



First Ibero-American Meeting of Theology

BOSTON DECLARATION

For several days, Catholic theologians from Ibero-America met in the city of Boston, United States, guided by a spirit of interculturality, ecumenism, and solidarity. Our ecclesial vocation inspired us to examine, learn, teach, and communicate the richness of the Christian faith in the church and society. We shared our experiences, reflections, prayers, and the Eucharist to commonly discern the signs of the times in this new global era. In this declaration, we share some of the fruits of our work with both the church community and the public in general.

We recognize, with happiness and joy, that we live at an auspicious time for the development of theology and in the life of the church. We live in an ecclesial *kairos* moment, evident in the new processes initiated by Francis, the bishop of Rome and the first Latin-American pope. His efforts towards evangelical renewal, expressed in the need for a reform of both our limited ways of thinking and our ecclesial structures, encourage us to consider the presence of God in history and to examine the realities that reject God therein. Our deliberations uncovered shared features and signs of a common history, and it is from them that we want to examine the present and future challenges of this global era. Hence, we stress the importance of examining, from the perspective of the Word of God proclaimed in the church, the socio-political and economic situation of our nations, which is an essential *locus theologicus* for the church. It is in this situation, in this place, that the church is called to incarnate itself in order to accompany, as the people of God, the peoples of this world.

We want to discern our experience as believers from the perspective of the key social questions of this time. Socioeconomically, this experience is characterized by the presence of social systems and relationships of exclusion and inequality. The socio-cultural sphere points to the need to move from the pluri-cultural to the intercultural. The socio-political calls for the urgent need to consolidate representative democratic systems and foster those expressions of civil society that propose a more humane vision of the world. In this context, we confirm our preferential option for those who are poor and excluded.

Latin America and the Caribbean is not the poorest region in economic terms, but continue to be the most unequal. The cause for this is not a question of inheritances or the rent of land, as it is in Europe or the United States of America, but in the unequal distribution of income and opportunities, including the unequal distribution of concentrated private land, which generates wealth for a few and poverty for the many. We urgently need a prophetic theology able to desacralize false gods. We cannot stop denouncing the economic and cultural causes for poverty, and must be attentive to the different socio-political mediations that seek to overcome it. An inculturated prophetic theology presumes the whence of our theology and the social place where we choose to stand to understand reality. Thus, it is necessary a critical discernment of the new styles of "neo-populist type" (Document of *Aparecida* 74), which have begun to emerge through Democratic ways in various Countries of the Americas.

In the context of all the Ibero-American languages that mediate the Gospel, we have reflected upon the service that a theology articulated in Spanish or Castilian offers to the church community, and especially to the universal magisterium. We are mindful of the widespread and the socio-cultural importance of the Spanish language in the Catholic world. Our work has confirmed the need to increase the personal and institutional relationship between Spanish and Portuguese speaking Latin-American theologians, Spanish theologians, and U.S. Latino/a theologians. We propose a historical and *theological* theology ready to engage those issues that affect the Ibero-Latin-American cultural and ecclesial context.

Encouraged by the Spirit who moves from the margins of the church and the underside of history, we believe that the peripheries are theological places that force theology to ask: When is a people authentically Christian? When it has many churches, or when it rejects poverty? Thus, we ratify our inescapable commitment to our brothers and sisters from the peripheries of society, scourged by poverty and so many forms of social, economic, political, and ecclesial exclusion that call for our urgent struggle on behalf of greater integration and inclusion. It also demands a greater fidelity from our ecclesial institutions to Jesus of Nazareth, the liberating Messiah, Lord of history and Son of God. We recognize that unjust poverty kills because it generates forms of premature death that we must reject. We are believers who wager on the praxis of mercy with justice. Our option for the poor is rooted in the memory of our martyrs' blood, in celebrating their lives, and in remembering their self-offering for the people of God, which is the light that illuminates our theological task.

