



The theology of Puebla: fights, ambiguities and continuities

A teologia de Puebla:
lutas, ambiguidades e continuidades

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Abstract

The reflection on the theology of Puebla exposes two theological tendencies present in the assembly and in the final document. The first tendency of a classical matrix rests on the essentialist view of reality. The second one was structured from a historic perspective which had its last outlines in the category signs of the times, consecrated by the Council. The theological struggle results in the conclusive text of Puebla and expresses the battle for the meaning of Vatican II. Nevertheless, this hermeneutic battle, the reception of the Third Conference will take place in a historical and liberating perspective in continuity with the consolidated tradition of the Medellín Conference. The current historical context is a presupposition that reaffirms the current relevance of the teachings of Puebla. The reflection starts from the historical possibilities of Puebla's realization, verifies the internal struggle for the meanings of Vatican II and Medellín that occurred within the process and concludes with the presentation of the Conference receptions.

Keywords: Latin America. CELAM. Episcopacy. Church. Puebla. Theology.

Resumo

A reflexão sobre a teologia de *Puebla* expõe duas tendências teológicas presentes na assembleia e no documento final. A primeira tendência de matriz clássica descansa sobre uma visão essencialista da realidade. A segunda se estrutura a partir da historicidade e tem sua elaboração final na categoria *sinais dos tempos*, consagrada pelo Concílio. A luta teológica tece como resultado o texto conclusivo de *Puebla* e expressa a luta pelo sentido do Vaticano II. Não obstante, essa luta hermenêutica, a recepção da III Conferência acontecerá em uma perspectiva histórica e libertadora em continuidade com a tradição consolidada da Conferência de Medellín. O contexto histórico atual constitui um pressuposto que reafirma a atualidade dos ensinamentos de *Puebla*. A reflexão parte das possibilidades históricas de realização de Puebla, verifica a luta interna pelos sentidos do Vaticano II e de Medellín ocorridas no interior do processo e conclui com a exposição das recepções da Conferência.

Palavras-chave: América Latina. CELAM. Episcopado. Igreja. Puebla. Teologia.

Introduction

The theological question in Puebla is as multifaceted and complex, as much as the event itself. The final text of Puebla (DP), in a more striking way than in others of the same nature, reveals the struggle between two ecclesial projects originating from two different readings of Vatican II and, therefore, the presence of two main theological models that operate as a foundation of the debates, decisions and the final text. Unlike the Medellín document, which has a theological axis that conducts the reflections of the parts and the whole, coherently following the steps of the see-judge-act method and sustaining itself in a liberating perspective, the DP reveals the plurality of theological positions, the parallelism of views and the seams of fragments of ideas and even of texts. This real fragmentation is apparently supplanted by the uniform textual style of the final document. The final text is framed in a logical structure that makes it prevail a general schematic form, a regular logical sequence and a didactic clarity in the mode of exposition that can offer an apparent basic theoretical coherence. However, there is a clear wording in the text that aims, on the one hand, to collect dissent from the positions present in the assembly and, on the other hand, to weave the set of ideas in a coherent way.

The conclusions of the III conference are the result of a context and a process, where theological tendencies predominate and, still, are the result of consensus built in an assembly, in which diversity is necessarily present and the dialectical process of the debate leads, in some way, the processes of reflection and decision. Certainly, a first analysis hypothesis can be formulated with more precision: the DP, although it intends a theological unit, it actually has a plurality of theological models that can be typified in some main models that operate in form and content both in the set and in the parts of the text. In this technical-methodological sense, there is no theological synthesis in Puebla, but, rather, an encounter of theological visions or models that meet and seek to answer previous and persistent fundamental questions during the reflections that made the Conference possible. In fact, no ecclesial document is made with a single theology, which, in practice, would make it politically unviable in an inevitably plural

assembly, especially in the post-conciliar era. DP, moreover, is part of a historical-ecclesial process - a time before, a time during and a time afterwards - which anchors the council in different contexts and in different theologies, starting with the theology that was already hegemonic in the continent, namely liberation theology. Although in the intentionality of the Conference managers linked to an ecclesial orthodoxy, with its active epicenter in the Roman Curia, the idea of building a theological unit reviewing Latin American ecclesial directions was present, an ecclesial assembly is defined precisely by the search for consensus and, therefore, by a real dissent. In this sense, a second hypothesis seeks to clarify this theological diversity that negotiates and establishes a structural eclecticism in the conclusions of the Third Conference: the DP expresses a struggle for theological hegemony that legitimizes two juxtaposed and negotiating perspectives: a classic theology that officially prevails and fulfills the function of guaranteeing doctrinal orthodoxy and a renewed theology that links reflection to the historical context. This struggle basically has two theological perspectives, but first, it has two worldviews with their resulting methods: an essentialist view and a historical view.

