamper their mission, undermine their reputation, violate their personal freedom, deny them the right to live in their own country, and make attempts against their physical integrity, even to the point of assassination. The experience of the cross marks the daily life of many Christians in Latin America.

The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero was undoubtedly a milestone in the life of the Latin American church. This great bishop risked his life in his Sunday homilies (the same was true of Bishop Angelelli in Argentina) and in interventions that responded to First World pressures by continually calling for a peace founded on justice. He received several death threats. The murder of six priests in El Salvador during the preceding years was already a warning close to home. A month before his own death he said with reference to those in power in his country: "Let them not use violence to silence those of us who are making this demand; let them not continue killing those of us who are trying to bring about a just

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<sup>30</sup> Address of December 7, 1965: "It might be said that all this and everything else we might say about the human values of the Council have diverted the attention of the Church in Council to the trend of modern culture, centered on humanity. We would say rather not diverted but *directed*. . . . If we remember, venerable brothers, and all of you, our children, gathered here, how in everyone we can and must recognize the countenance of Christ (Matt. 25:40), the Son of Man, especially when tears and sorrows make it plain to see, and if we can and must recognize in Christ's countenance the countenance of our heavenly Father—"He who sees me," Our Lord said 'sees also the Father' (John 14:9)—then our humanism becomes Christianity, our Christianity becomes centered on God. To put it differently, a knowledge of the human person is, of necessity, a prerequisite for a knowledge of God" (in *Catholic Mind* 64, no. 1202 [April 1966] pp. 62–63).

distribution of power and wealth in our country.” Calmly and courageously he continued: “I speak in the first person because this week I received a warning that I am on the list of those to be eliminated next week. But it is certain that no one can kill the voice of justice.”

He died—they killed him—for bearing witness to the God of life and to his predilection for the poor and the oppressed. It was because he believed in this God that he uttered an anguished, demanding cry to the Salvadoran army: “In the name of God and of this suffering people whose wailing mounts daily to heaven, I ask and beseech you, I order you: stop the repression!” The next evening his blood sealed the covenant he had made with God, with his people, and with his church. Martyrdom (in the broad sense of the term) is the final accomplishment of life; in this case, it was a concrete gesture toward the poor and thereby an utterly free encounter with the Lord.

Those who have given and are now giving their lives for the gospel demonstrate the consistency that the gospel demands. The Apostle St. James (1:8 and 4:8) warns us against the danger of being “double-minded” (*dipsychos*)—that is, of speaking in one way and acting in another. What brought Jesus to his death, and is bringing his present-day followers to their death, is precisely the coherence of message and commitment. It has traditionally been said that the church is enriched by the blood of the martyrs; the present vitality, amid distress, of the people of God in Latin America is due in great part to the same experience.

The testimony given by martyrdom shows clearly how ignoble are the maneuverings of the powerful, their accusations, and their fears, and how far removed from the gospel they are. The men and women—and there are many of them today in Latin America—who bear witness to their faith in the resurrection of the Lord are proof that they who sow death will depart empty-handed and that only they who defend life have their hands filled with history.

## CONCLUSION

In speaking of liberation theology I have been referring to a vast movement now to be found in various parts of the world. The longing for liberation from every form of servitude (which John Paul II has once again called “something noble and legitimate”: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 46), as well as the active presence of the gospel in Christians who share this longing, have given rise to a quest and a praxis; these in turn are the soil in which is rooted an understanding of the faith at the service of the church’s mission of evangelization.

Twenty years after the beginning of liberation theology in Latin America and, more importantly, twenty years after the decisive event of Medellín, new challenges face us. This is the best reason for deepening our fidelity to the God of life, to the church that is called to be a sign of the reign of God, and to the oppressed who are struggling for their liberation. In his letter to the bishops of Brazil (April 1986) John Paul II said:

Liberation theology is not only timely but useful and necessary. It should be seen as a new stage, closely connected with earlier ones, in the theological reflection that began with the apostolic tradition and has continued in the great fathers and doctors, the ordinary and extraordinary exercise of the church's teaching office, and, more recently, the rich patrimony of the church's social teaching as set forth in documents from *Rerum Novarum* to *Laborem Exercens*.

