Chapter III

THE MEDELLIN CONFERENCE

The Latin American bishops met for the first time in the twentieth century, as has been stated in the earlier Chapter, in 1955, in Rio de Janeiro. The founding of Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM), as Penny Lernoux writes, represented the first, "timid step away from Vatican's tutelage". Till then, all transactions between Vatican and the bishops in Latin America were carried out through a department in Vatican known as the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. Since the founding of CELAM the bishops experienced and exercised an authentic collegiality which was further strengthened during the many sessions of the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965. While the Council was still in its final session in 1965, archbishop Manuel Larrain, President of CELAM, a man of progressive tendencies (he was the first bishop to distribute the surplus Church lands to the poor landless peasants) put forward the idea of holding a Second Conference of the Latin American Bishops for the purpose of examining the road travelled by CELAM since 1955.

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and organizing its future in accordance with the trends and conclusions of the Vatican Council. The proposal was accepted by the bishops, and Pope Paul VI gave the idea his blessing (Dom Manuel Larrsin died soon afterwards in an accident).

The socio-political situation in Latin America had changed by 1966 from what it was in 1962 when the Vatican Council was convened. The euphoria created by the developmental activities had almost vanished. Brazil had passed from populist government to military dictatorship. The 'revolution in liberty' promised by the Christian Democrats in Chile was nowhere in sight. Poverty and oppression was on the increase everywhere in the land. There was frustration and disillusionment arising out of unfulfilled hope. In contrast to the failure of the capitalist developmental experience, stood the glaring success of socialist developmental experience of Cuba. To many Latin Americans, particularly the youth and a section of the clergy, the Cuban experiment was not just a viable but the only alternative for the liberation of millions of poor and oppressed and for the removal of the glaring inequality.

The bishops who returned from the Vatican Council were prepared to act according to the spirit of the Council which emphatically taught that the Church was to be at the service of the world. But their world, they discovered, was quite different from the world the Council spoke of. It was a world of injustice, misery, oppression, poverty and exploitation. Application of the
Council's conclusions to Latin America required reorientation and further formulation taking into account the concrete situation in Latin America. The bishops expressed their desire to meet immediately and discuss the Latin American realities and chalk out a course of action for the Church in Latin America. Pope Paul gave his final clearance only after the publication of his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* which dealt with problems particularly of the Third World including Latin America.

In the meanwhile, many diocesan and regional conferences took place throughout Latin America to study and apply the Council's conclusions to the land. The various Episcopal Commissions of CELAM undertook studies and discussions in which social scientists and other experts collaborated. The conclusions brought to sharp focus the oppressive Latin American reality and the need for profound structural transformations of the Latin American society. To cite one example, the Commission for Social Action that studied the "Presence of the Church in Latin American Development", concluded that the underdevelopment of Latin America "can only be understood in terms of dependency of relationship with the developed world that it results from. In large measure the underdevelopment is a by-product of capitalist development in the West".² Many declarations, manifestos, and letters from

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progressive individuals and groups appeared which demanded of the CEMAAM a definitive break with the capitalist structures and an unequivocal option for the poor and for socialism in the interest of the Latin American masses. Given the combination of facts, pressures and trends, the choice of the theme for the second general conference was not surprising. The bishops chose to focus on Latin American man and his reality.

Medellin Deliberations and Its Final Document

The Conference held in Medellin, Colombia, was attended by about two hundred delegates from all over Latin America. Pope Paul who solemnly opened the Conference denounced the structures that maintained oppression and inequality and stressed the need for profound and far-sighted transformation of society, but pointed out that violence was neither Christian nor in accordance with the Gospels.

The discussions were based on a working document prepared by experts which had been adversely criticized both by the ultra right as contrary to the social teaching of the Church and the ultra left as vague and lacking articulation of the Latin American


realities. During the debates the ultra conservative group of bishops who numbered about thirty, presented a counter working document which was vehemently opposed by an equal number of ultra progressives. After prolonged and acrimonious debates, conclusions were arrived at which reflected neither the views of the ultra conservatives nor those of the ultra radicals but rather those of the moderately progressives.

The conclusions have been divided into three general areas: 1) Human promotion, 2) Evangelization and growth in Faith, and 3) The visible Church and its structures. The first deals with the promotion of individuals and groups towards value of justice, peace, education and the family. The second spells out the need to restructure the catechetical and liturgical tasks of the Church to meet the contemporary needs for evangelization and growth of faith of the masses as well as elites. The third concerns the problems dealing with the members of the Church as institution.

At Medellin the bishops spoke to themselves, to priests and religious, to the elites, to the masses, to the young, and to all men of good will. They described their own role as "essentially that of being of service to inspire and educate the conscience of the faithful in order to help them perceive the responsibilities

5 "Documento Mayoritario del episcopado Colombiano", NADOC (Lima), 4 December 1968; See also Gheerbrant, n.3, pp.251-53.
of their faith in their personal and social life". This "responsibility" is later described as a "commitment...which in Latin America must be characterised by...a sign of liberation, humanization and development".  

