Light and darkness interact throughout today’s world, and also within the latinamerican church. So how may we be light for all people? On one side, there are honest persons and courageous organizations, and on another side, there is plenty of global inequality and colonial obscurity.

Our journey’s take place on bumpy roads. Pedro Casaldaliga offers a good clue. The church (and humanity) undergoes temptations: “to resign memory, to resign the cross and commitment, to resign utopia and hope”. These are not only bumpy temptations; these are obscure parts of our history, and also opportunities to change course. The focus of this essay is being faithful as People of God and being communities of the Poor.

Section one deals with landmarks. Section two underlines a prophetic ecclesiology guided by the Spirit. Thus I wish to take up challenges of Lumen Gentium, of Medellín’s Pobreza de la Iglesia and Pastoral de Conjunto, of Puebla’s sections that refer to being Pueblo de Dios. An awesome challenge is that ecclesial renewal be not self-centered but rather for the benefit of humanity and the universe.

1) Landmarks in people’s faith/church.

During more than 500 years, common people have been reconstructing the church in the world. This happens when faith and justice go hand in hand, when community is nurtured by ministries and charisms, when koinonia leads to diakonia, when catholic laity is a beacon among marginal people, when prophetic documents and mainly martyrs open the way to mission, when we join others who seek deep changes within history. All of this has been taking place in spite of colonial and neo-colonial political and cultural darkness, and in spite of shameful collaboration when unjust powers are sacralized. May I briefly mention five major

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*Input in “Celebrating the power of Lumen Gentium (50 years)”, at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, sept 17, 2014.

1 Pedro Casaldaliga, “Los pobres, interpelación a la Iglesia”, Congreso de Teología de la Asociación Juan XXIII, Madrid (1996); www.servicioskoinonia.org/Casaldaliga/textos “Tentaciones que acechan a la iglesia y, a su modo, a la entera humanidad: la tentación de renunciar a la memoria, la tentación de renunciar a la cruz y a la militancia, y la tentación de renunciar a la utopía, a la esperanza” (accessed 12/8/2014).
landmarks: people’s faith, associations, prophetic texts, witness through martyrdom, joyful historical change (and its church of the poor). Let me again underline that all of this happens in the midst of darkness, due to external and internal colonialism.

Since the middle of the 16th century indigenous and non-indigenous have warm contacts with Transcendence. For example, in Mexico: “Sancta Maria, in inantzin in huel nelli Teotl Dios, in Ipalmemokuani” 2 (=Saint Mary, dear mother of true God, giver of life). In other regions afro-americans with their axé (=wholistic power) acknowledge Christ as Black 3. In everyday patterns (that disagree with official standards) catholic faith/church has been indigenous, black, mestizo, suprapatriarchal, human-cosmic. The main thrust is sharing the faith; and a secondary factor is participation in church. These patterns, scorned by colonial catholic elites and institutions, do survive up till now in marginal ways.

Another set of landmarks, carried out during more than five centuries, is a wide spectrum of networks, wisdoms and spiritualities4. Thus there is a latinamerican tradition of ´people´s church´ (although this concept is rarely used). It is due to millions of rituals and of associations, during ancient and republican phases of our history, where common people structurally and symbolically subvert colonial and neo-colonial frameworks. What are most outstanding are festive rituals that imply love and solidarity among people (which is a way of being church). This is strengthened since the 1950´s up till today, due to basic christian communities (“comunidades de base”), biblical circles (“lectura comunitaria de la Palabra”), charismatic renewal, catholic devotions with lay and particularly women´s leadership, renewed catechetical programs.

Moreover, during the last 5 decades, prophetic texts and witness through martyrdom are reshaping the church. Lumen Gentium opened the way to creative proposals from Medellin (1968) to Aparecida (2007) and in a special way the poor church (Medellin’s Pobrez de la Iglesia), community and shared pastoral action

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2 Nican Mopohua (1556), Miguel León Portilla, Tonantzin Guadalupe, Mejico: FCE, 2002, 100.
3 Antonio Aparecido da Silva, “Elementos e pressupostos da reflexao teologica a partir das comunidades negras”, in ATABAQUE-ASSET, Teologia afro-americana, Sao Paulo: Paulus, 1997, 72: “...o Cristo negro, bem como o Cristo indio, e tambem mulher. Deus se identifica com seu povo, e o povo se reconhece no rosto negro, indio e feminino de Deus”. Unfortunately, the elites are not able to see indigenous, afro-latinamerican, and feminist ways of being church, and special ways of acknowledging themselves in God.
Church renewal aroused opposition from religious elites who were behind the assassination of Oscar Romero (24/3/1980) and of 5 jesuits and Elba and Celina in San Salvador (16/11/1989). Prophetic martyrdom and bloody persecutions are paradoxical landmarks of hope.

Finally, hope grows in the midst of joyful and wholistic change. Throughout *Evangelii Gaudium*, everyday concerns are combined with structural and spiritual challenges seen by Pope Francis: transformation of the church in today’s world and social/personal/joyful evangelization (where we find footprints of latinamerican experience and wisdom). “Joy experienced daily, amid the little things of life”; “being Church means being God’s people… where everybody can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel”; “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them” (EG 4, 114, 157) ². ¡Daily joy and structural change! ¡People’s of God who are poor! ¡Good news of life for all!

All of this mean ecclesiological breakthroughs (which do not happen through magic). A breakthrough allows us to have lengthy and difficult journeys. With systematic thinking, with communal prayer, with joyful and clever strategies, faith/church may continue flourishing in different parts of the world.

2) Ecclesiology: human, spiritual, prophetic.

