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FROM MEDELLIN TO MILITANCY: THE CHURCH IN FERMENT

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FROM MEDELLIN TO MILITANCY: THE CHURCH IN FERMENT

Medellin ¹ is the logical conclusion of Vatican II just as the religious militancy seen in Latin America during 1969 is a logical product of Medellin. Though individual prophetic witness and the mass "crying of my people" ² always invoked a response from God in the Old Testament, the Church has traditionally shied away from specific applications of its own theology as well as from spontaneous mass movements, unless such demands coincided with its hierarchical interests. The hopeful irony today is that the social and political militancy arising from Medellin, while challenging this disincarnational and ecclesiastical aloofness, is making the Church in Latin America embarrassingly relevant and increasingly attractive.

In another sense, both Medellin and this religious militancy are products of an inescapable and irresistible moral of the masses... a parable of poverty, a brewing revolt against the tacit acceptance of "the rich nations and the poor", and a rejection of a "wealthy" Church in the midst of its impoverished faithful. It is no longer a simple contradiction that the Church can pretend to have some kind of higher mandate because of its closer intercourse with God while ignoring the people it has claimed to represent before Him. It is increasingly an open scandal to only pastor, pray and pardon without also suffering with the people...

"The Church does not consider itself a privileged entity of the Paraguayan people. She wishes to run the risk and share the problems, the anxieties, the desires of the people

at whose service she is. The Church energetically rejects any attempt at a confrontation with political powers just as she denounces any efforts to identify the Church with political parties..."³

Today, in Latin America at least, the moral of the masses, as either a prophetic voice or a collective conscience has become the criteria by which the Church must measure itself, and Medellin was a product of this plumb line.

Some have challenged this socio-political emphasis of Medellin as only one facet of its varied Documents⁴. Certainly such a critique is justified by the sheer quantity of its recommendations that stand within the progressive or modernistic parameters of today's ecclesiastical up-dating. And others feel that Medellin is creating a dangerous polarization:

"The crisis in the Church arises from the tension between those who seek the urgent application of the conclusions of Medellin and those who believe that there should be a wider preparation. The great majority stand between these two extremes."⁵

But the Bishop who expressed these views assumes that this crisis is only a passing thing...

"In spite of ourselves, the Church is not going to fall apart, because the Church is protected by God; after this tempest, calm and reflection will come."⁶

The counter-point, however, is that the clarion-call of Medellin in the sections on Justice and Peace and to a lesser degree in those on Education

and the Pastoral to the Elites, openly challenge a system which here-to-fore has had or has used the Church as its moral justification and divine blessing. Furthermore, the above-mentioned documents do not simply add a new theological dimension... they are socially revolutionary. When, for instance, they speak of "arousing the social conscience"⁷ and demanding of "today's hierarchy greater social sensibility and objectivity"⁸ it means that the authors of Medellin as princes of the Church have by such words also become prophets... and no system or government or injustice, especially in Latin America, can easily abide the prophetic voice. As in the past, there are many ways to quote the Bible, but when Medellin says,

"It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh, so that He might come to liberate all men from the slavery to which sin has subjected them; hunger, misery, oppression and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origins in human selfishness (St. John 8:32, 34)"⁹ ...

that is a kind of interpretation that cannot remain within the walls of the Church nor within the confines of a sermon.

The absence of any immediate response to Medellin in light of the preceding was remarkable. As the ICODES report states,

"The first reaction to the Medellin Conference was 'no reaction'. It was almost as if the Conference had not occurred... this 'calm before the storm' lasted until December." ¹⁰

From the moment of the meeting at the Golconda farm in Cundinamarca, Colombia, until President Stroessner's silencing of Comunidad (the official organ of the Episcopal Conference of Paraguay), the "fruit" of Medellin has been by contrast more than anyone had hoped or bargained for. In fact, the militancy has become so marked that one wonders whether Medellin just barely got its message across in time. More important, in the long run perhaps, is the favorable response to Medellin from the Inter-American Bishops Meeting held in Caracas in June...

