

THE LESSONS OF PUEBLA

By JON SOBRINO

PUEBLA and its documents represent a particular moment in the life of the Church in Latin America. To understand this moment, we need to reflect on it as a movement which began at Medellin and is still in process, before we can consider the reality of the Church and its presence at Puebla, and the actual documents resulting from it. The events of Medellin brought together the hopes both of the Church and of the latin american continent, its new and hardly-won achievements, and the embodiment of Vatican II for the Church on this continent. In Medellin's 'good news', the Church made a decisive missionary appearance, with a clear and convincing apostolic programme: the condemnation of the world's sin, the announcement of total liberation and the solemn undertaking by the Church to achieve it by a shared commitment to the poor. In this programme for commitment the truth about Latin America and of the Gospel was uncovered, and thus established, after centuries, the authentic, specific nature and originality of the Latin American Church.

In its implementation of the spirit of the Medellin declarations, the Church began to see its decisive twofold dedication to the world. It directed itself to the voiceless majority, the myriads of poor and oppressed; and it went out to them through a conversion-process by declaring its opposition to the kingdom of sin. It became the voice of those without a voice: a great prophetic cry of denunciation. Thus it began to seek out the historic value of christian love which inspires fundamental structural change and makes common cause with popular movements organized to defend their legitimate interests. So the Church is truly becoming 'the Poor of God'. It encourages basic communities because God's poor are there, no longer voiceless but resounding within the Church, which is sloughing off its worldliness and sharing the poverty of the people. Consequently, there is a new-found unity between bishops, priests, religious and laity. The Church is promoting new ministries, discovering new

riches in its pastoral agents, in peasants, workers and natives. It is bravely facing up to persecution and martyrdom, finding in them the privileged sign of its truth. It has also entered into new theological reflections, not simply at the professional level, but starting from the grass-roots, which is providing a special service to its life and mission.

Alongside these positive results, there have been doubtful responses and even rejection of Medellín from within the Church. Ignorance and vested interests led to the feeling amongst some laity, priests and bishops of not knowing where they were or what to do in this 'new Church', so that unity and disunity began to cut across all levels of the Church. The theology of liberation, often before it was studied, much less understood, was ruled out of court in favour of an allegedly 'authentic' theology of liberation stemming from the CELAM Secretariate. Popular piety came to be viewed ambiguously, and is now used differently depending on the emphasis: liberationist, popularist and traditionalist. Finally, the new 'political' impact of the Church in the various countries has produced serious conflicts with régimes of 'national security'; and some bishops and nuncios long for a return to the less tense situation of a more traditional diplomacy.

It is not surprising, then, that there was an attempt to offer an alternative to Medellín: one more cultural, doctrinal, and in accord with the Western world of which some ecclesiastics wished Latin America to be a part.¹ The shock caused by Medellín had proved too much for some; the preaching of the 'good news' to the poor turned out to be too dangerous. These people sought to impose an honourable retreat back to a better-known Church, within which they knew what to preach, and how to deal with the powerful people of this world: one in which doctrinal answers could be found for almost all the problems which crop up.

None the less, there were other groups involved in the preparations for Puebla, who wished to build on the renewal of Medellín. These collaborated by discussions at the grass-roots, theological writing and in meetings of priests and bishops. The preservation of the spirit of Medellín is not a question of obstinacy and *amour propre*, nor of a more traditional, orthodox understanding of the value of

¹ Cf J. Ellacuría, 'Entre Medellín y Puebla', in *ECA* (March 1978), pp 120-29; and J. Sobrino, 'Sobre el documento de trabajo para Puebla', in *Christus* (January 1979), pp 42ff.

episcopal authority. It is much more a matter of keeping faith with a 'liberating' God who hears the cries of his people, and following in the steps of Jesus Christ. If conflict, certain obscurities and also healthy questioning resulted from Medellin, all this was in the context of the joy of those who believe in the great God, and in a Christ who is a scandal and is crucified. These groups went to Puebla or worked for Puebla with the dream of developing Medellin, whether by theoretical analysis or christian pastoral and social practice. It was in this uncertain climate that John Paul II arrived to open Puebla.