In their introduction to the final documents, the bishops adopted Pope Paul's description of true development in *Populorum Progressio* as "the passage for each and all, from conditions of life that are less human to those that are more human"\(^8\), and further specified the steps leading closer and closer to integral development:

- **Less human:** the material needs of those who are deprived of the minimum living conditions, and the moral needs of those who are mutilated by selfishness.
- **Less human:** the oppressive structures that come from the abuse of ownership and of power and from exploitation of workers or from unjust transactions.
- **More human:** Overcoming misery by the possession of necessities; victory over social calamities; broadening of knowledge; the acquisition of cultural advantages.
- **More human also:** an increase in respect for the dignity of others; orientation towards the spirit of poverty; cooperation for the common good; the will to peace;
- **More human still:** acknowledgement, on man's part, of the supreme values and of God who is their source and term.
- **More human, finally, and especially, faith,** the gift of God, accepted by men of good will and unity in the charity of Christ, who calls us all to participation, as sons in the life of the living God who is the father of all men.\(^9\)

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6 The Second General Conference, n.4, p.60.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p.49.
9 Ibid.
Economic development is an integral element of the total process, but, as Louis J. Lebret writes, it is a question of having more in order to be more. Development is fundamentally a means. The integral development process regarded from a humanist perspective requires a wider content than modernization (desarrollismo) which deals with the bettering of the existing system rather than its transformation. It is to this qualitatively different view that the term liberation is applied. The reason why liberation is replacing development is that "liberation from the system that maintains underdevelopment is the prerequisite if there is to be any development at all". As Hugo Assman points out, there are several levels of meaning of the term liberation: socio-analytical, theological, pragmatic and methodological. In another article he says that liberation is full of meaning in the context of the current absence of freedom because it deals with acquiring that freedom and retaining it. The very choice of the term indicates a new awareness of the dependent state of Latin America. But, liberation itself is only a means, Laurentin reminds, a first step, and unless it is so understood, as part of

12 Hugo Assman, "Implicaciones de un nuevo lenguaje teologico", in Teologia desde la praxis de la liberacion (Salamanca, 1973), pp.107ff.
a process, it runs the risk of becoming a myth or a hoax. 13

Medellin stated, in the words of Pope Paul VI that "development is the new name for peace". 14 It further links justice and peace (development/liberation): "Justice, and therefore, peace are achieved by means of a dynamic action of conscientization of the popular sectors, which enables them to urge public officials who are often incapable of implementing their social projects without popular support". 15 This link which Medellin establishes is an important feature of the conclusions, leading the argument into the area which Segundo Galilea refers to as "la vertiente de la politica de la pastoral" (the political dimension of pastoral work). 16 If peace (development/liberation) is rooted in justice, it can exist only on the basis of just relations at every level of society and in every sector. This demand for justice implies constant tension between and among groups exercising differing degrees of power.

The bishops at Medellin stated their understanding of integral development as synonymous with complete humanism. Quoting from Populorum Progressio, the Medellin Conclusions repeats that "true development is the progression of each man and all men from
less human conditions to more human ones.\textsuperscript{17} The Bishops further add that the Risen Christ, image of the invisible God, is the goal proposed by God for the development of man.\textsuperscript{18} Salvation history consists of liberating action which touches the whole man.\textsuperscript{19}

When the Medellin \textit{Conclusions} discusses inner transformation, it is not clear whether the intent is that it applies only to individual persons, or also to groups of persons. They state that human dignity demands that the necessary changes take place from within, through a growing awareness, adequate preparation and effective participation.\textsuperscript{20} If the term "from within" (\textit{desde dentro}) refers to a personal transformation, it implies the presence of a catalyst or an agent of change able to bring about this change. If, however, it refers to the exertion of pressure on public officials to persuade them to change the subhuman conditions of the masses which are the very cause of their marginality, it is unclear in the Medellin \textit{Conclusions} how this transformation is to come about.

A consistent theme of Medellin \textit{Conclusions} is that the empowering of the currently economically, politically and socially

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Second General Conference, n.4, p.49.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.100.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p.59.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p.78.
\end{footnotes}
powerless is essential to the attainment of peace (development). There is, however, no specific suggestion in the documents how to bring about changes in the existing political, social and economic infrastructure. The overall tenor and phraseology of the Conclusions do suggest, however that lack of political involvement of the marginal masses is at least one of the causes of the ineffectiveness of social action on the part of the government. This viewpoint differs from the more standard argument that the marginalization of the masses is an effect of inadequate economic development. Raul Prebisch has argued in that vein when he wrote:

The social integration of these stranded masses is of primary importance. It is a question of fair distribution ....However, redistribution measures alone will not suffice... there will be no substantial and lasting improvement unless the rate of [economic] development is speeded up. 21

Key words in theology of liberation are 'dependence', 'liberation', 'awareness', 'domination', 'struggle', 'just society', etc. Understanding or awareness of oneself as a person is considered basic, the corner-stone of any effort to grow and become more human. Participation in the process is indispensable. The transformation of reality by man is recorded as history. Gutierrez explains:

To reflect on the basis of the historical praxis of liberation is to reflect in the light of the future which is believed in and hoped for. It is to reflect with a view to action which transforms the present. But it does not mean doing this from an armchair; rather it means sinking roots where the pulse of history is beating at the moment and illuminating history with the ward of the Lord of history, who irreversibly committed himself to the present moment of mankind to carry it to its fulfilment. 22

Freedom consists in the ability of each man to fashion his own future. If societal and internal constraints make it impossible for a person, let alone a people, to exercise his rights and responsibilities, he is in need of liberation. Because the starting point of analysis is the social reality, an understanding of structural relationships is indispensable. It is no longer enough to describe the situation and to collect pertinent data. The analyst must discover and expose the root causes of the situation considered in a historical perspective.

