

# In Pursuit of the Kingdom



Writings 1968–1988

**Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga**

## **In Pursuit of the Kingdom**

*BISHOP PEDRO CASALDÁLIGA*

**In Pursuit of the Kingdom**

Writings 1968–1988

*Translated by Phillip Berryman*

ORBIS  BOOKS  
Maryknoll, New York 10545



CERZO BARRERO 88



*Twenty years after  
the Latin American Council  
of Medellín*

*Twenty years into the journey  
of the church of São Félix do Araguaia*

*With an eye toward the five hundredth anniversary  
of the misnamed "discovery"  
and such an ambiguous "evangelization"*

The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (Maryknoll) recruits and trains people for overseas missionary service. Through Orbis Books, Maryknoll aims to foster the international dialogue that is essential to mission. The books published, however, reflect the opinions of their authors and are not meant to represent the official position of the society.

---

Originally published as *Na procura do Reino: Antologia de textos—1968–1988*, by Editora FTD, São Paulo, Brazil, copyright © 1988 by Pedro Casaldáliga

English translation copyright © 1990 by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 10545

All rights reserved  
Manufactured in the United States of America

For works not previously translated into English, translations were done from the original-language version. Works that had been previously translated into English were in places edited by Phillip Berryman.

The following publishers have generously given permission to use extended quotations from copyrighted works: Claretian Publications (Quezon City, Philippines), for excerpts from *Fire and Ashes to the Wind*, copyright 1986. Fides/Claretian (Notre Dame, Indiana), for excerpts from *I Believe in Justice and Hope*, copyright 1978. Meyer-Stone Books, for excerpts from *Prophets in Combat: The Nicaraguan Journal of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga*, copyright 1987. For use of "On the *Ad Limina* Visit: A Memoir to Fellow Brazilian Bishops" permission was granted by the National Catholic Reporter (P.O. Box 419281, Kansas City, Mo. 64141).

---

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Casaldáliga, Pedro.

[*Na procura do Reino*. English]

In pursuit of the Kingdom : writings, 1968–1988 / Pedro

Casaldáliga; translated by Phillip Berryman.

p. cm.

Translation of: *Na procura do Reino*.

ISBN 0-88344-655-3

1. Sociology, Christian (Catholic)
2. Liberation theology.
3. Catholic Church—Latin America.
4. Catholic Church—Brazil.
5. Catholic Church—Doctrines.
6. Latin America—Church history—20th century.
7. Brazil—Church history—20th century.

I. Title.

BX1753.C325 1990

282'.81—dc20

89-43235  
CIP

# **Contents**

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>ix</b>
<i>by Bishop Thomas Gumbleton</i>	
<b>Homage and Context</b>	<b>xi</b>
<i>by José María Vigil</i>	
<b>Chronology of Key Events in Casaldáliga's Life to 1989</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>An Interview with Pedro Casaldáliga After Five Hundred Years: Decolonizing and De-evangelizing</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>I</b>	
<b>Identification Papers</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>II</b>	
<b>No Escaping Politics—Being Revolutionary in the Gospel</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>III</b>	
<b>With the Poor of the Earth and the Forbidden Peoples</b>	<b>45</b>
Struggle for Land	47
Indigenous Peoples	54
Blacks	66
<b>IV</b>	
<b>Passionate for Our Great Homeland</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>V</b>	
<b>Being Church, Here, Now</b>	<b>105</b>
Church	107
Pastoral Approach	129
The Missions, Today	143
A Renewed Religious Life	151

<b>VI</b>	
<b>Free in the Newness of the Spirit, in Solidarity unto Death</b>	<b>159</b>
The New Person	161
In Search of a Militant Form of Contemplation	167
Liberation Spirituality	178
Love, Political and in Solidarity	181
Martyrdom	187
Between Death and Hope	196
<b>VII</b>	
<b>In the Company of Those Who Have Believed</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>VIII</b>	
<b>Through Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Brother</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Epilogue</b>	
<b>On the <i>Ad Limina</i> Visit, Subsequent Events, and Casaldáliga Today</b>	<b>227</b>
On the <i>Ad Limina</i> Visit: A Memoir to Fellow Brazilian Bishops	229
On Events Following the <i>Ad Limina</i> Visit and on Casaldáliga Today: An Essay and Interview by Teófilo Cabestrero	238
<b>Abbreviations of Casaldáliga Texts Cited</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>List of Works</b>	<b>253</b>

## Foreword

It is my hope that *In Pursuit of the Kingdom* will become a best seller. I was deeply moved by the writings of Pedro Casaldáliga. When he writes he shares himself in a very personal way. This is a risk that most of us take only with trusted friends. But that seems to be part of what makes him so immediately an attractive person. He has nothing to hide. He is honest and open to everyone he meets. He reminds me of the disciple Nathaniel to whom Jesus was so quickly attracted because he was "without guile."

For me to read these writings was very humbling. I have long been convinced that our church in North America is dying spiritually because we are too rich. And for a long time I have felt that the so-called servant-leaders of the church have been anything but servants and therefore incapable of being leaders who can lead without "lording it over" others in the very way condemned by Jesus. I have wanted to let simplicity—even poverty—be the mark of my lifestyle and of the church, especially its leaders. Bishop Casaldáliga's writings proclaim a radical commitment to the poor and a solidarity with them. Our attempt to do something like this, for example in our Economics Pastoral, is revealed as shallow. We use the rhetoric about making a "preferential option for the poor." But what we say in our pastoral letter on the U.S. economy sounds more than hollow when read in conjunction with writings of a genuine prophet like Pedro Casaldáliga.

The important thing about these writings is that he is not writing as a theorist. He is more like the prophet Amos. Injustice is not an abstraction which is to be analyzed and studied and condemned in carefully measured ways so as not to "offend" the rich and privileged members of our church and society. The evil of injustice is an everyday reality. He knows the exploitation, oppression, structural violence and killing of the poor firsthand. It is happening to him and his people just as it is happening to the majority of the world's people.

His anger is as fierce as the anger of Jesus in the temple. And he does not hesitate to denounce the rich and attempt to overturn the tables of the money-changing oppressors. For this reason I suppose some will say that these writings will give scandal, and some will feel that he should have been encouraged to tone down what he says. But such a caution only indicates that we have forgotten how strongly the Hebrew prophets denounced the rich and the systems the rich devised to maintain their privileged place. It

indicates how much we want to avoid the truth that Jesus came not to bring "peace," but a *sword*, and one that would divide until true unity and peace could come as a result of justice.

In these writings Pedro Casaldáliga cries out in anguish and anger. But it is a cry that might touch our hearts. I especially hope that bishops and all pastoral ministers might read his words with genuine openness. But all who make up the church of the first world need to be scalded by the intensity of his anger and touched by his anguish for those who suffer so unbelievably in a world where God intended fullness of life for all.

One of the things that makes reading Pedro Casaldáliga a joy is that even in the midst of his suffering he is nevertheless a person of hope. His voice is indeed a voice of hope and joy, incredible as it may seem. He makes it clear that for him the resurrection of Jesus is the destruction of slavery, death, and sin. It is a definitive opening to new life, freedom, and justice. In fact, this is the very reason why he is—and tells us every Catholic must be—a revolutionary. We need to overturn the old order of sin and darkness and allow God's new order of light and love to take over ourselves and our world.

Any who read this book will come to know Pedro Casaldáliga well. I experienced his courage, compassion, and fierce pursuit of justice. I began to share his determination never to let up in the struggle for the poor and the commitment to be on their side, even as God is. I saw how much solace, strength, and joy he brings to the poor. I also felt his love for me and all of us from the world of the rich and privileged. Many from the first world who read this book may find themselves hearing the Gospel for the first time. It may almost be more than we can take. But I hope that we will respond to the love with which he cries out to us. If we have ears to hear, we will be "renewed by a spiritual revolution and will find ourselves putting on 'the new self' that has been created in God's way, in the goodness and holiness of truth" (Ephesians 3).

Thomas J. Gumbleton  
Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit

## ***Homage and Context***

This book is an homage to Pedro Casaldáliga. To introduce it I wish simply to say a few words to give readers a clear idea of its purpose.

In 1988 Pedro turned sixty. That year also marked twenty years of his involvement in Brazil and of his journey leading the now well-known church of São Félix do Araguaia. In order to celebrate these landmarks, his friends wanted to prepare a homage to him, something simple and heartfelt that would really "serve the Cause," in Pedro's terms. We then asked ourselves what form that homage should take.

Through our own experience and talking with Pedro himself, we have been aware for some time that many of his friends (especially those new friends who are discovering him every day) have asked us and him for his main writings, for a major work that would provide an overall vision of his thought and witness. But such a book did not exist.

Pedro has produced some twenty-five books, and there are more than twenty translations into various languages, in addition to more than a hundred forewords to other people's books, countless interviews in many magazines and other media, and several records, cassettes, and videos. Many of his works have been repeatedly reissued, but because his output is so extensive, it can be difficult to grasp the basis of his word and witness. What was needed was some way to bring together, at least in summary form, his best and most significant work, as an introductory letter to his new friends and as a compact reminder and a renewed appeal for his older friends. We thus decided that an anthology would be our best homage.

Moreover, when viewed from a wider viewpoint, the occasion of the book took on a historic importance: it has also been twenty years since Medellín, "our greatest council, unquestionably the high point of church history in Latin America." As is now recognized throughout the continent, Pedro's twenty years in Latin America and the twenty-year journey of his church of São Félix are now a part of the spiritual legacy of that church of liberation that got under way at that continent-wide Pentecost twenty years ago. We decided that publishing an anthology based on the witness of Pedro and his church would be an effective way to celebrate the anniversary of Medellín. It is a way to fan coals that are in danger of going out.

From an even longer range perspective, we could make out on the horizon the beginnings of the five hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" and "evangelization" of our continent. Given that context it seemed im-



portant to publish a book that gives voice to the passionate desire for liberation of the Great Homeland as Amerindian, as Afroamerican, as Creole, and as Latin American. Through the book Pedro and his church offer a worthwhile contribution to making the observance of this anniversary as penitential as it is celebratory, to making it as much an occasion for prophecy as for memory, and to making certain that the liberating—"decolonizing and de-evangelizing"—thrust of the observance will not be overlooked or forgotten.

So here is the book. This homage is simple, heartfelt, and "at the service of the Cause," at this complex moment in Latin America.

The aim of this anthology is to encompass all the main elements of Pedro's thought and experience, and what is most urgent in his pastoral message. We have ruled out any criteria of a merely esthetic and literary or historical and documentary sort. Thus excellent poems whose main value is literary do not find a place here, and we have passed over certain important documents and letters whose principal value is in documenting the conflictive and even martyred history of the church of São Félix. We have attempted simply to present those writings that best express the heart of the witness of Pedro and his church.

In order to be somewhat systematic, the texts are organized by topic and independently of their date or historic importance. Of course none of the texts is fully independent of the history of Pedro and his church's twenty years of life and death in the troubled *sertão* ["backlands"] of the Amazon region; but the texts we have chosen can be understood without specific knowledge of that history, and thus they allow readers to appreciate the wider significance of Pedro's life and prophetic witness.

Gathered here are some one hundred and fifty texts from forty different publications, from the things Pedro wrote soon after arriving in Brazil up to current writings, including a text or two from the past that have remained "embargoed" and unpublished, like Pedro's letter to John Paul II.

Pedro has been involved in choosing and arranging the texts from the start, and he has gone over the final version. The title and subtitles are also his.

Bibliographical references for each text are only for those who might want to look up the complete text or the context of any particular passage.

The bibliography at the end offers a panorama of Pedro's vast output, which we have tried to compress in this book, and provides guidance for those admirers or scholars who might be interested in further pursuing Pedro's works.

Special mention should be given to the drawings (cover and frontispiece) of Cerezo Barredo ("Mino"), the "painter of liberation theology," or "painter of liberation," as he is becoming known in Latin America. His drawings, which are making their way into all the forms of communication

of the “church that walks alongside the people,” could not but form part of this book.

May this book provide encouragement for Pedro’s old friends, his new friends, and especially those yet to come, on our journey “in pursuit of the Kingdom.”

*José María Vigil*  
*São Félix do Araguaia, 1988*



## **Chronology of Key Events in Casaldàliga's Life to 1989**

- 1928 Born in Barcelona. Brought up in a cattleraising family near banks of Llobregat River in Catalan region of Spain.
- 1936–39 Spanish Civil War. Priest uncle killed by “Reds.” Franco’s forces retake area.
- 1939–52 First year as seminarian with local parish priest. Year in diocesan seminary. Rest of seminary with Claretians. Feels vocation to missions. First writings.
- 1952 Ordained a priest.
- 1952–58 First assignment—to boys’ school in Sabadell. Youth work, radio programs, pastoral work with immigrants from the south and in poor neighborhoods.
- 1958–61 Assigned to Barcelona. Pastoral work. Youth work. Continues work with immigrants and poor. First book *Nuestra señora del siglo XX* (Our Lady of the Twentieth Century). Active in *Cursillos de Cristiandad*. Goes to Africa to help establish *cursillo* movement.
- 1961–64 Placed in charge of formation at Claretian seminary at Barbastro in province of Aragon. Also works with *cursillos* and is chaplain to the Civil Guard. First stirrings of Vatican II.
- 1964–67 Sent to Madrid. Edits *Iris* magazine, working with Latin Americans and Africans. Further *cursillo* work.
- 1967 Elected delegate to Claretian general chapter where he presses order to change to embrace Vatican II. Decides to go to Brazil.

- 1968 Goes to Brazil. After training course goes to area of São Félix do Araguaia with a fellow Claretian. Lay helpers, sisters, and other priests arrive. They begin by visiting the 150,000 square kilometer area completely lacking in infrastructure and services. Emphasis on formation of leaders and communities and providing services in health care and education, and aiding the people to organize and struggle for their rights.
- 1970 Writes report on "Feudalism and Slavery in Northern Mato Grosso." First stirrings of opposition from landholders.
- 1971 Chosen to be bishop. Writes letter of refusal but is persuaded by friendly bishop and others to accept. Pastoral letter on the church in the Amazon and the land problem published clandestinely and released simultaneously with his episcopal ordination. Letter banned in the region, condemned elsewhere in Brazil.
- 1972 Landholders bulldoze clinic in Santa Terezinha. Settlers defending rebuilt clinic fire shots at landholders' thugs. Denunciations and threats. Father Francisco Jentel blamed for conflict and arrested. Casaldáliga spends week in Santa Terezinha with settlers. Co-workers jailed, expelled, have to flee.
- 1973 Further threats and conflicts. Father Jentel sentenced to ten years for violating "law of national security." Troops ransack mission area, carry off archives and other material. Nine pastoral workers of prelature jailed, eventually released. Military court overturns Jentel verdict a year later and then expels Jentel.
- ca. 1973– Archbishop Sigaud makes a series of public accusations against Casaldáliga and his pastoral work.
- 1976–77 Further rumors of expulsion. Father João Bosco Burnier and Casaldáliga go to protest jailing and torture of two poor women. Soldiers shoot and kill Burnier as he stands beside Casaldáliga.
- Early 1980s Pastoral work continues. On national level Casaldáliga active in CIMI (Missionary Council for Indigenous People) and CPT (Pastoral Commission on Land) since their establishment.

- 1985 Leaving Brazil for the first time since his arrival in 1968, Casaldáliga goes to Nicaragua to join foreign minister Father Miguel d'Escoto in his fast. He has the backing of twenty-three Brazilian bishops and some two hundred other representatives of pastoral agencies, human rights organizations, labor unions, and so forth. He tries to meet with Nicaraguan bishops, but they refuse and complain of his interference. During the subsequent "Gospel Insurrection" he travels throughout the country in a "ministry of borders [reference is to people near the Honduran border, where contras kill and kidnap, and in general to working out at the 'edge' of church and society] and consolation." Also briefly visits El Salvador and Cuba.
- 1986 Letter to Pope John Paul II dealing frankly with a number of problematic issues.
- 1987 Second visit to Central America.
- 1988 Third visit to Central America.
- Ad limina* visit to Rome to meet with pope and Vatican officials. Interrogation by Cardinals Ratzinger and Gantin. Cordial discussion with pope. Back in Brazil Casaldáliga receives a strange unsigned document from the Vatican which he is requested to sign, an admission of a series of errors and faults. Consulting with canon lawyers he concludes that he need not sign and refuses. He is seconded by many Brazilian bishops, including Dom Luciano Mendes, the president of the Brazilian bishops conference. It is determined that Casaldáliga will continue in dialogue with the Roman congregations.
- 1989 Fourth visit to Central America, but not to Nicaragua, because Holy See requests that he not go without approval of Nicaraguan bishops.
- Continuing threats.





## *An Interview with Pedro Casaldáliga*

### **After Five Hundred Years: Decolonizing and De-evangelizing**

*Interviewer: Several anniversary celebrations are coming together at the moment you are releasing this book: we are moving into the major celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" and "evangelization" of Latin America; we are celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Medellín; it is also twenty years since you became a part of Brazil; your church in São Félix do Araguaia has been journeying for twenty years; and your sixtieth birthday is approaching. . . . How do you view the overall moment when your book is being published?*

*Casaldáliga:* I think it is an especially provocative moment and one that is salvific at the same time. In Christian terms, everything salvific is provocative. Medellín was undoubtedly the high point of the church's history in Latin America. To some extent it was a break and a great leap into the future: this great Latin American council of Medellín, our greatest council. In addition, we are approaching the five hundredth anniversary you speak of. The Iberian Peninsula, the United States, and the governments and non-governmental organizations of Latin America and Europe are preparing to celebrate in a very festive mood, very uncritically, and in fact with a good deal of self-interest—the anniversary will be greeted with a wave of tourism to celebrate five centuries, and noisy, mutual, ethnocentric back-slapping. . . . All of this obliges us, as Christians and as Latin Americans, to take another look, to examine things, to retrace our steps, to head back toward the sources of Latin American identity, and toward the sources of Christian identity as well. That is, to "decolonize" and to "de-evangelize." . . .

*Should the celebration of the five hundred years be festive or penitential?*

It can be both at the same time. I celebrate the death of Christ in a way that is both penitential and festive. It ought to be a paschal celebration.

First, we should obviously recognize all the death, negation, prohibition, slavery, colonialism, ethnocentrism, and reductionism that these five centuries have entailed and that are still at work. . . .

Secondly, we should also celebrate all the heroism, danger, and martyrdom present during these five hundred years. Of course I am talking not only about the martyrs the Indians made among us, but especially about the much larger number of martyrs we made among the Indians. I have in mind all those who were "martyrs of the Reign of God"—martyred on this continent for defending their own culture, for defending freedom, for defending justice. And also for announcing the gospel of Jesus.

*Should the arrival of Europeans in Latin America be called a "discovery"?*

No. It was largely a chance encounter. It was also a clash between cultures and peoples. It was greed. It was an invasion. It was a conquest. We should work so it will become increasingly an encounter between continents and between peoples. When we members of CIMI (Missionary Council for Indigenous People), and all honest anthropologists, challenge the policies of our continent's governments toward indigenous peoples, we question the "integration" of these cultures and peoples into what is supposedly a greater nation and what is supposedly a greater or a better culture. We do say, however, that we would be very willing to accept an "interintegration," one continent meeting another, some peoples being integrated with others, so they become "interintegrated." Latin America can and must provide Europe with a great deal in the way of ecology, nature, sense of gratuity, joy, color, hospitality, solidarity, utopia, hope. . . .

*You have said that all this means we must "decolonize" and "de-evangelize." What would it mean to "decolonize"?*

Decolonizing would mean going back to the sources of Latin American identity, allowing Latin America to be what it is in its origins, enabling it to reach fulfillment as a continent of all, brothers and sisters, with a radical unity that is indigenous, black, Creole. . . .

Decolonizing would mean permitting the self-realization and liberation of this continent which until now has been blocked, dependent, subjected to a foreign debt that is unjust and evil: a debt the Latin American people should not pay because the people did not create it; a debt that the Latin American people cannot pay because they have already paid it with raw materials and with cheap labor, handing over their own property, their soil, their minerals; a foreign debt that it is a sin to pay, a sin to collect.

Decolonizing, reaching back for Latin America's identity, means allowing the overall Latin American culture—which is the sum total of many cultures, first of many indigenous peoples, and of the black people, enslaved and brought to Latin America, and then of the resulting mixture in many places—allowing this culture to be expressed in education, in political life and in administration, even in agriculture.

Decolonizing means allowing the whole Latin American people to find self-expression within the concert of the nations of the world as another, a different, people, with an identity, as I see it, that to some extent draws all Latin American peoples together and makes it possible to speak quite properly of the "Great Homeland": all of Latin America and the Caribbean together.

*What would it mean to "de-evangelize"?*

De-evangelizing would mean decolonizing evangelization. The gospel came to Latin America wrapped, borne, and served by a culture at the service of an empire, initially the Iberian Empire. Rather than a pure, supracultural, liberating gospel message, what came was a message that was a cultural import, which for five hundred years has prevented a really indigenous church from developing in Latin America.

Puebla, in its notorious green document [proposed working document circulated among the bishops months in advance of the meeting], which providentially was rejected because it was incomplete (and because it distorted matters, I believe), spoke of the "evangelization of cultures." Today this expression is once more being used in Latin America, in CELAM [Council of Latin American Bishops], and in the Vatican. The term could even be valid, as long as it was not reduced to that kind of culturalism that denies the overall process, which is not just cultural but political as well. The inculturation in question should enter fully into the cultures of peoples, the history of those peoples, into the new historical processes that these peoples are living: processes that are cultural, social, economic, and political. . . .

De-evangelizing what has been badly evangelized, for us, here in Latin America, can only mean setting out toward an overall liberation, toward a full social, political, economic, and cultural liberation; it can only mean evangelizing the ongoing historic processes of our peoples in a liberating way. Seen from the viewpoint of faith, the liberation processes of our people become part of, and to some extent build, announce, prepare, accept, await, and hope for . . . the overall process of the Reign of God.

Puebla also rightfully speaks of the "civilization of love," a very beautiful expression, one that is energizing and Christian, if understood fully. Nevertheless, both in Latin America and in Europe this expression has been watered down to a kind of eirenicism that denies the dramatic nature of the historic processes we are living here in Latin America and throughout the Third World. To the notion of the "civilization of love" there should be added that of the "civilization of poverty," a concept felicitously proposed by a theologian who is a Jesuit, Spanish, Basque, and Salvadoran, Ignacio Ellacuría.

*"Decolonizing" and "de-evangelizing" taken together. . . . Right away I want to bring up to you a doubt with which some readers would attack you after just*

*this little you've said, and that many others would inevitably feel at the end of this book: Aren't you perhaps mixing religion and politics? In all these religious words of yours isn't there a lot of politics?*

I would like to respond to those who might make that accusation or have that reaction, and I can do that by going back to the very foundation, to God. (Talking of "de-evangelization" and going back to the sources of our Christian identity we can also certainly make space for going back to God, to revise our image of God.)

To avoid our having an idol, our God can only be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of the humanism, the humanness, of God who has appeared in our midst. I would like to interpret that as follows. Our God is a humanized, incarnate God—God's Son, the Word, Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, born of woman, son of Mary, a man in history, subject to a culture, within a particular time, under an empire. . . . For us Christians the mystery of the incarnation is the supreme expression of God's human solidarity. Jesus Christ is the historic solidarity of God toward human beings, with each individual human person, with each of the peoples, with their processes in history. Our God is a humanized, most human, historically most human, God. For our faith, human rights are God's concerns in history. . . .

For us there are not two histories: one profane and apart from God, and another supernatural history that God would care over, and make God's own. Without denying what theologians have traditionally called "of the natural order" or "of the supernatural order," "of nature" or "of grace," we profess belief in a single human history because the savior God is the creator God. . . .

This humanness of God, of Jesus Christ, who is the humanized God, takes place through a specific, determinate, historic process, one with tensions and temptations, one that clashes with the interests of the powerful of his time: of the Roman Empire, the Temple, Jerusalem, the landholders, the legalism that subjects the people to a true spiritual captivity. . . .

If we re-examine our image of God we will also have to revise this idea of religion as apart from history (the single history), apart from human beings, peoples, processes in history, politics. . . . If we really believe in the God of Jesus (I have no other God in mind) we cannot avoid getting into politics.

And if we believe in this God, if we accept this Jesus Christ, God incarnate, a conflictive man, accused, sentenced to death, hung from a cross, outlawed by the imperial, religious, and economic powers of his time, then as church, as the community of followers of Jesus Christ, we must also re-examine, revise, and transform our theology, that is, the systematization of our Christian faith, the celebration of that Christian faith, which is the liturgy, the administration of this Christian faith, of the way it is lived, which means pastoral practice, and the way individual Christians live out that faith, which means spirituality. . . .

During this particular period, since Medellín and now under the influence of the five-hundred-year anniversary, people in Latin America are experiencing (plainly with a great deal of conflict, which in itself is nevertheless a "Christian" sign) a new liturgy, a new theology, a new pastoral practice, a new spirituality, a holiness, that is to some extent new—all of them characteristically Latin American.

*Let's go step by step. Re-examining and revising theology first.*

That's what liberation theology is all about: a new systematization of Christian theology done from Latin America, today, one that tries to take a new look at Christian theology by going back to the roots of our Christian identity.

Taking a new look at the God in whom we believe means, above all else, overcoming any kind of dichotomy. The God of the Bible, on every page, is an anthropomorphic God, a God involved with the earth, a God involved in history. This God's self-description spans the history of a people. Jewish believers rightfully said with enthusiasm and gratitude: no other God is closer than our God. . . . We Christians also proclaim our God as Emmanuel, God with us; in fact, God like us; in fact, God like the poorest among us, God made human, God made poor, God made outcast, God made persecuted, God made excommunicated, God made sentenced, executed, dead. . . . This is the angle from which theology must be re-examined. And that effort is taking shape among us in liberation theology.

I have very often repeated that this theology receives a great deal more from the trudging advance of the whole Latin American people, a believing and oppressed people in the process of liberation, than from the cerebrations of our theologians, whom we might picture sitting in their studies surrounded just by texts from the Bible and the church's teaching. . . .

If the term is taken with a bit of humor, but at the same time, I believe, with a great deal of truth, I would say that liberation theology is very "geopolitical," quite radically historic. Its starting point is a specific land, specifically a continent; its starting point is a people, or a number of peoples, who are to a degree unified as a continent, and who are experiencing their processes of independence, of ongoing slaughter, hunger, captivity, and at the same time processes of making their demands and becoming liberated. This theology looks not only at the signs of the times—as Vatican II taught us to do—but also, as I often like to say, at the signs of places. It is a theology that prizes as never before—except perhaps during the first three centuries of the church—the voice of the people as God's voice, the *sensus fidei* of a people or of peoples. In Europe (at least years ago) it has been easy for theologians to remain in their studies, at their lecture podiums, with their books; and preachers have easily been left in their religious houses, their parishes, and their pulpits. Theologians or preachers of liberation live with the people, and they stress experiencing the poverty of

the people, and experiencing the pastoral processes of these peoples, processes that are cultural, political, and economic as well.

*That all explains why liberation theologians find that other theologians fail to understand them, right?*

Yes, and that is why we have to appeal for a necessary pluralism. I understand very well why I'm sometimes at odds with other bishops, and why I'm at odds with sectors of the Roman Curia—Ratzinger, for example—why I'm at odds with Pope John Paul II in some respects. That in no way nullifies either my faith or my communion with the church. If the church is also to be human, if it is also to exist within history, it must be many-sided within the unity of a single faith. One faith and many theologies, right? Would it be correct to say there can be only one theology when throughout twenty centuries of church history there have already been so many theologies? Augustine's theology is not Origen's—and both are accepted. Augustine's theology is not Thomas's; nor is Thomas's that of liberation. And yet all these theologies, each in their own time, with their own peculiar features and their historic and scholarly mediations, have tried to systematize the faith at every moment.

But this legitimate pluralism does not mean that liberation theology is "one more theology," the theology "for Latin America." It does not mean that liberation theology does not bear—beyond its own specific Latin American character—something of a permanent and universal nature that is not just for Latin America. I once said, and I'll repeat it, that for me the only true Christian theology must be "liberation" theology. The only true Christian spirituality must be "liberation" spirituality. The only true "Christian" theology is that theology that systematizes faith "in the liberating God" as manifested in Jesus, the liberator from sin, from slavery, from death, for both persons and peoples simultaneously. The only true "Christian" spirituality is that which makes the presence of this God manifested in Jesus Christ Liberator a living reality and which stimulates, assimilates, struggles, and takes risks even to the point of death, so that the "liberator" Spirit of this God may be present in each person, and so that "God's Liberation" may take place in each people.

*Let's move on to another of the points you have said must be re-examined, the liturgy.*

Liberation theology—which John Paul II has finally recognized as useful and necessary and now mature—has given us a certain freedom of spirit and maturity, enabling us to live our liturgy and pastoral promotion of spirituality in a way that is systematically clear-sighted, we might say. The people of Latin America have been pressing their popular religiosity for centuries, for five hundred years. This religiosity has often encountered contempt from those who perhaps first saw it as simply pagan, and later as something very ambiguous and eclectic. Even some on the left have re-

garded it as alienated and alienating. Yet we are increasingly recognizing it as a spirituality that, as Latin American, is utterly legitimate, and has a great liberating potential as well, although it undoubtedly brings along a heavy load of understandable historic ambiguities.

Religion is an essential part of a culture—according to the best ethnologists and anthropologists, it is the radical core of a culture—and here we are talking about the Amerindian continent, which is very deeply religious. The anthropologists who came from Europe early in this century went so far as to say that in some areas of Latin America, specifically in Brazil, the native peoples had no religion. Subsequently they had to acknowledge that among these native peoples everything was religion. . . .

People are living popular religiosity (or “popular religion,” as the specialists prefer to say in order to show greater respect, and in order to overcome a certain pejorative connotation) in a way that is quite consistent and harmonious, militant, and very liberating. Celebrations of the faith are increasingly connected to commitment: specifically, celebrations of “pilgrimages for land” here in Brazil, the national or continental celebrations of Christian base communities where the eucharist becomes—increasingly, without any dichotomy—a celebration of the pasch of Jesus and of the pasch of his people, a eucharist of kinship and subversion. . . .

#### *And spirituality?*

The new holiness for which we strive isn't so new. It simply desires to be “Christian,” the holiness of Jesus himself, the spirituality of the Christian who follows Jesus. That is, living the faith, in one's own place and time, according to the Spirit of Jesus. Isn't that the incarnate Word?

A Christian spirituality simply cannot be disincarnate or unhistorical. And history is political. . . . So this must be a *spirituality that overcomes any kind of dichotomy*. For us heaven isn't on one side and earth on the other. The most traditional Christian liturgy sings of this “exchange” or “trade” between heaven and earth, between God and humankind, an exchange and trade that takes place in Jesus Christ. A true Christian holiness, like the one we want to understand and live today in Latin America and around the world, will inevitably have to pass through “mediations in history.” This spirituality must take on the problems, sufferings, and risks of one's people, and of the particular moment in history that this people is living. It will contemplate God not only in the written and static word of the Bible and not only in what may be an idyllic vision of nature, but primarily and especially where there is conflict in struggle, in the process of history. The Bible, of course, and also nature, but primarily and especially history. Saint Augustine reminded us that God has written two great books: the book of the Bible and the book of life. The best biblical work in Latin America today is very insistent on this point, and it has gotten to the point of being a slogan in our Christian communities: “the Bible and life, life and the Bible.” Carlos Mesters, our renowned Brazilian scripture specialist, has



demonstrated his knack for translating this concern into marvelous books.

This political holiness is an incarnate, historic holiness, a holiness that *opts for the poor* and impoverished, that takes sides with the poor, that strives to take a stand where they are, that alongside the poor takes on the risks, conflict, and liberation struggle of the poor themselves, that challenges the system of oppression, domination, and privilege. It is a holiness that contemplates God within the movement of history and of everyday events.

Traditional spiritualities used to speak of contemplating and then passing on, communicating to others what one had contemplated. Other spiritualities used to say, "contemplatives in action." We say more concretely that we must be *contemplatives in liberation*, contemplatives in specifically political action. This is not just an action of good will, one that is merely humanitarian or charitable, but an activity that is characteristically political. If I'm not mistaken, Pius XI many years ago said that the best expression of Christian love would be political charity, because it is a love that reaches persons and peoples, reaches persons as structured and structuring, reaches particular moments and the structures of the being and life of human beings.

In addition, this is a holiness that is capable of *living ecumenically* God's presence and saving action in the world. Throughout this process of liberation, this process involving God with us and God like us, God may not always seem to be an "ecclesiastical" God, nor even a "Christian" God, but will always be seen as a humanly "liberating" God. When we celebrate our martyrs, we always keep in mind that even if some of them were perhaps not Christians and even claimed to be atheists, they were "martyrs of the Reign of God," martyrs of this overall process, of this overall cause, of this larger interest of God, which the church also must serve. The whole church cannot be anything more than a *diakonia*, a service of the Reign of God. The church is not for itself; the church is for the Reign, in the world, hoping and preparing for the Reign beyond, in the Parousia.

At the same time, by definition, the spirituality of liberation will be *inevitably conflictive* and misunderstood because it is challenging. Persecuted by the privileged, by all the powerful. It is a revolutionary spirituality.

This conflictive aspect is characteristic of Jesus Christ himself. This conflictive side of Jesus' life, this basic stance in his life, will be a basic stance in the life of the Christian who desires to live Christian spirituality.

Jesus also experienced *conflict with the Temple* and the synagogue. It might seem natural for him to come into conflict particularly with the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, we must say that in Jesus' life, we see conflict with the synagogue and Temple, conflict with the Law and worship, as something much more ongoing and everyday. If we can put it this way, Jesus appeared as the new God, who was retrieving the old God, and was denying the God who was profaned, utilized, subjected to the Law. When the Temple curtain is torn from top to bottom, we have the impression that

what is being torn down is a whole notion of God, a whole way of carrying out worship, a whole religious and moral law that does not really fit God, the true God. That is why Jesus stands in conflict with the Temple and the synagogue.

In the church, in each one of us, there is still Sadduceeism, Pharisaism, legalism. . . . Like any human institution, although it is not only a human institution, the church runs the risk of becoming overinstitutionalized, or of becoming turned in on itself. It runs the risk—as some of our theologians have put it, wisely seeking to alert us—of smothering charism with power. That is why a Christian today, as did Jesus in his own time, may experience conflict not only in relation to the powers of this world but even in relation to whatever there is of Temple and synagogue in the church. . . .

*In Latin America the most burning issue is not just the connection between faith and politics but between faith and revolution, since the historic processes our people are experiencing are revolutionary processes, and hence violent and traumatic processes. What do you have to say about revolutionary processes?*

If we say that the church has to become involved in politics (and that is acknowledged today) and if we say that the church must opt for the poor, of necessity we are saying that the church must be involved in the real politics taking place in each people and everywhere. We are saying that the church must opt not only for the poor taken as individuals, but also for the poor in a collective sense. The church must opt for the interests of the poor and for their processes. If revolutionary processes are taking place in Nicaragua, in Guatemala, El Salvador, or Mexico, the Philippines, Colombia, Peru, . . . obviously the church will have to become part of those processes. Just as Christ entered human history. It must become involved critically, in the light of a greater mediation. The church does not have the last word in socio-political mediations. The church cannot claim to have a social, political, and economic program for any society. Nevertheless, as light, yeast, leaven, the church can and must enter into all processes in history.

More particularly, in the case of revolution, the church obviously can and must become involved in a revolution that may change imperialist, oligarchical, exploiting, pillaging structures of hunger, illness, and lack of education, into structures of national cultural identity, independence, food, education, health care, and housing.

For Christians, the great problem is that of violence or nonviolence, since there's no doubt that Jesus, who brought peace, who is "the Prince of Peace," who "is our Peace," as Saint Paul said, in principle did not come to bring us violence. However, there is a series of texts that speak to us of a certain violence: "I have not come to bring peace but violence"; "I have come to separate parents from children"; "The Reign of God suffers (calls for, demands) violence." . . . I am aware that people say this is not a revolutionary violence. I ask: "What kind of violence is it?" Some will tell me

ascetic violence. I ask, "Is it a purely individual or individualistic reaction, one that ignores the collective, social, structural side of things?"

It's clear to me that a Christian must be against weapons and must be against all violence in principle. However, the church itself over the centuries has recognized that persons and peoples have a right to legitimate self-defense. In recent times the popes, Paul VI, and even John Paul II at a particular moment, have recognized that peoples who are being oppressed by a prolonged tyranny have the right to armed revolution—if there is no other way out—in order to free themselves from such a tyranny. If mankind evolves, if the rights of peoples are respected in a different way, if a future U.N. manages to resolve the conflicts between peoples and within each people through diplomatic and political means, so much the better.

As things stand today, the church of Nicaragua, the church of Guatemala, and the church of El Salvador cannot refuse to participate in the revolutionary processes of their peoples, in processes those peasant, Indian, oppressed peoples are experiencing. The church in those countries cannot refuse to take a clear position against U.S. intervention, against the arrogance and violence of the Salvadoran army, physically maintained by the United States, or the Guatemalan army, which is at the service of the national oligarchy.

The church as church, as institution, in its documents, celebrations, in the specific rules set for its whole community, above all else is to recall the major Christian principles related to political morality, to the historic commitment of Christians. Obviously, it will not advocate any process as though it were "the only possible process" for the Reign of God; it will not propose any party as though it were "the Christian party"; it will not say that the Christian Democrats are "the church's party." This sin has been committed first back in Europe, in Italy, which is so ecclesiastical, and it is being committed today in Central America: everyone knows that the upper echelons of the hierarchy are striving to have Christian Democracy win out in Central America. Duarte is a Christian Democrat and so is Vinicio Cerezo. (I was quite amazed to see that Napoleón Duarte had sent a letter to the official magazine of Communion and Liberation—the movement that is so powerful in the church and that Pope John Paul II so cherishes personally—calling the members of the movement "comrades" [*compañeros*] and that the magazine should publish the letter on the front page, practically as its editorial.)\* I think Christians, and the church as such, have had, and still have, few scruples over taking a stand in the case of a more conservative political line or process. However, it has had and still has many scruples when it comes to a revolutionary process. . . .

---

\*On Communion and Liberation, its methods, politics, and connections with the Vatican, see Penny Lernoux, *People of God: The Struggle for World Catholicism* (New York: Viking, 1989), pp. 224–37. —TRANS.

*Does the idea that the church should not canonize any party mean that it should remain neutral, above the groups contending in a revolution?*

No. Both sides can't be equally right. Both sides can't be equally just. Both sides can't have the same interests. Both sides can't have the same majority support.

This is quite clear in Central America. In Nicaragua, there is no doubt that Sandinismo, with its shortcomings, even with the instruments it uses, including Marxist ones, there is no doubt that it is a revolutionary project in history that grows out of the Nicaraguan people, and that the bulk of the Nicaraguan people have made that process their own, a process that is more Sandinista than Marxist (for it is also a Christian process), one that springs from the bulk of the Nicaraguan people and that challenges long-standing imperialism and long-standing oligarchy, specifically the Somoza dictatorship; a process that is demanding Nicaragua's independence, demanding an agrarian reform at the service of the majority in Nicaragua, the peasants, and that is demanding not only land but also food, health care, and education for the whole Nicaraguan people. And the majority of the Salvadoran people and the Guatemalan people are also demanding land, health care, and education and are challenging the same imperialism and the same long-standing oligarchies. Being neutral in those countries would mean ceasing to be Christian.

Faced with these kinds of liberating revolutionary movements—with this combination of causes seeking agrarian reform, challenging imperialism, struggling for liberation from so many long-standing oppressions and from colonization, and working to recover the identity of these peoples; faced with all this, and on the basis of our faith, and on the basis of the theology and spirituality of liberation, we cannot but support them—doing so critically of course.

When I was in Nicaragua, even though I went there after already taking a stand, and even passionately so, in the light of my faith and in prayer, and trying to re-examine things calmly, I understood at least four or five very obvious things, which are summarized in this book: the bishops as bishops in Nicaragua can and should take a stand against U.S. intervention. They can and must urge the self-determination of the Nicaraguan people. They can and must support the Sandinista process, insofar as it is about agrarian reform, restoring the cultural identity of the Nicaraguan people, food for everyone, education for everyone. These are basic, fundamental goods. That is where we Christians, who can believe only in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, find that these human rights coincide with the concerns of this same God. The church cannot be neutral anywhere. As I say elsewhere in this book, "in love, in faith, and in revolution, neutrality is impossible."

And this neutrality—let us emphasize—is not just impossible here in the Third World, but also in the First World. Even as a European, but also as

a bishop, I have often said, and I mean it very sincerely but also with a bit of pastoral aggressiveness, that the church in the First World—let's refer to the First and Third Worlds without qualifications—if it wants to be sincere and stand in solidarity, cannot do anything less than really opt for the poor of the First and Third Worlds; it must do this if it is to be part of the church of Jesus Christ throughout the world and if it is to proclaim its faith to the one humankind, itself child of the one God whom we call Father. If the First World church does not stand in solidarity with the individuals and peoples of the Third World, it is denying God, and failing to exercise family charity. In this sense, I say elsewhere in this book that today charity, understood in its social, communitarian, and collective dimensions, is called "solidarity." The Nicaraguan poet Gioconda Belli said that "solidarity is the affection of peoples"; I would add that solidarity is the charity of the churches. Or ought to be.

*Today we recognize that there is salvation outside the church, and we know that liberation movements develop outside the church, and are sometimes even attacked by the church. . . . What could we say today of the old adage that went, "Outside the church no salvation"?*

Outside of liberation—understood as integral, full, total—there is no church. And so outside of the liberating church there is no church. The church is church only to the extent that it announces, celebrates, builds, and awaits salvation. Salvation is salvation only if it saves persons as individuals and as members of a people, of a society. Salvation is salvation if it saves persons in history. Salvation will reach fulfillment in eschatology, in the Parousia, but salvation takes place in this world. Jesus is not our savior on the other side of death. Jesus is our savior because already on this side of death he saves us from all sin, from all slavery (slavery is organized sin), and will also save us from death.

"Outside salvation there is no church." Outside liberation, in this sense, there cannot be church. The church is either liberating or it is not the church of Jesus Christ the Liberator.

*Let's finish with two overall questions. As we approach the five hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" and "evangelization," what are the most important points of interest for Latin America?*

I've spoken about recovering the continent's identity. That means first acknowledging that the Latin American continent, the whole American continent, is an "Amerindian" continent: it means recovering the identity of all indigenous peoples; their full rights; their territories; their cultures, and within their cultures, their particular languages (language is half of a people's culture; as long as a people maintains its own language it remains "that" people).

It means acknowledging the rights and identity of blacks, up and down and around the continent. They were brought as slaves and on this conti-

nent they are more dissolved as a group than the indigenous peoples, but they represent a very significant body in numerical terms. (For instance, Brazil, with the second largest black population in the world, has some fifty million blacks.) It means acknowledging this kind of "eclectic identity," if I can use the term, of the Latin American continent, which is indigenous, black, and Creole. Latin America has a face. It has a soul. It is itself. It is other. It can and must complement humankind.

Secondly, recovering the continent's identity involves allowing Latin America to carry out its own native effort at social, political, and economic revolution. It means that Latin America will undertake its socialism and even its Marxism, where it thinks it should do so. Che and Mariátegui, to cite two significant, glorious names from Latin America, could show the way. Cuba, even though it has had to undergo the circumstances of strangulation, and has its own errors, of course, and then Nicaragua, with its Sandinista process, are showing how far Marxism—not to say more broadly revolution—can be experienced in an original way in Latin America. The very shortcomings, errors, and limitations of these processes can serve to teach us.

Democracy, in Latin America—and in the world itself, but we are talking about Latin America now—should be another kind of democracy. I have often said and I'll say it once more, that in our world perhaps only the word "love" has been more prostituted than the word "democracy." Saying "democracy" today is almost meaningless. Or unfortunately it often means the denial of democracy. Because it does not mean popular democracy. It does not mean majority democracy. It does not mean truly participatory democracy. It is not a government of the people to serve the people. It means once more minority government, oligarchical government, "in the name of the people," at the service of a few.

Latin America can and must demand, on the occasion of this celebration of this five hundredth anniversary, a new international law, a new law of the peoples. Why must one people be considered greater or better than another people? How can the United States feel free to invade Central America dozens of times? (We could also talk about Russia, if we were talking about the rest of the world, or of Japan, or Germany, to speak of two more recent empires, not to mention the Spanish or Portuguese empires.)

Furthermore, we should also demand of the church this native born quality that we are demanding in politics, culture, and economics, in a revolutionary process. This single humankind that exists on various continents is here an Amerindian, Afroamerican, Creole humankind. The one church of Jesus Christ that exists all over the earth, exists here, should exist here, in a Latin American manner, in order to be the church of the Word Incarnate, the church of Jesus of Nazareth, a church for these peoples, for this people, for this moment.

*Winding up, what are the major interests of the church in Latin America at this five hundredth anniversary?*

To joyfully and gratefully further the process of liberation theology. To make possible and stimulate joyfully and gratefully the process of liberation spirituality. To canonize, if not in the "glory of Bernini" (which may not be necessary) then certainly in public recognition, the vast array of martyrs Latin America has provided the church these last few years—martyrs whose names are solemnly recognized, like Saint Romero of the Americas, and thousands of anonymous martyrs, like the native peoples, the peasants, the workers, the pastoral workers, the defenders of human rights, in the various countries. . . .

To make possible a native liturgy, one characteristically Latin American. To stimulate Latin American pastoral work. To recognize the independence of bishops conferences. To "overhaul" CELAM, the CELAM that once aroused so many hopes, so much witness, so much brave prophecy, and that has lately become an encumbrance or is just tolerated. If only it were really a kind of communion of the various bishops conferences of the Latin American continent. . . .

A few days ago, I was thinking about the five hundred years again. I was even envisioning a set of sonnets I was going to write, and which I am writing now, as I go along, as I do all my poems. The series would start with five sonnets, to Columbus and to his sailing ships. Also five sonnets to the anonymous conquistador, the anonymous missionary, the anonymous Indian, the anonymous black, the anonymous mother. And finally a free sonnet to the Great Homeland.

Our beloved theologian, our great theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez is going to publish a book on "Saint Bartolomé de las Casas," as I call him. I have just finished a sonnet for that book. Here it is.

### *To Bartolomé de las Casas*

The poor have dealt you a hand that  
reveals a wider church, a truer God:  
against the baptism of a dead Indian,  
there is first the baptism of life.

A trustee of the good news  
you have challenged the Crown and Salamanca.  
And now your fiery heart  
bears witness for five hundred years.

It will soon be five hundred years, o seer,  
and today more than ever the continent roars  
like a volcano of wounds and burning coals.



Come back and teach us how to evangelize,  
the sea swept free of caravels,  
Holy Father of the Americas, las Casas!



**I**

## **Identification Papers**



## **IDENTITY**

If you don't know who I am. If you're disturbed  
at the combination of loves I till:  
a flower for Che, the whole garden  
for the God of Jesus. If I yearn

to bless barbed wire torn down  
and the myth of a village resurrected.  
If I test God for Nicaragua on the alert,  
for this continent still in chains.

If I offer the Bread and Wine on my altars  
over a tablecloth made by the people . . .  
Be aware: I'm from the people, and headed toward the Kingdom.

Accept me as a Latin American,  
accept me simply as a Christian,  
if you believe me and don't know who I am!

(TE, 13)

**IN EXODUS**

Living on wheels or on horseback,  
coming and going to fulfill a mission,  
like a tree among trees I go silent  
and hear how your coming draws near.

The less I meet you the more I find you,  
both of us freed of name and measure.  
Owning my fear which I give to you as vassal,  
I live in the hope of your life.

In pursuit of the different Kingdom,  
I keep loving things and people,  
citizen of all, and a foreigner still.

Your peace calls out to me like an abyss  
while I cross through the shadows, a  
guerrilla to the world, to the church, and to myself.

(TE, 14)

**I HAVE NOT DENIED YOU**

For the sake of your cause, I am battered about  
like a ship, old with adventures  
but now hoisting the youthful joy  
of being faithful to the end of the day's run.

Faithful, faithful . . . just a word. Time stretches out  
and the port is still a hazy shape  
out there in the fog of this dark age  
that drowns the sea in blood and wailing.

I've always awaited your peace. I have not denied you,  
although I've denied love in many ways  
and I've foundered even with you at my side.

I won't pay my debts; don't try to collect.  
Though I've not always known how to find you in all,  
never have I stopped loving you in the poorest.

(TE, 18)





## **II**

# **No Escaping Politics – Being Revolutionary in the Gospel**



## SERVE THE PEOPLE

In opposition to any kind of functionalist philosophy, I believe that neither science nor technology can ever under any circumstances raise the white flag of some supposed neutrality. Ideology is pouring out of every technical act, every scientific gesture. *You're either serving the system or serving the people.* Mapping out a highway, planning a census, classifying a medicine—all are political. Every technician, every scientist is always a political person, even when he or she denies it: either reactionary, or reformist, or transforming. Revolution buds not only in the arms or in the blood of laborers and workers. You, who are called to be the legitimate allies of the people, will either carry out this revolution or you will sell out and struggle against it. Out here in the badlands of Mato Grosso, I have often seen the immaculate doctors' jackets irreparably stained with the despised blood of the people.

Refuse to serve those experts who are supposedly neutral. Embody a science and technology for serving freedom, justice, and life.

(EDP, 170)



Arguedas said, "the God of the masters is not the same," and Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us that such a god "is not the same as the God of the poor. Ultimately the oppressor is an unbeliever vis-à-vis the God of the Bible."

In his book *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Gustavo recalls this statement by Berdyaev: "If I am hungry, that is a material problem; if someone else is hungry, that is a spiritual problem."

I would prefer to say: my own hunger is a material problem for me. Very real, unquestionably. My brother's or sister's hunger is also a very real problem, both material and spiritual. Material for him or her. Spiritual for me. That's just as true whether I am aware of that hunger or ignore it, when I should be aware of it. "I was hungry and you did not give me anything to eat." . . . Or I was hungry and you didn't even find out.

(ERF, 137)



No *Politics* is definitively written. The politics of a country or of the world, like the life of a person, is worked out step by step, day by day. I do know that I have somehow passed from the horror of anarchism I felt in my childhood to adopt some sort of socialist options, impelled by my contacts with the dialectic of life, by the demands of the gospel, and by some of the good points of Marxism. What kind of socialism I'm not quite

sure; any more than I'm sure of what kind of church will result tomorrow from our efforts at building one today, although I know that we want it to be ever more Christian; any more than I know what utopia is really like — that utopia (which, in my hope, I believe to be a reality) toward which humankind, stirred by the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, is heading.

(IBJ, 209)



... I think capitalism is "intrinsically evil" because it is nothing more than socially institutionalized selfishness, the public worship of profit for profit's sake, the official recognition of the exploitation of some human beings by others, and the slavery of the many under the yoke of the interest and prosperity of the few.

During the interrogation to which the pastoral team of the prelature was submitted, the presiding officer at the trial inquired insistently about my socialism and what I meant by socialization. (This latter word was ferreted out, as a "corpus delicti," from some of the writings that the police and the army had confiscated among our belongings.) To avoid getting into any long and involved arguments, since that was hardly the time or the place for them, I answered, "For me, Dr. Francisco, socialization means the greatest possible sharing by all citizens, within the greatest possible equality, in all the goods 'of nature and culture.'" (I borrowed this last expression from Paulo Freire, whose teachings and methods on popular education also formed part of the "corpus delicti" of our inquest.)

