

Latinamerican reception of *Lumen Gentium*

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Light and darkness interact throughout today's world, and also within the latinamerican church. So ¿how may we be light for all people? On one side, there are honest persons and courageous organizations, and on another side, there is plenty of global inequality and colonial obscurity.

Our journey's take place on bumpy roads. Pedro Casaldaliga offers a good clue. The church (and humanity) undergoes temptations: "to resign memory, to resign the cross and commitment, to resign utopia and hope"¹. These are not only bumpy temptations; these are obscure parts of our history, and also opportunities to change course. The focus of this essay is being faithful as People of God and being communities of the Poor.

Section one deals with landmarks. Section two underlines a prophetic ecclesiology guided by the Spirit. Thus I wish to take up challenges of *Lumen Gentium*, of Medellín's *Pobreza de la Iglesia* and *Pastoral de Conjunto*, of Puebla's sections that refer to being *Pueblo de Dios*. An awesome challenge is that ecclesial renewal be not self-centered but rather for the benefit of humanity and the universe.

1) Landmarks in people's faith/church.

During more than 500 years, common people have been reconstructing the church in the world. This happens when faith and justice go hand in hand, when community is nurtured by ministries and charisms, when *koinonia* leads to *diakonia*, when catholic laity is a beacon among marginal people, when prophetic documents and mainly martyrs open the way to mission, when we join others who seek deep changes within history. All of this has been taking place in spite of colonial and neo-colonial political and cultural darkness, and in spite of shameful collaboration when unjust powers are sacralized. May I briefly mention five major

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¹ Pedro Casaldaliga, "Los pobres, interpelación a la Iglesia", Congreso de Teología de la Asociación Juan XXIII, Madrid (1996); www.servicioskoinonia.org/Casaldaliga/textos "Tentaciones que acechan a la iglesia y, a su modo, a la entera humanidad: la tentación de renunciar a la memoria, la tentación de renunciar a la cruz y a la militancia, y la tentación de renunciar a la utopía, a la esperanza" (accessed 12/8/2014).

landmarks: people's faith, associations, prophetic texts, witness through martyrdom, joyful historical change (and its church of the poor). Let me again underline that all of this happens in the midst of darkness, due to external and internal colonialism.

A first landmark. Since the middle of the 16th century indigenous and non-indigenous have warm contacts with Transcendence. For example, in Mexico: "Sancta Maria, in inantzin in huel nelli Teotl Dios, in Ipalnemohuani" ² (=Saint Mary, dear mother of true God, giver of life). In other regions afro-americans with their *axé* (=wholistic power) acknowledge Christ as Black ³. In everyday patterns (that disagree with official standards) catholic faith/church has been indigenous, black, *mestizo*, supra-patriarchal, human-cosmic. The main thrust is sharing the faith; and a secondary factor is participation in church. These patterns, scorned by colonial catholic elites and institutions, do survive up till now in marginal ways.

May I now mention a set of landmarks. During more than five centuries, a wide spectrum of networks, wisdoms and spiritualities have been carried out ⁴. Thus there is a latinamerican tradition of 'people's church' (although this concept is rarely used). It is due to millions of rituals and of associations, during ancient and republican phases of our history, where common people structurally and symbolically subvert colonial and neo-colonial frameworks. What are most outstanding are festive rituals that imply love and solidarity among people (which is a way of being church). This is strengthened since the 1950's up till today, due to basic christian communities ("comunidades de base"), biblical circles ("lectura comunitaria de la Palabra"), charismatic renewal, catholic devotions with lay and particularly women's leadership, renewed catechetical programs.

During the last 5 decades, prophetic texts and witness through martyrdom carry out major and most meaningful landmarks. *Lumen Gentium* opened the way to creative proposals from Medellin (1968) to Aparecida (2007) and in a special way the poor church (Medellin's *Pobreza de la Iglesia*), community and shared pastoral action (Medellin's *Pastoral de Conjunto*) and renewal in all of the church (underlined in Puebla, and later in Santo Domingo, and even more so in Aparecida)

² *Nican Mopohua* (1556), Miguel León Portilla, *Tonantzin Guadalupe*, Mejiro: FCE, 2002, 100.

