

## THE CHURCH AND LATIN AMERICAN INTEGRATION

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Latin America is the most Catholic of continents. For almost five centuries Roman Catholicism has been the most active religious force in Latin America, it now claims at least ninety per cent of the continent's 275 million inhabitants. Before the end of this century, Latin Americans will constitute well over half of the world's Catholics and nearly half of its Christians. The Roman Catholic Church, in which every Catholic holds membership, is the oldest and most widespread institution in Latin America. It is impossible to speak of the history and formation of the culture which we call Latin American without speaking of the Church. So many of the spiritual elements which bind that culture together have either emanated from or been encouraged by the teachings and activities of the institutional Church. This is not a denial of the existence of culture traits, particularly political and economic ones, toward which the Church has been either neutral or opposed. The point which is important is that the institutional Church has been most important in the formation and direction of a great part of the cultural complex of Latin America. Indeed, any discussion of the people of Latin America which does not consider their religion and its Church would be a truncated one.

With the present process of disintegration, or at least reorientation, of its traditional and tribal societies, Latin America is undergoing the most fundamental and rapid cultural change since the sixteenth century Conquest. Not only are social, political, and economic institutions experiencing changes in structure and function, but more importantly so are the values which underlie and bind them. The latter is of particular concern to the Church, the institution which has traditionally been interested in the formation and maintenance of cultural as well as religious values. In addition to the concern over the challenge of "modernization" and all that it implies, the Church is being swept by the most rapid and fundamental changes she has experienced since the sixteenth century Counter Reformation.

Both the processes of "modernization" and "aggiornamento" are now taking place more in Latin America than anywhere else. Actions taken by the Latin American Church in the realms of spiritual and cultural values will have a profound

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affect on the continent's future and important ramifications for the rest of the world. It is the purpose of this paper to offer a glimpse at some of the attitudes of the Church toward the development and integration of not only Latin America, but also the Latin American Church. No attempt will be made to explain or interpret some rather spectacular recent happenings involving Latin American Catholics, or other Catholics in Latin America.

### The Integration of Latin America

Particularly since the reign of Leo XIII (1878-1903), papal encyclicals and Catholic teaching in general have been increasingly concerned with a development of a body of social teaching relevant to the modern world. Until recently these teachings have been most applicable to the highly industrialized areas of Europe and North America. However, since the reign of Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) and the sessions of the Second Vatican Council (1961-1965), an increasing concern has been shown for the underdeveloped world and its coming transformation. Encyclicals such as John's "Pacem in Terris" ("Peace on Earth") and "Mater et Magistra" ("Christianity and Social Progress"), Paul VI's "Popolorum Progressio" ("On the Development of Peoples") along with conciliar decrees on the nature of the Church, the Church in the modern world, religious liberty, the missionary activity of the Church, and ecumenism have added to this body of teaching. Particularly important for Latin America were the 1965 Council decree "Gaudium et Spes" ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World") and Paul's 1967 "Popolorum Progressio" because their principles underly many of the resolutions adopted at the 1966 meeting of the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM) in Mar del Plata and the 1967 publication of the Consejo's "Conclusiones de Mar del Plata." Here Latin America's Roman Catholic bishops fully embraced the "ideal of integration" as fundamental for the development of the continent and the continental Church. We shall dwell on these "Conclusiones" for some length.

Paul VI declared to CELAM that after considering the gravity of what he thought the two greatest questions of our time, the promotion of progress everywhere and the prevention of war in all its forms, and considering the importance and value of international organizations which seek to answer these questions for the betterment of mankind, that

...the Church can contribute valuably to the diffusion of the ideal of integration, awakening in Christians the conviction that national goals will be only attained within an international community, forming a supranational consciousness. (CELAM, Presencia, 17)

More specifically, the "Conclusiones" of Mar del Plata state:

The integration of Latin America is an on-going process of an irresistible character. It constitutes an indispensable instrument for the harmonious development of the region and marks a fundamental stage in the movement for the unification of the human family. In the present circumstances of crisis and the consolidation of political, economic, and social relations, integration is an essential contribution toward world peace. Manifesting itself as a "sign of the times," the integration of the Latin American continent arouses an attitude of service on the part of the Church, not only in view of the positions derived from the Second Vatican Council and the words of Paul VI to CELAM, but also as a consequence of a matter of conscience for Christians who live this historical reality. (Ibid., 17-18)

This commitment to the "ideal of integration" is the basis and goal of the various programs suggested by the bishops. In addition, it also serves as the grounds from which the Church wishes to launch a "doctrine capable of orienting the process of integration" of the entire Latin American continent. (Ibid., 21)

Although the Church feels that it is not within her "capacity or competency" to directly advance the necessary social, political, and economic reforms, "it is her concern to orient them toward the betterment of man in all his dimensions and toward the complete integration of marginal populations." (Ibid., 21) The imbalances which exist between various national social and economic sectors, between regions of a country, and between the developed and underdeveloped countries must be considered as grave threats to world peace. To alleviate these threats, basic structural reforms are necessary "in the socio-economic life" along with "a conversion in mentality and mode of being." (Ibid., 20). "The structures of society must have as their goal the development of the whole man and of all men. As such, they should be at the service of the human person and not at the service of themselves." (Ibid., 20) Since many existing economic, political, social, and cultural structures do not permit the participation and integration of the Latin American population, and there are great masses of people who remain on their margins, they should, in the light of this new mentality and mode of being, be reorganized.

