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LATIN AMERICA'S CHALLENGE TO THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES:
THE ISSUES WE FACE,

By

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In Romans 8:18 - 25, Paul has painted a vivid picture of the whole creation which is particularly descriptive of Latin America today. Suffering, futility, bondage, decay, groaning, and travail comprise the background. These words correspond to what we have seen and felt. We do not need the proverbial statistical report to confirm that this disfiguring reality exists, and that it affects the vast majority of Latin Americans. And once more we are tempted to stop here and go no further. In understandable impatience, we may feel prone to see in this background the clue to our urgent task, finding in it the "challenge to the churches and the issues we face."

Beginning here would mean, however, disregard for the totality of the picture. Against the awful background of human confusion, Paul discerns the awesome foreground of divine intervention. Here he finds both clue and beginning. In the light of this passage, we too can discern God's new order in Latin America. The ingredients of that new order, in Paul's words are: longing, disclosure, sonship, hope, glory, liberty, first-fruits, adoption, redemption, salvation, and even patience. Through them we are assured of God's prevenient and all-encompassing action, but not as onlookers. Quite the opposite: as partakers of the first-fruits of this new order, we too groan in travail, all the more when we feel within and see without the intolerable stubbornness of the old.

If we proceed at all, it is because of the hope which is Latin America's, the world's and therefore our own. Without any illusions, we know that we are "dealing with the passing and vanishing of a form of the world which is already, judged, removed, and outmoded by the coming and secret presence of the Kingdom... that under, behind and in all that will be and is seen, there is concealed, and presses toward the light, the new form of the world which alone must be taken with first and final seriousness"(K. Barth, C.D., IV II/2, Par. 72.2).

With this perspective in mind, the challenge for Christians is to live and work that more signs of God's new order may be seen in opposition to the old. Latin America's present mood of groaning and hope is itself the sign that the collision of the two orders has occurred, releasing a universal longing for the manifestation of a new and just society. The central issue is whether Christians will prove to be those sons of God eagerly longed for by a world groping for freedom amid bondage, for newness amid decay, for hope amid travail, for sonship amid orphanhood, for redemption amid enslavement, for salvation amid lostness.

THE CHURCHES' RELATION TO LATIN AMERICAN SOCIETY

The Evangel has always and everywhere brought into being the first-fruits of a new humanity. The Evangelical transformation of countless lives is in evidence today in practically every city, town, and hamlet in Latin America. As Latin American "evangélicos" we have rightly interpreted, along with all other Christians, that conversion to the Gospel meant a new existence, putting an end to the bondage of the past, confidently entrusting the present and the future to the ongoing renewal of God's Spirit. Potentially, the most sympathetic group to change in Latin America have been these Christians whose very lives are a harbinger of God's new order.

By and large, however, potentiality has not become actuality. I speak for the Protestant community. The theology of the first decades of evangelization became normative for the subsequent self-understanding of the Christian and the Church. It was marked by a concept of conversion which laid emphasis on individual salvation, and personal holiness. Moreover, its central idea of the "spirituality of the Church" was practically silent on the social dimensions of salvation. The wider theological context of the time did have a doctrine of the sovereignty of God, but it was applicable only to the Church. Reading Latin American Protestant literature of the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, one gets the impression that "evangélicos" are the only members of the Church, that their membership is legitimized by sound belief and correct behavior, and that their vocation is to remove other individuals from an unredeemable world, fitting them morally and spiritually for life beyond the grave. Of course, allowance was made for the attractive idea that some semblance of social transformation might come about if only there were enough converts. This idea was here and there vindicated by the conversion, for instance, of a whole village. I am reminded of a case in Northern Mexico, where this actually happened. A nucleus of the best leadership of my church traces its evangelical lineage to that event in the 1880's. As long as it remained isolated from the "world", that village was a showcase of puritanical virtue a la New England. But when the highway connecting it with the state capital was opened, it was no match for the "world". Attempts since then to recover its evangelical purity have proven increasingly unsuccessful.

Another attractive idea, more viable than the one just discussed, was the result of those exceptional times when recognized evangelical leaders rose to occupy a prominent public office, giving rise to the hope that a nucleus of them strategically placed in the citadels of power would bring about the transformation of society. Rightly, these men are revered. The pity is that they have been so few. Can there be any doubt that their fewness is due to the other-worldly theology of their churches, which gave them little or no support while swimming in the contaminated waters of the world, and frequently withheld approval from them until they had "arrived"?

