CHAPTER EIGHT

The Church of the Poor

> The Church is beginning to be born at the grassroots, beginning to be born at the heart of God's People.
> Leonardo Boff[1]

INTRODUCTION

During the 1970s, with political repression on the rise across the continent, the Catholic church in Brazil, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and other countries in Latin America started to refashion itself as a church of the poor. The emergence of this popular church (as it was often known) was a response both to pastoral initiatives from above (taken by bishops and church hierarchies in the 1960s) and to grass-roots activism springing up from below. The most important influence varied from country to country and diocese to diocese; in some places it was "top-down," in others was "bottom-up," and in some it was equally both. Depending on which factors predominated and how these were directed, the pastoral renewal took different shape in different local contexts. Some of these communities were simply part of ecclesial renewal to meet local pastoral needs and offered little that was new in terms of social activism. Many others, however, were strongly marked by social concerns and readily identified with liberation theology. These socially active communities were the most tangible expressions of the pastoral vision and political option advocated by liberation theologians. At the same time, these base communities helped to reorientate liberation theology's option for the poor.

The base communities were sympathetic audiences for the radical ideas of liberation theologians. As social bodies, the base communities could work toward the transformations of society and the church in practical ways at local and national level. Their activities allowed the literature of liberation theology to have a practical outcome in the shaping of a mass movement. At the

[1] L. Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (trans. R. Barr; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London: Collins, 1986 [Portuguese orig. 1977]), p. 23.

same time, the experiences of the communities encouraged and supported more thoroughgoing and systematic theological work. In particular, the struggles of the communities challenged theologians to clarify and redefine their option to the poor. As the popular church suffered a period of fierce persecution in many countries, their experiences evangelized the theologians. In 1980, looking back on the seventies, Gutiérrez commented:

> After Vatican II and the stimulus of the Medellín Conference, we creatively reappropriated the gospel expression about evangelizing or 'preaching the good news to the poor.' Reinforced by an option for the oppressed and commitment of solidarity with them, a series of rich and promising initiatives took place all over Latin America. . . . Then came the irruption of the poor. *At a terrible price the common people began to become the active protagonists of history.* This fact gave us deeper insight into the whole matter of evangelization. Working in the midst of the poor, exploited people, whom we were supposedly going to evangelize, we came to realize that we were being evangelized by them.[2]

As the 1970s progressed, liberation theologians increased priority to the poor as the active authors of liberation theology and incorporated an epistemological/theological option for the poor into their methodology. Liberation theology set out to transform the lives of the poor but in this process the poor, transformed liberation theology.

Repression and Persecution

During the early 1970s, Brazil positioned itself as regional policeman.[3] The Brazilian military successfully exported their National Security ideology to neighbouring militaries in the Southern Cone and Bolivia. Military coups in Bolivia (1971–1978), Chile (1973–1989), Uruguay (1973–1985), and Argentina (1976–1983) ensured that in the 1970s and early 1980s, almost the entire continent was under dictatorial rule.[4] Hard-line regimes willing to use torture and

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[2] Gutiérrez, "The Irruption of the Poor in Latin America and the Christian Communities of the Common People" in S. Torres and J. Eagleson (eds.), *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (EATWOT International Ecumenical Congress of Theology, São Paulo, Brazil, 20 February–2 March 1980; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), pp. 107–123 (120). At the same conference Sobrino noted: "Neither *Evangelii Nuntiandi* nor Medellín placed any stress on persecution or martyrdom either. They both re-emphasise the need for subjective witness in the evangelization process. Both, Medellín in particular, stress the need for poverty and the necessity of becoming poor in order to be in solidarity with the poor. But the essential nature of witness is not viewed in terms of persecution and martyrdom" (J. Sobrino, "The Witness of the Church in Latin America" in Torres and Eagleson [eds.], *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities*, pp. 161–188 [171]).

[3] See Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, pp. 167–175.

[4] Paraguay, which was always viewed as a bit of a backwater, suffered the long-standing dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner from 1954 to 1989; see P. H. Lewis, *Paraguay under Stroessner* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980). However, Peru was an interesting exception in the early 1970s, because during the first phase of military

state terror as policies of social control replaced the so-called soft dictatorships of earlier decades. The church was often caught in the crossfire or deliberately targeted when it tried to intervene or protest.

In Brazil, Emílio Médici's regime (1969–1974) continued the hard-line tendency of his predecessor Costa e Silva (1967–1969). General Ernesto Giesel (1974–1979) relaxed the military's grip a little, but human rights abuses under his government remained high. Progressive priests in the Brazilian church were often targets for political violence. In 1976, three more priests were killed.[5] In the same year, Bishop Dom Adriano Hipólito was kidnapped in his diocese of Nova Iguaça on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. He was only released when he had been stripped, splashed with red paint, and humiliated in an attempt to defame his reputation.[6] Between 1968 and 1978, nine bishops, eighty-four priests, thirteen seminarians, and six women religious were imprisoned in Brazil along with 273 other pastoral agents (local lay leaders).[7] Ordinary laity of the base communities, who enjoyed less protection, suffered in untold numbers. In 1972, Cardinal Arns of São Paulo created a human rights agency for the church, which served as a precedent for similar initiatives in Chile and El Salvador a few years later.[8] As the decade progressed, the Brazilian bishops became more outspoken, especially under Aloísio Lorscheider's leadership of the CNBB.[9] In

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rule, under General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–1975), the government sought progressive reforms rather than reactionary repression. As a result, the regime enjoyed positive relations with the Peruvian church, which at the time was one of the most progressive episcopates on the continent. It was not until the second phase of military rule, under General Francisco Morales Bermúdez, that Peru came under the influence of National Security Doctrine and repression started to escalate; see esp. J. Klaiber, *The Catholic Church in Peru, 1821–1985: A Social History* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), pp. 276–358.

[5] Frs. Rodolfo Llukembein, João Bosco Penido Burnier SJ, and A. Pierobon. See Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, p. 464.

[6] See Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, pp. 314–320.

[7] Archdiocese of São Paulo Human Rights Commission cited in Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships and Democracy in Latin America*, p. 35.

