

**The Stigmata of Jesus Christ  
and  
the Integral Liberation through Mercy**



**Mercy and Liberation, Redemption as Healing**

[cf. *Portare Cristo all'Uomo*. Congresso del Ventennio  
dal Concilio Vaticano IIº. Pontificia Università Urbaniana 1985, pp. 651-667]

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1985**

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... one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water [Jn 19:34]

He said to them: 'Peace be with you', and he showed them his hands and his side. As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you'. And, after saying this, he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained...' [cf. Jn 20:19]

**Introduction:**

On various occasions in recent years, Pope John Paul II has offered a kind of panoramic "pastoral" view of the complex world situation. He did so rather extensively in his first Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis* [March 4, 1979]. In the third part, the Pontiff speaks of the fears of modern humanity [# 15], and asks whether progress in some areas might also have occasioned something of a threat [# 16]; he analyzes some of the enormous calamities under the heading of Human Rights: Letter or Spirit [# 17].

In his Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misericordia* [November 30, 1980], His Holiness traces some of the "Sources of Uneasiness" [#11], and seriously questions whether justice is enough [# 12].

In the following year [September 14, 1981], in the Encyclical Letter, *Laborem Exercens*, in Part III, the Supreme Pastor gives his analysis of "The Conflict between Labor and Capital in the Present Phase of History" [## 11-15]. Just three months later [December 13, 1981], his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* appeared. In Part One of this document, there is offered an analysis of the "Bright Spots and Shadows for the Family Today" [## 4, ff.].

This "style" is continued in two important documents of 1984: the apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris* [February 11, 1984] and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* [December 2, 1984]. In the letter on suffering, with the aid of biblical examples, the Holy Father presents his own insights concerning "The World of Human Suffering" [Part II].

In the Post-Synodal exhortation, *On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today*, the analysis is more extended. The Pope describes :A Shattered world”: growing disproportion between groups, classes and countries; ideological rivalries, political polarization - the trampling upon the basic rights of the human person, hidden attacks against freedom, discrimination, terrorism, stock-piling of weapons of war, the unfair distribution of the world’s resources. And the Pontiff adds:

...However disturbing these divisions may seem at first sight, it is only by a careful examination that one can detect their root: it is to be found in a *wound* in man’s inmost self. In the light of faith, we call it sin... [# 2].

Deliverance from this sin can be looked upon in many ways - the Sacred Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ - inflicted on His body on Good Friday, preserved in His Resurrection on Easter Sunday - might also offer the suggestion of *the integral redemption of humanity through the merciful haling of God*.

### **1. Unilateral Solutions tend to Separate, Exacerbate**

With the complex world situation, there is the natural tendency to accentuate single aspects, and offer partial emphases. The prime consideration in many instances is “justice”, one’s rights”, to the extent that the law of retaliation [*lex talionis*] might seem more evident in human affairs than the “New Commandment” brought by Jesus Christ. To exercise mercy is seen almost as a weakness.

Some political solutions in modern crises tend to set segments of society more and more into real conflict with other human elements. Dictatorial regimes defend themselves countenancing anonymous violence - and on the post-war political scene there is a discouraging long list of political assassinations of world leaders. Remembering the death of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, violence has struck down many individual truly seeking a solution to the ills of their peoples and our times.<sup>1</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> cf. *Il Tempo*, Thursday, November 1, 1948, p. 2. There is offered a partial list of world leaders murdered since World War II:

- 1946: the President of Bolivia, Gualberto Villaroel;
- 1948: the Egyptian Premier, Mohamud Nokrashi; Mahatma Gandhi;
- 1951: King Abdullah of Jordan;
- 1955: the President of Panama, José Ramón;
- 1956: the President of Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza;
- 1957: Carlos Santillo Armas, President of Guatemala;
- 1958: King Feisal of Iraq;
- 1961: President Trujillo of Panama;
- 1963: President Kennedy of the United States;

addition to the ruthlessness that has been practiced on the world scene, there is an extraordinarily heated political climate, exacerbating feelings of mutual hatred. The very language that is used has prompted on political leaders' speak of "war talk", a kind of "culture of war".<sup>2</sup>

