

(7/8)
261(061.3)

H 27950c

THE LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH AND THE PROBLEM OF
UNDERDEVELOPMENT : AN ATTEMPTED TYPOLOGY

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1) A growing crisis of conscience or awareness - shared by both Christians and non-Christians - of the state of underdevelopment of the continent. As the document on Peace and Social Justice of the Synod of Bishops states: "Underdevelopment is an unjust structural condition which causes unjust pain. Poverty, injustice and man's exploitation of man, such as are characteristic of Latin America, create an abnormal situation which wounds the Christian conscience, which seeks permanent contact with the Gospel. It does not just mean institutional deficiencies, the limits or lack of a political life, but the total elementary requirements for the dignity of man in Latin America: his biological subsistence, his free, responsible being."

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The evolution of the presence of these two factors can be seen in a great number of occurrences in progress and the latter tensions and such tensions are relative to the efforts made by the Church and the faithful to overcome underdevelopment in Latin America.

Published by:
Division for Latin America, U. S. C. C.
Box 6066
Washington, D. C. 20005

Additional copies at .50 per copy may be purchased from the above name and address.

THE LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH AND THE PROBLEM OF
UNDERDEVELOPMENT : AN ATTEMPTED TYPOLOGY.

The Catholic Church in Latin America is living through a situation which is new in several aspects. This situation is the outcome of two principal factors:

1) A growing prise de conscience or awareness - shared by both Christians and non-Christians - of the state of underdevelopment of the continent. As the document on Peace (Medellín) states, if development is the new name of Peace, underdevelopment is an unjust situation fostering tensions which conspire against peace. Poverty, injustice and man's exploitation of man, such as are experienced in Latin America, create an abnormal situation which wounds the Christian conscience, which seeks permanent renewal with the Gospel. It does not just mean institutional deficiencies, the limits or lacks of a political life, but the most elementary requirements for the dignity of man in Latin America: his biological subsistence and his rights as a free, responsible being.

Further, there is a perception of the underlying causes of such a situation : our underdevelopment as a global fact, a by-product of the development of other world regions with the complicity of groups in each country.

2) The hopes aroused by the Second Vatican Council and by Medellín, in the sense of a presence in the action for development and justice, and also of an evangelical testimony of poverty, service and struggle for liberation.

The evolution of the pressure of these two factors can be seen in a great number of occurrences which indicate the seeking in progress and the inner tensions experienced. Such seeking and such tensions are relative to two interdependent poles, i. e. the future image of the Church and its positions toward the transformations underway in Latin America.

In this paper we will attempt to illustrate, by a number of examples, what these different positions of the Church are when facing the problems of Latin American development, which analysis illustrated specifically the second pole mentioned.

The task of comprehending the trends and the meaning of the evolution of the Latin American Church may be made easier if we

can formulate a sufficiently precise characterization of the various attitudes manifested around the two poles mentioned: the future image of the Church and its positions with regard to the transformations underway in Latin America.

We will try, at least hypothetically, to establish a typology of these attitudes. Any typology runs the risk of over-simplification, leaving on one side certain indispensable items; but it provides the opportunity of making distinctions in a sector which at the moment is rather confused.

Our typology will consider the two poles mentioned due to their intimate correlation. Our work is inspired by earlier papers formulated mainly by the Brazilian theologian Raymundo Caramuru de Barros and also by Francisco Whitaker Ferreira, in works as yet unpublished.

4.1 Hypothesis for a typology.

In relation to each of the poles mentioned, we can identify three basic types of attitudes, which we will call: conservative, modernizing and innovatory.

The conservative attitude is essentially traditionalistic; the modernizing attitude seeks to adapt the Church to the conditions and exigencies of today; the innovatory attitude wishes to create new structures.

We must point out that the three attitudes concerning the pole of the future image of the Church are not necessarily in line with the three attitudes concerning the other pole, that of the position of the Church in the present transformation of Latin America. There is a relation between them, but it is not one of absolute identity.