³ Antonio Aparecido da Silva, "Elementos e pressupostos da reflexao teologica a partir das comunidades negras", in ATABAQUE-ASETT, *Teologia afro-americana*, Sao Paulo: Paulus, 1997, 72: "...o Cristo negro, bem como o Cristo indio, e tambem mulher. Deus se identifica com seu povo, e o povo se reconhece no rosto negro, indio e feminino de Deus". Unfortunately, the elites are not able to see indigenous, afro-latinamerican, and feminist ways of being church, and special ways of acknowledging themselves in God.

⁴ See Enrique Dussel (ed.), *Resistencia y Esperanza, Historia del pueblo cristiano en América Latina y el Caribe*, San José: DEI, 1995; Maximiliano Salinas, *Gracias a Dios que comí. El cristianismo en Iberoamerica y el Caribe, siglos XV-XX*, Mexico: Dabar, 2000.

⁵. Church renewal aroused opposition from religious elites who were behind the assassination of Oscar Romero (24/3/1980) and of 5 jesuits and Elba and Celina in San Salvador (16/11/1989). Prophetic martyrdom and bloody persecutions are paradoxical landmarks of hope.

A third and most recent landmark has been unexpected and most welcome. Throughout *Evangelii Gaudium*, everyday concerns are combined with structural and spiritual challenges seen by Pope Francis are transformation of the church in today's world and social/personal/joyful evangelization. Here we find footprints of latinamerican experience and wisdom. "Joy experienced daily, amid the little things of life"; "being Church means being God's people... where everybody can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel"; "I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them" (EG 4, 114, 157) ⁶. ¡Daily joy and structural, wholistic change! ¡People's of God who are poor! ¡Good news of life for all!

All of this mean ecclesiological breakthroughs (which do not happen through magic). A breakthrough allows us to have lengthy and difficult journeys. With systematic thinking, with communal prayer, with joyful and clever strategies, faith/church may continue flourishing in different parts of the world.

2) Ecclesiology: human, spiritual, prophetic.

Often reflections about the Church are institutionally pragmatic, and boringly doctrinal. These paths are irrelevant (now and tomorrow). Today and in coming years ecclesiology needs courageous insights and systematic reconstruction. My small presentation (and all that is carried out these days in Duquesne University) may be hopeful if it deals with key human, spiritual, prophetic elements. The metaphor of tiny yeast and large amounts of flour (cf Mt 13:33) is adequate for small and significant events. In anonymous Christian communities (and at times in doctrinal texts) there are substantial breakthroughs.

⁵ See Episcopado Latinoamericano, *Rio de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo* Santiago: San Pablo, 1993; *Aparecida, Documento Conclusivo*, Bogotá: Celam, 2007; and also see interpretations by Gustavo Gutierrez, "La opción profética de una Iglesia", in Amerindia, *Tejiendo redes de vida y esperanza*, Bogotá: Indoamerican Press, 2006, 307-320; Juan Noemi, "Sobre la situación de la Iglesia en América Latina" in *La fe en busca de inteligencia*, Santiago: PUC, 1993, 201-218; and reception of Vatican II in Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina in S. Torres, C. Abrigo (eds.), *Actualidad y Vigencia de la Teología Latinoamericana*, Santiago: UCSH, 2012, 97-159. For a north-american perspective see Robert Pelton CSC, "The reception of Vatican II in Latin America", *Theological Studies* 74 (2013), 819-827.

⁶ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium, On the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world*, 24/11/2013.

In spite of worldly and of ecclesiastical obstacles, Latin American thinking (and also teaching by our Bishops) has been drawing good guidelines. There has been a creative “reception” of *Lumen Gentium*’s accent on being People of God and on being a church of mystery and sacrament in the world ⁷. During five decades our Bishop’s teaching has been underlining option for the poor, community in all its dimensions, and recently we have agreed upon a wholistic mission ⁸. At the same time, there are huge obstacles, such as ecclesiastical complicity with unjust powers, lack of support towards basic communities and ministries, and three decades of misinterpretation of liberation theology.