For proper government, philosophers speak of the essential requirement of "distributive justice". Furthermore, however, in order for society to "function", there is also needed some willingness on the part of the populace to be governed. These words seem pertinent:

... *Observantia* indicates the respect we feel inwardly and express outwardly toward these persons who are distinguished by their office, or by some dignity. We have only to lend an ear to the ironic overtones currently connected with the words 'signify' and 'office' to realize at once how remote from us is the reality which western moral theology has formulated in the concept of *observantia* and made an integral part of the ideal image of the ordered man and the ordered community...<sup>3</sup>

*Observantia* does not eliminate civic interest, and even protest - but, there is a profound difference between what has been called *class dispute* from *class struggle*:

...*Class dispute* is the natural result of the existence of various classes within a society. And it is quite conceivable that there might be a class dispute animated by a desire for justice. A totally different meaning attaches to the term *class struggle* in orthodox Marxism. Here 'class struggles' strive to annihilate the opposing class and to destroy order in a nation...<sup>4</sup>

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1966: President Verwoerd of South Africa;

1968: Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy of the United States

1973: Salvador Allende, Chile;

1981: President Sadat of Egypt

To this list might be added the many attempts on the lives of others, including that of Pope John Paul II.

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Il Tempo*, Sunday, December 16, 1984, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Josef Pieper, "The Limits of Justice", in: *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. University of Notre Dame Press, 5th Printing 1980, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Pieper, "Distributive Justice", in: *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, p. 97. He also states: 'Unwarranted criticism and opposition, blind abuse and fault finding, are acts of injustice, violations of *justitia distributive*, which alone enables states to exist in orderly fashion' [ib., p. 93].

'... genuine authority not only requires men fitted for the offices of government, but also presupposes an inner disposition on the part of the governed, a readiness to participate in the just rule by giving their consent to a just administering of the *bonum commune*... [ib., p. 96].

One of the inherent dangers in “class struggle” is that some simply, unilaterally determine who the “oppressors” are - it is not uncommon, in our own time, to find under this heading the inclusion of the “priestly caste.” Ernst Bloch, one of the sources for some aspects of modern political theology, has a decided anti-clericalism that permeates some of his analysis of these times. His harsh statements read; ‘clericalism cannot be forgotten’ - investigation was veiled over purposely by the priests with their ‘counter-revolutionary’ religious outlook - in chapter 16 of the Book of Numbers,

... ‘the priest-god, the God of priests and ruling classes, shows his reflexes in the face of practical revolt - when the people broke free from the lying group of prince and priest, the scales en masse fell from their eyes...<sup>5</sup>

This most subjective analysis of the “classes”, and their subsequent antithesis, is likewise projected into a “re-reading” of the Person and Message of Jesus Christ. There is the marked tendency of “eis-egesis”, a “re-reading” of Scripture from one’s own subjective point of view, and a lack of integrality in its interpretation. The “re-reading” for example, would postpone the Beatitudes of Jesus until some future idealized time:

... The sword in Jesus’ preaching and the fire which purifies as well as destroys, are certainly directed at more than mere palaces: they apply to the head of the old aeon, which must pass away. But at the head of the list stand the enemies of those who labor and are heavy laden ... the rich...<sup>6</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount is then contrasted with these words, or “set against” them:

... So far as the Sermon on the Mount is concerned, it does not - it is true - speak of one man being set against another for the love of Christ, as do some other zealous words [cf. Mt 10:35, ff.]; but, then it is not a sermon about the days of battle at all. With its blessing on the meek and the peacemakers, it is concerned with the last days: with the End which Jesus thought close at hand...<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity* [translated by J. T. Swann], New York: Herder & Herder, 1972, pp. 58, 79, 80, 241, and *passim*. cf. also by Bloch, *On Karl Marx*. New York: Herder & Herder 1971: *A Philosophy of the Future*. New York: Herder & Herder 1970.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> *ib.*, p.124.