The significance of John Paul II for Puebla

John Paul II decided to come to Puebla to open the Third Conference, when his pontificate was only four months old. There were certainly risks. It was hardly possible for him to have accurate knowledge of the richness and complexities of the Church in Latin America. However, his very presence was an indication that the Church here is of fundamental and increasing importance both quantitatively and culturally for the Church universal. His visit and his speeches served to inform the world that Latin America has a culture and context of its own which neither can nor should be assimilated into the so-called Western culture. His emphasis on the indigenous cultures of peasants and workers helped in the revealing of a people conscious of their own identity, with their own ecclesial and cultural future.

Besides this recognition of Latin America in its own right, the Pope's many speeches had a notable influence on Puebla. One may notice three main themes. In the first place, the Pope revealed his own personal, spiritual, human and christian experience as rooted in the country and local Church of his life and origins — Poland. This was clear from his emphasis on devotion to Mary and on fidelity to the Church, for whose very structures the Poles are still engaged in an agonizing struggle. This approach stresses the world of spiritual values, and the mystery of God; it explains his spontaneous compassion for children, the sick and the elderly: and, indeed, the affection he so frequently showed towards the Indians as preserving a unique culture. It is responsible, too, for his ability to see truth as a whole, without qualification or compromise. From the very first, he spoke of 'the truth which comes from God and which, brings with it the foundations of a real liberation for man'. To the bishops gathered at Puebla he said that their principal duty was

to be 'teachers of the truth' and to 'care for the purity of doctrine'. This insistence on the truth about Christ, the Church and man as the authentic tradition was at the heart of his every utterance.

Secondly, there were the warnings — inevitably the focus of the news-media. Here it is difficult to distinguish his own views from those of his advisers. Some of them were out of character for John Paul II, others dealt with problems hardly relevant to latin american theology: the 'parallel' magisterium, reductionism in Christology, a 'popular' Church very different from the Kingdom of God. Equally, when praying to Our Lady at Guadalupe he mentioned 'war, hatred and subversion' as three enemies of peace, without referring to generalized repression.

Thirdly, the Pope gave concrete expression to the whole purpose of liberation. This was affirmed programatically in the third part of his opening speech, when he moved to the Christology of the Synoptics, to the Jesus who feels compassion for the crowds and identifies himself with all the disinherited (Mt 25), and to the parable of the Good Samaritan. 'The Church has learned in these and other pages of the Gospel that its mission of evangelization has, as a central part of it, the quest for justice and the duty of advancing mankind'. Here the Pope echoes Medellin as well as the pastoral letters of many latin american bishops and the language of many committed Christians. Here he speaks of the 'social mortgage which burdens all private property'; of a peace that is the fruit of justice, condemns consumerism and denounces the violation of human rights, such as racial discrimination against individuals or groups, the physical or mental torture of prisoners and political dissidents. The theme of total liberation is reaffirmed: it must be christian, but it is still in the end liberation. Here too the Pope offers a deeply pastoral and 'popular' criterion: 'Let us not be mistaken. The humble and simple faithful with the true instinct for the gospel, understands spontaneously when this is being served by the Church, and when it is an empty shell and suffocated by other interests'.

Thus he reveals himself as one who carries the supreme and ultimate dignity of the human being deep inside himself, and offers an authentic theological vision of humanity as 'an image of God which is not reducible to a simple part of nature or to an anonymous unit of the human city'. For 'economics and politics never prevail over the human'. At Oaxaca he appeared both as guardian of the whole truth, and also as a pastor, full of compassion. So he greeted the Indians and peasants: 'the Pope strongly reaffirms that he wishes

to be committed to your cause, which is the cause of humble people, poor people. . . . He wishes to be your voice, the voice of those who cannot speak or who are silenced'.

As universal pastor of his people, he did not shrink from denouncing the oppressor:

To you, the ones who govern peoples, the powerful classes who let lie sterile the land which could produce the food so many families lack, the human conscience, the conscience of the common people, the cry of the underprivileged and above all the voice of God, the voice of the Church and I myself, repeat that it is not just, it is not human, it is not christian, to prolong these unjust situations. . . .

This is the Christology which identifies Jesus who is the one full of compassion, who speaks out, and is identified with the poor; it is an ecclesiology which links the service of the Kingdom of God with the demands of man's dignity.

It can be said, then, that John Paul II set the Puebla conference a threefold task: the enunciation of a clear doctrinal standard, an examination of conscience on the problems arising over the last ten years, and an unambiguous defence of the dignity of man in Latin America.