[8] The church's central Commission of Peace and Justice was originally created after Medellín, but it was based in Rio de Janeiro under the conservative oversight of Archbishop Eugênio de Araujo Sales. It was not until Arns developed a chapter in São Paulo (with independence after 1974) that the Brazilian church developed a serious role in recording and publicising human rights abuses. In the final years of the military regime, it was the São Paulo commission that organised the covert collection of copied military records for publication as Archdiocese of São Paulo, *Torture in Brazil: A Report by the Archdiocese of São Paulo* (trans. J. Wright; ed. J. Dassin; New York: Vintage Books, 1986 [Portuguese orig. 1985]). The amazing story of the ecumenical collaboration between Arns and the Presbyterian Jaime Wright on this project (supported by the WCC) is told in Lawrence Weschler, *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, rev. ed. 1998 [1990]), pp. 7–77. For a wider overview of the church's involvement in human rights in Latin America, see E. L. Cleary, *The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America* (Westport, Conn., and London: Praeger, 1997).

[9] Lorscheider was elected CNBB secretary in 1968. However, the early years of his

November 1976, the CNBB issued their outspoken "Pastoral Message to the People of God."

The situation in Chile was particularly severe. After the 1973 coup, the widely respected prelate, Cardinal Silva, responded to the torture and disappearance of thousands of Chileans by helping to establish the Committee for Cooperation for Peace in Chile. The committee provide legal and other assistance to victims of the Pinochet regime and documented the human rights abuses taking place.[10] When government pressure finally forced its closure at the end of 1975, Cardinal Silva responded immediately by establishing a Vicariate of Solidarity to continue its work.[11] Pinochet was furious at Silva's defiance and worked ceaselessly to intimidate and undermine him. Silva also faced considerable opposition from some of the other Chilean bishops, but other Latin American bishops rallied to his support.[12]

In fact, hostility towards the church was spreading across the continent and reaching the highest levels. In Bolivia, the government's Banzer Plan (named after the dictator) advocated covert actions to increase tension and widen divisions between different political factions in the church. The intention was to undermine and intimidate progressive bishops and harass and smear troublesome priests.[13] In many cases, harassment extended to physical beatings, death threats, and even murders. Missionary priests were liable for deportation or refused reentry if they travelled abroad.

While persecution was mainly at a local level, there were some very high profile exceptions. In August 1976, armed security forces in Ecuador broke up an international meeting of Latin American bishops and theologians in Riobamba

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leadership were constrained by the conservative majority on the CNBB executive. The previous CNBB president, Agnelo Rossi, had been very cautious in relations with the government. However, when Rossi became Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in Rome in 1970, it allowed progressives to make critical headway in influence over the Brazilian church. Paulo Arns replaced him in São Paulo, and Lorscheider was elected as president of the CNBB in 1971. Aided by Ivo Lorscheiter who became CNBB secretary (and later succeded Lorscheider as CNBB president in 1979), the progressives had considerable influence on the leadership of the Brazilian church in the 1970s.

[10] It was an ecumenical venture with the Methodist, Lutheran, and some Pentecostal churches as well as the rabbinical college and World Council of Churches. See B. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

[11] As a church office, the Vicariate came under Silva's direct protection and was located next to the cathedral in the central Plaza de Armas.

[12] Silva was known for his political moderation and diplomacy in dealing with Christians for Socialism and persuading Salvador Allende to back down over his policies on schools. Bishops elsewhere in Latin American responded cautiously to hostilities against bishops in Brazil who were seen as radicals (for example, Hélder Câmara and Pedro Casaldáliga). However, the campaign against Silva showed the extremity of the political forces that he and the Chilean church confronted and the need for a unified response.

[13] See Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, pp. 143–147.

and arrested them.[14] When the three Chilean bishops were finally allowed to return to Santiago, they were pelted with rocks in a demonstration orchestrated by Pinochet's security forces.[15]

The Riobamba affair suggested internationally organised harassment of the church.[16] The cooperation of the dictatorships in setting up national security states contributed to further collaboration between their security forces in eliminating political opposition. After 1976, state repression in Latin America became internationally organised, with political agreements by military regimes to collaborate with other. The most notorious example of this was the so-called Condor Plan, which allowed easy extradition of political refugees between collaborating security forces. Even more disturbingly, it allowed state-security forces to operate clandestinely in another member country to assassinate or disappear their targets without having to answer awkward questions.

In most countries, hostilities against the church did not reach the same severity as against other civil groups (for example, opposition politicians, union activists, or students), because the church's traditional status and international connections provided considerable protection. Nonetheless, the 1970s were an unprecedented period of church persecution across the continent. This deepened divisions in the church between those who had made the option for the poor and those who continued to opt for privilege.

After the coup in Argentina in March 1976, seventeen priests and nuns were murdered; thirty more were imprisoned by the end of the following year.[17] During the "dirty war" against internal dissent, most members of Argentinean church hierarchy actively supported the government or looked the other way and refused to speak.[18] An exception to this was Bishop Enrique

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[14] Bishop Mariano Parra León in Venezuela had a heart attack while they were held in custody.

[15] Penny Lernoux offers a typically vivid account of the Riobamba incident and the bishops return to Chile in *Cry of the People*, pp. 137–142.

[16] Lernoux (*Cry of the People*, pp. 141–142) points out that the Ecuadoran military would probably not have acted on their own initiative, but at the instigation of Brazil or Chile. Some of the church participants at the Riobamba meeting had just attended a similar meeting in Brazil, and Chile had particularly close ties with Ecuadoran military.

[17] Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, p. 345. Right-wing violence against the Priests for the Third World by groups such as the Argentinean Anti-Communist Alliance (AAA) began a few years before this. This included the murder of the movement's most prominent representative, Carlos Mugica, in May 1974. Partly as a result of these attacks, by 1974 the movement had already split and ceased to function. Nonetheless, priests who had been members of the movement were still prime targets after the 1976 coup.

[18] For the official report on the military's war against its own citizenship issued after the return to democracy in 1983 (and proving to be a best-seller), see National Commission on Disappeared People, *Nunca Más: A Report by Argentina's National Commission on Disappeared People* (trans. Writers and Scholars International; Boston and London: Faber & Faber, 1986 [Spanish orig. 1984]); an interesting analysis on the paranoia behind the terror is given by M. Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). For a fascinating investi-

Angelleli of La Rioja in the rural northwest region. In July 1976, he was attempting to establish responsibility for the murder of two priests in his diocese—the evidence pointed to the military—when he himself was killed in an automobile accident in highly suspicious circumstances.