In this scheme, the Sermon on the Mount is thought of as one that is not of any great importance for this earth.<sup>8</sup> The prescriptions of this Sermon are “incapable of fulfillment over any long period of time”.<sup>9</sup> Coupled with this is the accepted principle that sin is outside of us. Revolution becomes the great means of liberation. To arrive at “justice”, it is necessary to be unjust, at least in a temporary manner.<sup>10</sup>

What has developed is a decidedly “conflictual character” of modern times. For many, the sole solution that is proposed is one of a kind of “permanent revolution”.<sup>11</sup> The Marxist synthesis maintains that the human conscience is not what determines one’s existence, but rather the social existence is what determines one’s conscience.<sup>12</sup>

“Class struggle” was seen by Engels as the background for *all* of history. This “class struggle” is proposed unilaterally as the *sole* means of arriving at true justice and peace. The hardening of this struggle, and the subsequent revolution, are suggested as the *only* means capable of bringing justice and peace. Pope Paul noted that even the acceptance of the “Marxist analysis” leads to an implicit avowal of its ideology.

## 2. “Re-reading” of God’s Word

Divine Revelation maintains that the children of the wealthy, as well as those of the poor, are really brothers and sisters of creation, redemption and sanctification. There can be no real justice among them if the only means that is suggested is by a hardening of the contrasts between them. In the last analysis, the furthering of harsh divisions among nations and peoples is already an implicit denial of unity in God. The full Christian message would lead to ever greater solidarity, a deeper sense of self-denial, so that others might have more.

Ernst Bloch has “re-read” all of revelation from the perspective of materialistic Marxism - and he presents a separate “God for the rich” and a “God for the poor”.

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<sup>8</sup> *ib.*, p. 139.

<sup>9</sup> *ib.*, p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> Paolo Miccoli, “La filosofia contemporanea tra assenza e nostalgia di misericordia”, in: *Dives in Misericordia. Commento all’enciclica di Giovanni Paolo II*. Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Studia Urbaniana. 13. Rome: 1981, p.378.

<sup>11</sup> Angelo Scola, “La vera Liberazione 10. Teologia della liberazione. Una riflessione critica”, in: *Osservatore Romano*. Saturday, November 10, 1984, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Piero Bigo, SJ, “La vera liberazione. 13. La dottrina sociale della Chiesa”, in: *Osservatore Romano*. November 18, 1984, p. 1.

He contrasts the “God of Genesis” and the “God of Exodus”<sup>13</sup> with future humanity as the only “god’ that matters.

Bloch sees Exodus as the key, it is his “elemental category” for his *Atheism in Christianity*

... After the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, and of Yahweh from Israel, Job, the innocent sufferer, makes his *exodus from* Yahweh...<sup>14</sup>

In his “re-reading”, Bloch makes abundant use of a “red thread” of Scripture, more the product of his own speculation, than the authentic pondering of God’s word. He writes:

... When the Israelite Bedouins moved into the already stratified society of rich and poor in Canaan, they lost the old, simple, partly still primitive communist life of the tribes ... the riches of the few made the poverty of the many...<sup>15</sup>

Bloch contests the Books of Kings as being incapable of supplying the background for the early “communion of love.” With this, he might also eliminate the repentant King David, and his prayer for a “new heart.” Bloch sees the pre-agrarian, communist memories in the demand for a common enjoyment of produce and anti-capitalistic preaching in the prophets.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, “Exodus” comes to enter into the very concept of Yahweh Himself, with strong repercussions on the understanding of the Messiah. The “Son of Man” Messiah is no restorer of the Davidic kingdom, but comes as one who will over-throw all things, from their beginning to their end. There will always be needed an “exodus” from the *status quo*.<sup>17</sup>

Many aspects of his highly selective “re-reading” of Scripture have been contested strongly by exegetes.<sup>18</sup> Such interpretations deeply affect the understanding concerning Jesus Christ. He is presented as “far tougher than any of his prophetic predecessors.” He has come to bring the sword [cf. Jn 12:48]. The

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<sup>13</sup> Paul-Dominique Dognin, “Marxismo e ‘Teologie dlla Liberazione’, ib., p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*. p. 110.

<sup>15</sup> ib., p. 95.

<sup>16</sup> ib., pp. 98, ff.

<sup>17</sup> ib., pp. 84, ff.; 121, f.; 137, ff.