The presence of the reality of the Church at Puebla

The fundamental problem of Puebla revolved around the real presence of the Latin American Church. Obviously there were diverse elements from different countries and differing understandings of the situation, especially by the bishops. In this sense, Puebla was a struggle between those who sought to smooth over unpleasant realities and those who wished for the clear statement of the truth. If the immediate protagonists were the bishops, priests and theologians, the real protagonist was the actual situation itself. It was a question of the real nature of the Church over against church personalities who were more interested in thinking *about* the nature of the Church than in speaking from *within* that reality.

If, despite everything, the real nature of the Latin American Church won the day, it is because during the last ten years there has been an immense enthusiasm for christian creativity. Further, there has been real christian life and witness, sealed with the blood of Christ's faithful ones in conditions of persecution. In spite of attempts to channel the Conference into neutrality, pacification, prudent admonitions, it was not possible to smother the cries of reality which

were a challenge to the Church.

The immediate representation of the Church at Puebla was varied. Among the three hundred and sixty members of the Conference, the majority were of the prudential type. There was a notable group of bishops like the late Mgr Romero, Proaño and Flores, supported by priests, laity and the official representatives of CLAR (Latin American Conference of Religious). What they lacked in numbers was amply made up for by their conviction that they could build creatively on Medellín without fear. They relied on the faithful support of outstanding theologians, professional journalists, numerous members of whom were also earnest Christians, mothers of political prisoners and missing persons, and some thousand representatives from the 'basic communities', who waited in Mexico City until the end of the Conference.

The environment itself was a symbol of the struggle within the situation of the Latin American Church: the showmen and the students supported by a hostile press; press conferences held with the more important bishops of the Medellín 'wing'; calumnious stories against bishops and theologians; the tragic 'missing persons' lists from Argentina and El Salvador.

At any rate, the real situation was present at Puebla. The decisive step took place when the ineffectual group meetings changed into plenary sessions, and the feeling that the real nature of the Latin American Church was imprisoned by abstractions and artificial constrictions previously imposed, began to disappear. Now everyone could speak and contribute not only to the necessary theoretical discussion but by giving personal 'lived' testimonies. Christian truth could express itself in its precisely christian quality: that is to say, as 'incarnate truth'. Mgr Schmitz, a Peruvian, gained the only applause (despite its being forbidden by the rules) when, during the discussion about ideologies and the bogey of marxist ideology, said 'Let him who is without an ideology cast the first stone'. In the new atmosphere the totality of the christian message — pleading, questioning, provoking and creative — was allowed to emerge, with its necessary doctrinal foundations. Press relations also improved, and the questioning produced a more realistic ecclesial tone.

The Puebla document is the result of the struggle between the actual situation of the Latin American Church and the limits and directions imposed on it. Here we will notice the important lacunae, the internal tensions, the recurring positive themes, and finally the central principle of interpretation of the entire document.

The gaps in the Puebla document

It must first be said that the mistakes, failings and sins of the Church are not strongly emphasized. It is true that the 'Message to the Latin American Peoples' begins with a 'confession', but in a very low key. By contrast, the analysis of past and present evangelization across the face of the Church sounds triumphalistic. Similarly, the healthy and proper pride in possessing Christ's truth is rightly stressed; but the pauline corrective, that we carry this truth in fragile earthen vessels, so often shattered, is nowhere stated.

Another notable lacuna is any frank admission that there exists internal division within the Church and its hierarchy. It is not a question of manifesting a sort of masochism for those with 'chips on their shoulders', but rather of an honest appraisal, as the necessary prelude to achieving through reconciliation that unity which is crucial for the Church's mission. The absence of reference to internal conflict prevented any analysis of the various options actually available for uniting the Church in Latin America for the service of the Gospel. It is not easy to speak of the hurtful wounds of division, but equally they will not be healed by a simple appeal for unity.

There was silence, too, concerning the Church's attitude in those delicate areas between the specifically evangelical and the concrete historical task which necessarily touches on the political and ideological. It is not that these themes were left unmentioned, but that they were treated so simplistically that no specific pastoral directives were offered. It is the 'twilight zone' between the ecclesial and the political spheres, where the work of clergy and laity does not allow of sharp distinctions, which needs to be illumined by the light of Christ.