He limited himself to remarking (as so many of his stamp do) that this sort of socialization was a mere utopia. I answered, "I said 'possible,' Dr. Francisco. At any rate my hope really is utopian, in the sense that it will never be perfectly realized here, in the earthly city. . . ."

And yet I would like to add here that the whole Christian life should be a "realization" of this utopia. We are en route to the heavenly city only to the extent that we strive "utopianly" to establish it here, in the brutish streets of the earthly city. Those who refuse to build the world of the new humankind here below, with the political materials available to us in the here and now, are ipso facto nullifying their belief in the practice of social life (which is what politics is), and are refusing to build the Reign of God, which is also a community of kinship, an effective equality and real sharing of goods. The new commandment is radically socializing. The gospel itself is the subversion of interests, because it is the demolition of idols. Who can fit social classes into the makeup of the Reign of God? At our trial, Eugenio and I gave a copy of the New Testament to the presiding official and his recording secretary. It was inscribed as follows: "*Um dia a palavra de Deus fará o inquerito de todos nós.*" (Some day the word of God will interrogate us all.) Earlier, Eugenio had told Dr. Francisco that the police had passed over the "most subversive" book we had in the house. . . .

Summing up, I believe that the socialization of the world can be a real attempt to live in society in a Christian way. And I believe that capitalist society is a radical denial of this attempt. Capitalism cannot be Christian; socialism can. If tomorrow there should emerge some better scheme allowing us to be Christians politically—to be Christians in real life, which is always political—then we Christians should adopt this better scheme. And thus, by possible and concrete steps, we walk on until we reach the Parousia. Amen.

(IBJ, 211-12)



The *true revolution*, the one that will really transform human society, is psychological as well as social, political, and economic. We must transform *simultaneously*—put the adverb in italics, in order to avoid dualistic evasions—both persons and structures.

(EDP, 167)



## BEATITUDES OF PASTORAL CONCILIATION

Blessed are the rich,  
for they are poor in spirit.

Blessed are the poor,  
for they are rich in grace.

Blessed are the rich and the poor,  
for both are poor and rich.

Blessed are all human beings,  
for back there, in Adam, all are brothers and sisters.

Blessed, finally,  
are the blessed,  
who, with these notions,  
live content . . . ,  
for theirs is the kingdom of limbo.

(FAW, 44)



They say—and with so many evasions—that the *option for the poor* must be “preferential and not exclusive.”

If the option for the poor means putting ourselves at the side of the poor and against their poverty and marginalization, the option made for the rich must also mean putting ourselves on the side of their persons but against their profits and privileges. Otherwise, we're back to the same old thing. All one family in Adam and in God, but each in our own place and situation so some are well off while others have a very tough time.

I've always been very skeptical of the "preferential" side of the option. It's already an extra load, and things get even more loaded down if the term "not exclusive" is added to the option.

Obviously the salvation of Christ is universal. It's offered to everybody. But it goes by way of a particular path: really recognizing your neighbor as an equal, as brother or sister. With all the consequences. No one is equal when people have to live so differently. To do a balancing act between social classes is to turn the Father's name into blasphemy. The rich, as rich, are always excluded from the Reign of God.

If Christ is  
     the wealth  
         of the poor  
 why isn't he  
     the poverty  
         of the rich  
 —in order to be  
     the family bond  
         of all?

(ERF, 135)



In politics I continue to think, more and more, that everyone, even a bishop, *must make a specific statement* in order to be faithful and honest, and not be left in the nice and comfortable and advantageous position of neutrality, and afterwards feel entitled to receive homage and benefits from both sides because one did not commit oneself. By the same token, it seems to me more and more that the best road is socialism, a democratic socialism. I don't mean this or that political party, much less this or that country, although it can take shape a little in and thanks to a particular party or a particular country. After all, diverse experiences are what make possible a "more" perfect experience within the relativity of all things (the church included) in this time of our active hope. We are not yet in the era of eternity; we are in the era of relativity. So I believe that we ought to overcome the desire to link the faith too closely with any specific model of political programming. But of course we must (I repeat, must) always link the faith with a true socio-political commitment. This commitment will be translated into political parties; every Christian will see to it. And why not?

As I can and must have opinions and attitudes in biology, in medicine, in literature, much more so must I have them in politics, which is much more vital.

(ML, 162)



## **POLITICS AS INCARNATION**

There's no getting around it. I try to present the context and pastoral work of our church and I know that many friends of yesterday—and today too, I suppose—will have the impression I'm speaking too politically. I know that even from a distance I leave them with a bad taste in their mouths. Some of my brothers in our congregation might recall that Father Claret wanted us missionaries to remain aloof from any kind of politics. . . .

But the political aspect in my words and writings, in my life, my pastoral work, in our everyday activities or the jolts we get in our church in São Félix—whether we're right or wrong, I've said that's up to God's mercy—is, I believe, an inescapable demand of this situation in which we live and operate. It would be simpler and truer to say that it is a requirement of any human life—and of course that's true of a bishop as well—in any context. In this connection, I have to say that I thought Father Gentile's article in *L'Osservatore Romano* on my book *I Believe in Justice and Hope* had a condescending tone. That's often what happens with some of these First World gentlemen and these First Churches when they make efforts to "understand" the ideas and attitudes of their brothers and sisters in the Third World or Third Church. The point is not to justify our ideas and postures by the exceptional context in which we are living, but to see whether the ideas and postures of these gentlemen might not be too isolated from the normal human context in which they themselves live—though perhaps absently.

If politics means achieving the common good, who can try to get out of taking part in it? Who can try to avoid working for the common good within the possibilities and in accordance with the peculiarities of his or her function in society?

We Christians—and especially clergy, and even more, bishops—can never forget that, whether we say so or not, we are always political: we are either in favor or against, or trying to maintain an impossible neutrality. Unfortunately, for centuries (and today and tomorrow, unless we are careful) we were (and are and will be) much more easily . . . in favor. In favor of the established order which assures us of that peace which is not the peace that Christ came to bring to the world. Or we tried to maintain the sterile neutrality of those who do not want to soil their hands with the vicissitudes of this earth, where the Son of God really became incarnate as a human in history.

OK, so I'm theorizing, and repeating myself. But as the good old peasant said in Salamanca, "If we're more stubborn than others it's because we also happen to be right."

I'm not so naive as to get involved in laying out programs of political economy or organizing parties or proposing candidates. But neither do I accept a kind of politics for clergy that would remain in the area of lofty principles that don't give anyone life.

In any case, I must come down to the soil on which I am living, and there I see many brothers and sisters living and dying miserably, here in this Mato Grosso, which is an immense corner, wonderful and brutal, of this so-called Third World (it is the "Third World" because of the shadow cast by the other two Worlds that are striving to prevent there just being one world). Today, for example, August 19, 1977, we have no doctor in São Félix, no antibiotics, no X rays, no tanks of oxygen. A woman who is about to give birth is hemorrhaging. My colleague, Pedrito, a missionary from Murugarren, near Estella, in the province of Navarre, is in bed with acute laryngitis or something, and has a burning fever. Measles has invaded the city. The day before yesterday a nine-year-old little girl died of measles and tuberculosis, Eliane, beautiful like a premature angel, and I just buried her. . . . And these lousy multinationals come and not only take land away from the Indians and peasants, but under an official program of the government, which is on the side of the multinationals, they flood the country with pills that people in the First World don't want anymore. And we enter into nuclear contracts. And we waste resources and our nerves in an obsession over national security. (This is where I say: damn capitalism and colonialism and the dependent economy and the dictatorship!)

How afraid we are of equality, brothers and sisters! And how we clutch at our privileges! I who am "anarchistic" (according to a friend who is a Dominican friar) and "rebellious against everything and against everyone" (according to the good archbishop of Diamantina, who has accused me of so many things)—I feel content knowing that, according to future-scanning ethnographers, one day we will all be mulattoes, and, according to future-scanning political scientists, someday we will all live in a socialized fashion. . . .

Today as well as yesterday, those who want to live high have always said, "Everyone for themselves!" Human beings—the Lord has said—are brothers and sisters to each other; we are all neighbors. This is—lived well or ill—my revolutionary faith. To this egalitarian hope I hold fast. I stand by this commitment to liberation!

Still on the question of politics, I want to insert here one of my answers to a survey on Latin American pastoral work that the Swiss missiologist Hans Schöpfer is about to publish.

Question number 4 reads, "Do bishops and priests have a right or an obligation to engage in politics on behalf of the outcast and the exploited? Why and how?" I answer:



Of course they do. (Here Fernando Sebastian, cherished brother that he is, rector of the Pontifical University of Salamanca, who recently came through here making us very happy with his visit, warned me, with more prudence than usual of someone from Aragon, "You've got to qualify things. True, later on, you say it all, more or less. But you blurt out right away, 'Of course they do,' and that's a jolt, and it's always going to complicate things for you.") They do because of the very nature of things, namely human society (of which bishops and priests are also a part), and to step in as a service of charity—when normal institutions (parties, labor unions, parliaments . . .) cannot exercise their specific functions on the side of the people.

Human life is a single complex unity. Christian faith is either a part of history or it is not. Those who claim to stand on neutral ground by that very fact would be taking a politically reactionary stand, which always in fact means being on the side of the status quo.

Prophecy also means condemning injustice. And the situation of being outcast or exploited flows structurally from a set of unjust social and economic policies. Any prophecy incarnate in reality will have an impact on politics and will inevitably be regarded as political. Church history illustrates that statement, although unfortunately "prophecy" has often not been at the service of the people but of those in power. (Hasn't the church been imperial, feudal, slave owning, capitalist . . .?)

The church as such should not have its own sociology or its own politics, just as it cannot have its own medicine or biology. By means of the gospel and through the mediation of grace it should shed light on medicine, sociology, politics, and work its way into them.

But a bishop or a priest may explicitly and publicly opt for a political solution—democratic socialism, for instance—as a specific embodiment—always provisional, always imperfect—of the advance of human history at a particular moment and in a particular place. A bishop or a priest should never present this "political solution" as a postulate of the faith or as the only possible position for the church on this question.

Naturally, bishops and priests will keep their political activity primarily within the thrust of the word that illuminates and commits, within the work of consciousness-raising in their communities and with an attitude of full freedom in the Spirit vis-à-vis the established power, monopolies, privileged groups, pressure groups, and manipulative advertising and propaganda. . . .

(PL, 33-37)



The church is a mission of salvation for the world. It should not be the source of problems for the world, challenging just for the sake of challeng-

ing. That does not mean that it could not collaborate more closely with a really human regime. However, it will always have to do so with a critical consciousness.

To engage in a Christian politics—or to have a Christian party, Christian Democracy—seems ridiculous to me. Just as it would be ridiculous to engage in a Christian biology, painting, or science. Each of these—biology, painting, science, politics—has its own kind of identity, and yet the Christian message may inspire and energize them by liberating them from their own limitations. But without pinning any labels on them. That is a dreadful mistake.

(NDA, 109)

~

During the years before World War II, many people were led astray. The church stood opposed to communism with an ecclesiastical mentality, one that was underdeveloped and openly fearful. Atheism was the ultimate and fatal enemy. To some people Nazism looked like the enemy of communism and thus some kind of lifesaver.

(NDA, 181)

~

I believe that nowadays the only way to live is to live rebelliously. And I believe that you can only be a Christian by being a revolutionary, since there's no more use in pretending that we're going to "reform" the world. All the disembodied providentialisms, neoliberalisms, neocapitalisms, neo-democracies, or other leisurely reform movements which either deceive or are deceived—cynically or stupidly—serve only to protect the privileges of the privileged few, at the price of the submissive productivity of the many who are dying of hunger. And, by this very fact, they seem to be involved in objective iniquity.

One thing I have come to learn clearly from life: rightwingers are reactionary by nature, fanatically unbending when it comes to saving their own slice of the pie, and utterly united in defending the "law and order" that for the perennial few is what constitutes the good.

(IBJ, 209)

~

## **SONG OF SICKLE AND SHEAF**

*(Harvesting rice with the squatters in Santa Terezinha, who are persecuted by the government and the landholders.)*

With a callus for a ring,  
the bishop was harvesting rice.  
Bishop "hammer and sickle"?

They'll call me a subversive.  
And I'll reply: I am.  
I live for my people in struggle.  
I march with my people on their way.

I have a guerrilla's faith  
and revolutionary love.  
And between gospel and song  
I suffer and say what I want.  
If I scandalize, I started  
by burning my own heart  
in the flame of this Passion,  
cross of his own wood.

I incite to subversion  
against power and money.  
I want to subvert the law  
that degrades the people into a flock  
and the government into a butcher.  
(My shepherd became lamb.  
My king became servant.)

I believe in the International  
of heads held high,  
of speaking as equal to equal,  
and of hands linked together . . .

And I call "order" evil,  
and "progress" a lie.  
I have less peace than wrath.  
I have more love than peace. . . .

. . . I believe in the sickle and the sheaf  
of these fallen heads of grain:  
one Death and so many lives!  
I believe in this sickle advancing  
—under this bare sun  
and in common hope—  
so curved and so stubborn!



## VIOLENCE AND NONVIOLENCE

I have already remarked that I have not figured out an adequate statement of my position on violence and nonviolence. I confess that I don't like speaking about either of them. I would much rather talk about justice, freedom, and love, as a program. And when violence and nonviolence are discussed, I would rather see people inveigh against the first and worst kind of violence—the institutionalized, officially justified, diplomatically tolerated and dialogued sort—which provokes in reaction so many other, lesser forms of violence. This is the “spiral of violence” of which our dear Dom Hélder speaks.

Of course, I would not even like to see a flower petal “violated.” I am allergic to violence, both by temperament and by faith. I believe in the universal love of God, the Father of all. I believe in the new commandment of Jesus. I believe in forgiving one's enemies and, by that very fact, I believe in everyone loving everyone else, and in the family love that is every single human's due. And I can also assure you that this belief in charity has cost me a heap of suffering.

I don't think I've ever “hated” anyone. I have never rejoiced in the death of anyone or wished anyone ill. I have, indeed, more than once wished that certain enterprises, plans, governments, and powers would fail. I still do. And more than once I have felt the most consuming anger. Way back on October 29, 1969, I wrote in my diary:

I am building up a huge reserve of contempt and anger for this sort of exploiting, self-serving politics. . . . If I don't know how to do something about it or am unable to do something about it, if I can't find a way to speak about it or give some living testimony against it, then give me, Lord, at least the “minimum” grace of liberating someone through my death. . . .

Among my other passions, I have this passion of anger; I think it might even be a sort of exasperated “sacrament”: of my love for my neighbor. Setting aside my own modest anger, the anger of the prophets and the anger of Jesus were, in their own day and way, a sacrament of the inward fire of their zeal for the glory of God and the dignity of the human being.

I know that a certain amount of anger can be the product of your liver, or the result of your own social powerlessness to resolve the tragedies staring you in the face, or a reaction in the face of the passivity and “independent” coexistence of the powerful and institutions.

At any rate, I don't know how to say anything that will be of much help to those who feel the sting of oppression in their own house or hide:

I've been thinking and rethinking these days, about what sort of attitude toward social struggle could be truly Christian and, therefore, realistic and true. I don't say "efficient," in the sense of technical, profitable, or immediate effectiveness. I know that it is a struggle that takes place in time and aims at an eschatological goal. I keep thinking that the terms "violence" and "nonviolence" miss the mark. Justice and love more fully define the true Christian attitude of a life committed to the renewal of the world.

Speaking of "nonviolence" always seems like speaking of "nonwar" when you mean peace. "Nonviolence" is said with relationship to "violence." It would be better to talk of "justice" and "just means." But *which* means? And when are they to be used? And to what extent? This is the problem of conscience that faces every individual, every hour of the day. Which is not to say that there cannot be some basic church teaching or criteria on the matter.

Perhaps we need to work out a better definition of legitimate self-defense. I'd know quite well what to hold if I were speaking of my own, personal defense. Dying would be an easy solution, as applies to me personally. But it's not so clear that I could ask it of the father of a family or a people. Would we have to start talking about collective "martyrdoms"? I don't know. The theologians will have to do a great deal of thinking about the "theology of revolution" (and nonviolence). And all of us—"violent," "nonviolent," and "neither/nor"—will have to do a lot of dialoguing.

"If you want peace, work for justice." This, in any case, is a valid formula [*Diary*: June 7, 1972].

I lament the existence of guerrilla warfare and admire the (utopian?) generosity of many guerrillas, but, above all, I inexorably condemn the causes that provoke guerrilla warfare. And, in principle, a guerrilla seems worthier to me than a dictator.

God knows how much I have prayed and sought for *peace*:

The peace I always seek.

The peace I never find.

The strange peace of God that bears me  
like some creaking, joyful boat.

The peace I give, making my blood trickle,  
like thick milk. . . .

And yet, all of this notwithstanding, I have also written, during these days of conflict (suffering, persecution, and repression), that the very word "peace" smacks to me of inertia, self-interested complicity, and angelism. And in fact, all too frequently, peace has been a synonym for the established order, when justice alone is the old and new name for peace. "Peace, peace,

peace, and there is no peace," says the Lord, because there is no justice. Can anyone be blessed for seeking peace if, at the same time, he or she does not seek justice with a burning thirst? I know that Christ speaks of that justice which is the glory of the living God, but it is also the glory of the living human being! Just as he speaks of the first commandment, which is also the second! I know that "you cannot speak of justice unless you yourself are just," but can you speak of peace unless you wear yourself out trying to build it in justice?

I believe, in any case, that "He is our Peace." And I appeal to him in the last instance, while in the first instance I dirty my hands and muddy my heart in the ooze and outcry of the daily struggle for justice on the part of so many brothers and sisters. "Struggle and Contemplation" was the theme of the Youth Council held at Taizé, one August. Philippe, twenty-two years old, who lives among the Gypsies of Grenoble, commented on it as follows: "Struggle is a means. The end is the encounter with God. But this encounter is impossible without justice."

"For communists," says Ernesto Cardenal in the rather Amazonish foreword with which he was willing to honor my latest poems, "there is no God but justice. For Christians, there is no God without justice."

(IBJ, 212-16)



## **CAMILO TORRES**

Contrary to the efforts of the reactionary Colombian press, which heaved a sigh of relief over the death of the "bandit ex-priest," the priest-guerrilla Camilo Torres is not someone of the past, buried under an anonymous pile of earth with no flowers, "a modest chapter of history," now closed.

During the Civil War, a Spanish artist observed, "Fascism is not burying corpses but seed." Much earlier Jesus taught that the grain of wheat that dies in generosity produces a great deal of fruit.

Camilo Torres is a cause, the cause of Latin America.

It's not a matter of justifying his political errors in either vision or tactics. Many, including some who weren't hostile, branded him as naive and hasty. (Epitaphs are always too short.)

Nor would it be easy to clarify how correct or incorrect each of his stances was toward the church hierarchy, at a time, now behind us, when the hierarchy was always right. The canonical proceeding employed with Camilo Torres was certainly no model of dialogue within the church.

Although a great deal has been passionately written about Camilo, I feel there has been no serene study that takes into consideration the complexity of him as a figure—as a Colombian patriot, a priest, a sociologist, an ac-

tivist—and that also takes into consideration the real political and ecclesiastical context that produced that figure.

In any case, Camilo Torres was a reality in the country and church of Colombia. Someone said that only in Colombia could such a thing have happened, given the country's tightly knit and static Catholic tradition; the submissive dependence that tradition has imposed on the dispossessed classes; the system of rotating power between liberals and conservatives, but keeping it oligarchical; the solid mirage of democracy in which Colombia lives as a nation, which legitimizes the situation of want in which the Colombian population has to scrape by. . . .

Many—including myself—do not hesitate to call Camilo Torres a Latin American martyr and a prophet of our church. He loved all the way. In giving his life, he offered the greatest proof.

Camilo Torres was a forerunner who was dramatically isolated on the border between the church and the world. Let us recognize that fifteen years ago it was very difficult to understand and very difficult to accept what he did.

Since Camilo, a lot of water has flowed down the Andes to the sea, a lot of martyr and guerrilla blood, and a great deal of the wind of the Spirit has blown over the wounded flesh of the Americas. Medellín happened after Camilo. (Medellín, the "white city," contradictory Medellín!) And then came Chile, though it was cut off. And victorious Nicaragua. And now Saint Romero's El Salvador.

A man of violent and violating contrasts, Camilo Torres could not but arouse enthusiasm or wrath or resistance. Born into the bourgeois class, a priest given special treatment by his superiors, a university professor trained in the major markets of foreign wisdom, a public official, a creative and sought after journalist, a mass orator ("tribune," as they like to say in rhetoric-loving Colombia), Camilo openly betrays his class, doffs his cassock, and moves out with his backpack . . . and weapons onto the side of the people in the shantytowns and factories and peasant trails, onto the side of the "ambiguous" forces of the revolution. He dies in the hills, as one excommunicated, under the bullets of the "legitimately established" order.

Solitude—his celibate lover—certainly often his lot during his life, and especially during the last months of his generous adventure, continues to be his lot even in death, in much of the church and in the evil thinking and high living circles in liberal and conservative society in Colombia and in the world. In Brazil Camilo Torres today is a renowned unknown figure, just the name of a song by Viglietti among those entranced by revolution. . . .

Camilo Torres, the guerrilla fighter, was previously a sociologist and pastor. Before joining the guerrillas, he studied, prayed, consulted, as-

sessed, and tried out countless approaches in public opinion, organizing among the people, even working in government programs in education, cooperatives, and agrarian reform.

Guerrilla struggle and death were the logical unfolding of a journey, perhaps with its share of illusions and errors, but in my view, a journey that was heroically honest. . . .

A Colombian sociologist and man of the church, Camilo drew up a broad and harsh analysis of society and church in Colombia, of the Colombian hierarchy and clergy, whom he saw as far removed from the demands of social justice. And that analysis earned him a bitter reply, and posthumous vengeance, from the most highly esteemed clergy of ever so Catholic Colombia, and from the twenty-five millionaire families, the Colombian oligarchy, which could never forgive class treason by a Restrepo, a son of the Bogotá bourgeoisie.

I'm not an expert in sociology, much less in Colombian history—a history I became familiar with and came to love, even while a child—but I think Camilo Torres's sociological studies are indispensable for coming to a Colombian understanding of the present period, the end of the road for the oligarchical history of that neighbor country, if God and the people do their part.

Camilo's decision grew out of an analysis that was seriously grounded in research, in contacts with the real situation, and in steady work organizing the people. It was necessary to make a break, "give up our bourgeois way of life," be "with the poor and as poor people," "trust in the value of the people." Make the revolution. For "any kind of lukewarm reformism will be left behind," and "only through revolution can love for neighbor become a reality. . . ."

His faith became something urgent that demanded practice. His Christianity became a task in history. As a Christian, Camilo was an integral humanist, with no dichotomies, a humanist in personal and societal terms. Human beings became a passion for him, the passion of his life, as he understood had been the case in the life of Christ Jesus himself, "without the human being, Christ would be a useless redeemer." Camilo wanted "to achieve in all their breadth the psychological, sociological, and historical applications of God's incarnation with all their consequences."

Ever a priest, he believed that the priest was to be "professionally dedicated to love full time." "I discovered Christianity as a life completely centered on love for neighbor; I recognized that it was worthwhile committing yourself to this love in this life, and so I chose the priesthood to become a servant of humankind." He declared that "only through revolution was it possible to make this love for neighbor a reality," and that is why, generous and impatient, he demanded that this love be "effective." "The problem for Christianity is one of effective charity; it is the number one priority of the apostolate in the modern world and in the underdevel-



oped countries." "I realized that in Colombia this love could not become real just through good will, but that what was needed was a revolution, and that this love was closely connected to revolution." "Revolution," Camilo said over and over, "is a Christian imperative. . . ."

Students, whom Camilo knew up close from living with them and sharing in dialectical friendship, and all of us who are impatient, both young and old, who always have a bit of the student in us when it comes time to act, we could all follow the advice the young teacher solemnly offered on the grounds of the University of Bogotá: "The revolution is not a matter of throwing rocks at the police or burning a car. . . . The revolutionary conviction of the students must lead them to a real commitment, to the ultimate consequences." And he added in the spirit of revolutionary ascetics, "There's no need to go looking for poverty and persecution. Under the present system, they are the logical result of struggling all the way against the existing structures. In the present system they are the signs that authenticate a revolutionary life."

All those who claim to be honest allies of the people; groups that easily split apart through the peculiar aptitude of the left for being divided and then defeated; and all of us who dream of a really effective revolution—we should always desire like Camilo to be accepted as "servants of the majority," work so "the popular class may unify, get organized, and decide," and never forget that "the revolution is accomplished through deeds, and it is the people who carry out these deeds."

Even the lower ranking military, the soldiers, can learn from Camilo—and how beneficial that would be for our Americas, so heavily militarized—that they, paradoxically, are simply "peasants and workers in uniform," children of the people whom they scatter and shoot and seize or kill. . . .

From the mass forbidden to Camilo Torres—priest, prophet, and martyr—we Christians can and must learn the old and new lesson that the Lord Jesus left, as a testament to his disciples: loving one's neighbor effectively, and with this love going to the extreme of giving one's life.

(EDP, 224)



## CHRISTIAN FAITH AND REVOLUTION

What kind of religion can honestly stand up to a social revolution? In other words, can religion also be revolution? Or better yet *can Christian faith not be revolutionary?*

The term "revolution" should be well understood. In Europe, my own Europe, which is part of the sadly real First World—there shouldn't be three "worlds," just one human world of free and mutually complementing identities—it is quite possible that the word "revolution" arouses shock or

disillusionment. So many revolutions have turned dramatically toward death, betraying their fire and blood! After this acknowledgment of history, if sophisticated Europeans will still allow me my Christian naiveté, I would be so bold as to say that the revolution I am talking about is nothing less than the conversion of society: the radical transformation of structures that oppress and hold down, when they ought to be liberating in a human way and linking people together in kinship. Revolution is not a myth or chimera, at least not for us, the children of Amerindia. Revolution is not an evil. The banners of revolution that we—naive, utopian, gospelspirited!—still bear spill over from life and from the hope of the poor, “the wretched of the earth,” “the beloved of the Father.”

(From the foreword to the U.S. and German editions of  
*Fidel and Religion*, ed. Frei Betto)



Father Díez Alegría caused an uproar when he wrote, “Marx has led me to rediscover Christ and the meaning of his message.” Javier Domínguez, on the other hand, said, “For me it’s been the other way around: studying the Bible and the revolutionary Christian movement has led me to an understanding of historical materialism.”

In my own case it was daily life—in the light of faith—daily, growing contact with the poor and the oppressed—out of the demands of charity—that led me to an understanding of the Marxist dialectic and to a total political *metanoia*.

The “Murcian” families, the outlying districts, the workers, in Sabadell and Barcelona; the camp at Alto Aragón; the working families, the unemployed, the migrant field workers, the housemaids, the drifters of Sabadell, Barcelona, and Madrid; the colonized blacks of Guinea and Nigeria; the people of the *favelas*, workers, segregated blacks, the Northeasterners, those in hiding, and all who have been imprisoned, tortured, and murdered for political reasons in Brazil; the transient families, the squatters, the day laborers, the Indians and prostitutes of this Mato Grosso, of this Amazonia. . . . All these have been and are my judges, my teachers, and my prophets in revolution. To them I owe this unwieldy translation of the gospel of Jesus that I am now trying to live.

To them I owe it, them and so many martyrs—Christians, whether they knew it or not—whom I have known or read about, who gave their lives for the cause of the poor of the earth, for the cause of the new humankind. To one of them, Che Guevara, I dedicated a poem in my *Clamor Elemental*. This poem has led to scandal among the “good” and a pamphlet against me from those involved in repression. Here is how the poem came to me:

At night, until eleven, the town sleeping and an immense moon awakening, Manuel and I were listening alone to the transistor, to the

finals of the First University Festival of Popular Brazilian Music: "Que Bacana!," "Senhora de Luar," and then "Ven Companheiro Che!"—"Come comrade Che!," an homage and cry for the martyr of the continent.

Once again, Che Guevara. And the Americas. And death. And the poor. With a great peace, because I know that in Christ everything is grace, and I hope in him throughout all circumstances, however futile, sorrowful, or paradoxical they may be.

I pray for Che. I feel that he, now, will have come to know something of the supreme power of love's violence. "Without ever losing tenderness," he had asked. . . .

The Araguaia, pierced by moonlight, beats at our feet, like an artery. I feel the nearness of many particular friends. I feel Latin America. I peacefully recall some words by Loew, from the morning's meditation: in the apostolate, we must know how to hope. All those things in the gospel parables about the slowness of the seed's growth. And here am I, not much of anything, helping the gospel—and its revolution—to bear fruit in this America of Che's which must become the America of Christ. . . .

Someday I'll write a poem to my friend, Guevara. May he enjoy God's peace! [*Diary*: October 1, 1968].

And one day I did write the poem.

## CHE GUEVARA

And, at last, your death, too, called me  
from out the dry light of Villagrande.  
I, Che, go on believing  
in the violence of love: you said  
yourself that "we must steel ourselves  
while never losing tenderness."

But you called me. You too.  
(The agonizing cries we shared.  
Deathbed glances over and over.  
Frustrated impotent compassion.  
Sage solutions from far away . . .  
The Americas, the poor, that Third World,  
when there's only one world,  
the world of God and humans!)

I hear our rebel youth, on the transistor,  
singing of you,  
while the Araguaia, like a living artery, beats at my feet,

pierced by the near-full moon.  
 All the lights go out. There's only night.  
 Friends far away, and those to come, hover round.  
 ("At least your absence is very real,"  
 moans another song. . . . O the Presence  
 in whom I believe, Che,  
 for whom I live,  
 in whom I hope so passionately!  
 . . . But you must know a lot by now,  
 of answers and encounters.)

Rest in peace. And wait, secure,  
 your lungs cured  
 of the asthma of weariness;  
 your dying glance wiped clean of hate;  
 with no more arms, friend,  
 than the naked blade of your death.  
 (Dying is always winning  
 ever since that day when  
 someone died for all, like all,  
 killed, like many. . . .)

Neither "the good"—on one side—  
 nor "the bad"—on the other—  
 will understand my song.  
 They'll say I'm just a poet.  
 They'll think I've been swayed by fads.  
 They'll note that I'm a "new-style" priest.  
 It's all the same to me!  
 We're friends  
 and I am talking with you now  
 across the death that joins us;  
 and I'm holding out to you a branch of hope,  
 a whole flowering forest of Latin American perennial jacarandas,  
 dear Che Guevara!

(IBJ, 221–23)



With the specter of Marxism before their eyes, many wonder about Nicaragua and its future. A good number of the questions I've gotten about my trip to Nicaragua are entangled in the folds of this specter. Some who ask these questions simplistically view Sandinismo and Marxism as the same thing. They are convinced Marxism is radically evil, and believe you can ignore ongoing history. . . . "What is going to become of Nicaragua?" ask

the fainthearted. "Isn't it destined to go 'communist'?"

In December 1985, *Jornal do Brasil* published a survey on "Marxism and Christian Faith." Three questions. I was one of the respondents, and I would like to reprint my answers here, for my friends, whether Christians or Marxists, who, with or without specters, might question me from their faith, or from their active commitment. First I want to say what that most upright and charismatic mayor of Madrid, Enrique Tierno Galván, said to the Christian base communities, "God never abandons a good Marxist." To which I would add that history always steps out to meet a good Christian.

**Question 1: *Is Christian faith compatible with Marxism?***

**Answer:** Christians can be Marxists, I believe, as long as they do not make Marxism their philosophy of life. As long as they relativize them, they can use Marxist analyses and approaches, which are relative and provisional like all contributions of human thought and science.

The church has regarded and still regards other kinds of thinking and sciences—thus relativized—as compatible with Christian faith.

**Question 2: *What are the mutual contributions?***

**Answer:** To Christians who are unwilling to escape from the soil of history, Marxism offers an instrument for analyzing social and economic reality, an instrument that up to now has not been surpassed by better instruments. Marxism is especially helpful:

- for understanding the internal workings of capitalism as a systematic exploitation of human beings by human beings, of labor by capital, and of need by profit;
- for dealing with the fact that there really are social classes and that they are in struggle (or "conflict").

Marxism offers Christians a vision of life as dialectical and of history as an inescapable temporal task and as something that can be controlled, as a process of collective efforts. Everything isn't just providence and gift.

For its part Christian faith can offer the Marxist ultimate prospects and answers:

- the complexity of human beings, who are also women, ethnicity, culture, gratuitousness, spirit . . . ;
- openness to transcendence. God is there, sought, seeking us;
- and openness to eschatology, like hope in personal survival and not simply a continuity diluted into the current of history.

A Marxist is still first of all a person. Death is still the most pressing question in life, even for a Marxist.

On my way to Nicaragua I ran into our patriarchal figure Prestes [Luiz Prestes, long-time Brazilian communist leader] at the airport in Panama. Even though we were meeting for the first time, we hugged each other like old friends. As we were saying good-bye, he told me, "Dom Pedro, your Christianity and my communism are the same thing."

Of course, and of course not, I could have answered Prestes. Yes, since his communism and my Christianity are the cause of a whole life, the intention and commitment we both have to serve the people and radically transform society. No, since my Christianity, besides being a cause and a commitment, is revelation and grace. I may walk the road with Marx as my colleague, but for me the "Road" itself is Jesus Christ.

**Question 3:** *For centuries the church has been criticized for being a totalitarian institution while today it is rather communism that is accused of the same thing. How can both move along toward democracy?*

**Answer:** The liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez suggests that the best way to critically challenge certain existing socialisms is to pick up Marx's writings. Marx never intended to beget dictatorships.

The best way to challenge the church's totalitarianisms is with the gospel of Jesus in hand.

In the face of any totalitarianism what must be promoted is real participation by the people in the activities and operation of the state and in the life of the church and in its ministries. Just as we seek a socialism with a human face, we also seek a church with a popular accent. (I'm not asking that the church be a democracy; I'm demanding that it be even more: a community of brothers and sisters!)

If justice is the first commandment for any society, then freedom is the second, and is very much like the first.

Decentralize the power of the party and the curias. Make public opinion, in the church as well, the normal atmosphere for shared life. Make authority service. Create mechanisms to control the power of the state and to keep ecclesiastical structures evangelical.

(NCP, 178-180)

**III**

**With the Poor of the Earth  
and the Forbidden Peoples**





# ***Struggle for Land***

## **OUR LAND, FREEDOM**

This is our land:  
freedom,  
brothers!

This is our land:  
it's everybody's,  
sisters!

The land of human beings  
who go walking over it  
barefoot and poor.  
Who are born on it, out of it,  
like trunks of spirit and of flesh.  
Who are buried in it,  
like a sowing  
of ashes and spirit,  
to make it fruitful like a wife and mother.  
Who dedicate themselves to it,  
every day,  
and dedicate it to God and to the universe,  
in thought and in sweat,  
in their joy and their sorrow,  
with their gaze,  
and their hoe,  
and their verse . . .

Presumptuous bastard children  
of our common Mother,  
her misbegotten!  
Cursed be  
all your fences  
which encircle you  
from within,  
fat and isolated,  
like man-eating pigs,

shutting out your brothers and sisters,  
 shutting them off from your love  
 with your deeds and barbed wire.  
     (Shutting out their rights,  
     their children and their cries and their deaths,  
     their arms and their rice!)

Cutting yourself off  
 from your kin  
 and from God!

Cursed be  
 all fences!  
 Cursed be all  
 pieces of private property  
 that keep us  
 from living and loving!  
 Cursed be all laws  
 rigged up by the hands of a few  
 to protect fences and oxen  
 and enslave the earth  
 and enslave human beings!

Ours is another land, men and women, all!  
 The human earth made free, sisters and brothers!

(CEL, 15)



Brazil has had almost five centuries of landowners controlling large tracts of property. That is the main explanation for our "land problem." Brazilian law recognizes two kinds of claims of property rights over land: "possession" or occupying in good faith a parcel of land understood as not having an owner, and "title." In practice, the right that prevails is that of title, which only the powerful obtain.

The struggle of the *posseiros* (settlers) against the landholders is very familiar by now. In addition, in recent years the government has increasingly favored both domestic and multinational or transnational large holdings through "fiscal incentives" which eliminate taxes and offer other incentives to companies that invest in the countryside and especially in the Amazon.

There is another social problem that is closely linked to the uneven and unjust control of land — namely the problem of the agricultural hired hands. These are men and families, recruited in the poorest areas of the country (Northeast, North, Center) with no labor protection, usually without work

papers and at the mercy of middlemen (managers, administrators, contractors, supervisors, foremen).

Here in the Amazon, government officials do almost no checking to make sure labor laws are observed. The day laborer is an outcast in the countryside; many thousands have been killed with guns, with knives, or by malaria. Many have left the estate . . . in debt. The police normally have been and are on the side of the exploiters. Here the life of a cow is worth more than the life of a laborer.

In recent years areas in the Center and South of the country have witnessed something new in rural marginality: the *boia-fria* (man, woman, child) contracted for the day out in the middle of the plaza—as in the gospel parable. (*Boia-fria* means “cold meal.”)

According to official statistics in Brazil there are more than ten million families either landless or without enough land. I have often asserted that Brazil itself is a people whose farming vocation is frustrated. The large masses of workers and underemployed and the marginal people of the large cities are forbidden peasants—people prohibited from practicing their true vocation of farming. Against all odds, some reach heroic levels of militancy and faith: Santo Dias, the metal worker murdered by the police in a strike in São Paulo, had been a laborer and *boia-fria*.

(*Shupihui* magazine, Iquitos, Peru, 1981)



Like history itself, *greed for land goes back a long way* in this Brazil of ours and throughout the whole Latin American continent. The successive empires and the perennial oligarchies have turned, and are still turning, the earth into a kind of accumulated “capital reserve” and literally a battleground. Land in Brazil and Latin America is drenched in Indian blood, peasant blood, “pastoral” blood.

I and my local church of São Félix do Araguaia are witnesses to this long martyrdom due to the land. I have often thought, and still do, that it should be normal for a bishop, a Christian, to die or be killed for the sake of the land—the land of the poor, the land that should be free and shared—in Brazil, in this great Amerindian homeland of the great estates, of the multinationals, of mining and timber companies, of national security, and of continental geopolitics.

To be silent about large scale landholding—which is always pernicious, whether the land is productive or not, and whether it belongs to an individual or a private company—means accepting accumulation, privilege, the exclusion of the majority, the exploiting of cheap labor. To keep silent about the multinationals (Grande Carajas, Jica, or the Siuia-Missu, which belongs to Liquigas\*) which are located in the area of this prelature means con-

---

\*These are large mining, agriculture, and infrastructure projects in the Amazon and other rural areas in Brazil.

senting to the division of the world into First, Second, and Third Worlds, with the latter depending on and at the service of the First, and the Third World in dire poverty and ignominy, and with a death rate rising daily for the sake of those in the First World.

The land problem is a theological problem and one of pastoral urgency. "Land of God, Land of Brothers and Sisters" was the slogan of the 1986 Brotherhood Campaign, organized by the Brazilian bishops for Lent.

Land means habitat, culture, and life itself for indigenous peoples. It means soil, food, and work for farmers. In the city it means housing, the minimum of dignity that a human family can demand. For we must remember that the land problem is as acute in the city as in the countryside. Almost half the population of São Paulo lives in dehumanizing *favelas* or tenements. Massive rural exodus leads to crowding in cities, the destabilizing of culture and family, ever increasing unemployment, despair, violence. Once in a conversation at a national meeting of the Brazilian bishops conference, Archbishop Paulo Evaristo Arns of São Paulo told me that internal "migration," including both causes and effects, was the greatest pastoral problem in Brazil.

For some time as a body the Brazilian bishops conference has recognized the seriousness of this issue and has been taking a stand through major documents on land in both the countryside and the cities, demanding agrarian reform, encouraging a specific pastoral approach to land and to the *favelas*, condemning greed, arrogance, and the crime of large landholding and its effects. Indeed, Pope John Paul II—whom no one would regard as a communist or guerrilla—had to remind President Sarney how essential land reform would be in Brazil for even thinking about democracy.

After the CIMI (Missionary Council for Indigenous People), the CPT (Pastoral Commission on Land) has been the most felicitous—challenged, persecuted, misunderstood, youthful, martyred—expression of pastoral concern over land, and one of the most characteristic "rural faces" of the Latin American church of all time. Today agricultural workers have their say, and tomorrow historians will record the result.

We are going to celebrate and deplore the five hundredth anniversary of the conquest/invasion and of the more or less imposed evangelization; that anniversary constitutes a providential milestone. From both sides of the ocean, in the world of the colonizers and the colonized, in both churches, we can take on the land issue in Latin America, in its full scope as a great challenge for prophecy, solidarity, and pastoral work. The land which has been "stolen" from the indigenous peoples—as Marçal, the Tupã'i martyr, told the pope\*—is always off limits to the people of the

---

\*Marçal was murdered not long after he had met the pope in Manaus, a city in the heart of the Amazon. When Casaldáliga visited the pope in 1988 he mentioned Marçal to the pope, who recalled meeting him.—TRANS.

hinterlands and the peasants, and it must be returned to its legitimate owners, divided up and shared, and made peaceful. It must become the land of promise for the people of God; all children of this land must have land here on earth, for the sake of more all-encompassing hope. . . .

One day as I was involved with a community action of clearing forest under the gaze of gunmen from the Bordon estate in Serra Nova, I wrote a little verse and song which later spread in the hinterlands of Brazil:

We are a people of persons  
we are the People of God  
We want land on earth  
Land in heaven we have.

(From the foreword to *Chiesa e terra in Brasile*,  
SIAL-ASAL, Roma 1988)



Those of us who belong to the national board and broader consultation group of the CPT were gathered in São Paulo. Our main purpose was to consider the *agrarian reform*, to sense what grass roots people are thinking and doing, as they are already carrying out reform and changing the countryside, and to take a clearer look at the new wave of propaganda the government was unleashing about land reforms, including promises about titles being given out, promises made during an election year.

The government was promising 300,000 land titles (there are ten million agricultural workers who have no land or not enough in this continent-sized Brazil). Most of these titles had already been won by the people; they were just being acknowledged. They were titles in sweat and blood.

Discussion of agrarian reform must go by way of questioning private property, and indeed questioning the whole society.

What are the right terms for describing such an agrarian reform? Obviously neither economic nor bucolic. Some are afraid that it might be a hindrance on the road toward socialism. Others are afraid because they feel agrarian reform is inevitably a road to socialism.

What are the peasants' feelings and desires as regards land reform?

Professor José Martins reminded us, "History is not always insurrectionary and it is never magic." Agrarian reform is not an authoritarian decree, noted someone. "Overall social transformation either happens at the local level or not at all." Which does not mean that one should not be preparing for overall transformation at the local level. You make revolution by making revolution.

Capitalism will never carry out an agrarian reform for the real benefit of the majority, for that would be suicide. It will engage in agrarian reformism.

In any case the CPT supported only an agrarian reform proposal. The proposal advocated agrarian reform

- that would assure that the people who work the land themselves can say what they think, make decisions, and act;

- that is organized through unions or the union opposition movement or the thousand other forms of organization that the people may invent;

- that tends toward a structural transformation of society, tending, that is, toward an alternative that is socialist, Brazilian, and Latin American;

- that tends to “rescue” the land for the farm workers and also to rescue the soul of the peasants and their way of being and of living together, their culture, their religiosity, their human rhythm. This process would not be based on any utopian or wishful thinking about rural life; nor would it be based on any urban-oriented and mechanistic fatalism.

In Ceará they have set up “God’s Land Registry,” a true land office of the people.

A real land reform can only spring up out of the earth, from the grass roots, among country people. It will be for the whole human city, however. The “worker-peasant alliance” is no longer enough; there must be a popular bloc of brothers and sisters linking countryside and city. The great popular class, politicized, organized, struggling together. The people’s democracy, which is the only true democracy. Step by step and with a lot of realism and greater hope, and one day it will be so; it is taking place. At a hoe’s pace, a tractor’s pace, the people’s pace. And at the gratuitous surprising pace of the people of God.

(ERF, 132)



Agrarian reform is not a “matter of conscience.” That would be like saying that politics, economics, and public administration are a problem of conscience. Agrarian reform is not a matter of individual conscience but a *problem of objective justice*, of human rights. It does not depend on what I think or what my conscience dictates to me. It is an objective matter.

The earth belongs to everyone and is everyone’s. The people know that quite well. Private property is not a supreme, inalienable right. Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio* stated that explicitly. If we don’t understand that, there’s no way we can get along with this present world which is moving ahead, nor can we, in my view, respect the demands of the gospel.

I merely demand democracy, justice, freedom; I am demanding socialization, which I see as the best word for translating “brother/sisterhood,” or as the people in the *sertão* say, an equality. I demand equality. But it’s not me, it’s God that demands it. A woman from Riberão Bonito made a statement that made a deep impression on me and that I believe Saint

Irenaeus or Saint Augustine would have been pleased to make his own: "This is how God's glory is: nobody higher, nobody lower." There's the whole of the theology of social justice, of socialization, of human kinship.  
(NDA, 125-26)

## ***Indigenous Peoples***

The Indian peoples are being made a priority in some churches in Brazil. I assure you that they are in *my* pastoral thinking. They are the first evangelical priority. For two reasons. First, because they are the poorest, as persons and as a people. I don't say they are the unhappiest! As persons and as a people they have hanging over them the most immediate death sentence, the most logical death from the point of view of the system. They are in the way. Their lands, their woods, their hunting, their marvelous territory, this Lake Tapirapé—all are a lure for the greed of the great, of the powerful, of the landowners; all are a stimulus for building highways, for bringing about national integration, for promoting wretched development (and a curse on development in these deadly circumstances, right?) and tourism. Because of this death sentence the Indians are the most evangelical cause. They are the poorest ones. Their survival is often only a question of months, two or three months, a highway that breaks through or goes by, that attacks the native organism that has no other reserves. Or a simple attack of measles can carry off a whole village.

And in the second place, they are also the most evangelical in the sense that, by being the poorest, the smallest, the most unprotected, they are also the freest in spirit, the most community-minded, and the ones who live most harmoniously with nature, with the land, with the water, with the light, with the fauna and the flora. They make me think of the very ancient expression *Ad Gentes* [Vatican II's decree on missionary activity] brought up-to-date; it always impresses me deeply. They are the "seeds of the Word," or rather, translating more precisely, "the sown Word" is in these peoples. One really sees that the Word is sown here.

To the extent that the church in Brazil and the whole continental church know how to and want to make the proper amends and to take up evangelically the cause of the Indians, they will really be a shock for the whole church and for our society, and for that very reason a most powerful evangelical force. But, of course, in order to take up in this way the cause of the natives, they must strip themselves of all pastoral ethnocentricity, of all colonialism. But really strip. A stripping that must be extremely lucid, even scientifically lucid, and perhaps heroic. Why not, if that implies abandoning many things, thinking in other ways, giving up a great deal, even giving up religion itself. . . .

It would be well to start from a more global, more continental vision.



There was first a colonialist phase that I am not going to describe here (we have history books for that), in which Father Las Casas said great things and said them very well, right? He is a saint to whom I am devoted and to whom I would raise a monument—though that is not necessary—in every native village on the continent, and in front of every monastery of missionary friars, and in front of every cathedral so that everyone's eyes would have to take in Las Casas, and the stone would remind them of his cry! He warned us in time. Only four centuries later does it seem that we have begun to awake. . . .

Then with an overview of the whole continent, we would have to point out a few figures in various places. In Mexico, Bishop Ruiz: Samuel Ruiz, who was secretary of the mission council of CELAM, an extraordinary figure who deserves much gratitude from the native peoples and from the church in Latin America. You could also point out figures from our own land, Father Meliá, a Catalan in Paraguay working with the Guaraní Indians, an anthropologist and missionary. And other missionary anthropologists, other missionary figures in various parts of Latin America who some years ago, starting with self-criticism, stripped off their religious prejudice, Latin, Roman, occidental, etc., and have been able to distinguish clearly between religion and faith, have absorbed the discoveries of anthropology, of ethnography, and have even overcome the neocolonialism that there was in the council and that has occurred in the post-conciliar periods. Medellín itself, in practice, did not even think of the Indians; in spite of the clarity with which Medellín saw the continent and its major problems! And there are thirty million Indians in Latin America—including entire ethnic groups that are headed for extinction, with those roots and evangelical potentialities of which I was speaking.

Several missionary centers in Latin America have overcome those neocolonial attitudes. Here, in Brazil, it has occurred especially in conjunction with the CIMI, the Missionary Council for Indigenous People, which has been functioning as such for practically four and a half years. Its current president is Dom Tomás Balduino, dear friend and fellow bishop of Goiás Velho, who does his job very well and is often persecuted for that very reason. The CIMI has other dedicated members who devote their lives to the Indians and who have been persecuted. Several of them, and I also, have been forbidden, by the president of the FUNAI [National Indian Foundation, a government agency] himself, to enter any Indian village in Brazil. Orders have even been given to police chiefs in the different villages that if we entered we should automatically be arrested.

The CIMI has collected the whole legacy, past and present, especially present, of the ethnological and anthropological work done about the Indians, work which not only has ceased to be romantic and Rousseauistic, but which has also ceased to be pro-European and pro-science, and has become much more human and more pragmatic in the best sense of the word. And it has jolted the consciousness of all the missionaries in native

territories or in the villages here in Brazil. It has brought out very important publications (the CIMI newsletter itself is a historical monument), and it has already organized seven history-making meetings of Indian chiefs; not for four centuries had there been meetings of Indian chiefs. FUNAI, the landowners, and the economically powerful were bitterly opposed to these meetings because they know what it means to have the Indian chiefs meet. The CIMI has also organized courses in indigenous pastoral training, theology, anthropology, mission history, everything referring to cultures; it has organized language courses; it has organized regional commissions; it has a permanent national council and assemblies. . . .

It is important to bring out that in politico-sociological terms, and in biblico-pastoral terms, the Indian, the Indian peoples, properly understood, on the one hand offer a new alternative to our capitalist society of consumption, and on the other hand force us to discover the Bible in its simplicity. And in both cases we can see a marvelous concurrence and are offered a marvelous alternative in which the Bible is blended with the new society, which would be much more evangelical, much simpler—a society in which individuals would be much more in harmony with themselves and with nature, and with their fellow humans (among the Indians there are no neurotics, there are no insane persons); it seems to me that this alternative could show the church the way to become incarnate in the nonindigenous people, who now have some of the characteristics of the Indian but who lack the peace and happiness of the Indian, lacking even the sense of community that the Indian still has. Of course you will understand perfectly that I am not denying the roots of what theologians would call “original sin” in the indigenous peoples. I am not Rousseauistic. I am simply comparing one society with another, and one way of living the gospel with another way, among the thousand possibilities that indigenous life provides. . . .

To be truthful, I'll say that at times I have almost no hope, or none at all. And many other times, a lot of hope. Especially if we manage to make the cause a continental cause. And make that beloved and always dormant church remember that one must not love generally but concretely, and that the pastoral ministry can never be a great theory, but must be a great incarnate love, committed, daring, confronting anything that needs to be confronted. If we truly achieve a continental pastoral ministry and consciousness, and even a continental federation of Indian peoples—and for that it seems to me important that there be broad support, incisive, almost spectacular in the best sense of the word—then I believe that indigenous peoples could be saved.