<sup>18</sup> cf. for example, Walther Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope in the Old Testament*. Studies in Biblical Theology. Second Series 20. London: SCM 1971.

Romans convicted Jesus as a revolutionary.<sup>19</sup> Jesus' assertions are seen to be "highly revolutionary" and "all transforming" - He has come to cast fire on the earth.<sup>20</sup> These are substantial "re-readings" of the word of God, a unilateral, selective emphasis of some of the texts, taking them out of context.

### 3. The Paradox of Christianity: Antinomies: "Merciful Justice"

"Mystery" will always involve paradox, seeming contrasts, reconcilable only with great difficulty for the human mind. Nonetheless, any selective emphasis, of necessity, will lead to a distortion. In Jesus Christ Himself, there is needed a most delicate balance in the explanation of two natures in one Person. The Council of Nicea emphasized His divinity, Ephesus His unity, and Chalcedon His duality, as true God and true man, "without confusion, or change, without division or separation".<sup>21</sup> In the explanation of the Paschal Mystery, it is not the "Theology of the Cross" as *contrasted* with the "Theology of Glory" - but rather: "The Cross *and* the Resurrection are one Salvific Mystery".<sup>22</sup>

The paradox of the Holy Church, always in need of renewal has been brought out in a number of instances in the Vatican II documents this complex reality, mirroring the divine and human elements of Jesus Christ, will always be in need of purification {cf. LG 8}. This Church renders God the Father and His Incarnate Son perennially present, yet, ceaselessly renews and purifies herself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit [GS 21]. Cardinal DeLubac, SJ, perhaps more than any other single author has developed this theme in profound manner.<sup>23</sup>

In following after Christ within the Church, there is a wide possibility of "antinomies" - and there is always the danger of emphasizing one aspect at the cost of some other: as in "the totality of Christianity and the weakness of the Christian"; "the development of one's humanity and its crucifixion"; "the transformation of the world, and flight from it"; to be "in" the world" and not "of" it; contemplation

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<sup>19</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 126.

<sup>20</sup> *ib.*, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Bernard Sesboué, *Jésus-Christ dans la tradition de l'Église, Jésus et Jésus-Christ*, n. 17, Paris: Desclée 1982.

<sup>22</sup> Antonio Charabel, "Croce e risurrezione, unico mistero salvifico", in: *La Sapienza della Croce oggi, nella rivelazione e nell'ecumenismo*. I. Torino: LDC 1976, pp. 386-395.

<sup>23</sup> *Mystère de l'Église*. Paris: Aubier 1952; *id. Paradoxe et mystère de l'Église.*, Editions Montagne 1967.



inactivity; the proper evaluation of one's worthy, and humility.<sup>24</sup> In one and the same mystery of the Christian "way", many other aspects need balancing: **kenosis/pleroma**; vertical/horizontal; individual/community; already/not yet; desires/needs; servant/lord; pluralism/unity; incarnationism/eschatologism; right/duty; obedience/freedom; letter/spirit [cf. also Qo 3:1-8]. The tendency is to separate, while the appeal is to unify the most sublimes aspects in these various orientations. "Inadequate emphasis" on the one rather than on the other, leads to distortions of the message.

With the coming of Jesus Christ, a sublime program has been offered to those who follow Him: "justice" really means "salvation accomplished by the Lord and his mercy".<sup>25</sup> A real challenge is to bring about a climate of "merciful justice", to see that authentic justice prevails - but, this can never be, unless justice is permeated, inspired and at the service of mercy. The deepest law of Christianity is that of the Spirit - with the coming of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit, the promise of "a new heart of flesh" has been realized.<sup>26</sup>

Authentic freedom is limited by that relationship that exists between the creature and Creator, and that between human beings. Thus, human freedom is not an "absolute", but must keep in mind these relationships. If anyone, or any single group see freedom as an absolute, there is always the tendency of total self-determination and un-restricted self-sufficiency,<sup>27</sup> very often interfering with the legitimate rights of others.