While on the subject of ideas about social transformation, a grateful word is in order as we think of Protestant contributions to the alleviation of disease and ignorance, beginning in that period when public medicine and education were a rarity in Latin America. There come to mind two hospitals which have been untold blessing to Mexicans of all classes. Despite the sustained efforts of non-Protestants to discredit them, and equally sustained efforts of Protestants to make the conversion of patients the justification for their existence, they became signs of the kingdom, where the highest professional standards were wedded to Christian compassion. As

in other parts of Latin America, these hospitals find themselves today in unfortunate competition with increasingly superior public services, and under the continuing pressure to justify their mounting financial support in terms of conversions. Their future is problematic to say the least.

In Latin America schools are the pride and joy of the Protestant vision of service to society. From the Lancasterian school of James Thomson, in the early 19th century to the Evangelical University of Guatemala recently established, Protestants can rightfully claim to have been concerned for the enlightenment of Latin America outside of the strictly evangelistic outreach. Until the Second World War, it could be said safely that most of the Church's able leadership and some national figures had graduated from these "colegios". Moreover, the excellence of Protestant Schools became proverbial, so much so, that a growing number of non-Protestant families from the upper classes began to send the children there. As public education became available to a greater sector of the population, in many cases Protestant schools found themselves educating the children of the elite. Mounting costs had priced them out of the range of most evangelical families, and other poor people for whom they had been created in the first place. Pressures from governments to adopt official curricula, and in some cases, even official textbooks, further deprived them of their Protestant distinctiveness. In addition, the style of education oftentimes followed patterns borrowed from abroad, chiefly from the United States. One has only to remember how many of these institutions are known by the official or popular designation "Colegio Americano". Once again, a significant Protestant service to Latin American society was rendered inadequate by secularizing developments and ambiguous aims. With this history behind them, one wonders what new lights have led churches to found new Protestant schools in Latin America.

We cannot close this section without expressing genuine gratefulness for, and honest amazement at, the enormous accomplishments of those Protestant missionaries and nationals who preceded us. They were limited by a forbidding theology, but time and again the Gospel broke through those limitations in luminous lives and dynamic service. The best tribute we can pay them is to imitate their dedication, as we search today for a more viable theology.

TWO THEOLOGIES COLLIDE

If there is any truth in the statements made so far, it is no exaggeration to affirm that practically all Protestant churches working in Latin America are in dire need of a theology of the Church's relation to the world. Fortunately, such a theology does exist. It represents a rediscovery of a long neglected tradition of classical Christianity. As such, it guides the efforts of a vigorous vanguard. Indeed, much of the tension felt within Latin American Protestantism is due to the collision of two fundamentally different theological outlooks regarding the Church's presence in the world. It is not hard to see how a disdained religious minority, largely proletarian, arrived at such a literalistic understanding of the biblical condemnation of the world. Nor is it hard to see why it sought to express its condition of exile from that world. Only the person who has been closely identified with a tiny evangelical congregation, in the midst of a hostile society, can understand the Church's opposition to the world. Let it be remembered also that Protestantism came to satisfy pronounced eschatological needs among the victims of a brutalizing system, for whom the world held no promise but threat.

Understandable as this dichotomy Church-world may be in historical context, it is for a growing number untenable in the light of the Gospel. For them, the incarnation of God in the world establishes the world "as the theater of God's glory". (Calvin). As far back as the calling of Abraham, the inseparability between the Church and the world was ordained. Talk of separation is legitimate only if it is understood in terms of the biblical concept of sainthood; i. e., the act by which God sets aside a portion of mankind to serve the rest of it in His name. If God is sovereign over both Church and world, then, their solidarity is established. Sainthood, moreover, does not rid the Church of the sin of the world. Like the individual Christian, the Church never ceases to be simul justus et peccator. If anyone should be able to sympathize with the sinful condition of the world, it is precisely the Church, since it is made up exclusively of forgiven sinners, whose priestly vocation makes them responsible for their own sin and the sin of the world. Hence, the Church has life in the measure in which it lives for those outside it. Conversely, the Church ceases to have life in the measure in which it tries to save it.