In addition to the official text of Puebla, it is also necessary to seek the meaning that was built on the Conference, during the concrete process of its reception. This hypothesis affirms the hermeneutical function of Puebla's reception in line with the continuity with the constituted tradition of Medellín. It is in this specific process that the guidelines of the III Conference are practiced / interpreted by the concrete ecclesial subjects, therefore, where the relationship between the objectivity of the text and interpreting subjects occur and thus gives rise to a global meaning for those orientations. Sensitivity, perception and commitment to history triumphed in the process that has the III Conference as an epicenter and ecclesial landmark in the post-conciliar era in Latin America.

1 Possibilities and political-hermeneutical limits of the III Conference

The method adopted by the Puebla Conference, the path chosen to achieve a goal established by characters who were the managers of the works, explains the

final result formulated in the Conclusions and edited as an official document. The III Conference was held around the production of a text that should unequivocally express a clear position of the episcopate in relation to the historical-ecclesial moment experienced by the Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean. This was the objective assumed, defended and operationalized by those who presented themselves as leaders invested with official legitimacy delegated by Rome¹. It is in this condition of legitimacy that these subjects managed to impose a certain method for the execution of the III Conference, despite having an autochthonous ecclesial subject defending another ecclesial perspective: that is, part of the leadership of CELAM and a significant number of delegates from the local episcopate. In this regard, it is worth recalling the fearful expectation of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga on the eve of the Conference, at the end of 1978: “From what I see and read, from what I hear from other colleagues and many who think of Latin America and its Church and love them, I have a negative impression of CELAM. The great figures of CELAM saw their time pass”. (CASALDÁLIGA, 1978, p. 585). And he also regrets that the entity had assumed the position of control force, a kind of Sacred Congregation, ceasing to be a “collegial force of the episcopate of the Church of Latin America”. In the same testimony he says: “We have our reservations regarding the management of the current secretary López Trujillo [...] it gives us the impression that he feels with the mission - supported evidently by certain Vatican areas - to polish Medellín, to brown Medellín [...]. In any case, people are afraid that the next Episcopal Conference in Puebla could be the Conference of the staff López Trujillo.” (CASALDÁLIGA, 1978, p. 585-586).

The bishop's fears stemmed from a realistic perception of the political possibilities for making the Conference viable. Despite certain political limits, Trujillo staff, in fact, with relative efficiency with their subjects and ecclesiastically legitimate rules of conducting the work and designed a new dynamic of operation, different from what had occurred in the previous

¹ Pope Paul VI appointed Presidents of the Third Conference, Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and President of the Commission for Latin America, Cardinal Aloísio Lorscheider, Archbishop of Fortaleza and President of CELAM and Archbishop Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, Archbishop of Mexico, and general - Secretary, Bishop Alfonso López Trujillo, coadjutor archbishop of Medellín (SOUZA, 2019, p. 71).

Conference. Frei Betto talks about three main trends that made up the assembly: a conservative one that with an ecclesiastical discourse which advocated political neutrality; another one linked to popular pastoral care, with solid theological training and convinced of renewal; and finally, a third one composed of the majority who, willing to learn builds a position in the assembly process (CHRISTO, 1979, p. 92-93).

It is also necessary to add a determinant component of the course of the Conference: the delegates who were appointed by the Roman Curia and the exclusion of names of participants linked to liberation theology, which constitutes a truly episcopal assembly. Historian Enrique Dussel makes the symptomatic assessment of this picture:

In Puebla there were 5.7% of cardinals (compared to 2.4% in Medellín), 12.36% of secular priests (compared to 16.46% in Medellín) and only 10.43% of religious (compared to 13.25% in Medellín). In other words, the composition was more episcopal (in Medellín 55% were bishops, in Puebla 60%), and, in a special way, Protestant observers went from 4.85 in Medellín to 1.35 in Puebla". (DUSSEL, 1983, p. 577).

The III Conference of the Episcopate was installed as an Episcopal Assembly, with little space for debates and for the contribution of other ecclesial subjects. The method of work adopted had the objective of guaranteeing a hegemony of the participation and the word of the episcopate, which would result in a genuine exercise of the continental magisterium and in a final document coherent enough to define and correct the directions of the local Churches. At least with regard to what was officially intended with this methodological option, the Conference would not mean the point of arrival in a previous historical-ecclesial process, marked by meetings, reflections and textual elaborations, so that the assembly itself and the final text would be a final balance, as had happened at the Medellín Conference and at Vatican II itself. The III Conference was built directly around the text prepared by the Commissions under the coordination of bishops;² this method of work aimed to control any discussions that might occur between the

² Twenty-one work commissions were created, dedicated to the elaboration of the text around 4 basic groups: Pastoral vision of the reality of Latin America, Doctrinal reflection, Evangelization in and by the Church in Latin America, Evangelizing and missionary Church today and in the future of America Latina (LIBÂNIO, 1982, p. 59-60; DUSSEL, 1983, p. 590-591).