The "New Commandment" demands of the Christian that each on not only seek for solutions to existing human misery, but to eradicate the causes behind it.<sup>28</sup> Of the many voices that are heard in behalf of the poor, it is very necessary to know what is intended by "justice", "rights" and the "development" about which so much has been said. These many voices need to be measured from the background of the faith.<sup>29</sup> A great change happens if hope is placed before faith - faith

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<sup>24</sup> cf. C.V. Trulhar, SJ, *Antinomiae vitae spiritualis*. Roma: Gregoriana 1965, 4<sup>a</sup> editio.

<sup>25</sup> cf. Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, n.4.

<sup>26</sup> H. Cazelles, "Le vera liberazione. 3. Salvezza dei 'poveri' nella Bibbia", in: *Osservatore Romano*, Wednesday, October 3, 1984, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Prospero Grech, OSA, "Le vera liberazione. 2. Liberazione e liberta' nella Bibbia", in: *Osservatore Romano*, September 1984, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Joblin, "Le vera liberazione. 12. Giustizia, diritti dell'uomo, svilulppo", in: *Osservatore Romano*, Saturday, November 17, 1984, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Joblin, *ib.*, p. 5.

“transcendentalizes” hope, and charity “universalizes” it. When hope is not based on the Word of God, it tends to be solely “immanent”.

#### 4. **“Justice is based on Love, flows from it, tends toward it” [DM # 7].**

The “Rank of Justice” is comparatively supreme, being the foremost of all the other moral virtues.<sup>30</sup> The virtue reaches humanity at its spiritual center. Nonetheless, it is “limited”: in that justice alone can never maintain world order. Just to think in a monetary way, some of the balances of payments might never be met in strict restitution.<sup>31</sup> It is not mere edifying spirituality to state that even the work of divine justice always presupposes the work of mercy, and is founded thereon.<sup>32</sup> The Thomistic treatment of these virtues shows that justice without mercy is cruelty.<sup>33</sup> Unless there is charity, justice alone cannot establish world harmony. It might be said that justice is more limited than charity and mercy, in that justice is most interested in things: charity and mercy are more “person” orientated.<sup>34</sup>

On the teaching of Pope John Paul II, the association of justice and charity is often expressed. Charity fulfills, transcends justice. In the oft-quoted *liberty, equality and fraternity*, associated with the revolutionary ideal since perhaps the 18th century, the third element is most often neglected. The first two, “liberty” and “equality” are intimately associated with justice. Law and order must be established so that these may be enjoyed by all. The third element is generally seen as, at best, some distant possibility. *Fraternity* hardly ever appears in the strong appeals that are made for justice. It is precisely “fraternity” that cannot be treated solely on the level of justice.<sup>35</sup> The sons and daughters of creation and the brothers and sisters of redemption, are called to union in the one Spirit - they are called to share in the one loaf and the one cup. Through the Eucharist, human beings are indeed made “companions”, partakers of the same bread - in the most sublime communion possible to human beings.

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<sup>30</sup> Josef Pieper, “The Rank of Justice”, in: *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> Josef Pieper, “The Limits of Justice”, in: *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. p. 104.

<sup>32</sup> ib. p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> ib, pp. 110, f.

<sup>34</sup> Dario Compostra, “L’enciclica *Dives in Misericordia* e le sue dimensioni sociali”, in: *Dives in Misericordia. Commento all’enciclica di Giovanni Paolo II*. Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana. Studia Urbaniana/13. Paideia 1981, pp. 435,ff.

<sup>35</sup> Giuseppe Della Torre, “Diritto, giustizia, misericordia”, in: *Dives in Misericordia. Commento all’enciclica di Giovanni Paolo II*. Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Studia Urbaniana/13. Paideia 1981, pp. 287-291, passim.