"The pastoral lines of these Documents of Medellin are a prolongation and furtherance of the thought of Vatican Council II. They are a development because they apply the Council teachings to the integral reality of Latin America. They are a progression because in several instances one more step has been taken... these guidelines are a fruit of a vision of faith, not an opportunistic or pragmatic judgement." ¹¹

In order to understand the impact of these Documents, we will first consider some of the theologically-revolutionary concepts in them. Then, we will look at specific examples of militancy arising directly or indirectly from Medellin, and finally, I will attempt to suggest some of the implications of the Conference, not only for the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, but for the Body of Christ throughout the hemisphere. At this point it is instructive enough as an introduction to show how Medellin sees their present situation as a re-enactment of biblical history:

"Just as Israel of another age, the ancient people, felt the saving presence of God when He was freeing them from the oppression of Egypt, when he made them cross the sea and led them to conquer the land, so also with us, the new people of God, we cannot fail to sense His saving presence when true development is seen, which is the way for each and for all, from conditions of life that are less human to those that are more human." ¹²

I. Revolutionary Concepts in the Medellin Documents

The Role of the Temporal in the Kingdom of God

After making it very clear that Love is not only the supreme commandment but also the "dynamism" which can transform the world, the section on Justice goes on to say that the Church's role in serving the world involves elevating the dignity of each person and of unifying society. This emphasis on the temporal as an essential part of the mission of Christ is made clear by challenging the traditional view of triumphalism:

"Doubtless, for the Church, the fullness and perfection of the human vocation will be accomplished with the definitive inclusion of each man in the Passover or Triumph of Christ, but the hope of such a definitive realization, rather than lull (us to sleep), ought to 'vivify the concern to perfect this earth. For here grows the body of the new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age'. We do not confuse temporal progress and the Kingdom of Christ; nevertheless, the former

'to the extent that it can contribute to the better ordering of human society, is of vital concern to the kingdom of God.' " ¹³

It goes on in this vein, calling Christians to ...

"avoid the dualism which separates temporal tasks from the work of sanctification. Although we are encompassed with imperfections, we are men of hope. We have faith that our love for Christ and our brethren will not only be a great force liberating us from injustice and oppression, but also... an impulse toward the integral growth of our countries." ¹⁴

I have underlined "integral" because as distinct from so much of the "developmental" thinking going on in the United States (and in UNCTAD), which speaks of "import products", "commodity agreements" and "industrial preferences", Latin Americans are increasingly demanding, as does Medellin, the total integration of the whole society into the process of planning and execution...

"Socialization understood as a socio-cultural process of personalization and communal growth, leads us to think that all of the sectors of society... (should) become agents of national and continental development. Without this unity, Latin America will not be able to succeed in liberating itself from neo-colonialism to which it is bound..." ¹⁵

The uniqueness of these concepts is that whereas the Church has theologially always acknowledged, indeed demanded, the absolute worth of each

man's "soul", it is hereby declaring that this integrity includes his socio-political rights and can only be accomplished by actually involving every man in at least the beginnings of this earth's re-ordering.

Alternatives to Colonialism: Critique of both Capitalism & Marxism

Flowing directly out of the preceding remarks, the revolutionary thinking of Medellin moves logically to survey the whole hemisphere and indeed those world-wide structures that have made Latin American nations "client-to-paramount" instruments... and to attack the philosophies behind these power systems as unacceptable to Latin America as an integrated community:

"The system of liberal capitalism and the temptation of the Marxist system would appear to exhaust the possibilities of transforming the economic structures of our continent. Both systems militate against the dignity of the human person.

One takes for granted the primacy of capital, its power and its discriminatory utilization in the function of profit-making. The other, although it ideologically supports a kind of humanism, is more concerned with collective man, and in practice becomes a totalitarian concentration of State power.

We must denounce the fact that Latin America sees itself caught between these two options and remains dependent on one or the other center of power which controls its economy." ¹⁶

An interesting footnote to the above is that Medellin was a fore-runner to the Vina del Mar Consensus (May 17, 1969), calling for the opening-up of foreign markets for Latin American products as a just alternative to the paternalism and politics so frequently associated with aid and loans.

In another sense these "alternatives" are a reflection of the experiments already in practice in Africa, but Medellin has gone beyond either a demand for greater nationalization and from a philosophy of simply "borrowing from the good of each system" to saying of technol-
ogism...

"...neither the combined value of capital nor the estab-
lishment of the most modern techniques of production,
nor economic plans will serve men efficiently (in being
but effectively at the service of man), if the workers...
are not incorporated, with all of the thrust of their
humanity, by means of 'the active participation of all
in the running of the enterprise...'"

adding more moderately,

"according to ways which will have to be determined with
care..." 17

Concientizacion:¹⁸ Man As Subject of His History & Destiny

The Documents are not, however, simply using the United States or
Russia as convenient whipping boys. The process of change begins, for
the authors of Medellin, at the local level... in each village and with
each man, where both the individual and the community realize they need
not be simply objects of under-development but are called (by God) to be
the subjects of their own history. Both Justice and Peace speak to this
matter...