The result of such an analysis has been an understanding of development and underdevelopment as two sides of the same coin and so, underdevelopment as the end result of a process of dependence. Development appeared not as a desired goal any more, but as the cause of its opposite, lack of development. So, Andre Gunder Frank writes of the development of the underdevelopment, characterizing it as a "satellite development which was neither

self-generating nor self-perpetuating".  

Many economists and social scientists interested in examining the Latin American reality in the 1960s used the term "dependency" to subsume many facets of underdevelopment. Those who use dependency theories as instruments of analysis maintain that one of the fundamental elements of the development of the current world economy has been the structuring of an international system in which a few European countries and the United States have played dominant roles since the late nineteenth century, i.e., they have assumed and maintained a dominant position vis-a-vis other areas of the world. Dependency theories are concerned with an analysis of dominant-subservient relationships. They are akin to theories of imperialism, but they differ in that they posit a subjugation not maintained by overt political dominance. Dependency describes the relationship in such a global economic system. For these theorists "development" and "underdevelopment" are simultaneous processes. As Celso


Furtado contends, dependency and underdevelopment were deliberately created and consciously maintained by the metropolis to keep neocolonialism alive. 26

Utilizing the concept of dependency Medellin refers specifically "to the implications for our countries of dependence on a center of economic power around which they gravitate". 27

The bishops do not concern themselves only with an analysis of the political, economic and cultural order. They exhort the Catholics to search for remedies to social ills so as to liberate men from temporal handicaps. So, among their recommendations to the laity the bishops encourage them to "assume their Christian commitment at the level of international movements and organizations to further the progress of the poorest people and favor justice among nations". This ought to be done because it is a fact that the growing interdependence among the nations and the weight of dominating international power structures... exercise a decisive influence upon the underdevelopment of marginal peoples". 28

27 Second General Conference, n.4, p.73.
28 Ibid., p.169.
Other aspects of justice which the bishops mention in the Conclusions deal with its genesis, biblical teaching on the subject and the value of justice as the visible effect of man's transforming power, based on truth and characterised by freedom. In a later paragraph of the Conclusions, social justice is identified as a way of life and an impulse toward internal growth.

The Medellin statements abound in negative allusions to the centrality of justice, particularly the denunciation of injustice. Viewed as a systemic evil, injustice in these statements becomes "institutionalised violence". It is at this level that the strongest pleas are made for the creation of a just social order as an eminently Christian task.

Change is the key word throughout the Medellin documents, and the section on education expresses clearly what the position of bishops is on attitudinal change. They acknowledge the need for the permanent and organic change that development implies, and agree that education is the key to nurture this attitude.

The basic education, which the bishops promise to support, includes

29 Ibid., p. 59.
30 Ibid., p. 60.
31 Ibid., p. 78.
32 Ibid., p. 80.
33 Ibid., p. 100.
not only literacy but also the training necessary to transform persons into conscious agents of their integral development.\textsuperscript{34} It is not just the dispelling of ignorance that concerns Medellin. The kind of education the bishops endorse is not a synonym for schooling. Its goal is both to form and inform. What Medellin talks about, echoing \textit{Populorum Progressio}, is learning to be. The new education is essential to correct basic flaws in the prevalent world view of many Latin Americans, which are perceived as both the cause of difficulty and an impediment to its cure.

A document drafted by three hundred Brazilian priests and signed by many more, expressed clearly and concisely how change oriented Catholic elites perceive the problem. The masses are not sufficiently aware that God acts through secondary causes. They do not know, or their behaviour does not indicate they know, that man is the subject of history, i.e., that he is the agent and not the object of history, and that he is indeed called to be in charge of the material things of this world and to transform them for his use. The prevailing perception of the material world is that God holds title to it in perpetuity and paternalistically grants licenses and dispenses favours ready-made. Popular superstitions and practices feed and support this erroneous conception.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p.103.

\textsuperscript{35} "A Murdered People, A Plundered People" in Gheerbrant, n.3, p.130.
The existing educational system can never be an instrument of change because it is fundamentally a means for socializing the young into an existing system. An exposition of this argument which sees educational goals and procedures as practiced in the typical Latin American Church context as a causal element of underdevelopment was made by José Comblin in his commentary on the Working Document of Medellin. He offers three reasons in support of his argument that Catholic education is classist and counter-developmental: 1) it is generally reserved for the elites, 2) it is academic, formal and alienating; 3) it imports foreign methods, cultural patterns and values. He concludes that the traditional Catholic schooling is perhaps the most important factor supporting the traditional class in its privileged position.