(ML, 97–103, passim)



I believe *the Americas should be regarded as Amerindia* despite the long time that has elapsed and the empires that have followed one another and

the various breakdowns. I am not denying the migration movements that are now a vital part of this Great Homeland. And of course I recognize the right to Latin America that the enslaved African people have won through being humiliated and shedding blood. I nevertheless believe that at their roots the Americas are Indian and they must recover this maternal identity as people and as church.

This means defending in both theory and practice the self-determination of the different Indian peoples of the continent, and their organization into federations and confederations. In many cases this means supporting the claims of these peoples to their respective territories, and in other cases it means recognizing their languages "officially" and "nationally." And it means directly and consistently opposing the integrationist policies of the various anti-indigenous governments, which include virtually all governments in the hemisphere.

Besides singing out a much broader and more real *mea culpa* for its complicity and omission in the past, the church must "be converted to the Indian," overcome the proselytizing temptation of "forced evangelization," and bring just the gospel, not foreign culture, let alone capitalism, dependence, or Western consumerism.

Pastoral work with indigenous people cannot stop at adapting things, which inevitably ends up vitiating both the soul of a different people and the very gospel of Jesus.

The American continent, in its various nations, must relearn the basic values of indigenous cultures: the spontaneous concern for ecology, community orientation, continual living experience of religion and worship, and the antiprofit and anticommunist attitude of the Indian who is still free.

The Americas must recapture the art, music, dancing, and celebration of the indigenous peoples, without folklorism and primitivism.

I know I am advocating a utopia. That's why I'm advocating it. The gospel is always the greater utopia.

(*Shupihui* magazine, Iquitos, 1981)



Pastoral work with indigenous people is

- specific;
- appropriately gauged;
- on an emergency footing.

In pastoral work with the indigenous it is well to recall Rahner's statement, "The ordinary way (because it is the majority way) of salvation of peoples is through non-Christian religions."

Indigenous pastoral work must not promote the regionalizing of matters in local churches, in CIMI, or in the Brazilian bishops conference; these matters must not be taken by themselves and disconnected from the overall

pastoral work with indigenous peoples in Brazil and the Americas. Indigenous pastoral work must be continental in scope.

(ERF, 84–85)



I insist on this more and more. For me it is like a dogma of faith: *the Indian is either saved up and down the continent or is not saved*; just as Latin America itself is either transformed up and down the continent or is not transformed. It is not a matter of transforming one country, but all of Latin America. The Great Homeland isn't just folklore or literary romanticism or artistic movements. . . . No. The Great Homeland is a reality. It is a single system that holds us all in subjection. And there will be great joy when there emerges the freedom that will give new life to the whole of Latin America.

There are more than fifty million Indians throughout the continent. And deals over the Amazon are being made not for the sake of the little people, but for the great masters, the multinationals. Amazonia is being turned into a multinational reserve. Even the Indian reservations are being handed over to multinational companies. There are numerous examples.

I think that since the death of Padre João Bosco—for defending two women of the people—and of Father Rodolfo Lunkenbein—for defending the Merúri Indians—an alliance between these two social and ethnic sectors in our country has been sealed in the blood of the new church; this is an alliance between the Indians and the poor settlers, who are the most marginalized people in Brazil.

I believe this alliance is broadening. It is obvious that neither the Indians nor the backlanders will be saved if they try to be saved in isolation. By the same token, people in the countryside will not be saved unless they try to be saved alongside people of the city, the workers. The problem is one of class; we shouldn't be afraid of the word, because that's the reality of the situation. Poor people from any sector must link up with other poor people, with others, to be saved, to confront the society that is exploiting all. For there is only one enemy and only one prospect of salvation. Those who give their life for others are not renouncing their own life, but esteeming it as a service that gives life. . . . Jesus did not seek the cross for its own sake. . . . Jesus found himself there because he announced the good news of liberation. God wants us to love one another, to be happy. But for that reason Jesus had to struggle, had to confront the social classes of his age, and the powerful, whether it was the Romans, the Pharisees, or others who gained power from the Law. Inevitably, he was attacked, and his fidelity to his Father and to his brothers and sisters, to the gospel, led him to Pilate's tribunal. Because he gave up his life, he gave life—he more than anyone else, he who is resurrection and life. His life became resurrection for everyone. And since then no death is simply death. I am thinking of Father

Rodolfo Lunkenbein, Father João Bosco Penido Burnier, and so many others from around here. . . . Those were not simply natural deaths, nor deaths simply "undergone." They were deaths that are lived because they have a life-giving function. That can also be said of Che, or of anyone else who dies for a transforming political ideal. Che gave his life outside of any perspective of explicit religious faith, but no one can deny his generosity. It is clear that he gave his life feeling that life would go on. . . .

(NDA, 185)



For some time—since I entered into regular contact with Indian populations—I have felt that the disappearance of whole peoples is something of an *absurd mystery of historical iniquity* which reduces me to an utterly depressed faith. "Lord, why have you abandoned them?" How can the Father of life, the creative Spirit of all culture, permit these various annihilations?

For us Christians and for the churches as churches this tragedy of the Indians is an accusation of history never taken seriously enough. It must be a remorse that we take on, something prophetic that really shakes us up. For we have been more persecutors than persecuted.

The generosity to the point of martyrdom on the part of many missionaries in the Americas; the works of welfare and education done by the missions; the isolated prophetic gestures of a few Las Casases in the past and the late outcry that some churches, also isolated, are raising against this hemisphere-wide extermination—these do not exempt the church—the churches—from a historic guilt of omission and complicity, whose only equal is that other and perhaps greater historic guilt of the churches with regard to slavery and contempt for the black peoples.

(EDP, 220)



*To the Indians of Roraima:*

For the love of your dead, for the love of your children, for the love of your people, always remain united. Each village with its Tuxaua. The Tuxauas united among themselves, like brothers of a great people creating a partnership among all the villages of Roraima: Macuxi, Wapixana, Ingaricó, Taurepang, Yanomami, Wai-wai, Maiongong, Wamiri, Atorari . . . and other Indians whose names perhaps I have not even heard. All the Indian communities of this territory, as it were, forming a great native community. Indigenous unity makes for indigenous strength. Don't allow yourselves to be divided. Don't allow yourselves to be bought. Neither by threats, nor by promises, nor by money, nor by liquor, nor by the mirage of the life of

whites. Many Indians have been deceived and disappointed, those who one day left their villages and now live on the move and suffering, undergoing dire poverty and contempt throughout these cities and roads in Brazil.

Keep your ways of doing things lit like a fire in the heart of the village. Teach your mother tongue to those who no longer know how to speak it. Those who lose their language lose the soul of their people. Your language is not a dialect; when whites call it a dialect they are insulting the language your elders speak. If land marked off and defended is the soil in which a people sinks roots and grows, their own language is like the blood that circulates throughout the body of the community.

You are not alone. There are still millions of Indians in our Latin America. Get to know the life, the suffering, the struggles, the victories, the assemblies of the other indigenous peoples of all of Brazil and of all the Americas.

When he came to this continent the white man threw all the native people into a single basket with one name, "Indians." As if the many peoples of this continent had no name or history. And he persecuted all the same, like hunted prey. From all alike he tore away their land, their customs, their peace, their life.

Having survived so much persecution and so much greed from the white invaders, now turn this word "Indian" into a single banner: the banner of a great homeland, Amerindia, the America of Indians united, respected, and free.

The white man has always talked a lot about God, but has not respected the will of the true God. That God who is the Father of all persons and the only Lord of all peoples is with you, supporting your struggle. God is the God of life and not the God of death.

You who are Christians know that Jesus Christ did not come to the world so Indians would stop being Indians. He is not a white colonizer. He is the liberator. The Christian Indian who considers no longer being an Indian cannot be a good Christian. Those who deny their people, deny God, creator of all peoples.

(EDP, 176-77)



This afternoon, along with the glorious death of Christ, we have celebrated the glorious death of Rodolfo and Simão, the blood of Tereza, Lourenzo, Zezinho, and Gabriel, the anguish and solidarity of Ochoa, of the Bororo, and of the Salesian missionaries of Merúri.\*

July 15 becomes a historic date in the story of the new missionary church.

---

\*Casaldáliga refers to Salesian missionaries and Bororo Indians murdered in 1976 in the village of Merúri in the Mato Grosso by landholders who were invading the Indians' territory.

Rodolfo and Simão are two more martyrs, perfect in love, according to the word of Christ. The Indian has given his life for the missionary; the missionary has given his life for the Indian. For all of us, Indians and missionaries, this Merúri blood is a commitment and a hope.

The Indian will have land! The Indian will be free! The church will be Indian!

For the solemn funeral mass in the cathedral of Goinia, I have written a penitential litany that expresses what I feel about the collective wrong, the obstinate ignorance, that we must repair, as society and church, in our behavior toward indigenous peoples:

For all the sins of the old and new colonization that for centuries has been crushing the native peoples of our America, we ask forgiveness.

*(Forgive us, Lord, forgive us.)*

For the sins of the church itself, so often an instrument of colonialism, old and new. . . .

For the pride and ignorance with which we show contempt for the culture of native peoples, in the name of a civilization hypocritically called Christian. . . .

For the plundering of the Indians' lands and the destruction of the natural environment in which they live, a plundering done for the benefit of those with large landholdings, the interests of the large national or multinational companies, or by insensitive tourism. . . .

For the inhuman violence with which we seek to transform indigenous communities into new victims of our civilization of profit and consumption, under the pretext of an illusory integration. . . .

For our inability to discover the sown Word, the roots of the gospel in the simple and community-oriented life of indigenous peoples. . . .

For the lack of solidarity in national consciousness; for the lack of honesty or effectiveness on the part of responsible authorities; for the church's omission. . . .

Because we have so often sought to isolate the problem of native people from the overall problem of all the outcasts of our country, urban and rural. . . .

For the lack of vocations willing to become incarnate, like Jesus, in the culture, in the martyrdom and in the hope of indigenous peoples. . . .

For those who killed our brothers Simão and Rodolfo, for those who cover up this crime, for all who day by day are killing the Indians, our brothers and sisters. . . .

For our lack of hope in this new world that we must build, where we will all be free and family-spirited peoples, for we will be your people. . . .

(MSC, 28-29)



## **MASS OF THE LAND WITHOUT EVIL** [*excerpts*]

### ***Opening Song***

#### ***All***

In the name of the Father of all peoples,  
Maíra of all,  
most high Tupã.

In the name of the Son,  
who makes brothers and sisters of all us human beings.  
In the blood mixed with all bloods.  
In the name of the covenant of liberation.

In the name of the Light of every culture.  
In the name of the Love that is in every love.

In the name of the land without evils,  
lost in profiting, won in suffering,  
in the name of conquered death,  
in the name of life,  
we sing, O Lord!

[*The mass includes a lengthy penance service, which alternates between a group of "whites" and a solo singer representing indigenous groups. The following excerpts give a sense of it.*]

#### ***Solo***

I am the Americas,  
I am the people of the earth,



of the land with no evil,  
the people of the Andes . . . jungles . . . grasslands, the seas . . .

I am Apache,  
I am Aztec . . .

*[here fifteen indigenous nations are named.]*

Brothers and sisters from elsewhere,  
if you want to be brothers and sisters  
listen to my song.

*Whites*

We want to listen  
with open hearts,  
and with our remorseful hands  
over our breasts. . . .

*Solo*

I had an age-old culture,  
as old as the sun. . . .

*Whites*

And we destroyed it,  
full of arrogance,  
denying the identity  
of peoples who were different,  
but all human family. . . .

*Solo*

I lived in open nakedness,  
playing, sowing, loving,  
conceiving, being born, growing,  
in the pure nakedness of life. . . .

*Whites*

And we dressed you  
in the clothes of evil thoughts.  
We raped your daughters.  
We gave you our hypocrisy  
to serve as a morality.

*Solo*

I had my sins  
and engaged in my wars. . . .

I did not know the law made a lie  
or profit made a god. . . .

I adored God,  
Maíra in everything.  
Tupã in every gesture,  
reason at every moment.  
I knew the science  
of primal good and evil.  
Life was my worship,  
dance was my worship,  
the land was my worship,  
death was my worship,  
I was living worship!

### *Whites*

And we missionized you  
unfaithful to the gospel,  
driving into your life  
the blade of a cross.  
Bells of good news,  
tolling out death!  
Unfaithful to the gospel  
of the incarnate Word,  
we offered the message  
of an alien culture.  
We split in half  
the peacefulness of your life,  
always in adoration. . . .

### *Solo*

I gave you the beauty of the sea and the beaches,  
I gave you my earth and its secrets,  
the birds, the fish, the friendly, willing animals,  
the ear of corn, tight and shared,  
the generous cassava root—our daily bread. . . .

### *Whites*

And we plundered you,  
denuding the forests,  
burning away your fields,  
sowing poison in the rivers and the air.  
With fences  
we separated people from one another,  
separated the generous earth:

to fatten the cattle  
for a nation's hunger,  
to plant soybeans  
for enslaved export. . . .

*Solo*

I was health,  
eyes sharp as arrows  
ears alert,  
muscles in harmony,  
with my soul at peace.

*Whites*

And we submerged you  
in viruses, in germs,  
in imported plagues. . . .

*Solo*

I was all the Americas,  
I am still the Americas,  
I am the new Americas!

*All*

And we are now,  
still and forever,  
the legacy of your blood,  
the children of your dead,  
alliance in your cause,  
memory restored,  
in the covenant of this pasch.

(TSM, 33, passim)

## Blacks

In the name of a supposedly white and colonizing god, whom Christian nations have adored as though he were the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, for centuries millions of blacks\* have been subjected to slavery, despair, and death, in Brazil, in the Americas, in mother Africa, and around the world.

Deported like pawns from their ancestral Aruanda, they filled the cane fields and mines with cheap labor and filled the large estates with individuals whose culture was suppressed and who were uprooted, out of sight, and had nowhere to go. (They still fill the kitchens, the docks, the bordellos, the *favelas*, the swampy slums, and the jails with subhumans—in the eyes of the white lords, the white ladies, and the law of whites.)

But one night, the *quilombos* sprang up, including the Black Sinai of Palmares, and out of Palmares there emerged the Black Moses, Zumbi.† And the impossible freedom and the forbidden identity flourished “in the name of the God of all names” “who makes all flesh, white and black, reddened with blood.”

Coming “from the depths of the earth,” “from flesh under the lash,” “from being exiled from life,” blacks resolved to “force new dawns” and reconquer Palmares and return to Aruanda.

And there they are, standing tall, breaking many chains—at home, in the street, at work, in the church, radiatingly black in the sun of struggle and hope.

To the scandal of many pharisees and to the relief of many who are repentant, the *Mass of the Quilombos* confesses this supreme Christian guilt before God and history.

In the music of Milton Nascimento, a black man from Minas Gerais, and his singers and musicians, this mass offers to the one Lord “the work, sufferings, and martyrdom of the black people of all times and all places.”

And it assures the black people that the peace of liberation will be won. Through the rivers of black blood, spilled throughout the world. Through

---

\*Casaldáliga speaks of *o povo negro*, that is, he regards blacks as forming a “people,” over and above the particular peoples to which they may belong.—TRANS.

†The *quilombos* were settlements established by black slaves who escaped in colonial times, of which the greatest was Palmares. The growing black consciousness movement in Brazil has given them new importance.—TRANS.

the blood of the one who is "without human likeness," sacrificed by the powers of empire and Temple, but resurrected from ignominy and death by the Spirit of God his Father.

Like every true mass, the *Mass of the Quilombos* is paschal: it celebrates the death and resurrection of the black people, in the death and resurrection of Christ.

With the *Mass of the Land without Evil*, Pedro Tierra and I previously offered our word, in angry kinship, to the cause of native peoples. With this *Mass of the Quilombos*, we now lend our word to the cause of the black people.

Now is the time to sing of the coming *quilombo*: it is time to celebrate the *Mass of the Quilombos*, in rebellious hope, with all "the blacks of Africa, the Afroamericans, the blacks of the whole world, allied with all the poor of the earth."

(MQ)



## MASS OF THE QUILOMBOS [excerpts]

### Entrance

We are coming from the depths of the earth,  
we are coming from the bosom of the night;  
of the flesh under the lash we are made—  
we have come to remember.

We are coming from death out at sea,  
we are coming from the packed holds of ships;  
we are heirs of melancholy—  
we have come to weep.

We are coming from black rosaries,  
we are coming from our lands;  
we are accursed saints—  
we have come to pray.

We are coming from the workshop,  
we are coming from the sound and forms;  
we are stifled art—  
we have come to create.

We are coming from the depths of fear,  
we are coming from muffled chains;

we are a long lament—  
we have come to praise.

From the exile of life,  
from the mines of the night,  
from flesh bought and sold,  
from the law of the lash,  
from melancholy on the seas . . .

to new dawns:  
Let us head toward Palmares!  
Beat the drums!

We are coming from rich kitchens,  
we are coming from poor brothels;  
we are made of flesh for sale—  
we have come to love.

We are coming from the old slave quarters,  
we are coming from the new *favelas*;  
we are the outcasts of the world—  
we have come to dance. . . .

We are coming from the land of the *quilombos*,  
we are coming to the beating of drums;  
we are the new Palmares—  
we have come to struggle.

### ***In the Name of God . . .***

In the name of God of all names  
Yahweh  
Obatalá  
Olorum  
Oíó.

In the name of God, who made all people  
out of tenderness and dust.

In the name of the Father, who made all flesh,  
black and white,  
but red by blood.

In the name of the Son, Jesus our brother,  
who was born brown,  
of the race of Abraham.

the name of the Holy Spirit,  
banner of the song  
of the black reveler.

In the name of the true God,  
who loved us first  
with no discrimination.

In the name of the Three  
who are a single God,  
the One who was,  
who is,  
who will be.

In the name of the people who await,  
in the grace of faith,  
the voice of Xangô,  
the *quilombo*-pasch that will be their liberation.

In the name of the people ever deported  
under white sails  
in exile on the seas;  
outcasts,  
in ports, in slums,  
and even on altars.

In the name of the people,  
who made Palmares their own,  
who are yet to create  
Palmares again  
—Palmares, Palmares, Palmares  
of the people!

(MQ)

~

Has the slavery of black people in Brazil really been abolished? Is there not still a kind of slavery weighing down black people, always branding blacks as though they were worthless, pushing black people to one side?

People still speak very badly about blacks. There are many who say blacks

are worthless. Such is the state of ignorance that, as a compliment, some say a black person has "a white soul." As if whites were good because they're white. . . .

It's a big lie to claim there is no racial discrimination in Brazil. In Brazil blacks suffer contempt and are almost always stuck with the worst services. Eighty percent of the black population in Brazil lives in the poorest regions, confined to huts, swamps, and *favelas*.

For centuries the church itself showed no respect for blacks. Blacks were brought from Africa like merchandise, and upon arrival in Brazilian ports they were baptized and branded at the same time. By keeping silent the church accepted slavery.

It is said that six million black slaves were brought to Brazil. Today there are sixty million blacks and mulattoes in the country.

Brazil and Latin America have a great historic debt to these millions of captive blacks, who with their sweat, their art, and their soul—strong like burning coal under ashes—built the wealth and the future of our countries. No one has worked harder than the black man and black woman in Brazil. In sugar mills, on coffee and cotton plantations, in the slaughterhouses, in ports, in offices, on estates, in kitchens, in mines, in the streets.

Until now it's all been captivity for blacks. Princess Isabel freed them only on paper. But for blacks the day is coming when they become really liberated! And all of us, blacks and whites, must help this day come soon. Our God is a liberating God who accepts no captivity.

On November 20, 1695, in the free town of Palmares, in Alagoas, the Portuguese and the *bandeirantes* [explorer/adventurers in early Brazilian history, who killed many Indians] killed Zumbi, the great black leader in the struggle. The *quilombos* were settlements where blacks lived free and shared the fruits of their labor among all. The *quilombo* of Palmares, with more than twenty thousand inhabitants, held out for ninety-five years.

In memory of the martyrdom of Zumbi, the blacks of Brazil have chosen November 20 as Black Consciousness Day.

This year in the *quilombo* of Palmares on the twentieth and in Recife on the twenty-second, there will be a large mass of solidarity with the cause of black people: the *Mass of the Quilombos*. Pedro Tierra and I wrote the text, and the famous musician and singer Milton Nascimento composed the music.

I hope all our communities will join in this celebration, from the twentieth to the twenty-second, committing themselves to the cause of the black people.

Blacks, Indians, and workers in the countryside and the city, marching together, will make the day of the liberation of the people arrive. Jesus, poor and persecuted, but now resurrected, is out ahead, blazing the trail.

(EDP, 78)



I am writing you this letter already overtime (or perhaps beyond time). A bishop's life is not the leisurely life of a writer with time. You manage to write as you go along, making pastoral rounds, like someone speaking to conversation partners far away, in a moment of concern or intuition before things have settled out.

I wish to write to you, at this moment, a slight personal testimony on the *Mass of the Quilombos* and also on the *Mass of the Land without Evil*; it is a very worrisome moment. Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, these "banned" masses, liberation theology, the journey of the church, viewed with alarm as a "popular church" by those who are not very close to the people . . . all of this is ultimately a providential challenge, and indeed offers a gospel task.

When Pedro Tierra and I decided to write the *Mass of the Land without Evil* on the occasion of the Year of the Missionary Martyrs (1978), we insisted on "liberating" the sources of memory, remorse, and commitment in our church. It was also too in-house and even unjust to celebrate just three martyrs of Rio Grande when the blood that was spilled in that area—for one faith, for another faith, bringing the gospel, defending the land and life of a people—was a true river of martyrdoms piled up. "We Christians are used to only recognizing and celebrating when others make us martyrs. We calmly ignore the many martyrs we make of others," I said, pouring out my feelings. And I don't think this outburst of mine can be challenged simplistically. Those three and the many thousands, "all martyrs for the cause of the native people. The cross in the midst of all of them. The former dying for love of Christ, the latter slaughtered 'in the name' of Christ and the emperor.

. . . defenseless martyrs  
for the Kingdom of God made empire  
for the gospel made decree of the conquest."

*The Mass of the Quilombos* was born out of this same desire to "liberate" Christian memory, remorse, and commitment, this time with regard to the even sadder history of the millions of black slaves deported, sold, and utilized by "Christians."

The good intentions of many missionaries and the few figures such as Bartolomé de las Casas or Peter Claver do not allow us to irresponsibly shut out the debt we have as Christians and church toward the Indian peoples and the black people—a most heavy, public, and historic debt that ought to be paid publicly and within history. I am very suspicious of the preparations underway—in the church, in the Iberian Peninsula, in the United States, in Latin America—for the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" (and/or invasion), and of the "evangelization" (and/or colonization) of Amerindia plundered and forbidden, which even today still has "open veins."

In banning the *Mass of the Land without Evil*, the *Mass of the Quilombos*, and the *Mass of Hope*, the prefect of the Congregation for Worship, Cardinal Giuseppe Casoria, referred to the reply received from Bishop Ivo Lorscheiter, president of the Brazilian bishops conference, and said, "Allow me to note, your excellency, that your carefully considered response does not seem to have taken into account precisely the proper meaning of what was said about the so-called *Mass of the Land without Evil*, nor does it really provide the kind of response that was expected, assuring that in the future the celebration of the eucharist would be, as it should be, only the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection, and not the championing of any human or racial group."

I wholeheartedly agree that "the celebration of the eucharist is the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection." I would also like to discuss whether the eucharist can or cannot be — while remaining a true eucharist — the "championing" of justice, freedom, land, life for "any human or racial group." One who celebrates the Lord's death is already championing all life. One who celebrates his resurrection is championing the full liberation of persons and peoples. His Passover is our Passover. In his death all deaths are at stake, and in his resurrection all hopes live and keep living. From the first days of Christian communities, when they came together to celebrate the Supper, the martyrs were a presence that was even physical at the celebration table. The "mementos" in the mass have always sought to include — within the memory of that Dead and Living One who incorporates us by saving us — the memory of others living and dead with whom we make up a body in the Body, with whom we journey in the same hope, to whom we owe justice or love, whose cross "makes up what is lacking in the passion" of the Crucified One. . . .

Independently of theologies and liturgies, in connection with this prohibition by the Vatican, I was also wondering, "Aren't we priests, bishops, and popes already celebrating a large number of masses to commemorate a questionable civic or military anniversary, or to give thanks for a possibly sacrilegious donation from a prince, a business, or a society lady?"

Let the mass be mass, let it be the liturgy known and lived by all Christians as the public prayer of faith, as ultimately the celebration of the paschal mystery. Throughout the world let those basic gestures, words, and meaning, which have a place in every culture and in every historical moment — if faith is supracultural and indeed catholic — be preserved, and let us carry out the memorial of the Lord and not another routine ritual culturally imposed, nor some other arbitrary dramatization or "show." But let the mass always be the "subversive memory" that purifies and commits the church of Jesus. Let us also offer in the mass "the fruit of the earth and of human work," along with the culture and history of peoples. Let us incorporate every sacrifice into the Sacrifice. Let us communicate as whole Body, Head, and members. Let us be allowed to celebrate the mass today, here, ourselves. With our faith, experienced in person and community,

bringing to the altar of God the concrete struggles, sufferings, and hopes of God's children. There is a great deal of sterile mass celebration out there, which is no longer the Lord's Supper for those who "attend" and who are uncommitted or heedless.

I continue to believe in the catholicity of the church. And so I want it to be catholic. In its liturgy as well. I believe too much in the eucharist—memorial of the death and resurrection of my Lord Jesus Christ—to be willing to see it reduced to the narrow scope of a culture or a period. The eucharist must be celebrated from the rising of the sun to its setting, in accordance with the joyful assertion of the ancient church writers. Whether Amerindian, African, Asian, or European, it is always Jesus' Passover and our Passover. Until he comes.

*(Sem fronteiras magazine, September 1984)*



**IV**

**Passionate for Our  
Great Homeland**



## LATIN AMERICA

Over its long death and hope,  
naked from head to toe  
—the word, the blood, the memory—  
Latin America  
will no doubt  
be my cross.

God, poor and slaughtered,  
shouts to the God of Life,  
from this collective cross  
                  raised up  
against the sun of the empire and its darkness,  
before the veil of the trembling temple.

Tomorrow will be Easter  
—for he is tomorrow forever—  
(Garbed in wounds and surprises,  
freedom will walk,  
                  through the garden,  
                  my friends.)

We have to treat gently the reed flutes awakened  
and share the fragrances of solidarity  
and chase away the fear of the grave  
disarming the guards.)

But today it's still Good Friday.  
We are all witnesses  
amidst dice and lances,  
while the mother weeps over her fallen son.

I don't want to hold back from this mystery.  
I don't want to deny You!

Latin America  
will be my cross  
absolutely.

(TE, 62)

~

The awakening of Africa won me over to its cause, and unmasked for me the camouflaged colonialisms that I once thought of as discovery and

evangelization. America was no longer just one more glory of Spain's great navigators. True, I knew a sad side of Fidel Castro's Cuba through some young exiles who came to Madrid and whom I befriended. But I also knew enough about Batista's Cuba, Yankee imperialism's Cuba, the Cuba of Latin American cutthroats. And I knew about the hunger, the illiteracy, and the exploitation of the New World and of the whole Third World and its people, by the First and Second Worlds.

In Guinea I learned many things at first hand. And I remember the bitter confidences of certain black leaders and the blame they laid on whites and missionaries.

Since then I have fully grasped and felt the whole rotten myth of racist superiority and of divinely decreed eminent domain; and I have grasped and felt the inhuman exploitation that has gone into the discovery, colonization, and, at times, even the evangelization of the New World. "Colonization" and "civilization" are words that I no longer regard as part of a human vocabulary. And I feel the same, here where I live and suffer, about the new colonialist slogans of "pacification" and "integration" of the Indians. In my credo, imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism deserve an anathema. I loathe the monuments in honor of the discoverers and *bandeirantes*. I become physically ill when I see the monument to Anhanguera in the public square of Goiânia. I would much prefer to see a monument to Las Casas or to the "unknown backlander." And I would love to see a much more critically expurgated history of the colonized peoples and history of Christian missions. When I read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, I was once more — if I may be forgiven — ashamed of being "Western," "Spanish," and "Christian," because it reminded me of so many deeds perpetrated by those who carried out the penetration by "civilization." . . .

I am well aware that the roots of colonialism are sunk deep and stubborn in us, like a second nature of ethnocentric superiority. We are the "good guys"; while these "poor people" to whom we have been sent. . . . And we have not — not by a long shot — seen the end of ecclesiastical colonialism (if I may be excused for displaying some of our own dirty laundry). In theology, in liturgy, in law, in pastoral theology, we are thoroughgoing Europeans, intellectualizers, Latins, Romans, and to top it off, adherents of this or that religious order, or this or that church of origin.

(IBJ, 205-6)



## FLUTE SONG OF WIND AND PEOPLE\*

1. To say *compañero* today,  
here in Latin America,

---

\*These poems were written during a meeting of Third World Theologians held in São Paulo. The title refers to the Andean flute.



means saying

brother or sister in struggle  
flesh of the same slaughter  
fire of the same hope.

To say *compañero* today  
is to free the new Americas  
from those other "companies,"  
*compañeros*.

2. Mother church,  
mothers:  
you don't lose your child  
who goes off to the people.
3. "You folks are well off,  
very well off, here in this meeting room,"  
we heard in Quechua  
from the wonderful Indian teacher.  
"Out there it's another matter, friends . . .  
let's not make this meeting room  
the Amerindias we dream of,  
one that may exist some day,  
but does not yet, my friends."
4. Alas, frail liberty,  
space where the air becomes uncomfortable  
like an open womb!
5. May our calls for land  
not just stir up a wind  
that causes clapping rainstorms,  
and then the wind dies down,  
and the world goes on the same. . . .
6. "Managing to survive in this world  
—that is the 'black question' " —  
the black man was saying.
7. Don't put white clothes on  
this child you're baptizing.  
The child is black  
and grace is not white.  
Just give  
—may God give—  
new life to the black child.

## 8. Guillermina

Colombia

still without a face.

Woman face of the Americas, long suffering.

Word meek and strong,

lantern in the mines,

housewife, early rising mistress

of the New World soon to come!

## 9. The people

cannot flee

from the people being slaughtered.

(The outside agent—perhaps—

comes and goes

from the people to the people,

as the wind blows

as danger ebbs and flows. . . .)

## 10. Cursed be the hospital

that kills lives on their way to birth.

Cursed be its godfather,

the World Bank.

## 11. The doctor is the people,

knowing when and how

to deliver the baby.

## 12. Facing a single Goliath

many Davids,

together,

with slingshot and rock;

and also, when the time comes,

holding up the sword taken from the giant.

## 13. Struggles converging

in the struggle.

Streams flowing together

in the river of the people.

From mountain and village,

from countryside and neighborhoods.

## 14. Americas still Indian,

Mother in freedom and wisdom!

Americas formerly Spanish,  
betrothed left behind!

Americas freed, new morning,  
Sister!

15. Listen carefully:  
with the wind from the mountaintop there comes  
a reveille of flutes;  
with the wind from the sea there comes  
a reveille of arrows.  
The Americas are speaking  
in its first language,  
    that of Indians,  
        brothers and sisters.

16. Theory of mourning and seeds  
over my heart,  
Indian necklace,  
umbilical cord  
connecting the people, who are  
    the present of the past  
and the impossible future now arriving!

17. Your sugarcane,  
your rebellious flutes,  
called out to us, Cuba.

All your sisters  
will keep waking up  
toward the dawn.

18. And you, tiny Nica,  
are not the least of my cities,  
says the Lord;  
for from you has been born  
my daughter, freedom,  
my son, the New Man.

(Guerrilla fighter embroidered with affection,  
blossom of liberation, standard-bearer,  
guerrilla-sacrament of the New Americas,  
Nicaragua!)

19. Good Friday of the people,  
in its agony El Salvador continues  
Romero's mass.

With a cry of hope  
the people gives birth to the day  
of El Salvador in Easter celebration.

20. The stole you gave me,  
at every mass  
flows down my body,  
Guatemala. . . .  
All the blood of God,  
the blood of a whole people!

21. Precocious child,  
firstborn daughter  
of the liberation being won.  
Child betrothed of the Promised Day  
baptized in blood,  
heavy with hope.

I want to embrace you, Americas,  
around your red hot waist,  
Central America ours!

22. Every Indian woman in the Americas  
has a name and a face.  
Allow her to be equal to her beauty,  
even while she is the equal sister of a whole people.

23. First let there be bread,  
and then freedom.  
(Freedom with hunger  
is a flower laid on a corpse.)

Where there is bread,  
there is God.  
"Rice is heaven,"  
says the poet of Asia.  
The earth  
is a gigantic  
plate  
of rice,  
a huge loaf of bread that is ours,

for the hunger of all.  
God becomes bread,  
                    and work,  
                    for the poor,  
says the prophet Gandhi.

The Bible is a menu of family bread.  
Jesus is the living bread.  
The universe is our table, brothers and sisters.

(The masses are hungry  
and this bread  
                    is their flesh  
torn to pieces in struggle,  
triumphant in death.)

We are family in the breaking of the bread.  
Only in breaking the bread  
will we recognize each other.  
Let's be bread, brothers and sisters.

Give us, Oh Father, our daily bread:  
the rice or the corn, or the tortilla,  
the bread of the Third World!

24. And we also set  
before your creator eyes,  
and before our own, caught in fear,  
the tricontinental mechanism  
of free poverty  
that contemplates  
and struggles in hope . . .

25. "The dawn  
stopped being  
a temptation."  
In order to be an option  
and a long challenge  
of every human dream.  
It stopped being just mine  
and became ours, my friend.

26. May the people take in their hands  
the bread of the eucharist,  
since the people make the bread.

Let the earth and its spouse, the human being,  
produce the eucharist,  
living worship of the living God.

27. Blood poured out  
is a voice,  
    that draws together alive  
    in the flesh of the people  
    which is the earth.
28. His tomb empty,  
our tombs full  
of the people, slaughtered,  
announce the morning!
29. I want to plant  
here in the Amazon  
my free human cry,  
my protestant liberating faith,  
the torch of my blood poured forth.

I know that the seed  
will one day be harvest called together.

(CEL, 3-12)

~

**Question:** *How do you view the immediate future of the Latin American church and of CELAM [the Council of Latin American Bishops]?*

**Casaldáliga:** Fortunately, the Latin American church is one thing and CELAM another. May that and what I am about to say be taken with both respect and a brother's freedom, collegiality, and shared responsibility.

I am not a futurologist. This interview is taking place three days after Reagan's inauguration. And these days I am feeling great concern over El Salvador, Guatemala, and our America, like a creature wounded, relentlessly persecuted. Yet I don't want to make Reagan so important as though he were inevitable fate. The United States isn't what it used to be, neither in Europe nor in Latin America. But it is still too much.

Obviously the military governments of the continent and even the pseudodemocratic ones are going to feel more pressure from Reagan's policies and from his warlike secretary Haig. And the peoples on their way to liberation, especially El Salvador and also Guatemala, will suffer violent repression. They already are. Nicaragua is going to undergo a painful aftermath of revolution.

In this context, which is political, social, and economic, the Latin American church is going to be particularly challenged in its option for the poor and for the independence of peoples. That is where I fear that unfortunately CELAM will play a sad role. I'm sorry to be saying this, but I must say it if I am to be sincere. CELAM's intervention in Nicaragua lends credence to this depressing prediction.

I believe a priori and fanatical anticommunism and antiMarxism very blindly continue to prevent a good part of the Latin American church from being more free to take a stand and act. That is true of the hierarchy and of its middle-class activists. (I even wonder if this is more anticommunism or procapitalism. . . .)

All over the world the Catholic church strives to present itself as politically neutral. Let us recognize that it isn't. In Latin America the most "official" side of our church tends to be Christian Democrat or Social Democrat. In a continent oppressed by dependent capitalism, that is the same as playing the empire's game; it means betraying the people.

I also believe, as I said, that we are more Roman than Catholic, more Latin than Catholic. That is why we do not know how to press, in either word or deeds, for our proper distinct identity as particular churches and as a whole continental church, within the one church of Jesus Christ.

Our theology, our liturgy, our pastoral practice (not to mention our canon law) are Latin American still only in honorable but suspect exceptions. We all know the travails of liberation theology. The Brazilian bishops conference has had to go through almost grotesque contortions in order to get certain permissions from Rome, and not always successfully.

Nevertheless, I firmly believe in the Spirit of Jesus, which is manifest up and down the continent through Christian communities among the people. I passionately believe in the overflowing power of the martyrdom of so many Christians, so many children of God, in these slaughtered Americas. As was said on the anxious eve of Puebla, there's no stopping the advance of the popular church—which is Catholic in an utterly orthodox way. It is manger and cross.

Among the signs of hope I should also highlight the ability and sometimes heroic dedication of our theologians; I should point to the creation and operation of so many agencies for documentation, study, and pastoral training which are spreading throughout Latin America; and I should emphasize as well the new religious life that CLAR [Latin American Conference of Religious], which is under attack, has providentially facilitated.

I can't deny, because it's plain to see, that the church has turned in on itself in many sectors of the hierarchy and in many communities that have not taken clear stands. John Paul II's figure and his insistence on Catholic identity may provide some backing for this turning inward. Some will always take advantage, especially where there is a great deal of fear and little spirit of poverty and freedom.

Seen from Brazil, CELAM looks Spanish-speaking, and that's not just a

language problem, for there are many Brazilian bishops, and Brazil is a large and even powerful country. (The small episcopates in certain countries experience CELAM's arrogance differently.) This body, which I prefer to view positively with hope, should once more be a collegial stimulus, a sound box to echo the Spirit and the people in Latin America, a service to the particular identity of our church. Currently, I fear that is not the case. . . .

(*Shupihui* magazine, Iquitos, 1981)



The greatest problems encountered in setting up Christian base communities come from three sources: the people themselves, the church, and the government (or, more broadly, the regime, the system).

1. Brazil's Catholic population—the largest Catholic population in the world—is heir to centuries-old Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish Catholicism. At an important point in history, Rome left a strong imprint on Brazilian religiosity. The hierarchy, the clergy, and church structures were imposed on a subject, dependent, and enslaved population.

Without getting into any long discussion and acknowledging the rebellious freedom with which the soul of the people (native and black) survived the ecclesiastical dictatorship, we must recognize that the Catholic people of Brazil had gotten used to passive submission, a formalism that was even superstitious, a one-way communication from priests, and an exaggerated respect for the bishop. When the bishop went down the street, beans were left to burn in the kitchen. In the face of any problem with any kind of demand, people always suggested, "Go make your complaint to the bishop."

Under those conditions, it has not been easy for this people-and-church to be energized into independent, democratic, and really participatory communities.

There are further obstacles. The great mass of people is illiterate or semi-illiterate. And a community which is no longer a basically oral culture must also communicate through reading and through exchanging documents. The fear of repression, the daily and unpredictable tension of the struggle for survival, the urban and rural distances in this continent-sized country and—though this may seem a joke—television, have been and are factors that continue to impede the formation and ongoing vitality of Christian base communities in Brazil.

2. The church here was, and to a great extent still is, this vertical church I just mentioned. Moreover, for centuries the church was very suspicious of popular religiosity, which is so eclectic in this country of *candomblé* and *macumba*. In addition, the experience of base communities in Europe, which was supposedly anarchic and antihierarchical, put bishops and the Brazilian clergy on their guard. The truth is that the torrential advance of Christian base communities has swept away all these apprehensions and



stereotypes. And now the communities are numbered in the thousands, just as other church groups used to be.

The fact is that there are communities and communities. It basically depends on the pastoral thrust of each particular church. Or on the pastoral thrust of individual priests, sisters, or pastoral agents, who sometimes know how to "disobey" the bishop in a gospel spirit.

3. The government — keep in mind that I am also talking about the system and the regime — cannot look kindly on this popular movement which is raising consciousness, and rightly stirring up and prompting the people to become organized. During the harshest phase of the repression, anything that had a scent of popular community was brutally broken up. Matters went to tragic and ridiculous extremes. At this moment, with the 1982 elections in sight, there is a new wave of insinuations and calumnies on the supposed infiltration — Marxist, of course — into Christian base communities. The government knows that its party, the PDS, is not popular. The government is also aware of the popular power that the base communities have in developing the consciousness and political commitment of millions of Brazilians. The government and its top leaders also ought to be aware that the time when the "colonels" could control politics and lead people around by the nose is over.

The PT (Workers Party) has a good deal of support within the base communities, as does the Popular Tendency within the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party). These are the two largest and most authentic forces among the opposition political parties.

A cardinal, some bishops, and some people high up in the press and in money circles have docilely echoed the government's alarm. They are ignoring the other kind of infiltration — official surveillance of communities, the presence of disguised police agents among them, and the attempt to imitate them on the part of "Novo Mobral-Ação Comunitária," a government education movement that is trying to hide its failure by changing and taking advantage of work done by others. In Saint Augustine's expression, the devil mimicking God.

(*Shupihui* magazine, Iquitos, 1981)

~

### **ODE TO REAGAN\***

You are being excommunicated by me and the poets,  
the children, the poor of the land:

Pay attention!

---

\*This ode is consciously modeled on the "Ode to Roosevelt," written by the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío; Darío's poem is well known to many Latin Americans.

We've got to see the world in human terms.

Don't play Nero.

This isn't a movie, you screen monkey:

you're the leader of a great nation!

(I'll tell your people to clean off forever

the shit your cowboy boot has tracked over your flag.

And I'll tell them, when they vote,

to realize that they may be selling a lot of blood and their own honor!)

You may have inebriated the world with Coca-Cola,

but there is still someone lucid enough to tell you "No!"

The profits and power of your weapons

cannot be valued above

the feverish wail

of a little black child.

Empires no longer suit the race of human beings.

Listen, Reagan: the sun

rises as sun for everyone

and the same God rains

over every life God has invited to the celebration.

No people is greatest.

Take care of your own backyard.

Respect us.

Rachel has found you out, Herod,

and you will have to answer for her desolation.

Sandino's star

is waiting for you in the hills

and in the volcano a single heart awakes:

like a sea of indignation, little girl Nicaragua

will smash your aggression.

The blood of martyrs sustains our arms

and becomes song and fountain in our mouths.

You have never seen the hills, Reagan,

nor have you heard in their birds, the voice of the voiceless.

You know nothing of life,

and song means nothing to you.

Don't come to us with hypocritical morality,

you mass murderer, you're aborting a whole people

and their revolution!

The lie you try to pass off to the world (and to the pope)  
is the worst drug.

You are showing Freedom (in an exclusive screening)  
while you block the way to Liberation.

"The United States is powerful and mighty."

All right! "In God . . . we trust."

You may think you're the owners,

you may have everything,

even god, your god

—the bloodstained idol of your dollars,

the mechanical Moloch—

but you don't have the God of Jesus Christ,

the Humanity of God!

I swear by the blood of His Son,

killed by another empire,

and I swear by the blood of Latin America

—now ready to give birth to new tomorrows—

that you

will be the last

(grotesque)

emperor!

(PIC, 59–60)

~

## **SUMMONING THE ROSE**

All you who understand directly  
the sensible madness of Quixote,

Las Casas's upraised arm,

warning both empire and church,

Neruda's slingshot

arousing blood and volcanos.

(The solitary eye of Camões,

obsessing the sea with sails.)

All of us who want to be ourselves:

let us brandish this tongue

which served for conquest

turning it into the flag of conquered freedom,

brothers and sisters.

All of us together, let us make it

equal servant of the firstborn Song,

novice translator of the smothered Myth,

regained great-grandchild of the rebellious Dead.

Let us shout

all together

the password for Today!

(Tomorrow will once more be too late.

Freedom is kissing us with an urgent encounter.)

Let us summon the petals

of all the accents—sometimes of fratricide—

to a single rose called

Amerindian America, Afroamerica, Creole America,

our Great Homeland Free!

(CEL, 25)



### **CENTRAL AMERICA OURS**

Like a volcano within you,

the peace of justice.

Banner of the Poor,

like a wind of struggles,

freedom, within you.

Central America ours,

enduring birth pangs everywhere

yet to come, like the Kingdom,

daily, like weeping.

Corn from earth and blood, matures, our hope.

Love in every stone, tattooed with history.

Tortilla shared, Easter to come.

Crux of the New World,

Central America ours!

Keep still, learned ones, Pharisees,

leave her alone, you great ones, invaders.

Watch over her, on your knees, you little ones.

(May she remain in God's hands, day and night,

like a bird on the wing.)

Let no one abort the dream pulsating in the hills.  
Let no one put out the fire that gilds with promise  
the tents of exile.

Let no one clothe the day  
ours in its nudity  
being born in the night in  
Central America!

(TEP)



## **ON A TRIP TO NICARAGUA**

São Félix do Araguaia, October 1, 1985

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Companions in Hope:*

I owed this letter to all of you—bishops, organizations, friends—who have publicly accompanied me on my trip to Nicaragua with your solidarity. I am also sending this letter to other brothers and sisters who are interested in *this common cause of Central America*, its peoples and its churches. The near future of our peoples and churches throughout this Great Homeland goes by way of those peoples and churches.

You already must know something about my journey through the media, despite the distortions and guilty silence with which the major news agencies treat Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

In fact that is my first point: *we are very badly informed.*

During the first three weeks of Father Miguel D'Escoto's fast there was not a single news item about it in the United States. And the Voice of America cynically spoke of the end of a month-long fast as the end of a "vacation." And it announced the kidnapping of the Witness for Peace shipment by Pastora's bands as "a show put on by the Sandinista government." What I said when I returned to São Paulo recently was practically silenced even though there were lots of people at the press conference. The greatest despair of the people of Guatemala, which lives in a continual genocidal massacre, is that they are not heard, and are systematically ignored.

Another indisputable point is that Nicaragua has been at war for more than four years, *in a war of aggression, financed and led by the Reagan administration.* Many American pacifist groups have been denouncing it publicly. The military advisers, weapons, equipment, supplies, and public relations of the contras come from the United States. A woman in Santa María, by the border with Honduras, analyzed this war very clearly: "... It is the

United States that is causing them [the contras] to come do these cruel things to us. It seems that this grand President in the United States is unwilling to allow our tiny country Nicaragua to be free, since he wants to rule over us."

The empire uses Honduras and Costa Rica, with their governments in subjection, as a refuge for the mercenaries who come and go through the long hilly borders; they are also used for training camps and for kidnappings, and as platforms for counterinformation through powerful transmitters. Pérez Esquivel, the Nobel Peace prize winner, was aghast as he told me about the aggressive climate they have been able to create in Costa Rica against neighboring Nicaragua. Honduras, whose peasant population suffers so much, is so utilized that it will remain traumatized socially and politically for many years.

This war is *thoroughly wearing out Nicaragua as a country*. Open invasion is unnecessary. Nicaragua is already being "invaded" through military aggression, through systematic terrorism, through the economic boycott, through disinformation, through religious manipulation. Forty percent of the national budget must be spent directly on defense. Young people are continually on duty. Production is going down. That is affecting the process of the literacy campaign, which reduced illiteracy from 68 percent to 12 percent; there are shortages and sometimes empty shelves. In the hills and on the border people often live in terror. The peasants work by day and patrol at night. "I am a delegate of the Word, a producer and a defender," I was told by a farmhand in Escambray, right on the border.

*I have seen a great deal of death, a great deal of suffering*, many mothers whose children have fallen, many orphans, many amputees, many families whose relatives have been abducted, many Nicaraguans wondering about their future, living "restless for peace," as a peasant put it. Abductions of men, women, and children, especially of leaders of Christian communities and those in charge of education and popular organizations, are bitter daily bread. The most brutal deaths, torture and mutilation, rape, destruction of houses and crops, of towns, schools, cooperatives, farming centers . . . In a few months almost four hundred schools have been forced to close in peasant areas in Nicaragua. The number of Nicaraguans killed as a result of this aggression is calculated to be twelve thousand.

The contras, made up of ex-Somoza guardsmen and their relatives, mercenaries, and some kidnapped peasants, routinely go into action drugged.

*Manipulation of religion*—the contras invoking the names of God, the pope, and Reagan in a single war cry—and *the internal division of the church* are another drama in present-day Nicaragua. Communities in the city and the countryside and their pastoral agents were grateful and pleased by my presence and by human and church solidarity coming from Brazil. (I have never felt more Brazilian. I was "the bishop of Brazil," often welcomed that way, anonymously and collectively.) Unfortunately I was not able to

dialogue with the Catholic hierarchy of Nicaragua. They did not answer my letters. They did send, as was their right, a note protesting my presence in Nicaragua to the Brazilian bishops conference. I knew my trip would be conflictive, but I thought that conflictiveness unavoidable in terms of the gospel. That is what I said in my letters, along with noting that my trip was personal in character, although it had the backing of twenty-three of my brother bishops and many Brazilian organizations and friends.

I must regret that the Nicaraguan hierarchy does not take an open stand against outside aggression and for the self-determination of its own people and of all Central America. In Nicaragua it is clear that the hierarchy is against the revolutionary process either openly, or by submission or through some kind of corporative agreement. Inside the country and elsewhere, especially Miami, Cardinal Obando is used as a banner by the bourgeoisie and the anti-Sandinista forces in general. Auxiliary Bishop Bosco Vivas of Managua accused the "popular church" of being "communist and atheist" in headlines that filled the page. Two weeks ago in Bonn, Bishop Pablo Vega, president of the Nicaraguan bishops conference, justified seeking aid (from the United States, it was understood) because human rights were being trampled in Nicaragua, he believed. Amnesty International in its most recent report says that in Nicaragua there is no violation of human rights (but there is in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, countries which according to the U.S. State Department are under attack from Nicaragua . . .). In Rome Bishop Vega sought to delegitimize the elections his country carried out and denied that those of us who went to Nicaragua to join in the "gospel insurrection" were religiously motivated. Presently the Reagan administration is on trial in the World Court for its aggression against the Nicaraguan people.

I have listened to many ordinary people lament that their pastors are far away and do not understand. In several dioceses, in opposition to the hundreds of delegates of the Word—heroic servants of the church for so many years, many of them martyrs, all of them constantly in danger—the "official" church has set up, as a kind of alternative, other delegates who carry an official church identification card. One bishop went so far as to say that his diocese would be fine if no foreign priests or priests from religious orders were there. And two years ago a spokesperson for the Managua chancery office, in the presence of a number of priests, even offered a toast for the speedy arrival of yankee marines. . . . The pope's visit remains like an open wound in the heart of many Nicaraguans. There can be no neutrality in this country torn apart by the Somoza dictatorship for forty years, then won by the revolution, and now under attack by imperialist aggression.

Nevertheless, for anyone willing to accept my word, I can say before God and the church that after going around a good deal of Nicaragua and being in direct contact with its Christian base communities and pastoral agents, *I have not found a single priest, sister, delegate of the Word, or catechist*

who is striving for a "parallel church" or who rejects the episcopal ministry. For my part I always emphasized the basic unity of the church of Jesus, within an adult and sympathetic pluralism; I also emphasized prayer and real commitment to the poor and to their processes in history.