"We wish to affirm that it is indispensable to form a
social conscience and a realistic perception of the

problems of the community and of social structures." 19

"Justice, and therefore peace, conquer by means of a dynamic action of awakening (concientizacion) and organization of the popular sectors..." 20

But it is in the section of Education where we find this concept most clearly delineated:

"The task of the education of these our brothers does not properly consist in incorporating them into the cultural structures existing around them, which can also be oppressive, but in something deeper. It consists of equipping them so that they themselves, as authors of their own progress, develop in a creative and original way a cultural world attuned to their own abundance and which is the fruit of their own efforts... We would call it 'liberating education'; that is, that which converts the student into the subject of his own development..." 21

The revolutionary nature of these statements if applied to the masses of poor in Latin America is obvious enough... indeed, it was explosive enough to require the expulsion from his country, of the author of the term, Paulo Freire. 22 And it was one of his students who has best articulated this dynamic into an integrated philosophy:

"Political humanism understands man as 'homo creator': he has the power to insert his transcendence into space and time. His transcendence becomes act, history. It creates the new, thereby making possible the reconciliation between the existential and the objective, since the

tomorrow is to bear the stamp of man's negation and hope..."²³

Dependency of Peace on Justice

Increasingly important as the power structures (and individual dictators) in Latin America respond repressively to the stirrings of the masses (often directly aided by the United States in the name of "peace"), is the Medellin position that true peace is absolutely dependent on justice. The point is not that such regimes cannot continue to externally control and effectively silence the voices of protest, but that no human progress will occur under those conditions even though economists can show that the GNP is going up.

More important is that Medellin had the courage to go beyond the rhetoric about violence and peace and make it very clear where the guilt rests. Pope Paul opened up this subject by stating in Bogota:

"And what do we say to you, men of the ruling classes? Do not forget that some of the great crises of history could have been diverted had the necessary reforms been implemented in time, thereby preventing explosive revolutions of desperation, through heroic sacrifice..."²⁴

The Documents then became even more explicit in recognizing that....

"the privileged many times join together, and with all the means at their disposal pressure those who govern, thus obstructing necessary changes. If they jealously retain their privileges... they are responsible to history. The peaceful future of the countries of Latin America depends to a large extent on their attitude."²⁵

Also responsible for injustice...

"are those who remain passive for fear of the sacrifice and personal risk implied by any courageous and effective action..." 26

Nor do the Documents forget that while it is true...

"that revolutionary insurrection can be legitimate in the case of evident and prolonged 'tyranny that seriously works against the fundamental rights of man, and which damages the common good of the country...' " 27

It also reminds the revolutionaries that

"violence or 'armed revolution' generally 'generates new injustices, introduces new imbalances and causes new disasters; one cannot combat real evil at the price of a greater evil.' " 28

All of these truths need to be clearly stated, as much for and in the United States as in Latin America, but most importantly, the order of their priority must be emphasized, as in this Document.

II. Militancy Arising Out Of Medellin

Space does not allow extensive detailing of the militancy which has arisen from Medellin, so the following examples only serve to suggest the variety of the activism. But each case does challenge traditional Church philosophy and/or practice.

The Golconda Priest Movement: An Attack on Institutionalized "Democ

Quoting from the Medellin Documents, "The Golconda Statement" opens its declaration of purpose with the words:

"As Christians we believe that this historic epoch in Latin America is intimately linked with salvation history..."²⁹

And Medellin is frankly cited as the inspiration of the Golconda:

"These words of the II Conference of the Latin American Episcopacy meeting in Medellin, like the inerrant groanings of the Spirit which the Apostle Paul speaks (Roman 8:26), strike a resounding echo in our consciences."³⁰

Even more important, they detail their philosophy of change... "while avoiding confusion or simplistic identification there should always be manifested the profound identity which exists between... the revelatory action of God and human experience"... because Medellin called them

"to make decisions and set up projects only if we are resolved to execute them as our pastoral commitment, even at the cost of sacrifice."³¹

Under the "social, economic and political" goals of the Golconda, I will focus in on one in particular:

"8. We reject as a tactic of division the existence of the so-called traditional political parties which divide our people into two bands, each directed by groups which are equally exploitative of the masses and equally submissive to and colonized by foreign monopolies."³²

Four priests of the Golconda, Rene Garcia, Manuel Alzate, Vicente Mejia and Luis Currea began to implement this policy of action on October 8, 1969 by holding public meetings calling on poor Colombians to boycott the up-coming 1970 elections and thereby refuse to give a "democratic" stamp of approval to either of the official parties (Liberales and Conservadores

automatically alternate in office) because they fail to respond to the needs and demands of the electorate once in power. Two meetings were held, one in Cali, the other in Bogota. As the time drew near for the third gathering at the University of Antioquia in Medellin on October 16, the authorities cracked down, imprisoning the priests and preventing Bishop Gerardo Valencia Cano from entering the city. Rene Garcia relates some of the details:

"... we came to Medellin to ask the students, seeing the obvious hunger and suffering of the poor, if they would help us to organize the people and show them that the next elections were not going to benefit the poor..."

After their arrest by the police, they were taken by the Department of Security (DAS) where...

"they gave orders to the employees to beat us. At first they refused, but then pressured by orders they began to do it. Only today I learned that I had been the least mistreated, since they only stretched out my arms against the floor, while my fellow priests were repeatedly wounded..."³³

After being detained for many days, first in prison and then under house arrest, the priests were released.

Because the hero-martyr of the Golconda is Camilo Torres, a priest-sociologist who became involved in politics and then was killed as a guerrilla, and since two of the above-mentioned priests have since been censured by their Bishop, one is prone to ask if such militancy can remain within the Church (as is the intention of the Golcondo clergy) or will it only further polarize both Church and society? They claim that

such "involvement" in inseparable from the nature of the Eucharist:

"Its forward looking nature and its eschatological outlook make the liturgical celebration a call to a continual dedication to the transformation of an ever changing and limited reality."³⁴

In simpler language, Camilo Torres had said,

"The temporal defects of the Church should not scandalize us. The Church is human. The important thing is to believe that she is also divine and that if we Christians fulfill our obligation to love our neighbor, (then) we are strengthening the Church."³⁵

Third World Priests of Argentina: Linking the Church With the People

In April of 1969, the Social Studies Group (A.E.S.) of the Catholic University of Cordoba, called for a "Liberating Education" which converts man into the subject of his own development, using as a basis of their new philosophy, the Medellin Documents and saying,

"Profound, radical, valiant must be the changes which the Argentine Church will have to realize to be faithful to Medellin..."³⁶

Such are the increasing links between liberal and radical students and workers which have paralyzed Argentina in 1969 and the increasing militancy within the Church. The best organized and most outspoken of these is the group called the "Priests For The Third World" (Sacerdotes Para el III Mundo), who in May of 1969 held a meeting in Cordoba to which 80 priests from 27 dioceses attended, representing (they claim) some 400 clergy throughout the country. Their official spokesman, Fr. Miguel Ramondetti, writes:

"In this moment in diverse countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America (the 3rd World), people are organizing to break the old dependencies of colonialism and assume the leadership of their own destinies. The Movement of Priests for the III World desires to place itself within that process as Christian men and women..."³⁷

Like the students, the clergy use Medellin and Vatican II as the "light of faith" that moved them to conscience and action. By June of last year, the Third World Priest Movement had ten groups in Argentina affiliated with it, including non-violent, student, labor union, faculty, official Church, and international secular fraternal organizations.³⁸ Their "activism" has sometimes involved acts of violence, which they defend by saying...

"The moral scandal lies in the fact that a child dies of hunger, in that a man is exploited... the scandal arises from the fact that in order to feed a hungry person, to liberate someone who is exploited, we are obliged to use violence... not that we choose violence but that we are obliged to use it..."³⁹

To what degree these priests and laymen have developed a philosophy of necessary violence or simply decide about each issue on the basis of "situational ethics" is not clear. What is, is that they see their motivation coming from their faith:

"We do not seek demagoguery. Our intention is to put ourselves at the side of those who suffer, who are hungry, and who find themselves enslaved by fear and impotency. Thus did Jesus do. And in the midst of our responsibilities

we have the will to assume our commitment as the Church in Latin America calls for it." ⁴⁰

Mass of The 20th Hour In Paraguay: Prophetic Voice Against "El Supremo"

Unique among the Churches in Latin America, one might call the Church in Paraguay "united", so similarly and positively have its bishops and priests been influenced by Vatican II and CELAM II. Several bishops from Paraguay shared in preparing the guidelines on church renewal and social reform at Medellin. But until recently, the Church had been fairly "non-political", concerning itself with the poverty, ignorance and ill health which plague the Paraguayan poor.