Leopoldo Zea had already pointed out the inherent conservatism in Catholic education. Comparing and contrasting Catholic and military educational methods in Mexico he had pointed out that both produced students who were resistant to change. Both systems were designed to form each student into one whose goal was to find the niche in the establishment that would assure him of the highest degree of status and privilege. This kind of education which stifles creativity and enhances uniformity, cannot

but produce individuals who are inimical to all manner of change, forward movement or progress, or conservative beings incapable of transforming their reality.38 Houtart and Pin have pointed out that Catholic education in Latin America is one of the weakest sectors of the institutional Church, because of its conservatism, individualism, and inadaptability.39

Paulo Fráire's pedagogy of education has been an attempt at changing the conservatism and inadaptability of the prevailing education. His influence is evident throughout the document on education. Freire's idea of man's need to become critically aware of the social myth surrounding him, underlies many of the statements. It is Freire's argument that education is worthy of its name only when it liberates, when it enables the persons to be more, not merely have more. He uses the pejorative 'domestication' for the process whereby marginal or new members of a society are adapted to fit into a system. A system is unjust, and therefore, undesirable, he says, in so far as its highest goal is not to enable such man to be a better human being. He condemns those systems of schooling that absorb as many persons as possible so as to strengthen beyond questioning, structures that enable some persons to use others as means to their ends.40

38 Leopoldo Zea, Del Liberalismo a la Revolución en la educación (Mexico, 1956), pp.61 ff.


40 Three books of Paulo Freire in English which contain the core of his pedagogy are: Education for Critical Consciousness (New York, 1973); Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York, 1970); and, Cultural Action for Freedom (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).
The permanent and organic change which the bishops advocate would be the result of a 'liborating education' (the phrase is almost a tautology) which would transform the educated into subjects of their own development. Conscientização (conscientization) which sums up Paulo Freire's pedagogy is often used in the texts of Medellin. His central concept on education has been paraphrased by Medellin in terms of a 'new man' who creates a 'new society'. Such a person is formed by an educational system which favours free self-determination and promotes a sense of community. This 'new man' also enjoys a realistic perception of community problems and social structures.

Structural changes are broached upon in other sections of the documents but often indirectly by pointing out the conditions of injustice of the present structures which characterize the lives of the great masses of Latin Americans. The bishops disagreed with the existing Latin American enterprise system. In their view, in a truly human economy, a business would not be identified solely with the owners of the capital because a business also involves

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41 Second General Conference, n.4, p.99.
42 Conscientização is sometimes rendered in English as 'creating an awareness or 'consciousness raising' or 'creating or acquiring a critical consciousness'. But none of these is fully satisfactory because they do not make clear the essential relationship between self-initiated action and the awareness of reality on which it is based.
43 Second General Conference, n.4, p.59.
44 Ibid., pp.97-98.
a community of persons in need of capital to produce goods.
Neither the liberal capitalist system nor the Marxist system is acceptable because they militate against the dignity of human person, regarding people as means rather than as ends. 45 What is needed is a new way of constructing society, transcending the shortcomings of both capitalism and communism, which will provide justice for all. The bishops stress the relationship between education and structural changes:

The task of education of these our brothers does not properly consist in incorporating them into the cultural structures existing around them... It consists in equipping them so that they themselves, as authors of their own progress, develop in a creative and original way a cultural world attuned to their own abundance and which is the fruit of their own efforts. 46

The bishops are more explicit in their support of structural change in the section on education particularly the conclusions than in the other documents though the idea runs through all of them. In outlining the direction social change ought to take, the Medellin documents point out the need for creating or strengthening intermediary structures between the person and the state, such as families, professional organizations, and peasants and workers' union. **Communidades eclesiales de base** (Basic Christian Communities) were singled out for special endorsement and encouragement. 47 The sociological

46 Ibid., pp.97-98.
47 Ibid., p.120.
importance of these "communities" as balancers or counter weights to the small groups that monopolize political and economic power is highlighted. 48

The bishops stress the need for profound attitudinal change in all sectors of society such as businessmen, government bureaucrats and professionals. What is needed to attain true liberation is for all men to be truly converted. Translating these concepts into sociological terms, this means that socialization is perceived as a socio-cultural process of personalization and growing solidarity, which will enhance the capacity of all sections of society to become agents of change. 49

This societal state must be brought about by individual conversion. It is the process of personal, individual reorientation which Medellin regards as the proper sphere in which the Church ought to exert its influence upon society. 50

Should the desired inner change take place, the whole of society would be transformed through the dynamics of transforming love. 51

48 Ibid., p.60. Basic Christian Communities will be discussed in Chapter V.
49 Ibid., p.63.
50 Ibid., p.58.
51 Ibid., p.33.
Medellin documents discuss the priests' roles on several levels. Not only are priests to promote human development, which translated in terms of everyday life means health and nutrition, schooling, housing, employment, and social services as well as a more equitable income distribution, but they are also to see to it that all human striving attains to its full sense of fraternal and spiritual participation. In order for priests to accomplish their task more effectively, it is necessary, the documents point out, that they become incarnated in the environment of the people, rooted in their culture, and adapted to their needs. They themselves must be dynamic elements in society. An urgent call is addressed in the documents to business and governmental officials, bureaucrats and professionals and other elites in society all of whom need to be sensitized and educated in their social obligations.

Medellin's Views on Violence

The bishops at Medellin were confronted with the problem of institutionalized violence. They describe it as existing when, due to industrial and agricultural structures, national and international economic systems, and cultural and political patterns, whole peoples lack the necessities of life and find themselves in a state of dependency that deprives them of all

52 Ibid., pp.62-65.
53 Ibid., p.65.
initiative and responsibility, a condition that is a violation of their fundamental human rights. The working document explicitly addressed the problem of violence. A letter from one thousand Latin American priests to the CELAM assembly spells on the terms of the problem. It is the violence a minority of privileged ones practices against the immense majority of exploited people. It is a violence of hunger, vulnerability, underdevelopment, persecution, oppression, ignorance, organized prostitution, illegal slavery, social, intellectual and/or economic discrimination, and so on. It tells the bishops to avoid the temptation of "comparing or identifying the unjust violence of the oppressors who support this 'iniquitous system' with the just violence of the oppressed, who are forced to the position of having to use violence if they are to gain their freedom". According to representatives of lay movements in Peru, the existing violence in Latin America is "permanent, institutionalized and intolerable". Bolivian bishops, priests, and laymen in their letter point to underdevelopment, lay-offs,

54 Ibid., p.78.
56 "Letter to the Latin American Bishops Assembled at Medellin" in Sheerbrant, n.3, p.163.
57 Ibid., p.166.
ineffective education system, child vagrancy, pitifully small salaries, slave-like conditions of labour, corrupt juridical and administrative systems, etc, all of which amount to 'established disorder' and 'legalised violence'. Many other statements and letters emanating from other parts of Latin America also pointed out this situation of sin.