In Central America, the repression was just as bad.[19] In El Salvador, a small group of radical priests became active in the 1970s and the appointment of Bishop Oscar Romero as archbishop of San Salvador in 1977 was widely interpreted as a conservative move to bring them into line. Romero's appointment coincided with the fraudulent election of General Romero (no relation) as president and a clamp-down on the country's unions and political movements.[20] Perhaps because of the new archbishop's perceived conservatism, persecution of the Salvadoran church escalated dramatically in 1977 after his appointment.[21] Two priests—the Jesuit Rutilio Grande in March and the diocesan priest Alfonso Navarro in May—were killed and right-wing groups threatened to assassinate any Jesuits left in the country after 21 July 1977. In face of widespread condemnation, the threat went unfulfilled; but in the next three years, a further six priests were killed. This experience and the suffering of ordinary Christians in the base communities moved Archbishop Romero deeply. He became one of the most outspoken prophets of the Latin American church and—in fulfillment of the 1971 Synod of Bishops—became known as the voice of those without voice.[22] He was outspoken in condemning both the political violence that was becoming commonplace, and the economic injustices that were

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gation of the religious dimension to dirty war torture, see F. Graziano, *Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexuality, and Radical Christianity in the Argentine 'Dirty War'* (Boulder, Colo., and Oxford: Westview Press, 1992); for the wider background, see J. Burdick, *For God and Fatherland: Religion and Politics in Argentina* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

[19] Argentinean security agents actively collaborated with their Central American counterparts in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala in setting up surveillance and security apparatus; see A. C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America 1977–1984* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), pp. 73–105.

[20] General Romero had been the hawkish defence minister for the previous president, General Molina (1972–1977). Since a communist uprising in 1932, El Salvador's military maintained a tight control on state security, and the 1972 and 1977 elections simply endorsed their nominated candidate. For an overview of the period in El Salvador, see P. Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London: SCM Press, 1984), pp. 91–161; Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, pp. 61–80.

[21] Archbishop Romero was previously known for his political moderation and had been in conflict with the country's priests and Jesuits who advocated political engagement. On Romero's life see J. Brockman, *Romero: A Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), and O. Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero: A Shepherd's Diary* (trans. I. B. Hodgson; London: Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1993).

[22] For his homilies and pastoral messages, see O. Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements* (trans. M. Walsh; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985 [Spanish orig. 1980]); *The Violence of Love: The Words of Oscar Romero* (trans. J. Brockman; New York: Harper & Row, 1988; London: Collins, 1989).

at the root of El Salvador's problems. In weekly homilies broadcast on the radio, he frequently committed the church to standing with the poor in their tribulations and finding its own salvation in solidarity with their suffering.

This prompted retaliation from his opponents. Bombs exploded at churches, the archdiocesan radio station, and the Catholic University. Romero himself was frequently threatened with death. In February 1980, he sent a letter to President Carter requesting a halt to further consignments of aid to El Salvador's security forces.[23] On 23 March 1980, Romero's sermon pleaded for an end to the violence with an appeal addressed directly at ordinary soldiers: "In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!"[24] The next day, he was assassinated as he celebrated mass in a hospital chapel. Within a year, El Salvador toppled into a full-scale civil war that brought untold misery and lasted throughout the following decade. This civil war dominated internal politics and everyday life in the 1980s and brought further persecution of the church.[25]

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza won a staged election in 1974. Rejecting political pressures for overdue reforms, he chose instead to unleash the National Guard against his political opponents, union representatives, and peasant leaders.[26] Eventually, he united almost the whole country—including the business community and church hierarchy—against him.[27] In July 1979, a mass uprising led by the Sandinistas finally swept him from power. Thus, just as the decade began with Allende embarking on a socialist experiment in Chile, so it ended with the Sandinistas adopting a range of socialist

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[23] See "Letter to President Carter" in O. Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless*, pp. 188–190. President Jimmy Carter rejected his plea, despite his 1976 election victory over Gerald Ford on a platform that promised honest government and concern for human rights in foreign policy. However, Carter's Democratic administration was at least more concerned for human rights in its foreign policy than the Republican period of Nixon and Ford in the early seventies. While Carter's professed concern for human rights did not prevent widespread human rights abuses in Latin America during 1976–1980, it at least moderated them to some extent. The night that the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan beat Carter in the 1980 election was a night of celebration for the right wing of Salvadoran politics. Two weeks later four U.S. women working in El Salvador—three U.S. nuns and one U.S. lay missionary—were raped and murdered by National Guard members who believed that they were now beyond any moral or political restraint.

[24] Brockman, *Romero*, p. 242.

[25] See A. L. Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

[26] This included particular persecution of grassroots Christian movements inspired by Capuchin priests. See Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, pp. 51–89; Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, pp. 81–107.

[27] See A. Bradstock, *Saints and Sandinistas: The Catholic Church in Nicaragua and its Response to the Revolution* (London: Epworth Press, 1987); J. M. Kirk, *Politics and the Catholic Church in Nicaragua* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992).

policies in Nicaragua.[28] However, during the 1980s, it would pay a high price—just as Allende's Chile had done—for its search for a political alternative.

THE BASE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

One of the signs of the times recognised at Medellín was the potential importance of base communities in the Latin American church.[29] The base ecclesial communities (commonly referred to by their acronym in Spanish and Portuguese as CEBs) developed into impressive national movements in many countries, and especially in Nicaragua, Chile, Peru, El Salvador, and most of all Brazil.[30] For many progressives the CEBs pointed toward a grass-roots regeneration of the church in Latin America.[31]

The rest of this chapter focuses on the CEBs in Brazil in the 1970s and their role in integrating the ideas of liberation theology with a socially orientated pastoral practice. It has proved surprisingly hard to even estimate the number of CEBs or quantify the people involved with them.[32] It has become clear that

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[28] It would, however, be quite wrong to think of the Sandinistas as hard-line Leninist-Marxist. There polices were a mix of free-market and state-planning intended to better the lot of the poor majority who had been impoverished under Somoza. They achieved notable success in raising standards of health and education, despite these projects being particular targets for U.S.-sponsored contras during the 1980s.