Despite it all, there is a great deal of faith in Nicaragua and a great deal of popular religiosity—just as there is a great combative spirit, a high level of consciousness, a lot of affection and even joy. The "gospel insurrection" and solidarity from many brothers and sisters abroad have rekindled within many people their troubled faith. I can also attest to that. While traveling during this period I have reconfirmed my conviction that the church in Nicaragua and in Central America should carry out as a priority a *pastoral activity of consolation and of the border*—understanding "border" in both geographical and sociopolitical terms—in order to maintain the credibility that the new situation of these peoples, martyred and on their way to liberation, demands. On that credibility will depend the very credibility of the gospel and even the credibility of the Living God.

It is ridiculous to speak of religious persecution in Nicaragua. There have been particular mistakes such as the expulsion of certain priests, as the Sandinista leaders themselves acknowledge. Far fewer "mistakes," nevertheless, than in the other countries with which we are familiar as "democratic" or "Christian Democratic." . . . In Nicaragua no one is inconvenienced for his or her faith. Elaborate religious ceremonies, undeniably anti-Sandinista in nature, take place on a daily basis.

It would also be ridiculous to simply speak of censorship. There is a censorship required by war which is standard international practice. *La Prensa*, the opposition paper and the voice of the "anti-Sandinista" church and religion, tells lies and calumniates to its heart's content every day, as I could attest.

That there is no contradiction "between Christianity and revolution" is far more than a slogan; it is the living experience of thousands and thousands of Nicaraguans, who are committed to the gospel and to their people.

I also visited Cuba—for two and a half days. There is a new period for Christian faith in Cuba, as the church itself there acknowledges. I can also attest to the accomplishments of the Cuban people in health care, education, and production. We must open our hearts and the gospel to this admirable island. In Cuba I met with the apostolic nuncio. And also with Fidel Castro.

In El Salvador—which I visited for just a day and a night—I went to the little hospital and the grave site of our Saint Romero of the Americas and two nerve-wrenching refugee centers. A half million Salvadorans within the country and more than a half million outside are refugees. The Reagan administration is giving the Salvadoran government a million dollars a day against the popular insurgency.



I am not going to say anymore for now about these two visits to Cuba and El Salvador, which affected me a great deal.

In San Salvador Archbishop Rivera y Damas, the president of the bishops conference of Central America and Panama, gave me a very cordial welcome. In Panama I met with Archbishop McGrath, the president of the Panamanian bishops conference, and with the papal nuncio in Panama. I also met with Bishop Rodríguez, the president of the Cuban bishops conference.

All these high church leaders of Central America feel that the situation of the region is very dramatic, and they agree that there is a pressing need for the church to work for peace and the independence of these people who are being ground down.

I am finishing, brothers and sisters. I could write books full of cherished memories and of unavoidable challenges for all Latin Americans, and especially for Christians.

I don't demand that anyone feel toward Nicaragua the same kind of affection I feel for it, which is even greater now that I have experienced its land, its people, its fiery history. I nevertheless want to express thanks—in the name of that same Nicaragua that repeatedly asked me to do so—for the support you gave me in this journey of communion. In addition, I ask of you, brothers and sisters and *comrades*, that you show real solidarity with Nicaragua and with all Central America. I ask those bishop colleagues who gave me public support to invite their churches to a monthly day of vigil for Nicaragua and for Central America. I ask everyone to join solidarity committees and to cooperate effectively in the campaigns that are organized. . . . I ask everyone to stay informed and to inform others. We have to break through the blockade of silence and lies. Let our denunciation be heard. Let the news be heard: the bad-good-news of death and resurrection our Central American brothers and sisters are undergoing. Their blood—poor and generous—must fall into our hearts, becoming eucharist.

Let us make our own the prophetic statement of a Nicaraguan, a survivor of Wiwilí, who, transfixed with grief, told Teófilo Cabestrero, "I survived to tell about it, so that the story will be told and the world may know."

I trust in the desire for liberation of these heroic peoples and I believe in the torrential blood of their martyrs. I fully believe in the God of life, Father of the poor, and in God's son, Jesus, the total liberator. For our part, let us force that day of liberation to come, comrades!

A very friendly embrace to all, in this hope and with this commitment,

Your brother,

Pedro

(Letter to friends in Brazil)

The very fact that the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission has asked me for a statement on behalf of the rights of Salvadoran refugee children makes me deeply ashamed before God and before history.

Ashamed of being a human being and ashamed of being a Christian. Impotent and frustrated, despite my hope.

For Central America has been an open wound for years. And the so-called Christian West, and too often the very church of Jesus, have manifested passive complicity if not open involvement while neocolonialism, the oligarchy, and military repression—which means jail, torture, and death—decimate these tiny peoples at the waist of the Americas.

And the criminal nightmare has become a routine news item, or has even ceased being news, upstaged by a soccer ball. . . .

I am not going to make a statement. Any word that is just a word seems cynical to me. May any of us who can passively witness the pain of Central America be cursed by the living God.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos . . . will threaten the wrath of Yahweh against our insensitive society and church.

The statement is there, inexorable. Let those who have ears to hear listen to the cry of an exiled child. Let those who have eyes to see witness the anemic faces of refugee mothers and children.

Sometimes, in my heart, I have asked John Paul II to come to Central America before it is too late, if he wants to visit like a Good Shepherd. His own Poland under repression and the absurd Malvinas/Falklands war were no more than a painful illness when compared to the systematic slaughter—true genocide—that takes away whole settlements in Guatemala and El Salvador.

Five hundred thousand refugees, 40 percent of whom are children; undernourished, traumatized, many of them condemned to an early death. "Dead before their time," our prophet Las Casas would say.

Being a child, a refugee, and Salvadoran are, in our stupid society, like three stigmas gathered in a single mysterious fragility.

Anything we do for these children, for their mothers, for these tiny peoples—the least of Judah, the Tom Thumbs of the Americas, and yet lusted after by the mighty—will do no more than save our own condition as human persons.

All these children are our children; blood of our blood, poured out; humiliated soul of our own soul.

Let us save the children of El Salvador, to save our very selves!

The least we can offer is money, publicity, protest, commitment. And urgent prayer. We are not doing the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission a favor. We are paying, late and poorly, a common debt.

Those of us who have the nerve to call ourselves Christians and yet stand by unmoved at this tragedy of Rachel weeping for her children or to simply to get off a sporadic prayer, an occasional speech, or an indifferent check,

will have no answer on our face when the sovereign judge on that last day with no provision for appeal says to us, "I was a refugee in the flesh of a Salvadoran child (in Honduras, or in Nicaragua, or Belize or Costa Rica, or Panama or Mexico, or in the caves of martyred Indian Guatemala), I was a refugee in the flesh of a Salvadoran child, and you did not take care of me."

Brothers and sisters of the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission, you can count on me for anything, to the death.

These children will judge us before the just judge. And I want them to judge me from a situation of brotherhood and sisterhood in freedom, won by their parents, their grandparents, and their older brothers and sisters.

These children, flowers of wailing and bloodshed, announce a different future for their still forbidden peoples.

Against every hope and every power, and for the sake of the risen one who died and lives, I firmly believe in the resurrection of Central America.

Precocious child  
firstborn sister  
of the liberation  
    being won.

Child bride of the promised day  
baptized in blood  
heavy with hope  
    and raped!

I want to embrace you, America,  
around your red-hot waist  
Central America ours.

(EDP, 180-83)



## **SONG OF MAYAN TIME**

The wind blows passwords  
through the harsh embattlements  
and the rocks heave, like expectant wombs,  
enwrapped in combat-ready flesh.

Now it is Mayan time.

With green tenacity  
out in the sun that belongs to all,  
the fathering corn raises

its millions of torches.

Between power and fear,  
   on the move,  
 many arms guard the rebelling dawn.

Indians, that's all,  
 no ID papers,  
 out there in the camps—the tents of the desert—  
 refugees in their own land  
 wait to go back:  
 — We will go back  
 to Guatemala  
 when democracy  
                   makes  
                           way  
                                   for justice;  
 when what's Christian  
                                   is truth  
   and not a label.

In white herons, I pour  
 my prophetic omens  
 over the camp, dry and footworn.  
 The night comes down like a challenge  
 of disturbing shadows  
 before the hills  
 that know everything.  
 Pain and fury and chant overflowing,  
 the blue water comes from deep within history,  
 and rises through the whole Mayan earth  
 like a bowl boiling with promises  
 the blood of the martyrs.

It is Mayan time.

— We will be a free people again,  
 the new Guatemala  
 with almond eyes.  
 We will look upon beauty afresh.  
 We will see quetzal birds make their home with us.  
 We will cross the forbidden hills, brothers and sisters,  
 in one continuous wave of peace and fruitful song.  
 We will close the wound of the border forced upon us.  
 We will finally clear the calendar

of so many "days of dread."  
Wise hands able  
to give the opaque world  
lanterns of folk art.  
We will weave life with colors,  
we will braid history with surprises every day,  
crafted in peace and with justice  
on the loom of the people.

This is Mayan time.

(TEP)



*Question: What does the church in Brazil think about the changes taking place in Central America? What did Archbishop Romero's death mean for the Brazilian church?*

**Casaldáliga:** Unfortunately we have to realize again that the two Americas, Hispanic and Portuguese, are ignorant of each other. Just as South and Central America are alarmingly ignorant of each other. More specifically, the large southern countries have never been very interested in these Tom Thumbs here at the waist of the Americas. What is true of our peoples is also the case in our churches. Our common enemy knows us better. Obviously some committed groups have made progress as have some sectors in theology and pastoral practice on the continent and even in the ecumenical sphere.

I have the impression that in terms of viewing the changes in Central America, the church in Brazil can be divided into three branches.

There is a conservative branch, more along the lines of CELAM as it is today. It is alarmed over the revolution in Nicaragua and doesn't want to see a similar revolution in El Salvador or Guatemala. This group finds it easy to reduce every danger to communism.

A second branch picks up the news on television and in the newspapers more or less superficially. This group knows that a lot of people are being killed in Guatemala and El Salvador. They know what people say, that Central America is a powder keg, and so forth.

A third group, which is small but quite significant, I believe, follows closely the ups and downs of these peoples and these kindred churches. It looks on the New Nicaragua with passionate sympathy and ultimately with trembling expectation. It regrets the fact that most of the Nicaraguan bishops have retreated and regards that as antiprophetic at a time when Nicaragua needs a prophetic stance brimming with a willingness to risk and hope ever more. I believe El Salvador and Guatemala may have no other way out than the one taken by Nicaragua. That way is not chosen out of

whim or out of a thirst for war or revolution. A certain historic realism is necessary. Would that it might be possible to avoid spilling even a single drop of family blood!

López Trujillo's CELAM, with its interfering which one sincerely cannot justify, has no doubt supported the cautious or even hostile attitude of the first two sectors of the church in Brazil with regard to the sufferings of the people and church of Central America.

The ominous victory of Reagan, president by default in the other, imperialist, America, means the horizon of Central America is full of shadowy questions. Some people in Brazil will breathe a sigh of relief with Reagan's inauguration and a greater degree of intervention.

People have judged Archbishop Romero's death and his final prophetic years of life in accordance with the three visions just sketched. However, I believe most of the bishops and the church in Brazil have bowed down to venerate the martyr figure of Romero.

For the church "born of the people through the Spirit," as we say here and believe is true — Archbishop Romero is Saint Romero of the Americas, pastor and martyr, a true patriarch of pastoral prophecy and witness on our continent, a Salvadoran sign of contradiction. In the future, Latin American church history, specifically the history of the hierarchy, will pivot around the martyrdom of Oscar Romero. (Angelelli and Valenica Cano, two other great pastors who fell victim, died more obscurely.)

Like others, I believe that we should be dedicating heartfelt attention to pastoral work in Nicaragua during this salvific period of national reconstruction in Sandino's country. For the sake of the people and for the credibility of the Latin American church, Nicaragua cannot fail.

(*Diálogo Social*, Panama)



### ***In Love, in Faith, and in Revolution Neutrality Is Impossible***

As a missionary for many years in São Félix do Araguaia in the northern part of the state of Mato Grosso in the Amazon basin of Brazil, I feel deeply Latin American. Nevertheless, I continue to be a man of the First World, even if my beloved old Spain so often seems to be merely a tolerated outpost of that First World. . . .

As a man of the First World I want to ask all First World friends who might read this book [*Prophets in Combat*] to focus on the unquestionable and fundamental principles that we First World people sometimes forget and that the New Nicaragua is elegantly demonstrating before the World Court and before the tribunal of any human conscience that is sensitive to international law, freedom, and peace, the quest of peoples for their own independence and identity, and the equality of all nations.

Freedom cannot remain a statue on a pedestal. It is not the privilege of

some supposed mighty ones. The United States is not any "more" than Nicaragua, nor is Europe "greater" than Africa.

Augusto César Sandino, general and ancestral forebear, a preeminent figure in the struggle against American imperialism, wrote these prophetic words:

We . . . are not protesting against the magnitude of the invasion but simply against the invasion. The United States has been interfering in Nicaragua's affairs for many years. . . . Its intervention is more pronounced every day. . . . You say the governments of Honduras and El Salvador are hostile to me. So much the worse for them. Tomorrow they will regret it and change their attitude. All Central America is morally obligated to unite against the invader. . . .

The excuse of anticommunism used by Reagan and others like him does not in the least justify this aggression, nor the ongoing imperialism that maintains Central America in subjection, nor the centuries of colonialism, nor the officially sanctioned poverty, nor the institutionalized injustice that the ever-servile local oligarchy maintains over these "lesser" peoples of the empire—once Spanish, then English, now American. You don't defeat communism, supposedly so perverse, with other perversities. You don't prevent some future imperialism—from the Soviet Union or wherever—by using firepower and bloodshed to sustain an imperialist intervention that is evil from any angle. It is more than likely that the objectives of the Pentagon and the good of the White House will not coincide with the vital necessities and the human rights of Central America. What's "good" for the United States is not always good for the rest of the world.

The United States should understand that Nicaragua's cause is the cause of all Latin America. That Latin America is ready to say "Enough!" That we don't want to be dominated by Reagan or the IMF or General Motors or Rambo. We are going to be brothers and sisters—human persons, sovereign peoples, a global humankind—all of us free, all of us equal, each one himself or herself, all of us together making human history, which is both arduous and beautiful.

And, speaking in explicitly Christian language, all of us together are bringing about God's Reign.

For this cause of tiny Nicaragua under attack—its people and its church—is also the cause of God's Reign. This Reign that is given to us and that we bring about; the Reign of God that is also the Reign of men and women; the Reign of whites, Indians, and blacks; the Reign of persons and of peoples; a gratuitous fulfillment in the beyond—when the barriers of time and death are overcome—and a daily conquest in the present, overcoming selfishness and injustice, overcoming greed for profits and the arrogant might of weapons.

I believe that Nicaragua's cause is also the cause of the whole church of

Jesus. A symbol-case, a crucial locus for experiencing both faith and politics harmoniously and dialectically, its past one of a more or less colonizing and oligarchical Christendom, and its future a Christianity that will be more evangelizing and rooted in the people; a prototypical locus for keeping lit the flame of the credibility of the church that is *semper renovanda*—and ultimately the credibility of Jesus and of his Father our God, above and beyond the contingent aspects of a revolutionary process in history.

Just as there is a First World, there is a First Church, and they have their counterpart Third World and Third Church. The First Church must comprehend and joyfully accept that the Third Church will finally be itself, faithful and indigenous, “catholic” and different, so that, in the unity of faith and the plurality of communion, both may be followers and messengers of the Word of God who became incarnate in a time and a country (indeed, in a country colonized by another empire!).

I want to tell Christians and specifically Catholics that there is no so-called popular church—schismatic or headless—in Nicaragua, such as Nicaragua’s enemies, for their own reasons, or some narrow-minded and near-sighted people, have sought to detect with alarm. Yes, there is a portion of the church of Jesus—both Catholic and Protestant—that strives to be faithful to the historic demands of his people, precisely in the name of the gospel. There is a tension—which will be healthy in the long run if many of us get involved with our hands and on our knees—that will force both sides to pluralistic dialogue, to accept the complementarity of charisms and services, to the realistic dialectic of history, to fidelity to the signs of the times and of the place. All of which meshes perfectly with the spirit of Vatican II, if I may point to an expression of the church at the highest level.

If these arguments and demands and examples are not enough, I must remind my friends in the United States and in the whole First World, that in Nicaragua, in Central America, and throughout this whole Great Homeland of this continent to the south, there is a vast flood of people, a whole legion of those “marked with blood,” a legion “that no one can count” who are making their claim. These people are judging us with the absolute legitimacy of their extreme witness. It is to this witness in blood that my fragile witness on paper makes its appeal. . . .

(PIC, preface)



I am going to treat two questions: (1) What are the causes of the divisions in the Nicaraguan church and what are the ramifications of those divisions? and (2) What is needed from Christians in response to these divisions and to the revolution in Nicaragua?

The “division” of the church—whether greater or lesser and making qualifications—is a fact not only here in Nicaragua, but worldwide. (And why not remind ourselves that there have always been tensions and differences in the church, even between saints?)



There are, as it were, two ways of experiencing how it is to be church vis-à-vis the world. One is more spiritualistic, and considers itself more spiritual, and another is more committed to the reality of human life. The fact is that what divides us is not the gospel but politics. We all have "our" politics; there is some ideology inside everyone's head.

It is also true that church authorities and the clergy in general often live somewhat removed from the suffering of the people, from the processes of history, and from the crucial moments in their own country.

Manipulation of religion no doubt plays a role. By both right and left. (Not to mention the center!) However, experience and history show us that it is almost always right-wing groups that manipulate the church and religion. The hierarchical church, the clergy, and religious congregations until now have always found it normal to be on the side of the bourgeoisie, and to support the "established order" and fear social change. That is what happened during the independence struggles of our Latin American peoples—although there were some priests and friars involved in those struggles—and the same was true of the enslavement of Indians and African blacks and of the great social, labor, and cultural movements of recent centuries.

The "established" order has often been confused with "just" order. The biblical phrase "all authority comes from God" has often been repeated in the churches without a good explanation. For an authority that takes charge of a country or many countries against the peoples in those countries, wringing sweat out of the poor to serve a few privileged people in a "First" World—when there should be only one human world belonging to all—such authority cannot come from the God of life and kinship.

... We need greater motivation, more "mystique," that is, a deepening of our faith, greater clarity in Christian ideas, a better knowledge of the Bible and theology, and also a good political and economic vision. We need more prayer. Greater passion for the Reign of God. A true friendship with our Lord Jesus. And a great deal of unity among ourselves, brothers and sisters.

If this is lacking, the problems of the church itself and the hardship of everyday life lead us to give up hope and we give up; we will run away from the struggle; we will settle down, like so many others, first taking it easy, and then adopting an "I don't want to hear about it" attitude.

We can't forget that there are negative aspects to the revolution, failures, mistakes. The Christian should be critical. Salt at meals, as Jesus says; or in wounds. Light in darkness. Leaven in the mass.

What contributions do we have to offer as Christians to this revolution, which is also ours? We are going to inject a hefty measure of gospel into the revolution.

(NCP, 75-77)

To all the children of Nicaragua  
—mother of free men and women and children—  
who have shown their willingness to love their liberty unto death.

To all Christian sons and daughters of Nicaragua,  
who with the witness of their struggle  
and with their hope and their martyrdom  
prove that our God is truly a liberator God.

To all the mothers of Nicaragua,  
who have given birth to so many poets, so many liberators, so many  
martyrs.

To the free people of Nicaragua,  
who whether at work, at a party,  
on the border or at prayer,  
keep defending their beautiful freedom, once more under attack from  
the empire.

To the churches of Nicaragua,  
who want to walk like Jesus of Nazareth,  
in the simplicity of the gospel of the poor,  
and struggle to build God's Reign,  
strengthened by the Spirit of the risen one.

May the freedom of the New Nicaragua  
—of which Sandino dreamed in the mountains—  
come to be utter freedom;  
that freedom with which Christ liberated us.

May the freedom of the New Nicaragua  
leaven the whole liberation  
of the New Americas of which we dream.

(PIC, 18-19)

V

## **Being Church, Here, Now**



## Church

Vatican II was a great light in my life. It gave me a "reason" for having suffered and loved so many things. It fed so many flagging hopes. It was really a "window" opened to the wind of the Spirit and to the cries of a suffering humanity. A new springtime for the church. I drank in its documents, especially *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Ad Gentes*. *Lumen Gentium* still moves me.

I have since come to feel that what was especially of value about Vatican II was what it intuited, the things it "let go," the doors it opened irreversibly, the Christian liberty it won for all of us in the church; and it was of great value because through it the Council fathers made a profession of service to the world, and through them—at least theoretically—the church made the same commitment.

Vatican II was a starting leap. But the church, too, surpasses itself, and Vatican II was not the last word. For me, and I suppose for others, the Council had the Christian merit of demythologizing the church as an institution, as a history, as the "only locus of salvation." By this I do not mean to say that Vatican II denied anything that the church has always said or blurted out about itself. It simply translated it. I said that it demythologized. It also did away with a lot of older adherences. It recognized the creativity of the Spirit and the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. And it had the courage, however timid, to state the *mea culpa* that the church was centuries overdue in admitting.

Vatican II greatly encouraged the faith of the community: it was like a new, collective baptism, or, as the Council popes, John and Paul, both said, "A New Pentecost."

Starting from the ground floor up, so to speak, the Council began building on the forgotten motif of the church as the *people of God*, an entire people of the elect, a whole messianic and priestly community.

With this, the hierarchy ceased to be "the" church. And we began to feel, with a rejuvenated faith, that all of us—including the laity—were the church. It would be overly optimistic to say that hierarchism, clericalism, and ecclesiastical *machismo* ended, *comme ça*, with the Council. My experience as a priest and bishop has taught me, frequently, that the contrary is the case. Even today, and in these latitudes which are much less conditioned by solemn traditions, laymen—let alone women—are "generously" tolerated. When they are admitted to an assembly or to some post, they

are not accepted as equals. They can talk, but one mustn't take seriously what they say. Lower is lower, after all. We are rabidly clerical and hierarchical. We deceive ourselves so easily about our benevolent concessions. What more do "they" want, after all? We, the bishops and, to some extent, the priests, know all about what needs to be done. . . . It is hard to get down to really living the idea that the charism of service demands a real commitment to listening and dialogue and walking elbow-to-elbow with others. (I would like to be able to share this sentiment with many others. I think that this is one spot where the church has failed the gospel, and one which calls for a profound conversion on our part, starting with Rome and filtering down to the humblest mission prelate and the most embryonic council of priests.)

(IBJ, 174-76)



Since the church is the people of God, we can more readily understand that it has to be the people of human beings, "a light among the nations," as well as a "sign and instrument of the unity of the whole human race" (LG, 1); that "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted," are also those of the church; that "all that is genuinely human finds an echo in its heart"; and, finally, that "this community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with humankind and its history" (GS, 1).

The church is "essentially mission." But it exists in the world and for the world. Its mission is to save the world, just as the Word became human and took upon itself the nature, the sin, and the history of humankind, and then died and rose for us.

The parables of the Reign of God—those about the yeast in the dough, the candle in the darkness, the seed in the earth—have always seemed so clear, so normal, and so demanding to me.

God has willed the salvation of all. God's Son died for all. The church is not a "perfect society," but the "perfecting" of human society. The church can't be the sort of "ghetto" that Israel tried to be. Christ formed his people and all peoples into "one" people, the people of God.

The church is the humanity that God loves and has tried to win: mysteriously on God's part, freely on the church's part. The history of salvation mysteriously coincides with the history of the world. Just as there is a single God, so there is but a single human history. The creator of human beings and of the universe is the redeemer and glorifier of humankind and of the universe. This conviction has continued to grow in me, so that today it is the cloudless horizon of my faith. It is my hope.

I, who was once tormented with the obsession of "saving" everyone possible, as soon as possible, "on the run," if you will—my missionary training and my experience with the *curtillo* movement contributed to this

obsessive zeal—now believe, trustingly, that God saves according to God's own rhythm and in many ways. "In a fragmentary manner," perhaps, "but in many ways," God keeps on speaking to the world, with the "further complication" of the saving presence of God's Son, who died and rose for the world.

I still believe that the church is mission, and that the Lord's command to "go and proclaim" is still valid and urgent. I still believe in the seven sacraments, for example, as an historical expression of the sacramental being of the church itself. But I also believe in many other "contraband" sacraments which God can make use of, because I believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, the savior of all humankind, the primordial sacrament, whose blood cannot have been slowed down to a small trickle for some favored few. I believe that salvation often "works from within." I believe that everything is grace. I believe that grace is "greater" than the church, because grace is the universal saving love of God, in Christ.

Whereas I once held that outside the church there is no salvation, I now believe (as I wrote in my diary on February 3, 1972) that outside salvation there is no church. "The church exists only in saving: church is built only in the measure to which the world is saved!"

The church cannot be just the ready-made, airtight room where the privileged celebrate salvation and make merry. The church is the open sign of salvation: the "official" place, yes, where salvation is celebrated—consciously, in community—a certain place, yes, but a place that is a point of departure, arrival, and encounter; a place of constant going out. . . .

(IBJ, 183-86)



To the extent that the church is known as the sacrament of salvation and as the people of God, it is also recognized as being "particular" as well as "universal." Vatican II helped me, along with many others, to discover the *good news of the particular church*, however imprecisely. Only later have I come to understand that the "signs of the times" should be complemented by the "signs of the places."

(IBJ, 188)



By nature the church is *as catholic as it is local*. "In order to be able to offer all of them [those belonging to other religions and those who may deny God's existence] the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, the church must become part of all these groups for the same motive that led Christ to bind himself, in virtue of his incarnation, to the definite social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom he dwelt" (*Ad Gentes*, 10). Christ continues incarnating himself, through and with the

church, in the concrete world of the human beings of every age and every place. God loves in the singular and effectively. Salvation becomes present in everyday reality and touches the real human being primarily through the church—"universal sacrament of salvation" (*Ad Gentes*, 1)—insofar as the church brings its witness to human beings with the word "translated" and with the sacraments made a living experience, and elicits and stimulates in them, through the power of the Spirit who is ever ready to act, the response of faith that transforms and liberates.

We—bishop, priests, sisters, committed lay people—are here between the Araguaia and the Xingu, in this world which is real and specific, marginalized and accusing. We either facilitate the saving incarnation of Christ in this environment to which we have been sent, or we deny our faith, become ashamed of the gospel, and betray the rights and the embattled hope of a people of human beings which is also a people of God: the people from the backlands, the squatters, the day laborers in this portion of the Brazilian Amazon.

Because we are here, it is here that we must commit ourselves. Clearly. All the way. (There is only one sincere, ultimate proof of love, according to the word and example of Christ.) As a bishop and at this moment of my consecration, I accept as addressed to me Paul's words to Timothy: "Therefore, never be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but with the strength which comes from God bear your share of the hardship which the gospel entails" (2 Tim. 1:8).

We of the church of São Félix don't want to look heroic or even original. Nor do we intend to teach anyone a lesson. We only ask the committed understanding of those who share our same hope.

We look upon the land and the people of this prelatore with a great deal of love. Nothing about this land or these people is indifferent to us. We condemn things that we have experienced and documented. Those who might find our own attitude to be childish, distorted, imprudent, aggressive, theatrical, or publicity-oriented should consult their own consciences and read the gospel with simplicity; and they should come to live here in these backlands for three years with even a minimal human sensitivity and pastoral responsibility.

Vatican II, Medellín, the synod; the voice of Third World bishops conferences; the gospel—all these not only justify but even demand this openly committed activity. The time for words (but of course not for the Word) and for collusion and soft-pedaling delay is over. (Was there ever such a time?) "One who is not with me, is against me; and one who does not gather with me, scatters" (Luke 11:23). "It is not enough to reflect, come to greater clarity, and speak. We must act. It is still the time to speak, but it has also become in a dramatically urgent way, the time to act" (Medellín, Introduction).

We want to, and we must, support our people, take our place at their side, suffer with them and act with them. We appeal to their dignity as



children of God and to their ability to stand firm and to hope.

We are anxiously appealing to the whole Brazilian church to which we belong. We ask, we demand in a spirit of kinship, that it be decisive and fully co-responsible in prayer, witness, commitment, and the collaboration of pastoral agents and instruments. (Almost all those who continue to struggle disinterestedly believe that at present only the church seems to have the possibility to act decisively.) We ask that the Brazilian bishops conference, in which we now have more confidence, commit itself soon and effectively to a clearly realistic program within the commitment it has made publicly and as a matter of priority in the Amazon region.

To "Catholic" large landowners who enslave the people of our region — who themselves are often alienated by the self-seeking or comfortable connivance of certain ecclesiastics — we would ask, if they are willing to listen to us, to choose simply between their faith and their selfishness. "You cannot serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24). It will not do them any good to "give *curtillos*" in São Paulo, or sponsor "Christmas for the Poor," or give alms for the "missions" if they close their eyes and hearts to the farm workers enslaved or dead on their estates and to the families of the squatters whom their estates have uprooted in an eternal exodus or have cruelly closed off from the land they need to live. Let them read the gospel, let them read the first letter of Saint John, and the letter of Saint James.

With a lot of money it is easy to cover over the facts, the reality, with whole pages in the newspaper. God sees. And every day the people are more aware of what they are suffering, and they do not forget.

Once more and even more urgently we appeal publicly to the highest federal authorities — the president, the ministers of justice, of the interior, of agriculture, of labor, INCRA [Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform], and FUNAI [National Foundation for Indigenous People]. (Unfortunately we cannot appeal to SUDAM since up to now it has proven to be exclusively at the service of those who control the large landed estates.) We appeal to these persons and organizations to listen to the muffled cry of this people, to subordinate the interests of individuals to the common good, to subordinate the politics of cattle to the politics of human beings, and to subordinate splashy investments in roads, the occupation of the Amazon (the "Mesopotamia of cattle"), and the misnamed "national integration of the Indian" to the concrete needs and primordial prior rights of people in the Northeast, who are continually moving away without any future, and of the people of the Amazon region, Indians, squatters, farm laborers. . . .

Many incentives have been given — and with how much monitoring? — to the oligarchies and trusts in the southern part of our country who "occupy" this region. If those incentives had been shifted to the people who cleared the region and who live here, the conflictive situation we are "unveiling" (only to the naive or self-seeking) would have been turned into a future of

hope and development "of the whole person and of all persons" here in the heartland.

Isolated solutions do not resolve widespread problems. And in social matters alms are never the answer. For example, after four years of huge effort by the people and the mission, there was an attempt to resolve the Codeara/Santa Terezinha conflict with an alms of 5,582 hectares for the squatters out of an estate of more than 196,000 hectares, while the whole urban area of the town remained in the power of the company.

Our own experience has shown us the evil of capitalist large landholding as a radically unjust pre-structure, and has confirmed our clear option to get rid of it.

We also feel bound in conscience to help demystify private property. Alongside many other sensitized people we must press for an *agrarian reform* that is just, radical, inspired by social research, and carried out with technical competence, without any frustrating delays or unacceptable subterfuges. "Christ wants goods and land to have a social function, and no human being has the right to own more than is necessary, as long as others do not even have what is necessary for living. That is why Pope Paul VI said, 'Property is not an absolute and inalienable right' (*Populorum Progressio*, 23)" (José Manuel Santos Ascarza, Bishop of Valdivia, president of the Chilean bishops conference, in a letter to the Organization of Peasants of Linares, May 19, 1970).

There is a name for injustice in this land: large landholding. And the only true name for development here is agrarian reform. (According to Paul VI, in *Populorum Progressio*, "development is the new name for peace.")

We hope that no Christian is so shameless and cynical as to consider this document subversive. Again we point to the gospel. And also to Vatican II, Medellín, and the most recent synod. "The witness (prophetic function) of the church to the world will have little or no validity unless at the same time its commitment to the liberation of human beings proves effective in this world. . . . The church may make major efforts to defend the truth of its message, but if it does not identify that truth with a love committed in action, this Christian message runs the risk of no longer offering people today any sign of credibility" (draft of Justice in the World, bishops synod, 46).

These pages are simply the cry of one church in the Amazon, the prelature of São Félix, in the northeast of Mato Grosso, in conflict with large landholders and institutionally shunted aside.

We are not ignoring the marvels of nature or progress being made in the Amazon, nor do we underestimate the good that the Brazilian government or individuals are doing in this unending region. There is plenty of poetry and propaganda that sings about all that. What we must make public, out of both pastoral duty and human solidarity, is what is tragic in our Amazon, or what is being done mistakenly, or what is not being done, what

is no longer tolerable. Speaking the truth is a service. And our aim of speaking the truth makes us free.

Our bitterness does not come from lack of hope. (Only alienation or selfishness can live comfortably surrounded by established injustice.) We know in whom we trust (2 Tim. 1:12). We know that "where sin threatens the liberation and humanization of life, God sends us his only Son in order to liberate the human heart from selfishness and sin" and that "it is precisely here in the incarnation that the greatest foundation for hope for human beings and their universe is to be found." "It is in his spirit and in his church that Christ offers human beings this light that they need, this confirmation of the human values of dignity and kinship, this courage to practice justice and offer sacrifices to bring it about." Moreover, we know that "the justice that human beings achieve in this world becomes an anticipation of final hope" (draft of *Justice in the World*, 56-57).

(UIA, 42-45)



This recognition of the church as "particular" and "local" involves some practical demands: in pastoral practice, in liturgy, in canon law (why not?), and in life. It involves its risks, too, and its challenges, both theoretical and practical.

It goes without saying that I believe in the pope as the visible rock of apostolic collegiality and ecclesial community, the ministerial cornerstone of communion in faith, as the one who should preside humbly and lovingly over the whole Christian people and their shepherds. Nevertheless, I do not believe in the Vatican as a state, as a "world power," as a bureaucracy. It troubles me. It acts as a drag on the footsteps of the church of Jesus. I wish it would stop. I lament and reject all the titles, privileges, and benefices of bishops and priests and religious. One can "explain" all this as the baggage of history; but one cannot justify it. I believe that the gospel follows another route.

I say all this with an equal dose of respect and liberty.

If I am not contemplating an *ad limina* visit, it's because it would cost too much for travel and regalia, and because I would have to deal with too much interference in waiting rooms that I don't regard as "ecclesial." I would like to be able to have a simple, straightforward, and brother-to-brother talk with Peter, the bishop of Rome, who is, as I said, the ministerial cornerstone of the communion of all his people and their shepherds.

If I am at odds with the whole economic setup of the curia and with the way that setup is run—apart from the good will and expertise of its corps, of which I have no doubt—it is because here, in my own home territory of this prelatore, I have lived through and am still living through the contradictions and scandals which these entanglements produce, both among the people and among their exploiters.

If I censure certain interventions of the nunciature, for example, which I have had to suffer more than once (as have some of my brother bishops), it is because I do not accept these interventions as a form of "church ministry," because I think that they are, at the very least, uncalled-for anachronisms, and because I discern in them the interferences of diplomacy to the detriment of the gospel.

If I occasionally disagree with the Vatican or the presiding board of the National Council of Bishops, I do so despite my rank as a rural bishop, and I believe that any Christian, bishop or not, should be able to disagree. I say that because I believe the church is like a family, as well as being apostolic and hierarchical; I believe it is both a pilgrim in a state of search and conversion and divinely guaranteed in the Spirit; it is particular, and at the same time, universal.

I also find it to be a perfectly Christian thing, for example, for a priest of the diocese of Rome to feel free to write the pope a letter about the Holy Year; or that some conscientious Catholics from the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean should feel free to do likewise; or that the priests and laity of the church of Viana in Maranhão should represent their feelings and wishes previous to the appointment of their new bishop.

Saint Cyprian told his priests: "I do not wish to do anything merely on the basis of my own opinion, without taking into account your consent and that of the people."

We have all heard, and with good reason, the oft-repeated adage, "Nothing without the bishop." Now we should hear, just as frequently, the adage, "Nothing without the people."

I'm not talking about pipe dreams. The pope or any bishop can have his curia, let us say. But what I would ask for is that such a group should change its style: less "curial" and more "evangelical." I am also well aware that centuries of historic precedent cannot be done away with overnight. But I believe in the Spirit's power to make even these "things new," without having to wait until the Parousia.

Where there is a greater clarity, simplicity, and coresponsibility in faith, there will also be a correspondingly greater freedom of spirit, word, and action.

Those "on top" (I even include myself, somewhat, in that group) will have to get used to listening to what their brothers "on the bottom" have to say. Those who are "on the bottom" will have to be freer, more responsible, and more daring in exercising their right to speak up to those above them and alongside them, and they will have to exercise that right more frequently. And those below will have to concede to those above their own freedom and responsibility, and their special ministry of feeding God's flock (which is a human flock of human beings, who are children of God, and not just a pack of sheep!).

And both of us will have to get used to walking together, side by side, on the same level of family communion, without so many aboves and belows,

accepting in practice the fundamental equality of all the baptized, favoring in fact the exercise of pluralism within the unity of the faith, and pleasing God and humankind by giving rein to the free and enriching interplay of a dialogue between the church and the world.

This family attitude of listening and dialogue and freedom will in no way prejudice the hierarchical structure of the church, although it will restrict it to its proper confines, as a safeguard and stimulus of harmony in faith and charity within the body, and of apostolic service to the community of believers and the wider human world.

I repeat once more my declaration that I say all this with such vehemence because this church that I dearly love also pains me deeply.

(IBJ, 190-93)



**Question:** *What should a bishop be like today?*

**Casaldáliga:** Today as always a bishop should be a bishop: being "present" in his church, presiding over it in a gospel spirit; and being present throughout the human world of this church of his. In a posture of both vigilance and service in the church and in the world.

He should be a living pointer to the gospel experienced in community. "Contextualized" [*"Ubicadamente"*], as Latin Americans put it. Sensitive to the needs of his people, and open to their hopes, he should exercise the ministry of consolation and the ministry of prophecy. And he will thereby inevitably be a sign of both unity and contradiction.

He should "give his life" for his sheep and possibly some day give it all at one stroke in certain churches in this world of ours marked by injustice.

*If you weren't a bishop, where and how would you like to live now?*

In a contemplative community in the midst of the poor of the earth. In Central America, for example, in an Indian town, in a refugee camp . . .

*What would you ask the pope with all affection?*

I have just written him a long letter (see pp. 118-26) discussing the following concerns and aspirations that we feel deep inside us, in our church, here in the Third World: co-responsible collegiality and real catholicity; reinvigorated ecumenism; the true option for the poor and their liberation process; lay people; women; serious renewal of the Roman curia and its relations with particular churches and bishops conferences; witness and dialogue. . . .

(*L.E.A.* magazine, Madrid, June 1986)



**JOHN PAUL II, SIMPLY PETER**

*(From brother to brother,  
from poet to poet.  
I don't bear a question, but a poem.  
Peter and Paul conversed apostolically in prose.  
Would it be too much to suppose  
that a lesser Peter from Araguaia  
might converse apostolically in verse  
with a greater Peter of the Tiber?)*

John Paul, simply Peter,  
gather us together  
around the rejected stone,  
like stones out in the sun.  
Stir up in your brothers  
the freedom of the Wind,  
fisherman.  
Confirm our faith  
with your love.  
Give us the audience of prophecy  
and the encyclical with a shepherd's whistle.

The tribunal of the poor  
judges our mission.  
The good news,  
today as always,  
is news of liberation.  
The Spirit has been poured forth  
over the least ones of Zion.

The curia is in Bethlehem  
and on Calvary  
the major basilica.

It's time to shout with our whole lives  
that the Lord is alive.  
It's time to face the new empire  
with the ancient purple of the passion.  
It's time to love to the point of death  
and so give the ultimate proof.  
It's time to fulfill the testament,  
forcing communion,

in the ecumene.  
John Paul,  
just Peter,  
fisherman.

(FAW, 94-95)



*In Ocotal, Nicaragua*

That night in the spacious patio of the parish house we chat for hours with a large group of the most committed Christians. About the church. And the pope. Some of the mothers still feel a wound left in their soul by the pope's visit to Nicaragua which they—and many—see as very unfortunate. We speak about Christian life taken up in simplicity, and become daily fidelity. Questions and answers fly back and forth and affect me deeply. The only way the Nicaraguan people will be able to live their faith—and that means many of the best people—is with critical clear-sightedness and no evasion: “yes, yes, no, no,” as Jesus required. Getting beyond scandals, separations, misunderstandings, divisions. The result will be a faith purified in a crucible.

“You want me to talk with you about the pope. What I think about the pope, his trip to Nicaragua, how the pope is dealing with liberation theology and Christian communities.

“Well, the fact that the pope is Peter's successor and has the mission of confirming his brothers and sisters in the faith, as Jesus asked Peter himself to do, that is a matter of Catholic faith for all of us. I would give my life to defend this apostolic truth.

“The pope, bishop of Rome, safeguards the unity of the church, scattered throughout the world in many local churches, each with its own bishop. Upon this Rock/Peter, Jesus ‘builds’ his church, in the sense that he keeps it visibly united in one and the same faith, in the celebration of the same eucharist, in the communion of charity and in the organization of pastoral services. The true ‘cornerstone,’ the ‘sole foundation’—‘let no one lay down another’—is Jesus Christ himself. The New Testament puts it that categorically, and that is what we Christians all believe.

“The manner and style in which the pope has lived and acted throughout history, the way he lives and acts today, that is open to discussion. Peter is one thing and the Vatican something else. The pope could have his curia and his aides—which he needs—in a very different manner. The pope could be pope in a simpler, more evangelical, manner (from our viewpoint, right?), one that would also be more evangelizing.

“You people don't like the Vatican; I don't like it either, as it is. That in no way lessens our faith. We have the right and the duty to want the

church to be—and to make it—ever more authentic and a better example. You are also ‘the’ church.

“Obeying the pope and the bishops doesn’t mean keeping your mouth shut in their presence like little children who have no responsibility, and simply accepting everything they say or do. In the church we should be adults. We are all church: holy and sinful, ‘the chaste prostitute,’ as some of the ancient saintly fathers of the church put it. If the church makes us, and is our mother, we also make the church, and it is to some extent our daughter—fruit of the Spirit of the risen one and fruit of our common faith, of our responsible behavior, of our missionary activity, of our service to God’s Reign.

“Vatican Council II has providentially rediscovered that the church is the people of God, gathered in Christ. A people journeying toward full liberation.

“This Gospel Insurrection that Nicaragua is now experiencing [activities growing out of the fast of Foreign Minister Miguel D’Escoto in 1985] presses us to move forward more conscious and more committed: we must all ‘rise up’ in daily personal conversion, in active participation within the revolutionary process itself, and in the ongoing renewal of our church. . . .”  
(PIC, 80–81)



## **A LETTER TO POPE JOHN PAUL II**

São Félix do Araguaia

February 22, 1986

Feast of the Chair of St. Peter

*Dear Pope John Paul II,*

*Brother in Jesus Christ and Pastor of our church:*

For a long time I have been wanting to write you this letter, and I have been thinking about it and meditating over it in prayer for a long time.

I would like it to be a brotherly chat—in human sincerity and with the freedom of the Spirit—as well as a gesture of service from a bishop to the bishop of Rome, who is Peter in terms of my faith, my co-responsibility in the church, and my apostolic collegiality.

I have been in Brazil for eighteen years, and I came here voluntarily as a missionary. I have never returned to my native Spain, not even when my mother died. During this whole period I have never taken a vacation. I did not leave Brazil for seventeen years. During these eighteen years I have lived and worked in the northeast part of the state of Mato Grosso, as the first priest who came here on a permanent basis. For fifteen years I have



been bishop of the prelatore of São Félix do Araguaia.

The area of the prelatore is located in the Amazon territory of Brazil and covers 150,000 square kilometers [57,915,000 square miles]. Even today there is not an inch of paved highway here. Telephone service was installed only recently. Rains and floods that make the roads impassable very often isolate the region or make communication tenuous. This is an area of large landholdings by both natives and foreigners, and of large estates with hundreds of thousands of hectares, estates on which workers often live under a system of violence and semislavery. For some time I have been accompanying the dramatic life of the Indians, of the *posseiros* (farmers without land titles), and of the hired hands (labor supply for the estates). In this prelatore everybody has been forced to live precariously, without adequate services of education, health care, transportation, housing, legal protection, and especially without any assurance of land to work.

During the military dictatorship the government tried to deport me five times. Four times military operations surrounded the whole prelatore to watch us and apply pressure. My own life and that of various priests and pastoral agents in the prelatore have been threatened publicly and a price has been put on our heads. On several occasions, these priests, pastoral agents, and I myself have been jailed; several of them have also been tortured. Father Francisco Jentel was jailed, mistreated, sentenced to ten years in prison, and then deported from Brazil, and he finally died in exile, far from his mission country. The army and police have broken in and taken materials from the prelatore's files. The regime's repressive bodies brought out a false edition of the prelatore's newsletter, which was then published in the major media, in order to serve as a basis for making accusations against the prelatore. Even now three pastoral agents are involved in trials under false accusations. I myself have witnessed violent deaths, like that of Father João Bosco Penido Burnier, S.J., whom the police murdered at my side, when the two of us approached the sheriff station/jail in Riberão Bonito to formally protest the fact that two women, peasants and mothers, unjustly jailed, were being tortured.

Throughout all these years there has been a great deal of misunderstanding and calumny on the part of the large landowners—none of whom lives in the region—and other powerful people in the country and elsewhere. Inside the church as well there have been instances of a lack of understanding on the part of brothers and sisters who have no knowledge of the situation of the people or of pastoral work in these remote and violent regions, where often the only thing the people can rely on is the voice of the church which is trying to put itself at their service.

Besides the sufferings I have experienced in the prelatore, since I am the national coordinator of the CPT (Pastoral Land Commission) and a member of CIMI (Missionary Council for Indigenous People), I have had the occasion to be very involved in the tribulations and even the death of

so many indigenous people, peasants, pastoral agents, and persons committed to the cause of these brothers and sisters, whom the greed of capital does not even allow to survive. One of them was the Guarani Indian, Margal, who greeted you personally in Manaus, in the name of the indigenous peoples of Brazil.

It is the living God, the Father of Jesus, who is going to judge us. Nevertheless, let me open my heart to yours, the heart of a brother and pastor. Living in these extreme circumstances, being a poet and writing, and maintaining contacts with persons and milieux involved in communication or living out at the edge (whether because of age, ideology, cultural otherness, social situation, or through the emergency services they are providing) may lead one to gestures or stances that are unusual and sometimes bothersome to established society.

Both as brother and as pope, which you are for me, I ask you to accept the sincerity of my intention, passionately Christian and ecclesial, both in this letter and in my attitudes.

The Father has granted me the grace of never abandoning prayer, throughout this more or less feverish life, has preserved me from greater temptations against the faith and religious life, and has made it possible for me to be able always to rely on the strength of my brothers and sisters through a communion in the church that has been rich in meetings, study, and assistance. I believe this is undoubtedly why I have not strayed from the path of Jesus, and that is why I also hope I will stay on this road which is truth and life to the end.

I am sorry to be inconveniencing you with having to read this long letter, when you are already weighed down with so many other services and concerns.

Two letters from Cardinal Gantin, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, and a message from the nunciature that I recently received have finally prompted me to write you this letter. These three messages pressed for my *ad limina* visit, questioned aspects of the pastoral work in the prelatore, and criticized me for going to Central America.

I feel rather tiny and, as it were, remote, out here in the Brazilian Amazon, which is so different, and in this Latin America, so agitated and often not understood.

I have come to believe that I must pave the way with this letter. It seems to me that only a serenely personal contact between the two of us, through a well-pondered and clearly written statement, will enable me to come really close to you.

The other way for us to come together is already assured: I pray for you every day, dear brother, John Paul.

Do not consider it disrespectful when I make reference to topics, situations, and practices that have been controversial in the church for a long time or even challenged, especially today, when the critical spirit and pluralism are also strongly present throughout the life of the church. I regard taking up these uncomfortable issues in discussion with the pope as an expression of my co-responsibility toward the voice of millions of my Catholic brothers and sisters—and of many bishops as well—and of my non-Catholic brothers and sisters, whether Protestants, followers of other religions, or simply human beings. As a bishop of the Catholic church, I can and must make this contribution to our church: thinking my faith out loud and exercising the service of co-responsible collegiality in the spirit of family. It would be a lot more comfortable to keep quiet or with a degree of fatalism let the power of age-old structures keep going on its own. However, I do not think that would be more Christian or even more human.

By talking like this, calling for reforms, assuming new positions, one can cause “scandal” to brothers and sisters who live in calmer or less critical situations, just as by being silent, or accepting routine, or taking unilateral measures indiscriminately, one can cause “scandal” to many brothers and sisters who are situated in other social and cultural contexts and who are more open to criticism and desirous of church renewal—it is ever one and *semper renovanda*.

Without “being conformed to this world” and in order to be faithful to the gospel of God’s reign, the church of Jesus must be alert to the “signs of the times” and of places, and announce the word with a cultural and historic accent and with the kind of witness of life and practice that enable the men and women of each time and place to understand this word and be prompted to accept it.

Specifically, in the social realm we cannot very accurately claim that we have already made the option for the poor. First, because in our own lives and our institutions we do not share the real poverty they experience. Secondly, because we do not act toward the wealth that comes from evil doing with the freedom and firmness that the Lord adopted. The option for the poor will never exclude the person of the rich, since salvation is offered to everyone and the church owes its ministry to everyone. It does, however, exclude the way of life of the rich, which “offends the misery of the poor,” and their system of accumulation and privilege, which inevitably despoils and shunts aside the vast majority of the human family, and indeed whole peoples and continents.

I did not make the *ad limina* visit even after receiving, like others, an invitation from the Congregation for Bishops reminding us of this practice. I wanted, and want, to help the Apostolic See to revise the way this visit is made. I hear criticism from many bishops who make the visit, since even though it permits contact with the Roman offices and a cordial meeting

with the pope, it clearly cannot bring about a true interchange of apostolic collegiality between the pastors of particular churches and the pastor of the universal church. A lot of money is spent, contacts are made, a tradition is maintained. But do those visits help keep the tradition of *videre Petrum*? Do they help Peter see the whole church? Would it not be possible for the church today to have other more effective ways of exchanging views and establishing contacts? Mightn't there be better ways of evaluating and expressing the communion between, on the one hand, pastors and their churches and, on the other hand, the universal church and, more concretely, the bishop of Rome?

I would never even assume that the pope has a detailed knowledge of the particular churches, nor would I seek from him specific solutions for their problems. That is why we have the pastors, ministers, and pastoral councils in each church. That is also why we have bishops conferences, which I and many others believe are not being properly appreciated, and are even being passed over or unjustly criticized, as reflected in the attitudes of some people in some areas of the Roman curia. If bishops conferences as such are not "theological" or "apostolic" — they might not exist, and the church has gotten along without them — neither in themselves are curias or even the Roman curia: Peter has presided over and ruled the church differently in various periods.

The pope needs a body of aides just as all the bishops in the church do, although that body should become simpler and more participatory. Nevertheless, brother John Paul, many of us believe that certain structures in the curia do not reflect the witness of gospel simplicity and family communion that the Lord and the world demand in us; nor are their attitudes, which are sometimes centralizing and top-down, an expression of a truly universal catholicity; they do not always respect the demands of an adult co-responsibility; sometimes they do not even respect the basic rights of the human person or of different peoples. In parts of the Roman curia there are often prejudices, one-sided attention to information, and even more or less unconscious postures of European cultural ethnocentrism toward Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Viewing things objectively and calmly, women unquestionably continue to be very much marginalized in the church: in canon law, in the liturgy, in ministries, in church structures. For a faith and a community of that good news that no longer discriminates between "Jew and Greek, free and slave, man and woman," this discrimination against women in the church can never be justified. Perhaps the past can be explained on the basis of masculine cultural traditions; nevertheless, those traditions cannot nullify the newness of the gospel; they cannot justify the present, much less the near future.