Hence, the bishops at Medellin unequivocally denounced the unjust situations which included class tensions and internal colonialism, pervasive marginality—socio-economic, political, cultural, and racial—all of which amounted to institutionalized violence. The process of economic, social and political repression by violence in Latin America was well known and the trade unions of Latin America brought it to the notice of Pope Paul VI in their letter to him on July 18, 1968.

In the Conclusions on Peace, the bishops at Medellin characterize their mandate as being the creation, albeit indirectly, of a just social order:

To us, pastors of the Church, belong the duty to educate the Christian conscience, to inspire, to stimulate and help orient all of the initiatives that contribute to the formation of man. It is also up to us to denounce everything which, opposing justice, destroys peace.


60 Second General Conference, n.4, pp.71-75.

61 "Letter from Trade Unions" in Gheerbrant, n.3, pp.66-79.

62 Second General Conference, n.4, pp.80-81.
The subsequent denunciation of institutionalized violence in the context of the sentiments noted above would appear to be a battle-cry and a call for action. In referring to institutionalized violence, the bishops made one of the most forceful and unambiguous statements contained in the documents. "This situation demands all-embracing, courageous, urgent and profoundly renovating transformations".63 This line is followed by the acknowledgement that these oppressed people find themselves in the state because of the lack of awareness of human rights to which they are entitled.64

The bishops realize that "those who, in the face of injustice and illegitimate resistance to change, put their hopes in violence" and declare that "their attitude frequently finds its ultimate motivation in noble impulses of justice and solidarity".65 They recall also the teaching of Populorum Progressio that Christians ought to resist the temptation to use violence as means to right wrongs to human dignity and that the effect of violent revolution is to produce new injustices, imbalance the society and cause new disasters. Pope Paul during his speeches in Bogota had repeatedly reminded that violence was neither Christian nor evangelical. The ideal of the Christian as

63 Ibid., p.75.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
peace-maker was engraved in the soul of the Church. But the letter from nine hundred priests to the Medellin Conference expressed a different view: "This light of the Gospel shows us clearly that one cannot condemn oppressed people when they feel obliged to use force for their own liberation; to do so would be to commit a new injustice."

The bishops at Medellin perceived the problem of violence as a dramatic dilemma and a temptation. In the cautionary statement which appears in the Conclusions on Justice, regarding revolutionary insurrection, they state:

Although it is true that revolutionary insurrection can be legitimized in the event of an evident and prolonged tyranny that would gravely impair fundamental human rights...it is also true that violence or 'armed revolution' generally generate new injustices.

The life and death of Camilo Torres exemplify the dilemma faced by those within the Church institution who perceive the contradiction between the denunciation of the violence of the oppressed and their experience of the unwillingness of the powerful to make it possible for the people to take the steps towards any meaningful change. He wrote:

66 Peruvian Bishops Commission, n.2, p.228.
67 Second General Conference, n.4, pp.72-73.
68 Ibid., pp.79-80.
Throughout my ministry as priest, I have tried in every way possible to persuade the laymen, Catholic or not, to join the revolutionary struggle. In the absence of a massive struggle I have resolved to join the revolution myself, thus carrying out part of my work of teaching men to love God by loving each other. I consider this action essential as a Christian, as a priest, and as a Colombian. But such action, at this time, is contrary to the discipline of the present Church. I do not want to break the discipline of the Church, but I also do not want to betray my conscience. 69

The dilemma continues in the Church in Latin America, as also the debate on political activism of the clergy and on violence as a positive and legitimate force for social change. 70

Medellin Conclusions contain a whole section on elites. The term elite is used to indicate:

a) In general: The high level leaders in areas of culture, the professions, business and industry, and government;

b) In particular: Within these groups the dedicated few who exercise actual or potential influence on decision-making in the cultural, professional, educational social and political level. 71

Three types of elites are further identified in relation to their attitude to change, without, however, any judgement


71 Second General Conference, n.4, p.130.
of values or connotation of class. They are: 1) the conservatives or traditionalists; 2) developmentalists or evolucionists; and 3) revolutionaries. The conservatives, the document says, exhibit a lack of social awareness, a bourgeois mentality, a paternalistic orientation, and an unwillingness to modify the status quo. For a person of this mentality faith and social responsibility do not meet. Transforming actions are not a component of the living out of a creed and a set of moral principles.\textsuperscript{72}

While the conservatives equate their privileges with the established order the reformists, according to Medellin, are interested in economic advancement and argue for the integration of marginal groups into the mainstream of society as producers and consumers. Reformists or developmentalists accept gradualism as a basic premise; revolutionaries, however, demand a radical change, a change of the ends as well as the means.\textsuperscript{73}