[29] Document 15, Pastoral de Conjunto, §§10–12; Document 1, Justice, §20; Document 6, Pastoral Popular, §13. Medellín refers to the communities as base Christian communities rather than base ecclesial communities, although it does describe the Christian base community as "the first and fundamental ecclesial unit" (Pastoral de Conjunto, §10) and speaks of "ecclesial communities in the parishes" (Pastoral Popular, §13). As the movement grew in strength it attracted attention outside Latin America and was supported in Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975) following the 1974 Synod of Bishops in Rome on "Evangelization in the Modern World." *Evangelli Nuntiandi* cautioned against a number of perceived dangers in base communities (§58.5–58.13), but gave the CEBs an important endorsement as "a hope for the universal Church." (§58.5). At Puebla, in 1979, considerable attention was given to the CEBs and their value and importance for the Latin American church was strongly reaffirmed (§629).

[30] The Portuguese *comunidades eclesiais de base* and the Spanish *comunidades eclesiales de base* are both commonly abbreviated to CEBs and translated as base church communities or basic christian communities in English. However, the communities are sometimes referred to as *comunidades Cristãs de base* (Portuguese) or *Comunidades Cristianas de base* (Spanish), which is more literally translated as base Christian communities.

[31] See S. Mainwaring, "Grass-Roots Catholic Groups and Politics in Brazil" in S. Mainwaring and A. Wilde (eds.), *The Progressive Church in Latin America* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 151–192 (151). It should also be noted that base communities also existed outside Latin America and were especially developed in the Philippines.

[32] There are a number of reasons why the figures need to be taken with some caution. First, the definition of what constitutes a base ecclesial community will alter the numbers significantly. Second, all the estimates are based on very partial samples, and therefore rest to a large extent on guesswork in assuming how representative these

despite the impression sometimes given, even in Brazil, the communities never represented the whole Brazilian church or even a majority of Brazilian Catholics.[33] Nonetheless, they were a very significant sector of the church. During the 1970s, they emerged from fairly modest early origins to become a focus of world attention and assume a position at the forefront of liberation theology.

The Distinctive Features of the CEBs

The CEBs were known as base level or basic communities because they were smaller subdivisions of the parish. A large or particularly active parish might be divided into many such communities.[34] Many CEBs were in poor rural areas or in the working-class and shanty-town areas (*favelas*) surrounding Brazilian cities.[35] In these areas CEB members were likely to work with their hands as poorly paid labourers. Many were near the base of the social pyramid and some

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might be. Third, there is inevitable pressure for numbers to be reported favourably in areas supportive of the movement and down-played in areas where there is disapproval for them. The most frequently given numbers are based on a survey by the Centró de Estatística Religiosa e Investigações Sociais, which suggested that there were 40,000 CEBs in 1974, rising to 80,000 in 1980. Furthermore, it seems that the strength of the CEBs in Brazil and elsewhere peaked in the 1980s, and has been in decline since (although sometimes even higher numbers—100,000 or 120,000—are cited as the peak). Hewitt reviews different estimates of the number of CEBs and the difficulties in counting them in, W. E. Hewitt, *Base Christian Communities and Social Change in Brazil* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp. 6–10. In terms of the number of people, Edward Cleary suggests that CEBs have approximately one million members in Brazil and at least as many in other Latin American countries (E. Cleary, *The Church in Latin America Today: Crisis and Change* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985] p. 104). Once again, however, others have estimated significantly higher than this, with some estimates for Brazil going as high as four million. Unfortunately, estimates of CEB membership have even more problems than estimates of the number of CEBs, since levels of membership need to be defined and accurately measured. Hewitt comments: "Although, consequently, two or perhaps three million Brazilians may participate in CEBs, the level at which they do so may disqualify many from actual CEB membership" (Hewitt, *Base Christian Communities and Social Change in Brazil*, p. 8).

[33] Scott Mainwaring suggests three factors in the Brazilian situation that help to explain why the church in Brazil took such a progressive and innovative lead. First, the initiatives of the 1950s that provided the foundation for the more radical approach in the 1970s. Second, the history of institutional weakness that encouraged innovation at grassroots level. Third, the absence of sustained persecution by liberalism, which encouraged a general openness to society. See S. Mainwaring, *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil, 1916–1985* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986), pp. 237–238).

[34] For insider accounts of particular communities in Brazil, see D. Barbé, *Grace and Power: Base Communities and Non-violence in Brazil* (trans. J. P. Brown; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987); A. B. Fragoso, *Face of a Church* (trans. R. R. Barr; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987); R. Rezende, *Rio Maria: Song of the Earth* (trans. and ed. M. Adriance; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1994).

[35] Regrettably there is no single term that provides an adequate translation of the Portuguese and Spanish term *de base*. Each of these English variants captures a different nuance of what is meant by *de base*.

were only marginally literate. However, even in poor neighbourhoods, the membership was unlikely to be composed of the most destitute. Most community members had sufficient means to get by most of the time; and enough stability in life to attend meetings on a fairly regular basis. The dispossessed homeless or entirely disenfranchised poor were less well-represented than the working poor. Furthermore, the CEBs often included more financially secure members as well—teachers or white-collar municipal workers—who might provide lay leadership for the group.[36]

As ecclesial, the groups were part of the official pastoral work of the church. The strength of commitment to the groups varied from diocese to diocese and parish to parish, but in Brazil, at least the communities were a central part of the church's official national plan. When base communities first developed in the 1950s and 1960s, they found support from a wide variety of political positions in the church. As a way of extending church authority in society, they had a wide appeal amongst the episcopacy.

In 1975, crucial impetus to the term base ecclesial communities was given by Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (*Proclaiming the Gospel*) after the 1974 Synod of Bishops.[37] Not only did *Evangelii Nuntiandi* use the term basic ecclesial communities, but it distinguished between communities which were critical of the institutional church (referred to simply as basic communities) and those which were supportive (described as basic ecclesial communities).[38] Thus, the term CEB—base *ecclesial* community—reflected official church approval.[39] For many progressives in Brazil, the CEBs were more than just a legitimate part of the church, they were seen as essential to the church's future.[40]

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[36] It would be mistaken to think that base communities only existed in the poorer neighbourhoods. However, in middle-class areas, the communities might have a less pronounced political edge and concentrate more on traditional charitable acts (see Hewitt, *Base Christian Communities and Social Change in Brazil*, pp. 60–72).

[37] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi: Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World* (1975). The Medellín document *Pastoral de Conjunto* (§§10–12) referred simply to base *Christian* communities without adding the term ecclesial.

[38] *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §58. Azevedo (*Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil*, pp. 70–71) interprets this as a reference to the difference between communities in Brazil (which had support of the bishops), and communities in Europe and North America (which were not part of an episcopal strategy).

