

THE FACE OF CHRIST AND THE CALL TO GOSPEL JUSTICE

A reflection exercise based on excerpts from the *Documents of Puebla* Nos. 31-41
(Episcopal Conference of Latin America, 1979)

Trans. Tony Cosentino (2007)

In the late 1950s, a call went out from Rome to all the world's Catholic bishops, requesting issues for discussion at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Archbishop Karol Wojtyla of Krakow asked that the Council discuss the world's need to recognize the face of Christ in the human person. Wojtyla had seen the horrors of Nazism and was living under Communist rule. He knew that the remedy to humankind's inhumanity lay in recovering the sense of the dignity of the human person that is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. Contemplating the face of Christ in the human person became a constant theme in John Paul II's writings. Below are some excerpts from the *Documents of Puebla*, where he was present with Latin America's bishops in 1979, clearly reflecting this concern:

The widespread situation of extreme poverty acquires in real life very concrete faces in which we should recognize the features of the suffering Christ, the Lord, who questions and beseeches us (Puebla, 31):

-faces of children, beaten by poverty from before birth, by the blockage of possibilities for self realization due to irreparable mental and bodily deficiencies; homeless and often exploited children of our cities: the fruit of poverty and family moral disintegration. (Puebla, 32)

-the faces of youth, disoriented because they can't find their place in society; frustrated, above all in rural and marginal urban zones, by a lack of opportunities for training and work. (Puebla, 33)

-faces of indigenous peoples and frequently African Americans, who living marginalized and in inhuman situations can be considered the poorest of the poor. (Puebla, 34)

-faces of farmers, who as a social group throughout our continent live at times deprived of land, in situations of domestic and foreign dependency, subjected to systems of commercialization which exploit them. (Puebla, 35)

-the faces of workers, frequently poorly compensated and faced with difficulties in organizing themselves and defending their rights. (Puebla, 36)

-faces of the underemployed and unemployed, fired from work due to harsh demands of economic crises and often [harsh demands] of models of development which subject workers and their families to cold economic calculations. (Puebla, 37)

-faces of the marginalized and urban slum-dwellers, with the double impact of shortage of material goods while faced with the show of riches in other social sectors; (Puebla, 38)

-faces of the elderly, growing more numerous every day, frequently marginalized by the society of progress which bypasses those persons who

do not produce. (Puebla, 39)

We share with our people other anguishes which rise up out of the lack of respect for their dignity as human beings, image and likeness of the Creator, and for their inalienable rights as children of God. (Puebla, 40)

Countries like ours in which fundamental human rights are frequently not respected –life, health, education, housing, work... -are in a situation of permanent violation to the dignity of their personhood. (Puebla, 41)

To this are added the anguishes rising due to abuses of power, typical of regimes of force. Anguishes due to the systematic or selective repression accompanied by violations of privacy, disproportionate pressures, torture, exile. Anguish in many families due to disappearances of loved ones who are never heard from again. A total lack of safety due to detentions without judicial order. Anguishes in the face of the subjugated or fettered exercise of justice. Just as the Popes have indicated, the Church, “with an authentic Gospel commitment,” must make heard her voice denouncing and condemning these situations, and even more so when governments or those responsible profess themselves Christians. (Puebla, 41)

Reflection Questions on the Documents of Puebla Nos. 31-41

1. Try and identify 5 groups of people in whom the Bishops of Latin America see the face of the suffering Christ.
2. Please take a few minutes to name 5 persons or groups of persons who represent for you the face of Christ in your school or community.

-Why do you see Christ in these persons?

3. Can you name an activity in your classroom/school/board that helps students grow in reverence for the dignity of all persons?
4. Please read the quote from Matthew’s account of the Last Judgment (below):

'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' (Mt 25, 34b-36)

In light of this Gospel story, this reading from the documents of Puebla, and your experience, why do we as Christians place so much importance on upholding human dignity?