The kinds of attitudes towards change which the Medellin documents suggest provide a clue to the intellectual climate of the 1960s in the Latin American society and particularly in the Latin American Church. As Mutchler points out, examples of different orientations to change are perceptible in the different sections of the Medellin document itself. The Medellin Conclusions

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p.131.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., pp.131-32.
on Justice call only for elite initiated change while the one on peace which deals more specifically with dependency, is more sympathetic toward radical change and sensitive to the kinds of reform advocated by specific reform groups. 74

Three facts stand out in this discussion of the Conclusions of the Second General Conference. The Latin American Bishops recognised the existence of institutional violence; they acknowledged the lack of awareness of human rights on the part of the great masses of people; they considered it their role to speak out against injustice. Given these declared perceptions of the problems to be attacked, and the manner in which it was done, how adequate were the means proposed? The bishops' declaration of their lack of expertise and their consequent unwillingness to participate in the technical aspects of structural change relegated them to a purely advisory role. As pastors it is not surprising that they stressed the importance of education and grass-root ecclesial communities.

In so far as Medellin was a call to conversion, it followed the long tradition of exhortative documents which one has come to expect from the Catholic Church hierarchy. However the fact that the starting point of its deliberations was the Latin American

reality—the historical, economic, political social conditions of the land—marked a new kind of awareness and a different kind of analysis concerned not only with man's soul, but with the integral human being, here and now.

Whereas the Second Vatican had focused on the problems of underdevelopment from the point of view of the developed countries, Medellin's approach was that of the poor countries. While the Second Vatican spoke in general terms of a Church in the world, Medellin documented the fact that the socio-economic, political and cultural environment of the Latin American Church was in total revolution. The Second Vatican outlined the transformation of the Church, Medellin applied the guidelines to the Church in the Third World, a world characterized by misery and injustice. Dom Holder Camara says: "Medellin is the symbol of a clear and bold vision of the reality of Latin America seen in the light of our Christian obligations".75

The RAND study conducted soon after the Medellin Conference states:

The new emphasis on participation and the frequent use of phrases like 'revolution', 'revolutionary', 'violence', 'internal colonialism' and 'liberation'...combine to give the impression that CELAM attained in Medellin a new level of radicalization and politicization. 76


The study however expresses some reservation about the "emotive denunciation of imperialism and injustice" that CELAM documents contain. It points out further that some key terms are ambiguous; they lack strict definitions and are used with a variety of meanings. For example, as the study says, it is quite different to "be in a revolution" and "make a revolution". 77

**A Theology of Liberation**

The Medellin Conference was a turning point in the history of the Latin American Church. It initiated new and far-reaching changes. Nelson Rockefeller who toured Latin America in 1969 reported to President Nixon about the disturbing phenomenon of profound transformation taking place in the Latin American Church. He predicted that the military and the Church would be the principal actors in Latin America. 78 The Rand Study conducted by Luigi Einaudi and others confirmed it. 79

The most profound transformation that was taking place in the Latin American Church was in the realm of theological thought. A new theology known as theology of liberation was systematically formulated in the years after Medellin. Medellin did not create it, nor did it formally endorse it. Only on four occasions the

77. Ibid., pp.41-43.


79. Einaudi, n.76, p.vi.
Conclusions used the term "liberation". The more frequently used term was "integral development". But for the bishops it was synonymous with "liberation". In any case, as Jose Comblin, the theologian who assisted the Brazilian bishops at Medellin says that the central idea at Medellin was liberation. The choice of liberation as the natural nucleus for Christian thinking has profoundly influenced the evolution of Latin American thought since 1968. The encouragement liberation theology received from Medellin contributed in no small measure to the plentiful and bold writings in the field of liberation.

Many Christian revolutionaries like Camilo Torres had begun to relate their revolutionary commitments to their Christian commitment in faith. But a formal theological formulation or an attempt to formulate a theology of revolution seems to have been made first by Rubem Alves, a protestant theologian. Richard Shaull, another protestant theologian formulated more elaborately the theology of revolution in his many writings. The ecumenical


81 Camilo Torres, "Revolution Christian Imperative", in John Gerassi, n.69, pp.270-301.


conference held in Geneva in 1966 took up revolution and Christian faith as its theme. Catholic theologians like Hugo Assman also tried to analyse the revolutionary struggle in Latin America in the light of faith. The basic concepts and assumptions for the construction of a theology of liberation were propounded by many Catholic theologians already prior to the Medellin Conference which accepted them and used them as the basis for many statements contained in the Conclusions. Medellin chose the term liberation as the main theme because liberation was more pregnant with Christian meaning in the Biblical context than development and revolution. It was only after the Medellin Conference that liberation theology was systematically formulated.