[39] Prominent writers in Brazil referred to the communities as ecclesial in the 1960s. For example, R. B. Caramuru, *Comunidade eclesial de base: uma opçã pastoral decisiva* (Petrópolis, R. J.: Editora Vozes, 1967), and J. Marins, *Comunidade eclesial da base* (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1968). However, the CNBB was still referring simply to "communities from the base" in the early 1970s, for example in their study, *Comunidades: Igreja na Base*, (CNBB Studies, 3; São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1974). The term base ecclesial community became common in the literature after 1975; a similar CNBB document was titled *Comunidades eclesiais de base no Brasil*, (CNBB Studies, 3; São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1979) and likewise a subsequent study was *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base na Igreja do Brasil* (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1982).

[40] The importance of the base ecclesial communities in this period is reflected in the

The Brazilian bishops' biennial plans of 1975–1977 and 1977–1979 placed the CEBs among the top four pastoral priorities. This meant practical support for the communities in terms of resources and expertise. Furthermore, the CNBB's endorsement of CEBs ensured that even if a local bishop was unsympathetic, the local CEBs could call on support from a national network.

As a community, the people might meet once a week in small groups (anything from six to over a hundred people) to reflect on the Bible in the light of their local situation and their own lives.[41] Active involvement of the laity was central to the CEBs.[42] CEBs usually had someone who acted as a facilitator or animator who need not be a priest.[43] More often, lay catechists took this role. The intention of the facilitator was not to instruct, but to provoke the discussion and dialogue.[44]

As noted below, it was not until the early 1970s that many of the communities—and especially those in dioceses with progressive bishops—became active agents for political change. However, when this happened, their communal emphasis meant that all members of the group were encouraged to express their views on contemporary issues. In the process of sharing experiences, a deeper awareness of common problems and their relation to wider causes often emerged. This process owed much to the pedagogical approach to consciousness-raising piloted in Brazil in the early 1960s by Paulo Freire. After discussing

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national meetings of communities that started after 1975. The first national plan was "CEBs: Born of the People by the Spirit of God" (1975); next came "CEBs: The Church, a People Walk Together" (1976) and "CEBs: Church, A People Liberating Itself" (1978). The fourth meeting took place in 1981 as "CEBs: The Church, A People Who Have Organized Themselves for Liberation" and the fifth in 1983 as "CEBs: A United People, Seedbed of a New Society." See Azevedo pp. 99–100 n. 3.

[41] They are only residential communities in the sense that the members are likely to live fairly close together. They do not share a communal residence and although families often cooperate together, the CEBs are not communes where all possessions are held in common such as described in Acts.

[42] In most of Latin America, it was usual for progressive bishops to promote CEBs and conservative bishops to resist them. However, Brazil was unusual for the shared consensus between conservatives and progressives that the church should promote base communities. Support for base communities as a way of strengthening the church's presence in society was common in both the progressive and conservative wings of the Brazilian church. However, there was a marked difference on the social and political dimension to CEBs activity from diocese to diocese. For progressives, the orientation to social transformation was an integral part of the CEBs. For conservative critics, this politicisation was a serious deviation from the original purpose of the communities.

[43] Progressive women religious and/or the local priest were often critical in the establishment of a community, but as the CEB developed it was likely to become increasingly dependant on lay leadership.

[44] In practice, their effectiveness in this depended on their personalities, skills, and commitment to the participatory ideal. It would be naïve to believe that every CEB lived up to these high ideals in every situation, but it would be unduly cynical not to recognise the dramatic change toward more equal relationships created within the communities.

a problem and diagnosing its roots, the community could reflect on how they might solve it using their own means and initiatives.[45] Community level solutions could range from pooling resources into a small credit fund for members, working together to build a shared centre, organising a petition for traffic controls to protect pedestrians, or any manner of local community action.

The Historical Development of the CEBs

The political orientation of CEBs in the 1970s and 1980s did not materialise overnight. Base communities in Brazil were originally part of a nonpoliticised pastoral process in Brazil that predated the earliest publications in liberation theology. A number of early experiments in church renewal at a community level were made in the 1940s and 1950s. These provided a foundation for the emergence of the early base communities in the 1960s.[46] The ecclesial base communities extended this trend further in the late 1970s and early 1980s. After the mid-1980s, the momentum of the movement slowed, and after the return to formal democracy in 1985, the CEBs ceased to be the force they once were.[47]

To understand this history more precisely, a helpful distinction may be drawn between the early base communities of the 1960s and the later base *ecclesial* communities of the 1970s and 1980s.[48] In itself, the change in terminology did not mark a significant change in the nature of the communities, However, its timing overlapped with a more important change that was taking place, because in the early 1970s many base ecclesial communities were influenced by liberation theology. It was these activist communities—committed to social analysis and social transformation—that liberation theologians had in mind when they referred to CEBs in their work.[49]

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[45] The Medellín document on education encouraged the adoption of Freire's approach with its references to liberating education (esp. §§ 7–9).

[46] For an excellent recent overview, see A. Dawson, "The Origins and Character of the Base Ecclesial Community: A Brazilian Perspective" in C. Rowland (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 109–128 (esp. 110–113).

[47] The conservative upswing in the church in the 1980s and the retirement of bishops who supported the CEBs (and their replacement with less sympathetic or actively hostile bishops) also had a signficiant impact and is discussed at greater length in Chapter 11.

[48] In the 1960s, the ecclesial nature of the base communities was certainly recognised (and the movement endorsed by the CNBB in their national plans), but the term that was used was base communities not base ecclesial communities. However, after 1975, formal references to the movement invariably referred to the base ecclesial communities (or frequently the acronym CEBs) even though it was common for these to be abbreviated to base communities or simply communities in less formal references.

[49] Although, as noted above, liberation theologians referred to the communities as base communities or base ecclesial communities, it was invariably the social activist CEBs of the 1970s, not their earlier predecessors, that they meant.