participants and the influx of ideas from on-duty theologians, specifically liberation theologians (COMBLIN, 1981, pp. 99-102). It was a conscious and deliberate methodological option that aimed, therefore, to avoid the Medellín method, but, above all, the reproduction of the Medellín result. DP was born as a new phase of work that started, therefore, from a zero point, regardless of the contributions already prepared by the preparatory documents, in particular the Working Document (LIBANIO, 1982, p. 59)³. Unlike the method adopted by Medellín based on the sequence, study-discussion-formulation-voting, which had the active participation of advisers and subjects in plenary, Puebla centralized the work in the Commissions and restricted the possibilities for discussion in plenary, focusing sequence layout-writing-voting. It is true that the assembly redid the method originally presented under the direct influence of Dom Luciano Mendes de Almeida, which allowed for a relative porosity in the work commissions and a plural composition that would reflect in the final text. (DUSSEL, 1983, p. 590-591).

However, in addition to the centralizing method that controls external theological debates and influxes, it is necessary to find an analytical balance point, to consider the “Puebla total”, the one that, in fact, was possible to be realized, in view of the ecclesiastical and theological tendencies present within the assembly, an expression of the concrete experience of the Churches scattered across the continent and the full process of receiving Vatican II, via the Medellín Conference (DUSSEL, 1981, p. 58-61). In hermeneutic terms, it means affirming that DP operates its meaning within a context, where subjects and assumptions that prepare the Conference's broader climate are located, shrink into it through prelates and subsidies offered by theologians and, above all, constitutes the environment of receiving decisions codified in the DP. In this way, a Conference emerges as an ecclesial event that inevitably happens as a process made up of different temporalities - at least three main ones: the before, the during and the after - that extrapolates beyond the methodological-textual controls as places of meaning. It is necessary to relate Puebla with the historical-ecclesial context (the

³ An exposition of expectations about the contributions of the Working Document to the III Conference was systematized by Alberto Antoniazzi, from the National Institute of Pastoral. In that document there were tracks of action such as: the primacy of the Gospel, the primacy of renewal, the option for liberation and for the poor and the mobilization of all (ANTONIAZZI, 1978, p. 611-624).

Vatican II era in which the Church is found and, in particular, in the Latin American continent), with the process that has the III Conference as its epicenter (the preparatory phase with the two documents and the preparatory meetings, the holding of the Conference and the reception phase) and in the style of the final document (document resulting from consensus built at that assembly). The final document, despite constituting a textual objectivity of a normative nature, as a text of the local teaching profession, inevitably falls within a context that produces it and, above all, that welcomes it.⁴ In this sense, the intention to review and correct the Conference of Medellín, made explicit by vigilant sectors of Catholic orthodoxy, represented there by members of the Roman Curia, by sectors of the episcopate and by the Pope himself, had a relative result: more textual than historical. Finally, it was Puebla's reception that gave at its guidelines the actual measure of application and interpretation.

For this reason, Puebla's hermeneutics can be diverse, as, in fact, occurred at the event's reception stage. Certainly, three main hermeneutics that are present in the process of holding the event can be typified here: one of the conservative type that receives Puebla as a moment of correcting the history of the Latin American Church, a typical case of the reading made by Boaventura Kloppenburg (1979), a liberating reading, being the most emblematic in our context the works *Diário de Puebla* and *Puebla for the people*, by Frei Betto and, evidently, an episcopal reading, guided by the search for coherence in the doctrine and pastoral orientations of the Conference, a clear hermeneutic of continuity with previous tradition and ecclesial consensus. This reception can be clearly detected in the CNBB Documents that were being prepared in the decade after the Conference.⁵

⁴ It is necessary to emphasize, therefore, a fundamental distinction between the text (final document), the III Conference (the assembly of the episcopate), the ecclesial context / process that prepared the Conference (meetings, previous documents, reflections etc.) and the phase reception (with their struggles, subjects and strategies). Puebla's global meaning presupposes this totality and emerges from this concrete, broad and complex process, in addition to a literal reading of the textual objectivity of the DP.

⁵ Since the well-known Subsidy for Puebla, approved by the bishops at the 1978 assembly, which will end up in the Working Document, but, above all, the Documents that are approved after the Conference. Examples of immediate echo: (NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS OF BRAZIL, 1980). The general objective of pastoral action was formulated thus in 1979: "Evangelizing Brazilian society in formation, from the option for the poor, for the full liberation of man, in a growing participation and communion, aiming at the construction of a fraternal society, thus announcing the definitive Kingdom". Doc. 20 links this objective directly to the Puebla guidelines. See National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (1981).