Liberation theology, as Segundo Galilea writes, is not a school, but a multiple current with varying directions and emphases. An understanding of the links between the theology of revolution and the theology of liberation is important because it sheds light on both the innovative aspects and the roots of the latter. In Comblin's opinion the theology of revolution is not a doctrine; rather it is a "collection of problems around a main question...what is the relationship between Christianity and contemporary revolutions?". It is, to repeat Segundo Galilea's explanation of pastoral theology, a reflection on the Good News

86 José Comblin, "Liberation and Theology" notes on lectures delivered at Harvard Divinity School as Visiting Professor of Ecumenical Studies, Spring Term, 1976, mimeo, IDOC (Rome) doc.no., 15346.
by those engaged in the conscious living of the Christian faith. 87 And conscious living in Latin America brings the Christian face to face with underdevelopment, with less than human conditions that must be changed. So, reasons Comblin, the Latin American theology of liberation may be considered as a "particular and original way of doing revolution theology". 88

Harold Brookfield comments:

"No other major region of the world parallels Latin America's colonial traditions, it is therefore no cause for surprise that this region has been in the forefront of a whole school of new thinking on the process operating in so-called 'development'". 89

Juan Carlos Scannone also alludes to this fact and adds that the logical reflection on the problems of underdevelopment and dependency coming from Latin America has to involve praxis and the intelligence of the Catholic faith because Latin America is the only grouping of Third World countries which is all Catholic. 90

The theology of liberation was not formulated in the abstract. Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the leading liberation

87 Segundo Galilea, Para una Pastoral latinoamericana (Mexico, 1968).
88 Comblin, n.86, p.4.
theologians, in his introduction to *Theology of Liberation*
which is acknowledged as the most classic work on liberation
theology, says:

This book is an attempt at reflection, based on Gospel
and the experiences of men and women committed to the
process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited
land of Latin America....Our purpose is...to reconsider
the great themes of Christian life within this radically
changed perspective and with regards to the new questions
posed by this commitment. 91

Theology of liberation is specifically a Latin American
theology because its content is the Latin American reality; and
because its method is to take, as its starting point, a
scientific and social analysis of that reality.92

Comblin links the remote origins of theology of liberation
to the Christian Democratic movement in the 1950s and to the
"Economie et Humanisms" group led by Lebret which were influential
in most countries and prepared a new generation of lay Catholics.
He sets 1961, after the publication of Pope John XXIII's encyclical
*Mater et Magistra*, as the beginning of the reflection about
development that led to a formulation of the theology of liberation.93

91 Gutierrez, n.22, p.ix.

92 Attempts are being made to enlarge its content so as to
include the other parts of the Third World and formulate
a Theology of the Third World. A group of theologians
from Latin America, Asia and Africa held a Conference at
Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 5-12 August 1976 and similar
gatherings have been taking place since then.

93 Comblin, n.80, p.12.
At the time of the Medellin Conference the theology of liberation which had been growing throughout the decade appeared openly. Scannone observes that the confluence of several circumstances in Latin America had a bearing on the more proximate beginnings of this reflection. In the first place, Latin American social sciences offered a new interpretation of Latin American underdevelopment, proposing various theories to explain the fact of dependence. Secondly, in various countries Christians awakened not only to the fact but also to the cause of their underdevelopment and attempted to struggle for a better life. Thirdly, the interaction of the Vatican Council—caused openness of the faith to the world and to contemporary men and women, when applied to the subhuman Latin American realities, sparked a new theological reflection, a critical reflection of the historical praxis in the light of the Word of God. Because in Latin America this praxis is one of liberation, the reflection on it produced a theology of liberation. 94

Development in its fullest meaning is the main concern of liberation theology. In A Theology of Liberation Gutierrez provides a historical survey of the origin and use of the term development and how in the wake of the disillusionment caused by developmental activities in the 1960s in Latin America the term developmentalism came to be used in a pejorative sense. 95 Latin Americans who agree with this analysis differentiate between desarrollismo (developmentalism) which they understand as

94 Scannone, n.90, pp.16-17.
95 Gutierrez, n.22, pp.24-26.
synonymous with reformist and modernizing efforts, inspired by a technocratic ideology of domination, and supportive in the long run of the status quo, and desarrollo (development), which attacks the root causes of dependence—economic, social, political and cultural and whose goal is not to better the system but to transform it. It is in this latter sense that the bishops at Medellin frequently used it. However, in order to avoid any confusion the liberation theologians prefer to refer to it as liberation since it refers in fact "to the inescapable moment of radical change which is foreign to the ordinary use of the term development." Moreover it has deeper meaning in the Biblical context. "The Bible presents liberation—salvation—in Christ as the total gift, which by taking on the levels we indicate, gives the whole process of liberation its deepest meaning and its complete and unforeseeable fulfilment."  

In an attempt to synthesize the characteristics and main themes of the theology of liberation and differentiate it from the traditional theology in the Church, Segundo Galilea makes some important synthesis of the tradition of theologizing in the Catholic Church. He explains that there are three ways of theologizing. A Christian can reflect on the Word of God in order to

96 Ibid., p.27.
97 Ibid., p.x.
become better acquainted with it. This kind of theology of spiritual reflection is unsystematic and unscientific. A second approach is the more traditional, systematic or scientific one which is usually referred to as dogmatic theology. Its purpose is to reason about the faith. The third way of theologizing produces a pastoral theology. Its point of departure is the ministerial action of the Church. It is a reflection on the Good News by those engaged in the living of the faith. The pastoral theology which has emerged from reflection done in the midst of involvement in the Latin American praxis is theology of liberation.

Gutierrez also differentiates three kinds of theology in the Church. The first is the theology as wisdom which is essentially a meditation on the Bible. The second is theology as rational knowledge, an intellectual discipline born of the meeting of faith and reason, and the third is theology as critical reflection on praxis. Ecclesial praxis, a life of commitment in faith and love is the point of departure. "Theology of liberation offers us not so much a new theme for reflection as a new way to do theology. Theology as critical reflection of historical praxis is a liberating theology".  