Each attitude will be presented with a series of characteristics, but we will not stray from the level of actual phenomena, or rather we will restrict ourselves to enumerating a number of visible signs. We are aware that a deeper analysis would call for a study of the motivations and causes of these apparent aspects, but within the limits of this paper we must limit ourselves to this first level of analysis.

4.2 The future image of the Church

In order to characterize the three attitudes, we will examine 6 aspects: the visible presentation of the Church; image of the hierarchy; working methods of the hierarchy; overview of social

action; liturgical overview; and view of the world and of the insertion of the Church in this world.

4. 2. 1. Conservative attitude.

. The Church is presented in the large cathedrals and magnificent temples; quest for prestige of the institution.

. The bishops are the princes of the Church. Use of purple, insignia, pompous vestments.

. Diocesan work is centralized and based on authority.

. Assistential and paternalistic social action.

. Traditional forms of liturgy.

. The world is seen as a present "Christianity", or one to be built, under the aegis of an institutional, clerical, triumphant Church.

4. 2. 2. Modernizing attitude.

. The Church presents itself in a modern public-relations perspective; the churches are transformed into multipurpose halls; striving for poverty but with "dignity, realism, prudence".

. The bishops should be simple and use lowly dress; be easily approachable; be helped by efficient, modern secretaries.

. Diocesan work proceeds according to modern methods, with planning and rationality.

. In social action, the key word is "human promotion", in a paternalistic view. Great importance is attached to the formation of leaders.

. Liturgical renewal with greater participation of the faithful.

. The same outlook of "Christianity" with less triumphalism but a fair amount of clericalism and institutionalism.

4. 2. 3. Innovatory attitude

. The Church should present itself in the simplest possible manner; worship and meetings do not need churches, but could take place in workplaces or dwellings; striving for "difficult" poverty.

. The bishop lives as a servant; no distinction from other men in his mode of dress.

. The work is carried out with no permanent structures; when there is planning, the plans are considered as research methods and methods of permanent questioning.

. In social action, there is an attempt before anything else "to arouse men's consciences" that they may assume their own destinies; participation of Christians in the liberating revolution is considered not just as a right, but rather as a duty.

. Dynamic and pluralistic vision of the world; the Church in a situation of diaspora and ferment; its members gathered in basic communities, priests working for their own sustenance like all other men.

4.3. Positions with respect to the transformations in Latin America.

To characterize the three attitudes concerning this second pole, we will take two aspects : positions regarding the socio-economic regime, and relations with power.

4.3.1. Conservative attitude.

. They support the socio-economic and political regime of their country when the objective of this is the maintenance of the status quo; they defend this system and combat all those opposing it.

. Compromise is admitted with the temporal powers and with the economically powerful in exchange for advantages and privileges, in the certainty that the Church thereby gains in prestige and substance, or that difficulties can be overcome to increase the Church's spiritual dominion among the people.

. In accordance with this attitude of permanence, it is impossible for the Catholic to cooperate with atheists, marxists, non-Christians, non-Catholics, even if it be to liberate majorities exploited and submitted to violence.

. Violence is morally justified when imposed by those wielding the means and instruments of power, but it is condemned when used by the oppressed as their sole outlet to liberate themselves from poverty or subhuman conditions of existence in which they are forced to survive.

. By supporting the civil power, it helps to maintain the status quo with its spiritual authority.

. It condemns revolution, change of structures, and the only possible reforms are the restoration of traditional Christian virtues.

4.3.2. Modernizing attitude.

. It perceives existing injustice, inequalities, the need for change and development.

. It criticizes the excesses and abuses of capitalism, which is not intrinsically bad as a system, but can give rise to certain defects or injustices. It also denounces economics that seek only profit and the international imperialism of money.

. It criticizes communism as intrinsically bad and atheistic; it condemns socialism which is identified with totalitarianism.