Another matter that is sensitive in itself and that you feel very much in

your heart, brother John Paul, is the issue of celibacy. Personally, I have never doubted its gospel value and necessity for the fullness of church life, as a charism of service to God's reign, and as a witness to our future condition in glory. Nevertheless, on this issue I think we are neither showing understanding nor being just with thousands of priests, many of whom are in a desperate situation; many accepted celibacy by force, as a requirement and as linked to the priestly ministry in the Latin church. Subsequently, due to this requirement which they had not really internalized, they have had to leave the ministry, and have not been able to normalize their status within the church, and sometimes not even in society.

The college of cardinals is sometimes privileged with powers and functions that are hard to reconcile with the prior rights and the functions that in keeping with the nature of the church are more fitting to the apostolic college of the bishops themselves.

I personally have a sad experience with nunciatures. You are more aware than I that bishops conferences, bishops, priests, and large sectors of the church have repeatedly raised questions about an institution which in society is so plainly diplomatic in nature and which often engages in activities that parallel those of the episcopacies.

John Paul, brother, allow me yet another word of fraternal criticism to the pope himself. As traditional as the titles of "Most Holy Father" and "His Holiness" may be, like other ecclesiastical titles such as "Your Eminence" and "Your Excellency," they are obviously not very evangelical and indeed in human terms they are quite strange. "Do not be called fathers or teachers," says the Lord. By the same token it would be more in the gospel spirit—and closer to contemporary sensitivity—to simplify vestments, gestures, and to shorten distances in our church.

I also think it would be very apostolic if you were to ask for an evaluation of your trips, making sure there is enough freedom and participation. In many respects those trips are generous and even heroic, but they also meet much resistance, which, I believe, is not always groundless. Aren't these journeys conflictive both for ecumenism—Jesus' testimony appealing to the Father that we all be one—and for religious freedom in pluralistic public life? Don't they require heavy expenditures by both churches and states, and thus take on a certain arrogance and imply civic and political privileges for the Catholic Church, in the person of the pope, that other people find disturbing?

In order to serve ecumenism and give witness to the world, why not re-examine, in the light of faith, the Vatican's condition as a state, which gives the pope an explicitly political dimension, and thus undermines the freedom and clarity of his ministry as universal pastor of the church?

Why not decide to undertake a profound renewal of the Roman curia with both gospel freedom and realism?

I am aware of how painful was your trip to Nicaragua. Nevertheless, I feel I must express to you my impression, shared by many others, that your advisers and your own attitude did not help make this trip, which was crucial and indeed necessary, happier, and, especially, more evangelizing. A wound was opened in the hearts of many Nicaraguans and Latin Americans, just as you felt wounded in your own heart.

Last year I was in Nicaragua. That was the first time I had left Brazil in seventeen years. Because of my long-standing friendship with many Nicaraguans through personal contacts or letters, I felt I had to go there as both a human being and as a bishop of the church, at a time of very serious political and military aggression and deep internal suffering.

I did not seek to take the place of the local bishops, nor did I make light of them. Nevertheless, I felt that I could and even should help the Nicaraguan people and the Nicaraguan church. That is what I said in writing to the bishops as soon as I arrived. I made efforts to converse personally with some of them, but they would not meet with me. The Nicaraguan hierarchy is openly on one side; on the other side there are many thousands of Christians, and the church also has obligations to them.

I sincerely believe that on the official level our church—I also feel part of the Nicaraguan church as a Christian and as a bishop of the church—in that suffering country is not giving the witness that it ought to give, and the effects are negative for Central America, the Caribbean, and all of Latin America. Such witness would include condemning aggression, championing the self-determination of those peoples, consoling the mothers of those who have fallen, and celebrating in hope the violent death of so many brothers and sisters, most of them Catholic.

Is it just with socialism or with Sandinismo that the church cannot dialogue?—critically, of course, as it ought to dialogue with the human situation? Can the church not dialogue with history? It dialogued with the Roman Empire and feudalism and is quite happy to dialogue with the bourgeoisie and capitalism, often uncritically, as subsequent historical evaluation has often been forced to acknowledge. Doesn't it dialogue with the Reagan administration? Is the U.S. empire more worthy of the church's consideration than the painful process with which Nicaragua is seeking to finally be itself, taking risks and even making mistakes, but being itself?

The danger of communism will never justify our omission of dialogue with important forces in history; nor will it justify our complicity with capitalism. Such omission or complicity might eventually provide a dramatic "justification" for rebellion, religious indifference, or even atheism on the part of many people, especially activists and the new generations. The credibility of the church—and of the gospel and of the very God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ—largely depends on our ministry, critical of course, being committed to the cause of the poor and the liberation processes of peoples that have been held in subjection for centuries by one empire and oligarchy after another.

As a Pole, your personal experience should serve you very well for understanding these processes. Your native Poland, so suffering and so strong, brother John Paul, so often invaded and occupied, deprived of its independence and threatened in its faith by its neighbors (Prussia, Nazi Germany, Russia, the Austro-Hungarian empire), is a twin sister of Central America and the Caribbean, which the empire to the north has so often invaded. The United States invaded Nicaragua in 1898 and later came back to occupy it with its marines from 1909 to 1933, leading into a dictatorship that lasted until 1979. Haiti was under occupation from 1915 to 1934. Puerto Rico has been occupied from 1902 until the present. Cuba underwent several invasions and occupations, as did the other countries of the region, especially Panama, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. Most recently Grenada suffered the same fate. The United States exports its sects to these countries, and they divide the people internally and threaten the Catholic faith and the faith of other Protestant churches already established there.

I am aware of your apostolic concerns about our liberation theology, about Christian communities in the popular milieux, about our theologians, our meetings, publications, and the other signs of vitality of the church in Latin America, of other churches in the Third World, and of some sectors of the church in Europe and North America. It would be tantamount to ignoring your mission as universal pastor to hold that you should not be interested in, and even concerned over, all this movement in the church, especially when Latin America represents almost half the members of the Catholic church.

In any case, again I apologize for expressing a heartfelt word about the way the Roman curia is treating our liberation theology and its theologians, certain ecclesiastical institutions (like the Brazilian bishops conference itself, on some occasions), and initiatives by our churches and some suffering communities on this continent and their leaders.

Before God I can testify on behalf of the pastoral agents and communities I contacted in Nicaragua. They have never sought to be a "parallel" church. They do not ignore the hierarchy in its legitimate functions, and they are aware that they are church, and show a sincere desire to remain in it. Why not consider the possibility that the hierarchy can also be the source of some of the reasons for conflicts like this one which has arisen over the nature of pastoral work? We members of the hierarchy often fail to acknowledge that lay people are adult and are co-responsible for the church, or we want to impose our own ideologies or styles, demanding uniformity or entrenching ourselves in centralism.

I have just received the most recent letter from Cardinal Gantin, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops. In that letter, among other admonitions, the cardinal reminds me of the apostolic visit I and the prelature of São Félix do Araguaia received in 1977. I simply want to tell you that what

prompted that visit were accusations or calumnies made by a brother bishop and that the apostolic visitor spent just four days in São Félix, did not visit any community, and only talked with a tiny number of people; he looked at the prelatore's files only after we insisted that he do so. Neither he, nor the nunciature, nor the Holy See has ever shared with me the conclusions of that visit, even after I have expressly asked them to do so.

Finally I want to reassure you, beloved brother in Christ and pope, that I am in communion with you and sincerely want to continue with the church of Jesus, serving the Reign of God. I leave it up to you, using your criterion as Peter in our church, to make the decision you see as most fitting about me, who am also a bishop of the church. I do not want to create unnecessary problems. I want to help advance the evangelizing mission of the church in a responsible and collegial way, especially here in Brazil and Latin America. Because I believe in the perennial relevance of the gospel and the ever liberating presence of the risen Lord, I also want to believe in the youth of the church.

If you think it is a good idea, you may indicate an appropriate date for me to visit you personally.

I trust in your prayer as a brother and as pontiff. I leave the challenge of this moment in the hands of Mary, Mother of Jesus. I reiterate to you my communion as a brother in Jesus Christ, and with you I reaffirm my condition as a servant of the church of Jesus.

With your apostolic blessing,

*Pedro Casaldáliga,*  
*Bishop of São Félix do Araguaia, MT*

(Previously unpublished)



**Question:** *What lights and shadows would you single out in today's church?*

**Casaldáliga:** The prefect of what was formerly the Holy Office, Cardinal Ratzinger, has already pointed out the shadows (too pessimistically, many believe). Perhaps, like Saint Augustine, he feels that a particular world is coming to an end. . . .

For myself, I would single out other shadows in the church, seen perhaps from the angle of a world that is beginning:

—The lack of a real option for the poor and for their liberation process. Generally speaking, we in the church are poor neither in our persons nor in our institutions. We do not live with the poor of the earth, nor do we become incarnate in their daily reality. We offer them sympathy, words, charity. . . . We are afraid of their more important demands!

—Centralism—very often European or Western ethnocentrism— which



prevents pluralism in communion, and which in practice ignores other cultures and the legitimate autonomy of local churches.

—Fear of dialogue with humankind about its deepest and most universal aspirations and problems (such as complete disarmament, the equality of peoples, the radical injustice of the great dependencies and the debt, the problems of women, hunger . . .).

—The pseudo-eternal slowness of our reforms in curias and law codes. As a specialist in eternity, the church often lets time pass by. . . .

That's enough shadows, agreed?

As for the lights of the church, I would point to:

—First of all, Vatican Council II, still there and still proceeding in Spirit and in history.

—The resurgence of churches in the Third World and particularly here in Latin America, with Medellín and Puebla, with Christian base communities, with the ample martyrology that is rebaptizing us as in the early days of the Christian faith, with liberation theology, both battered and cherished, in its various thrusts, including black theology, with its own style, and women's theology.

—The irreversible fact that lay people have both become aware and taken their place within the church, and fully as church.

—The other "mystery" of the church, as people of God, which broad grass-roots sectors are now living with a great deal of clarity and power.

—The numerous focal points of ecumenism, also from the grass roots or in centers for theology, pastoral training, or popular education. The ecumenism of great humanitarian actions for peace, on behalf of exiles or the disappeared, for the outcast, against segregation.

There is no question that in recent years we have been enveloped in a cloud of regression or of turning inward, but the new time has been inaugurated and, having been purified, we are marching ahead.

*How can the First World and Third World churches help each other?*

They will help each other to the extent that they get to know one another in an unbiased way and respect each other as equals in dignity and as different—indeed, complementary—both in their cultures and the periods they are going through.

The First World church should accept in gratitude, as a gift of the Spirit, the creativity of the young Third World churches, which was smothered for many centuries. It should also continue to provide its missionary help, but without colonialism or paternalism, and offer its criticism in a family spirit and without any claim to superiority.

The Third World church can stimulate within the First World church the perhaps dormant forces of the gospel utopia, press it to show support and to practice pluralism, communicate to it a certain youthful freshness vis-à-vis ritualism and authoritarianism, and help it discover that mission is a circular process: We engage in mission, others engage in mission with us,

we engage the world in mission, the world also engages us in mission. . . .

Specifically, the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the evangelization of Latin America is already beginning. Why not celebrate in a critical manner, without any triumphalism, being grateful for the gospel, which is always God's gift, but recognizing the domination, plundering, genocide, and dependence that went along with that evangelization, which was complex, ambiguous, and still not well discerned?

(*L.E.A.* magazine, Madrid, June 1986)

## **Pastoral Approach**

Your *mitre* will be the straw hat of the backlander; sunlight and moonlight; rainy and clear weather; the glance of the poor with whom you walk and the glorious glance of Christ, the Lord.

Your *crozier* will be the gospel truth and the trust of your people in you. Your *ring* will be fidelity to the new covenant of the God who frees and fidelity to the people of this land.

You shall have no other *shield* than the power of hope and freedom of the children of God.

You shall wear no other *gloves* than the service of love.

(Invitation and souvenir, ordination as bishop,  
October 23, 1972)



The local church of the prelature of São Félix, in communion with the church of the Third World,

- for the sake of the gospel,
- and challenged by the local situation,
- opts for the oppressed.

Consequently, it defines its pastoral ministry as a liberating evangelization, in accord with the inspired word: "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me and sent me to announce the good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Isa. 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19).

In an initial analysis, which makes no pretense at being exhaustive, we have singled out the following points as basic elements in the overall problem of the oppression in which the people of this region live:

- superstition, fatalism, and passivity;
- illiteracy and semi-literacy;
- social marginalization;
- large capitalist landholding which perpetuates this condition of oppression.

### **Our Objective:**

The prelature's objective is to unleash and accelerate, among the people of this region, the process of total liberation wherein Christ freed us (see Gal. 5).

*Our Means:*

1. Becoming incarnate in the poverty, struggle, and hope of this people.
2. Providing a liberating education to raise the consciousness of the people and to promote human advancement.
3. Prophetic denunciation.

*Our Commitments:*

1. Fully aware of the conflicts implicit in this fundamental option, we are committed to respecting the stages of liberating growth among the people, as well as the pluralism of charisms and ministries.
2. Respecting the personal options of the different members of the team, we are also committed, as an ecclesial group, to an explicit attempt at living our faith—in the witness of our life and in prayer, especially in the celebration of the eucharist—and to a periodic review, comparing our basic option with the concrete action we have taken to fulfill it.

(IBJ, 86–87)



My first two or three years here were largely a matter of feeling shocked at the different kinds of distance and estrangement that I encountered, and I lived with the pressing need to get to know and to feel reality. Afterwards, starting with that need to experience reality, that desire to experience incarnation, I gradually defined our church's work on four levels that might be formulated as follows. First, the direct pastoral ministry. Second, attention to matters of education, on various levels and aspects—formal, informal, adults, young people, children, the different clubs, meetings, encounters that have to do with education. Third, health: attention to sanitation and hygiene, in various aspects, giving primacy to preventive medicine and health consciousness. And, at the fourth level, land problems: to discover, to teach, to shed light on human rights; to strengthen the struggle of a people for their rights, a backwoods people, an Indian people for whom land is a vital and basic problem. Starting from this struggle there arose the CPT [Pastoral Commission on Land]—at the level of the national bishops conference—which today in Brazil is, for me, the great force of renewal, really from the base, together with the CIMI [Missionary Council for Indigenous People]. The other means of renewal from the base is ministry with workers, and more generally, the base communities. I would like to state specifically, with heavy emphasis, that those four lines or levels of our pastorate are, for the church of São Félix, a single evangelization of a single reality. Starting with faith and with the very experience of this human reality, we seek to raise consciousness and we seek to form community. Consciousness-raising and community formation are the two immediate

objectives of our pastoral work, in the light of faith and with strength of hope, which clarify and unite and then issue in celebration.

(ML, 146-47)



Since childhood my heart has turned toward shepherds\* and their flocks of sheep and lambs—with a few crazy goats and the tiny kid that the army stole from me as it fled in disarray. I have always felt special affection for the gospel of the Good Shepherd. Like the ancient Christians in the catacombs. As Israel felt toward its shepherd, Yahweh.

In Jesus' time Israel saw in the shepherd the biblical splendor of the Lord Yahweh, and yet also something of an impure social and cultural class. And when Jesus called himself a shepherd he certainly did not try to escape either of these two aspects that the image of pastor aroused in his hearers. Being a shepherd in those days, quite a long way from the nomad tribes and flocks that the patriarchs had been assured would be Yahweh's blessing, did not exactly mean belonging to a gentlemanly class or a sacred hierarchy or an undefiled caste. In the Talmud we find harsh references to shepherds. The Father first called together the shepherds of Bethlehem to adore the Word made flesh, not because of the idyllic features that these shepherds later took on in our imagination, but because of the abject condition of their poverty in those days, which also made them open. The shepherds became fully part of the category of "poor of the earth."

We bishops, shepherds of our churches, generally do not bring together in harmony the dialectical contrasts of the Good Shepherd: on the one hand, the parental concern of the shepherd Yahweh for the people, with a heart of mercy for each strayed or tiny sheep, that maternal affection that Isaiah describes so movingly and that overwhelmed Theresa of Lisieux; and, on the other hand, the humble condition of service, gratitude, solitude, and risk that a shepherd should take on daily, night and day. We bishops should always be somewhat "the other," the "unique" one, in the flock, just as God—even taking into account all the infinite distances—is in the midst of the flock as the "Other" and the "Unique." The shepherd always should be working to become, to some extent, pasture, river, salt, and road. Not eating the sheep but handing oneself over to be eaten. In an ongoing eucharist of shepherding.

We have certainly made ourselves "other," but in a rather different way. . . . From shepherds we have gone up to being hierarchs. Our staff has become a golden crozier of power. And perhaps we have changed the free people of God into a flock of sheep taking no initiatives and making no

---

\*Spanish uses the word *pastor* for both "shepherd" and "pastor." —TRANS.

decisions; docile "sheep of Christ," as the scathing anticlerical Spaniards would say.

According to the Good Shepherd, being a good pastor means "giving one's life" for the flock. But you don't give your life in one outpouring on the day of final witness unless you've been giving your life on a daily basis, bit by bit. For it is not a matter of them taking away our life. "No one takes my life from me," said Jesus. It is a matter of giving it, freely.

What would it mean, as a shepherd, "to give one's life for the sheep"?

I think that first of all a good shepherd should try to "give life" to the flock, to do everything possible to enable the flock, the people, to have decent living conditions. Our God is a God of life, one who does not take pleasure in a slaughtered flock, a flock of corpses. Anything that amounts to furthering a people's dignity, health, freedom, participation, identity, or joy—that is shepherding according to the gospel. Why would I "give my life" for my people on a particular occasion on a special day, if I have not been obsessed daily to aid my people to have life, a worthy life, life in abundance, a life of persons, a life of children of God . . . ?

Here in Latin America "giving life" even more dramatically means saving from death—this daily and collective death, as we say, which apocalyptically is decimating El Salvador and Guatemala and all the countries on our continent to a greater or less extent, differently in different regions, but really everywhere. Saint Romero of the Americas understood this and practiced it very well, good shepherd that he was, Latin American model of shepherds, still not understood by many of his brethren, but already canonized by the people.

"Giving life" also means giving one's own life: giving one's own time; personal tranquility; our accustomed sort of privacy, which is somewhere between that of a spinster and a monk; comfort; one's good name. It means giving up the warm hospitality—with good meals and drinks—that the families on top know how to show, very disinterestedly, to ecclesiastics who continue to make the grade; it means giving up the privileges that the political, military, and economic power holders are always ready to grant to a shepherd who keeps quiet or goes along with them.

The Good Shepherd became "shepherd and lamb." We—bishops, priests, community leaders—must become every day more vitally flock with the flock, people with the people.

I have the sensation that many bishops imagine that they are not people of God. They are above that people. They are like the shepherd of actual sheep who sits high up on the cliff and plays a bucolic or haughty flute. May God forgive me for thinking evil. . . .

Of course it is not easy to be people. To opt preferentially—how adverbs can serve for well or ill!—for the people, for the poor, that is something that often takes place. To try to live with the people and even like the people—in poverty, dialogue, and danger—to take sides socially and polit-

ically with the people, going all the way . . . that is another kind of shepherding, a gospel measure, the rare measure of a good shepherd.

If some day the "hour" to give one's life for the sheep arrives, that will be simply the last and logical service rendered by a good shepherd, one who habitually serves his flock. There are Christians who, like Francis of Assisi, require no marginal notes on the gospel; for them there is something connatural about martyrdom. There are those who give their lives every day; they are the same ones who one day simply and generously give their lives. That is how Valencia, Angelelli,\* and Romero—to mention our own nearby shepherds—thus gave their lives for the gospel and for the people.

(EDP, 124)

~

I should like to pick up an old expression and give life to it: we have always said that the voice of the people is the voice of God, right? We have always understood—rightly or wrongly—also that the prophet was speaking in the name of God, at a given moment, at a given hour, in a specific set of circumstances. And that the prophet was also talking *to* God in the name of the people, was shouting to God in the name of the people. In this sense it seems to me that the people is being the prophet of itself and the prophet of its own pastors. I have already told you that the closeness of pastors—bishops, priests, religious—to the people, and the fact that the people have taken part in our programs, in our evaluations, and in the reformulation of our pastoral plans, have forced us to be aware of the reality of the people. For me the first act of teaching and of prophecy has been just that: the tragic reality of the people, their poverty, their state of captivity; this has shaken the church and it will shake it even more. It is a marvelous prophecy that pressures us toward incarnation. It has also been a prophecy inasmuch as it is helping us a great deal to overcome the distinction that I was making between the ecclesiastical and the ecclesial. Where does the bishop end and where do the people begin? And the priests and the people? And the priests and the community? And the bishop and the community? In this also the people constitute a form of prophecy. And they are also a prophet through their own oral or written expressions, through their songs; marvelous songs are being created in the country, popular liturgies; through them the Spirit is revealed, so that we can overcome our self-sufficiency as pastors, bishops, and priests, too accustomed to distinguishing between the liturgical and the extraliturgical, as if the people were nothing, trifles, but as soon as we reach the throne—aha!—the Spirit begins to arrive. No. In

---

\*In 1971 Colombian Bishop Gerardo Valencia Cano died in a plane crash that some believe was the result of sabotage by those who resented his defense of the poor. The murder of Argentine Bishop Enrique Angelelli in 1976 by official forces was disguised as a highway accident. —TRANS.

this the people are a prophecy, showing us through the Spirit their strength and their presence, like Peter learning from the Gentiles. It is curious to see how the songs and the texts that the people create are pulling away from imitative and imported models.

In these texts and songs the identity of the people comes forth and is expressed. These works take up the main problems in the people's lives—problems of land, food, wages. The concerns of wives and children are expressed. Everyday life comes out in a much more normal way, and it shakes our faith and our lives, and prevents us from artificially living the liturgy, for example, and the pastoral ministry. Pamphlets and bulletins are being published. The "church of the mimeograph" is very strong in Brazil. There are bulletins, like our humble and popular *Alvorada*, or *A Folha* of Nova Iguaçu, that have evoked persecution and that have even been utilized, replaced, or reproduced in counterfeit. There is in preparation, at the national level, a congress to study the phenomenon and the contents and significance of these pamphlets and bulletins. Small manuals, which are an expression of the people, have been published, as well as popular plays that put together and enrich the liturgy of the word. Of course, there are still people who shudder at all that and who get scared. But I believe that this is an avalanche, a sea, of people and of Spirit, and no one can stop it.

Finally, I think the people are becoming a prophet for us, the bishops and clergy, because they force us to distinguish clearly between the Reign of God and the power of the world and the devil. The people are being oppressed and suppressed by that power, and if we—the pastors, bishops, priests, and religious—want to be more authentic and become incarnate in the people, then we are obliged to feel that power too and to feel ourselves distant from it, and to prophesy as well. The prophetic spirit of the people stirs up in us too the prophetic spirit.

(ML, 137-39)



I would not agree that there is a danger of mythologizing the people. For me never; never, for all the centuries through which history runs, shall we give, either as church or as society, the value that we must give to the people. The people are the people, and that's that. They are the majority. And either we are at their service or we deny ourselves as church, as society, as intelligence, and so forth.

Now, the "utilization" of the people I certainly see as possible. It can occur. It does occur. And it will occur as it has occurred, on the basis of one ideology or another. We can say that centuries will go by before we can compensate for the way the people have been used against the people themselves and in favor of the powers of capital and oligarchies. No one need fear that this compensation will soon be paid.



It seems to me that to the extent that you live with the people and are in the people, you feel obliged—through the power of prophecy—to do a re-evaluation of the people themselves. With that it is no longer so easy to fall into utilization. Theoretically, it is. Practically, it seems to me that it will be less and less so.

(ML, 140)



## GOSPEL POVERTY

Having nothing.  
Carrying nothing.  
Able to do nothing.  
Asking nothing.  
And, by the way,  
killing nothing,  
silencing nothing.

Just the gospel, like a sharp knife.  
And grief and laughter on your face.  
And the hand held out and firmly gripped.  
And life, on horseback, as it comes.

And this sun and these rivers and this purchased land,  
to be witnesses of the revolution already unleashed.

And that's all!

(CEL, 53)



At the University of Goiânia I gave a talk on "Prophecy in the Church" to a group of priests and sisters who are taking a course for further training:

—It is the church's mission to be prophecy. Prophecy should possess it completely, because the whole of the church is a people of prophets. Prophecy must run through all its ministries.

—Prophets are those who have the clarity needed to see and to hear God; to see and hear human beings. To interpret them: both human beings and God.

—Prophets are dissatisfied with the existing situation of sin and injustice. They are uncertain and experience fear, since they know how much they are risking. They are radicals because they see what is "new" in God and proclaim the newness of God's Reign.

—Their word—like the biblical *dabar*—is not just a spoken word; it is

stance, gesture, practice. A word not kept is not God's word.

— Possessed by the Spirit of God, their whole being becomes living word. The prophets' first great word is their witness, the entire word of their lives.

— Jesus is "the" prophecy of God: God's last Word.

— A world ever new (in evil, in good, in what it hears, its needs, in its expectations) always requires a new way of speaking, new signs, new gestures. Only those who make themselves understood are prophets.

— As the people of prophets that it is, the church must speak in a community fashion or it will not succeed in evangelizing the world.

— Since the church has no patent on God or on human history, it must recognize and accept the prophecy that is being spoken elsewhere. Even for its own sake. There is a world prophesying, out of its own causes, its own struggles, out of its deeds of solidarity and social transformation.

— Prophecy is always God's future—God's Reign—in current human history.

— Marcelo, a biblical scholar and friend, summed up the book of Revelation like this: "Victory after victory, the powerful head toward defeat. From defeat to defeat, the little ones head toward victory." In him who was killed and is the victorious one.

(ERF, 213-14)



The habit of saying "amen" (in lower case—there is an upper-case "Amen," the Lord Jesus himself) has habituated many Christians irresponsibly to not accept *co-responsibility for the church as a daily right and duty* on all levels of the church and despite the inconveniences it would bring. For if all of us are church, we should be so vitally. For we also make this church that makes us. For the church is both our mother and our daughter.

On the other hand, the pretension and power of the hierarchy (too "worldly," not very brotherly and sisterly), Roman or Western centralism (not very "catholic" and not at all favorable to ecumenism either inside or outside the house, though both "inside" and "outside" are encompassed by the larger House that is God's Reign), and hyperorthodoxy in witch hunts or constant restrictions (with little sensitivity to community in pluralism, and in practice unaware of the situation of other environments and the demands they make on Christians) have created within many Catholics a complex of ecclesiastical fear, infantile subjection, and sterilizing uniformity. When we don't breathe freely in the church, it is because the breeze of the Spirit is in short supply on all sides and highfalutin airs are too common. . . .

This custom and complex do little to evangelize the good news of Jesus Christ, who is life and liberation, and hardly serve the credibility with which the church should present itself to the world as a new community of equal

brothers and sisters, beyond any kind of servitude, a hope giving announcement of the Reign of God.

(From the foreword to *La tunica lacerata*,  
by Giulio Girardi)



**Question: *What is the "popular church" about?***

Casaldáliga: First I feel I must regret once more that we have lost the freedom and even the joy of using this expression. Several times I have chided our theologians, who out of a docility that is understandable, given the persecutions our good Latin American theologians are suffering in Latin America, are forced to give up a very meaningful and legitimate expression.

If we say "hierarchical church," we have all the more reason to say "popular church" and that is so for two reasons. The church "has" a hierarchy, but it "is" people, people of God. The hierarchy is a minority in the church. It is a service to the church, and through the church a service to the world, while the people, this people of God, makes up the vast majority of the whole church.

Moreover, to speak of the popular church would mean, does mean, a "church at the grass roots," where the poor are. A church where Jesus put it. A church within a people that is discovering itself, recovering its identity, taking on its process.

For us in Latin America speaking of people means speaking about the people in a historical process, and indeed in a historic process of liberation. In Brazil, for example, at meetings on pastoral activity, theology or work among the people, we usually distinguish between "mass" and "people." Mass, people, community, leadership. . . .

In biblical terms, the people of God, "the people that was not a people and is now a people. . . ." "They will be my people, and I will be their God."

The expression is so beautiful that I would like to see it recovered unashamedly, without giving in to misunderstandings that may arise from plenty of goodwill, but certainly do not arise from sharp theological insight or from a committed pastoral vision, and may be unintentionally serving those who do not want the people to be people, who do not want the church to be people, who do not want the people to be church. . . .

***So are "popular church" and "church of the poor" similar expressions?***

The popular church means the church of the conscious poor, who are becoming organized into a process, into being a leaven of liberation. . . .

***Leonardo Boff says the popular church is not opposed to the hierarchical church but to the bourgeois church.***

Of course. And it is also opposed to the clerical church, in the pejorative sense of the word (a clericalized church). The popular church is ultimately the church, people of God, that really opts for the poor, that situates itself where they are, that takes sides with them, that takes on their cause and their processes. It is also a church that tugs on the hierarchy and clergy, tugs on theology, tugs on the liturgy, even tugs on canon law, and brings them down, in a historical and pastoral *kenosis*, to the place where Jesus put himself, that is, the people.

*“Bourgeois church”—would that be a contradiction?*

Obviously, obviously.

*Can't there be a bourgeois church?*

I ask, what should be the real gospel-spirited canon law of the church? And I answer: the new commandment, the Beatitudes. In a bourgeois church, a church of privilege, where the majorities are exploited, where the majorities are pushed out, is there room for the Beatitudes? A bourgeois church would no longer be the church of Jesus.

*Does that mean that baptism, conversion, would demand that people change class?*

I ask: doesn't baptism mean plunging into the Passover, into death, into resurrection? This plunging into the death of Jesus obviously must be the death of selfishness, the death of privilege that accumulates and excludes. And in this sense the death of a bourgeois life. A bourgeois life is a life that is sinful, structurally sinful.

*If all this is true, conversion would demand taking sides with the poor. Would it also demand being involved in a party?*

Certainly parties must be relativized. But of course if the political dimension, political charity, and political holiness flow naturally from living consciously as Christians, embodied in history, this political dimension will normally demand, as things are today in the political life of peoples, being involved in party politics.

Today the party is more and more being relativized broadly throughout the left. Too often in the past the party was something absolute. I often say: Don't make the party the cause—the cause is the people, and the party is just an instrument. But it remains a normal mediation in the life of most nations.

*What would you reply to the objection that the church is for everyone, that it is above political options?*

I would answer that Christ also came for everyone and opted for the poor. And he condemned the rich. And he rejected privilege. And he was

sentenced, tortured, executed, and put on the cross by power holders representing large landholders, law, and empire.

The gospel cannot be regarded as for everyone alike. The worst thing you could say about the gospel would be to call it neutral. I often say the gospel is for everyone, on the side of the poor and against the rich.

Here's what I mean. "On the side of the poor," in whatever they have of gospel poverty, and against the fact that they must live as outcasts and perhaps in despair. And "against the rich": against their ability to live in a privilege that despoils the vast majority of their brothers and sisters, against their ability to exploit these brothers and sisters, against the insensitivity in which they live, against the idolatry in which they are sunk.

In our tiny catechism in São Félix we have emphasized this, where at the end, when talking about Christian morality, the basic law, we put the woes Jesus spoke alongside the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes.

The rich are normally excluded from the Reign of heaven. They can only enter if they cease being rich. . . .

(From the foreword to *Nicaragua y los teólogos*,  
ed. by José María Vigil)



**Question:** *How do you feel about the relationship between the church and media?*

**Casaldáliga:** The mission of the church is to "communicate" the good news of Salvation in Christ Jesus. Obviously such communication is not simply announcing—since it also includes the celebration and practice of this good news—but it still must entail announcing. "From the rooftops," "in season and out of season." And, "Woe is me if I do not announce!" A proclamation to everyone, to the vast majority, to the human "masses." To be closed up within the walls of the church would turn the gospel into a ghetto.

Moreover, today the media shape most people's "consciousness" and even their "truth." A consciousness and truth usually distorted and even perverted by consumerism, profit, hedonism, arrogance, and ethnocentrism. The church has the duty of proclaiming to this vast majority, and whenever possible through these very mass media, the full truth, and it has the duty to help shape a critical and free consciousness.

**Why has the Brazilian bishops conference chosen communication as one of its priorities for the next four years?**

In the recent national assemblies of the bishops conference you can see that many bishops are concerned about the media. In some cases this concern seems to be simply "moralistic." I get the impression that most of the bishops who are concerned about the media do not see them as a major instrument for truth or lying, for liberation or dependence. In the hierarchy,

however, we are coming to the conclusion that leaving the media aside or using them only haphazardly in our activity today is tantamount to betraying our evangelizing mission.

The media are becoming an inescapable tool in certain aspects of our work in the church—the Brotherhood Campaign [annual event sponsored by the bishops], promoting the people's awareness of the effects of the invasion by alienating TV programs made by the powerful, and some more in-house things, such as Verbo Films, and getting the word out about new approaches to pastoral work, promoting the demands of lay people and communities, the experience of doing newsletters, diocesan radio stations, pastoral records and videos, and so forth.

Of course what we do is not always of high quality or up-to-date.

*How important are film and video for evangelization?*

We're tired of hearing, and we can attest ourselves, that ours is a "civilization of the image." Film and video are "permanent" image. Video is film at home, in community centers, in clubs. Film remains a grand and evocative spectacle. A good film leaves its mark. It even seems that a good book has to be brought to the screen. . . .

It seems that there will no longer be room (in community centers, in diocesan or union meetings, or for political work among the people, in pastoral or educational meetings or courses) for the mere word, or even simply a chart: the "living" image is becoming mandatory.

Catechetics demands image. So does celebration.

That does not mean that the word is being downgraded. The word will continue to be the best "interpreter" of the image. The word says what the eyes do not grasp.

(*Verbo Films* newsletter, 1988)



*Let us be communication,*  
for that is why we have been born  
from the very mouth of God.

Let us be communication,  
for his Word  
is communicated in our own flesh.

Let us be communication,  
for we have been marked  
by the very witness of God's Spirit.

Let us communicate with each other, friends, communicate.  
Let us speak truth against every lie.

Let us shout hope against all sadness.  
Let us embody the supreme message of love against all selfishness.

Let us learn to tame the shouting  
of our own restless heart.  
Let us learn to master the media,  
for the children of the master cannot be slaves.

Let us hear everything,  
hear every side,  
hear every step.

We can't let ourselves be left out, deaf or dumb,  
neither out of fear,  
nor for profit,  
nor by order of those on top.

Let us join our voices in a single cry for justice  
above the sea of the various worlds,  
above the mountains of all structures.

Let the people speak on the radio,  
let the people speak in the press,  
let the people speak on TV.  
Let the people tell the truth.  
Let the truth speak to the people.  
The truth.

From up on the rooftops  
in the heart of the world.

In the midst of the noise that is bewildering humans,  
let us force open the space of human freedom  
for the news of the Kingdom.

Let us shout the gospel.  
May we know how to be a word transmitting the Word,  
words of the Word, which is ever becoming incarnate,  
near Nazareth,  
on the outskirts of Bethlehem,  
on the lake shore by the hungry crowd,  
in the streets of the city with the din of  
market, festival, and the empire's trumpets,  
before the Sanhedrin and the pretorium,  
on the cross that they set on the shoulders

of the Suffering Servant,  
in the silenced life of the tomb,  
on the triumphant Sunday morning.

If some day we can no longer speak with words,  
let us speak with a witnessing life.  
Let us speak with our eyes to our bewildered kin.  
Let us pray especially to the Father's ears.  
And perhaps let us protest  
with the greater word  
of blood, proclaimed to be herald of Passover.

(EDP, 157-59)



## ***The Missions, Today***

During our childhood—a churchy childhood—the missions were in far off countries. As far away from us and from the church as perhaps from the God of whom we were exclusive owners.

To go to the missions meant taking this God to those peoples, seemingly abandoned by God. We were the New Israel; they were the new Gentiles.

Today we feel—or should feel, with a more humble faith and in the light of a more critical theology—that there is no people far off from God. For God is within every people as within every human heart.

And yet mission remains a fundamental duty of the church. The church is “essentially missionary.” In order to be faithful to its identity, today as yesterday and still tomorrow, it must “go” and “be in mission” to “all nations.”

The church is, by definition, the one “called out” from all peoples and “sent to all peoples.”

As the Father sends the Son, who is the One Sent, so Jesus sends his church, which is the one sent. The Testament of the risen one is “Go forth, engage in mission. . . .”

Go—from where? Carry out mission—from what starting point?

One theology, now largely overcome, thank God, regarded the church as a vast and more or less perfectly established people. Did it not regard it as Western, Latin, and even Roman, in a privileged and closed way?

Rather than seeing the church as established and particularized in a single culture or continent, today we regard it as in a state of mission; journeying and manifold; changing in its expression, “catholic” like the very Spirit of Pentecost speaking all tongues.

No continent has a corner on the church of Jesus. The cradle of Christendom may be the Mediterranean, but the cradle of Christianity is Jesus Christ’s own heart.

No culture has more natural affinity with the church than any other. No cultures are either Christian or anti-Christian by nature. The Spirit of truth and of life, who is the soul of the church, adopts and adapts all cultures and all persons to the gift and the demands of the Reign of God.

The church’s mission is thus to act in a mediating fashion, putting these cultures and these souls in contact with the Spirit of Jesus, which is poured out through the gospel. Or better: instead of speaking of cultures and souls, we should speak of *these peoples* (with their culture, their structures, and

their present period in history) and *these persons* (who live their sufferings and their hopes historically and politically).

To engage in mission only with cultures—as an unacceptable pre-draft for Puebla sought to put it—would be at the very least an illusion, and it would serve the dominant empires.

Engaging in mission cannot be—as it has been all too often—a matter of bringing in and implanting an alien and colonizing culture, but must mean bringing a message. Or drawing that message out of the culture and history of the “mission country,” helping each people and each person to open up to the Spirit and the Reign. And if possible to open up into church—into the community of Christian faith called together.

Hence, every mission should become dialogue and communion. Missioners engage in mission to the extent they are also missionized. As Bishop Angelelli, the apostolic martyr of La Rioja, used to say: they should have one ear on the gospel and the other on the people to whom they are sent.

And this spirit of dialogue must be an essential attitude, not an opportunistic pose. Unfortunately the church, to take one example, begins to become African only after Africa succeeds in declaring itself Africa. And very seldom has the church in Africa, the Americas, or Asia, in its structures, known how to be “indigenous” in living communion with the natives and against the interests of the invaders and what they have imposed.

Hence, today less than ever can missioners be improvising with a paternalistic superiority. They must learn to be missioners, and ultimately that can be learned only in the mission land and under the roof of the people who receive them. As in baptism, in mission you have to be born again. Of course missioners could and should prepare themselves first; the ecclesiastical training of missioners should be a lot more mission oriented. But missioners will only become such by engaging in mission and being missionized. They become missioners by being engaged between the gospel and the people, and often in the Christian dialectical tension that consists of being on the cross.

You are no good for “mission countries” if you’re no good for your own country. Nor should people go to the missions to resolve the crises they cannot resolve at home. Mission is in itself a great “crisis” that shakes one’s whole existence and commits it.

Engaging in mission is much more than bringing, teaching, doing.

It is not enough to bring the catechism or theology in translation or to build churches, schools, and hospitals, or even to administer baptism and celebrate the eucharist. Some mediations are humanly indispensable, besides the great mediation, and they make baptism a complete baptism, one that encompasses the neophyte’s soul and body, personal life and social life, and they make the eucharist a table set in a particular place and a local and complex communion of each people in the Passover of the Lord. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* talks about “the specific people.”

Such mediations take a scientific or scholarly form in anthropology and

ethnology, as well as sociology and political science. And they take a humanistic form in cultural sensitivity and patience with history.

This will never mean reducing the gospel, which is irreducible. But it will prevent missionaries from feeling reduced by their own culture or by the peculiar nature of their church of origin. It will also prevent missionaries from feeling like foreigners in any land, even as they feel as though they are "in a strange land" anywhere they go.

With regard to the identity of the evangelizing mission and to the search for what is specifically Christian in the message, this question has been raised repeatedly: Is it the Reign of God, the Christ, or the church that must be announced?

The Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino, who is thoroughly involved in Central America and was very close to the martyred Archbishop Romero, answers that "the central issue is whether it is a matter of just announcing Christ or doing what Jesus did, and thus proclaiming him as the Christ."

Doing what Jesus did.

Ultimately mission-praxis will be the only valid kind of Christian mission. Not what we say but what we are. What our lives say about the Word of life. Whatever good news can be seen in the life of missionaries and in the church they represent. Whatever a mission has of the gospel being communicated. That will herald the proclamation of Jesus, which is God's Reign. That will proclaim Jesus himself who is Sovereign and Reign in person.

We should bear "neither gold nor silver," neither mathematics nor English, neither technology nor antibiotics, nor Western Christian culture. (At the right time and in the appropriate measure we can handle all that too, as long as it be in the manner of the poor and without any kind of colonialism so that the means of God's Reign may be poor and free.) What we must bear, as a gratuitous and liberating gift, is what we will be able to give in a gospel spirit: to help "in the name of the Lord Jesus" a village, a tribe, a people, to "stand up and walk" on their own cultural legs, walking determinedly their own road, although in the direction of the Reign of God.

This missionary attitude that I have called essential obviously assumes a radical gospel poverty. Only the poor can engage in mission, without colonizing interference, without outside dependency, without cultural or ecclesiastical ethnocentrism. Only they can be sent, and the greater their abnegation, the more trustworthy they are. Completely at the disposal of the One who sends them and of the people to whom they are sent.

Mission is a service, in dialogue and poverty.

(EDP, 118-22)



The church will be the announcement of God's Reign only insofar as it is the *condemnation of the anti-Reign*. And it will be able to be a witness to

forgiveness and grace only insofar as it is itself penitent and gratuitous. "Announcing the good news always takes place in the context of the bad news of the invasion and robbery of Indian lands, the extinction of their cultures, of paternalistic and oppressive practices. Announcing the good news cannot be separated from denouncing genocide and ethnocide. But prior to announcing and denouncing there must be renouncing and conversion on the part of the whole missionary church."

Too often evangelizing has been equivalent to civilizing, Westernizing, integrating.

The "sin" of some of the great missionaries of the Americas, Asia, and Africa, whom the church shunted aside as suspect, was simply that they showed a greater evangelizing sensitivity. They refused to transmit culture while evangelizing. They became incarnate in a self-abnegating manner as did the Jesus of the letter to the Philippians. They did not help make martyrs of the peoples to whom they were sent.

For the gospel can never be the replacing of one culture with another, but must be the power transforming any culture, the soul of a people, a dynamic collective reality, capable of gratuitous eschatological sublimation.

In studying history, missiologists should re-examine the excessively ethnocentric studies that have been made of how peoples called "pagans" reacted to the foreigners who were invading their lands and their souls, their language and their myths. Missiologists should work to uncover the real reasons those martyred peoples reacted as they did. In the name of the "true" God, a God assumed to be false was killed and is killed, and at the same time the souls and also the bodies of the worshipers were murdered and whole cultures and peoples were wiped out. We not only bear the glory of martyrdom—we are guilty of it!

(EDP, 221-22)



## **A LETTER TO FELLOW CLARETIANS**

*To my fellow Claretians, gathered at the Missionary Conference for Central America and the Caribbean:*

The peace of God, Father of all persons and of all peoples, and the power of God's Spirit in Jesus of Nazareth, in Christ the Lord, be with you.

With a brother's simplicity and freedom, I want to join you in your meeting through this letter and through the prayer with which we will be accompanying you these days from our own Mato Grosso, which is now flooded due to rain.

The moment in which you are meeting is truly grave and, for us, prophetic. All Central America has become a crossroads where challenges for society and church come together. Because of our charism of being at the

edge—"most fittingly, urgently, and effectively"—we Claretians should respond to these challenges without hesitation or excuses, with the same wholehearted impetus that our founder, Antonio María Claret, once put into his own church in Cuba.

Any fear, evasion, or what is miscalled prudence (sometimes so typically ecclesiastical) would hobble missionary efforts. To keep up the routine of ministries in a parish, or school, or Easter duty, or administering sacraments would mean ignoring the desperate situation of death, of exile, of the slaughter of ethnic groups, or of marginalization that the peoples of these Americas are undergoing.

We must pause, make a critical assessment in the light of faith and of political science, hear "the cries of the people," and intuit with a spirit of prophecy.

The greatest sin the church—and we as a missionary congregation of the church of Jesus—can commit, and we are already committing it, at this tragic moment in Central America, is the sin of omission. We are in league with injustice. We do not share the cross of the poor. We have still not put a drop of Claretian blood into the torrent of martyrdom irrigating Central America today. We are very far removed, it seems. We are afraid to be contaminated. Jesus had no such fear. As a pastor Claret was used to being defamed.

You will understand me. I am not ignoring or underestimating the long-standing work of the Claretians in those countries. I am talking about the present circumstances which, as I see it, we have not shouldered.

I know that people don't come to a corporate commitment just through discussion. Let us pray. Let us allow the Spirit of Jesus to challenge us. Let us take in the cry, the weeping, the martyrdom of so many Indians, peasants, pastoral agents (lay people, religious, priests, and bishops). Let us measure up to living with prisoners, orphans, refugees, the hungry, the outcast.

Let us step out of our comfortable residences and our neat schedules. Let us be "impelled by the charity of Christ." . . .

I won't go on.

Forgive me.

I wanted to write another kind of letter. This just came out of me. Take it with the same brotherly freedom with which I write it to you.

Let us come closer to the word, the practice, and the cross of Jesus. (And to his victory over sin, over slavery, over death.) Let us live in the manner of the poor, without privilege. Let us go where others cannot or do not want to go. Let us learn to break with the protection or the favor—so often sacrilegious because it is dehumanizing—of the powerful of this world. Let us come close to the poor of the earth.

May we be capable of taking advantage of the mediations of scholarship and history so we won't serve the purposes of profit, injustice, or consumerism. We may disagree among ourselves. We will have to respect a healthy pluralism. But we must come together on the basic demands of the gospel:

poverty, renunciation, the freedom of the children of God, sharing with those who do not have, hope against all hope. . . .

If we are foreigners, let us become "indigenous." Let us recognize (in words and deeds and in pastoral work, by supporting the proper native organizations) the otherness and the ethical and cultural identity of each people. Let us colonize no more—not even pastorally. Each people has its soul and God defends that soul and cultivates it as a different spark of God's own glory. Let us live Latin America as a destiny, as a salvation history set in a particular place, as a grace that complements us.

Let us not be afraid of freedom. Let us not be afraid of truly popular revolutions. Let us not be afraid of the history now under way; for it is being drawn by the Spirit of him who makes all things new.

Not improvising, of course. Not giving in to euphoria or anarchy. Planning things. In a community fashion within an overall joint pastoral activity. But moving forward. Pressing ahead. That is why we are missionaries. And the edge is where we should be. Humbly faithful to our vocation.

May the mother of Jesus—she who was a poor woman of Nazareth, who sang the Magnificat of liberation and suffered behind her son, whom the powers of the empire and the synagogue calumniated, persecuted, and called subversive and then executed on the cross, she who is now glorious with him who has conquered death—gradually shape our heart in tune with her most faithful and free heart.

I embrace you all, my brothers, with a great deal of affection. And I ask you to pray for our tiny church of São Félix do Araguaia. Although we are far apart, let us always be united in the prayer of faith and in the urgings of our common hope.

Your brother and companion in Jesus, the Christ who saves and frees us.

*Pedro Casaldàliga*  
*Bishop of São Félix do Araguaia*

(Previously unpublished)



## **EVEN TODAY I BREATHE IN CATALAN\***

This book grew out of a poem that originally had only one verse. And that verse sprang from the growing awareness and feeling that "the further we go away the more we come back."

Nostalgia for country and home, of course. Nostalgia of an old man, or

---

\*When Casaldàliga's book in Catalan, *Encara avui respiro en Català*, appeared, he wrote the following for a Catalan magazine.—TRANS.

of "high tide," as they now say with a euphemism that is quite pedagogical and Christian if it does not evade old age accepted as the decline of life and the unmistakable eve of death.

(For some time I've been convinced—no doubt because I'm getting old, but also because I have seen many older people remaking themselves with the approach of the kindly God—that old age is the most effective of the sacraments for most men and women who take the usual route through this world.)

### **Nostalgia and Catalan Nostalgia**

I'm more Catalan at sixty—which I'm about to be if I make it to Candlemass Day [February 2]—than I was at twenty-five or forty. I say that in the book and I will try to explain it quickly.

The Third World, in which it has been my lot to live, and the oppressions with which the First World holds it in subjection; indigenous peoples and cultures, which have been blocked for centuries but there they are, unique; our holy mother church's Western and Roman ethnocentrism and its unceasing obsession for control, which I feel more as my own sin since I am also a member of the hierarchy; the fact that I have rejected monogamous and indissoluble marriage to a single language and have to speak and write in Catalan, Spanish, and Portuguese—three loves, none with full abandon. All this leads to nostalgia and to me feeling more Catalan than I did years ago.

### **The Heart of a Payés**

I have re-encountered the root *payesa*—which grows in the fields of Catalonia—in these lands which are so dramatically peasant lands, where being a farmer can easily mean being a martyr, but where every day I can still live alongside uncaged songbirds and where clucking hens crap in the bishop's palace and where cows gaze at me with their kindly eyes from behind barbed wire fences, or around the *masies* [houses] of the *posseiros* [squatters].

I smell like cows' milk  
and have the heart of a *payés*.

### **And Mission**

For I am missionary and bishop. For better or worse—God knows—devoted to serving the whole church, sent to the whole world. From this corner of the Mato Grosso and the Araguaia, after coming here from the corner of Balsareny and the Llobregat.

With the passion—a Christian passion, I think—that I got from my home,

from the Fejoicistes (Young Christian Federation of Catalonia), from my martyr uncle, Father Luís, and the priests of the parish, and now from the activists and martyrs I'm associated with right now in Brazil or in Central America, in the midst of this whole quest of gospel and liberation that we bear in our hands and our dreams, hoping against all hope.

I would like to believe that I also breathe the Spirit.

Speaking about the challenges of this evangelizing mission, I write in the Preface: "I have sometimes thought of venturing to write an essay that in a dialectical and complementary way would try to deal with identity, homeland, culture, mission, and native church. But it may be that my running around as a bishop and my own disposition may prevent me from doing it calmly."

Still I've done it in bits and pieces, stirred by the breeze of God and of my own heart, with a poem, through a letter, with a prayer to the Dark Virgin,\* with a message to the people of Catalonia. This book has a little of everything. Texts in prose and in verse. Inevitably conditioned—as the generous writer of the foreword fittingly points out—by the surrounding context. "I am myself and my context," our words have to say.

This rather jumbled book has the provocative intention of bringing out the suffering I have had to experience up close and the yearning to overturn the world felt by millions of brothers and sisters on this continent of death and hope, which has made me its own, and which I have made my own, and which for me is a second and ultimate Great Homeland.

"The further we go . . .," I said. I've come a long way, no doubt. I am far away. I am something else, while yet retaining my own unsunderable identity. And thus I would like my own, those of my own house, the Catalans of Catalonia, and even more so if they are Christians and want to be "catholic," to live "turned toward the peoples of the earth," "listening to all languages," "making every people their own people," open and free like the gospel.