It can be said that the conservation-renewal ambiguity is constitutive of the Puebla event as a whole. In fact, these two trends are displayed throughout the document with their concepts and are offered with their contents that can be distilled into pure types, depending on the reading option. In this sense, the Puebla Conference represents an emblematic historical testimony about the reception period of Vatican II, with its hermeneutic struggles, when the decisive steps were taken in a conservative rereading of the conciliar *aggiornamento* process, under the strategic management of Pope John Paul II. Puebla's match was, in fact, a decisive landmark of what was verified in the following decades in terms of the struggle for the meaning of the Council within the scope of the Catholic Church, with Latin America being the fruitful site of a struggle that reached open conflicts between the Roman curia and the local church of the continent. This historical data not only makes up the history of the Church in a unique way as a laboratory of visions and original creations in the post-conciliar era, but also makes explicit the prophetic position of the Church as a whole, of the Latin American episcopate and of the scattered Churches across the continent.

Puebla reproduces in its own way and in the process of its reception what happened in Vatican II in methodological terms: despite the hermeneutic struggle there constituting, it affirms a legitimate method of thinking about faith, an action that occurs within history and in relation to it, although traditional dogmatic and methodological devices are used (KÜNG, 1999, p. 130-133). Sensitivity to history can be found as a basic pathos that guarantees the prophecy of the Third Conference, even when a conservative logos imposes itself as a legitimate doctrine, true and normative doctrine on the part of a vigilant orthodoxy at the Conference.

In every reception process, the basic question of the relationship between the text and the receiving subjects is raised in technical terms, between objectivity and subjectivity. In the case of texts resulting from Conferences or Synods that involve preparatory participatory methodologies, as has happened in the current Synods, this circularity acquires its own dynamism: the final and official text is inevitably inserted in a broader process of construction of meaning that , to a

certain extent, produces it, and to a large extent, welcomes it. The text does not, by itself, exhaust all meaning as a finished objectivity, but, on the contrary, is inserted in a complex context of expectations, “previous truths” and decodings that build a global meaning for its results. The Latin American ecclesial context was a decisive factor in the construction of the meaning of Puebla, even though the method of the Third Conference was centered on the construction of a textual objectivity. In this case, this hermeneutic circularity between text and subjects is, in fact, conditioned to some factors that very quickly build the hegemonic meaning of the text in the reception phase: a) the climate and the generation of the post-conciliar era open to the process of ecclesial renewal, which, in some way, links the Church's mission to the present reality and seeks in this dialectic the direction of ecclesial reflections and practices; b) the consolidated tradition of Medellín throughout the continent, in pastoral practices, in ecclesial organizations (CEBs and popular pastorals), in the methodology of reading the Bible, in the theological reflections and in the ecclesial documents of the local magisteries; c) in the urgencies of the present reality: the Churches of LA received Puebla in contexts of social and political emergencies that cry out for stances, discernments and decisions of the local Churches as solutions to contexts of oppression; d) the pedagogical performance of ecclesial agents who affirmed a reading of Puebla in line with Medellín and in response to the current challenges.

2 The strategic struggle for the theological meaning of Vatican II

Puebla Conference presents itself in the post-council as a landmark review of the *aggiornamento* process (ALMEIDA, 2015, p. 8-9) that shaped the Second Vatican Council in spirit and in letter. What Massimo Faggioli called “struggle for meaning” (2013) to understand the conciliar process was in that historical context in a moment of inflection: the moment to return to tradition, doctrine and ecclesial praxis according to a parameter that would allow to correct the ongoing errors within the Church. According to this view, Vatican II, concluded more than a decade ago, had shown its limits and had, therefore, a new Pope willing to lead a clear and sure direction regarding the conciliar reforms. The conciliar majority that

had decided on the basic guidelines of the Council was no longer invested with the original vigor of the reforms, and, far from the renewing charism, had realigned themselves in different trends, including that which intended to review the direction of the so-called *aggiornamento*. The primordial moment of consensus had given rise to doubts and disagreements about what, in fact, the Council had intended. Latin America was, in fact, the fruitful bed of the conciliar reception where the intended renewal of the Church was visible: a more authentic expression of the conciliar orientations for some, an expression of the mistakes of renewal for others. The Medellín Conference had put the Council into practice and taken the radical consequences of its decisions. A decade later, the Church was no longer the same. The Roman Curia, the institutional and direct caudate of the little enthusiasts for renovation and even the so-called conciliar minority, had become more empowered by the traditional sectors of the Church, knowing that, since the conclusion of the Great Synod, Curialist Departments and Prelates have endeavored to institutionalize reforms in a conservative way, and Pope Paul VI had also become more fragile and a hostage to those segments. What in the conciliar process had been stifled.

as a secondary position, in terms of ecclesial vision and practice, is gradually taking on a visible and efficient role. The very post-conciliar dynamic that had delivered the Council to all the people of God to be applied, did not have a mechanism that would allow the institutionalization of the referred *aggiornamento*; on the contrary, renewals were delegated to the decisions of the local Churches and, therefore, to the play of forces of theological convictions and localized pastoral decisions.

