

# Excerpts from the Interview with Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga<sup>1</sup>



Photo: J. M. Concepción

Dom Pedro Casaldáliga.

**AFTER MORNING PRAYER** a group of us visiting Dom Pedro remained sitting on stools for almost an hour listening to Pedro speak passionately about the Church Base Communities in an informal interview.

As Dom Pedro sits down, he looks full of energy. We ask him to speak of the Church Base Communities; what are they, what is their place in the renewal of the church?

**Casaldáliga:** These communities emerge from the grassroots, from the simple folk, and they are the base of the church. In Brazil we say that this is a new way of being church. I add that this is a new way of being for the whole church. Bishop Leonardo was a bit excited, so he said to me: Pedro, that is a dream. Yet it would be the way to be church: communitarian, faithful, joining together faith and life, putting the Bible in the hands of simple people, having a capacity for dialogue with an ecumenical awareness. We have always said that there must be a dialogue between the people and their culture. The challenge, and it is a big one today, is *convivencia* (a Spanish term signifying convivial fellowship, peaceful and happy living together). Its challenge emerges in every area of life: in the family, in the neighborhood, at work, in the church community. The Minky Indians say that *vivir es convivir* (to live is to live together). *Convivencia* presupposes that as a church we assume an attitude of equality: relating as equals with other churches, with other religions, with other spiritualities, and with the whole human family. Our starting point must be macro-

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the original Spanish in the book: *Pedro Casaldáliga, utopía encarnada*, by Avelino Seco Muñoz, © 2013, Editorial Nueva Utopía, Madrid

ecumenical (wide-ecumenism) rather than a posture that turns in on itself. We must begin with a vision that is open and in communion with all other movements, spiritualities, and religions. We must present our faith not by imposing it from a place of superiority, but by offering our contribution through the concrete story and experience of Jesus of Nazareth.

**Q.:** Can you explain what you mean by saying that there cannot be faith without politics?

**Casaldáliga:** There cannot be a Christian faith that is not enfleshed. Incarnation (God-become-flesh) is the mystery of God entering fully into our humanity through Jesus of Nazareth. This presupposes that we assume the challenges of life each day. Everything is politics, although politics is not all there is. Jesus said that he came so that all would have life, and have it abundantly. If I don't care about the land, health, education, communications, or even about vacations in order for people to take a break, I am not caring for human life. Life in the other world is God's business, God will take very good care of it because there will be life, abundant life for everybody. Yet we are to improve life and make it universally available to all here and now, in this world. And if the church, the pope, the bishops, the priests, the nuns and all of us who want to be followers of Jesus do not take part in politics, do not promote social causes which have the faith's political and economic consequences, what witness are we giving to love?

**Mino Cerezo** (one of the participants): I am asking myself if the bottom line is not about believing in Jesus but believing in what Jesus believed. We seem never to touch that. To believe as Jesus believed is a very important aspect of prayer, because Jesus believed in others; he prayed with others in mind. Leaving the apostles behind, he used to go up to the mountain by himself and spend the whole night in prayer. Yet he would always come back to be with the people to proclaim the Reign of God. He placed prayer foremost in his practice. I feel that we are falling short here. Young people believe in Jesus. However my question is for them as it is for us older folks as well: are we believing as Jesus believed, or only in Jesus?

**Casaldáliga:** When you think of T-shirts, it is easy to carry Jesus on your chest, it is very challenging to have in our chest, that is, in our heart, the courage to follow Jesus.

To finish, I would like to offer An Epilogue in Memory of Dom Aloisio Lorscheider [who was the former cardinal archbishop of Sao Paulo]. Dom Aloisio used to say: The church needs the church base communities in today's world, especially in the world of the impoverished, the marginalized, the forgotten. The church is and ought to be essentially a community of faith and struggle, fostering truthful bonds of sisterhood and brotherhood, and not just gathering crowds in order to entertain them. All Catholic movements and all pastoral ministry must have the church base communities as their model, as a way of being church today. ■