. It wishes to participate in the transformation of Latin America, but in such a way that the Church can be guaranteed a position of power in the new order being constructed.

. The standpoint of work is to obtain a series of structural reforms at national and international level, which can ensure development; it is wished to diminish inequalities of a social, internal order, and also the distance between developed and underdeveloped countries, and all this in an atmosphere of social peace.

. The neo-capitalist system and the ideology of Christian Democracy are accepted.

. In relations with the civil power, it always seeks conciliation and prefers collaboration or "direct contacts at high level", among leaders. In these contacts the powers-that-be can be manifested the social preoccupations, and the powers thus be helped to perform their social duties and responsibilities all the better. Typical instances : laymen and priests are arrested or tortured because of their ideas or participation in the struggle for liberation; what do the bishops do? They seek contact with the authorities, but they carefully avoid any public condemnation, and "prophetic" manifestation. However, at times the modernizers take up public attitudes of protest, which may lead to conciliation or even lead to a growing radicalism with various results which depend on evolution in relation to the very future image of the Church.

4.3.3. Innovatory attitude.

. Denounces injustices and inequalities and pronounces the need for change, development and also liberation of the oppressed, of the people.

. Does not limit itself to protesting against these phenomena, but seeks out the causes and criticizes capitalism (in its national and international dimensions) as the cause of these phenomena. It considers the neo-capitalist solution and Christian Democratic ideology as insufficient.

. Becomes more and more involved in various forms of revolutionary action against imperialism and neo-colonial bourgeoisie, refraining from falling into merely contemplative attitudes and therefore justificatory ones.

. Therefore it accepts this revolutionary solution within a properly Latin American socialist outlook.

. It insists it is not enough to have goodwill, that it is necessary to know the objective reality.

. Seeks to work out a scientific methodology of investigation and work which prevents the falling into empiricism and practicalism.

. In its relations with the civil powers, it prefers to stand alongside the poor and the oppressed; it opposes and publicly condemns the oppressing power, and institutional and structural violence; it suffers persecution.

. Seeks to make all activity to serve the people guaranteed by personal and communitary testimony in complete involvement and in poverty.

. Its attitude is total engagement with the people and on this basis stands its action against injustice. A free Church is wanted, in the service of the oppressed, whether these are considered as nations or as human conglomerates.

. The principal agent in the fight for liberation is the conscious people. The unity of all popular forces at national and international level is advocated in the fight against capitalist imperialism.

4.4. Attempt at differentiation.

If we wished to substantiate the typology here presented as a hypothesis, we should take into account two differences in the composition of the members of the Church: on the one hand the different roles and functions within the ecclesial structure, and on the other hand, the various age levels.

This check could provide us with good indications on internal tensions presently shaking the Catholic Church in Latin America, and also help us to gain a better understanding of certain attitudes or actions of Latin American Catholics.

Taking partly as our basis various studies on the Latin American Church and development, it can be stated that those who take a conservative attitude in relation to the images of the Church, are also conservative in relation to the transformations afoot in Latin America. But this identity does not occur in relation to the other two attitudes. That is to say, many of those who take up a frankly innovatory attitude in relation to the image of the Church, do not have a completely innovatory attitude in relation to the transformations in Latin America, and in this attitude they are modernizing. To sum up: they advance with respect to the ecclesial society, but stay in a less exacting position with respect to human or civil society.

In relation to the various roles and functions, we can consider these in three groups: the bishops, the priests and the religious, and laymen. In our view the distribution of the three attitudes varies for each of these groups.

a) The bishops.

We can say that the majority of Latin American bishops adopt a modernizing attitude in relation to the image of the Church, while the others are evenly divided among conservatives and innovators.