For a significant sector of the Church in Latin America this is now the theological perspective. One of the first results has been an enormous sense of liberation from fear of the world. Confessing the sovereignty of God in the world, they refuse to accept as alien any sphere of Latin American life, in the conviction that God is everywhere already exercising His dominion. They gratefully acknowledge that the Church has no monopoly on the "higher deeds", for outside of it there are countless men of good will, natural allies in any humanizing effort, capable of love, justice, goodness, honesty, and sacrifice. Moreover, they understand that God's action in the world is always both indigenous and secular. Just as the Word became Jewish flesh in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod Tetrach of Galilee, the Church's message can be no less indigenous or secular. It takes on Latin American flesh in the fifth year of the Alliance for Progress, while Juan Carlos Onganía is President of Argentina, and Fidel Castro is Prime Minister of Cuba. Therefore, they repudiate forms of witness which are foreign and irrelevant. The Church must rid itself of all glorious traditions tying it to the past and to another culture, preserving only those human and material resources which have undergone the self-emptying demanded by a contemporary incarnation. Above all, they have rediscovered a sense of genuine solidarity with those who no longer tolerate the existing order, and with them seek the establishment of a new and humane one. Indeed, they consider it immoral to speak of eternal bliss without first actively sharing in the struggle to put an end to present misery. The Church perishes without Christ's constant presence. In a vibrant, new sense, the doctrine of Christ's ubiquity has become essential for them. The metaphysical categories of the 16th century, however, will not do. Instead, they insist that he is met in the everywhere-ness of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. But He is not truly met unless something effective is done for the rest of His brethren, whether by literacy campaigns, social security services, food distribution programs, reform legislation, equitable trade agreements, vigorous diplomacy, timely protest, or armed conflict. Love for Christ and His little ones demands dove-like gentleness, and snake-like wisdom, and therefore highly responsible action. But subject as Christians are to the ambiguities of the human condition, they cannot be paralyzed by the very real possibility of minor and major errors, for even then, the words of forgiveness apply: "As you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Such action on behalf of the world is also understood as an effective cure for a great deal of the Church's inner tensions and divisions.

Many of today's Christian students in Latin America can vouch for this experience. It was as they became involved in significant movements of social and economic reform that they found denominational differences pale into insignificance. Especially has this been true in Protestant-Catholic relations. I am of the conviction that in the absence of moral support from their largely conservative churches, many of these socially concerned Protestants will turn to the reform-minded Roman Catholic sectors for fellowship and common action, thereby finding a viable alternative either to desertion from a Christian commitment, or to joining radical groups committed to Havana, Moscow, or Peking.

The clash of two theologies, disagreeing so fundamentally on the relationship between the Church and the world, is at once the source of enormous frustration and hope. A recent illustration is the quadrennial meeting of one of Latin America's most prestigious "historical" Protestant churches. Its first official action was the appointment of a committee empowered to purge its seminary faculties of professors teaching ecumenicity (meaning rapprochement with the Roman Catholic Church), and the social responsibility of the Church. As deplorable a sign of reaction as this undoubtedly is, it points to a very encouraging growth of a theological vanguard committed to involve the Church in the humanization of society. Moreover, similar crises in both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches are bringing into being a continental solidarity of kindred minds.

THE CHURCHES' READINESS TO SERVE TODAY'S LATIN AMERICAN SOCIETY

This last section is intended to isolate areas of conflict and promise in an attempt to assess the capabilities of Protestant churches to be themselves signs of God's new order in Latin America. We proceed on the assumption that adherence to the traditional conception of the "spirituality of the Church", conversion of individuals away from the world, foreign patterns of worship and witness, and disregard for the social dimensions of the Christian life have no future, save perhaps the future of God's disapproval. Similarly, a vanguardist church-world position whose commitment remains at the level of endless dialogue and conference-going, avoiding the practical consequences of sacrificial involvement, is sterile, repugnant, and under the greater judgment of God.

1. An acute polarization of positions marks the life of the Protestant churches in Latin America today. The theological issue causing it is precisely what we have discussed so far at great length: the Church's relation to the world. The non-theological factors are as important, and often a great deal more sinister. Many churches are in the grips of a powerful clique which justifies its variety of motives under the rubric of protecting the Church from heresy. Uppermost in their denunciation are secularism, involvement in politics, and a rapprochement with Rome via the ecumenical movement. The pity is that at one time many of these men were known for their sterling character. No matter how reactionary they may have become, their unforgettable witness of earlier years, when being a Protestant was considered fanatical, has earned them the gratitude of all younger men of charitable disposition. Granting they share in all the foibles of the human condition, one wonders if they have not fallen prey to the worst aspects of a theology that taught them to disdain the world as dangerous, non-Protestants as children of anti-Christ, worldly believers as no believers at all, and unorthodox positions as

the work of Satan. Moreover, these men fell heir to a life margined from society in the name of Christ. Reduced to a limited sphere of action, they found compensation in endless activism and petty detail. By the time they came to power, they were masters of the bureaucratic arts. When to all this one adds the caudillista tradition of Latin American society, the result is not surprising at all. Once at the top, suspicious of the world and fellow-Christians, where can they go? They can either weep with Alexander the Great because there is nothing more to conquer, or perpetuate themselves in power through a clever arrangement of musical chairs and new alliances.