The process of socialization, the necessity to order a dynamic production and just distribution in this new organization, obliges a thorough review of the structure of associations, and of the State. (Ibid., 21)

More specifically referring to basic structural reforms, CELAM has encouraged its member national Episcopal

Councils (national councils of bishops) to promulgate several important pastoral directives.

While safeguarding the natural right to private property, following the teachings of the Church, it is necessary to treat the following points: the fundamental right of all to the use of material goods comes before private property; that it is necessary to correct, with wisdom and firmness, the accumulation of property in the hands of a few; that the State - bearing in mind the common good and social justice - has the right to determine the limit to which proprietors may freely administer their goods. (Ibid., 21)

As for associated structures, it will be necessary to promote

enterprise systems which institute a just distribution of the common product and the responsibility of all participants of the enterprise; a free syndical organization of external pressure groups which determine the attainment of their ends; an organization of the sectors of production, based on the equal participation of workers and employers; a cooperative organization which loans the necessary services to producers with the object of increasing the productivity of their work. (Ibid., 22)

And as for the increasing role of the State, it will be always necessary in Latin America

to stand in favor of associations and persons within the limits of the common good. Thus it is necessary to plan the economy with the cooperation of the community, and to modify structures of democratic power and public administration so that they are able to play their economic and social part with major efficacy and with major participation of the community in the means of their organization. (Ibid., 22)

Agrarian reform is of seminal importance here. Latifundia and minifundia are grave problems in Latin America which contribute to the continent's imbalance. Thus it is necessary to establish a policy of land redistribution. Again, the notion of the common good should come before the idea of the rights of private property. In all of agrarian reform, basic education (Educación de Base, mainly adult education) is indispensable for the formation of personal incentive and a sense of community.

For this, it is necessary to contribute to the raising of the rural population's standard of living giving Church properties an effective social

function; contributing to the creation of a rural middle class capable of participating in the social, economic, cultural, and political life of each country; contributing to the raising of the productivity of the land, helping in the propagation and adoption of modern techniques of production; stimulating fundamental education especially utilizing audio-visual aids; assuring, through competent organisms, official and private, an ample program of technical assistance and financial credit. (Ibid., 23)

But these are mainly economic and political reforms deemed necessary by the bishops. Latin America now is beset also by social problems which need solution.

Apparently the Church feels that while it does not have the "competency or capacity" to directly foster necessary economic and political structural reforms, it does so in areas needing social reform. While recognizing the State's "rights and obligations" to deal with its population problems, such as social and family legislation, rural to urban migration, or the provision of information about the situation and needs of the country, no policy suggestions similar to the ones made above are made to the State in these areas. However, CELAM suggests the continental promulgation of a broad range of pastoral programs and reforms dealing with the problems of population, urbanization, and internal migration.

Specifically dealing with "population" the Mar del Plata "Conclusiones" suggest the establishment on a continental level of technical organizations which stimulate an awareness of the gravity of the problem, warn society and Christians against easy solutions which will hinder human dignity and which are at the same time socially insufficient. They suggest programs which will investigate the causes and sources of the solution of the problem. They also suggest the intensification of pastoral programs, especially in "fluctuating groups," concentrating and orienting themselves toward the family. This includes increasing the number of family apostolates with emphasis on the dignity of love, human generosity, and a sense of parental responsibility to children, society, and the Church as well as the psychological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of Christian matrimony (mainly through courses before marriage). (Ibid., 23)

For a program aimed at the solution of the problems of urbanization, CELAM suggests to its member Episcopal Conferences the study and creation of urban pastoral programs which will be dynamic, adaptable, fruitful, open to the participation and collaboration of all, and which go beyond present static and routine ones. Also suggested is preparation and adoption of new norms for the distribution and coordination of clergy to come more into focus with urban life; the intensive recruitment

of the laity, and the mobilization of all Church forces into integrating the work of evangelization; and the revitalization of sacramental and liturgical programs which with a view of the formation of a lay community and the formation of missionary groups within the city. As for the great masses of people pouring into Latin American cities, CELAM suggests the acknowledgment of the problem, the creation of special pastoral programs for immigrants, the promotion of centers which will plan the settlement of migrants, and the encouragement of ideas for the decentralization of economic and social resources from large cities to areas in the country. The last will with the creation of "poles of development" alleviate pressures on the great cities. (Ibid., 28)

### Integration of the Church

In addition to its concern with the problems facing Latin American society in general, the Church is faced with a host of its own. The late Manuel Larrain E., Bishop of Talca, Chile, for example, has outlined four "areas of deficiency" which call for immediate attention: "the absence of proper evangelization; an excessive devotion to the sentimental rather than the doctrinal; a lack of adequate structuring of pastoral programs; and a scarcity of clergy." (Larrain, 217). Or more specifically on the "religious situation" Cardinal Suenens notes

the long traditions now imperfectly understood, the customary Catholicism, the flashes of true heroism and generosity, the patience and simplicity of the poor, the fiestas - little more than an emotional release - the fervent practice and the social inertia, the cultured piety, and the superstition. (Suenens, 345)