Forerunners in the 1940s and 1950s

Notable amongst the precedents for the CEBs were the ecclesiological innovations in the Northeast diocese of Barra do Piraí and especially the popular catechesis movement associated with Dom Agnelo Rossi. Beginning in the 1950s, popular catechism sought to "extend evangelization and the presence of the church."[50] Lay leaders would substitute for the priest in those roles that were open to them in the absence of the priest. Although it was impossible to celebrate mass in this way, other aspects of worship were possible including weekly meetings with reading of the Bible and prayers.[51] Likewise, in the Amazon area of Maranhão from 1952 onward, the bishop of São Luis (Dom José Delgado) decentralized parishes into chapels and encouraged lay leadership in them. To support this shift, his auxiliary bishop (Dom Antônio Fragoso) provided training courses for lay administrators and maintained contact with them.[52]

Tentative origins for the political dimension of the CEBs may also be discerned in this period. In the late 1940s, the movement for adult education in the Northeast diocese of Natal under Dom Eugênio Sales linked the traditional concerns of catechesis to integral concerns for the whole human being. A similar concern for the whole human being became increasingly prominent in the radio-broadcast movement that started in the Northeast in the late 1950s and the Base Education Movement with its commitment to conscientization built on this foundation in the 1960s.[53] The Movement for a Better World might also be noted here. It spread to Brazil from Rome in the late 1950s and influenced both priests and bishops. It stressed the importance and urgency of social issues. Its social programs were firmly anticommunist rather than politically progressive in inspiration, but at least they posed an implicit challenge to the fatalistic acceptance of poverty and misery.

Emergence of Base Communities in 1960s

Early base communities appeared in Brazil in the early 1960s.[54] The communities offered the chance for participation at a more personal level in a social community as Brazilian society became increasingly disrupted by the effects of migration and industrialization. National support for the base communities in Brazil was first indicated in the Emergency Plan of 1962 drawn up in response

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[50] M. Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil* trans. J. Drury; (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press), p. 26.

[51] Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil*, pp. 25–27.

[52] Although he was moved from this position in 1963, Dom Fragoso continued to play a prominent role as a leader of the progressive church as bishop of Crateus (also in northeast Brazil). His story and reflections on the church's role are offered in his book A. B. Fragoso, *Face of a Church* (trans. R. R. Barr; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987).

[53] On Paulo Freire, conscientization and the Base Education Movement, see Chapter 3.

[54] At about the same time, base communities were also appearing elsewhere. For example, one of the earliest and most influential for Central America was San Miguelito in Panama City; see F. Bravo, *The Parish of San Miguelito in Panama* (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1966).

to a letter from John XXIII.[55] This was subsequently reaffirmed in the bishops' First Joint Pastoral Plan (1966–1970) with its recognition of the church as the people of God.[56]

The emphasis in Vatican II documents on active participation in the church (*Lumen Gentium*) and involvement with the world (*Gaudium et Spes*) gave the existing initiatives in Brazil official support and encouragement. In Brazil, the very process of disseminating Conciliar documents through courses, study sessions, and popularised publications started to build the new participatory pastoral model and take forward the existing experiments in lay participation in the church. This was a remarkable development in a church that had only just allowed the mass to be celebrated in the language of people attending and started to encourage people to read the Bible for themselves.

Throughout this period the role of base communities was understood in fairly traditional ways.[57] The relatively poor priest-to-population ratio in Brazil created a desperate need for more lay leadership if the church was to maintain its influence on society. The communities allowed the church to project its institutional presence, promote lay participation, and enrich relationships within the local church. The fact that evangelical churches and traditional Afro-Brazilian religions—both of which are significant in Brazil—have a much more participatory style may have encouraged the people of Brazil to support the base communities.

Radicalization of the CEBs in the 1970s

The CNBB, which was virtually silent on social matters since the 1964 coup, finally started to raise its voice in protest against the military regime in the 1970s.[58] By then, many leaders of the Brazilian church were progressively radicalized by the repressive measures of the military dictatorship, which were

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[55] CNBB, *Plano de Emergência para a Igreja do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Dom Bosco Editôra, 1963). It was formally adopted by the CNBB in 1963.

[56] CNBB, *Plano de Pastoral Conjunto 1966–70* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Dom Bosco Editôra, 1966). The plan recommended: "Our present parishes will or should be composed of various local communities and basic communities. . . . Thus it will be most important to undertake parish renewal through the creation of dynamization of these basic communities" (2nd ed. 1967, pp. 57–58; cited in Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil* p. 46 n. 21).

[57] The relative readiness with which the Brazilian church contemplated changes in the 1960s has been interpreted by some as a survival mechanism, a response to the social and economic changes of the preceding three decades. Proponents of this view argue that industrialisation and mobilization eroded the traditional power of the church over the people, and the church was eager to restore its institutional role. In this interpretation, the changes undertaken in the 1960s were to undercut the appeal of socialism (on social concerns) and Pentecostalism (on lay participation). The CNBB integrated the nascent local movements into their national plans, and thereby made them into a concern for the Brazilian church as a whole.

[58] See esp. D. Regan, *Church for Liberation: A Pastoral Portrait of the Church in Brazil* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Fowler Wright Books, 1987).

at their height from 1968 to 1974.[59] Hand-in-hand with this radicalisation of many in the church hierarchy at a grass-roots level, the base communities movement also developed a more radical political outlook after 1968.[60]

On 6 May 1973, the bishops from the Northeast and Amazon regions both published documents that sharply condemned abuses by the military regime and its human rights violations, "I Have Heard the Cries of My People" and "Marginalization of the People, Cry of the Churches."[61] Although the bishops in the Northeast and Amazon were still ahead of the CNBB, by now the CNBB was becoming increasing critical of the military. It was starting to express public concern not just over individual cases of human rights, but also of the widespread and entrenched social poverty in Brazil's National Security State. In 1972 and again in 1973, the CNBB stated its support for the Amazonian bishops. Increasingly, CNBB statements started to address issues of poverty and commit the church to the poor.[62]

As the military clamped down on opposition organizations and prevented political meetings that might voice criticism of the regime, the base communities came to the fore as voices of protest on behalf of the poor majority in the 1970s.[63]

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[59] Hélder Câmara and other outspoken bishops voiced criticism of the government on a number of occasions. The Dominican Affair of November 1969 was a particularly high-profile example of tensions with the church. On 4 November, Carlos Marighella (the leader of the guerrilla group Alliance for National Liberation, ALN) was caught in São Paulo and the church came under suspicion for helping him. A nationwide investigation eventually accused eleven Dominicans, one Jesuit, and two secular priests of aiding subversives. The Dominican Carlos Christo was arrested on 9 November and spent twenty-two months in trial before being sentenced in September 1971 to four more years in prison. Christo's writings in prison were published as C. Christo, *Against Principalities and Powers* (trans. J. Drury; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977; U.K. ed., *Letters from a Prisoner of Conscience* [London: Lutterworth, 1978]). The shocking treatment of one jailed Dominican, Father Tito de Alençar (graphically described in a letter from the prison), led him to commit suicide on his release (see Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, pp. 321–324).