No one at all conversant with the present situation of Protestant churches in Latin America is unaware of these new alliances. Powerful conservative church groups in the United States are actively promoting a continental common front of so called conservative, evangelical elements opposed to so called liberal, ecumenical groups, precisely at the time when a sincere effort (UNELAM) is being made to bring some semblance of unity by a coordination of functional groups. Justice is not served by an attempt to lay equal blame on both groups. Nothing can rival the intolerance of the reactionaries. Circulating all over Latin America and the United States is an unfounded document, read at the annual meeting of the Council of Churches of Perú last January, charging ecumenical leaders and groups with fostering communist infiltration. Also in January, a conservative magazine with the largest circulation among religious publications in the United States printed an article by a good but sadly misinformed missionary accusing the Latin American Board of Church and Society (ISAL) and its supporters of advocating a marxist ethic for solving the social and economical ills of the continent. In Chile, as John Housley informs us in a recent issue of Christian and Crisis (October 31, 1966), what had become a chaotic involvement of the Council of Churches with a propagandistic U.S. government food distribution program, was rendered even more destructive by the apparently successful attempt of North American conservatives to gain control of the program, knowingly retaining some of its corrupt national leaders, and blaming the debacle on leftist ecumenical agencies.

That this clique continues in power by an anti-ecumenical and anti-Roman Catholic appeal is, in itself, the saddest commentary on the churches' outlook, and the failure of more progressive groups to gain a hearing. The ecumenical cause in Latin America has suffered from several congenital defects. The world ecumenical gathering of Edinburgh 1910 in effect declared Protestant missions invalid in a supposedly Christian continent. The redress was attempted through the efforts of LAD's forerunner, the CCLA. In any event, its genesis was not in Panama, Montevideo or Havana. While committed to unity, North American mission boards related to CCLA kept sending missionaries largely unconcerned with Christian unity, and many, by design or default, quite unecumenical. From time to time there appeared on the Latin American scene North American ecumenical executives with little or no sensitivity to the mood of the churches. This lack of sensitivity was especially tragic in relation to Protestant-Catholic relations. Few outsiders, and few young Latin American Protestants know from personal experience the traumas inflicted by Roman Catholics upon Protestant believers, or have reason to remember how hopelessly ill the Roman Catholic Church was in most parts of Latin America until the mid-fifties. It is tragic that reactionaries capitalize on these memories, and that "progressives", both Protestant and Roman Catholic, often seem to be so insensitive to them.

There is good reason to suppose that the polarization of Latin American Protestantism will become a great deal worse before it gives way to a creative tension. No effort should be spared in the pursuit of reconciliation. But there is no genuine reconciliation without giving up dogmatic positions, and exposing intrigue to public light. We should be thankful that we can tackle this huge task of housecleaning in relative freedom. The discredit of Protestantism is no longer part of Roman Catholic strategy, while for a highly secularized continent the inner struggles of minority religious groups are hardly newsworthy. What we are not permitted to do is to forget that intramural repairs are ultimately not for the sake of the Church, but for the sake of the world, that it may see in Christian fraternity and service the unmistakable signs of a new humanity.

2. Another area of conflict and hope is the context in which Christians are having to decide how to translate their love for the world. Obviously, there is no unambiguous Christian option. Most Latin American Protestants have chosen to involve themselves only in distinctly church activities, including modest social services, ultimately designed to enlarge their constituencies; hence the constant preoccupation with more effective techniques of evangelism. No serious Christian can be contemptuous of these efforts, for the results are oftentimes lives changed, families reconciled, and invigorating additions to the believing community. What is questionable is the type of evangelism which by design or accident desensitizes the new believer to the claims of a suffering society upon his new life, or worse, which teaches him to fear and disdain society. In that case, evangelism is subversive in the extreme. It produces parasitical enclaves which dissociate themselves from any struggle to change the old order, while drawing from it its less compromising resources (language, schools, medical services, employment, and even its converts!) These enclaves dot the cities and the country side of Latin America. They are tolerated because they are largely apolitical, while serving as an effective tranquilizer for the discontent.