Then, following the arrest of student leaders in June, 1969, public and ecclesiastical protests led Pres. Stroessner to issue a new law on August 1 entitled "The Defense of Democracy and the Political and Social Order of the State" which among other things called for...

- 3-6 years imprisonment for anyone public any event considered a crime by this Law, including reading anti-government literature
- Declaring as crime any criticism of law enforcement agencies or any questioning of this Law as just
- 6 months to 1 year imprisonment for any group meeting without permit or disregarding orders to disband from such gatherings... etc., etc.

Besides his general attack on the Jesuits, President Stroessner also cancelled unilaterally an agreement with Caritas which was distributing nearly \$1.5 million in food annually from CARE to needy Paraguayans.

The Paraguayan hierarchy openly condemned the new legislation and supported priests who raised the issue in their local parishes. The most outstanding of these was Cristo Rey in Asuncion where a Padre Francisco

Oliva held Sunday evening eucharists called "The Mass of the 20th Hour" at which time he would discuss current political and social problems. These services were regularly attended by hundreds of students (along with the secret police) and were following by a radio program including a similar format of dialogue. On October 22, Padre Oliva was expelled from the country (having become a Paraguayan citizen the preceding June), and during a Via Crucis procession held a few days later protesting the government's action, three priests were beaten and several nuns manhandled.

Archbishop Anibal Mena Porta of Asuncion responded by invoking canon law and declaring the Minister of Interior and all others responsible for the repressive treatment, excommunicate. He also suspended services in all 49 churches of the archdiocese on Sunday, October 26, saying...

"The Church, as a gesture of protest and pain, on this day, renounces the ultimate expression of liturgical and religious worship, which is the celebration of the Holy Mass. We understand the transcendental nature of this decision and we sincerely believe that it corresponds to the gravity of the hour..."⁴¹

Comunidad, the official organ of the Episcopal Conference faithfully reported all these events, adding that October 22... "is a day of mourning for the Paraguayan Church and a day of national shame for the whole country" and going on to claim that President Stroessner was trying to turn the Church into... "an inoffensive and servile body as it is in Brazil under the military government..."⁴² By the end of the month Comunidad was closed down and its editor, Fr. Gilberto Gimenez, was in hiding. Nonetheless, on November 1, its first mimeographed and clandestine copies

were distributed in Asuncion, including the words:

"... when the Church stands up, prepared to vindicate its evangelical liberty before civil power and to awaken the people to a sense of justice and conscience about its violated rights, this regime... cannot but cast far from itself its Christian mask in order to lash out with blind hate against all that is holy..." ⁴³

.....

Space does not permit additional examples of this process of ecclesiastical concientizacion, but in passing we might mention that the Church in Peru has urged Pres. Velasco Alvarado to go even further with his agrarian reform; in the Dominican Republic it has forced Pres. Joaquin Balaguer to re-admit an expelled Cuban priest to Santo Domingo; and in four or five countries the Church has pressured the State for a breaking of their nation's concordat with Rome... among them, Mons. Juan Landazuri of Peru requested that the new Constitution establish complete autonomy of both parts... "while always remembering that both (Church and State) should be at the service of man." ⁴⁴

III. The Significance of Medellin

As increasing militancy has become linked with Medellin, whether such was intended by its authors or not, doubts and opposition have arisen in the minds of laymen and the hierarchy about the long-range value of

CELAM II. In the beginning, for instance, Monsenor Anibal Munoz Duque of Bogota held a series of dialogues between priests and bishops at a country house baptized "Tranquilandia" during which the subject of change was discussed and Mons. Munoz was quoted...

"I have to change, you have to change, the community has to change... (but) before changing things, change yourself." ⁴⁵

But events are no longer at the point of dialogue nor are they occurring at very tranquil places. Today, there is often open confrontation between "rebel priests" and their bishops and frequently they meet on the street with a "censured" clergyman backed up by hundreds of his poor parishioners who see in him a hero-prophet... and "their" man. Understandable then, there are many who claim that Medellin either went too far too fast or actually made a detour from the guidelines of Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes and Populorum Progressio, while others tend to dismiss Medellin because it...