The most painfully obvious silence concerns the experience of martyrdom in the Latin American Church, among the hierarchy, priests and religious, but more widespread among the laity. This has been manifested in threats, imprisonment, expulsion and death. True, there are expressions of approval and joy at this experience of persecution for the faith and for justice; but it is hardly one of the main themes of the document. Whether out of fear of repressive governments, or lack of experience on the part of hierarchy and clergy in certain countries of this persecution, or even because of the casuistry which tends to surround definitions of 'persecution' or 'martyrdom', the facts were played down. It is, however, heartening to recall the explicit approval given by so many bishops to Mgr

Romero's letter,² and to the President of the Bishop's Conference of Nicaragua, Mgr Salazar.

The internal tensions of the document

These are amply illustrated by the fact that the final version of the document is the result of four drafts. The various schemata of the first were generally inadequate, except for those describing the latin american situation, the 'consecrated life' and the option for the poor. However, in spite of the many improvements, the lack of harmony between an inadequate theoretical framework and the appropriate contents remains. There is a further imbalance between the more explicitly doctrinal sections (for example, those on Christology and ecclesiology) and others more explicitly pastoral: and this to the detriment of the theology.

One can also detect a twofold tension in the use of sources. First, papal statements take precedence over directly biblical references and the authoritative teaching of many latin american bishops. Secondly, there is a subtle change of emphasis in the many citations from *Evangelii nuntiandi*. Whereas Paul VI himself begins with the figure of Jesus the evangelist, the Kingdom of God and the proclamation of the good news to the poor, and then moves to the mission of the Church in carrying on the work of Jesus the evangelist, the Puebla document tends, logically at least, to begin with the nature of Christ 'in himself' and the Church 'in itself'.

These various tensions impart to the document an uncertain accent as it moves awkwardly back and forth between the doctrinal and the pastoral. Such infelicities mutilate the attempts to provide pastoral inspiration and animation. The three doctrinal documents on Christ, the Church and Man sound like formal lectures; whereas in the passages describing the actual situation or the commitment to the poor, and the introductory 'message', one senses that it is the pastor speaking. Tone and accent are of vital importance if the document is to be read intelligently and translated into action in the every-day life of the Church here. The ordinary Christian in Brazil, for example, accustomed to the tone of his bishops' pastoral letters, will need help in order to catch the drift of the many positive things in the Puebla document, lurking beneath excessively schematic and formal language.

² Cf the reference to the recently murdered Archbishop Romero in 'A Kingdom of earth and heaven', in *The Way*, vol 19, no 4 (October 1979), p 296.

There is tension also in the content, between 'liberation' and 'communion and participation'. These are common terms allegedly expressive of world-wide realities of the nature, mission and utopian qualities of the Church. However, if 'liberation' includes both the utopia still to be realized *and* the process by which it is to be brought about, the phrase 'communion and participation' refers rather to the end of the process. The middle term, that is, the conflict inherent in this process, is lacking. Often the utopian hopes are spoken of as though they were already realized. This can be seen in the document's systematic treatment of the Church.

However, both the letter and spirit of Medellin are present in the document: Puebla's fundamental perspectives on education, ministry, the religious life and so on. Especially notable is the 'letter of citizenship' given to 'liberation': a theme clearly affirmed afresh, in spite of the much-publicized warnings of the dangers inherent in it. Authentic evangelization demands total liberation, particularly liberation from the real misery of grinding poverty, oppression and exploitation. The intuition of Medellin and of liberation theology remains: there can be no history of salvation without the salvation of history. So the Puebla document repeatedly speaks of Jesus Christ as liberator.

Besides this reaffirmation, certain themes appear which imply an advance on Medellin, both in content and in formulation. It is important to bear in mind that the document several times affirms that the current state of affairs is far worse than ten years ago. Generally speaking, there has been regression; there is more deprivation and repression. To say that Puebla is different from Medellin means primarily that the present situation is most frightening. The document highlights certain processes of industrialization, urbanization and tendencies to secularism. Puebla validates Medellin.

A firm stand is taken on consumerism. It is mentioned many times as a serious danger to and a negation of a christian anthropology, which is based on 'being more' and 'serving more' than on 'having more'. Here we have a positive orientation towards the building of a new society, which is more christian and more human.

Significant also is the frequent use of the phrase 'the idols of our times' which enslave the continent: worldly ambition and the accumulation of riches and power, sex and increasing eroticism. It emphasizes the recovery of the biblical term 'idol' as descriptive of the tragedy of the latin american situation. When the document

warns of the tendencies and dangers of religious indifference, secularism and atheism in Latin America, it is pointing the finger at these 'idols' whose worship dehumanizes and sacrifices a man to other men. The strong and repeated condemnation of idolatry to these gods is also the condemnation of any attempt to justify misery and oppression in the name of a god. The great problem of the continent is not an abstract or passive agnosticism or atheism, but the active atheism of idolatry, with its cult of sacrificing life and human values. In this same context Puebla mentions explicitly and frequently the régimes of 'national security' as new idols which justify themselves and their criminal atrocities.

