

1968: A Global Perspective

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The Poor Will Always Be with Us: On the Preferential Option for the Poor

The convening of the Medellin Congress of the Latin American bishops and the emergence of the "Preferential Option for the Poor" are pivotal moments in the post-Vatican II reformation of the Catholic Church, especially in the Americas. Pedro Casaldiliga, Bishop of Sao Felix, Brazil, summed up the events of 1968 "as nothing less than the provision of a new identity for the Church by, on the one hand, shaking its excessively hierarchical structure, and, on the other, galvanizing a 'popular Church'." Time has shown that this optimism might have been somewhat misplaced as the Catholic hierarchy quickly reasserted itself with the publication of Paul VI's encyclical *Humane Vitae* that same year. This paper will trace the legacy of 1968 on Catholic social teaching as illustrated by these two events.