In light of the gravity of this historical moment, which calls for the deeper commitment of our communities, we insist on the urgent need to collaborate with the theology and pastoral plan of Pope Francis. We support a theology that attends to the reality of social conflicts and makes its way through the peripheries. Just like the shepherds who live with the smell of sheep, theologians must smell like their people and their streets; thus, the need to pay back the pastoral debt that professional theology still has with our poor people. Within this context, theology must be saturated by an evangelical mercy that promotes a church of the poor and for the poor—a church where the poor become the subjects of their own history and not the object of ideological manipulations. The poor, many times victims of violence, are privileged theological places, our commitment is not only to walk with them, but also to let ourselves be evangelized and transformed by them in an ongoing process of pastoral and missionary conversion.

We recognize that current globalization processes have allowed a greater interdependence and exchange between distant people. Nonetheless, we also endure its sociocultural outcomes. Thus, we note, with some perplexity, the globalization of indifference, of indolence. We pay special attention to the complex phenomenon of migration, the precarious nature of employment, and the lack of opportunities generated by systems that do not assume the cause of the poor or consider them authentic subjects of their own processes. We have entered a new world stage that some call “de-globalization,” and that seems to be characterized by our inability to relate as mutual subjects engaged in reciprocal humanizing relationships.

We believe that migrants are a great sign of our times. In them, Christians are called to recognize the face and the voice of Jesus (Mt. 25:35) and respond to the following insights: the affirmation of the dignity of every human being, the promotion of a “culture of encounter,” and the praxis of fraternity, hospitality, and compassion. The reality of migration invites us to build processes of interculturality as a key element in our theological reflection. The presence of multiple cultures in our countries calls for a

deepening of our recognition of alterity, a welcoming embrace to the richness given to us by our differences, and the permanent expansion of the horizon of our theological reflections. All of this assumes the reciprocal learning from our daily experiences, and demands the constant openness to changing our thinking based on our encounter with the life of the poor.

Our practices cannot continue producing forms of domination, like those marked by the clericalism that disrespects lay people. Institutional rigidities fail to mediate the merciful images of the God of Jesus and hinder the much-needed process of pastoral conversion in the church. In this regard, it is important to emphasize the value of the new contextual theologies, like those practiced by indigenous and Afro-American women, which highlight the experiences of subjects who have been marginalized in their social and ecclesial life. Their commitment to the liberation of victims of exclusion has emphasized their struggles and the difficulties they have endured. In a similar manner, we note the work produced by women theologians who invite us to make a greater commitment toward nature and against the causes of women's oppression. They articulate a more adequate conception of the type of transformation that our societies must follow for a fuller and more authentically Christian development.

We also highlight the contributions of U.S. Latino/a theology as an effective way to reflect upon the preferential option for the poor, and the defense of the cultural and religious identity of Latino/a communities that are all too often discriminated against in society and within the church. This theology has focused its attention on key themes of the Latino/a experience in the United States like *mestizaje* and popular religion with its particular Marian expressions and *lo cotidiano*. We believe that only through the recognition of the socio-cultural and religious roots of the Latino/a population will the churches of the United States and Canada be able to offer an effective pastoral response to the increased transformation of these churches. In this sense, a better preparation and sensitivity of the ministers and all the pastoral agents is urged.

These considerations point out that the synodical reform of the whole Church, in the complexity of its various instances and in creative fidelity to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, constitutes an inescapable presupposition for the conception of life, mission, and theology of the ecclesial communities. As Ibero-Latin-American theologians, we support with great hope the process of reform that the current Bishop of Rome has called for in the mentalities and structures of the church.

The people of God is a community of missionary disciples called, in a dynamic of departure and donation, to witness the Gospel under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Only an institution that is spiritually more evangelical, theologically more consistent, and pastorally more open to sociocultural and religious diversity will be able to respond to the challenges of working for justice, peace, and the care of our common home, from a stance of genuine attention to the most poor and the excluded of our age.

Mary, especially in the image and the name of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Patroness of America, accompanies our walk.

Primer Encuentro Iberoamericano de Teología
Realizado del 6 al 10 de febrero de 2017 en el Boston College
Boston, Massachusetts

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