Those whose energies are exhausted in church growth are among the first to attribute sinister theological and political motives to churchmen concerned with the social and economic transformation of society. Their simplistic scheme of a sinless church as opposed to a sinful world leads them to no other conclusion. As if they were totally free from the sway of the world, they excuse themselves from secular involvements by raising some such question as "What communion does light have with darkness?" Apparently they never heard of God's raising pagans like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus as His servants to make up for the impotence of His disobedient people. This huge misunderstanding would not be so crucial if it were not the source of truly damaging charges, which poison the fellowship of believers, jeopardizing their public life, strengthening the grip of injustice, and adding to the calamities of the cold war.

I have specifically in mind the irresponsible charge of communism frequently raised nowadays by the traditional leadership of the churches when socially minded Protestants speak and work against oppression, particularly when this entails criticism of United States policies in Latin America. Only the most obtuse can deny that there is, for instance, a direct connection between the growing poverty of Latin American masses and a largely U.S.-dominated international trade system based on declining prices for Latin American primary products and increasing prices for manufactured products from the rich countries.

To some extent, it is fortunate that the charge of communism levelled at some Protestants coincides in chronology and intent with similar charges raised against reform-minded bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, and a growing number of other Roman Catholic leaders. Time was when reactionaries of both churches and governments could easily discredit, and often, with impunity, silence voices of legitimate protest by simply crying "Communism." Time was also when the United States could righteously justify support to dictatorial regimes as partners in a holy anti-communist crusade. Amazingly enough, the Roman Catholic Church's liberal elite, and a kindred vigorous Protestant minority are greatly clarifying the need for sweeping structural reforms, while making it increasingly difficult to peg the communist label to their efforts. (For a similar assessment, see Carlos Fuentes' review of three books dealing with the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, in the Sunday Herald Tribune's Book Week, p. 14, April 24, 1966). There is a great deal of hope in this development, particularly as it may tend to change public opinion in the United States, so intimidated by communism, and so unable to discriminate between any two types of political left.

This vexing problem of the left in Latin America brings to mind the crucial need for U.S. citizens visiting or working in Latin America, especially for missionaries, to help in the task of interpretation to their fellow citizens back home. It is a matter of sincere concern to many of us that few missionaries are able or willing, whether because of temperament, training or theology, to perform the labor of love of truly understanding the present political situation of their host country in Latin America. Most regard such concerns as outside their professional competence or their vocational commitments. Moreover, as aliens, they consider it improper even to inquire. One would naturally expect them, then, not to attempt any political analysis when they write their missionary letters, or when they go on speaking engagements after they return home. The fact of the matter is that, whether they like it or not, they do engage in political analysis because their churches are vitally concerned about communism in Latin America (after all, they read Time, Life, and Readers' Digest!). I recall the many missionary letters which hailed the April 1, 1964 coup in Brazil as practically an act of God, on the assumption that the country had been in imminent danger of a complete communist takeover. I heard substantially the same idea expressed last summer by a missionary addressing an audience of 3,000 persons. Would it be an exaggeration to suppose that, on the whole, missionaries have made a contribution to anti-communist fear in the U.S., and have, at the same time, made much more difficult the participation of Latin American Protestants in the struggle against injustice? Needless to say, U.S. churches are in dire need of much more competent information regarding Latin America, especially in the field of U.S. responsibility for the perpetuation of the status quo in the hemisphere.

3. Convinced as many of us are that a theological aggiornamento is essential to the Church's involvement in the world, we regard as truly hopeful developments in theological education. Apart from such excellent seminaries as the Union Seminary of Buenos Aires, the Lutheran Seminary of José C. Paz, the Union Seminary of Puerto Rico, the Presbyterian Seminary of Campinas, and the Biblical Seminary of San José, a new and highly functional approach to theological education is now being implemented, as for example, through the Interdenominational Theological Community of Chile, the multi-level Presbyterian Seminary of Guatemala, and the four Federated Seminaries of Mexico City. Furthermore, there are now promising regional associations of theological schools for the River Plate, Brazil, and the Northern Region of Latin America. The

latter includes both seminaries and Bible institutes, representing the whole theological gamut of Latin America. Without outside interference, these associations are likely to be one of the most effective instruments for ecumenical action and the renewal of the Church. Of course, theological education is not confined to the training of future clergy, some theological schools carry out a variety of extension services. Professors are frequently used as preachers, lecturers, leaders of retreats and conferences, as writers and translators, and in a word, as the mentors of the Church.