The supremacy of mercy over justice is noted in the classical teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. From his work as a young theologian, to his mature judgment near the end of his life, this doctrine clarified in his presentation: in all the divine works, mercy is “super-eminent over justice.” In his earlier writings, St. Thomas presents mercy as flowing from the very nature of God - later on, his emphasis was to see divine mercy as the gratuitous and ineffable choice of the Will of God, a personal choice on the part of God. Divine mercy is seen to be proper to God, and the principle of creation.<sup>36</sup>

As divine mercy is for St. Thomas “the first cause of the works of God”,<sup>37</sup> this same teaching is applied to the work of Redemption, as would be expected. There would almost seem to be a “natural” attribution of divine omnipotence to creation, and divine mercy to redemption. Yet, many scholars emphasized far more, divine justice in the work of redemption, over divine mercy. Early in his career, St. Thomas pointed out that it pertains to the magnitude of mercy that sins be forgiven, with satisfaction being rendered. Thus, it is opportune that God became man to satisfy for humanity. In his later *Summa*, the Angelic Doctor taught that, in truth, the satisfaction of the Son responds to the demands of the justice of God - but, that already this satisfaction is an act of mercy. Mercy transcends justice by elevating human nature to a superior dignity. This would not have been attained through justice alone. Thus, the merciful Love of God is the most sublime manifestation of His omnipotence.<sup>38</sup>

Traditional Thomists have repeated this central teaching through the years. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, for example, presented the “various aspects” of redemption. He analyzed briefly several theories existing among Catholic scholars of the time: that of “expiation”, “satisfaction”, “reparation”, and finally that of the Father’s love for humanity: “God so loved the world that He gave up His only Son” [cf. Jn 3:16]. Traces of all these views are found in St. Thomas, but are all subordinated to that of the Father’s love for humanity. Mercy proceeds from uncreated love, as goodness is diffusive of itself. This is evident in creation, as well as in the divine elevation to the order of grace. This truth is evident as well in the free divine decree of the restoration of humanity through the Incarnation of the Word.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Domenico Spada, “La misericordia nel pensiero di S. Tommaso”, in: *Dives in Misericordia. Commento all’enciclica di Giovanni Paolo II*. Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana. Studia Urbaniana/13. Paideia 1981, pp. 203-207, passim.

<sup>37</sup> Aloysius M. Ciappi, OP, *De divina Misericordia ut prima causa operum Dei*. Roma 1935.

<sup>38</sup> Domenico Spada, “La misericordia nel pensiero di S. Tommaso”, pp. 212-216, passim.

<sup>39</sup> cf. for example, P. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, OP: *De Cristo Salvatore*. Torino: Beruti 1945, pp. 393, f.

#### 4. “Mercy revealed in the Cross and Resurrection”

The Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, treats of Christ the New Man [# 22], as the concluding article of its first chapter, “The Dignity of the Human Person.” These few paragraphs have intensified the reflections of modern Christology:

... He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart, he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has already been made one of us, like to us in all things, save sin..

These moving words, along with the entire Council, have been an extraordinary enrichment, offering a deeper insight into the mystery of Jesus Christ.

Further insights have also come to the fore since the great event of Puebla. In his opening address, at the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, on January 28, 1979, the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in the early months of his pontificate, emphasized the conference theme, evangelization. For any authentic evangelization, there is needed truth about Jesus Christ, the Church’s mission and about human beings. As Universal Shepherd, the Holy Father suggests Peter’s response to Christ’s question: who do you say that I am? Peter answers: ‘You are the Messiah ... the Son of the living God’ [cf. Mt 16:16].<sup>40</sup>

The “re-readings of the Gospel” are not representative of the faith of the Church, in that they are not based on the authentic meditation on God’s word. At Puebla, Pope John Paul II stressed that any form of silence, disregard, mutilation or inadequate emphasis on the whole of the mystery of Christ that diverges from the Church’s faith, cannot be the valid context of evangelization.

The Puebla Conference pondered deeply on the mystery of Jesus Christ. The Person of Jesus can be distorted, “ideologized” in at least two ways: either by making Him a revolutionary, ; or, on the other hand, by restricting Him as being a simple prophet. He has come with a service of love, preaching conversion, radical discipleship, that embraces the *whole* human being - recalling to mind that the *integral liberation* taught by Pope Paul VI must be an *evangelical liberation*.<sup>41</sup> The Puebla document emphasizes Jesus’ spirit of Filiation, communion and participation of *everyone*: Christ alone makes people really free.

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<sup>40</sup> Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops. *Puebla. Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America. Conclusions*. Official English Edition. London: St. Paul Publications, January 1980, pp. 3, ff.

<sup>41</sup> Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangeliu Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, # 33.