With respect to the transformations underway in Latin America, there are fewer innovators and more modernizers, the latter probably equalling the conservatives in numbers. The prospects of evolution in relation to the latter attitude would seem at first sight to be - if we take account of the conclusions at Medellín - towards increasing the number of modernizers, thereby lessening the number of conservatives and also of innovators. In this we must also consider certain pressures originating in Rome and thrusting in the direction of "modernization". Suffice it to recall certain premonitions of Pope Paul VI when he says that "the Church suffers from the rebellion

and the disorganized, subversive criticism of so many dear sons against its institutional existence".

On the other hand, the bishops belonging to the conservative persuasion are creating a broad, powerful current of opinion for the condemnation of the movements of the innovators and even of the modernizers, which movements are dubbed "charismatic" and "secularizing prophetism".

Lastly we will underline the recent crisis in such countries as Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Bolivia. These crises occurred precisely because of the innovatory action of many priests and laymen, and which places them in a situation of conflict with the government. With such crises, the conservative attitudes of many bishops in relation to the transformation of Latin America seem to extend.

b) Priests, religious and laymen.

The situation in relation to priests, religious and laymen is different, and evolution could also take different courses.

Regarding the image of the Church, the innovatory and modernizing attitudes are more numerous among priests, religious and laymen, with only a small part conservative. It can also be said that there is a tendency for the innovatory area to extend.

Can we say the same in relation to attitudes facing the transformations in Latin America? We do not possess many data on this aspect, but as pointed out, it is necessary to conduct a more thorough study on the spontaneous groups of laymen and priests in Latin America - of these groups which in a way constitute the "Underground church in Latin America". In this way we could make an attempted interpretation.

We believe there to be a modernizing majority and an innovatory minority among priests and religious, and an innovatory majority and modernizing minority among the lay.

The trend would be for the increase of innovators among priests, religious and laymen. But in relation to the laymen, we must observe that many adopting an innovatory attitude tend to separate from the institutional Church.

If such trends continue, they will also heighten the tensions between the hierarchy and the bases, and also between innovators and dictatorial governments.

The certain thing is that a concrete social phenomenon is already taking shape: the popular sectors are clustering more and more around rebel priests, while the oligarchic blocs, militarism, chiefs of state - with extremely rare exceptions - surround the defenders and advocates of the conservative or modernizing attitude.

Below we indicate the factors which, as we see it, could have the strongest influence on the evolution of these three attitudes quoted, always in relation to the transformation of Latin America.

We believe that one of the most serious problems to be solved is found precisely around one category - Marxist in origin - and the class struggle. The class struggle is frequently identified with violence and this gives rise to a grave ambiguity in the Church regarding the requirements of brotherhood and solidarity. A theological reflection on these concepts could help to gain a better identification of the nature of certain ruptures which are demanded by the socialist perspective, as by the concrete conditions in the Latin American context.

Our opinion is that the interdependence existing between the evolution of the Church and the evolution of global society must be examined attentively. In the instances of Latin America, such interdependence is decisive. The struggle for the "modernization" of the economico-social system, by means of reforms and "developmentism" in a neo-capitalist setting, is the basic characteristic of the civil and military governments of Latin America. So the governments strive to put down the tensions which could threaten the ruling socio-economic system. In the light of these facts, we understand the importance to the present structure of power for the Church to retain its conservative attitude, or at most a faintly modernizing attitude, with respect to the transformations in Latin America. This is borne out by all the efforts made by governments to neutralize, harry and denounce all innovatory groups.

Will the hierarchy decide for the conservative or modernizing tactics and pronounce itself against subversion of priests and laymen, thereby running the risk not only of losing prestige, but also of the Latin American masses abandoning it?