Vital to theological education and to the whole teaching ministry of the Church are serious publication ventures now at work, chiefly those assisted by the Theological Education Fund, and other agencies, in Argentina, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, and Mexico. Valuable textbooks in Spanish and Portuguese have appeared making available in translation the best authors of Protestantism, and original works like the important three-volume History of Christian Thought by Justo González. From my own experience as a former seminary teacher in Mexico, I can vouch for the fact that the nascent commitment of the Church to Mexican society coincides with that period when serious theological literature was introduced to students, pastors and congregations by way of the theological seminaries.

4. Inter-Church relations and aid constitute also an area of hope and conflict. This conference will, no doubt, review failures and accomplishments in service programs to Latin America. The recent fiasco in Chile, already referred to, should teach us valuable lessons, among others, the fact that professional churchmen are seldom good administrators. Furthermore, no church should be burdened with the responsibility of distributing relief commodities, which, to be sure, meet acute human need, but which at the same time, are used for propaganda purposes. There is something intrinsically wrong when in any way relief programs become benefaction, and a substitute for servanthood. These programs should be seen as emergency measures, while the causes that make them permanently necessary are being resolutely attacked. The Church serves society best when it points to the roots of an unjust order, and with other men of good will, at home and abroad, struggles to bring about radical change.

Here we touch also on resources that make possible the existence of continental functional groups, like ISAL, ULAJE, or CELADEC, to mention three prominent ones. Few agencies have made a larger contribution to raising fresh leadership and welding it together. Yet, they have often been under the attack of conservative elements, and the result has been that most of their support comes from the U.S. via New York or Geneva. In my judgment, this has been one of the best investments, especially because these groups have shown a great ideal of independence from donors, even to the extent of being publicly critical of the U.S. when the occasion made it necessary. It speaks very highly for North American churches to continue this support, as evidence that the resources of one part of the Church Universal ultimately belong to all, and that the sharing of them is to maintain the freedom to speak the truth to one another in love.

There is reason to suppose that, in the near future, misunderstanding as to the role of churchmen in the struggle against injustice will mean, for some, persecution, unemployment, imprisonment, and even martyrdom. The shadow of Camilo Torres is cast on all who so translate their Christian witness. Would it be too crass to suggest the establishment of an ecumenical fund, drawn from all quarters of the hemisphere, to aid the victims of governmental and church reaction? Have not the churches in the United States made this provision for the victims of the Church's struggle against racism?

5. Finally, we close with a serious consideration of Protestant-Catholic relations in the hemisphere. The mutual rejection of the past has no reason to be perpetuated. Not that we will ignore the incalculable damage it has caused. That would be false irenicism. Rather, for the sake of a common witness in Latin America, we shall forgive and be forgiven. Few signs of God's new order in Latin America could be more luminous than this reconciliation for the sake of Christ and the least of His brethren. We owe it to one another to rediscover our essential brotherhood in Christ, as we meet Him in the biblical revelation. Bible study together, undertaken for the sake of greater service in the world, will confirm our oneness and embolden us to raise more signs of the coming and secret presence of the Kingdom. The renewal of the Roman Catholic Church means that we can no longer, as Latin American Protestants, profess to find our spiritual unity in the Biblical message, when in practice we continue to be united in a holy crusade against Rome. The "evangelical" nature of the Roman Catholic renewal is, fortunately, forcing us to look away from anti-Catholicism and toward the Evangel, the good news of God's gracious decision for the world, as our meeting point. At the same time, it is providing us with a standard by which we can judge all truly Christian action, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic. No wonder formerly anti-Catholic evangélicos in North East Brazil have recently stood in solidarity with Archbishop Hélder Câmara as he sought to answer the Brazilian army's charge of communist sympathies against him. Witness their statement:

Faithful to the Biblical spirit, and in accordance with the imperatives of a Christian conscience, we wish to affirm our solidarity to father Hélder Câmara and to the other Roman Catholic representatives for their stand... in the struggle against oppression and for the sake of justice toward those who are oppressed and persecuted. We call upon all Christians to close ranks for a watchful resistance against the dictatorial acts which disrupt the life of our country.

(Carta Latinoamericana, Vol. II, No. 7, p. 4)

As in North East Brazil, the travail of a groaning Latin America shall again and again be the occasion for Christians to know the reality of reconciliation, and to know themselves and to be known as the awaited children of God.