(*Foc Nou* magazine, Barcelona, October 1987)

---

\*The *Moreneta*, or Dark Virgin, is a black statue in the monastery at Montserrat, and is the patroness of Catalonia.



## ***A Renewed Religious Life***

If we still believe it is valid and has a future, religious life should be:

—vis-à-vis the world, an ecclesial expression of the power for challenge and change that comes from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and

—vis-à-vis the church, a needed ongoing critique of the integrating function of Christianity, which so easily turns into religion, social and cultural integration, civilization, and so forth, at the cost of its primary mission.

Both yesterday and today, a “holy deviation.” A subversive option . . .

We know that historically in order to respond to the aspirations and needs of the world at particular moments, religious life has embodied itself in those symbols, “scandalous” at the time, that could express it in a gospel manner: *the desert, the mendicant life, unconditional obedience to the pope.* (The desert in order to flee the embrace of the empire. The mendicant life in order to challenge the security and vanity of feudalism and the Renaissance. Unconditional obedience to the pope in order to make up for the rebellion of the Protestant reformation.)

This always happened in a radical and revolutionary way, at least at the great founding moments.

*The new sign, the only symbol really understandable today, the incarnational gospel context for a credible religious life today, is THE PEOPLE.* (“The true measure for any priest is the people,” said a French specialist in pastoral work some time ago.)

*This means the people as a social class.* It involves knowing, experiencing, and assimilating the people politically—as they are expressed socially, publicly, historically, politically. It means becoming involved so concretely that it amounts to a true class shift. Losing one’s previous social identity. Taking on the cause of the people, but not just to help them. Going from being for the people or even with the people to being like the people.

Getting beyond legalistic moralizing. Getting beyond neutrality, which doesn’t really exist. Putting aside rationalizing fear or Pharisaic fastidiousness and/or sterile Pharisaism, plunging into the great wave of unavoidable politics, which is the only platform for incarnation that leads us into history.

Religious life will never be simply ideology or politics. Like the gospel itself, which surpasses all ideologies, the church—and with it religious life—will never leave any politics, or any ideology in peace (for the sake of that peace that the world cannot give).

Being of the world, not being world—that is the cross. Separation or participation? Neither a splurge of participation, nor a facile separation, but rather a dialectical approach.

Incarnation, in any case. In a way of life that is an “outward manifestation in society proving that a radical option has been made. There should be a visible continuity between both.”

And service. Service to concrete human beings in concrete situations.

Poverty-*diakonia*.

Utter availability. Is not such availability what is specific, or rather proper, to religious life?

Certainly this new vision of religious life is very demanding. It is a whole revolution. For centuries we religious have been bourgeois and at the service of the bourgeoisie, even though with alms, with crumbs from the banquet of society, we have served the poor who have come to us, or out of charity we have sought them out on the fringes of society.

It is a political option. “Our activities are tied to capitalist development.” A risky option, indeed, especially in Latin America. An option that might lead to martyrdom. You don’t have to be a prophet to say that; you only have to open the paper or turn on the radio.

An option that is unavoidably historical and untransferable. “The real and effective conversion of the church to the people will perhaps turn out to be the most significant event of the close of our century.” And since we religious are in some way a vanguard in the church, we must make this option right away, by being converted to the people. Without it ceasing to be the time for words—we would say, as a variation on Medellín—without it ceasing to be the time for taking traditional vows (lived, however, in another way), the hour has tolled for us religious in Latin America, the time for action, the time for a radical option. . . .

Not just for the sake of ideology or for strategy, but for the cause of the gospel of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Religious life as radical option. When this option takes place, the traditional vows will also be assumed in a radical way.

Vis-à-vis wealth, *liberating poverty*. No longer just a poverty “in spirit,” but a class poverty in the Spirit. In order to liberate the poor from their misery and despair, accompanying them in their struggles and hopes. To liberate the rich from their wealth and haughtiness, helping to “tumble them from their thrones” of privilege, as Mary the poor woman of Yahweh sings. Enriching all with our poverty, like the Son of God, who while rich in divinity, became poor, by incarnating himself as human.

Vis-à-vis love, *celibacy* or *virginity as complete availability*. Like poverty as well. Being eunuchs for the Reign of God. Marginalized, as Arturo Paoli has aptly pointed out. (Marginalized within society, “free” in love, or very

well organized in love; within the church itself, freedom from imposed celibacy. . . .)

Vis-à-vis society, *being another social class* in radical obedience to Christ who, though he was Lord, became a slave. With all the consequences of marginalization and revolution that this entails.

Always for the sake of the gospel. In order that we may be eschatological witnesses in today's world. To be leaven, salt, light, both inside and outside our home.

(From foreword to *Projecto de vida radical*,  
by Frei Mateus Rocha, OP)



**Question:** *Where should religious life be headed?*

Casaldàliga: Frankly, I feel tense and unsure about the future of orders and congregations in the style and size as we know them.

Will they survive as such, or must they be radically transformed in the way they are structured? Will they be replaced by new kinds of religious life that are more flexible, poorer, and not structured so parallel to particular or local churches?

Will these new forms be more indigenous and not strive to be so universal or "multinational," shall we say? Might they not be, paradoxically, more catholic?

Will there continue to be general governing bodies with their Roman curias and provincial governments with their provincial curias, or will these give way to groups of leaders chosen in periodic elections and according to regions and aspects of life, less top down and more bottom up?

Will both the old and the new institutions of religious life be more ecumenical? (More ecumenical in every sense of the word: an ecumenism within the church, between congregations, and between vocations.)

Won't they have to be more radical in contemplation, in poverty, in chastity as availability for the Reign, in obedience to God and to God's children (human beings), within the particular day-to-day unfolding of history?

Will they not have to be more Christian, more explicitly centered on following and proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Founder, the Master, the Lord?

Won't the new religious have to be much more daring in their incarnation for the sake of the incarnate Word, really sharing the gospel lot with all the outcasts of this world?

Won't they have to be—even if it's uncomfortable—an intolerable and eschatological challenge to the reign of money, power, and pleasure?

These are questions I ask myself and that perhaps we all ask ourselves. Normal questions, when we raise them from the incisive angle of Christian faith. And if we answered them out of that Christian faith we would no doubt have to respond affirmatively.

Just *how* and *when* to carry out these changes is something that demands greater gospel courage and realism. Unfortunately, institutions, and holy mother church herself, change only when pushed, and they react at a deep level only when they've been hit by suffering and persecution. Structures of any sort, even when they are necessary in relative terms, are resistant to life, which is ever new.

(EDP, 133-34)



**Question:** *How do you view the near future of religious life in Latin America?*

**Casaldáliga:** Latin American religious life is giving witness that is pure, committed, and often heroic, already sealed with the blood of many martyrs on this continent, in this vast homeland. I think there will gradually be more and more communities living alongside the people. When they discover the risen Lord, the women almost always move ahead of us. The witness of incarnation, poverty, and availability will grow. Religious will realize more and more that they must be a service to the world in the church, in local churches, and they will take on the most pressing and most effective ministries, because they can do so by the very fact that they are religious, due to the availability that comes from their vows and due to the bonds they have in a contemplative and apostolic community. They will increasingly move toward the cutting edge of evangelization. Obviously there will be tensions—they are already there and they will continue. What I would ask is that religious, their superiors, and also Rome have a pluralistic attitude of both respect and freedom (an attitude that I see as basically Christian), and that working from that attitude they leave room for new experiences, for new ways of living religious life radically in prayer, poverty, contemplation, and commitment.

**In your view, what is the biggest hindrance today to embracing the gospel in an utterly radical way?**

It depends on people's mindset, sometimes a bit on age (at least spiritual age), and the setting, the social and political situation in which they live. For some the greatest problem is perhaps a certain consumerism, an easy life, horizontalism, and too little spirit of celebration, or of childhood. For others it is the lack of a deeper and more up-to-date theological education, and the fact that they do not use social and political means for analyzing the structures and particular moments of their country, continent, and world. There is also the burden of traditionalism that is hard to set aside and that prevents people from living religious life in a balanced but radical way, with no dichotomies: radical in prayer and contemplation, radical in poverty and freedom, radical in service and in the temporal commitment to building God's Reign here and now.

*Religious life is a peculiar way of being agents of political action. How do you see this aspect?*

We know that the cause of Jesus is the Reign of God. The Reign is his food, his sustenance, the purpose of his life. And this Reign is already here. It is to come later. It is gradually coming into being. It is gift and conquest. It is task and hope. Some day it will exist in fullness. This Reign, already here, as task and conquest, is also political action, that is, changing the structures of society for the common good, in the defense of justice and of brotherly and sisterly equality, in the vigorous defense of all human rights (of men, women, and peoples), and in order to overcome any kind of marginalization or racism, or imperialism, or domination, of privilege or oligarchy. Leonardo Boff has reminded us very appropriately that we need "political saints." And Pius XI once said that the greatest charity is political charity (and no one is going to accuse Pius XI of being a communist, are they?).

*What new traditions are emerging in religious life?*

First, communities involved out at the fringes of the world, in cities, in rural areas, in Indian villages, on the frontiers of society or of evangelization. Second, a poverty really accepted and lived within the structures of religious life and within the person of each religious; this poverty demands becoming thoroughly involved in the poverty of the people. Third, a new tradition of really being community oriented. We have been talking about community for many centuries. And very often community was just a word. I feel that in many religious communities today, and specifically in Latin America, the community orientation is life in prayer, in word, and even in obedience (obedience is becoming more and more a matter of community).

*What do you think about the initial formation of young religious?*

First, I think that religious life should be presented to them in a completely radical way. No smoothing over anything. No filing down the bull's horns. The full radical scope of the gospel. What must be emphasized above all is what is really the center of religious life because it is the center of Christian life: following Jesus, rediscovering Jesus, contemplating him, even studying him, Christology (today there are terrific books on Christology!); Christology has to be a daily subject from the beginning.

Second, they must be brought to feel the people, their suffering, their despair, their hopes, their struggles, and their processes; from the outset they should be situated and incarnated in the midst of the people; any kind of distance that might make them insensitive or bourgeois should be cut.

Third, they must be given a very ecumenical vision of Christianity, of the Catholic church, starting at home but going out to the whole world (our God is the God of all men and all women and all peoples!). This will make it easier to have a missionary heart, detached from family, homeland, and cultures, and will prepare them for that kind of pastoral work, for those

ministries out at the edge, which I believe should be very much the kind of ministries carried out by all religious involved in pastoral work. It is also important that they receive a human formation that is very clear-sighted, very open, more scientific and scholarly, and that they be provided the means for achieving emotional balance, training in sports and the arts, and that their sensitivity be cultivated.

Those who undertake religious life should do so with a great deal of maturity. And so the full maturity of the person must be encouraged. I am thinking especially about celibacy, which is obviously a serious renunciation (eunuchs for God's Reign, as Jesus said), a kind of lifelong gospel poverty. Celibacy can be a witness and even spiritual balance and greater availability for serving the Reign, but only if it is taken on with full awareness and with full psychological, emotional, and sexual maturity. We surrender what we know is a value, offering it up for a greater value.

*Continuing with this last topic, what is your understanding of chastity, poverty, and obedience practiced for God's Reign by religious in the Latin American context?*

Poverty, chastity, and obedience must all become more and more of the people, that is, more a part of the life of the people, in their suffering, struggles, hopes, processes. I would say that poverty, chastity, and obedience must all be lived "politically," if the term is well understood, in a service of transforming society, which also means serving God's Reign. The vows should be lived both individually and corporately. We must be chaste, poor, obedient—both be and be seen to be that way. They used to say that the queen of Spain had to be upright and be seen as upright. Let us say the same of religious men, of sisters, and of their congregations. We can never forget that religious life is a proclamation of the life to come, in accordance with the most classic teaching of the church, which Vatican II reaffirmed. It is a witness for the church and for the world. Let our light shine forth. May our vows be resplendent. Our structures in housing, clothing, vacations, meals, and social relationships must be poor, must be chaste, and they must be a living out of that community obedience I've already mentioned, an obedience of service.

*What is your view of the presence of religious women and women's communities in the process of women's liberation in the church and in society?*

I've already said that they are ahead of us, like the Marys at the resurrection. I believe we men should learn from them detachment, generosity, and the ability to go to the edge of witness and evangelization. I believe that to the extent sisters live out their consecration with that maturity I mentioned, they fit very well into this whole process of women's liberation. In a very special way they should be free and liberating women.

I recall a bit of testimony somewhat from outside. Fidel Castro himself has repeatedly said how impressed he is with the witness of sisters who are

working in Cuba and serving the people in positions that others are not willing to accept, with a wholehearted devotion and constancy that would be hard to find in others.

Unfortunately we must acknowledge that the church still does not recognize in justice the rights that belong to women. We do not allow them a space equal to that of men, as they should have in church and society. With simplicity, but with freedom of spirit, I must say that I cannot really find any truly biblical argument or one from the great tradition that would close ministries to women. The arguments used are just cultural arguments. I think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, the free and strong woman, the poor woman, the virgin singing the Magnificat, the first one who was a witness to Easter, the minister of the Spirit at Pentecost. Her presence was a kind of mediation for the Spirit to be poured out over the church and the world.

*Religious life being inculturated and in the midst of the people. Religious vocations arising in other cultures or in the midst of the people. What thoughts do these topics prompt?*

I have already urged that religious life and the church in general be more ecumenical. To the extent that we open ourselves to the one God, who is the God of all persons and of all peoples, we will learn how to become involved and become inculturated, overcoming colonialism and imperialism, realizing that Europe is not the center of the world, as it once thought it was, and making God the center of the world. Thank God there are efforts at inculturation. I think they should be promoted and greatly encouraged. Obviously, to the extent that they grow in awareness, in asserting their rights and assuming their identity, different peoples, especially in the Third World, will increasingly demand that religious, priests, and the church become vitally incarnate in the cultures and in the processes in history that these peoples are living. By definition (historically, it's the first dogma of our faith!) we proclaim the "incarnate" Word. So let's become incarnate!

*You are familiar with all of Latin America and are quite familiar with communities that have a serious commitment to the people, and you are also familiar with the ecclesiastical and political centers of decision. What are your final observations for those communities that are struggling to be identified with the people in order to proclaim the gospel?*

With those centers of ecclesiastical, political, economic, and cultural decision making in mind, I would tell men and women religious in the Third World, and specifically in Latin America, those who are in the midst of the people and on the edges of witness and evangelization, to recall that the gospel is always a grain of wheat that dies; not to lose heart, to recall that the power of the Spirit is a leaven that will overcome the inertia of the mass, of the mass in the church, of the mass in politics, of the mass in culture, in consumerism. I would like to ask them to remember that being

witnesses of the gospel of Jesus is synonymous—often concretely—with being martyrs of the gospel and of God's Reign. Many have already gone before us in this greatest sign, this greatest proof, as Jesus put it.

*(Vida religiosa magazine, Madrid,  
November 1, 1987)*

## ECUMENISM

I have gotten to know the "other" churches, too.

The cause of ecumenism has become another of my suffering causes. For many years now I have been deeply wounded to witness how the prayer and testament of Jesus—"That all may be one"—have been so systematically ignored and blessedly taken for granted by Christians. The division that exists among Christians has always seemed to me to be the most absurd human division recorded in history. It is a sort of reverse mystery of faith, a sort of collective insanity of faith. It should not be, it must not be.

I know that the cause of unity, besides being a mystery of faith, is also a mystery of the cross, which we must all redeemingly bear until it is transformed into a paschal witness. And I know that the work of a few days is not going to undo the pride of centuries. But I do think that we might accelerate this cause, and I think that we should force its hour. Perhaps we're beating around the bush with orderly shared services, theatrical gestures, and chats on doctrine and tradition, and are allowing ourselves the luxury of leaving up to the Holy Spirit alone, what we ourselves, depending on the Spirit, of course, should be doing ecumenically, with a little more freedom of faith and enough good will to make some historical reparations. Ecumenism isn't going to get done by just praying, any more than justice is done by just teaching or announcing, or any more than the church is built up by just announcing.

I hope that the churches are not going to spend their lives imitating the embraces of John XXIII and Athenagoras, or sending mutual observers to each other's meetings.

(IBJ, 186, 187-88)



## THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

The Kingdom  
unites.

The church divides  
when it does not coincide  
with the Kingdom.

(FAW, 93)



**VI**

**Free in the Newness  
of the Spirit,  
in Solidarity unto Death**



## ***The New Person***

With a greater or lesser clarity, with a more or less consistent living logic, we have uncovered society as system, within a structure that envelops and conditions us, as our day-to-day situation pulls at us.

For centuries the church, expert in eternity but less expert in history, found it easy to see only persons; or just individuals; or working from even more of a dichotomy, sometimes it only saw souls. . . .

While always confronting this overall structural reality in which human history is forged and within which God's Reign takes place, we must now rediscover, in a committed fashion, the person as member of society and as protagonist of history and of the Reign.

The person, male and female, is a structured and structuring being. History, the system, and the Reign shape the person, but the person in turn makes the system, history, and the Reign.

For us Christians, the human person is above all else the living image of God, whom Jesus Christ incarnates fully and bodily, as the Unbegotten of the Father and as elder brother to all other brothers and sisters.

He, Jesus of Nazareth, is the prototype of the human person, because, by triumphantly overcoming the old humanity of slavery, sin, and death, "he created in himself the new humankind" (Eph. 2:15).

For us, being human beings, really being human beings must be a matter of "continually dying to the old person" and gradually becoming this new person, Jesus, Son of the Most High God and child of the poor village woman Mary.

Paul, the convert, a Pharisee filled to the brim with the Law, was overjoyed to discover the Christian utopia of the new person, and within his religious and cultural context he proclaimed it with sharp features.

The new person, however, is a universal utopia, and we Christians—who believe that this utopia has become a reality in Christ Jesus—do not have a monopoly on this overwhelming passion that God has sowed in the heart of every human being and in the history of each people.

For example, here in Latin America, which today is aroused and agita-

---

\*Casaldáliga speaks of the "new man," which makes reference to Saint Paul, to the language of revolutionaries (Che Guevara), and to human beings both collectively and individually. Here the term is rendered both as "new person" and as "new human."—TRANS.

tedly seeking its second and complete liberation, two great Marxists proclaimed with their words and their lives—and their deaths—the utopia of the new person, the irrepressible dream of the “dawning person.” Those two Marxists were Che and Mariátegui. And in the magazine *Amanecer*, in the March and April issue for 1982, this year of death and grace, I have just read a passage from the prize-winning book by the Sandinista comandante, Omar Cabezas, on “the gaze of the new person” and “the new person in the hills. . . .”

Those reflecting on and living out a spirituality of liberation in Latin America (and in the Third World in general, and throughout the world) must take the necessary utopia of the new person as their most basic element and requirement. Being a Christian, anywhere in the world, at any moment in history, means being a new person in the New Person Jesus. But being Christians today in Latin America, where the Spirit and the blood are pressing, can only mean striving passionately to really and freely be to the scandal of the world and the church; it means being new persons, in a new church, for the sake of a new world.

What follows is a stammering attempt to sketch out the basic features of the new person. Our theologians, sociologists, psychologists, and pastoral specialists will make their more weighty statements in a scholarly way. And our saints and martyrs will make the Latin American face of the new person a reality—and indeed they are doing so now quite abundantly.

As I see it, the features of the new person are:

### 1. *Sharp Critical Vision*

An utterly critical stance toward supposed values, the media, consumption, structures, treaties, laws, codes, conformism, routine . . .

An attitude of being on the alert, incorruptible.

Passion for the truth.

### 2. *A Sense of Wonderment, Bedazzled Gratuity*

Contemplative gratuity, open to transcendence and welcoming the Spirit.

The gratuity of faith, the experience of grace. Living in the state of prayer.

The ability to be surprised, to discover, to express thanks.

Rising anew each day.

The humility and tenderness of gospel childhood.

Greater forgiveness, without pettiness or servility.

### 3. *Disinterested Freedom*

Being poor in order to be free toward authorities and seductions.

The free austerity of those who are always on pilgrimage.

An orderly life of combat.

The complete freedom of those who are willing to die for God's Reign.

**4. Creative Festivity**

Intuitive, unself-conscious, good-humored, playful, artistic creativity.

Living in the state of joy, poetry, ecology.

Affirming what is native.

Shunning repetition, formulas, or dependence.

**5. The Conflictive Aspect of Things Accepted in Militancy**

Passion for justice, in the spirit of struggle for true peace.

Untiring tenacity.

Prophetic denunciation.

Politics as mission and as service.

Always taking a clear stand on the side of the poor, both ideologically and in experience.

Daily revolution.

**6. Egalitarian Brother-sisterliness**

Or brother-sisterly equality.

Ecumenism, above race, age, gender, and creed.

Combining the most ample communion with preservation of one's own ethnic, cultural, and personal identity.

Socialization, without any privileges.

The true economic and social advance of the classes that really exist, in order to give rise to a single human class.

**7. Consistent Witness**

Being what you are. Saying what you believe. Believing in what you preach. Living what you proclaim. To the ultimate consequences and in the smallest everyday details.

Habitually being ready for the witness of martyrdom.

**8. Utopian Hope**

Both related to history and eschatological. Out of today toward tomorrow.

The credible hope of the witnesses and builders of the resurrection and the Reign of God.

This is utopia, the utopia of the gospel. Not on bread alone does the new person live, but on bread and utopia.

Only new persons can make the new world.

I think these features are the features of the New Person Jesus. He lived in such a utopian manner; that is what he taught in Bethlehem, on the

Mount and in the Pasch; his Spirit, poured over us, is laboriously shaping us in this fashion.

(EDP, 113)



## **NOTES ON A PRESENTATION IN NICARAGUA**

It is not always easy to combine contemplation with struggle, and to put tender care into frustrating reality. Despair easily slows our journey on the long haul of everyday fidelity.

If the revolution now seems irreversible to all those who have a revolutionary heart, certainly God's Reign is irreversible for all of us who have Christian faith. And we are in debt to the Reign. The Gospel Insurrection commits all of us, and as a priority. In its threefold dimension: personal, sociopolitical, and ecclesial.

A new people requires new men and women who can empty themselves to live in:

- habitual contemplation;
- disinterested gratuity;
- the poverty of the people, assumed in a gospel spirit;
- revolutionary freedom, in him "who makes us free" and who "makes all things new";
- community solidarity without competitiveness, in a church that is one and manifold and perhaps conflictive;
- a spirit of service, both tender and combative at the same time;
- political historicity;
- Easter hope.

(NCP, 152)



## **I BELIEVE IN THE IMPOSSIBLE AND NECESSARY NEW HUMAN!**

I do not believe in racial or classist segregation. (Because there is but one image of God in human beings.)

I do not believe in slavery of any kind. (Because all of us have the right and duty to live in the freedom of children, a freedom which Christ gave us.)

I do not believe in capitalism of any kind. (Because the real capital of human beings is the human being.)

I do not believe in the development of minorities or in the "develop-

mentalist" development of the majority. (Because this "development" is not the new name for peace.)

I do not believe in progress at any cost. (Because humankind has been bought at the cost of Christ's blood.)

I do not believe in the mechanizing technology of those "who pray to the computer: 'our father art thou.'" (Because only the living God is our Father.)

I do not believe in the "consumer society." (Because the only blessed ones are those who hunger and thirst for justice.)

I do not believe in the so-called order of the status quo. (Because the Reign of God and human beings is a new heaven and a new earth.)

I do not believe in the heavenly city at the cost of the earthly city. (Because "the earth is the only road which can lead us to heaven.")

I do not believe in the earthly city at the cost of the heavenly city. (Because "we have here no lasting city, but seek the city that is to come.")

I do not believe in the old human. (Because I believe in the new human.)

I believe in the New Human who is Jesus Christ Risen, the firstborn of the New Humankind! Amen, Alleluia!

(IBJ, 223-24)



## **BEATITUDES OF THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE**

1. Happy are those who love God and who live by faith in God's presence.  
—those who believe, pray, and have time to take part in community celebrations.

2. Happy are those who acknowledge God as the Father who zealously cares for his children.

—Don't turn God into a merchant you remember only when you need to ask for favors in exchange for promises you make.

3. Happy are those who have discovered that the true God walks alongside the people and wants them to be liberated.

—Don't say that exploitation, dire poverty, injustice, and the existence of rich and poor are God's will.

4. Happy are those who know that to follow Jesus is to live in community, always united to the Father and to their brothers and sisters.

—Don't be deceived: those who shun community for the sake of personal advantages are shunning God; those who pursue community are pursuing God.

5. Happy are those who respect and treat all alike, as true brothers and sisters.

—One who shows contempt for the Indian, the black, the day laborer, the old person, the prostitute, the poor person is not a true Christian.

6. Happy are those who trust in their comrades. "The world will be better

when unimportant people who are suffering are able to trust in unimportant people."

—Don't trust in the promises of the powerful. Don't seek support from a "tree that gives lots of shade." An "agreement" between boss and worker can't accomplish anything.

7. Happy are those who believe that the life and good name of their comrades are worth more than all the gold in the world.

—Those who get caught up in revenge, who can't forgive, who bear false witness, or who betray their comrades are not Christians.

8. Happy are those who love and respect their family: husband, wife, children, parents.

—Don't spoil your life and the happiness of your family by being tyrannical, with gambling, getting drunk, or prostitution.

9. Happy are those who know that their personal dignity is sacred.

—Don't sell your conscience, your freedom, or your vote, for money, a job, or favorable treatment.

10. Happy are those who have discovered that true religion consists in loving God as Father and one's neighbors as brothers and sisters:

—working for the Reign of God,

—always being on the side of the weakest,

—never turning coward, not even in hardship and persecution,

—struggling for liberation, in popular organizations, in unions, in politics, in the community.

(EDP, 90-92)



## ***In Search of a Militant Form of Contemplation***

Starting with my years of seminary formation, my *prayer* was invariably either a sort of contemplative attitude—without many formulas, or with formulas that were torn from me, since I don't like praying with my mouth—or else a sort of insistent petition for myself or others. I have asked the Lord for a great deal. Tenaciously. And I can guarantee you that the Lord has had to get up many a night, come downstairs, and give me the loaf I was asking for. The Cursillos de Cristiandad only reinforced me in this prayer of petition. I'm not so sure that this wasn't, at times, a bit like what Jesus referred to as the "prayer of the Gentiles." What I do know is that my intention wasn't the same as that.

Lately, I have almost left off "petitioning." I do, of course, "remind" God of certain names, certain situations. Filled with references, I open up my heart to God. I place myself in God's presence, powerless and yet confidently believing that God will take care of that powerlessness.

At any rate, I have never abandoned or undervalued prayer. I believe in prayer. I often ask my friends to pray, for the prelature, for instance. I have kept an "inevitable" fidelity to prayer, and it has been a grace accompanying me throughout all the workdays of my life. I don't care what modern psychology may have to say on the matter: I accept psychology and I believe in prayer—both at the same time. If I believe that God is present, then it seems only logical that I should "be in God's presence." That presence accompanies me, and I need some "intense moments" to grasp that presence. "The spirit of prayer and prayer itself," as Vatican II taught.

(IBJ, 166-67)

~

If, as Arturo Paoli told us at a retreat, to pray is to frequent the Lord Jesus, I believe that in all these sufferings, worries, afflictions, in this struggle and even in these contradictions, I persistently frequent the Lord Jesus. Appealing to him, living his passion, feeling his cross, crying out the force of his resurrection, seeking his word and his gestures, as keys of interpretation. Singing, too. One of my great prayers is song; singing with the people or alone, at various moments, even on long bus trips; I meditate and I sing;

sometimes people think I'm nuts, though I don't sing out loud, of course, but in a soft voice. I've become somewhat Teilhardian and I commune with nature and with the universal presence of God in everything and in everyone. In the presence of this most beautiful and most outraged nature I feel the unity and the presence of God. I used to believe that contemplation was not for me; now I am within myself more and more. On bus trips (I've traveled ten, twenty, thirty, forty, sixty hours in a row, two, three, four thousand miles), I meditate a lot.

(ML, 169-70)



It is an old saying but ever true: "The way we pray shows how we believe," shows how we live, how we are.

Naturally Christians should pray as Christians. "Do not pray as the pagans . . . nor even as the Pharisees," Jesus told his disciples.

*And what must true Christian prayer be like?*

Through its twenty centuries of life the church cannot have been mistaken in its prayer. Nor can it be that the church would not know how to pray today.

Has prayer changed from what it used to be? Or perhaps prayer doesn't change? Today should we pray like monks in the Middle Ages, or like the ancient communities in Palestine?

Here's the problem: How should we pray today without running away from life? How should we pray in this suffering Brazil, in this Latin American continent of ours, oppressed and struggling? How should we pray at home, in a group in the city or the countryside, in a pastoral team or in a small religious community, in the midst of the people gathered together?

Renewing the church—which must always be renewed—also means renewing the prayer of the church. We are engaged in a new kind of pastoral work, one that is more our own. We are also learning and doing a theology that is more our own, our cherished and persecuted liberation theology. Of necessity we want and are seeking a prayer that is very much our own.

We are not trying to create prayer from scratch, nor can we keep mouthing it out of habit.

Perhaps the old way of praying no longer works for us. Perhaps we have never learned it very well because we were stuck in the formulas, in the remote and uninternalized language, in the split or separation between prayer and toil, between God in heaven and our brothers and sisters on earth, and so we felt false or at a loss. How many of our associates who were generous to the point of death have run up against this problem with anguish? How many others, not so generous, have withdrawn from the struggle because they were unable to re-encounter prayer in their new context of life? A Christian who stops praying as a Christian inevitably stops struggling as a Christian, and often just stops struggling. . . .

Of course it is hard to find the new way to pray, conditioned as we are by the old, imposed, conventionally inherited way. The church's "official" prayer is a long way from life, and seems like a collection of recipes. For young people and more critical minds, popular devotions are dead and gone. Nevertheless, since our prayer "is the history of our prayer," according to Jon Sobrino, we cannot drop instantly the way we have lived our prayer.

Besides, must the new way of praying be so new? Must we break with a past filled with the Spirit, a past in which the Spirit put prayers into the mouth and heart of prophets, martyrs, and saints? You don't invent a people's prayer the way you invent a mechanical device or a new dance.

So it is hard to find the right new way, and it is hard for many people today to feel content in prayer. You only have to listen when people open up in spiritual retreats or read friendly letters from priests, sisters, and lay people who are searching. Bishops, priests, and leaders only have to be sincere when assessing the "spiritual life" of the communities under their care.

It is also true that for some years now all over Latin America we have been engaged in recapturing prayer, the wind and fire and life of the Spirit. "Contemplation and struggle" are advancing, often wonderfully linked. There are more and more publications (books, booklets, leaflets) on prayer, and experience of prayer is flourishing all over this continent, contrary to what outsiders or accusers imagine. As our theologians have stressed, in response to misunderstandings from above or alongside, in our experience faith has preceded theology; spirituality has preceded systematic theory; the blood of martyrs has preceded the paper of books or booklets. For a long time the new Christian communities in Latin America have been "drinking from their own wells," the Spirit of Jesus, dead and risen.

Still missing, however, is a further systematization of the intuitions and experiences of prayer and contemplation that our saints and our communities, whether religious or popular, are living. Yes, we need to systematize, but without trying to replace formulas with formulas, and without falling into a new routine, now in our own style, since prayer, like life, cannot be codified.

(From the foreword to *Seu louvor em nossos lábios*,  
by Marcelo Barros)



## PRESENCES

I'm always finding myself speaking  
with absent friends.

I'm always finding myself  
between the moment and death.

I'm always finding myself  
with a book in my hands,  
with a man in pain,  
a landscape and rushing water,  
and the red hot sun,  
and in the end pleasant sleep.

And a bird, and a child, and a tree, alive.

And God persistently present.

(CEL, 51)

~

### **ABRAHAM**

Just look at the stars,  
Abraham.  
Do not try to number them.

(FAW, 90)

~

### **I HAVE PLANTED A GARDEN**

I have planted a garden. I grow flowers  
in tins, in my spare time.  
I uselessly practice beauty.

I water the green leaves and their ephemeral cries.  
I protect them from the hurricane wind,  
from the burning sun. I glance at them every day,  
three or four protecting looks,  
and I surprise creation in its becoming . . .

They've never told me how they feel  
this unselfish human care;  
but they live, bloom, and accompany me,  
entertaining visitors pleasantly,  
as if talking on my behalf, as if speaking for me;  
they surround the Araguaia with peace,  
and mark with waitings, questions,

answers, flourishing songs,  
the long and dark horizon.

(FAW, 87)



### **GROPING THROUGH LIFE**

I can hardly see the color,  
not to mention the shapes.  
I can see the splendor of the route,  
not the way.  
At my half-walked fifties  
I hear the same Voice  
poorly answer.

It will be too late tomorrow.  
The dark day is today.  
Being faithful  
must mean  
being faithful  
at every grey moment  
without much certainty,  
behind the Calling,  
groping my way through life  
in the crowd;  
alone with the man  
— humus, seed, fence, and horizon —  
that makes me possible;  
in half agreed peace  
— gratuitous victory —  
with that God  
faceless  
awaiting me  
— My Father and my Beggar,  
my Storm and Harbor —.

(FAW, 66-67)



### **THE DIFFICULT WHOLE**

The only thing better  
than the best part

that Mary chose,  
the difficult whole.

To welcome the Word,  
while busy with service.  
To wait out his absence,  
shouting his name.  
To discover his face  
in all the faces.

To convert silence  
into the greatest listening.  
To translate into actions  
the sacred scriptures.

To combat by loving.  
To die for life,  
struggling in peace.

To tear down the thrones  
with the old arms  
broken in anger  
wrapped with flowers.

To raise the banner,  
justice made free  
in the cry of the poor.

To sing through the world  
the expected arrival  
that the world demands  
perhaps unawares.

The difficult whole  
the other Mary  
knew how to choose. . . .

(FAW, 37-38)

~

## **YOU HAVE SEDUCED ME, LORD**

You have seduced me, Lord,  
and I let myself be seduced,  
since I first learned your name

baby talking at home.

You have seduced me, Lord,  
and I let myself be seduced  
in each new call  
beckoning from beyond the high seas.

You have seduced me, Lord,  
and I let myself be seduced,  
to the ends of the earth,  
to the portals of death.

You have seduced me, Lord,  
and I let myself be seduced  
by each poor person's face  
that shouted to me of your face.

You have seduced me, Lord,  
and I let myself be seduced,  
and in uneven combat  
you have come out on top, Lord,  
and victory is utterly yours.

You have seduced me, Lord,  
in an uneven trade,  
and victory is utterly ours.

(CM, 35)



*I believe in celibacy and virginity, freely chosen, as an evangelical offering. As a form of poverty in the Spirit. As a Christian force which is a sign of eschatological witness, on the one hand, and of ecclesial availability, on the other. Nevertheless, I believe that in the future there will be both celibate and married priests. For the good of celibacy and for the good of the ministerial priesthood. God will not cease calling people to the charism of chastity for the sake of the Reign; nor will the men and women of today and tomorrow cease responding to that call, any more than did those of yesterday.*

Evangelical chastity is not a "discipline." It is a charism arising from within the calling to be a Christian.

(IBJ, 183)



## **MY ALONENESS**

My aloneness is me.

There's nobody  
to go with me all the way.

To a very great extent  
living means walking alone.

(TE, 66)

~

### **ARE YOU LEAVING ME ALONE?**

Are you leaving me alone?  
With the truth?

Why don't you help me  
examine the fascinating stone  
that has always drawn me to the edge?

The well trod paths  
are everyone's paths.

We at least  
should venture on these trails  
where the flower of the New Age blossoms,  
where the birds say the Word  
with ancient vigor,  
where other venturesome folk seek  
human freedom . . .

If our heart is pure  
we should never be caught  
in the impassable night.  
The wind and the stars  
will tell us where to walk.

Why do you leave me alone  
with or without the truth?

(TE, 55)

~

### **PERHAPS THIS SOLITUDE**

Perhaps this solitude  
means touching horizons  
where night closes over,  
and walking, despite our fear,  
when so many huddle



under cover, and the mountain  
is falling all over us.  
Solitude is not being alone,  
it is overcoming the company  
that holds us back, and going ahead,  
with the backpack of peril,  
aware of the border,  
and our destiny to be human.

(TE, 76)

~

### **SOLITUDE**

Like an impossible sweetheart  
solitude is all around me.  
When I embrace her, I find myself.  
When I find myself, she leaves.

(FAW, 68)

~

### **TRIAL**

Solitude, at last,  
far off and close by.  
Utter solitude.

Where are the familiar roads?  
Where is joy, my friends?  
Is this the final eve?

Why did you abandon me?  
I touch and do not find myself.  
I look in all the mirrors I find  
and don't recognize my face.  
Stop calling me, for now, by my former name!

Can it be that the friends I've so often called  
before are baptizing me in waters of poverty?  
Does some new road await me in the morning?  
Leave me the bread baked in the embers!

Like the king Tagore saw in dreams  
the Lord arrives, loaded with demands,  
all over the place . . .

It is still night yet. Deepest night.  
My hammock is stretched over the passageway in the tiny loft  
leaving just enough space  
to take out a corpse.

(AR, 57)



Freedom is a word we ought to write on all the leaves, on the wings of all birds, on every post in the world, on the first stone, and the last, of every house or building, and every child should be named Freedom. In one of my poems I tell my mother that if she were to have me baptized again she should give me the name Pedro Libertad.

I've said that if we've had to go through what we've gone through, it's simply because we've tried to enter into the rights, the aspirations, and struggle of the people. Let that be utterly clear. It would be vain exhibitionism and senseless masochism if we were to think or talk about our own persecution or our own suffering: the point is the people. You can tell my friends out there that they can have their doubts about me if they want. They can question my honesty, my charity, my sanity, but they can't question my faith in Easter. That is deep down in my soul, and the countless situations that I have been experiencing have solidified this experience of faith and hope in Christ's pasch more and more. There is nothing passive about Christian hope. Sitting around and waiting is poles apart from Christianity. You will naturally be a revolutionary if you understand Christ's resurrection as a destruction of death, slavery, and sin, and as a definitive opening to new life, freedom, and justice. You can't be a Christian unless you're utopian. You can't be a Christian unless you are, in the best sense of the word, a militant.

(NDA, 192)



## WITNESS AND SCANDAL

Each day I'm more aware  
that I don't belong to myself.  
Clothes hung out to dry and for gossip,  
I live out in public.  
I have no fences, no yard,  
not even a dog to scare away

at least at night  
my more inconvenient visitors.  
They have already made of my cape  
many tunics.  
Wilderness revealed by fire,  
that passers-by all assess  
with eyes enough.  
Land that God heats to ash with demands  
and stubbornly covers over with affection,  
with new green growth despite the years,  
against every hope.  
I am, with each twisting step,  
witness or scandal,  
witness and scandal.

(TE, 56)

~

### **I KEEP TO MY WORD**

I keep to my word:

Justice,  
in spite of law and custom,  
in spite of money and alms.

Humility,  
to be myself, true.

Freedom,  
to be human.  
And poverty,  
to be free.

Christian faith,  
to walk by night,  
and especially, to walk by day.

Anyway, brothers and sisters,  
I keep to my word: Hope!

(FAW, 51)

## ***Liberation Spirituality***

With regard to liberation theology, one can understand why it is hard for Rome, for Europe, to accept a theology that comes from the provinces. Rome and Europe think very "intellectually" — which is not always the same thing as thinking very intelligently. And liberation theology has arisen more from life than from speculation. From the life of communities, from committed pastoral work, from group martyrdom, from the complex reality of this "believing and oppressed" continent, as our theologians like to say. This does not mean that liberation theology is not "serious," or that its theologians aren't really theologians, or that it is just religious sociology. . . .

I understand how Rome and the European church as a whole are concerned over a "new" theology coming to Europe and shaking up communities, seminaries, and pastoral workers. I cannot accept as human, let alone Christian, the measures taken against Leonardo Boff, the way the "clandestine" trial — and I mean both the noun and the adjective as a rough description — was carried out against Gustavo Gutiérrez, the persistent mistrust evident in the treatment of many bishops or institutions or bishops conferences, certain attitudes on the part of the Roman curia, and all this ecclesiastical animosity — on both sides, in the end — that is wearing us down with internal battles and diminishing our witness before the world and our enthusiasm for evangelization.

(*L.E.A.* magazine, Madrid, 1986)



*Liberation spirituality is simply striving to be Christian spirituality* and, in this sense, perennial Christian spirituality. "Following" Jesus, living according to his Spirit, practicing his own practice: "the practice of Jesus." With the specific features of time and place, culture and history, challenges and hopes that we are living here as people and as church.

The spirituality of love committed to the poor of the earth. A political love, in its daily implications. The cross of conflict accepted in a paschal manner. Solidarity as a real expression of this love, poor with the poor, family-spirited in real equality. Returning to contemplation, which is at the root of the great cultures in the Third World. Detached gratuitousness. The joy of our songs and colors and dances. The service and hospitality of the Indian and peasant. Martyrdom as a locus or a fate, something normal

for that "greater love" that Jesus expected of his own.

The purpose, the genuine intention, the very detailed and everyday strategy for liberating yourself from within, and of liberating, of collaborating, in a self-emptying way in all the liberating struggles, of persons, of society, of the church. Commenting on the "Gospel Insurrection" that Miguel D'Escoto unleashed in Nicaragua with his well-known fast, I always emphasized three aspects: we should have an insurrection within ourselves, we should take part in the insurrection of society—which is built on injustice—and in the insurrection of the church—which must be ever renewed.

Being poor with the poor. Sharing. Being free and making free. Contemplating the living God in the life and death of God's children. Living Bethlehem and Easter. "Spiritual childhood" is a basic topic in the spiritual literature of Gustavo Gutiérrez, for example. Paschal conflictiveness is a basic topic in the writings of Jon Sobrino.

(*L.E.A.* magazine, Madrid, 1986)



## **QUESTIONS FOR CLIMBING AND DESCENDING MOUNT CARMEL**

*(To Gustavo Gutiérrez,  
spiritual master  
in the highlands of liberation,  
for his Latin American handbook,  
We Drink from Our Own Wells.*

*From the Brazilian Amazon  
in moments of trial  
and of invincible native hope.)*

"There's no road along this way."  
How long will that be so?  
If we don't have his wine  
won't homemade *chicha* do?

Will all those who walk with us  
last to the light of day?  
How can we have fellowship  
if we don't even have bread?

What path will you take to heaven  
if you don't go along the earth?  
For whom are you climbing Mount Carmel  
if you go up and don't come back?

Will the oils of the Law  
soothe old wounds?  
Are this King's battles  
mere flags or are they lives?

Does the mission take root  
in the chancery or in the street?  
If you allow the Wind to be silenced  
what will you hear in your prayer?

If you don't hear the voice of the Wind  
what word will you bear?  
What will you give as sacrament  
if you don't give yourself in your gift?

If in the face of the empire  
you surrender hope and truth  
who will proclaim the mystery  
of utter freedom?

If the Lord is bread and wine  
and the way on which you walk,  
and if you make the path by walking,  
what path are you waiting for?

## ***Love, Political and in Solidarity***

*Charity.* That is, love of God, love for God, starting with Christ, as Christ has loved, in accordance with the power that his Spirit as the risen one has communicated to us so we may love. At that point all fancy reflections and all merely ideological reference points fall short. For we must love everyone, always, losing or risking our life.

A charity that gives itself completely, that makes God's cause and the cause of human beings one's own reason for living, and for dying.

I have often felt outraged here in the Mato Grosso, and as though I were drowning, my mouth already full of water. I have meditated a great deal about violence and nonviolence, and very often I have had to forgive the enemies of the people, who are, and I say it in all sincerity, my only enemies—my adversaries, if you want me to talk to you with all the air of a bishop. That, however, does not prevent me—God knows how correctly or erroneously—from continuing to detest capitalism, dictatorship, large landholdings. . . . On the contrary, it forces me to do everything I can to bring about the “end” of these enemies.

Paulo Freire, the teacher of the Americas, has said with gospel clarity and insight that the only way to love the oppressors is to prevent them from ever oppressing anyone again. And long before Paulo Freire, Mary, the mother of Jesus, sang it in her Magnificat: the powerful must come down from their thrones and walk on foot like everyone else. We have to love them by stripping them of what they have. That way we make them poor and therefore free. Assuming that they want that.

I mean to say that charity is also political or it simply doesn't exist. Long ago Pius XI spoke of “political love.” The charity of every Christian; the charity of a bishop, of course, and of a cloistered Carmelite.

(EDP, 105-6)



Sharing as a brother with the readers of the French magazine *Spiritus*, I jotted down some of the assumptions in conscience, faith, and pastoral stance that sustain our pastoral work in our tiny church of São Félix. I can also communicate them to all who feel a gospel concern for mission.

1. The people of God is the same people as the people of human beings, loved by God in Jesus Christ. Thus, salvation history coincides mysteriously

with the overall history of the world. The church of São Félix cannot be anything but the people of São Félix, in a historical way, here, now.

Obviously, we are not denying the identity of the church, nor do we intend to make it an anonymous majority. We would simply like to overcome false dichotomies.

2. For a marginalized people, only that church that becomes marginal with the people is a sign of salvation. Moreover, we believe that the true church of Jesus is that which is "born of the people" through the Spirit, always in communion with the whole body of the Lord.

We are not denying the church hierarchy. We would simply like to see it take another and more evangelical form.

3. The church is not the ready-made place for salvation, nor even less, the imported place. To the signs of the times must be added the signs of places. To be Catholic the church must be as particular as it is universal.

There is no mission without incarnation. All colonialism is sin, because it denies the incarnation.

What is specific about the church is not its well-organized religion but its living faith. Communion in the church is precisely not about ethnocentric Latinity, but organic charity, in the freedom of the children of God.

4. Marx did not invent class struggle—much less did we. It's out there. And any true pastoral activity will be conflictive as is the gospel itself. To opt for the poor of the earth means opting in a saving manner "against" the rich of this world. (I say "in a saving manner 'against.'" I do not want to repeat what the founders of São Félix did with hagiography; for their patron they chose St. Felix de Valoix—who is said not to have existed—precisely because he would be a good intercessor "against the Indians.")

The church will always be a sacrament of both unity and contradiction.

5. All pastoral activity is political. Liberation theology is not a Latin American fad, but a postulate of the gospel when it is lived in a historical manner.

The politics we are talking about is not necessarily party related, but it is committed. When we speak of complete liberation it is always in the anxious wait for the Parousia.

6. The church in the Third World must condemn and combat the injustice of dire poverty and oppression while announcing and promoting the gospel of poverty and freedom.

We think this is a charism and service the Third World church is providing for the First and Second World churches.

(PL, 31-32)



## **LETTER OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE PEOPLE OF THE PRELATURE OF SÃO FÉLIX**

I am writing you this letter during a time of suffering and persecution. I want to speak with you and meditate about some things that affect us all; in a very simple way, so we can all understand.



You know who we are. You know what we of the church of São Félix are doing. You know whether we are "terrorists," "communists," "subversives." . . . You and the Lord are our best judges.

Traveling around the region and living in your midst we have noted the most important problems and sufferings of the people in this prelature:

—land problems for squatters who are struggling with big companies or estates;

—bad administration or politicking by local authorities;

—utter neglect in the areas of health care, education, communication;

—exploitation in stores, pharmacies, etc.;

—workers enslaved on large farms;

—arbitrary treatment by the Military Police.

We could not sit back and watch all this. One who believes in God must believe in the dignity of human beings. One who loves the Father must serve one's brothers and sisters. The gospel is a fire that burns away one's tranquility. There is no point to being a Christian and yet supporting injustice by being quiet. In the gospel Jesus says he will judge us on the last day in accordance with what we have done with our poorest and most oppressed brothers and sisters.

We had to cry out, to act. Even at risk to ourselves. And we tried to cry out and act as best we could.

We wrote many letters and reports to state and federal authorities. I wrote a book called, *Uma Igreja da Amazônia em conflito com o latifúndio e a marginalização social* [A church in the Amazon in conflict with large landholding and with social marginalization], which the head of the Federal Police then banned. We made many visits to these authorities. We spoke with landowners and managers. Very often we went to the various sites of conflict in the region. We became involved in the struggle you were carrying out for your rights.

And that is where we began to be persecuted. As you were oppressed we also began to be persecuted by your oppressors.

We were the object of all kinds of calumnies and threats. We lost the friendship of the rich and powerful. We were treated as "communists," "terrorists," "subversives." A price was put on our head. We were put in jail. . . .

Because we were the same thing, a single people, the people of God living and working out here in the backlands, we suffered the same persecution from the same enemies. . . .

People have suffered so many other persecutions in this area, almost always for defending the right to land and life that you have as persons.

I am quite aware of what this means, and you also should know. We are persecuted because we are with the people, defending their rights. The prelature of São Félix is a persecuted church because it has not accepted concubinage either with political power or economic power. And we will

be persecuted more and more, since, with God's strength, we will continue alongside the oppressed and the poor. . . .

The sharks and the politicians say that we bishops and priests should not become involved in these questions of land or of justice. Colonel Euro Barbosa de Barros, the head of the Military Police in Mato Grosso, who was in charge of this last military assault on the prelature, has said many times that priests and sisters should only "take care of souls. . . ."

Who is going to say what the mission of the church is? Colonel Euro or the church itself?

Besides that, where are these "souls"? God's children have body and soul. They are persons. And they have the right to live like persons, here on earth. The land and goods of this world are everyone's and are for everyone, because we are equal. God is Father to everyone, and wants all these children to be happy, now and in eternity.

Those who love their neighbor must be concerned for their neighbor's soul and body. "I was hungry, I was naked, I was a wayfarer, I was in prison . . .," Jesus will say on judgment day.

A country that does not have justice for all is not a free homeland. Where there is no justice and freedom there is neither peace nor progress nor gospel.

Brothers and sisters, I know that this persecution is going to discourage some people, and some will stop being our friends or even stop going to mass and receiving the sacraments. Some are going to "be ashamed of the gospel." . . . Some settlers and other people here will leave the region out of fear. Children and young people will have problems in school. Cattle from the large ranches may casually graze over the land and crops of families, who once more will move on, always assaulted by the sharks. . . .

This is a time of testing, brothers and sisters. And it is also a time for faith, a time for unity and courage.

It is the time to choose: being either with the people and with Christ, or against Christ and against the people. "No one can serve two masters," Jesus said.

This is not about "being a friend of the priests": it is about *being persons* and demanding the right of all to live like persons; *being Christians*, and living in accordance with the gospel of Jesus, which is the good news of truth, of justice, and of freedom.

With God on our side and all of us united in prayer, in suffering, and not giving in, we are going to continue on our journey, as that ancient people of God journeyed through the desert to the Promised Land. We have already been liberated by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and his Reign is our Promised Land, now here on earth and one day in heaven. We must therefore liberate ourselves a little each day from any kind of slavery and sin, and we must expel from our midst anything that enslaves and degrades our brothers and sisters.

"No one who waits for you shall be put to shame," says Psalm 25. "And this hope will not leave us disappointed," says the apostle Saint Paul (Rom. 5:5). "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you," Jesus told his friends. "Do not be afraid, no; I have overcome the world." By dying and rising, he has already overcome the "world": of selfishness and slavery, the "world" of sin and death.

Brothers and sisters, with him we will also overcome. An embrace for everyone.