Shortly after Medellin (in Sucre, 1972) conservative leadership took over CELAM and begun dismantling reforms and spearheading campaigns against theologians (considering them unfaithful to the magisterium and contaminated by marxism) ⁹. A major obstacle has been that doctrine about being People of God has been marginalized (as it happened mainly during the 1985 Synod on Vatican II) and “communion” has been highlighted ¹⁰. However, significant voices and institutions have carried forth Vatican II reforms, acknowledging the church’s vocation to be God’s people and community, and reading the signs of the times (in the midst of tensions and debates over the meaning of the Council). A key experience has been solidarity and service to the downtrodden where Christ is encountered; thus we have a christological understanding of people of God (that needs a pneumatological approach).

Latinamerican ecclesiology has propelled a “faithful creativity” when it carries out its reception of text and spirit of *Lumen Gentium*. “Christ is the light of all nations... and that radiance of His brightens the countenance of the Church” (LG 1); she is a sacrament in Christ, and “becomes on earth the initial budding forth of the kingdom” (LG 5). When kingdom and church -and people of God and church- go hand in hand, she is not self-centered. All are aware of controversies in

⁷ See LG 1, 9:3, 26:1, 48:2, SC 5:2 and in a special way LG 1: “bring to all humanity the light of Christ”. The Church is sacrament/mysterion, and this happens within human history, and in a special way among the “little ones”.

⁸ Texts in footnote 5.

⁹ See Jose Comblin, *O povo de Deus*, Sao Paulo: Paulus, 2002, 106-107: “a Curia pode lancar a grande campanha contra a nova eclesiologia latinoamericana e, além dela, contra a eclesiologia conciliar que a sustentava... a acusacao de marxismo foi lancada com muita publicidade”; J. Ratzinger had written on 2000 : “fut compris dans le cadre de la theologie de la liberation selon l’emploi du mot marxiste de peuple” and later referring to the 1985 Synod praised its focus on communion: “resumer l’ensemble de l’eclesiologie conciliaire dans un concept de base: l’e de communion” (J. Ratzinger, “L’eclesiologie de la Constitution Lumen Gentium”, en <http://vatican.va> (accessed 24/8/2014)..

¹⁰ *Idem*, 118ff. See points of view of Card. Ratzinger (in footnote 9). Shortly after the Council, Y. Congar had argued that the category people of God is insufficient and that it needs to be understood in terms of body of Christ (“La iglesia como pueblo de Dios”, *Concilium*, 1, 1965, 9-33).

the preparation of the Council, and during the 1985 Synod on the Council (that has dealt with key doctrinal issues).

As a matter of fact, the biblical and patristic images of Church (LG 6 to 8) surpassed the juridical perspective of Vatican I; and it opened many windows to fresh air on episcopal collegiality, ecumenism, religious freedom. These and other concerns have had an impact in Latin America, where ecclesiology underlined being people of God and solidarity with the poor ¹¹. As is well known, *Lumen Gentium* was approved by 2151 yes and 5 no (and promulgated on nov. 24, 1964); and like all of Vatican II it is an enlightening treasure up till today. It also deserves critical and on going “reception”. For example, Giuseppe Alberigo points out an “excessive tendency to refer to Christ and the marginal role accorded to the Holy Spirit seen in the overall structure of the Council’s declarations” ¹². Throughout Latinamerica, significant persons and communities have been reframing *Lumen Gentium* in terms of church as community, solidarity with the poor, and a joyful and also decolonizing mission. This implies service to humanity’s wellbeing (and not simply a focus on ecclesiastical issues).

When the Gospel is the guiding light of ecclesiology, it can read the signs of the times, and for example, confront individualism and a market of desires. Our major problem today is not secularism, but rather secular absolutes (that in many ways function as belief in gods). Thus, in the world of today people have cultural-economic wounds, and are called to resign to well disguised idols ¹³. All of this implies that having faith in the living God (and doing it as communities of faith) means also unbelief in modern absolutes and non consumption of worldly pseudo happiness. These are huge challenges; that are dealt with systematic and daily

