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provides me with a mirror that I can use in my teaching in the evangelical churches of Spain. The wave of Latin American immigrants to Spain has surprised these Spanish churches with new challenges. In a way it stirs up social disturbance caused both by cultural differences in spite of a common language and by the social needs of the newcomers. But it also sparks a kind of Christian life marked by enthusiasm and vitality that can have a rejuvenating effect. This immigrant presence could well be a force of renewal for missionary vision and vigor in the Spanish churches. Furthermore, it begs new patterns of relationships. It challenges the church to demonstrate that Christ can fashion new attitudes in people of different cultures that learn to accept one another as Christ has accepted them. In today's society of tense pluralism, such transformation is the only way to become the people of God.



Harold Segura

Originally from Colombia, Segura now works with World Vision International from Costa Rica. He and his wife have two children. This article is a translated chapter from his book *Más allá de la utopía: Liderazgo de servicio y espiritualidad cristiana* (Kairós, 2005).

Jesus in the Face of the Needy

Spirituality and Leadership in Latin American Theology

Even though liberation theology is out of fashion as a system and has been condemned by the Vatican its impact on the theological conscience of Latin American Christianity has endured.

Emilio Antonio Núñez¹

The stormy decade of the 1960s occurred when, together with the stirring of new social and political revolutions, churches were also asking themselves how to renew their message of faith and how to proclaim the gospel in the midst of the world's chaotic situation. The Catholic church was experiencing the renewal movement of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and Pope John XXIII, the "good pope," announced that the moment to open the windows of the church had arrived so that the fresh breezes of renewal would blow upon her. It was the era of *aggiornamento*, of breathing in fresh air

¹ Emilio Antonio Núñez, *Teología de la liberación* (Miami: Caribe, 1986), 256.

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and giving a new facelift to the church. Answers were sought for a world that struggled with growing violence, social inequality, secular thought, and the absolutism of many governing authorities that, having become intoxicated by power, had awakened the fury of rebels. Struggles within the church were no small matter. The laity demanded a greater role in the life and liturgy of the community of faith. The church sought to make authentic popular liturgy a reality, to validate the Bible in the theology and life of the entire church, to interact with different cultures from the vantage point of the faith, and to open up spaces for ecumenical dialogue with Protestant churches, with the major non-Christian religions, and with the new religious movements.² On the other hand, the base communities of the so-called “Third World” countries raised their voices demanding that the church take a stand against inequality and therefore demonstrate to a doubting world that the church really was concerned about the miserable situation of the world’s poor.

The Church of the Poor

Months before the Second Vatican Council began, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (Pope John XXIII) had expressed the urgency to focus on three points that could be delayed no longer. The first was that the Council should study the way in which the church could speak about God in an atheistic world filled with unbelievers. The second dealt with the unity of Christian believers

and sought to answer the question, “How can we speak about Christ if we are separated in various Christian confessions?”³ Then some Latin American bishops recall their conversation with the Pope a few days before the opening of the Council. Based on their discussion, the Pope “proposed an enlightened third issue: ‘The Church, faced with people of developing nations, discovers who she is and who she should be: the Church of the poor, that is, the Church of everyone.’”⁴ “The poor” was not referring to poor individuals but rather to the world of poverty and, something that would eventually become a central theme in the subsequent development of Latin American liberation theology, structural poverty. When the Pope referred to this poverty, he was identifying the responsibility and guilt of unjust economic systems that contributed to the creation, emergence, and growth of poverty.

When the sessions began, Giovanni Batista Montini (later Pope Paul VI), who had been named by Pope John XXIII to be a personal assistant to the Council, addressed a group of bishops in a private meeting:



Pope Paul VI

Brother Bishops, we must discuss the option for the poor. We are not going to treat it as one theme in the Council, but as *the* theme of the Council. And if we do not deal with it in depth, we will not have dealt with the other two topics: “how to speak about God in the face of atheism” and “the unity of

² For further treatment of these topics of the Vatican II Council see Hans Kung, *Libertad conquistada* (Madrid: Trotta, 2004), 571.

³ Samuel Ruiz, *Cómo me convirtieron los indígenas* (Santander: Sal Térrea, 2002), 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.