[60] Barbé (*Grace and Power*, p. 92) writes: "By Christmas of 1968, after the toughening of the regime in December of that year, the priests and religious—the 'agents of pastoral ministry'—had to make a choice: either join the guerrilla forces and the clandestine subversion, as urged by certain Marxist and even Christian elements of the middle class, or attach themselves, more seriously than before, to a pastoral labour at the base, in order to get close to the worker militants and peasants and form communities with them. Those options were never laid out with the clarity just used here, but they were real." The radicalization of Catholic Action and the MEB in the early 1960s provided a precursor to this shift in the base communities in the early 1970s.

[61] Mainwaring (*The Catholic Church*, p. 93) comments, "At the time, these two documents were probably the most radical statements ever issued by a group of bishops anywhere in the world."

[62] Mainwaring divides the CNBB's attitude to the dictatorship into three periods: "After virtually supporting the military regime (1964–1968), it raised a timid voice against the repressive excesses (1968–1972) and finally a much stronger voice against violations of human rights and authoritarian excesses (1972–1982)" (*The Catholic Church*, p. 112).

[63] An important precedent for this was the so-called Catholic Left, which was radicalized during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Within the Catholic Left, the Young Catholic

In the CEBs people were able to discuss politics in ways that were not possible elsewhere. This contributed to a self-reinforcing process by which the CEBSs increased in their importance for Brazilian society during the military dictatorships. They attracted involvement from those committed to social change, and became increasingly political in their outlook.

The more progressive leadership of the CNBB (elected in 1972) helped give the communities at least some protection. Meanwhile, liberation theology encouraged the communities to view their social involvement and political actions as promoting the kingdom of God and living out a new reality of being the church.[64]

The Significance of the CEBs

Church and Society

The CEBs changed the face of Brazilian society. Bible reading and discussions in the CEBs often generated community actions and social projects. Usually, these started at fairly modest local level with objectives that would directly benefit the local community (a daycare centre, a food cooperative, a school, or health

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Students (JUC) and Popular Action deserve special mention as anticipations of the radicalization of the CNBB and the CEBs in the 1970s (see Mainwaring, *The Catholic Church*, pp. 60–75). The JUC began in the 1930s as part of Brazilian Catholic Action (a clerically controlled conservative movement addressed to the future elite of the nation). However, with the reorganistation of Brazilian Catholic Action in the late 1940s, the JUC became more independent of clerical control started to work more closely with the national student movement. By 1960, JUC was actively involved in student and national politics and was highly critical of the social problems facing Brazil. In 1961, the Brazilian hierarchy started to take sanctions against the movement and it was eventually disbanded in 1966. However, Popular Action (Ação Popular) quickly replaced JUC as the channel for radical Catholic political action. Popular Action was created in 1961 and became a small, but highly influential force in left-wing Brazilian politics. It favoured revolution and endorsed socialist policies more clearly than was ever the case in JUC, but it remained highly critical of the Soviet Union and insisted on the importance of freedom and pluralism. After the 1964 coup, it was forced underground and underwent a further sequence of radicalization that propelled it toward Maoism and armed struggle. By this time, it had moved away from its original Christian identity, and in 1973, its remaining members joined the Communist Party of Brazil.

[64] For liberationist ecclesiology of the CEBs, see L. Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (trans. J. Diercksmeier; New York: Crossroad; London: SCM Press, 1985 [Portuguese orig. 1981]); P. Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), pp. 64–68; J. Marins, T. M. Trevisan and C. Chanona, *The Church from the Roots: Basic Ecclesial Communities* (London: Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, 1989 [ET 1983]); S. Torres and J. Eagleson (eds.), *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Papers from the International Ecumenical Congress of Theology, 1980, São Paulo, Brazil; trans. J. Drury; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981). For a Protestant perspective, see G. Cook, *The Expectation of the Poor: Latin American Basic Ecclesial Communities in Protestant Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985).

clinics; electricity, water, sewer systems, and paved roads). In time, the community might develop and join with other communities to address more national and structural issues such as minimum wages, working conditions, land distribution, and political campaigns.

Equally important, the communities provided experience of a working democracy. This often had a profound effect on participants. They developed confidence, understanding, and practical skills that were transferable to other political projects as the basis for participation in long-term social transformation far beyond any immediate work of the CEBs. Many of those involved in the transition to democracy in Brazil in the 1980s developed their political awareness and leadership skills in the CEBs.

For the Brazilian church, the CEBs provided new energy and a new relevance in many working-class and rural areas. Furthermore, as the movement became part of a national pastoral plan, they prompted the institutional church to assert its role in national political life. The church—and the CEBs themselves—often paid a heavy price for these social initiatives. However, for the many participants involved, it gave a new sense of pride and value in the church's social role and gained admiration from around the world.

At an ecclesiological level, the CEBs were also significant because they modelled an alternative vision for the church's own institutional relations. The CEBs provided a model of lay leadership and democratic principles that raised questions about the appropriateness of existing church hierarchies. Analysis and criticism of power structures led thoughtful members to envisage alternative power structures within the church.

For the Roman *curia* this reinvention of church relations was a highly sensitive issue. In the 1980s, it was at the heart of the difficult relationship between the Brazilian church and the Vatican. Although the Vatican endorsed the CEBs and saw them as a valuable tool in promoting the active and energetic presence of the church in society, it was always concerned that the CEBs be kept under firm ecclesial control. As a result, the CEBs could have an uneasy relationship with institutional authorities. Although they officially operated within the structures of the institutional church, and at least in Brazil the CEBs were part of an officially endorsed pastoral plan, their democratic nature was an implicit critique of the hierarchical church.[65]

The Reorientation of Liberation Theology

The CEBs prompted profound changes in liberation theology as a theological movement. In the communities, liberation theology interacted with real people and their problems. This interaction gave the developing theology a much stronger popular base than is normally the case for an academic theology and encouraged a new methodological emphasis on dialogue and a new epistemo-

[65] Chapter 11 examines how this tension created in the 1970s became an open conflict in the 1980s.

logical interest in the experiences of the poor as the starting point for theology.