(Mimeographed letter, June 15, 1973)



The various names given to love throughout the centuries are today joined together in one powerful and meaningful word: *so-li-da-ri-ty!*

Recognition, respect, help, collaboration, alliance, friendship—effective solidarity is all this, but something more besides, a kind of collective tenderness and affection [*ternura colectiva*], as a woman poet in Nicaragua says. Assuming of course that it is not a synthetic but rather a genuine solidarity, which always entails respecting the basic demands built into this kind of reciprocal help between peoples as they grow mutually and support one another.

For solidarity assumes that one acknowledges the other's identity. It assumes an acknowledgment of independence on the part of communities that link up of their own free will. You can only be in solidarity with someone whom you acknowledge to be free and equal. (Reagan's United States, for example, cannot be in solidarity with any other people, for it believes that it is the greatest and the best, if not the only. . . .)

The autonomy of peoples, the equality of peoples and persons, and the socialization of life—its goods, challenges, and hopes—are a precondition for living together in solidarity, without any paternalism, dependence, arrogance, or humiliation. An empire, a transnational company, or the bourgeoisie give alms; they do it top down, or calculate aid according to their own interests. The IMF, to take the example of a contemporary social monster that is assaulting us every day, is the very opposite of international solidarity.

In Latin America—Latin America and the Caribbean, to mention the whole Great Homeland—solidarity means taking on the continental dimension as a huge common challenge of liberation. Being in solidarity in this case means struggling together for the liberation of all. Other kinds of aid stop right here, just at being aid, and they might even serve the enemy, negate history, or, in Christian terms, negate the Reign of God. Giving, aiding, promoting will never be able to replace being in solidarity. Just as among us the new name for peace can only be the old name, justice, so liberation is the proper name of our Latin American solidarity.

The only persons, communities, or peoples who can be in solidarity are those who recognize and demand the right to liberation that our peoples and all their children so dramatically lack. Among ourselves only those who make this right of their brothers and sisters their own, by practicing liberation, or co-liberation, are in solidarity: denouncing, announcing, renouncing, and doing so daily in the context of personal and family community, as a collective exercise of cultural, political, economic, and religious liberations. These processes and liberations are those which draw us out of the manifold dependence in which we have been held down for centuries.

Latin America means a lot more than a song at certain moments of nostalgia: it is a family drama, a burning mission we have in our hands, a legacy whose responsibility we cannot pass over to others, a memory of countless martyrs, our own indivisible future. We will either save ourselves up and down the continent or we will be ruined up and down the continent. Many countries and many ethnic groups, but in the end just one family mansion. Until now they have managed to divide and conquer us: with the Spanish and Portuguese languages, with treaties and borders, with different crosses and swords, with national securities and hemispheric geopolitics.

Here in Latin America, a church, a political party, a union, a federation, or a cultural association is negating the future and prostituting itself if it does not live continental solidarity as something inherent in its very being and in its activities.

Nicaragua is all of us. We are all Chile and Paraguay. We are all our root Amerindia, Afroamerica, the millions of abandoned children, the workers, and the midwives—all those who on our continent are prevented from being themselves and who are robbed of their free and independent dignity by the system, states, the empire, and the imported culture that undermines our natural identity.

The name for our solidarity is *continental liberation*.

(Contribution to the book *A solidariedade nas práticas de libertação na América Latina*, pp. 43–45)

# ***Martyrdom***

## **MARTYRS OF THE PEOPLE'S JOURNEYING**

His Father's hands guard over the road  
and the Spirit seals the journey  
with wings opening up to peace.  
Jesus, with his wounds as faithful witness,  
heads out, the first of those reborn,  
from victorious death.  
And his hand marks the end of the ancient darkness.

On his face, the everyday  
face of the people.  
And alongside him, comrades in battle,  
João Bosco, Margarida,  
Rodolfo, Gringo, Tião,  
Josimo, Chico, Santo,  
... so many, men and women, so many!

Saint Romero celebrates eucharist  
on the altar of the continent,  
garbed in prophecy poured out,  
the stole of the Mayans alive once more.  
While Marçal, the Guaraní, holds up the ear of corn,  
our daily bread in Amerindia.

The tools shout out  
the power of work organized,  
the power of hands linked together.

Behind the prison, demolished  
by the battering of a stubborn rebelliousness,  
the Kingdom's morning grace breaks through.  
And the barbed wire fences writhe,  
cut open by the justice-forging march.

In its dungeons the night still holds  
 tortured brothers and sisters.  
 There are still people disappeared  
 in complicit silences.  
 In vain, empire, in vain!

Our fallen die  
 with the flower of hope in their risen hands.  
 Our dead ones journey on,  
 hauling the new history along.  
 Against the cries of death  
 we shout the battle cries, Land! Liberation!  
 The choral song of a whole people on the march.

A cloud of witnesses  
 protects our courage.  
 We are witnesses  
 of witnesses, we are  
 heirs of their blood.  
 With them we walk liberating the future.  
 We walk through Him, Horizon and Road.  
 Children of the same Grace,  
 born of the same Death,  
 memory of him and of them,  
 we celebrate the Passover!

(*Liturgia* magazine, São Paulo, February, 1987)



**Question:** *What is the theological meaning that the Christian church has always given to martyrdom, and how is the church in Latin American living out the reality of martyrdom?*

**Casaldáliga:** The church has always regarded martyrdom as a greater fidelity, extreme fidelity. In accordance with he who is the faithful witness, Christ the Lord, "martyr" means one who takes to its ultimate consequences fidelity to the gospel, to the God of love, and to love for one's brothers and sisters. "No one has greater love than one who surrenders life for those he or she loves." So martyr means witness-sign, one who remains faithful to the end.

Martyrs also unite the community around them. Since the earliest days of the church Christians have celebrated around relics and often in the presence of the martyrs' bodies. Giving it greater or lesser prominence in different periods, the church has understood very well that Jesus and the first disciples were persecuted and took up their cross publicly. The cross Jesus asks us to carry is basically not a cross of personal sufferings or of

internal anguish. Jesus' cross is a public cross. It is the empire and the synagogue that persecute him and kill him. It is the same cross the apostles and the disciples of all ages have been carrying.

*Who is and who can be called a martyr?*

Anyone who gives his or her life for the same cause for which Jesus gave his can be called a martyr. Jesus surrendered his life for the Reign of God and anyone who dies for the Reign is a martyr.

Obviously, for us Christians a Christian martyr is any person who dies consciously for the cause of justice, truth, and freedom, against torture and while professing faith in the God of life, who is the God of Jesus Christ. One who dies for the same cause without explicit faith will not be an explicitly Christian martyr. Nevertheless, both are martyrs, because they were faithful to the greater cause of the Reign of God.

*Why are martyrs celebrated?*

The church celebrates martyrs because they are an example, they are a force. Liberation theologians have recently emphasized very well that the opposite of faith is fear. The martyrs are those who have lived their faith to such an extent that they have been capable of overcoming even the supreme fear in human life, which is the fear of death.

*What characterizes Christian celebration in memory of the martyrs?*

The starting point for Christian celebration of a martyr is the passover of Jesus Christ. Martyrs are companions and faithful followers of Jesus even to the point of surrendering their own lives. Martyrs are those who are so deeply identified with the life and mission of the Lord Jesus that they are also willing to share his fate.

When the people come together around a martyr, and when faith is not made explicit, such a martyr is one who has accompanied the people, one who has struggled for the people's causes, whether or not he or she is associated with Jesus. However, if we continually point to the overall cause, which is God's Reign, the people's celebration and the celebration of faith will ultimately come together.

Jesus died for being faithful to the will of his Father. His Father's will is the Reign, and in the Reign "all may have life and have it in abundance."

In the light of faith, we know that this life in abundance, full and complete, is the very life of God, God's grace, love, Spirit, and eternal life. One who does not know this explicitly but struggles and even dies that there may be life, a life in truth, justice, brotherhood and sisterhood, and freedom, and so that there may be life where people have land, housing, bread, freedom—such a person is also dying for the cause that brought Jesus to his death, and is a companion to Jesus in witness.

*What does the martyrdom of Father João Bosco mean in the journey of the prelature of São Félix?*

The death of Father João Bosco was the high point of the persecution that the prelature was suffering during those more aggressive years from 1971 to 1976, because this was unquestionably a martyr's death and because the murder victim was a priest. The people attribute to the priest this explicit sacred character, making it a major sign.

There was no way you could find any "political" reason or any rivalry that might justify his death. In him were concentrated all the reasons why the prelature took up the line it did, the causes that the prelature has been defending. In a place where the land problem was very central, Ribeirão Bonito, a very marginalized place, where the Military Police even ran a death squad. In this context, the martyrdom of Father João Bosco is the visible sign of the persecution inflicted on the whole prelature.

#### *Why did Father João Bosco die?*

He died precisely because with gospel firmness and meekness, together, he protested against torture. It is interesting to note that in the United States, Canada, and several countries in Europe, the celebration of Father João Bosco's martyrdom has underlined this aspect: he is a martyr against torture and not just a martyr for the faith, against injustice, and for truth and liberation. He is quite explicitly a martyr who went to protest against the torture being inflicted on two poor women.

There's something else more connected to me. Father João Bosco insisted on going with me when I was on my way, alone, to try to free these two women, Margarida and Santana. Out of solidarity he insisted on going with me, even though he was quite aware of how risky it was for us at that moment. João Bosco is a martyr of charity in a way that is both quite personal and quite collective. Charity toward me, charity toward those two women, and toward the oppressed people in the area.

#### *What symbols are linked to the life and death of Father João Bosco?*

The church built in his honor. The wooden cross set up in front of the church. The photos of Father João Bosco spread throughout the people's houses and in our churches. And his name, given to many children born in the prelature after his death. Father João Bosco's bloody shirt on display in the church.

#### *What does the Shrine of the Martyrs of the Journey mean?*

Since October 12, 1986, the shrine in Ribeirão Bonito has grown and expanded; it is no longer just the shrine of Father João Bosco, but of all those martyred along the way, in Brazil and Latin America.

The purpose of this first shrine devoted to our martyrs is to be a homage to all our brothers and sisters who have proven capable of "remaining in love" to the end, struggling for the Indian cause, the cause of peasants, of workers, and against torture. There are twenty-one of these martyrs; for each there is a photo and an inscription giving the particular cause which



was the reason for their death. For example, martyr for the truth and martyr of pastoral work with youth. . . . They represent all our martyred brothers and sisters, the anonymous martyrs, the children of Ronda Alta, the anonymous martyrs in the Northeast.

The shrine of martyrs in Ribeirão Bonito gathers together along the way what our people have been celebrating so intensely, as was evident in the Sixth Interchurch Conference of Base Communities.

The custom of dedicating churches to saints and martyrs is quite old in the Christian church. Augustine was quite insistent on building shrines and dedicating churches to the memory of the martyrs in North Africa, and the same was done in Rome, Europe, and throughout the world.

To dedicate a shrine to today's martyrs fits quite well in the religious sensitivity of people today and yesterday—it is always done within our people's religion and is always clearly connected to Christianity, the Pasover of Jesus, or his martyrdom and that of his followers.

*(Revista de liturgia, São Paulo, January/February, 1987)*



For me death has always been a little like that song, "I am the bridegroom of death." I don't really know why. It seems to me that it's a little of everything. It may even be a question of temperament; that I leave to the psychiatrists. It seems to me that it's a bit of childhood experience. (As a child I saw those martyrs of the red zone, saw them with so much emotion, fear, terror.) It seems to me also that it's a little—so to speak—rooted in Spanish mysticism. And it also seems to me—why not?—to be a bit of grace. I believe, with all gratitude and simplicity, that the Lord has given me this vocation. If some day I find that vocation has not been fulfilled; if I die at ninety-odd years and it is given to me to die stretched out in a bed or on a couch, still the presence of martyrdom in my life will have been, I believe, like a fabulous sacrament.

All those meditations of ours about death, and the drastic book of Job, the sapiential books, the verses of Jorge Manrique, and all our ascetics and the literature of death that I have read—I believe that it is all very insignificant beside a specific experience of martyrdom in which you discover a kind of vocation, an aspiration takes shape, a plea is made. Of course you understand that this obliges one to be authentic, doesn't it? And in that sense, those deaths that I have been experiencing, on the one hand have

made me feel injustice in a drastic way. And out of that has emerged that passion for justice and freedom.

(ML, 38-39)



### **TO GASPAR GARCÍA LAVIANA\***

Like a soaring flight, cut off by death,  
or like a living crucifixion,  
like an ultimate embrace, summoning me,  
your name is wound about me,  
Gaspar, brother mine.

Asturian, miner's justice,  
rugged cliff,  
Sacred Heart of Jesus in utter wound.

Tola and its hills will now be silent  
—green the war and green the forest—  
while we speak together with the God who listens,  
while the people still keep vigil, waiting  
for the peace of God's Reign, so long in coming.

You and I will speak, Gaspar, by ourselves.  
Against the light of my anxious fever.  
As though you were already not in glory, already arrived.  
Heart to heart,

Gaspar,  
with no other witness  
than the Love you now live face to face.

It was the landholders  
who were strangling your poor people,  
who strangle my people.  
And it is the same gospel  
that caught fire in your hands  
more than the ill-fitting rifle,  
frustrated love, my brother:  
your hands still anointed,

---

\*Spanish-born Sacred Heart priest who joined the Sandinistas in 1977 and was killed in combat in late 1978.

bleeding,  
your eyes crying out to the heavens above.

Tell me, Gaspar,  
what would you do  
if you came back?

And take good care of Tola.  
Take care of Nicaragua, still in battle.  
Don't let your blood dry up  
in the (cracked) chalice of your church.

(PIC, 53-54)



## ROMERO

*Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Church and People of El Salvador:*

Yesterday we heard the news, as inexact as such things generally are out here, of the death of the affectionately beloved Archbishop Oscar A. Romero, of San Salvador.

A "good news" from the angle of the gospel; a paschal event.

For myself, as a brother bishop, and in the name of my whole church in São Félix do Araguaia, here in this suffering Mato Grosso in Brazil, I want to express to you—bishops, priests, communities, church, and people of El Salvador—the witness of fullest communion.

The only thing left is to gather up Archbishop Romero's blood as a flag of paschal liberation.

He has been a good shepherd who knew how to give his life for the flock.

The suffering of his people sanctified him in complete freedom and fidelity.

He was a free man who helped liberate.

The national oligarchies and the interest of the empire and all the repressive forces allied together could not silence that last great homily Romero gave, the pure cry of his death, his truest mass.

He was the very model of a bishop who is committed to the history of his people, and being consistent pastorally led him to martyrdom.

His blood, and the blood of so many children of God, poor and oppressed, peasants and especially Indians, young students and devoted pastoral agents, will forge Central America's new day and will purify the face of our church.

All the Americas and the world, the whole church, and especially the

poor have their eyes on El Salvador and Central America. For us you are a living gospel, an Easter witness.

Do not give up. Be faithful. Be united. Pray together. You may be sure of our prayer and our solidarity. Provide the people a voice and a way. May the Spirit of the risen Jesus be with you.

Fear and death always make way for life.

Thank you for your witness, thank you for the blood of Archbishop Romero. His presence, now risen, will be a new "subversive memory" for our church. Romero is a new martyr of liberation, a new saint for us in the Americas.

I embrace you all, we embrace you all, with a great brotherly affection in Him who is the Faithful Witness and our Peace and the Resurrection and the Life.

(EDP, 204-5)



## LETTERS TO BISHOP CASALDÁLIGA

*The following is a letter from Archbishop Romero to Bishop Casaldáliga. It was written on the day Archbishop Romero was murdered. It is followed by a letter sent by Bishop Rivera as an accompaniment to Romero's letter.*

San Salvador, March 24, 1980

His Excellency  
Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga  
São Félix, Brazil

*Dear Brother in the Episcopacy:*

I am very touched and grateful for your brotherly letter showing concern over the destruction of our radio station.\*

Your warm support is a great encouragement to us, helping us remain faithful to our mission of expressing the hope and anguish of the poor. We are happy to be running the same risks Jesus did, for being identified with the just causes of the dispossessed.

In the light of faith, consider me closely connected with you in affection, prayer, and the victory of the resurrection.

*Oscar A. Romero, Archbishop*

---

\*YSAX, the radio station of the archdiocese of San Salvador, had been bombed by right-wing forces opposed to Romero's work and aligned with the government of El Salvador.



April 19, 1980

His Excellency  
Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga  
São Félix, Brazil

*Dear Bishop:*

We are here sending you the letter that our beloved Archbishop Romero left ready the very day he was murdered, and that he would have signed that night.

In thanking you for your Christian solidarity with him and with our church we also ask that we may be able to count on your prayers so as to continue the work that the Lord, the church, and Archbishop Romero—following the criteria of the church and Our Lord—carried out.

Gratefully,

*Bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas*

## ***Between Death and Hope***

My faith, for a long time now, is hope.

And, as Cardinal Felin remarked: "Christian hope is not just an 'afterwards' that helps us live; it is not something; it is Some-one."

My hope has a first and last name: JESUS CHRIST RISEN.

The Passover of Jesus Christ, who is "our Passover," is the real reason for my hope. I hope because he is risen and is "the resurrection and the life."

When, as a seminarian, I discovered that grace is somehow "already" glory ("groping glory," we used to call it), and that here on earth we were living that same, unique, eternal life we would be living in eternity, then all the foundations for my dichotomies between this life and the next crumbled at a single blow. (I'm not saying that the "how" of that eternal life here is not profoundly different from what it is there. Anyone knows that earth is "not yet" heaven!)

Then all of human history was really the unique history of salvation. Every attempted human joy and every human failure; every achievement, every step of humankind; the history-bound hope of the Marxist struggle; above all, the deaths of those who gave their lives for the cause of human beings; the strokes of those who—perhaps blindly—strove to build a better future—all of these were being transformed into an eschatological tension, into a "profession—cogent or crazy—of total hope." And "hope never fails" (Rom. 5:5).

"Earth is the only road that can lead us to heaven," I have repeated endlessly, in the words of the unforgettable Père Charles of our missionary readings.

Every waiting became hope. "Knowing how to wait in hope" was knowing how to live actively and alertly, with our lamps filled and burning. . . . "If only we are fearless and keep our hope high" (Heb. 3:6).

No, Camus, hope is not resignation. Resignation is only hope's silence.

But hope has words of eternal life! To resign oneself is not to hope.

It may even be the very opposite [*Diary*, April 1, 1970].

According to Ligier, Paul discovered sin as a universal reality that resists the gospel. Paul also discovered, as he himself says, that where sin abounded, grace did more abound.

Hope "deciphers" everything "into hope." Hope is like Moema, the Indian girl in the story, "reflected in her face, even death was beautiful." Through hope, nature, with all its mysteries and terrors, becomes the harmonious cosmos. Through hope, "society" becomes humankind; humankind becomes church; history becomes Reign of God and Parousia.

(IBJ, 229-30)



### **FINAL PROPHECY, RATIFIED**

I shall die erect like the trees.

They'll kill me standing up.  
The sun, like a major witness, will put its crimson  
on my body doubly anointed.

And the rivers and the sea  
will become the path  
for all my desires,  
while the beloved forest will shake her tree tops with joy.

I will speak my words,  
"I was not lying when I shouted to you."  
God will tell my friends, "I testify  
that he lived with you waiting for this day."

Suddenly, in death,  
my life will become truth.  
At last I shall have loved!

(FAW, 48)



### **SHE WILL COME**

I often held her in the shadows  
and I feared her, silently encircling me.  
It wasn't the wedding wine, but the dregs;  
it was the fear of love, rather than the lover.

But I know she will come. I trust in her,  
everyone's lover, faithful and accursed.  
There's no escaping her pursuit.  
She's the appointment, no time, no place.

She will come. Out of me. I bear her within me  
 from the moment I exist. And I go to meet her  
 with all the weight of the years I've lived.

But she will come . . . and go her way.  
 And in the spark of her bitter kiss  
 God and I will be forever fixed.

(TE, 21)



## OUR HOUR

It is late  
 but it is time for us.

It is late  
 but it's all the time  
 we have at hand  
 to make the future.

It is late  
 but we ourselves are  
 this late hour.

It is late  
 but it's early morning  
 if we insist a little.

(TE, 68)



## LITTLE BALLAD OF DEATH\*

Death goes circling around,  
 circling around goes death.  
 Christ said so  
 long before Lorca.

---

\*This poem is from Casaldáliga's diary covering 1975-77, the period of greatest violence against him and his co-workers, when priests were killed and he himself received many overt threats. Death could come from any direction. Priests and even bishops were being murdered with impunity in a number of Latin American countries.—TRANS.



So you'll circle me, *morena*,  
dressed in fear and shadow.

So I'll circle you, *morena*,  
dressed in hope and glory.

(What is your victory,  
when facing Life?  
He, with his death,  
was your undoing.)

You circle me in silence,  
I circle you in song.  
You circle me with a sting,  
I circle you with a crown.

So you'll circle me,  
and I'll circle you.  
You to kill,  
I to be born.  
So I'll circle you,  
and you'll circle me.  
You warring to death,  
I warring to Peace.

(So you'll go circling within me  
or in the poor of my people  
or in the hungers of the living  
or in the accounts of the dead.

You'll circle me bullet  
you'll circle me night  
you'll circle me flank  
you'll circle me car.  
You'll circle me bridge  
you'll circle me river,  
kidnapping, accident,  
torture, martyrdom.  
Feared,  
invoked;  
sold,  
bought;  
felt,  
lied about;  
silenced,  
sung . . . !)

So you'll circle me,  
and I'll circle you,  
so we'll circle each other,  
all of us,  
I,  
and He.  
If we die with Him,  
we will live with Him.

(With Him I die alive,  
through Him, I live though dead.)  
You'll circle us,  
but we will prevail!

(MSC, 13)



### **HEART FULL OF NAMES**

At the end of the road they will ask me  
—Have you lived? Have you loved?  
And not saying a word I  
will open my heart full of names.

(TE, 100)



### **THE PALM OF YOUR HAND**

And I shall arrive, at night,  
with the joyful astonishment  
of seeing,  
at last,  
that I walked,  
day-by-day,  
in the very palm of your hand.

(FAW, 109)



### **SHORT PROFESSION OF UTTER HOPE**

White heron, good-bye,  
little one.  
Good news of God.

*Signum credibilitatis*  
of the new creation.

Wing of all my flights  
in these years of *sertão*.  
Sail of so many shores  
that welcome the uneasiness  
of all the waters and people.  
Little hand of this clock  
of waiting and hope.  
In my silences, song.  
To all my arrogant answers,  
question mark.  
And sometimes in my haste,  
bell calling to prayer.  
In my Grace,  
white grace,  
Creation.

I am leaving, to return,  
alive with resurrection,  
and I will take you with me  
to bring you back better,  
alive in flesh and glory,  
because of the new creation,  
free from any sin  
and all exploitation — new heavens, new earth —  
rivers, herons, women, men, God!

(FAW, 110–11)

~

## NEW EYES

Then I will see the sun with new eyes  
and the night and its village brought together;  
the white heron and its hidden eggs,  
the river's skin and its secret life.

I will see the twin soul of each person  
and the whole truth of what each sought;  
and each thing in its first name  
and each name in its essence fulfilled.

In the peace of Your gaze,  
I will finally see the true crossroad  
where all the paths of history meet

and the overturning of the feast of Death.  
And I will feast my eyes on Your glory,  
and see ever more, see myself and see You!

(MSC, 82)

**ULTIMATELY WE ARE**

Ultimately we are  
the Kingdom given to us  
and that we make each day  
and toward which, in yearning, we go.

(TE, 82)

**VII**

**In the Company of Those  
Who Have Believed**



## IF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI WERE ALIVE TODAY IN LATIN AMERICA

If Francis of Assisi were alive today in Latin America, he would live in a Franciscan manner of course, and also in a Latin American manner; but differently, depending on whether he were living in Brazil or El Salvador or Bolivia.

For Latin America, even while it is a common reality, a "believing and oppressed continent" as our theologians say, is still diverse.

In any case, he would live like an Indian or a *favela* inhabitant or any ordinary oppressed person among our people. He would be poor, truly poor. He would not just make a "preferential option for the poor." For someone who opts for the poor is not poor. And one who opts preferentially, for the poor—it's just an expression, I guess—also remains, though less preferentially with the rich (our holy mother church has been quite skilled at this for centuries, if I may be forgiven by all of us who are church).

He would be a pastoral agent, so as to announce the word in a more ecclesial manner. For Francis was very ecclesial. Today perhaps he would be less "ecclesiastical."

He would undoubtedly get along very well with the popular Christian communities. And he would feel that it is they who are restoring our old church, more or less in ruins.

He would be passionately on the side of justice and peace. I believe he would live in a more politicized way—each era has its charism—for it is inconceivable that Francis of Assisi would not take up Medellín and the cry of the poor on Latin American soil and this whirlwind of Spirit and blood that is shaking up our continent.

I believe he would be anguished to death—Francis of Assisi might be a martyr today, if he lived in Latin America—at the sight of so much chronically institutionalized violence that is pulverizing the souls and bodies of whole populations and nations.

He would be—why not?—an exile or a torture victim or one of the disappeared.

He would be anti-North American in a gospel spirit—may North Americans as a people forgive me, and especially those North Americans who are also Franciscans—for I fear that the Sultan of the United States would not listen to him as respectfully as the Sarracen Sultan did.

He might go to Rome as a crew member on a boat, to draw the pope's attention to the intolerable barbarity of the massacres in El Salvador and Guatemala, which are much more intolerable than the conflicts over the Beagle Straits or the Malvinas [Falklands] and than the harsh situation in papal Poland. In the process he would try to convince the pope that the Sandinista revolution is much more Christian than all the Christian Dem-

ocratic governments or Catholic republics throughout the continent that have no diplomatic conflicts with the Holy See.

He would hurl warnings against the multinationals and their chemical and radioactive products and all the suicidal "progress" that tears up forests and contaminates lives and rivers and air and starlight.

Assisi was a luminously human city: soul, rock, landscape. And before dying Francis blessed it as one blessing a mother's womb. Poor Francis if he sought to bless—impotently—the monstrous sprawls of São Paulo or Mexico or Buenos Aires . . . !

Nor am I able to understand how Francis might manage to subdue the human (?) wolves of repression, unleashed by the thousands on our continent. How meek the wolf of Guibbio alongside these wolves!

Here as well Francis would be a people's troubadour, a guitar slung over his shoulder; with a native accent he would sing of the suffering and hope of this whole Great Homeland, our Indian-Afro-America. Popular culture and religion would be his culture and religion, but with a hearty measure of revolution and liberation theology deep in his soul and on his exultant lips.

Francis would show a brother's love for many Latin American Clares—religious and lay—who are devoted to serving the Reign of God with abnegation and dedication.

I know that toward certain crusades against communism he would feel the same Christian disappointment he felt toward the crusades against Muhammad. For neither type fights purely for the sake of God's Reign, using the cross to liberate the poor. The fact is that the poor are worth infinitely more than the profits of capital and the holy sepulcher.

.. Would Francis found a religious family today in Latin America, after what he now knows about orders and congregations? In any case he would remind his own religious family and all others and all Christians that the gospel is to be understood "without marginal notes" (but he would be warning us in vain . . .).

He would be even more contemplative, if it is possible to be more contemplative than that seraphic contemplative actually was. For contemplation is all the more urgent and vital the greater the struggle for justice. For the true Christian revolution is achieved only through the power of a great deal of prayer. For the Americas, like the whole Third World, is a continent that is essentially contemplative.

To conclude, I believe Francis would be very much in agreement—and blushing a little if you can blush in Glory—with the wonderful book our persecuted Franciscan theologian Leonardo Boff has published on the "strength and tenderness" of Saint Francis [Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation (New York: Crossroad, 1982)].

An issue of *Concilium* said that we all have "our own" Francis in our mind and heart. This Francis of Assisi that I have just imagined in Latin



America today is obviously "my" Francis of Assisi. Any other possible Franciscans deserve the greatest respect on my part.

Praised be my Lord for once giving us this human creature called Francis and for giving us even today this restless will to be Franciscan in a Latin American style.

(EDP, 146)



### **SAINT ROMERO\* OF THE AMERICAS, PASTOR AND MARTYR**

The angel of the Lord declared in the evening . . .

The heart of El Salvador was set at  
the 24th of March and in agony.

You were offering up the bread,  
the living body—  
the pulverized body of your people;  
their victorious spilt blood—  
the peasant blood of your slaughtered people  
that is to tinge the longed-for dawn in wines of joy.

The angel of the Lord declared in the evening,  
and the Word became death, once more, in your death;  
as it does each day in the naked flesh of your people.

And it became new life  
in our old church!

Once again we stand ready for witness,  
Saint Romero of the Americas, our pastor and martyr!  
Romero, pilgrim of peace, almost impossible on this embattled earth.  
Romero, blossoming in the purple of the unvanquished hope of the  
whole continent.  
Romero, pilgrim of our Latin American Easter.

---

\*Casaldáliga uses the unusual "Saint Romero" instead of "Saint Oscar Romero" to take advantage of two meanings of the Spanish word *romero*: (1) a pilgrim (one who goes to Rome, from medieval Spanish practice), and (2) rosemary, both flower and spice (used in cooking and perfumery), which is regarded as an emblem of fidelity.

Poor pastor now in glory,  
 murdered by hire  
     by dollars  
     by foreign exchange  
 like Jesus, by order of the empire.

Poor pastor, now in glory,  
     abandoned  
 By your confreres of crozier and table . . . !  
 (The curias could not understand you:  
 No well-fixed synagogue can understand Christ.)

Your poor folk went along with you  
     in faithful despair  
 both shepherd and flock of your prophetic mission.  
 The people made you a saint.  
 The hour of your people hallowed you as *kairos*.  
 The poor taught you to read the gospel.

Like a brother  
     wounded  
     by so much family death.  
 You learned to weep, alone, in the garden.  
 You learned to be afraid, like a warrior in battle,  
 but you also learned to make your word, free, ring out like a bell!

And you knew how to drink  
     the double chalice  
     of altar and people  
 with a single hand, consecrated to service.

Latin America has already set you with all the glory of Bernini—  
 in the halo-foam of its seas,  
 in the age-old altarpiece of the Andes,  
 in the wrathful canopy of all its forests,  
 in the song of all its pathways,  
 in the new Calvary of all its prisons,  
     all its trenches,  
     all its altars, . . .  
     and on the secure altar of its children's  
     sleepless heart!

Saint Romero of the Americas, our pastor and martyr,  
 no one

will silence

your final sermon!

(EDP, 237-39; FAW, 24-27)



## MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

Among my friends I have a reputation for being "Marian."

And really, I have counted heavily on the Blessed Virgin during my life. I have spoken and written a great deal about her. I have prayed to her frequently, and meditated on her. I have felt her quite present. I love her. I confide in her.

I believe in Mary, the poor woman of Yahweh, the immaculate one, full of grace, ever virgin, mother of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, maternally associated in the life and death of her Son, singularly glorified in her assumption, type and mother of the church. . . .

As the years have gone by—with the coming of the new theology in the new church after Vatican II, with my Christian experience of social struggle, with the poverty of environment and spirit that have eaten into me here in this Mato Grosso—my faith in Mary has become more naked, more free, and more true. And more and more she has become, in my mind and in my heart, the songstress of the Magnificat, the prophetess of the poor made free, the mother of the people, the outcast mother in Bethlehem, in Egypt, in Nazareth, and among the great ones of Jerusalem. Mary is "she who has believed," and is hence blessed; she is the one who "turned over in her heart," in the silence of faith (without vision, without much advance knowledge), the things, the deeds, the sayings of her son. The mother of the one who was persecuted by all the powerful. The sorrowful mother of the crucified. The most conscious witness of the Passover and Easter. The most authentic Christian of Pentecost. A great, eschatological sign in the midst of the people of hope. . . .

(IBJ, 195, 197)



## MARY OF LIBERATION

Mary of Nazareth, prematurely wife of Joseph the carpenter  
—villager in an ever suspect colony—  
anonymous peasant girl in a Pyrenean valley,  
woman startled while praying in forbidden Lithuania,  
Indian woman slaughtered in El Quiche,  
*favela* woman in Rio de Janeiro,  
black woman segregated by apartheid,

untouchable in India,  
gypsy woman anywhere around the world,  
unskilled worker, single mother, cloistered nun,  
child, betrothed, mother, widow, woman.

Singer of the grace offered to little ones,  
for only the little ones know how to receive it;  
prophetess of the liberation that only the poor achieve,  
for only the poor can be free:  
we want to believe like you,  
we want to pray with you,  
we want to sing your own Magnificat.  
Teach us to read the Bible—reading God—  
as your heart knew how to read it,  
outside the synagogue routine,  
and despite the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Teach us to read history—reading God,  
    reading human beings—  
as your faith intuited it,  
in the stifling air of oppressed Israel,  
in the face of the Roman Empire's panoply.

Teach us to read life—reading God,  
    reading ourselves—  
as your eyes, your hands, your sorrows, your hope  
    went along unveiling it.

Teach us that true Jesus,  
flesh of your womb, race of your people, Word of your God;  
more ours than yours, more among the people than at home, more of the  
world than of Israel, more of the kingdom than of the church.

That Jesus who, for the Father's Kingdom, tore himself away from  
    your motherly arms  
and surrendered himself to the crowd,  
alone and compassionate, powerful and servant, loved and betrayed,  
faithful to the dreams of the people,  
faithful against the interests of the Temple,  
faithful against the spears of the pretorium,  
faithful to the solitude of death . . .

Teach us to carry this true Jesus  
through the silent streets of our everyday lives,  
on the joyful mount of celebration,

alongside your cousin Elizabeth,  
and before our battered people who nonetheless await him.

Our Mary of the Magnificat:  
we want to sing with you!  
Mary of our liberation!

With you we proclaim the greatness of the Lord, who alone is great,  
and in whom we rejoice with you, for despite it all, the Lord saves us.  
With you we sing, Mary, overflowing with gratuity.

For he has his eyes on the insignificant,  
for his power is poured out over us in the form of love,  
for he is ever faithful,  
the same in our diversity,  
one alone for the sake of our communion,  
from age to age, from culture to culture, from person to person.  
For his arm intervenes in history,  
through our arms, unsure but free;  
for one day he will intervene, ultimately, Himself.  
For it is he who smashes the projects of the transnationals,  
and sustains the faith of the little ones  
who organize to survive humanly.  
For he empties the coffers of the capitalists of their profits  
and opens community spaces  
for planting, education, and celebration  
on behalf of the disinherited.  
For he tumbles all dictators from their thrones  
and sustains the advance of the oppressed  
who break structures seeking liberation.

For he knows how to forgive his servant, the church  
ever unfaithful, thinking she is a great Lady,  
yet ever the chosen loved one,  
for the sake of the covenant once made in the blood of Jesus.

Mary of Nazareth, singer of the Magnificat, servant of Elizabeth:  
Stay also with us, for the Kingdom is on its way!  
Stay with us, Mary,  
with the humility of your faith, capable of accepting grace;  
stay with us  
with the Spirit that made your flesh and heart fruitful;  
stay with us  
with the Word that went on growing within you

human and savior, Jew and Messiah, Son of God and your son,  
our brother Jesus.

(EDP, 137)



**Question:** *For you, who is Mary?*

Casaldáliga: To frame in a meaningful way the little statue of the Virgin in the church in Vila Santo Antonio here in São Félix do Araguaia, I asked Father Cerezo Barredo, our dear mission colleague here in the Americas, to paint this inscription:

*Comadre\* de Nazare,  
Mãe de Jesus,  
Companheira da caminhada.*

[Village woman of Nazareth,  
Mother of Jesus,  
Companion on our journey.]

In other words, Mary is:

— a village woman, a poor *comadre*, wife of a Galilean worker, daughter of her people — with all the glory and all the burden of Israel — born under the domination of the Roman Empire at a moment of hope and messianic frustrations for the nation.

— the true mother of Jesus, also a villager from Nazareth. With all that is implied in being a mother of a villager who becomes a prophet ever seeking a total fidelity to the One he calls his Father; acclaimed and not understood by the crowds, followed and betrayed by a few insignificant companions, persecuted by all the powerful in politics, money, and religion, and finally condemned to the utter ignominy of the cross.

— the first, the best, among all Christians. Living, exemplary, paradigmatic member of the community of Jesus' followers. So unique in the church that insofar as the church comes to self-awareness and clarifies its faith in Jesus Christ it comes to regard her, Mary, as bosom and consolation of the Christian community: mother of the church.

*Which of Mary's virtues do you find most attractive?*

*Her faith, which is at once*

\**Comadre* has no direct translation. When a child is baptized, parents and godparents become *compadres* and *comadres* with each other. In Latin American cultures the bonds of friendship, respect, and aid thereby established are taken very seriously. *Comadres* also has the connotation of women chatting among themselves. Thus the notion is that of Mary thoroughly a part of the community life of Nazareth. — TRANS.

—acceptance of God and proclamation of God's liberating salvation,  
—and a servant's openness to the mystery and the cause of Jesus.

A faith that is dark and gratuitous as true faith always is. But also responsible and worked on: a faith that knows how to ask God; knows how to read the signs of the times; knows how to ponder. . . .

The greeting Luke puts in the mouth of Elizabeth, on the day of the visitation, translates very well the image the first Christian community forged of Mary: "Happy you, who have believed."

Her *charity*, which is that of a servant and which the gospel shows especially in the visit to Elizabeth and at the wedding feast of Cana.

*Do you feel devotion to Mary under any particular title?*

I have lived and proclaimed devotion to the Virgin in an unending litany of titles, both well-known and original. All names—all compliments—strike me as falling short for her.

As a child I was most affected by *La Mare de Déu del Castell* of my town, Balsareny, and the *Moreneta* of Montserrat. Here I am very affected by the Latin American Virgin of Guadalupe.

If I had to choose among all possible Marian titles and mysteries, I would choose:

—her Heart, which is her whole interiority, full of grace and of faith;  
—the child of the annunciation, the prophetess of the Magnificat, the outcast mother in Bethlehem, the village woman of Nazareth, the strong woman of the Passion, the triumphant lady of Easter. . . .

*Do you think devotion to Mary has been or is in crisis?*

Unquestionably. Devotion to the Virgin has been in crisis and is still in crisis in certain sectors of the church that are more "critical"—or perhaps less "mature." A crisis that can in fact be explained as even providential given the excesses of credulity, fanaticism, or profit-seeking with which this devotion has so often been used in the Catholic church. A crisis of healthy renewal which is forcing us to situate Mary adequately in the mystery of Christ and within the great community of the church.

*What do you think must be done to rekindle genuine devotion to Mary among the Christian people?*

That will vary depending on circumstances (culture, age, situation in society). But in all contexts I believe that we should: —help the Christian people go to Mary from the Bible and from Jesus Christ;

—nourish their Marian piety by utilizing the great tradition of the church, both Eastern and Western;

—renew the celebration of Marian feasts and pilgrimages theologically, liturgically, and pastorally, turning them into an opportunity for evangelization and gospel commitment;

—live and teach the Magnificat;

—put the Virgin within reach of young people in a contemporary way, within life, in the midst of the struggles and aspirations of the people of every culture.

(Interview with López Melús)



Mary of Nazareth is still contemporary. Even in our controversial liberation church. I'll go further: it is especially in our church where she is a contemporary reality, new and strong. For besides being Latin American, she is utopia, paradox, and mystery, marginal woman from the outskirts and victory of what is small, this Mary of Nazareth, poor village woman, wife of a peasant, worker, and jack-of-all-trades, freedom-loving singer of the Magnificat, follower of the "subversive" Jesus, Son of the living God and her son, condemned and executed by the empire and the Temple, and yet risen and very much present.

And it is good that our Christian communities, the dear base communities and all those who believe in them and are accompanying them, should retrieve in a new spirit the presence and example of Mary of Nazareth. For it is also true that together we have managed to obscure Mary's identity and we have distanced her from the faith of the most conscious people and from the daily life of the most active. Perhaps that old saying "Never enough about Mary," has turned into "Enough of Mary." . . .

Mary gradually became too much (who knows? — or rather, we all know): the celestial lady, miracle worker, propitious for certain important days, an influential advocate alongside the Lord Most High. A spiritual, dehumanized, great lady. But she is the first faithful "believer" — faithful because she believed, says the gospel in the best summary of Mariology — the most sincere follower of Jesus, the exemplary Christian. Living church, symbol of the church. Yet mother of Jesus, of course, mysteriously virgin-mother, gloriously Our Lady, too. Both one thing and the other, together. That is the way she is and that is how our devotion should be; she is an example for all of us who are trying to follow Jesus; for those of us who hope to be one day with Jesus, in glory, as she is now.

(From the foreword to the Brazilian edition of *Maria de Nazaret*, by José María Vigil)



## **SPIRITUAL VISIT TO SANTA MARIA DE MONTSERRAT**

1. Happy mother, you who have believed the Word with docility and with your faith have made possible the fulfillment of the promise:

Renew in the purity of the gospel the ancient faith of the new Catalonia



and help us change our sick faith into witness that reveals life, political activity that forges history, and a prophetic sign of that ultimate Homeland for which we hope.

2. Neighborhood girl of Nazareth, woman of the people, married to a worker, a poor woman among the poor of Yahweh:

Liberate our Catalonia from consumerism and materialism and from comfort without solidarity; pull us out of our neutrality, which is impossible in this world of exploited and exploiters, and force the Catalonian church to make an option, like Jesus, in both its common life and action, for the poor of the earth, the only heirs of heaven.

3. Prophetess of liberation, troubadour of the Magnificat on the mountains of Judea and from this chiseled brow of Catalonia:

Keep our minds rooted in our traditional good sense and free of any foreign lying; free our spirit from all slavery and corruption; and confirm us as unfailing militants in the cause of that total liberation with which your Son freed us forever.

4. Shrine of the new covenant, maternal womb of the eucharist, our Sinai of Montserrat:

Reconcile us with the Father, in the Spirit of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ; preserve the unity of Catalonia above all partisanship, joining in kinship all those of Catalan stock and the other Catalans as well, and make of our people, accustomed to the open sea, a community of dialogue and collaboration, within Spain and Europe, with all nations, and even with the most scorned peoples of the Third World.

5. Daughter of a people subject to the empire, mother of a son who was persecuted and sentenced; heart of a woman and a mother, battered by suffering and by the expectations of your people; Christian most faithful in following Jesus, even to the extreme proof of the redemptive cross:

Teach us the humble fidelity of everyday life, alongside the people and carrying the cross, and make the work and progress of hard-working Catalonia always a disinterested service in the building of God's Reign.

6. Star of the dawn of budding Easter, first witness of the resurrection, light of Montserrat that brightens our nights:

Fortify in us that hope that never becomes discouraged or scandalized by either the misfortunes of our homeland or the infidelities of the church; that knows how to press for the coming of the new age here and now on earth and which, with your risen Son, overcomes the darkness of death for the fullness of life.

7. Mary of Pentecost, mountaintop caressed by the wind of the Spirit, cenacle of the prayer and culture of Catalonia:

Make us always open to the Spirit; people of prayer, reflection, and study; leaven of the gospel fire in today's world; ecumenically impassioned for the one church that Christ sought in his witness; and everywhere and with everyone builders of the Reign of God and of human beings.

**PRAYER**

O living God, you who are love,  
power, and beauty in nature,  
guide for the journey of all peoples  
and company within the deepest recesses of every human heart,  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father:

You who chose Mary to be mother of your Son and consecrated  
Mount Montserrat as shrine of Our Mother and our people,  
lead all of us Catalans, under the gaze of our *Moreneta*, to  
walk forward, made kin in Christ, faithful to our family home  
on earth and sure of our family home in heaven. Through the same  
Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(EAR, 27-29)

**VIII**

**Through Jesus of Nazareth,  
Lord and Brother**



*I speak of Jesus Christ throughout these pages, as is only logical. I believe that I really believe in him! I believe in him and I adore him! I love him. I live by him and for him. I would like to give my life for him. I hope, at any rate, to die in him, in order to live with him eternally. I believe in this friend who was introduced to me by my parents and the church: God made human, born in Bethlehem, of the impoverished line of David, true son of Mary, a Jew and a worker, born of a colonized people; a man who loved and suffered and died, persecuted and condemned by the power of human beings; raised up by the power of God, the man who is the Son of God, mysteriously equal to the Father, "in whom the fullness of Godhead dwells corporeally," whose Spirit animates the church; way, truth, and life, savior of humankind, Lord!*

My idols and vain imaginings are dead: I believe firmly, I believe only in him, the God-man, who has undertaken and revolutionized and provided the solution for human history, and he is the true face of the living God and the firstborn face of the new human.

(IBJ, 167-68)



## **JESUS OF NAZARETH**

How let you be just yourself  
without cutting down or manipulating you?  
How, if we believe in you, can we not proclaim you  
equal, greater, better than Christianity?

Harvester of dangers and doubts,  
dethroning all the powers,  
your flesh and your truth on the cross, naked,  
contradiction and peace, you are who you are!

Jesus of Nazareth, son and brother,  
living in God and bread in our hand,  
road and travelling companion,

complete liberator of our lives,  
you come, at the seaside, with the dawn,  
coals and wounds both glowing.

(TE, 25)



## **LORD JESUS!**

You are  
my strength and my failure.

My inheritance and my poverty.  
 You, my justice,  
 Jesus.

My war  
 and my peace.  
 My free freedom!  
 My death and my life,  
 You.

Word of my cries,  
 silence of my waiting,  
 witness of my dreams,  
 cross of my cross!  
 Cause of my bitterness,  
 forgiveness of my selfishness,  
 crime of my trial,  
 judge of my poor cry,  
 explanation for my hope,  
 You.

My promised land  
 are you . . .

Easter of my Easter,  
 our glory  
 forever,  
 Lord Jesus!

(FAW, 49-50)

~

## **AND THE WORD BECAME CLASS**

In Mary's womb  
 God became human.  
 In Joseph's workshop,  
 God also became class.

(FAW, 12)

~

## **HUNGER FOR YOU**

*"We burn with love for you,  
 white Body"—Unamuno*

We burn with hunger for you, living Dead One,  
Lamb slaughtered for the Passover.

With neither wings nor witnessing spices,  
we are called to touch your wounds.

On all the twists of the road,  
we will find your feet to kiss.

So many graves on all sides, emptied  
of compassion, sealed with threats.  
Silently, at the entrance, friends,  
afraid of power or nothingness.

But your hunger still burns us, Christ,  
And in you we shall be able to light the dawn.

(TE, 58)



**TO THE CHRIST OF THE TRINITY,  
PAINTED BY MAXIMINO CEREZO BARREDO**

Your hands over the poor,  
who through you have come to God,  
and are welcomed in family,  
of communal equality.

Your hands in the Father's  
current of a selfsame Spirit.

Your hands on the cross, stretched  
toward the hands of the world,  
shores of the New Era,  
Way, Truth, and Life.

Trinity come way down,  
to make us all to all.

Hands/House,

Wounds/Easter,

Wings/Flight,

One and ours!

Trinity that pulls us along  
toward the struggle, toward the people  
with the Son,

poor Brother,  
also dead!

(TE,47)

~

**HIS NAME IS JESUS**

God has come home, retracting glory.  
God has sought permission  
of the womb of a little girl trembling at a decree from Caesar  
and has become one of us:  
A Palestinian among many on a street with no address,  
a semi-skilled worker doing rough jobs,  
who watches Romans and swallows come and go,  
who later on, dies a bad death, murdered  
outside the city.

I know  
    that it's a long time ago  
        that you know about it  
            that they've told you,  
that you know it coldly  
because they've told you about it with cold words. . . .

I want you to know it  
    with a jolt  
        today, perhaps  
            for the first time,  
attentive, uneasy, freed from any myth,  
freed from so many petty freedoms.

I want the Spirit to tell it to you  
    like an axe falling on a living trunk!  
I want you to feel him like a rush of blood in the heart of your routine  
in the midst of this race of clashing wheels.

I want you to stumble over him as you might stumble over the doorway  
    of your house,  
coming back from the war, under the gaze  
and the restless kiss of your Father.

I want you to shout him out  
as the victory cry over a lost war,  
as the bleeding birth of hope



on the bed of your listlessness, with night coming on,  
and all learning darkened.

I want you to find him, in a total embrace,  
Companion, Love, Response.

You will be able to doubt that he's come home  
if you expect me to show you the warrant of his wonders,  
if you want me to sanction life's untidiness.  
But you will not be able to deny that his name is Jesus,  
and he has the stamp of a poor man.  
And you will not be able to deny that you are waiting for him  
with the crazy emptiness of your rejected life,  
as you wait for breath to relieve asphyxia  
when death was wound round your neck  
like a questioning serpent.

His name is Jesus.  
His name is what ours would be  
if we were really ourselves.

(EAR, 153)



## **JEALOUS LOVE**

You ask,  
    you're always asking,  
        you ask a lot,  
            Lord.  
                    You ask everything.

You like to come charging in, like a fire,  
into the life of those who love you  
and burn up their time, their rights, their good sense.  
You create the eunuchs and idiots of the Kingdom.

You abuse the love  
    of those who are able  
        to abuse your love.

Not a lot, but rather a few.

(All will be able to be saved,  
few want to save you fully.)

Saint Teresa, who knew it  
 from walking those paths and nights on Mount Carmel,  
 told you. In vain, of course.  
 You remain the Whole  
                                   the burning bush  
 on the Horeb of all who are called.

Before your Glory, jealous Love,  
 the only possible gesture is to make the soul go barefoot.  
 You are. You make us.

                                  By burning us up  
 the Wind of your flames frees us.

In any case, you love us first.

(TEP)



## **GOD IS GOD**

I write verses and believe in God.

                                  My verses

go forth full of God, like lungs  
 full of fresh air.

                                  Carlos Drummond de Andrade  
 writes—used to write—verses,  
 better than mine,  
 and did not believe in God.

(God isn't simply beauty.)

He surrendered his life for the people  
 and did not see God on the mountain.

                                  I don't know if I could live with the poor  
 if I didn't run into God in their rags;  
 if God wasn't there like a flame,  
 slowly burning away my selfishness.

(God isn't simply justice.)

Many humans raise their banners  
 and sing to Life,

                                  leaving God aside.

                                  I can only sing pronouncing the Name.

(God isn't simply joy.)

Maybe I wouldn't know how to walk on the road,  
if God wasn't there, like a dawn,  
dispelling for me the clouds and my weariness.

And there are wise people who journey along  
undisturbed,

against God's radiance

making history,

unveiling mysteries and questions.

(God isn't simply truth.)

... Truth without reasoning,

Justice with no reversals,

Unexpected love,

God is simply God!

(TEP)



## **EPILOGUE**

**On the *Ad Limina* Visit,  
Subsequent Events,  
and Casaldáliga Today**



## ***On the Ad Limina Visit: A Memoir to Fellow Brazilian Bishops***

*As the following memoir recounts, Casaldáliga for many years years had not made an ad limina visit to Rome, which bishops customarily make every five years. In his 1988 letter to Pope John Paul II (see pp. 18–26, above), Casaldáliga explained why he had not made such visits. He was, however, called to Rome and went in June 1988. In Rome Casaldáliga was “interviewed” by Cardinals Ratzinger and Gantin and later met with the pope. The following is a memoir he wrote to his fellow Brazilian bishops about his trip. For a detailing and analysis of events subsequent to the visit, see the piece by Teófilo Cabestrero that follows the present selection.*

Until now, I had not made the *ad limina* visit to Rome, which we bishops are obliged to make every five years. I had already been a bishop for seventeen years. I received two quite tough letters from the Congregation for Bishops insisting on this visit, and reminding me—nine years after the event—of alleged unpaid “debts” stemming from the apostolic visitation made to the prelature after accusations made by an ultraconservative bishop.