"failed to recognize sufficiently the signs of the times... The most salient reality in contemporary Latin America is the revolutionary process (not simple change)..." ⁴⁶

But in my estimation far more was accomplished than can be proved or denied by the words used, and I will describe three of the changes I consider "revolutionary".

A New Latin American Church

If the Church in North America (both Protestant and Catholic) can be typified by traditional parochialism on the one hand and radical avante-garde experimentation on the other, the Church in Latin America

(mainly Catholic but with increasing pockets of Evangelicals) seems to have "found itself", post-Medellin, as the Church of the people... i.e., of the poor... and therefore a Church having to free itself from its power structures, while not having time nor interest in merely toying with modern religious faddism. In this sense, and to the degree that this is true (not simply where it is ministering unto the poor... but standing with them in their anguish and protest), it is both closer to the Biblical tradition and to reality than is true in North America... and therefore more sensitive to the signs of the times...

"The pastoral guidelines chosen there (at Medellin) flowed from a vision of Latin American reality and theological judgment of the same. They lose their value and scope if they are not considered from this point of view... these guidelines are nourished by the theology of the particular Church, its growing maturity, its self-support, whatever will make her an authentic and true Church... they do not bind with the force of law, they express the commitment of the Latin American Church to the continent and to the world." ⁴⁷

Medellin was then much less a provocateur than an "outpouring" of present reality; sometimes halting and half-hearted, sometimes powerful and prophetic... its verbalizations representing what every bishop, priest and layman with half an eye and an open heart has realized for some time. And if the God we worship is indeed the Lord of history, then Latin American Christianity by the simple fact of standing closer to the slavery of Egypt and to the lost wanderings of Sinai is also closer to a break-through to a new Church. And if this is happening

(as I believe it is), then the prophetic voices and the dynamic models for the Body of Christ in all the hemisphere will be found more often there than in the North...

"Our exploration, however, has led us to reach a different conclusion: that the future is mediated in to history through the present, that the present is where the future is being formed. History is thus the medium in and through which God creates for history, man and himself, a future that does not yet exist, either actually or formally." ⁴⁸

"We think that the most adequate setting for an authentic liturgy is the 'comunidad de base', in which the Christian may find the communion to which he has been called as a living experience... (which) demands of bishops, priests, religious and laymen the spirit of poverty which by breaking the ties of selfish possession of temporal goods stimulates the Christian to direct organically the economy and power of the State toward the benefit of the whole community." ⁴⁹

A Poor Church Led By Middle Class Clergy... Socially Converted

Camilo Torres presented a good case for the ministry in Latin America in the past serving as a channel for social ascendancy within the ecclesiastical system on the basis of the self-destructive condition of conformity to the hierarchy ⁵⁰. The new clerical phenomenon in Latin America involves just the opposite... increasing numbers of middle-class priests not only challenging their bishops and the socio-political structures (as is also happening in the United States), but also personally identifying with the poor (which is seldom the case in the U.S.).

Returning to the advice "...before changing things, change yourself", we find that that is precisely what more and more Latin clergy are doing. They are ready to submit, to "give up all they have" while standing and suffering alongside the poor. In this sense they follow the example and dedication of Camilo Torres perhaps without his academic rationale, but similarly without the frustrated flamboyance that caused him to go off and join the guerrillas. The Golconda is more self-disciplined and more communal, even though they tend to be a clergy-dominated movement. But these rebel priests are not approaching the masses with their charity, rather they are seeking the "dignity of the poor.."

"I am weak, my brothers, as everyone. I am weak, but I have in the depth of my heart a hope: to see this people freed from their oppression. And I ask the Lord the grace to let me die with this hope in my heart..." 51

Less euphoric and more concrete in this determination to re-orient the Church to the priorities of the poor can be seen in the Golconda statement...

"Among other things which need correcting we believe that the present system of charges made for sacraments and other religious services is contrary to the spirit of poverty. Its financial aspect prevents the gratuity of the grace conferred and signified by the sacrament from being seen." 52

Even more concrete is the example of Bishop Pepin of Higüey in the Dominican Republic who last January (1969) asked President Balaguer to seek from Congress additional funds for the completion of the Basilica of Our Lady of Altigracia⁵³ started under Trujillo. But by April,

after consultation with priests and laymen and partly in response to Medellin, he submitted a new request, supported by the Episcopal Conference, that the same monies be instead used to help complete the Tavera Dam project which would "give light and food to thousands of poor farmers".

