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Q & A: Bishop Jaime Soto

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Distinctly Catholic

This week at Q & A we are looking at the contributions of Pope Benedict to the life of the Church. This examination is prompted by the release of a new book about the Pontiff from the USCCB, *Pope Benedict XVI: Essays and Reflections on His Papacy*. It is natural that Americans tend to look at the Pope's contributions through the lens of our national experience, but I wanted to also see how the Pope is contributing to the life of the Church beyond our borders. So, today, we have comments from Bishop Jaime Soto of Sacramento, who attended the meeting of the Latin American bishops' conference (CELAM) at Aparecida, where the Pope gave a memorable address. Bishop Soto's comments amplify the earlier observations of some of our contributors this week.

The question: How has Pope Benedict contributed to the life of the Church?

Bishop Soto:

The Fifth General Conference of CELAM took place in Aparecida during the month of May, 2007. Early in the proceedings during one of the keynote addresses, Bishop Carlos Aguiar, now the Archbishop of Tlalnepantla, Mexico proposed a question for the gathered assembly of cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons, religious and laity. He asked whether the dramatic changes overtaking the continent were a sign of an age of change or change of the age. In other words, was the Church experiencing a time of much change or was the Church and the Latin-American continent going through a change of paradigm? This was a key question that would stimulate much of the dialogues that would continue through the weeks of the Fifth Conference under the shadow of the widely-venerated Marian image of the Our Lady of Aparecida.

At this conference, the bishops from the United States and Canada participated, not only as auditors, as was done in previous conferences. The bishops from the Episcopal Conferences of North America were able to dialogue with their brother bishops as well as given a vote. This fraternal gesture was a bow to the growing globalization that has wrapped the peoples of the American Continent more closely together and

made more urgent the call to see ourselves as one Church, united in the one mind and the one heart of Christ.

It is with this hopeful challenge that the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, spoke to his brother bishops during the opening address for the Conference in Aparecida: "God is the foundational reality, not a God who is merely imagined or hypothetical, but God with a human face; he is God-with-us, the God who loves even to the Cross." The human face of God is found in the person of Jesus. His face is found as well in the humanity of those persons whom the Lord Jesus has chosen to embrace. Benedict went on to say, "The preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty." This unites Aparecida with the proud legacy of social teaching that has emerged from the litany of Continental Assemblies: Rio de Janeiro, Medellin, Puebla, and Santo Domingo. The evangelizing mission of the Church must bring the human face of Jesus into the turbulent, uncertain world of the post-modern age. This must be done so that humanity might not only rediscover the God of salvation. Men and women can rediscover the dignity to which their creator has called them. The reclaimed dignity of the Christian is to be both a faithful disciple and a zealous missionary of the Lord Jesus so that all the peoples of the American continent may find life in him.

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