At the moment, the power structures are winning the battle, and the hierarchy does not appear to be decided to give the innovators any strong support; the rare exceptions confirm this general rule. It means the confirmation of a hypothesis which would be set forth as follows: the Latin American hierarchy is not innovatory,

and its dominating ideology is the same ideology as that of the power groups, when they represent the middle and upper classes. When the hierarchy sees the building up of the military dictatorships and neo-capitalist governments, it gives up its most advanced positions and takes up an attitude of conciliation. This history of Latin America is a clear demonstration of this. The Church hierarchy has seldom made any clear, unequivocal pronouncement against dictatorships when the latter destroy human rights and crush the people's every effort to achieve liberation, and has barely if at all raised its voice when dictators or governments dared to touch its property or colleges. Without doubt we bear with the progressive attitude of certain declarations of the episcopate, such as for example at the Latin American Episcopal Conference at Medellín which established the following pastoral line: "defend the rights of the poor and the oppressed, urging governments and managerial classes to eliminate everything that destroys social peace, injustices, inertia, venality, insensitiveness... To encourage and foster every effort made by the people to create and develop their own basic organizations for the recovery and consolidation of their rights and in their search for true justice" (Documents on Peace, nos. 20-27).

If we examine these and other similar declarations of the Latin American episcopate we can see that they generally occupy a position of modernizing ideology. But we must not illude ourselves by a few isolated denunciations taken out of the overall context of the document.

Another aspect of the question arises: the sector supporting attitudes we have called innovatory is struggling for a change in content and not just for a change of words or of masters. Hence their involvement with movements of popular liberation as an effective solution to Latin American problems. They know that they are up against imperialism and neo-colonialism. They do not remain indifferent because they are less afraid of communism in Latin America than a rebellious attitude by priests and nuns in the service of the real interests of the people.

If the members of the Church Hierarchy decide for an explicit, global condemnation, they seem mortgaged to imperialism, if they keep silent, they ipso facto place themselves alongside their oppressed faithful who form the huge majority, and movements will go forward with greater force than they have at present.

On the other hand there are some very significant indicators of the silence and choice of the Hierarchy for conservative attitudes,

which options contradict certain declarations or loud talk.

The Hierarchy keeps silent when the army puts Camilo Torres to death on his way to Chucurí; it keeps silent when Ivan Illich is sentenced; it keeps silent when seven hundred Brazilian priests ask to be relieved of their duties in less than three years; when 150 members of the Peruvian clergy accuse the papal nuncio of interference in matters that do not concern him; when over a score of priests confront their archbishop in Rosario, Argentina; when thousands of faithful protest to the Archbishop of Medellín to reject the dialogue, urging him not to change the parish priest of a poor district; when the Colombian government expels the priest Domingo Lain and four other missionaries as "separatists"; when the police kill peasants at Puerto Montt in Chile; when the dictatorship in Haiti multiplies its torture and expulsions of priests; when in Brazil priests are expelled from the country for their social activities; when in the same country hundreds of workers, students, priests and nuns are tortured and killed by the police.

There is no doubt that the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate at Medellín signals the upsurge of a renewed, dynamic Church launched on the reconquest of its primitive evangelical spirit; but this Church is already beginning to suffer the checks of the anti-Christian structures in which it had hitherto been submerged and slumbering. This was inevitable. When the Conference affirms in the Pastoral Conclusions of the Document on Peace that facing the social stresses and the temptations of violence which they provoke, "the Latin American Episcopate cannot opt out of assuming very concrete responsibilities" (2nd General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, ed. oficial Celam, p. 47, 1968); when, in application of these conclusions, the individual national episcopates start analyzing the reality of their respective countries and concretely denouncing unjust situations, the considerations and praise for this "harmless pachyderm" turn into recriminations, affronts and threats. Accused of meddling in politics, the episcopates claim their legitimate right of taking part in the construction of things temporal for man's liberation.

Thus the Paraguayan episcopate theologically bases its temporal intervention, stating that the "Church exists in this world as a sign of man's total liberation", and cannot therefore disassociate itself from man's concrete efforts for his liberation, "since every human attempt to conquer a little more freedom and dignity is in itself the germ of total liberation" which is the very stuff of the Kingdom, because in it the "liberating dynamism of God's grace" unravels (Declaration of the Paraguayan Episcopate, in Cuadernos de Marcha, No. 2, 1969).