The election of the Polish Pope introduced a decisive variable in the revising directions of the Council. As João Batista Libanio (1984) correctly interpreted, it was a project of “returning to great discipline” along the lines prior to Vatican II (LIBÂNIO, 1984). The Third Conference was an opportunity to correct mistakes and take a step forward; strategic moment that allowed the new Pontiff to express his position in relation to what happened in Latin America since Medellín and to

lead a new project for the whole Church. In his inaugural speech at the Palafoxian Seminary, the Pope makes this position clear:

In these ten years, it is important to highlight how far humanity has walked and especially how far the Church has walked in the service of humanity. This III Conference cannot ignore this reality. It is necessary, therefore, to take Medellín's conclusions as a starting point, with all that is positive, but without ignoring the incorrect interpretations sometimes made and which require serene discernment, timely criticism and clear positions. (Puebla conclusions, p. 14).

On the other hand, the results of the conciliar *aggiornamento* showed its visible fruits in the Churches of Latin America. After the Council, faithful and coherent local ecclesial expressions flourished and their results were theological reflection, collegiality, pastorals and ministries, the prophetic presence of the Church and service to the poor. For ecclesial subjects, bishops, priests, religious and lay people, who led this process, Latin America represented the space and time for the faithful renewal of the Church. Bishop Aloísio Lorscheider spoke in his opening speech on the “new vitality” of the Churches of the continent, manifested in prayer, collegiality, Base Ecclesial Communities, new ministries, ecclesial insertion in poor areas, planning and pastoral participation, methodology of analysis of reality, in the conscience of the laity and in the ecclesial identity (Discourse of Don Aloísio Lorscheider. Conclusions of Puebla, p. 45-50). This was undoubtedly the direct inheritance of the Council and Medellín gathered as a tradition to be carried forward in that Conference that was just beginning.

There is a very evident substratum of liberation theology in this inaugural speech by the Cardinal President of CELAM. It is worth remembering that among the experts present at the III Conference there was no theologian representing this theological current, although it was an expressive elaboration of the post-conciliar era in the continent and had given the tone of the previous Conference. Indeed, the theses of liberation theology with its theologians were, at that time, the visible enemy to be fought in the Church of Latin America, although this hermeneutical struggle shall be inserted in the broader context of the conciliar theology.

It was undoubtedly a seemingly new conflict. The struggle waged inside Vatican II now took on concrete confrontations, in an asymmetrical two-way relationship. On the one hand, from the point of view of ecclesial legitimacy, it was a battle lost in the medium term for theology and the local Churches, in view of the Catholic ethos of tradition and of fidelity to the papal Magisterium that settles there as bearer legitimate speech and the orthodoxy of faith. However, on the other hand, a local ecclesial tradition was consolidated, as Dom Aloísio very well expressed in his speech. A growing wave of young and productive theologians assumed the role of reflection on the continent, and the liberating ecclesial front configured practices and imaginations consolidated across the continent that, in fact, would only change over time and under the centralizing strategies of the Roman Curia. The struggle for meaning in Vatican II analyzed by Faggioli offers a broader understanding of what was at stake at that time. The conciliar process had already taken place in a dialectic that opposed not only the conservative representatives of the so-called conciliar minority with the adherents of renewal, but also two distinct theological tendencies: the Augustinians and the Thomists (FAGGIOLI, 2013, p. 102-131). Beyond this typification, what really presented itself as distinct perspectives in the conciliar hermeneutics was a reading in terms of the old theological tradition of Platonic and essentialist roots and another in terms of the Thomist tradition, open to the incorporation of history as a positive greatness in the considerations about the modern world. This dialectic resonates at the 3rd Conference clearly, with defined subjects, contents and spaces. Two theologies are in charge of reflections, although the protagonism of the bishops and the Roman Curia itself allows us to perceive a hegemony of classical Augustinian theology that insists on starting from doctrinal principles to consider the challenges of reality. In the same process, many bishops and the president of CELAM himself think from the references of Latin American theology, centered on history, discernment and pastoral action.