Again, Puebla speaks repeatedly of the option for the poor, making of it the framework of the Church's whole mission and the ingredient of all its missions. That the bishops harped on this theme *opportune et importune* shows that the poor's point of view, and the preference given to the option for the poor, is an irreversible commitment in the Latin American Church. Nor is there any doubt about the identification of these poor: they are the Indians, the peasants, the workers, the slum-dwellers, the unemployed. There are warnings, clarifications and admonitions, but no condemnations. In the context of the previous atmosphere and expectations, we have here a condemnation of condemnations. There was no condemnation of liberation theology nor of 'basic communities' nor of the impetus of CLAR nor of the Church of the poor. There was not even a condemnation of the marxist analysis, except of its global ideology, and in the same breath, of capitalism and 'national security'. This indicates the positive presence of a pastoral spirit basically more interested in building than destroying.

The central nucleus of Puebla and its principles of interpretation

Since Puebla is a long document with a certain encyclopaedic quality in the organization of the themes, it is important to discover its central focus and organizing principle, in order to understand the whole. The document itself offers an objective criterion: the 'fundamental option' in the evangelization of 'the many who have little and the few who have much'. So the Church asks herself not only who she is but what she should contribute and offer to the continent. The reply is clear. The Church offers what is most typical of herself. 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk'; the Church is offering what can actually happen in the name of Jesus.

We have, then, a Church which directs herself to men and women in the concrete situation by denouncing the sin which oppresses them, and offering them liberation: and this in the style of the prophets and Jesus.

The central force of the document is thus a theology of history, linking the actual situation to the Church's mission to the poor. Puebla will be misinterpreted if it is read as the first step of the traditional triple division into analysis of the situation, doctrinal reflection and practical conclusions.

'The achievements and failures of the last ten years' (8) sums up the first section: It cannot go beyond these real facts, in which 'God is to be discerned speaking in the signs of the times' (7). The positive signs of the action of God in history and the response to him are the sharing and the unity among the poor, the heightened awareness of Latin Americans, shown in 'the proliferation of community organizations in the populated areas, the increasing interest in indigenous values', in the efforts of the young to organize themselves for attaining their just rights (10-13). These achievements reflect the will of God in history.

The negative signs of history's 'No' to God — the mystery of sin — are also spelt out (38): the wretched conditions of the great majority, the violation of man's dignity, a dehumanized culture. The increasing gap between rich and poor is a 'scandal and a contradiction of christian life' (17). 'The most devastating and humiliating scourge is the inhuman poverty in which millions of Latin Americans live: seen, for example, in starvation wages, unemployment, malnutrition, infant mortality, a lack of adequate housing, health problems and labour unrest' (18). This poverty is denounced as the product of continuing economic, social and political structures (19).

This poverty, lastly, has 'very concrete features in which we should recognize the suffering features of Christ the Lord, who questions and appeals to us' (20). Again the Church at Puebla identifies these poor:

the faces of the Indians and Afro-Americans living on the fringes in sub-human conditions . . . the poor within the poor . . . peasants, outcast and lacking land, the workers who are badly paid and unable to organize themselves . . . overcrowded city-dwellers, lacking material goods in the face of the flashy riches of the other social classes . . . the underemployed and unemployed losing their jobs through the cold calculations of the economy . . . the disorientated and frustrated youth lacking opportunities for qualifications and training . . . children

wounded by poverty even before they are born . . . the elderly pushed to the edges of society as unproductive(20).

Next, the bishops emphasize the permanent violation of the dignity and the fundamental right of God's children to health, education, homes and work; the distressed condition of so many because of the abuses of power typical of coercive régimes, of systematic repression through denunciation, violations of privacy, torture, exile, detention without trial (21).

On the cultural level, it is noted that those with political, ideological and economic power manipulate the media and thus permeate the very atmosphere the people breathe. False hopes and fictitious necessities are created which often contradict the basic values of an authentic culture (30).

