



SACRAMENTALISM versus DISCIPLESHIP

By Tarcisio Beal

The recent controversy over the Catholic formula used to baptize children and others, once again, exposes how “sacred” power and control have throughout the centuries twisted the ultimate meaning of Christian discipleship. According to a report from the *New York Times/San Antonio Express-News* (February 20, 2022), Father Andrés Arango, pastor of St. Gregory Catholic Church, in Phoenix, Arizona, has baptized thousands of children with the wrong formula and, therefore, invalidly—because, instead of saying, “I” baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” he said “We baptize you...” The Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith confirmed that Arango’s baptisms, which he also performed in Brazil and in the Diocese of San Diego, California, did not make the recipients Christians. Thomas J. Olmstead, Archbishop of Phoenix, added that “baptism is a requirement for salvation.”

The same controversy is now involving the Church of St. Anastasia, in the Archdiocese of Detroit. Fathers Matthew Hood and Mark Springer have both acknowledged using “We baptize you” instead of “I baptize you.” “The Church”—said one parishioner—“is hung up on a single word.” Never mind that, in the case of baptism, “we” actually has meant, throughout the centuries, “the Christian community.”

Another controversy stirred by some archconservative cardinals and bishops relates to Pope Francis’ prohibition of the Tridentine Latin mass. A feature of the Council of Trent, the Latin mass allows the celebrant to monopolize the liturgy, even if allowing some songs in the people’s native language and having lay distributors of the Eucharist place the bread in the faithful’s hand. Worst of all, the prayers of the Holy Friday continued to blame the Jewish people as the killers of Jesus. After Vatican II, however, the mass began to be celebrated in the vernacular and the participation of the faithful greatly increased. But Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, whose hierarchalism and insistence upon Tridentine liturgical regulations were well known, restored the Latin mass. Now that Pope Francis has restricted its use, some archconservative Catholics, including some cardinals and bishops, are quite unhappy and very critical of the Pope. Msgr. Andrew Wadsworth, an Englishman from the Archdiocese of Birmingham and President of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, harshly criticized Pope Francis’ decision to proscribe the Tridentine mass, obviously because he wishes to have an English version that literally repeats the Latin mass. He also blasted any mass celebration that includes the participation of the people with their own native language, specifically the natives of the Andes. For Wadsworth, such practices are equivalent to the worship of Pachamama, the fertility goddess of the Incas.

Now, given the current proposal for the beatification of six Black

Catholics (Pierre Toussaint, founder of Catholic Charities; Henriette DeLille, founder of the Sisters of the Holy Family; Father Augustus Tolton; Julia Greeley, Denver’s “Angel of Charity;” Mother Mary Lange, founder and Superior of the Oblate Sisters of Divine Providence; and Thea Bourman, of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration), we should briefly look into the historical process of canonization and its present shortcomings. If the traditional rules about declaring someone a saintly follower of Jesus are again enacted, quite a number of names might be eliminated and others not even considered. That’s because of the requirement of at least one certified miracle as defined by Church authorities. The present canonization process to declare someone a saint was established by the Council of Trent in mid-16th century after the certification of at least one miracle. However, since the early Church and throughout the Middle Ages, as the community of the faithful venerated someone as a saint, the Church authorities would concur and place him/her on the list of the holy ones. There was no lengthy process to verify whether he/she had performed miraculous deeds. It must also be noted that the list of saints grew exponentially after the invention of the printing press and that the largest portion of them were intellectuals, hermits, and members of the clergy or the religious Orders.

Today, it is the people of God who initiate the process that ends in a decision of the Roman Curia. In fact, from the late 1960s to the 1990s, the terror of Latin American military dictators and their allies, mostly land barons, multiplied into the thousands the number of Christian martyrs now venerated by the people. The majority were persecuted and killed because they helped and defended the poor and the persecuted. Between 1978 and 1990, 750,000 Salvadorans were slaughtered by government and para-military squads, including (1) Four American missionaries (the Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clark; the Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel; and the lay missionary Jean Donovan, all pictured below) who, on their way to the airport were raped, killed and buried inside small trenches along the highway, on December 2, 1980; (2) six Jesuit professors of the University of San Salvador (Antonio López Quintana, Ignacio Ella-

curia, Juan Ramón Pardo, Joaquín López y López, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and Segundo Montes Mozo) plus their housemaids Elbal Julia Ramos and her daughter Celina Maricet Ramos, all killed on November 16, 1989.

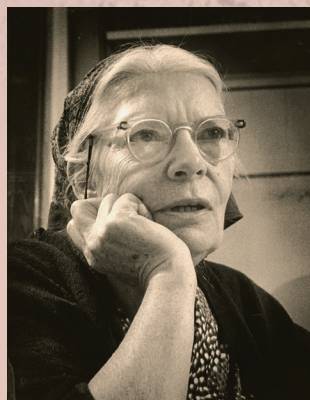
While many Salvadorans started to venerate these martyrs, Jean Kirkpatrick, U.S. Delegate at the United Nations and a supporter of President Reagan’s military funding of the Salvadoran government, uttered the following comment: “Those nuns weren’t just nuns, you know, they were political activists.” This kind of excuse or justification typifies the archconservative stance of



many wealthy Catholics and several prelates. It brings to mind what San Salvador's martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero, assassinated on March 24, 1980 and now declared a saint by Pope Francis, said during his visit to the University of Louvain, Belgium: "The political dimension of the faith is nothing else than the response of the Church to the exigencies of the socio-political world in which the Church lives. We rediscovered that these demands are fundamental to the faith, and the Church cannot ignore them."