Engagement with the poor converted liberation theology much more profoundly than anyone expected. Everyday experiences of oppression started to take precedence as the starting point for theology. Liberation theologians started to recognise the struggles of the poor as a privileged *locus* of theology—a place were God was specially revealed in history. Gutiérrez's book *The Power of the Poor in History* and Sobrino's *The True Chruch and the Poor* both reflected this new outlook and provided its theological foundation.[66] This was not intended to romanticize either the poor or their state of poverty. Gutiérrez was clear that:

> The preference for the poor is based on the fact that God, as Christ shows us, loves them for their concrete, real condition of poverty, 'whatever may be' their moral or spiritual disposition.[67]

Liberation theologians started to engage in a genuine dialogue with the poor, so as to learn from them. Picking up the challenge laid down by Freire's work on dialogical education, liberation theologians sought to listen to the poor and be their partners in articulating their experiences and faith. As a result, liberation theology became distinctive in terms of *who* did theology. The common split between the academic theologian and the people was rejected; instead, the theologian was challenged to forge an organic solidarity with the people.[68] Thus, after the mid-1970s liberation theology would often take place in at least three different levels: the professional, the pastoral, and the popular. At each level, there was a different emphasis in the theological forms even though each level was interdependent on the others.[69] In a classic image, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff refer to the different parts of a tree to explain the different parts of this single process:

> Liberation theology could be compared to a tree. Those who see only professional theologians at work in it see only the branches of the tree. They fail to see the trunk which is the thinking of priests and other pastoral ministers, let alone the roots beneath the soil that hold the whole tree—trunk and branches—in place. The roots are the practical living and thinking—though submerged and anonymous—going on in tens of thousands of base communities living out their faith and thinking it in a liberating key.[70]

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[66] Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (trans. R. R. Barr; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London: SCM Press, 1983 [Spanish orig. 1979]); J. Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (trans. Matthew O'Connell; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London: SCM, 1984 [Spanish orig. 1981]).

[67] Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, p. 138; cp Sobrino. In locating the preference for the poor in their struggles with poverty and not in any merit that they have as people, Gutiérrez and Sobrino, p. 137, reaffirmed the line of teaching that went back to *Rerum Novarum* that there was nothing specially deserving about the poor as people but they should be given special consideration because of their situation (see p. 46).

[68] On the practical ways that such solidarity might be shown at different levels of commitment, see L. and C. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, p. 24.

[69] See the chart in L. and C. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, p. 13.

[70] L. and C. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, p. 12.

Not all of the earliest pioneers of liberation theology were unhappy with this new orientation. Juan Luis Segundo saw the shift in the 1970s as effectively creating two different theologies of liberation.[71] The first, which was prompted by work with students' movements, was concerned with the social function of ideologies. It critiqued the role of Christianity in Latin American class interests that Christianity traditionally served. Its purpose was to "de-idologise" Christianity by rigorous ideological suspicion.[72] Because the context of this work was the universities, those who first received it were not the oppressed, but middle-class students who were concerned with the liberation of the poor previously held back by oppressive elements that they saw as constituent parts of their faith.[73] In contrast to this, Segundo outlined the second type of liberation of theology arising from a new context for theologising: the common people.[74] This type of theology emphasised learning from the common people, structuring the common people's understanding of faith, and grounding the practices coming from this faith.

Segundo himself remained firmly in the former camp. He left open the extent to which the two approaches were complementary or opposed and simply wished to emphasise how deep the division between them went.[75]

CONCLUSION

To understand the development of liberation theology in the 1970s, it is essential to recognise this interaction between its academic literature and its ecclesial manifestations. The base communities that sprang up throughout Latin America, especially in Brazil and Central America, provided fertile soil for lib-

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[71] J. L. Segundo, "Two Theologies of Liberation," *The Month* 17 (October 1984); reprinted in Hennelly (ed.), *Liberation Theology*, pp. 353–366.

[72] A classic example of this strand is J. L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (trans. J. Drury; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; 1976 [Spanish orig. 1976]). See also the five-volume Christology he wrote in the 1980s, *Jesus of Nazareth, Yesterday and Today* (5 vols., trans. J. Drury, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London: Sheed and Ward; 1984–1989 [Spanish origs. 1982–1985]). For good overviews of Segundo's work, see Marsha Hewitt, *From Theology to Social Theory: Juan Luis Segundo and the Theology of Liberation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); A. T. Hennelly, *Theology for a Liberating Church: The New Praxis of Freedom* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1989).

[73] Segundo, "Two Theologies of Liberation," pp. 357–358.

[74] Segundo notes: "This context was already there in most Latin American countries, but it was discovered, so to speak, with the help of some popular or populist movements, which came to public attention in the early 1970s and still more openly in the late 1970s.... Thus, Enrique Dussel coined for theologians and pastoral agents the expression, the discipleship of the poor; Leonardo Boff spoke about a new 'ecclesiogenesis,' a church born from the poor; and Gustavo Gutiérrez chose as the title of his new book *The Power of the Poor in History*; Segundo, "Two Theologies of Liberation", pp. 358–360.

[75] Thus, he concluded: "... after twenty years at work, liberation theology is profoundly alive on our continent, although taking different forms in different classes or groups of society"; Segundo, "Two Theologies of Liberation," p. 365.

eration theology and ensured that the impact of liberation theology would spread much further than most theological movements. However, the CEBs were more than passive recipients of liberation theology.

The writing of liberation theologians stimulated and directed the growth of the popular church, and the needs and experiences of the popular church stimulated and redirected the writing of liberation theology. Theologians became actively engaged with CEBs and sought to engage with the concerns of CEBs. This had a profound effect on the style and focus of their theological work. The involvement of an increasingly mass popular movement in the vision of liberation theology started to transform the movement in the 1970s. The CEBs prompted many liberation theologians to focus on how their work could support the church at a popular level.

Whereas many of the early works in liberation theology prior to 1975 were clearly intended with a well-educated audience in mind, as the 1970s progressed, liberation theologians were prompted to reconsider the insights in the movement's earliest publications in the light of their creative theological partnership with the base communities and their readings of the Bible. In the process, they began to open up further theological avenues for exploration. It was this shift, which can be dated from 1975–1979 onward, that marked the transition from opting to write a theology *for* the poor to a theology *from* the poor. Liberation theologians engaged with the people's thoughts and ideas as they arose from everyday life in the light of Christian faith. In turn, they offered theological reflections intended to strengthen and sustain the people in their journey of faith as the people of God.