And in its turn the Argentine episcopate states that "evangelization covers the whole range of human promotion. It is therefore our duty to strive for man's total liberation and to illuminate the process of change of the unjust and oppressive structures generated by sin" (Argentine Episcopal Conference, Marcha No. 1446 of 2 May 1969).

It is apparently the Church's firm intention to gravitate in worldly realities, and this, in addition to the foreseeable and already real attitudes of rejection and condemnation by the constituted powers, causes the need for a deep-going revision of theological and ecclesial schemata to support a pastoral of conflict, and calls for the working out of orientative guidelines in the face of an action whose hallmark is the very ambiguity of historical development.

It was to be expected that in Latin America this abrupt change in orientation of the Church (at least of its innovatory sectors), swinging round from being an ally and supporter of the status quo to one contradicting and accusing this same status quo, could not take place without a profound internal shudder, without grievous moral perplexities and acute intellectual resistance. The step taken from hieratic, bourgeois-like institutionalism to dynamic, revulsive prophetism, from disincarnate, tranquil angelism, to insertion in the broiling existential reality, could not happen without a crisis occurring in the Church, understanding the term to mean "a happening on which and from which God addresses it".

And this is seen to grow more acute because in reality the Church was not totally foreign to the political superstructure of established society. It participated in the hotch-potch of privileges and mutual concessions, it was a user of the system and placed the weight of its spiritual influence on the side of the powers that be; it accepted persons and parties according to whether or not they paid homage to its prerogatives. It thus engaged in politics, practising a *de jure* clericalism which discredited the content of the gospel message.

This acceptance - sometimes underhand - of unjust structures masked its tacit connivance with Caesar beneath the cloak of a privatist and individualist theological doctrine of personal salvation, by which the Church abstained from committing its opinion, publicly proclaiming the condition of structural sin of an unjust society. Even though this position was not consciously explicit, there is no

doubt it found its justification in that theological and pastoral concept elaborated for a utopian Christianity with no exploited and no exploiters, with no class struggle, where only individuals exist, monads with a soul.

Therefore, in endeavouring to take upon itself the proclamation of the Message, in its evangelical dimension, the Latin American Church must rid itself of these exigencies and - as the grievous consequence - it must turn against itself in everything it has taken and adopted in its ecclesiastical structures and pastoral choices from this "sinful" society.

The proclamation the Church makes - or should make - is not a secret message to a chosen few, nor a call in code to the intimacy of the spirit, but a public proclamation, cosmic if one will, of the ultra-worldly sense of all creation and, in counterpart, a denunciation of misinterpretations, of all those situations which cause man to lose himself in the senselessness of his existence.

Such are - in our era more acutely - the situations of social injustice, of the exploitation of man, the exploitation of peoples.

This call for justice must become so absolute and radical in the Christian concept of man that no form of unjust society can be imagined which does not call forth the Church's public and permanent denunciation. In this way, immersed in history, it works as a catalyst of progress, it impels historical decisions and marks a minimum and tendential ethical level for political action.

Most times - and this is being witnessed in Latin America - a mere ethical attitude is inadequate and even negative, since it provokes the reaction and hardening of the means of oppression in the structures and of the oligarchies they support. Should then the Church transform itself into an ideology to promote change and to construct more human structures in substitution? Without doubt this is not its function. The step from prophetism to ideology is a permanent and dangerous temptation when the Church assumes its intrahistorical function. Political practice, immediate, concrete political affairs, are no prophetic, eschatological function, but political science, social skill, eminently human charism. Here must be added the commitment of the Christian who endeavours to offer his person and his action to the technical and political building of a more just society. The Church - illuminator of history - administers man's salvific coordinates with those which the Christian orients his fermentive action. The Church, the people of God, thus acts through its members, who, paradoxically, are also the Church.