Often reflections about the Church are institutionally pragmatic, and boringly doctrinal. These paths are irrelevant (now and tomorrow). Today and in coming years ecclesiology needs courageous insights and systematic reconstruction. My small presentation (and all that is carried out these days in Duquesne University) may be hopeful if it deals with key human, spiritual, prophetic elements. The metaphor of tiny yeast and large amounts of flour (cf Mt

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(13:33) is adequate for small and significant events. In anonymous Christian communities (and at times in doctrinal texts) there are substantial breakthroughs.

In spite of worldly and of ecclesiastical obstacles, Latin American thinking (and also teaching by our Bishops) has been drawing good guidelines. There has been a creative “reception” of Lumen Gentium’s accent on being People of God and on being a church of mystery and sacrament in the world. During five decades our Bishop’s teaching has been underlining option for the poor, community in all its dimensions, and recently we have agreed upon a wholistic mission. At the same time, there are huge obstacles, such as ecclesiastical complicity with unjust powers, lack of support towards basic communities and ministries, and three decades of misinterpretation of liberation theology.

Shortly after Medellin (in Sucre, 1972) conservative leadership took over CELAM and begun dismantling reforms and spearheading campaigns against theologians (considering them unfaithful to the magisterium and contaminated by marxism). A major obstacle has been that doctrine about being People of God has been marginalized (as it happened mainly during the 1985 Synod on Vatican II) and “communion” has been highlighted. However, significant voices and institutions have carried forth Vatican II reforms, acknowledging the church’s vocation to be God’s people and community, and reading the signs of the times (in the midst of tensions and debates over the meaning of the Council). A key experience has been solidarity and service to the downtrodden where Christ is encountered; thus we have a christological understanding of people of God (that needs a pneumatological approach).

Latinamerican ecclesiology has propelled a “faithful creativity” when it carries out its reception of text and spirit of Lumen Gentium. “Christ is the light of all nations… and that radiance of His brightens the countenance of the Church” (LG 1); she is a sacrament in Christ, and “becomes on earth the initial budding

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7 See LG 1, 9:3, 26:1, 48:2, SC 5:2 and in a special way LG 1: “bring to all humanity the light of Christ”. The Church is sacrament/mysterion, and this happens within human history, and in a special way among the “little ones”.

8 Texts in footnote 5.


10 Idem, 118ff. See points of view of Card. Ratzinger (in footnote 9). Shortly after the Council, Y. Congar had argued that the category people of God is insufficient and that it needs to be understood in terms of body of Christ (“La iglesia como pueblo de Dios”, Concilium, 1, 1965, 9-33).
forth of the kingdom” (LG 5). When kingdom and church -and people of God and church- go hand in hand, she is not self-centered. All are aware of controversies in the preparation of the Council, and during the 1985 Synod on the Council (that has dealt with key doctrinal issues).

As a matter of fact, the biblical and patristic images of Church (LG 6 to 8) surpassed the juridical perspective of Vatican I; and it opened many windows to fresh air on episcopal collegiality, ecumenism, religious freedom. These and other concerns have had an impact in Latin America, where ecclesiology underlined being people of God and solidarity with the poor. As is well known, Lumen Gentium was approved by 2151 yes and 5 no (and promulgated on nov. 24, 1964); and like all of Vatican II it is an enlightening treasure up till today. It also deserves critical and on going “reception”. For example, Giuseppe Alberigo points out an “excessive tendency to refer to Christ and the marginal role accorded to the Holy Spirit seen in the overall structure of the Council’s declarations” 12. Throughout Latinamerica, significant persons and communities have been reframing Lumen Gentium in terms of church as community, solidarity with the poor, and a joyful and also decolonizing mission. This implies service to humanity’s wellbeing (and not simply a focus on ecclesiastical issues).

When the Gospel is the guiding light of ecclesiology, it can read the signs of the times, and for example, confront individualism and a market of desires. Our major problem today is not secularism, but rather secular absolutes (that in many ways function as belief in gods). Thus, in the world of today people have cultural-economic wounds, and are called to resign to well disguised idols 13. All of this implies that having faith in the living God (and doing it as communities of faith)
means also unbelief in modern absolutes and non consumption of worldly seudo happiness. These are huge challenges; that are dealt with systematic and daily behavior. It is most difficult to deal with them, since individualism and market idols touch us each day in almost invisible ways. However, it may be said that due to many tiny flowers, a huge garbage area is transformed.

In recent times, in Latin America some are making a distinction between theology/ecclesiology “of the people” (and say that Pope Francis has this framework) and theology/ecclesiology “of liberation” 14. The first is described as understanding religion as a mediation between people´s faith and inculturated theology 15. Most theologians see liberation as mainly engaging people and its faith. The above mentioned distinction does not consider several strands of latinamerican theology and a polysemic liberation. Moreover major challenges of today seem to be understanding the faith vis a vis the bumpy roads of the global market, individuation, cyberculture, social inequality, different images of God. In terms of being Church in contexts of abundance, recently Pope Francis warned in Korea the “temptation to remove the poor from very prophetic structures of the Church and to make you become an affluent Church for the affluent, a Church of the well-to-do, perhaps not to the point of developing a ´theology of prosperity´ but a Church of mediocrity” 16. Being away from the poor implies mediocrity.

May I conclude with the priority of being today and tomorrow a latinamerican church nurtured by pneumatology 17. Thus we may move beyond obstacles in areas of memory, cross and commitment, utopia (as spelled out by Pedro Casaldaliga). Such movements are like yeast in the midst of much flour, like tiny lights and fresh flowers in the midst of darkness, as we move ahead throughout bumpy communal-spiritual journeys.

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16 Francis to the Bishops of Korea, in [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/august_20140814](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/august_20140814)