'The first words of the new Pontificate: were entitled *Redemptor Hominis* [March 4, 1979]. They offered further insights into the mystery of Jesus Christ, as the basis of the Church's mission and Christianity. This document continues the Council's teaching that "Christ united Himself with every human being: [GS 22], and adds:

... The Church therefore sees its fundamental task in enabling that union to be brought about and renewed continually. The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life, with the power of the truth about man and the world that is contained in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption and with the power of love that is radiated by that truth... [RH # 13].

It has been perceptively noted that a good number of modern Christologies have not developed the mercy of Jesus Christ. There has been much discussion about Him as Redeemer, Savior, Liberator. Perhaps among the underlying reasons why mercy has not been a central theme in recent times is "the loss of the sense of sin".<sup>42</sup> There had really not been much discussion on mercy prior to *Dives in*.<sup>43</sup>

So much in recent times has become fragmented, also because of selectivity and subjectivity. This adds to the real need to ponder Jesus Christ integrally: true God and true Man, in His Mercy and Justice, in His Cross and Resurrection. Inadequate emphases on any one aspect of the whole mystery of Christ results in very partial understandings, by a restriction of the full Paschal Mystery.

Puebla emphasizes this mystery integrally:

... Fulfilling the mandate received from the Father, Jesus freely surrendered Himself to death on the Cross, the goal of His life's journey ... the Father resurrects His Son from among the dead and exalts him in glory at his right hand... His resurrection is the sign and the pledge of the resurrection to which we are all called... Through Him and in Him, the Father chose to recreate what He had already created...<sup>44</sup>

The Encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia* teaches that the divine mercy is revealed in the Cross and the Resurrection:

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<sup>42</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, n. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Battista Mondin, "Le misericordia nella teologia contemporanea", in: *Dives in Misericordia. Commento all'enciclica di Giovanni Paolo II*. Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Studia Urbaniana/13: Paideia 1981, pp. 386. f/

<sup>44</sup> Puebla Document, ## 194, 195.

... What else, then, does the Cross say to us, the Cross that in a sense, is the final word of his messianic message and mission? And yet, this is not yet the word of the God of the Covenant: that will be pronounced at the dawn when first the women, and then the Apostles, came to the tomb of the crucified Jesus, see the tomb empty for the first time hear the message: He is risen...<sup>45</sup>

The Paschal Mystery is one: this is also the message that the Decree on the Church's missionary activity offers:

... By his death and resurrection, the Lord completed once and for all in himself the mysteries of our salvation and the renewal of all things... He founded his Church as the sacrament of salvation...

The Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ, inflicted on Good Friday, were retained in His Resurrected Body on Easter Sunday. They are signs of faith and joy for the apostolic mission, in its aspect of forgiveness [cf. Jn 20:19, ff.]

## 5. In the Spirit of the Beatitudes

Much insistence has been given to the fact that the official Magisterium of the Church is not above the divine word, but at its service [DV 10]. This is likewise true for all who seek to understand divine revelation.<sup>46</sup> Violence is not Christian- and only generates new violence.<sup>47</sup> Pope Paul categorically excluded it:

... The Church cannot accept violence ... We must say and reaffirm that violence is not in accord with the Gospel, that it is not Christian; and that sudden or violent changes of structure would be deceitful, ineffective of themselves, and certainly not in accord with the dignity of people..<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> DM V, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Bonaventure Kloppenburg, "La vera liberazione.11. Il pericolo della politicizzazione delle comunita; ecclesiali di base", in: *Osservatore Romano*, Thursday, October 15, 1984, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> José Saraiva Martins, "Le vera librazione. 8. Le basi per un'autentica teologia della liberazione", in: *Osservatore Romano*. Wednesday, November 7, 1984, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> EN # 37.