I decided to appeal to the pope—the bishop of São Félix to the bishop of Rome—and wrote to him February 22, 1986, pouring my heart out in a long, ecclesial letter. “If you think it is a good idea,” I said, “you may indicate an appropriate date for me to visit you personally.”

That date was now, in the month of June [1988].

I traveled to Rome by Alitalia, surrounded by boisterous Italo-Argentinians who were also returning to their roots. Traveling in the same plane were forty Sisters of Saint Joseph—among them our Sister Irene—who were going as pilgrims to the place where their religious congregation had originated.

I felt myself sustained by many prayers, much friendly advice, and promises of support. For their part, the curia and nunciature had asked me to observe the greatest discretion about this journey.

In my extremely intermittent diary, I noted: “I am going to Rome as a pilgrim. *Videre Petrum, videre Martyre, videre Franciscum* [To see Peter, to see the martyrs, to see Francis]. Rome and Assisi. The stone, the blood, and the dove of Latin America with the ear of corn made fertile by so

much martyrs' blood, and fraternally united in its desire for liberation."

After twenty years, waiting for me in Rome, Italy, were the historical stones, the basilicas, the catacombs, obelisks brought from other peoples; ruins patrolled by sacred cats; sun-filled piazzas with their happy-go-lucky tourists; the hills and their country houses; the cornfields; the cherry trees and good wine; the olive trees; the native gorse—my Catalan *ginesta*.

Also the *gelati*, of course, and that Roman traffic so familiar in its madness; the posters proclaiming ecology, politics, art; reporters, especially those from Spain and Catalonia, accompanying me only too eagerly. Christian communities of radical commitment; old friends; my Claretian confreres, in particular, more than eager to help me, especially José Fernando Tobón and Angel Calvo of the general prefecture of the apostolate; and my family—reunions, nostalgic encounters, roots. At the end of the day, a European as well as a Latin American.

And, as I said, the apostolic stone, sealed with the blood of the first martyrs. All of us who inherited the milk of Latin, the faith of Peter, have something of Rome, of the Romans. Despite the empire, behind the Vatican, in the shared stone and blood, all of us have much of the Romans.

On [June] 16, wearing a borrowed jacket, I was received in the anteroom by Monsignor Giovanni Ré, secretary of the Congregation for Bishops, who had already been in the nunciature of Panama. "*Cum Petro et sub Petro*" [with Peter and under Peter], he cautioned me insistently. And "only one Lord, one faith, one baptism," I added so that the confession might be fuller.

He also reminded me that, on Saturday, in the joint interview with Cardinals Bernardin Gantin and Joseph Ratzinger, I would have to appear in the appropriate dress. (In that case, it would be the cassock and the Claretian girdle kindly lent to me by the veteran Father Garde, and the [South American] Indian collar of *tucum* and the Franciscan cross.)

Cardinal Gantin, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, told me in advance, "It will be a meeting of complete sincerity, liberty, and brotherhood."

I felt at once that I would be submitted to an ecclesiastical entrance examination on discipline by the Congregation for Bishops, on theology by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

This took place on Saturday, June 18. It lasted one and a half hours, at the Congregation for Bishops. With Cardinal Gantin were his secretary, Ré, and an undersecretary; with Cardinal Ratzinger, his secretary, Monsignor Alberto Bovone, and Monsignor Américo, a Portuguese from the secretariat of state. The monsignori noted everything and had in their hands photocopies of my texts. Expectation, seriousness, and tact. No aggression.

Personally, I think I spoke freely. Ratzinger smiled often. I made a point of saying that, thank God, I had no problem of faith, although I had theological differences with them; nor did I have a problem of communion



with the church, although I did have reservations concerning minor aspects of ecclesiastical discipline.

Cardinal Gantin began reading a text, which reminded me of the solemnity of the occasion and of all *ad limina* visits. He recognized our sufferings and our dedication to the people (at times I felt as if I were being collectively challenged; who knows, perhaps this was because of the Italian collective *voi*). "Cardinal Ratzinger and I will give you certain warnings," he said. And he mentioned the anxiety about the (Archbishop Marcel) Lefebvre case, which was coming to a head at that time.

*First question by Ratzinger:* Do you accept the documents of the Holy See on liberation theology?

*My reply:* I accept the three complementary texts in substance: the two documents together with the letter sent by the pope to the Brazilian bishops in which he affirmed that "liberation theology is not only opportune but also useful and necessary." Where I differ is on certain aspects of theology and sociology and in respect of certain statements concerning our theologians made in the first document. In fact, we are dealing with "instructions" here.

The pope himself asked that to the first instruction, which was so negative, should be added five introductory sections. Moreover, the pope declined to acknowledge his paternity of this instruction, saying: "It is Cardinal Ratzinger's." "Just jokes," replied the cardinal.

*Second question:* You wrote that the option for the poor should be understood in a "class-based" sense. We prefer to speak of a preferential love for the poor. "Class-based" is a term charged with meaning, and one which cannot be gotten away from.

*My reply:* Indeed, the term is charged with meaning, and a valid meaning as I see it. If you do not want to speak of a "class struggle," we can call it a "conflict of classes," as do the instructions. But the conflict is there. We in Latin America wish to avoid people thinking of our poor as spontaneously poor, isolated, existing outside a structure which exploits and marginalizes them; this is why we speak of the "impoverished."

The pope himself has said on several occasions that, precisely in Latin America, "the rich are becoming richer and richer at the expense of the poor who are always the poorer thereby." This "at the expense of" is structural and, if you permit me the scandalous term, "dialectic."

*Third question:* You and your colleagues speak of social sin. And what about personal sin?

*My reply:* It is my custom always to call to mind simultaneously both aspects of sin. In the Pilgrimage of the Martyrs, in Ribeirão, we burn in the penitential pyre social sins as well as personal sins, explicitly listed, the one and the other.

The New Testament denounces "the sin of the world." There was something of social structure in this sin: the synagogue, the empire, slavery.

Obviously, it is people who sin, but within structures which they render sinful and which in a way make these people what they are. We are at once creators of structures and subject to them.

*Fourth question:* You and your colleagues celebrate the eucharist as a social rite. . . .

*My reply:* I very much doubt whether you can accuse me of reductionism in this case. Indeed, I always say expressly that the mass is "the Pasch of Jesus, our Pasch, the Pasch of the world." Death and life, passion and resurrection. In presenting the host to the eucharistic assembly, it is my custom to say, "This is the lamb of God who takes away sin, slavery, and the death of the world."

We also speak of the passion, death, and resurrection of each one of us and of the people, yes, indeed. The eucharist exists also for this. In order that we might have life, Christ gave his own. Traditionally, the church makes us repeat at the offertory: "this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made." There is something social in the earth and in this work referred to in the prayer.

I then reminded the cardinals of the *Mass of the Land without Evil* and the *Mass of the Quilombos* [places where the runaway black slaves took refuge], which the Vatican banned, and which I took the opportunity of defending. To the African Cardinal Gantin I quoted with special emphasis the *Mass of the Quilombos*, a prayer for the cause of the blacks. I observed how difficult it is for the church to "inculturate itself," to be indigenized in the other cultures of our Third World.

*Fifth question:* Your colleagues and you easily give the name of martyrs to Monseñor Oscar Romero, Camilo Torres. It is good to call to mind certain people who dedicated themselves to the people, but to call them martyrs. . . .

*My reply:* We are quite capable of making the distinction between "canonical" martyrs, officially recognized by the church, and those many other martyrs whom we call martyrs of the Kingdom, who gave their lives for justice, for liberation, the majority of the latter being Christians who also died expressly for the cause of the gospel. Yes, I wrote a poem to "Saint Romero of the Americas" [see pp. 207-8], and I consider him thus: a saint, a martyr, ours.

*Sixth question:* You spoke of "revolutionizing" the church.

*My reply:* The complete phrase cropped up on the occasion of the "gospel insurrection" of Nicaragua: "It is imperative to revolutionize oneself constantly, in one's personal life, through *metanoia*, or conversion; it is essential to revolutionize society, no matter what the system or regime; and it is also imperative constantly to revolutionize the church itself, in order that it may be ever more evangelical." I was addressing the less "ecclesiastical" world. I could have said that the church is *semper renovanda* [always to be renewed].

In the course of our conversation we mentioned pluralism, liberation theology, the episcopal conferences, and the appointment of bishops.

"You have been referring to pretorium and Sanhedrin," Ratzinger said to me, jestingly. And I agreed, in the same tone.

Monsignor Bovone read me the telegram ten of us Brazilian bishops sent to Rome on the occasion of the first public censure of Father Leonardo Boff. He added, "You wrote that the second document on liberation theology corrects the first."

I answered that this was true. It corrects it because it completes it. Had the first been complete, the second would have been unnecessary.

At a certain point, Cardinal Ratzinger observed that all words can be justified, suggesting, as it were, that it is easy to give subsequently correct interpretations of things previously incorrect.

Cardinal Gantin referred gravely to the problem concerning my visits to Nicaragua. "This is already a 'fact,'" and he stressed the word. "To leave one's own diocese to go to another country to interfere with another episcopate. . . ." I tried to explain myself. But, in the course of those Vatican encounters, I saw that Nicaragua is the last thing which can be "explained" there.

I told them that I went to Nicaragua during the fast against violence, and with the support of twenty-three fellow bishops; I detailed my previous friendship with the Nicaraguans, quoted my letters to the bishops of that country, and referred to my journeys to other Central American countries and the warm welcome of my brother bishops in those countries.

I spoke of solidarity, of what Nicaragua means for the whole of Latin America. I recalled that there are Christians, Catholics more specifically, on both sides of that church and that the church, like the hierarchy, is also obliged to take into account the other side: I quoted the scandal suffered by the other side. We were not all equally "convinced" of this!

"You said the *ad limina* visit was useless," Gantin said.

I said it was "almost" useless, I joked. And I repeated the complaint of so many [bishops] throughout the world on this matter. I recognized that there was a new form of visit, as was seen during the last visit of the Brazilian episcopate, when twenty-one bishops journeyed to Rome for three days in which they and the dicasteries openly discussed matters in front of the pope.

I reminded them of how John Paul II himself, in his letter to the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), recognized this new form of visit as being more collegial and one which could serve as a model for other episcopates.

"You are being used in what you say, write, and do," said Gantin.

We are all used, I answered. You are also used; the pope is used. Besides, we must see by whom and how we are used. I spoke about communication, public opinion—within the church as well—of collegiality and co-responsibility. I lamented the fact that we cultivate excessive secrecy.

Right from the beginning of the interview, they had hinted at the possibility of a text of propositions I would have to sign. Now, they formulated this proposal more specifically. I answered that I would sign nothing without sufficient time in which to think and consult. I answered that I myself would never ask anyone for such a signature. They reacted: "It is not a question of a tribunal, no. You will have time to think about this."

I reminded Cardinal Gantin that, in his letter, he had promised me a meeting with the pope. He confirmed this. He would be meeting John Paul II that very afternoon. I understood this would be to brief him on our interview.

We got up. I asked if we might pray together, that we may be always faithful to the Kingdom, in order to help the church to be ever more evangelical. "To revolutionize it," intervened Ratzinger, smiling. "Yes, to revolutionize it evangelically," I added.

I told them about the recent threats by the UDR [União Democrática Ruralista—the National Landowners' Organization], of which I have been the target, and assured them that if I am killed it will be for the Kingdom and also for the church. . . . We said the Our Father in Latin and made a prayer to Mary, mother of the church.

When I was already on the stairs, one of the monsignori came to ask me not to report any of our conversation to the journalists. I said that I would only speak to the press after my audience with the pope and that, if we do not tell the journalists the truth, they have to invent it, or perhaps even lies. I insisted on my right and duty of communication. Subsequently, I found out that Vatican Radio had received orders from above to transmit nothing about my stay in Rome.

Before the audience with the pope, I sat in a waiting room. In the room there was an ACNUR calendar which was dedicated to refugees. I recalled with special affection the Guatemalan refugees. The caption on the calendar said, "It is very easy to be a refugee; your different race and your different opinions can suffice."

In the waiting room after the interview, I saw three fine ink drawings with royal peacocks, lions devouring a lamb, and serpents wound around a column; a painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe; and a crucifix. Fellini would have had a malicious treat.

The private audience with John Paul II took place June 21 and lasted approximately fifteen minutes, after I had passed by some eight guards, presented the *biglietto* [ticket] of the prefecture of the Pontifical Household four times, crossed patios, and passed through corridors and sitting rooms.

The pope gestured to me to speak, both of us seated at a table.

I said I had had the interview with Cardinals Gantin and Ratzinger, and that they had given me a series of warnings. I said that the pope had already read the letter I sent to him containing my preoccupations and explaining to him why I had not made my *ad limina* visit.

The pope nodded.

"I am here to hear whatever you have to say to me," I added.

He wished us to speak in Portuguese. He speaks fluently, a true polyglot.

He dwelt on the importance of unity in the church, of communion, and also of communication not only with the pope but also with his collaborators. He reminded me that the *ad limina* visit is not a mere question of bureaucracy. I agreed.

I insisted upon the benefits of communion on both sides, upon the advantages of this new form of *ad limina* visit initiated with his agreement with the CNBB, advantages he himself had since recognized in the letter that he wrote us and that was so warmly welcomed by us. He praised the loyalty of the CNBB in communicating everything to him promptly.

I explained to him how the different reality of our latitudes and the situations we have to live out oblige us to adopt positions which are possibly not understood by other people in the church. He recognized this and stated several times that "the church must take on the social issues." "They are human problems," he said.

Many people inside and outside the church, I said, were grateful to him for his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, which was, in our opinion, very precise and clear. Satisfied, he added: "They even call it the charter of the Third World."

He showed that he knows of our sufferings and repeated, several times, that he was aware of the great injustice taking place in Brazil, above all in the north of the country.

"It seemed to us most opportune," I said, "for you to have reminded President José Sarney that, without agrarian reform, there will be no democracy in Brazil. Unfortunately, the National Constituent Assembly has already forbidden us agrarian reform in the text of the new constitution voted so far."

On the table was a folder with my name of the cover and a map of our region. The pope bent over it. We spoke of the prelature, of the situation of the people—Indians, land squatters, farmhands, tenant farmers; we spoke of the pastoral team: priests, sisters, lay people, seminarians.

He asked me whether the lay people could read. I explained the various types of lay people who work on the team and in the communities and the many reading and writing courses and schools which have been in operation in the area for some time. And I asked: "You are thinking of returning to Brazil, possibly next year, aren't you?"

"I wish to. I hope the Lord will permit this visit."

"It would be very good if you visited these inland areas; the sanctuary of Trindade, for example, near Goiânia, would be a most suitable place; it is an extremely popular and much frequented sanctuary."

"Trindade, Trindade," he repeated as if to engrave the name upon his mind.

I mentioned the proposal of the cardinals about certain propositions

which I would have to sign, and confessed that, as I saw it, this appeared to me to be a lack of trust.

"It can also be a sign of confidence," he replied. "Cardinal Arns, when he comes here, likes to have things in writing."

Afterward, as we were sitting down again, he opened his arms and, half warning and half jesting, said to me: "So that you may see that I am no wild beast . . . !"

At first, I was all but astonished, then I found this gesture funny.

"I didn't think that for one moment," I said, and smiled.

(But in truth, being so much nearer to it during those days, I felt just how this Vatican resembles a cage, albeit a golden one. Before the bronze statue of Saint Peter, I remembered—how could I not?—Alberti's verses about Saint Peter's longing to be free as a simple fisherman.)

I asked John Paul II for his blessing on the entire prelatry, and we went on listing groups of people. I asked, above all, his blessing on those who are persecuted.

"Above all, the persecuted," he repeated.

On Thursday, June 27, in the morning, the last day of my stay in Rome, I had another meeting with Cardinal Gantin and his secretary, Monsignor Ré.

The cardinal looked tense: "You have been with the pope, haven't you?"

"Yes, I was with him for about fifteen minutes."

"Useless!"

Faced with my astonishment, he grimly wanted to know why parts of my letter to John Paul II had already been published in Spain. "The whole world," he added, "will see your differences with the Holy Father." He and the secretary insinuated that this letter showed a lack of respect.

"The letter," I replied, "appeared to me to be extremely respectful and ecclesial. It is a letter based upon thoughtful, prayerful reflection and consultation with others. It did, indeed, express preoccupations and even differences felt by many of us Catholics, and which we have the right to feel and express, as the church which we are. The letter did not deal with private matters."

Afterward, the cardinal once again reproached me very strongly for my visits to Nicaragua, and this in the name of the Congregation of Bishops.

"I shall pray, reflect, and consult with my companions," I replied.

He asked me to examine my conscience about the way in which I related to public opinion.

"I also am a bishop of the church," I said. "And I am aware of my duty of co-responsibility. The pope himself insisted on communication. I believe that we had to facilitate dialogue, pluralism, the greater good of the church, the work of all of us."

The Lefebvre case cropped up again. And I said that I thought it most evangelical that the curia had shown so much understanding toward the aged bishop but that I would like them to show the same understanding

toward other sectors of the church. The cardinal answered that they treated all bishops equally.

"Cardinal Ratzinger will write to you," he concluded.

I also had an extremely warm meeting with the Latin American Cardinal Eduardo Pironio—outside the official program.

During those days, my thoughts turned many times in faith but with sadness and with hope to our binding obligation of communion and communication between local churches and the church of Rome; between the pope and his curia and the bishops and their conferences; between our church and the other churches, ecumenically speaking; between these churches and the world.

Amid those stones and filled with reverence in the face of so much tradition, I dreamed of another type of Roman curia for another type of papal ministry. I felt, and this not without a tinge of guilt, the distances which set us in contradiction with each other when they ought to bring about catholicity, to make us united in our plurality, faithful yet free, evangelical and historical.

And I felt so strongly the truth of the Third World with an indignation which, for all its commitment, remained impotent. Only by recognizing this truth will the First World be able to find its human and Christian salvation. . . .

*(National Catholic Reporter)*

## **On Events Following the Ad Limina Visit and on Casaldáliga Today: An Essay and Interview by Teófilo Cabestrero**

*In March 1989 Casaldáliga made his fourth visit to Central America. For a number of reasons detailed below, he did not go to Nicaragua, though he had gone there as part of his first three trips to Central America. While in Panama he was interviewed by a fellow Claretian, Teófilo Cabestrero, author of *Mystic of Liberation* (Orbis, 1981), a portrait of Casaldáliga. The following contains Cabestrero's reflections on the interview and a number of important statements Casaldáliga made during the interchange. These statements cover a variety of subjects, among them the events that followed his 1988 ad limina visit to Rome (for details of which see the previous selection).*

### **EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE AD LIMINA VISIT**

In September 1988 wire service stories from Brazil indicated that the Vatican was "punishing" Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, forbidding him to "speak, write, and travel outside Brazil." The Vatican issued a denial and stated that it had only sent him a "monitum," as it does to many bishops after their *ad limina* visit, reminding him of his episcopal duties regarding the magisterium, communion and respect for the Holy See, and liturgical regulations; this monitum further told Casaldáliga to get the previous consent of local bishops if he goes to other countries, particularly Nicaragua.

The wire service report was hasty and incorrect, but something of what it said might be true. In smoothing things over, the Vatican spokesperson did not tell the whole truth of the case.

On August 23 the nunciature in Brazil notified Bishop Casaldáliga that it was looking for him "to sign a document" about his *ad limina* visit. Some days later the bishop of São Félix received two copies of an unsigned document sent from the Vatican; the document bore the words "personal and reserved." There was no explanatory letter from anyone in Rome. Bishop Casaldáliga was supposed to "sign and write the date" on one copy and return it to the nunciature.

The document was in Portuguese, was titled "Writ" [*Intimação*], and had



four headings: Liberation Theology; Criticism of the Roman Curia; Short Catechetical Works, Celebrations, and Pilgrimage of Martyrs; Visits to Central America and Especially Nicaragua. It was not any old monitum and was not simply a reminder of a bishop's responsibilities. It was written in the first person. There were three parts to each section: Inasmuch as . . . ; Transgressions; and Corrective Measures. Each section progressed along the lines of these statements: "As a bishop I committed myself to . . . ; but I have been wrong in . . . ; and I will correct things and change in this fashion. . . ." What the Vatican had sent for his signature was an already prepared confession of sins with the penances attached. Legal advisors at the Brazilian bishops conference studied the document and came to the conclusion that it was unprecedented in relations between the Holy See and bishops. If Bishop Casaldáliga signed it, the document meant he was blaming and criticizing himself and promising to change; he was accusing and punishing himself, gravely limiting his episcopal and pastoral freedoms and rights. During his interview in Rome with Cardinals Ratzinger and Gantin he had been told he would have to sign a set of propositions. Did this document contain the same set of propositions? In that discussion Bishop Casaldáliga did not accept any of the accusations they were making, if indeed those questions were meant to do anything more than inquire. Had his answers not dispelled all doubts?

When he read this document Bishop Casaldáliga was surprised and believed that in conscience he could not sign it. He entered into consultation, keeping the whole matter secret. But it seems that a cable from Rome "revealed" to the O Globo TV network (which is right-wing and against the progressive Brazilian bishops) that Bishop Casaldáliga was being punished by the Vatican. So there was a great debate in Brazil in public opinion as well as in intellectual, popular, political, and church circles. Bishop Casaldáliga is very well known throughout Brazil; some appreciate and admire him and others criticize him, but all acknowledge his poverty, sacrifice, and risk of death in order to serve and support his people, a people made up of peasants and Indians. There were members of the hierarchy who in written and spoken statements said that Pedro should humbly accept the Vatican's correction and become more moderate. Very many people and groups and well-known personalities supported Pedro and his causes and criticized the Vatican. Forty bishops and one hundred priests wrote to the pope, standing in solidarity with Bishop Casaldáliga in very firm terms: "This bishop's causes," they said, "which are the causes of the gospel of the Reign and the causes of the suffering people of Latin America, are also our causes."

Bishop Casaldáliga publicly stated that in conscience he could not sign this document without getting an explanation from Rome, and on this point the president of the bishops conference, Archbishop Luciano Mendes Almeida, supported him. After stating that the leak and misrepresentation by the O Globo TV network were "very regrettable," Archbishop Mendes

said, "I know and deeply admire Dom Pedro and I know that matters will be cleared up satisfactorily between him and the Holy See; Dom Pedro has a right not to sign and to continue his work until all the doubts are cleared up." The president of the bishops conference went to see the nuncio to ask for an explanation (thus far the nunciature had not communicated anything to the bishops conference) and went to Rome. When he came back from Rome, Archbishop Luciano Mendes said he had had satisfactory conversations with Cardinals Gantin and Ratzinger and with the pope. He had told each of them of Dom Pedro Casaldáliga's fidelity and could attest to their appreciation for Dom Pedro. In a statement in the official newsletter of the bishops conference he ended by saying that "the bishop of São Félix will engage in gospel-spirited exchange with the Roman congregations, thus following up on the discussion this past June." He announced a change of procedure. Rome was not asking Dom Pedro to sign that strange document called a "Writ," whose origin no one in the Vatican seemed to know. Some things would seem to remain forever behind the curtains of Vatican offices and halls. However, in Rome there was no hiding the fact that the bishops of Nicaragua had pressured strongly for the Vatican to clamp down on Bishop Casaldáliga.

Never at a loss, Pedro Casaldáliga said, "I haven't lost a minute of sleep over any of this. I have no intention of becoming a little left-wing Lefebvre." After coming back from Rome he was calm and good humored enough to write a poem out of his experience, this time "penitential":

## **I, SINNER AND BISHOP, CONFESS**

I, sinner and bishop, confess  
 that I have come to Rome holding a country staff;  
 that I have sneaked up on the wind among the columns  
 and that I tried to play the flute in the teeth of the organ;  
 that I have come to Assisi  
 surrounded by butterflies.

I, sinner and bishop, confess  
 that I dream of a church  
 wearing only the gospel and sandals;  
 that I believe in the church  
   despite the church, sometimes,  
 that in any case I believe in the Reign,  
   journeying in the church.

I, sinner and bishop, confess  
 that I have seen Jesus of Nazareth  
 proclaiming the good news also  
 to the poor of Latin America;

that I have greeted Mary, "Hail, our *comadre!*"  
that I have celebrated the blood of those who have been faithful;  
that I have gone on pilgrimages.

I, sinner and bishop, confess  
that I love Nicaragua, the little girl with the slingshot.

I, sinner and bishop, confess  
that every morning I open the window of time;  
that I speak as a brother to sisters and brothers;  
that I don't lose sleep, or fail to sing or laugh;  
that I tend the flower of hope.

"Given everything," Pedro told me with tranquility during our interview in Panama, "after a good deal of prayer and consultation I decided to suspend my visit to Nicaragua this year. I wrote a letter to the pope and I also wrote to Cardinals Gantin and Ratzinger."

He gave me a copy of his new letter to the pope and I read it. He wrote it November 16, 1988, when the events surrounding his *ad limina* visit had died down. He gratefully referred to the interview the president of the Brazilian bishops conference, Archbishop Luciano Mendes, had had with the pope and added:

With this letter I want to renew to you my witness of apostolic collegiality, my intention to be faithful to the church of Jesus, and my free, joyful, radical commitment to serve the Reign of God, day by day among the poor, in this tiny plot of the "young vineyard" of the church that is Latin America, as the founder of my religious congregation, Saint Anthony Mary Claret, put it.

To avoid further misunderstanding and suffering among brothers and sisters, I suspend my journey to Nicaragua this coming February. I hope that many will pray and show solidarity toward Central America, which is so conflict-ridden and so important for the political and ecclesial future of our continent; and especially I hope that there will be emergency solidarity with Nicaragua, attacked, economically hemmed in, and now lashed by a terrible hurricane.

The approach of the fifth centenary of the evangelization of the Americas commits our whole church to the great missionary task of the "new evangelization" which you have fittingly announced and which must be creatively inculturated and Latin American in a catholic way.

We are about to begin the liturgical season of advent, preparing once more for Christmas. May Mary, the mother of Jesus, help us to discern the new age and to grasp faithfully the salvation that is ever arriving.

You may rely, dear John Paul, pastor of our church, on my daily prayer for you and your aides in the ministry of Peter.

With your apostolic blessing, fraternally in Christ Jesus,

*Pedro Casaldáliga*

*Bishop of São Félix do Araguaia*

"You're well aware," Pedro told me, "that I am not standing up for the sake of a problem of my own, but for causes that are part of the cause of Jesus; that is why I stand up for them with a certain passion and at risk to myself. My reference point is Jesus."

He went on, sadly, "In all these incidents I have seen how Rome is deluged with wrong accusations and how little effort there is at maturity, family trust, and freedom of spirit in certain ecclesiastical circles." He then spoke about his many reasons for continuing to come to Central America, out of love and fidelity to the people and the church of Latin America.

"I am a bishop of the church. Certainly I am a bishop of a particular church, but the fact that I am a bishop does not mean I cease to be a human person in solidarity, a Christian in solidarity, and a bishop in solidarity. If as a human being everything human is my concern, as a member of the church, everything ecclesial is my concern. And as bishop of São Félix do Araguaia, I ought to be especially aware of and in solidarity with all of Latin America. For a whole series of reasons in my life, for which I thank God, I see in myself a certain vocation, I believe, and certain opportunities to engage in a gospel dialogue on the frontiers of Latin America. Some of these factors in my life are the following: my relationships and possibilities as a writer and poet; the fact that I was brought up in Spain, with the Spanish language; the fact that perhaps I feel more easily and passionately than others the continental dimension of the many-sided processes—ecclesial, ethnic-cultural, and sociopolitical—of Latin America, all of which are in liberation; my passion for solidarity and the obsession growing within me as we approach the five hundredth anniversary that only as a continent can Latin America be saved and that only in a continental manner will the church in Latin America be what it must be. All that has led me to engage in these actions which I am very aware can only be conflictive, given all the complexity, in both human and church terms, in which we live. But with faith and hope and family spirit, we can continue to journey in the midst of conflict even maintaining canon law (the church also needs structure). We can promote dialogue, sometimes even by giving up Nicaragua as I have done on this fourth journey of solidarity with Central America. God will exact an account of our fidelity within the horizon of fidelity we can see, all of us accepting challenges and family-spirited suggestions, since no one can boast of already seeing the whole truth clearly."

I asked him what horizon of fidelity he sees. He answered, "Personally in the midst of all this conflict, I sense that the Father and my brothers

and sisters are demanding that I combine, dialectically and in a gospel manner, fidelity to my own conscience as an adult and free person; fidelity to Latin America, which is now my Great Homeland, in a liberation process; fidelity to the church, one and universal, with a Christian's co-responsibility and a bishop's collegiality; and above all, fidelity to Jesus Christ and to the Reign."

In September 1988 during the argument over whether the Vatican was "reprimanding" Bishop Casaldáliga, it was revealed that Argentinian Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the well-known defender of human rights, had officially proposed the bishop of São Félix do Araguaia, Pedro Casaldáliga, as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize for 1989. "The primary reasons for Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga's candidacy," said Pérez Esquivel, "are the work this bishop has carried out for twenty years to unify Latin America and his defense of the Indian peoples and rural workers in the Brazilian Amazon."

To some, witness; to others, scandal. Some years ago Casaldáliga wrote these lines: "I am, with each twisting step, / witness or scandal, / witness and scandal."

## **ABOUT THE FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF EVANGELIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA**

"It's a bit frightening," the bishop told me, "to see how certain sectors of the church have sought to put aside the expression that Vatican II retrieved, that the church is the 'people of God' at the service of the Reign in the world; the church is the 'light of peoples,' 'sacrament of salvation,' in dialogue with other religions and in dialogue with the processes affecting humankind. They have wanted only to speak of the church as 'mystery.' And of course it is. If it is 'sacrament,' it is 'mystery.' It is faith, it is eucharist, it is hope of full eschatology, and Jesus himself is head of the church. But what greater 'mystery' is there than the people of God, possessed by the Spirit, journeying through the desert, through the exile of history, and announcing, celebrating, and largely making it possible for God's Reign to happen. What a magnificent trinitarian mystery, magnificent Christological mystery, and a magnificent mystery of people and history!"

"I have regretted several times that our theologians surrendered so quickly and gave up the expression 'popular church,' which when well understood (as Pope John Paul II himself has said) is a healthy complement to the expression 'hierarchical church.' I am concerned that we are abandoning this term (which some have 'demonized') since we could give the impression that it really is a 'parallel church' that must be given up, when actually it is a matter of helping the whole church become 'church' as Jesus wants. I defend the CBCs [Christian base communities]; not only are they a way of being church; I assert that the CBCs want to help the whole church to exist in a new way; they are seeking to aid the whole church to be more

visible in a community way, and to aid the whole church, in imitation of the kenosis of its own founder, Jesus, to exist more toward the bottom of the human race, among the vast majority of the poor, and moved by the Spirit; they are seeking to help the whole church to be rooted in the aspirations and the sufferings of peoples, so that it may really be the church of the Incarnate Word.

"I believe the CBCs are now a permanent feature. They are the work of the Spirit for co-participation in the great ministry of the church. . . . Liberation theology is also irreversible; it has matured; today no one can call it an 'adolescent' theology. It has become more well rounded and universal. Increasingly it has highlighted the world of indigenous people, the world of blacks, and women, as being part of complete liberation. When lived in history, the full liberation brought by Jesus demands not only human liberation in economic, political, and social terms, but also in ethnic, cultural, and sexual terms, since all this is subject to sin. Women theologians are helping us, and the indigenous and black worlds are increasingly helping us. And Rome, with the two documents on liberation theology, the pope's statements, and dialogue with other theologians—all that has been challenging and is helping liberation theology become increasingly 'theological.' I also think that the involvement of other cultures, pluralism, conflicts, even the conflict in which I am engaged myself, will help the church's catholicity improve. A Spanish journalist laughed when, at the end of an interview in the midst of the notoriety that my visit to Rome caused, I said, 'Ultimately what I want is for the Catholic church to be more catholic.'"

And Casaldàliga stresses that we must all help the church be more truly catholic and points to the many and obvious developments that show how the Catholic church around the world is turning in on itself toward uniformity and centralism; as evidence he points to doctrine, publications, theologians being put on trial, appointment of bishops, and tensions with bishops conferences, especially those of Brazil and the United States. . . .

"Besides all that," he continues, "the sects are doing a great deal of harm all over Latin America. They are ideological extensions of the empire, and they are getting into the minds of our people who are religious and Christian, breaking up communities, especially communities of native peoples. Three years ago Guatemala got more money from the United States to strengthen the sects than it got for strategic military aid. It's dramatic. A kind of fragmentation of the Christian faith, a Christ broken to pieces on this continent. I hope the Spirit of God will be able to put together the faith that has thus been shattered.

"I see the five hundredth anniversary as a providential framework and a great challenge. Also an area of tension. The governments of Spain, Portugal, the United States, and most of Latin America are getting ready for the tourism, the business opportunities, and the nostalgia that will surround the celebration. But there are some of us in intellectual, church, popular, and native forces, the black movement and some political sectors,

who are getting ready to celebrate the five hundred years in another way. I continue to believe that the right attitude, especially for Christians and the church, is an attitude of 'memory,' of 'remorse,' and of 'commitment.' A critical and self-critical accumulated memory of history, which can retrieve the great traditions, the great cultures, the prior history of the peoples of Amerindia and Afroamerica. Remorse for every element of collusion or omission during these five centuries. Bishop Leonidas Proaño, bishop of the Ecuadoran Indians (alongside Las Casas one of the four or five greatest figures who have respected indigenous cultures in the history of evangelization), at 2:30 A.M. on August 27, 1988, the last year of his life in time (he died on August 31), said these historic words and left us this testament for celebrating the five centuries: 'An idea is coming to me, I have an idea: that the church has sole responsibility for the burden that the Indians have suffered for centuries. How terrible, how terrible! I'm burdened with this weight of centuries.'

"Memory, remorse, and commitment. Commitment in solidarity, genuinely Christian commitment, that may permit a liberation that will make the full experience of these primeval cultures to flourish, overcoming colonialism, dependency, oligarchies, and borders that have been imposed for centuries. I believe that in the future international relations will take place from continent to continent without empires. And I think that that is how the liberation of the United States of America will take place, making the expression of those who struggled for independence almost two centuries ago really true: '*América para los americanos*': '*All the Americas for all the Americans*.'

"I also think that with this five hundredth anniversary the church has the chance to be 'catholic' by being specifically 'Latin American.' My dream is that the conference in Santo Domingo [the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops] in 1992 will take up not only the 'muted cry' of Medellín, and the 'loud and clear cry' of Puebla, but also the organized cry of peoples, of ethnic groups of Latin American cultures. And I hope that the celebration of the year two thousand, which is shaking the consciousness of the church and the world, will not be just an inappropriate millenarianism. In Latin America celebrating the year two thousand has to go by way of the celebration of the five hundred years. What an opportunity for the gospel if the churches know how to live this paschal and subversive memory, know how to have the Lent-like remorse that they should have, and know how to take on the commitment of the process of the Reign in the historic, ethnic, and cultural expression of these peoples of our Great Homeland!"

### **CONFLICT AND JOY ARE SYNONYMOUS IN GOOD CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY**

Once again I began to discuss things with Bishop Casaldáliga, as a "believer and sinner." I asked him, "What is your personal spirituality like in

the midst of the conflicts you're experiencing now?"

"Conflict is at the heart of Christian spirituality. Those who have written on the Christology of liberation have helped us understand Jesus as a 'man in conflict.' And our Christian life is a life on the cross, always. If the option for the poor is to be 'clear and in solidarity,' as Puebla says, it is obvious that we must take on the conflicts of the poor and the process of poor peoples in conflict. A genuine Christian spirituality must have, above all else, a paschal disposition, and the Passover is passion and death, even as it is also resurrection. Moreover a unity that is not simply for the sake of peace but is one of fidelity, a chance for mature unity, must go by way of conflict. We will always be misunderstood, both at home and elsewhere. And at these very urgent periods in social and political processes as well as in the church, it is natural that conflict will stand out more clearly. The important thing is not to be either masochistic or aggressive. The important thing is to do things with the intention of building the Reign; with a certain capability for dialogue; with the good humor that is the joy and fruit of the Holy Spirit. I observe that these peoples, specifically in Central America, in their suffering, tension, struggles, and with their disappeared, abducted, and dead, keep up a great hope and even a joy that can come only from God. By contrast those of us who are well established in society and in the church shudder at any conflict or at the prospect of going without things or at situations of tension. I have often said that poverty and liberation are synonyms. I believe we also should say that in Christian language conflict and joy are also synonyms, with the paschal disposition.

"There are certain basic notes of spirituality that motivate me and that I try to live. Fundamental virtues of a liberation spirituality we could call them. Before that, though, I must confess that I continue with my sins. I continue to be impatient. A fruit of that very impatience (or its cause for all I know), another sin, is a certain susceptibility. I think on this point I've matured somewhat, but . . . I never lose the dream. That's the truth. I don't have any kind of hatred or enmity toward anyone, that's for sure. I shocked them a little at a round table discussion on Cultural TV in São Paulo when a reporter asked me, 'Who would you like to meet in heaven?' 'Everyone,' I said, 'even Somoza.'

"They were stunned, they couldn't believe it. Sure, why not? I mean it with all my heart. I don't hate anyone; I want salvation for everyone and I believe in a God who can save everyone while respecting human freedom. We allow the mystery of God's love this ultimate chance.

"Perhaps—I'm back to reciting my sins—I should allow effective dialogue to become real in me; I understand that it is not enough to engage in dialogue sincerely but that dialogue presumes the word and the external deed. Perhaps I sometimes fail to have a comprehensive understanding of diversity or to keep it very present. If we could keep that understanding present in something like the way we feel our own vision of God that comes to us from faith, then maybe we would avoid scattering, being torn up inside,



anxieties, worrying, closing ourselves off or making dialogue impossible. I think that I could engage in prayer even a bit more systematically; but I do usually feel very much in communion with the Lord. After a very intensely Christological period, even in my readings (magnificent, beautiful books of Christology), it seems that Jesus is really drawing me to where he had to lead me, where he leads all, to the very bosom of the Trinity, to the Homeland of the Trinity, from which we come, in which we move and toward which we are headed, this ultimate Homeland of the Three in One, in the full community of knowledge, of love and of love with all.

"I'm going to set out some basic lines of liberation spirituality that I am in the process of discovering, that I try to live, and that I would like to communicate to my brothers and sisters who today in the midst of the challenge of reality sometimes do not find how they can live out Christian spirituality, which must be spirituality according to the Spirit of Jesus, a spirituality of following Jesus. The basic lines of that liberation spirituality are these:

"First, being poor, in solidarity, committed. The option for the poor in solidarity, committed to their causes and their processes.

"Second, contemplatives while on the way; decodifying reality, as Leonardo Boff would say. Running up against the God who is present in the processes of peoples, and in the process within each one of us. Contemplatives while on the march. Here we would also say that you engage in contemplation while on your way, as long as you are walking in the light of faith, as long as you are trying to walk with your feet in the challenging reality of history, with the dogma of the incarnation as your starting point.

"Third, artisans of the gospel insurrection. This involves the simultaneous triple revolution that I mentioned to Cardinal Ratzinger and that he even kidded me about, when we—the cardinals and their secretaries and I—all prayed the Our Father that unites us. This gospel insurrection is the revolution of one's own person in *metanoia*, in continual conversion; the radical revolution/social transformation—this is a continual conversion of some structures of sin, selfishness, and privilege toward structures of life, and it also involves participation and egalitarian kinship; and the revolution of the church, which is *semper renovanda*.

"Fourth, on the cross of conflict. The various possible kinds of dark nights; the things given up; asceticism which remains valid, even in concrete deeds of a vigil or fasting; above all giving up your own selfishness; the desert; solitude; perhaps failure, misunderstanding, persecution, martyrdom; ultimately, the mystery of the cross—being baptized in Christ, crucified with him, buried in his death.

"Fifth, in the kinship that makes us equals. More and more I feel that we can speak credibly about being brothers and sisters only if at the same time we demand the greatest possible equality. If brothers and sisters are very unequal, I doubt they are really brothers and sisters. And as much as possible the Lord wants us to be equal in possibilities, and wants to spread

out this world's goods in a certain family equality for all.

"Sixth, stubborn in hope. Against all hope, out of what is not, despite what is, in failure itself, sprouting in death. The murdered grain of wheat, buried in the ground, sprouts forth. *Parrhesia*, courage, fortitude, a kind of perfect joy that is characteristically Latin American; Francis in his situation talked about perfect joy; a Latin American perfect joy. And the celebration of hope, the eucharist. From the perspective of five centuries, even in these processes of conflict, of misunderstanding, of death threats. . . . In the pre-lature of São Félix we are once more experiencing this climate; Gascon and Fernanda, a married couple who have been pastoral agents for a number of years—he was recently shot and very seriously wounded, and lately I have gotten death threats from the UDR [the União Democrática Ruralista—the national landholders' organization]. We continue to be surrounded by death, so hope must continue to surround us. I think this is not a matter of tactics or strategy. If there is something in us that is deep, vital, definitive, it is precisely hope. I always say we are not headed toward death, but toward life. One of the little poems I have written lately says, 'Here is our alternative / alive or arisen; dead never.'

"And finally, as though summing up this whole spirituality, the four fidelities that I believe are really the passion of my life: trying to be consistent witnesses to Jesus Christ, following him, according to his Spirit; carrying his cross; announcing his word; being passionate for his cause which is the Reign, the cause of the Father, until he returns. I think if you try to live out these main features of spirituality with simplicity, and with a continual examination of conscience, at least it keeps you from going astray in these main attitudes of fidelity. And so I must strive to live combining these four fidelities, which for me mean four branches of this single paschal cross that I am living."

## A PORTRAIT

Bishop Casaldáliga left Panama, going back to Brazil. Alone. With his cross, inside him.

As the end of his life in this life draws near, he is writing more and more poems. Two recent books of poems are *El tiempo y la espera* and *Todavía estas palabras*. These poems not only radiate his persistent major and minor fidelities (fidelity is a diamond), but also radiate his aim of defining himself vis-à-vis those who are upset with and do not understand his deeds and words. To friends and enemies Pedro spells out his "identity" (see, for example, the first three poems in the present book).

In these most recent poems one can also note a strong effort to defend personal values and charisms for the common good and for the whole church. Above all Casaldáliga defends being "human," something that in a bishop is in danger of being denied:



Why don't you help me  
examine the fascinating stone  
that has always drawn me to the edge?

The well trod paths  
are everyone's paths.

We at least  
should venture on these trails  
where the flower of the New Age blossoms,  
where the birds say the Word  
with ancient vigor,  
where other venturesome folks seek  
human freedom.

If our heart is pure  
we should never be caught  
in the impassable night.  
The wind and the stars  
will tell us where to walk.

Why do you leave me alone  
with or without the truth?

Finally I am pleased to note a final abandonment, a simple and trusting  
"Father, into your hands," in these three lines of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga:

When the winepress finishes its unpleasant work  
You will save the cause of my name,  
which only wants to be Your Cause.

## **Abbreviations of Casaldáliga Texts Cited**

AR	<i>Antologia retirante</i>
CAB	<i>Cartas aos amigos do Brasil</i>
CDP	<i>Com Deus no meio do povo</i>
CEL	<i>Cantares de la entera libertad</i>
CG	<i>A cuia de Gedeão</i>
CM	<i>Cantigas menores</i>
EAR	<i>Encara avui respiro en català</i>
EDP	<i>Experiencia de Dios y pasión por el pueblo</i>
ERF	<i>En rebelde fidelidad</i>
FAW	<i>Fire and Ashes to the Wind</i>
IBJ	<i>I Believe in Justice and Hope</i>
ML	<i>Mystic of Liberation</i>
MQ	<i>Missa dos quilombos (record jacket)</i>
MSC	<i>La muerte que da sentido a mi credo</i>
NC	<i>Nosso catecismo</i>
NCP	<i>Nicaragua, combate y profecía</i>
NDA	<i>Nós, do Araguaia</i>
PIC	<i>Prophets in Combat</i>
PL	<i>Pere Libertat</i>
TE	<i>El tiempo y la espera</i>
TEP	<i>Todavía estas palabras (forthcoming)</i>
TSM	<i>Missa da terra sem males</i>
UIA	<i>Uma Igreja da Amazônia em conflito com o latifúndio e a marginalização social</i>

*Full bibliographical references are given at the end of this volume. Existing English translations have been used, sometimes with extensive revision.*



## List of Works

Works are listed in chronological order, according to the date of publication or release of the original. Publication data for English translations are given following the information about the original version of the work.

### BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

- Palabra ungida*. Spain: Teologado Claretiano de Zafra, 1955. 63 pp.
- Nuestra Señora del siglo XX*. 2d ed. Madrid: Editorial PPC, 1962. 241 pp.
- Llena de Dios y de los hombres*. Spain: Teologado Claretiano de Salamanca, 1969. 36 pp.
- Uma Igreja da Amazônia em conflito com o latifúndio e a marginalização social*. Pastoral Letter. 1971. 121 pp.
- Clamor elemental*. Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1971. 103 pp.
- With Teófilo Cabestrero. *Una Iglesia que lucha contra la injusticia*. "Misión Abierta" 7-8 (1973). Madrid. 228 pp.
- Tierra nuestra, libertad*. Buenos Aires: Guadalupe, 1974. 151 pp.
- Fleuve libre, ô mon peuple*. Paris: Cerf, 1976.
- Yo creo en la justicia y en la esperanza: el credo que ha dado sentido a mi vida*. Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1976. 202 pp. Eng. trans.: *I Believe in Justice and Hope*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides-Claretian, 1978. 232 pp.
- La muerte que da sentido a mi credo: diario 1975-1977*. Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1977. 86 pp.
- Antologia retirante*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1978. 240 pp.
- Edited by Teófilo Cabestrero. *Diálogos en Mato Grosso con Pedro Casaldáliga*. Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1978. 186 pp. Eng. trans.: *Mystic of Liberation: A Portrait of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga of Brazil*. Prefatory poem by Ernesto Cardenal. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981. 220 pp.
- Airada esperanza*. Barcelona: Claret, 1978. 171 pp.
- Pere Libertat*. Barcelona: Claret, 1978. 140 pp.
- With Edilson Martins. *Nós, do Araguaia: Pedro Casaldáliga, o bispo da teimosia e liberdade*. Foreword by Leonardo Boff. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1979. 221 pp.
- Cantigas menores*. Goiânia: Projornal, 1979. 84 pp.
- With Pedro Tierra. *Missa da terra sem males*. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo e Presença, 1980. 91 pp.
- With Izquierdo Maldonado, the CNBB, and Souza Martins. *Profetas, tierra y capitalismo*. Bogotá: Cinep, 1981. 193 pp.
- A cuia de Gedeão: poemas e autos sacramentais sertanejos*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1982. 98 pp.

- En rebelde fidelidad: diario 1977-1983*. Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1983. 222 pp.  
 With Pedro Tierra. *Palmares, il villaggio della libertà: missa dos quilombos*. Parma: CEM and *Missione Oggi* magazine, 1982.
- Experiencia de Dios y pasión por el pueblo: escritos pastorales*. Foreword by Alberto Iniesta. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1983.
- Cantares de la entera libertad*. Managua: IHCA-CAVCEPA, 1984. 81 pp.
- Fuego y ceniza al viento: antología espiritual*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1984. 111 pp.  
 Eng. trans.: *Fire and Ashes to the Wind: Spiritual Anthology*. Quezon City, Philippines: Claretians Publications, 1984. 111 pp.
- Com Deus no meio do povo*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1985. 75 pp.
- Nicaragua, combate y profecía*. Madrid: Ayuso/Mision Abierta, 1986. Foreword by Mario Benedetti, epilogue by Leonardo Boff. 189 pp. Eng. trans.: *Prophets in Combat: The Nicaraguan Journal of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga*. Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1987.
- With A. Duterne and T. Balduino. *Francisco Jentel: defensor do povo de Araguaia*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1986. 75 pp.
- El tiempo y la espera*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1986. 126 pp.
- Encara avui respiro en català*. Barcelona: Claret, 1987. 185 pp.
- Todavía estas palabras*. Estella: Verbo Divino, 1989.


## RECORDS, TAPES, FILMS, AND VIDEOS

- Missa da terra sem males*. Tape. Music by Martín Coplas. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1980.
- Missa da terra sem males*. 16 mm. film. 35 minutes. São Paulo: Verbo Filmes, 1981.
- Missa dos quilombos*. Record and tape. Music by Milton Nascimento. São Paulo: Ariola, 1982.
- E o Verbo se fez índio*. Record and tape. Music by Martín Coplas. São Paulo: Verbo Filmes, 1985.
- P(F) é na caminhada*. 35 mm. video. 80 minutes, color. Script: Pedro Casaldáliga. Narration: Leonardo Boff. Director: Conrado Berning. São Paulo: Verbo Filmes, 1987.





# IN PURSUIT OF THE KINGDOM

 ORBIS/ISBN 0-88344-655-3

"Any who read this book will come to know Pedro Casaldáliga well. I experienced his courage, compassion, and fierce pursuit of justice. I began to share his determination never to let up in the struggle for the poor and the commitment to be on their side, even as God is. I saw how much solace, strength, and joy he brings to the poor. . . . Many from the first world who read this book may find themselves hearing the Gospel for the first time. . . ."

—from the Foreword by Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

Through writings that span two decades the reader is introduced into the heart and soul of an extraordinary man: Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga of Brazil. The unconventional Claretian prelate has earned his share of praise and condemnation for his forthright identification with the poor. Casaldáliga has been described as a "witty, fiery, mystical, practical poet-priest, bishop of the poor, defender of the Indian, a combination of Oscar Romero, Dom Helder Camara, and Dan Berrigan." It seems few who know of him, or read his writings, remain neutral!

*In Pursuit of the Kingdom* is the only anthology in English of Casaldáliga's works. It includes excerpts from his many books, sermons, and poems. There is also a personal (and not unhumorous) account of his summoning to Rome, plus an intimate interview with journalist Teófilo Cabestrero. All these writings reflect the vast range of Casaldáliga's concerns, theological and pastoral: the option for the poor, the struggles of the people of Central and Latin America, the theology and spirituality of liberation, and the mission and future of the church.

"In his person Pedro Casaldáliga gathers together all the dimensions of the Latin American continent: believing and exploited, joyful and oppressed, black, Indian, mestizo, white, conquered, and liberated. It could be that, after the death of Oscar Romero, he is the preeminent prophet of Latin America and perhaps of all the third world. . . . In these inspired pages of Pedro Casaldáliga—poor, friend of the poor, and brother of all creatures—there is the good perfume of the Gospel."

—Leonardo Boff

"Perhaps the best lens through which to see the turbulent and hopeful situation among Christians in Latin America is the one provided in this collection of writings by Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga . . . all of which serve to illuminate the theology, spirituality, and practice of engaged Christians in Latin America today. The courage and inventiveness of this modest man are evident throughout this book."

—Harvey Cox



Eric Wheeler

*Pedro Casaldáliga is Bishop  
of São Felix, Brazil.*

 ORBIS BOOKS  
Maryknoll, New York 10545

Cover design: Alicia Grant