98 Segundo Galilea, Teología de la liberación - ensayo de síntesis (Bogotá, 1976), p.15.
99 Gutiérrez, n.91, pp.8-14, 15.
The starting point of the theological reflection is the historical praxis.\textsuperscript{100} Yves Congar has pointed out that if the Church wishes to be relevant in today's world and attempts to suggest some answers, it must consider other than the traditional ways of approaching theologically-pastoral epistemology. He says: "Instead of using only revelation and traditions as starting points, it must start with facts and questions derived from the world and from history".\textsuperscript{101} The liberation theologians start from the Latin American historical experience. But the present is not devoid of its eschatological dimension. For, as Gutierrez writes, to reflect on the basis of the historical praxis is to reflect in the light of the future which is believed in and hoped for.

Liberation theology is concerned with concrete reality. The concrete Latin world is the place in which the Latin American man acquires a new understanding of his situation and his social reality. Liberation theology may be differentiated from other formulations by its method rather than the subject matter. It may be summarized in terms of a Christian life centred on a concrete and creative commitment to serve others.

The language of liberation theology is not primarily philosophical; it is derived from social sciences. Gutierrez

\textsuperscript{100} The liberation literature often contains the Greek word "Praxis" which refers to practice as distinguished from theory. Praxis could be translated as the "living" or "experience" or "exercise" of liberation.

\textsuperscript{101} Yves Congar, Situation et taches presents de la theologie (Paris, 1967), p.72. cited in Gutierrez, n.91, p.12.
writes: "The understanding of the faith is also following along new paths in our day; the social, psychological, and biological sciences". 102 Regarding the influence of Marxist analysis of society he says:

...contemporary theology does in fact find itself in direct and fruitful confrontation with Marxism, and it is to a large extent due to Marxism's influence that theological thought, searching for its own sources has begun to reflect on the meaning of the transformation of the world and the action of man in history. 103

Liberation theology emphasizes the process rather than the outcome. Emphasis on the praxis, on living the faith, stresses formation through action. It is in the midst of the struggle for a more just society that man may become more human and better able to order his own life and determine his future. The model of the Church in the theology of liberation is clear. It is to be a community of Christians in active solidarity with the interests and struggles of the poor.

The theology of liberation has drawn objections and even opposition in Latin America and elsewhere. It is not easy to evaluate these criticisms, or to judge their legitimacy or the insights they shed. The reasons that motivate them and the precise points they are making are complex. Often enough, the opposition is due to confusion and misunderstanding. As noted above, the theology of liberation is not a single, uniform school

102 Gutiérrez, n.22, p.5.
103 Ibid., p.9.
of thought. There are pluralistic currents within the basic framework discussed above. Some theologians emphasize the temporal aspects especially political, more than the religious aspects. But criticism is directed indiscriminately against all currents which becomes often unfounded.

There is a plethora of literature in Latin America centred on the socio-political theme of liberation. They are not strictly theological writings. But the critics and adversaries lump them together with the strictly theological writings and direct their attack on the theology of liberation.

The standard criticism against the theology of liberation is that it is a pseudo-theology formulated in support of a particular political behaviour. That criticism arises out of a superficial understanding of the theology of liberation. Liberation theology does not propose or support any particular political action. Gutiérrez makes the purpose of his reflections very clear. In his introduction he writes: "Our purpose is not to elaborate an ideology to justify postures already taken...nor to fashion a theology from which political action is deduced". ¹⁰⁴

The opposition to liberation theology is led by archbishop Lopez Trujillo, currently President and formerly Secretary General of CELAM, and Roger Vekemans S.J., who currently directs the Centre

¹⁰⁴ Gutiérrez, n.22, p.ix.
of Study for Development and Integration of Latin America (CEDIAL) and its journal Tierra Nueva in Bogota with his immense resources in men and materials and who, it has been established had co-operated with the CIA in the Chilean elections of 1970. Besides their own writings, they have organized several conferences of theologians opposed to liberation theology under the auspices of CELAM or CEDIAL. The latest was the one organized in Rome in March 1976 which was financed by a funding agency of the German Bishops, ADVENIAT to expose the 'anti-theological' and 'Marxist' tendencies of liberation theology. One hundred German theologians including such renowned theologians as Karl Rahner and Johannes Metz, in a statement reacted strongly against this attempt to denigrate the theology of liberation which, according to them, contributed to the richness of Christian theology. They also raised objection to the abuse of the funds of ADVENIAT for propaganda against liberation theology.  

105 See for example Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, Liberación o Revolución (Bogota, 1975) Liberación marxista y liberación Cristiana (Madrid, 1974), and the proceedings of a meeting on the theology of liberation to "clear the air" published under the title Liberación: Dialogos en el CELAM (Bogotá, 1974); Roger Vekemans S.J., Caesar and God: The Priesthood and Politics (New York, 1972) and the many articles in the several issues of Tierra Nueva (Bogotá).

106 "Protesting a Campaign against Liberation Theology", a memorandum from theologians in West Germany, cited by Penny Lernoux, n.1, p.22.
A more reasonable criticism comes from those who point out that liberation theology is too narrow, constricted and parochial, too Latin American. ¹⁰⁷ This criticism is no longer valid as liberation theologians of Latin America have been striving with their counterpart parts in the rest of the Third World for the formulation of a liberation theology of the Third World.¹⁰⁸