The Prophetic Church: Withdrawing Its Mantle of Blessing

By far the most important contribution of Medellin is that it began to challenge the Church's role as one of automatically equating authority with divine sanction. That neo-Platonic hang-over was philosophically challenged by CELAM II when it said,

"The 'tranquility of order', according to the Augustinian definition of peace, is neither passivity nor conformity. It is not something acquired once and for all. It is the result of continuous effort and adaptation to new circumstances, to new demands and challenges of a changing history." ⁵⁴

From that starting point, it was not too great a step, faced by a violent clash with the government, for the Paraguayan bishops to say:

"They... want the Church to extend the cover of 'spiritual unity' over the deep social inequities that divide the country... (but) when men and women in Paraguay find themselves oppressed by unjust social and economic structures, and by the abuse of power violating human rights, the mission of the Church becomes that of the prophet denouncing evils, that of a force of moral pressure seeking man's liberation and respect for his rights." ⁵⁵

In this statement and stance, the Catholic Church in Peru not only had

the backing and cooperation of many Evangelicals with whom increasing numbers of priests are finding "concordancia", but it removes from the political system the moral justification of its having God's blessing on whatever it does or in spite of what it does. In Brazil, this "abandoning" of the Church's traditional role has been equally traumatic, so much so that the military now considers itself the new custodian of national and "moral" values.

What is really happening, of course, is that the State is being unmasked to be judged in the future by its fruits... as it should be, for good or ill... while the Church has been freed to be the prophet and servant it was meant to be. But the Church will not realize how enmeshed it has long been by the power structures until, as the Paraguayan experience made clear, action is taken...

"The reaction has occurred only when those principles have taken life in preaching and in newspaper print, and when they have been applied to concrete situations by priests..." 56

It is not my intention to idealize Medellin, but it did provide the verbalization which so many situations and sacerdots had been waiting for, and by its words has moved many in the Church beyond rhetoric and into reality. Latin American governments will probably become more cynical and repressive towards religion in the future, but that harsher honesty cannot help but make the Church more relevant... even in its suffering.

(End)

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The city where the Second Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM II) was held in Colombia, S.A., during Aug. and Sept. of 1968, immediately following the visit of Pope Paul VI to Bogota.
- 2 Exodus 2:23-25.
- 3 "Paraguay: Conflicto Iglesia-Estado", Centro de Documentacion MIEC-JECI, Montevideo, Informe Especial... Message from the Archbishop of Asuncion, #4, p. 22.
- 4 The Documents include those under the titles of: Human Promotion (Justice, Peace, Family & Demography, Education, Youth), Evangelization & Growth in the Faith (Pastoral Care of the Masses, Pastoral to the Elites, Catechesis, Liturgy), and, The Visible Church & its Structures (Laity, Priests, Religious, Formation of the Clergy, Poverty of the Church, Joint Pastoral on Planning, Mass Media).
- 5 Quote of Mons. Juan Carlos Aramburu, Archbishop-Coadjutor of Buenos Aires, from article "Pugna por Rapidez de los Cambios Origina la Crisis" by W.G. Landrey, U.P.I., Buenos Aires, April 7, 1969.
- 6 Quote by Mons. Juan Carlos Aramburu, Archbishop-Coadjutor of Buenos Aires, Ibid.
- 7 Justice, III.
- 8 Justice, Ibid.
- 9 Justice, II.
- 10 Colleen A. Kiedrowski & Myriam Ordonez, "The Catholic Church in Colombia Since The Medellin Conference-- Sept. 1968-Sept. 1969", Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Social (ICODES), Bogota, Sept. 17, 1969, p. 1 of 6-page report.
- 11 Rev. Edgar Beltran, "Pastoral Guidelines for Latin America set by the Medellin Documents", Dept. of Pastoral Action, CELAM, Caracas, June 1969, p. 1-2.

12

Medellin Documents, "Introduction to the Conclusions"

13

Justice, II, Doctrinal Bases, with quotes from Gaudium et Spes, 39

14

Justice, Ibid.

15

Justice, III, "Unity of Action"

16

Justice, III, "Business Enterprises and the Economy"

17

Justice, III

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The process of becoming aware of oneself and one's community as a socio-political change agent and that it is not fate nor God nor environment which made a given society "backward" but those subjects and structures which have dominated and "used" that situation for its own ends... & that this can be changed.