Houtart and Pin quote a 1958 estimate that 3.5% of male and 9.5% of female Latin American Catholics attend Sunday Mass (compulsory for Catholics). (Houtart and Pin, 166). My own calculations indicate Latin America's priest-laity ratio of 1:4851 (one priest for 4,851 Catholics) was in 1966 almost four times that of the rest of the Church. Despite these problems, Latin America remains, "in some mysterious way" to quote Suenens, overwhelmingly Catholic. Any attempt to solve these internal problems and remedy the causes they signify must be massive and involve a good deal of the Church's organizational structure.

A start toward a solution was made in 1955 with the foundation of the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM). This organization is both unique in the Catholic world and in Church history since it is the first and only continental organization of bishops. The purposes of CELAM are to

Study the problems of interest to the Latinamerican [sic] Church in order to find their adequate

solution; obtain an opportune coordination of Catholic activities of the continent in order to assure efficiency; promote and sustain projects that, directly or indirectly, present a common interest; make available to the national Episcopal Conferences the pastoral and technical services that respond to the real needs of the Church; prepare for the Latinamerican Episcopal Conferences, when the Holy See convokes them and at the same time concern itself with the problems that the Holy See refers to it. (CELAM, Latinamerican, 5).

CELAM is made up of delegates and alternates elected by each of the 21 member national Episcopal Conferences (national organizations of bishops). A delegate or alternate must hold the office of bishop. CELAM has no formal authority to implement policies, its role is purely one of "contact, collaboration, and service." (Ibid.)

To fulfill its purposes, CELAM has a dozen specialized departments dealing with pastoral programs, liturgy, faith, missions, vocations, seminaries, education, university apostolates, social action, lay apostolates, social communication, and ecumenism. (Ibid., 14). While the General Secretariat of CELAM is located in Bogota, specialized departmental headquarters and staff are scattered across South America, the president of each department may be - but sometimes is not - in the same country as his department. The departments also prepare special institutes in their respective fields. Apparently once held an institute acquires a specialized staff and continues as an educative organ. Thus mainly through the work and coordination begun by CELAM, the Latin American Church has committed - or will commit - a great deal of its resources to its "ideal of integration."

As a testament to this commitment, and so that others in Latin America will follow its example, the Church has begun the integration of all its facilities on all levels, parish, diocessan, national, continental, and intercontinental. This amounts to a monumental task involving in Latin America 352 dioceses with 17,213 parishes, 43,756 priests, 7,689 seminarians, 29,585 men religious (brothers), 136,394 women religious (sisters), 14,808 schools with 3,987,267 students (National Catholic Almanac 1968) and countless thousands of "associated structures" such as Catholic Action groups, labor unions, political action groups, family movements, cooperatives and so forth. It also involves the cooperation and aid of the Church in other areas, mainly North America and Europe. For example about 40% of the clergy in Latin America now is foreign (Labelle, 168), the United States will have about 10% of its clergy in Latin America by 1971. The Holy See evidently feels that the "ideal of integration" in Latin America is so important that it established the Pontifical Commission for Latin America in 1958 to deal specifically with the area.

Ultimately all levels of the Church in Latin America will be committed to the "ideal of integration" of not only the Church itself, but also of the continent. If need be, there will be the "creation and adoption of structures, services and movements within the Church which contribute to the integration of the continent," there will be the "approval and giving favor to organizations which are engaged in Latin American integration," and the "ideals of integration and development" will be dispersed to all Church educational institutions. "It is necessary to explain and fortify a Latin American consciousness....for socio-economic, political, and cultural unity, and for an effective consciousness of a Christian community on the continent." (CELAM, Presencia, 18)

### Conclusion

Obviously the material considered here has as many interpretations as there are readers to read it. Mountains of pages already exist seeking meanings or motives from the statements of the recent Council, from CELAM, and from the words of Paul VI in his "Populorum Progressio." What strikes this author, a cultural geographer by craft, is that Latin American Roman Catholicism joins other religions of the "third world," Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and the thousands of messianic cults everywhere, in their reaction to the spread of northwestern European and Anglo American technological and industrial innovations. While each reacts in its own way, all show a vitality and determination to combat, and perhaps alter, the processes of industrialization and "development." Roman Catholicism in Latin America seems determined to "orient" the development of the continent toward its "ideal of integration" based on the Christian humanistic concept "the whole man and all men." If successful in the formation of a "Latin American consciousness" necessary for this orientation, the results will be profound, not only for Latin America and the Latin American Church, but also for the rest of the world.

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Only the Church can carry out the full meaning of development. To live up to this will, the Church must recognize that the development of nations is not an end in itself but a means to a higher end, the humanization of man.

The Church's mission is to be carried out by the people themselves. The Church must not be a mere spectator but a participant in the development of nations. The Church must be a sign and instrument of unity and peace in the world.

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