Liberation theology is in fact "a new stage" and, as such, strives to be in continuity with the teaching of the church. This theology, in my understanding of it, does indeed seek to be "closely connected" with the church's teaching. In my opinion, its power and importance are due to a freshness or newness that derives from attention to the historical vicissitudes of our peoples, for these are authentic signs of the times through which the Lord continually speaks to us. At the same time, its power and importance are due to the continuity that leads it to sink its roots deep in scripture, tradition, and the magisterium. These factors play a determining role in the continuing evolution of a theology that aims at being "a reflection on praxis in the light of faith." I have been discussing this evolution in the preceding pages, and it is within it that I locate myself.

In connection with the fifth centenary of the coming of the gospel to these lands, John Paul II has spoken of the need for "a new evangelization." The expression has far-reaching implications. The preaching of the reign of God is always something new, just as the commandment of love which Christ left us is continually new (see John 13:34). But there are many other reasons for speaking of a renewed evangelization in Latin America. The cumulative experience and reflections of the last few decades can serve as a springboard capable of giving a major impetus to this task.

One of the great achievements of these years has been the vital presence of the gospel in our midst. The change begun at Medellín and ratified at Puebla gave many a new vision of the church in Latin America. Despite our tremendous problems and the especially painful conditions in which the vast majority of Latin Americans live, it can be asserted that the Christian

community in Latin America is experiencing a fruitful and vital period, a period that is certainly not any easy one to deal with but that is heavy with promise. It is therefore cause for concern, and sometimes for anguish, to see the resistances and hostilities of some among us to the most fruitful trends in pastoral practice and in theology.

The challenges we face in Latin America are, of course, very great, and the changes needed are radical, even within the church. That is why Puebla several times called for the conversion of all Christians and of the church as a whole in face of the poverty prevalent throughout the region (see part 4, chapter 1, “A Preferential Option for the Poor”). We must nevertheless face our new situations with faith and love; according to the Bible, fear is the opposite of both. In the Gospels the words “Have no fear” are a response to a “man of little faith” (Matt. 14:26–31). St. John, for his part, tells us that where there is love there is no fear (1 John 4:18).

I am not saying that we should urge imprudence and thoughtlessness, but only that we should be convinced that the Spirit will lead us to the whole truth (see John 16:13). His presence is visible in the new face of the Christian community in Latin America: the face of a church that is poor, missionary, and paschal. We would betray and sin against the Spirit if we were to lose what has been gained in these years by Latin American Christians and non-Christians.

John XXIII has left a standard in this area, one that cannot be bettered. In a passage that reflects his strong sense of the God who “makes all things new” (Rev. 21:5) and his deep spirit of hope, the pope said with crystal clarity:

Today more than ever, certainly more than in previous centuries, we are called to serve humankind as such, and not merely Catholics; to defend above all and everywhere the rights of the human person, and not merely those of the Catholic Church. Today’s world, the needs made plain in the last fifty years, and a deeper understanding of doctrine have brought us to a new situation, as I said in my opening speech to the Council. It is not that the Gospel has changed: it is that we have begun to understand it better. Those who have lived as long as I have were faced with new tasks in the social order at the start of the century; those who, like me, were twenty years in the East and eight in France, were enabled to compare different cultures and traditions, and know that the moment has come to discern the signs of the times, to seize the opportunity and to expand the view.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Words dictated to Cardinal Cigognani on May 24, 1963, shortly before

To expand our view—beyond our little world, our ideas and discussions, our interests, our hard times, and—why not say it?—beyond our reasons and legitimate rights. The church in Latin America must combine its forces and not wear itself out in discussions from which it derives little strength. In this way it will be able to “seize the opportunity” for a new evangelization to be carried on in solidarity with all, beginning with the poorest and least important in our midst. To this end we must hear the Lord speaking to us in the signs of the times; they call for interpretation but, more than anything else, they call for a commitment to others that will make us friends of him who is “the friend of wisdom” (Wisd. 11:26).

Allow me to end with a personal story. Some years ago, a journalist asked whether I would write *A Theology of Liberation* today as I had two decades earlier. In answer I said that though the years passed by, the book remained the same, whereas I was alive and therefore changing and moving forward thanks to experiences, to observations made on the book, and to lectures and discussions. When he persisted, I asked whether in a love letter to his wife today he would use the same language he used twenty years ago; he said he would not, but he acknowledged that his love perdured. My book is a love letter to God, to the church, and to the people to which I belong. Love remains alive, but it grows deeper and changes its manner of expression.

Lima

February 1988

—Translated by Matthew J. O’Connell

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the pope’s death. The passage is cited in Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII: Shepherd of the Modern World* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), pp. 498–99 (emphasis added).