19

Justice, III, 3

20

Peace, Part II

21

Education, I.3 and II.8

22

"La Educacion como practica de la Libertad", by Paulo Freire, Tierra Nueva, Montevideo, Nov. 1969.

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Rubem A. Alves, "A Theology of Human Hope", Corpus Books, Washington, 1969, p. 43.

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Paul VI, Address on the Day of Development, Bogota, August 23, 1968.

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Peace, Second Part, "Problems of Violence in Latin America"

26

Peace, Ibid

27

Peace, Second Part with inserted quote from Populorum Progressio, 32 and 31.

- 28
Peace, Ibid.
- 29
CELAM II, Conclusiones
- 30
Introduction, "The Golconda Statement" from the 2nd Meeting of the Golconda Priest Group, Buenaventura, Colombia, Dec. 9-13, 1968, translated by the Rev. James Goff, Cuernavaca, Mexico.
- 31
Ibid., "Introduccion a las Conclusiones", Medellin Documents, p. 7.
- 32
Ibid., Section III, # 8, p. 7.
- 33
"El Tiempo", Bogota, Article entitled "Rene Garcia Contesta a Arzobispo de Medellin", Nov. 15, 1969.
- 34
"The Golconda Statement", Ibid., B.2., from Medellin, Liturgia, p. 9.
- 35
"Mensaje A Los Christianos", Camilo Torres Restrepo, Frente Unido, Bogota, Aug. 26, 1965, from Sondeos, No. 5, CIDOC, Cuernavaca, Mexico, translation by P. Wheaton., p. 29/326.
- 36
"Iglesia y Educacion Libertadora", Agrupacion Estudios Sociales, article in Christianismo y Revolucion, Ano 3, # 15, May, 1969.
- 37
"Curas que dicen no" by Fr. Miguel Ramondetti, Ibid., #16, May, 1969.
- 38
Movimiento de Accion Civica no violenta, Accion Sincdeal Argentina, Centro de Estudiantes de Sociologia Del Salvador, Centro de Estudios Camilo Torres, Christianismo y Revolucion, Estudiantes Profesores y Personal de la Facultad Teologica Evangelica, Grupo 'Conciencia' de la Universidad Catolica Argentina, Juventud Estudiantes Catolicos, Secretariado Nacional de Juventud Universitaria Catolica, Fraternidad Secular Charles De Foucauld.
- 39
"El escandalo de la violencia" por Olivier Maillard, Cristianismo y Revolucion, Buenos Aires, June, 1969.
- 40
"Curas se juegan en San Juan", signed by 12 priests... to the press in Alta Gracia, San Juan, Argentina, May 8, 1969.

- 41 "Paraguay: Conflicto Iglesia-Estado", Ibid., # 7, p. 22.
- 42 Comunidad, Oct. 28, 1969, Asuncion, N.C. News Service, Nov. 1, 1969.
- 43 Comunidad, (De La Clandestinidad), Nov. 1, 1969, Ibid.
- 44 Episcopal Conference, Lima, July 19, 1969, N.C. News Service, July 22, 1968.
- 45 El Tiempo, Bogota, "La Formula 'Tranquilandia' " by Javier Dario Restrepo, March 28, 1969.
- 46 Remarks on Medellin's relevance for CICOP, 1970, by Gustavo Perez Ramirez, Rector General of ICODES.
- 47 Inter-American Bishops Meeting, Caracas, June, 1969, # 4, 7 and 9 of Second Point of the Pastoral Guidelines for Latin America set by the Medellin Documents.
- 48 Rubem A. Alves, Ibid., p. 97.
- 49 The Golconda Statement, Ibid., p. 10.
- 50 "La Violencia y Los Cambios Socio-Culturales En Las Areas Rurales Colombianos" by Camilo Torres, Sondeos, Ibid, 3.1.6, "Canal Eclesiastico", p. 10/159 ff.
- 51 "La dignidad del pobre" by Dom Antonio Batista Fragoso, Cristianismo y Revolucion, # 19, August, 1969, p. 49.
- 52 The Golconda Statement, Ibid., III., B. 3 ff, p. 10.
- 53 National Protectress of the Dom. Rep. since Independence in 1845.
- 54 Peace, Medellin Documents, Second Part.
- 55 "Church in Paraguay States Views" (Quotations), Latin America Bureau, U.S.C.C., Washington, D.C.
- 56 "Paraguay: Conflicto Iglesia-Estado", Ibid., p. 30.