

The Truth, Pilate, is...

In total fraternal communion
with Jon Sobrino,
theologian of God and of the poor,
faithful companion of Jesus of Nazaret,
witness of our martyrs

What is truth? Who has the truth? What is true politics? What is true religion? These questions, in varying tones and sometimes provoking confusion and indignation, are universal questions of every day, and we cannot flee from them, neither in politics nor in religion. Globalization, if on the one hand ties us to heartless profit, on the other hand facilitates for us new spaces of dialogue and living together, in a shared truth.

Our *Latin-American World Agenda* for these years of 2007 and 2008 seeks after true democracy and denounces false politics. In 2007, “We demand and make a different democracy”; and in 2008, “Politics is dead, long live politics.”

There is no doubt that we are still moving on in spite of the dramatic statistics that the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) and other institutions of opinion give us. There are 834 million persons that suffer hunger in the world, and every year there are four million more. 40% of the world population lives in extreme poverty. In Latin America 205 million live in poverty. In Sub-Saharan Africa there are 47 million. The economist Luís de Sebastián reminds us that “Africa is the sin of Europe,” the largest actual debt of Humanity. The world annually spends a billion dollars in arms, an amount 15 times higher than the quantity destined for international aid... The inequality in our global village is a veritable blasphemy against universal fraternity. An example: the average annual income of the richest persons in the USA is 118,000 dollars; and the average annual income of the poorest persons in Sierra Leone is 28 dollars.

The ecumenical and interreligious dialogue moves on, still at the margins, and still a minority. The grave world phenomenon of immigration is demanding answers and decisions that already affect different peoples, cultures and religions. Who has the truth? Who does not?

The Church, the Catholic church, celebrates, in Aparecida (Brazil), in this month of May, The Fifth Conference of the Latin-American and Caribbean Episcopacy. Already voices have been raised up, sincere and worthy of full participation, reclaiming “that which cannot be missing in Aparecida”: the option for the poor, ecumenism and macro ecumenism, the joining of faith and politics, the care for nature, a prophetic response to neoliberal capitalism, the rights of indigenous and Afro-American peoples, the protagonism of the laity, the participation of woman in all ecclesial levels, the co-

responsibility and subsidiarity of the whole Church, the encouragement of the BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities), the committed remembrance of our martyrs, the sincere inculturation of the Gospel in theology, liturgy, pastoral, and canon law. In short, the continuity and actualization of our “irrenunciabile Latin-American tradition which sprouts, above all, from Medellin.

The theme of the Fifth CELAM is: “Disciples and Missionaries* of Jesus Christ, so that in Him our peoples may have life. I am the way, the truth and the life.” *(Translator’s note: all are masculine in the original Spanish.) (Since women disciples and missionaries do not enter into the announced title, let’s hope that they will enter in the decisions of the Conference.) Discipleship and mission are the concrete and passionate living out of the following of Christ, “the seeking of the kingdom.” The theologian, A. Brighenti, points out that the ecclesiastical deficit of the Participation Document is expressed especially in the eclipse of the Reign of God, cited only twice in the whole document. Why so much fear of the Reign of God, which was the obsession, the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus?

Not everything is tranquil in that CELAM Conference. With a very bad shadow, as the purists would say, now on the eve of the Conference, the process against our dear Jon Sobrino has started. Very symptomatic, because a cardinal of the Roman curia has already declared that before Aparecida the Theology of Liberation will be liquidated. That illustrious cardinal will have to accept, I suppose, that after Aparecida the God of the poor will continue alive and active, and the subversive Gospel of liberation will also continue; and that unfortunately hunger, war, injustice, marginalization, corruption, and greed will continue, demanding of our Church a real commitment to the service of God’s poor.

I have written to Jon Sobrino, reminding him that there are millions of us accompanying him, and above all, it is Jesus of Nazareth who accompanies him. I recalled for Jon that stanza I wrote immediately after the martyrdom of his companions of UCA (University of Central America): “Now you are truth on the cross / and science in prophecy / and the company is total / companions of Jesus.” Through your holy fault, I said to Jon, many of us are hearing, pierced with actuality, the decisive question of Jesus: “And you, whom do you say that I am?” Because it is the true Jesus whom we wish to follow.

Scornfully, Pilate asks Jesus what is truth, doesn’t wait to hear an answer, then gives him over to death and washes his hands. Maxence van der Meersch responds to Pilate and responds to all of us: “The Truth, Pilate, is to be on the side of the poor.” Religion and politics have to grasp that response to its ultimate consequences. All the life of Jesus, furthermore, is the same response. The option for the poor defines all politics and all religion. Before it was “No salvation outside the Church”; then “No salvation outside the World.” Jon Sobrino reminds us, once again, that “There is no salvation outside the poor.” John XXIII advocated for “a Church of the poor, so that the Church would be of all.” What is certain is that the poor define, with their prohibited lives and their death “before time” the truth or the lie of a Society, of a Church. Our Jon Sobrino

says: “Those who have not explicitly known God, have encountered God if they have loved the poor.” And the Gospel repeatedly says it in word and in the life of Jesus: in the crib and on Calvary, in the beatitudes, in the parables, in the final judgment...

Brothers, sisters, beloved folks so close in the same vigilance and in the same hope, let us continue trying “to make the truth in love” as the New Testament says, in fraternal communion and in liberating praxis. “With the Poor of the Earth.” Being “lives for the Reign of Life” as we proclaimed in the Pilgrimage of the “Martyrs of the Journey.”

May this brief circular letter be a large embrace of commitment, of gratitude, of invincible hope, the Reign within.

Pedro Casaldaliga

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Pasch of Saint Romero