The preparatory phase of the Conference portrays these different hermeneutics, in the coming and going of texts for the Conference and also of the meetings. The deliberate rupture of the assembly of the Third Conference with the Consultation and Working Papers, had undoubtedly aimed at producing an

authentically episcopal reflection and under secure theological control. In fact, in the midst of this control, traditional doctrine has a general and structuring place in the set of the Final Document. To this end, John Paul II's Discourse had a performative function, whether in the announced need to re-read the Medellín tradition, or in the formulation of the three truths to be taught by the bishops: the truths about Jesus Christ, the Church and man. The category "truth" adopted by the Pope clearly signaled the need to distinguish the true from the false, present in praxis and in the reflection of the Latin American Church. This truth would undoubtedly be transmitted by the tradition and teaching of the Church and was presented as an available collection and a normative parameter for discerning the ongoing renovations in Latin America. And as João Batista Libânio so precisely observed, this speech had an unprecedented impact on the assembly, surpassing the classical sources of theology in reference numbers. As says Libânio in the didactic introduction of the DP of Loyola Editions:

Thus, with his speeches given over a week, João Paulo will impress the drafters of the document more than a long ecclesial tradition. This shows that they do not stick to documents so much because of their internal theological value, according to the Church's own criteria, but rather because of their psychological (and also ideological) strength. (LIBÂNIO, 1982, p. 66).

And Libânio concludes with a severe criticism:

We all know that a Pope's speech on a trip has much less theological importance than the teachings of the Holy Fathers, the great Councils, the Encyclicals. And despite that, they were cited in the Puebla Document more than 100 times [...]. (LIBÂNIO, 1982, p. 66).

The assembly of the III conference will proceed with a methodology of theological control that aims to review and evaluate the Medellín tradition, filter the possible influences of liberation theology, disregard the work of these theologians, minimize the influences of advisers and produce an authentically episcopal document. However, two factors go against this central control: the presence of bishops convinced of the truth of the conciliar renewal embodied in Medellín and the external pressure from the continental historical context that calls

for a word of discernment from the Church and for the effective solidarity of Christians affected by dehumanization processes. These two factors, it can be said, break more in the background than in the form of an eventual traditionalist unanimity that would effectively govern the theology and pastoral of DP. In this sense, one can speak of the late reproduction of that conciliar struggle: of a tendency centered on an essentialist view of reality, supported and reproduced by logical and doctrinal schemes of Augustinianism and a tendency that comes directly from the conciliar theology of a historical nature, whose principle and method were expressed in the category signs of the times, practiced and offered by the same Council.

Therefore, from a methodological point of view, one can infer two trends that intersect in the background structure of the Document; they are two theological perspectives with their resulting methodologies: the classic Augustinian matrix scheme centered on the creation-fall-redemption triad with its applications through deduction and the modern scheme underlying the inductive method see-judge-act typified in the theological dialectic: history – revelation: history – revelation – discernment – action. The first scheme offers the principles from which the present reality is thought and an attitude is assumed; the second start from the ambiguity of reality, the ambiguity to be discerned by the Word that speaks in the present time and and is sought as a result of a given decision and action. The first one offers a constructed truth that must be applied universally to all reality. The second one welcomes history as the place of God's revelation and seeks to discern God's plan within, through biblical parameters. The first one is reproduced, deductively and authoritatively, from a doctrinal system centered on tradition and teaching, specifically on papal teaching. The second one operates as a confrontation between tradition / teaching and reality, but, rather, between Scripture and historical reality.

DP operates with these two perspectives and methods as a whole and in parts. Classical theology formally structures the moment of Judging as a guarantee of an orthodoxy of the faith in the face of the theological deviations risks listed in

several passages⁶. Theology of history provides the general outline of the Document, a sort of general assumption that frames the set of reflection in the permanent link between contents of faith and contents of reality. The intersections of the two schemes are visible. In the second part, there is a kind of updating of classical theology that is anchored to reality, explaining - inevitably - the common places of liberation theology. In other parts, it takes the position of correcting what it considers to be deviations from the same theology. In some passages, minor syntheses that articulate the two theological models may also be surprising. The DP thus expresses a concrete historical-ecclesial process being thought and guided by theological tendencies in search of legitimacy as faithful to tradition and illuminating the urgencies presented by the context of the time. Indeed, the historical trend expressed in sensitivity to the urgencies of the concrete context and in a method that needs to anchor the doctrinal dimension in some way in the historical perspective, permeates the DP as a fundamental concern that legitimizes the reflection in its three parts. As Gomes de Souza claims, a text of a pastoral nature is not built in a negative way (as in the case of legal documents), but in a positive way, what made the most proactive and advanced political and theological trends succeed in imposing their perspectives on the set of deliberations (SOUZA, 1979, p. 68). The historical context accepted as concrete data, discerned by faith and assumed as a challenge for the urgent action of the Church, saved the III Conference of the homogeneous and hegemonic reproduction of the classical theological tradition present there as a vigilant orthodoxy and a healer of mistakes.