Another major area of terror that produced many martyrs was Honduras' Olancho Province. The Honduran army, under Gal. Alberto Melgar, sacked the churches and convents arresting 32 priests and nuns. Honduras had the strongest labor union of small farmers (*Unión Nacional de Campesinos*, with 140,000 members) and this greatly irritated the land barons, especially José Manuel Zelaya, who was behind the arrest and killing of the Colombian priests Ivan Betancur and Wisconsin-born Franciscan Father Jerome Cypher. The big landowners greatly resented the defense of basic human rights and land rights of the campesinos by these priests. In June 1975, they were held first in jail, then taken to Zelaya's Los Horones Ranch and barbarously tortured, dumped into a 150 meter deep hole along with two young campesinos and dynamited into ashes. Zelaya was never punished for his horrendous crimes.

The canonization of Oscar Romero (pictured above) has increased the probabilities that all the martyrs mentioned thus far will also be considered to be officially declared saints by the Church. We must also add the names of Father Hector Gallego who was also a strong defender of the poor farmers and was murdered in Veraguas, Panama; of the Argentinian Enrique Angelleli, Bishop of La Rioja, at the bottom of the Andes, a fearless defender of the natives, killed by the police, who pushed him into a deadly car accident, then claimed it was caused by the bishop himself. The killing of Angelleli occurred at a time when the Argentine armed forces were openly persecuting Jews and exalting Hitler and the Nazis—to the point of inviting the people to come to the Buenos Aires Basilica to celebrate a mass in honor of "our friend and brother, Adolph Hitler." Furthermore, there is quite a number of Latin American clergymen whose lifestyle and Jesuan example should lead Rome to declare them saints, specifically the Brazilians Padre Cícero Romão Batista, Dom Hélder Câmara, Archbishop of Olinda-Recife, and Paulo Evaristo Arns, Cardinal-Archbishop of São Paulo, who was my mentor during my theological studies. Since the latter two were prominent in the creation of the new Church envisaged by Vatican II and are well-known, we would like to briefly tell the story of *Padim (Godfather) Cícero*, as the people of the State of Ceará called him.



Pastor of the town of Juazeiro, Ceará, Padre Cícero was celebrating mass in 1889 and had placed the sacred host in the mouth of Maria de Araújo when something miraculous happened: the woman started bleeding profusely through her mouth. The people called it "a miracle" and connected it with the celebrant. Rome's Holy Office became alarmed with the multiplication of "beatas" like Maria de Araújo, blamed the surge of popular devotions on Padre Cícero, placed them under strict clerical control 1895 and, in 1896,



prohibited him from celebrating mass. In 1916, he was excommunicated, reinstated, then expelled from the priesthood on March 3, 1926. He died in 1934. Keep in mind that since Vatican I (1870), the major push of Rome was aimed at re-europeanization or re-romanization of the Church. That meant that popular devotions and shrines outside of Europe were viewed with suspicion. Rome was especially irritated with Juazeiro and the Brazilian "beatas." Vatican II and Liberation Theology have been viewing popular devotions much more positively and now Pope Francis is specifically looking into the story of Padre Cícero whom he called "a model example of a changing Church."

Now, there is also at least one American who, we believe, should be among the list of new official saints of the Church, namely, Dorothy Day (pictured below)—a courageous and wholly Catholic woman who championed the Catholic Workers Movement and who, in the 1960s, faced the opposition of the hierarchs, especially of the Cardinal-Archbishop of Los Angeles and his clergy. She viewed Christian spirituality as inseparable from social justice: "We are working for a new heaven and a new earth where justice dwelleth. We are trying to say it with action 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!.' We are working for a Christian social order" (cf., Cornell, T, Ellsberg, R, & Forrest, T., *A penny a copy. Readings from the Catholic Worker*. New York: Orbis, 1995, p. 31).

Pope Francis is now leading the Church to be truly apostolic by re-emphasizing synodality and the true meaning of the sacraments. At least until the 4th century, the only sacrament (from the Latin "*sacramentum*:" an oath of allegiance to a specific lifestyle) was a commitment to follow the example of Jesus. The imposition of specific clergy-controlled liturgical ceremonies were first enshrined in the Canon Law by the Council Lateran IV (1215). Nevertheless, many local churches kept on celebrating the Eucharist as the gathering of the community to share its faith and human resources. The Gallican/French Church, for instance, continued to celebrate the Eucharist as an *agape*, a feast of life, of shared nourishment and of love. In São Paulo, Brazil, during the last decades of the 20th century, the suburban pastor Padre Zézinho, a well-known defender of the poor, had his congregation sing the following hymn at Communion time:

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| Amar como Jesus amou | To love as Jesus loved, |
| Sonhar como Jesus sonhou, | To dream as Jesus dreamt, |
| Pensar como Jesus pensou, | To think as Jesus thought, |
| Viver como Jesus viveu, | To live as Jesus lived, |
| Sentir como Jesus sentia, | To feel as Jesus felt, |
| Sorrir como Jesus sorria: | To smile as Jesus smiled: |
| E ao chegar of fim do dia | And by the end of the day |
| Eu sei que eu dormiria muito mais feliz! | I know I would sleep so much happier! |

Ultimately, the only sacrament necessary for salvation is the "love of neighbor." Without it, all seven sacraments lose their meaning and effectiveness.

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