¹¹ Cf Gerard Philips on the history of LG and Aloys Grillmeier on chapters I, II, III of LG, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, NY: Herder, 1967, 105-225. Concerning Latinamerican “reception” of being people of God, see Comblin, *op.cit.*, 17-114; Jon Sobrino, *Resurrección de la verdadera iglesia. Los pobres, lugar teológico de la ecclesiology*, Santander: Sal Terrae, 1981; Ronaldo Muñoz, “La recepción de la Lumen Gentium en América Latina” (<http://servicioskoinonia.org/relat/347.htm>) y en *Nueva conciencia cristiana en un mundo globalizado*, Santiago: LOM, 2009, 191-198, 279-286; Demetrio Valentini, *Revisitar o Concilio Vaticano II*, Sao Paulo: Paulinas, 2011; Andres Torres R., “La Iglesia en la Constitución LG. Una mirada histórica crítica y prospectiva”, *Revista del Itepal del Celam*, 2013.

¹² See Giuseppe Alberigo, *A brief history of Vatican II*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006, 88; and challenging essays in *Concilium* 312 (2005), under the general heading: Vaticano II ¿un future olvidado?

¹³ See Peter Berger (ed.), *The desacralization of the world: essays on the resurgence of religion in world politics*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999: “the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false” (pg. 2); “strategies are based on mistaken perceptions” (pg. 3); the “world today is anything but the secularized world that had been predicted by so many analysts of modernity...” (pg. 9); see also Laurence Moore, *Selling God. American religion in the marketplace of culture*, New York: Oxford, 1994, and David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland. Religion in postmodern times*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

behavior. It is most difficult to deal with them, since individualism and market idols touch us each day in almost invisible ways. However, it may be said that due to many tiny flowers, a huge garbage area is transformed.

In recent times, in Latin America some are making a distinction between theology/ecclesiology “of the people” (and say that Pope Francis has this framework) and theology/ecclesiology “of liberation”¹⁴. The first is described as understanding religion as a mediation between people’s faith and inculturated theology¹⁵. Most theologians see liberation as mainly engaging people and its faith. The above mentioned distinction does not consider several strands of latinamerican theology and a polysemic liberation. Moreover major challenges of today seem to be understanding the faith vis a vis the bumpy roads of the global market, individuation, cyberculture, social inequality, different images of God. In terms of being Church in contexts of abundance, recently Pope Francis warned in Korea the “temptation to remove the poor from very prophetic structures of the Church and to make you become an affluent Church for the affluent, a Church of the well-to-do, perhaps not to the point of developing a ‘theology of prosperity’ but a Church of mediocrity”¹⁶. Being away from the poor implies mediocrity.

May I conclude with the priority of being today and tomorrow a latinamerican church nurtured by pneumatology¹⁷. Thus we may move beyond obstacles in areas of memory, cross and commitment, utopia (as spelled out by Pedro Casaldaliga). Such movements are like yeast in the midst of much flour, like tiny lights and fresh flowers in the midst of darkness, as we move ahead throughout bumpy communal-spiritual journeys.

¹⁴ See Sebastian Politi, *Teología del Pueblo*, una propuesta argentina a la teología latinoamericana, 1967-1975, Padua/Buenos Aires, 1992; Juan Carlos Scannone SJ, “Papa Francesco e la teología del popolo”, *Civiltà Cattolica* 3930 (15/3/2014) and “El papa Francisco y la teología del pueblo”, *Mensaje* 631 (2014), 14-22.

¹⁵ Cf Scannone, *Mensaje...* pg. 16. Scientists debate the meanings of “people”; see A. Badiou et alii, *Qué es pueblo?*, Santiago: LOM, 2014 (that includes a discussion on populism).

¹⁶ Francis to the Bishops of Korea, in www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/august_20140814

¹⁷ See Ana Maria Tepedino (org.), *Amor e discernimento, Experiencia e razao no horizonte pneumatologico das Igrejas*, Sao Paulo: Paulinas, 2007; Victor Codina, *No extingáis el Espíritu 1 Tes 5:19*, Santander: Sal Terrae, 2008, and *El Espíritu del Señor actúa desde abajo*, Santander, 2014; Leonardo Boff, *O Espírito Santo; Fogo interior, Doador de vida e Pai dos pobres*, Petropolis: Vozes, 2013; Maria Jose Caram, *El Espíritu en el mundo andino*, Cochabamba: Verbo Divino, 2012.