3 Receptions and reception from Puebla

As already mentioned, it is possible to distinguish different receptions from Puebla and affirm the relevance of this moment of the Puebla ecclesial event for the understanding of its results. The types presented can be verified in texts that became known shortly after the Conference. The subjects who were present there

⁶ In addition to the Christological corrections (176, 178, 179, 1166), The cleisiological ones (222, 223, 262 and 263) and the anthropological ones (308-315), can also be observed corrections referring to the theology of salvation (353, 354) and, above all, in the repairs to the concept of liberation (26, 141, 189, 321, 475, 480, 481, 482, 488, 489, 696, 895, 1026, 1134) and, emphatically, in the theological method that makes use of Marxist analysis (91, 544 and 545).

were also subjects who built, each according to their perspectives, receptions of the DP. In this sense, it is worth checking here briefly two of these main positions.

Boaventura Kloppenburg does not hide the revising intentions of the Document in its Article below:

[...] el documento debe dar una doctrina clara sobre Cristo, explícita e inequívoca; que de hecho en América Latina existen actualmente diversas cristologías que no satisfacen los requerimientos de la fe cristiana bíblica y tradicional; [...] También sobre la iglesia hubo varias intervenciones: que urge deshacer sin ambages los equívocos existentes sobre la naturaleza y misión de la Iglesia, que el Documento debe rechazar categóricamente aquellas tesis que propugnan una visión de la Iglesia contraria a la que nos da la Tradición y sobre todo el Concilio Vaticano II; que es necesario denunciar, como lo hizo el Papa Juan Pablo II, la llamada 'Iglesia popular' que pretende poner la dirección de la Iglesia, su doctrina y su liturgia, en la base. (KLOPPENBURG, 1979, p. 200-201).

The internal differences of the Puebla Conference, portrayed in Frei Betto's *Diário de Puebla*, as well as by the historian Enrique Dussel (1983), are visible in the subtext of the Final Document. However, they do not appear in the reception phase, when, in fact, a hermeneutics of Medellín's continuity became unanimous across the continent. In this respect, Frei Betto's popular text, "Puebla for the people", is emblematic. The Third Conference is translated into a popular language and despite the effort to remain faithful to the text, it makes clear the reading made in the perspective of the theology of liberation and of the Basic Ecclesial Communities. It is worth transcribing the beginning of the Introduction, which aims to define what the Conference was:

This is a popular version of the Puebla Document. This document is the result of a joint effort of about 356 people - lay people (Indians, peasants, workers, couples, religious, priests, bishops and cardinals. All these people were gathered in the city of Puebla, Mexico, from January 27 to February 13, 1979 [...] They represented the Catholic Church in our continent [...]. (BETTO, 1979, p. 7).

The popular book by the Dominican frater above mentioned with its successive editions symbolizes the liberating reception of Puebla, widely practiced in popular groups and pastorals throughout the continent. The pastoral organization of the Churches, according to the guidelines of Medellín and the Latin

American theological reflection, established, in fact, a climate largely favorable to a reception by Puebla in line with a document that came to offer a path of liberation for the peoples of the continent. Right after the Conference, Enrique Dussel proposed exactly a popular reception as a strategy that could overcome the intended break with tradition and Medellín. For this reason he insisted that: “Puebla's popular 'appropriation' is the current and immediate task” (DUSSEL, 1981, p. 60).

While the reading presented by Kloppenburg, although vested with theoretical and political authority, as he is an expert theologian of the Conference and speaks on behalf of its own coordination (at least one sector of the coordination), it was restricted to the scope of theoretical debates of an ecclesial, theological and pastoral elite⁷, the reading that predominated across the continent was established in the perspective of the continuation of the Medellín tradition in line with what Dussel had planned. It is in this same direction that Leonardo Boff took stock of the Conference in terms of “gains, advances and emerging issues” and defined this advance, not so much forward, but to the sides as “widening ecclesial consensus” and as a “moment of Spirit in the history of our Church” (BOFF, 1979, p. 44). In the same article, the theologian detects 10 positive axes that run through the conclusive text: consecration of the see-judge-act method, social and political dimension of faith, defense and promotion of the dignity of the human person, preferential option for the poor, promotion and full liberation, popular religiosity, Ecclesial Base Communities, preferential option for young people, promotion of women and three condemnations (the idolatries of wealth in the form of capital and Marxist collectivism and the ideology of national security). He concludes this positive list by stating that Puebla “constitutes a vigorous reaffirmation of the Church's path in the last 10 years.” (BOFF, 1979, p. 51-52).

Indeed, the conservation-renewal ambiguity is constitutive in Puebla, if not from ecclesial documents in general. The two trends are available throughout the

⁷ Case of the postures of the CELAM secretary; check out Trujillo (1982).

document with their concepts and are offered with their contents that can be distilled into pure types, depending on the reading option.