While there is no objective biblical support to call Jesus a “revolutionary”,<sup>49</sup> the NT terminology of “liberation” concerning Him is almost double in references to His work as “redemption”.<sup>50</sup>

The Beatitudes offer a program not merely for quiet interior life, but one of courageous realization of the long missing *fraternité*, so necessary for any authentic, deep social change. They are not invitations to fatalistic quietism, but are clearly one of the central challenges of our own time. In the love for enemies, and in working for peace, the yearning for genuine liberation finds its greatest power.<sup>51</sup>

Nearly forty years after his death, the figure of Gandhi has grown still more in stature. His message today would still be his fascination with the non-violent Christ and His Beatitudes. The impact of this message of Jesus Christ remained with Gandhi until the end of his life.<sup>52</sup>

The following of Jesus is not the way of arrogant self-assertion - it is rather the disinterested self-giving and sacrificial love.<sup>53</sup> Jesus Christ has sent out His Spirit of Filiation, truth, love and liberty.<sup>54</sup> The call is that the “communities” of human beings truly become a holy “communion” and share in the life of the Trinity.<sup>55</sup> The authentic evangelization of the Church is a summons to every human being to participate in the communion of the Trinity.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> cf. Martin Hengel, “Victory over Violence”, in: *Jesus and the Revolutionists*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1973; id., *Christ and Power*. Philadelphia: Fortress 1974.

<sup>50</sup> Jorge Mejia, “La vera liberazione. 5. Redenzione e Liberazione in Cristo”, in: *Osservatore Romano*. Thursday, October 11, 1984, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> Settimo Cipriani, “La vera liberazione. 4. Beatitudini e ‘teologia della Liberazione’”, in: *Osservatore Romano*, Saturday, October 6, 1984, pp. 1 & 7.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*. Library of Philosophy and Religion. London: MacMillan 1983, pp. 41, ff., 75, ff. In the “Preface” [p. x], the General Editor, John Hick, states: ‘Gandhi was perhaps the first practitioner of Liberation Theology.’

<sup>53</sup> Puebla # 194.

<sup>54</sup> ib., ## 198, ff.

<sup>55</sup> ib., ## 212, ff.

<sup>56</sup> ib., # 218.

### **Conclusion: Redemption as Integral Healing**

In the Gospel according to John, there is the application of the unusual Exodus story of the bronze serpent [cf. Jn 3:14; from Nb 21:4, ff.] to Jesus Christ: whoever looks upon Hi in faith, will be healed. In the blood and water that flowed from the wound in the side of Christ, there may also be another reference back to Exodus times: the early people of God were saved by the blood of the Lamb, and by drinking from that water that flowed from the rock tapped by Moses. The deeper symbolism refers to the outpouring of the unifying Spirit for the remission of sins.<sup>57</sup>

*Ad Gentes* speaks of this healing mission of the Church:

... The sainted Fathers of the Church firmly proclaim that what was not taken up by Christ was not *healed*. Now what He took up was our entire human nature as such as it is, found among us in our misery and concerning Himself, whom the Father made holy and sent into the world [cf. Jn 10:36]: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me; to bring the good news to the poor he sent me, to *heal* the brokenhearted, to proclaim to the captives release, and sight to the blind’ [Lk 4:18] [AG # 3].

The merciful God is also the Healer of His People [cf. ex 13:26; Ps 103:3; 147:3; 2 K 20:5, 8; Os 19:22; 30:26; Jr 30:14; 33:6]. This aspect of the mystery of divine forgiveness and restoration has the distinct advantage of emphasizing mercy in an age in which the “law of retaliation” finds ready adherents. The Wounds of Christ, in their “sorrowful” aspect, are poignant testimony of the magnitude of human sin, and the limitless mercy of God. The “glorious” wounds of Easter offer great hop for the healing of the Resurrection.

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<sup>57</sup> cf. Ignacio de la Potterie, SJ, *La verdad de Jesus. Estudios de Cristología Joanea* [Spanish translation by Gonzalo Haya]. Madrid: BAC 1979, pp. 220-239; J. Henchey, “The Holy Spirit, the Stigmata of the Resurrection and the Apostolic Mission”, in: *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum. Atti del Congresso teologico internazionale di Pneumatologia*. Liberia Editrice Vaticana 1983. Vol. I, pp. 775-789; Sergio Stancati, OP, *Gv 19:31-37. Culmine della dimensione pneumatologica della cristologia del quarto vangelo*. Roma: Angelicum, Dissertatio ad Lauream in Facultate S. Theologiae. 1982.