This vision is crucial for the understanding of the theology of history that guides the document. Its point of departure is the place where the world says a clear 'No' to God:

From the heart of the different countries that make up Latin America a cry rises to heaven . . . of a people who suffer and who demand justice, freedom, respect for the fundamental rights of man and communities . . . a cry clear, increasing, impetuous and, on occasion, menacing(49).

This sinful situation is 'the great challenge to our pastoral role' of helping to build a more fraternal society' (50). The response to this challenge, 'the best service of one's brother, is an evangelization which liberates him from injustice, promotes his full development and enables him to achieve his status as God's son' (909). It finds its *raison d'être* and actual direction when it becomes 'a priority of commitment to and solidarity with the poor' (897).

Once again we hear a theology of history explicitly prophetic and Christ-like. The God of this history, the Father of Jesus, 'defends the poor and loves them' (906). The Son sent by the Father takes his definitive form in impoverishment and solidarity with the poor (cf Lk 7, 21-23) [906].

The document, then, shows us what the Church must be and without which she is nothing. It repeats with the Pope that 'the engagement of the Church must be like Christ's — an engagement with the most needy' (Lk 4, 18-21) [905]. This commitment to eradicate sub-human poverty is the historic source of christian spirituality: impoverishment for the enrichment of others (914).

Such priority of commitment is at once moral and theological. It is the historical way to life in God's reality: the mystery of the Father, the sending of the Son, the action of the Spirit, effecting the spiritual, transcendent and christian experience. Thus the substance of the document is a theology of history which recovers all the christian realities: God, Jesus, the Spirit, the Church, the practice of charity, faith and hope, over against sin and the mystery of evil.

It is true that sometimes the document gives the appearance of defending a realized eschatology rather than a 'prophetic' theology of history. But we believe that the emphasis on an already existing fulness of christian existence implies that we understand how God offers us this fulness and the way the Church has to bring it to reality. And this concrete christian way necessarily leads to the favoured option.

After Puebla

The true interpretation of Puebla will be the actual life of the Church which emerges from it, as was the case with Medellin; and we are still too close to it to draw conclusions about its likely repercussions in history. But there are already signs of hope. We have referred to the letters of Mgrs Romero and Salazar. Some one thousand representatives of 'basic communities' in Mexico waited for the bishops and theologians after Puebla. John Paul II, in his first public speech after Puebla, assumed the prophet's mantle in denouncing concrete examples of sin, and generally praising all theology that was liberating.

To end with some practical and theological reflections. Puebla simply reminds us who the poor are, how to respond to the sinful situation, and what it means to identify with the poor. Those who distort these truths or water them down with a thousand qualifications and distinctions are unfaithful to Puebla.

For those church groups who have already adopted the spirit of Medellin, Puebla shows the necessity of deepening what they already possess: to be more at one with Jesus who founded the Church of the poor in order to further the reign of God in history and to confess fully to him; to unite practical experience with the spiritual experience of the gifts of God. The Pope's words about the need for complete truth are not to be treated either as a brake or an admonition, but as a spur to become more totally committed to liberation and to Christ's suffering little ones. God has taken up our history in the Incarnation of his Son and in the present action of his

spirit. The Church must be submerged in the depths of the same history with its pains, hopes and poverty, so as to be the sign of freedom, communion and participation with the poor of Yahweh, witnessing to his truth.³

This article had just gone to press, when the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, in his own cathedral of San Salvador, shook the western world like a violent earthquake. The Times of London simply headed its leading article 'The Martyrdom of Archbishop Romero'.

Comparisons with 'The murder in the Cathedral' of Canterbury eight centuries earlier merely serve to indicate the wide differences of interpretation that have occurred, and still do, on the matter of hierarchical responsibility. Thomas à Becket's major pastoral concern was to separate out and to defend the rights of the Church against the state of his day. Oscar Romero's convictions were acquired through his pastoral solidarity with his people, as his spiritual presence at Puebla confirmed. He wrote firmly to President Carter that political power in El Salvador was in the hands of a brutal military régime, whose only policy was to trample on the rights of the people in order to safeguard the material interests of the rich few. Though he spoke out against the wrong-doings of leftist organizations 'in the name of the Church', he saw these as far less grave than the oppressive violence of the military. He would submit to no security measures to protect his life: 'it is for God to decide the moment when he wishes to call me'. His martyrdom was celebrated on 24th March, 1980.

³ The above is a translation and abridgement of 'Puebla: serena afirmacion de Medellin', which first appeared in the latin american periodical *Christus*. We are most grateful for the permissions granted.