It is worth remembering that all reception is primarily a process; it involves different readings, subjects, contexts and options, always in search of a coherent and active fidelity of an ecclesial orientation. Therefore, it is neither a mechanical application nor a betraying reading of the guidelines. Mechanical application evokes the method of the decree that begins and ends in the law and does not always generate conviction and life in the ecclesial community and in each believer. The traitorous reading, by its hidden nature, subtly hides the interests of others or even contrary to the guidelines; this type of reception has been recurrent in the current pontificate. Therefore, a reception involves the process of receiving an orientation or norm and strategies for understanding content and for building common actions. Reception, therefore, requires working time, presupposes the action of subjects, and the construction of interpretative consensus and joint actions. (PASSOS, 2018, p. 284).

Puebla's reception took place above all in a context, through subjects and a methodology demarcated by the Medellín tradition, in an ecclesial culture that reads the reality and understands the Church and its mission according to the guidelines of Medellín. In this sense, the circularity between the second and third conferences actually happened: as a conscious or spontaneous action. In this sense, there was a hermeneutics of continuity between the two events. The active and active ecclesial forces bearers of the renewing charisms of the Council and Medellín made a renewing reception of the teachings of Puebla, overcoming those internal contradictions of the Document and, above all, those that marked the assembly, as those who were present and absent testify.

The III Conference carried out the conciliar era, explaining the historical conscience of the Church (THEOBALD, 2015, p. 122-202) at that urgent time for the Latin American peoples. The reading of the signs of the times was done in a concrete way and not only as an ethical or hermeneutical posture before reality.

The reality of the continent has been discerned in its structures and causes and the Church assumes a prophetic position that requires a change in behavior on the part of religious subjects and an option for the poor and suffering. This attitude has social and political translation, which embodies Vatican II in the time and space of the people of God. In the process of receiving Puebla, it was effected based on a sense of faith and a theological method that articulated faith, life and faith in an intense, critical and creative way, church and reality, sacramental praxis and political praxis.

Final considerations

The threads of history which wove, with their concrete appeals, the Puebla plot provided the ecclesial climate that guaranteed a hermeneutics capable of articulating Medellín with Puebla and, consequently, Puebla with the ecclesial contexts of that time. The historical context and pastoral praxis provided the basis for Puebla's liberating reception and can also provide today the axis that builds a continuity on the basic axes of the option for the poor, the servant Church and the struggle for justice. Puebla event rises as a moment of awareness of the reality of oppression and the prophetic mission of the Church. This perspective and value show its relevance, as poverty persists on the continent and becomes globalized and authoritarian political trends expand across the continent and the world.

The historical conjuncture that provoked and made possible the III Conference today shows its late developments, if not its even more perverse regurgitations: mechanisms that generate poverty globalized by the era of the unproductive financial market, idolatries of the market and money, alienations produced and reproduced by the culture of consumption, denial of social and human rights, and so forth. The return to the teachings of Puebla becomes necessary and urgent as a source from which principles of discernment and criteria of action for the life and action of Christians are derived.

The theology of / in Puebla is inserted in an ecclesial conjuncture that is marked by a broader hermeneutic struggle between preservation and renewal, a struggle that involves different subjects: prelates of the Curia and the Pope himself and prelates of Latin America, theologians with a conservative profile and theologians renewal (in particular liberation theologians), clergy and laity. The theological matrices available are asymmetrical: the so-called official theology presents itself as synonymous with orthodoxy of the faith and sound doctrine and imposes itself by the weight of tradition and the strength of officiality, while the renewed theology that emerges from Vatican II imposes itself as a coherent response and direct to the urgent challenges of reality. Indeed, the assembly should not dispense with either model, although they often operate in clear parallelism. At the end of the battle, it can be said that, despite a general theological scheme guided by the classical matrix, the renewed and liberating theology fulfilled its function of connecting doctrine with reality; it worked as a ground for reflection, as an anchor of doctrine, even in its most general and universal formulations.

It is worth remembering that in the reception phase, Latin American theology advances quantitatively and qualitatively in its reflection, together with the prophetic positions of the episcopates, the Base Ecclesial Communities and the social pastoral ministries. DP was a fruitful ecclesial source for these practices and reflections, consolidating the perspective of ecclesial renewal unleashed by Vatican II and consolidated in Medellín. Puebla was welcomed and interpreted as an ecclesial landmark confirming the renewals underway on the continent, despite the revision intentions programmed by conservative ecclesial trends. Evidently, in the following decade, the review mechanisms of these ecclesial frameworks and the direct controls over the episcopate and theology produced on the continent by the leaders of the Departments of the Roman Curia, advanced more intensely. Nowadays, the teachings of Pope Francis allow us to affirm that the fundamental teaching of the Third Conference remains alive and universalized, as Francis enables a return to the essential that comes from the Gospel and the cry of the poor, dimensions of the same truth of the incarnate word of God. With Francisco,

Puebla emerges as an authentic teaching of local and universal teaching and as an event that legitimately composes the history of Christian-Catholic theology.

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