

U.S. CULTURE AND ITS CAPACITY FOR
COLLABORATION IN LATIN AMERICA
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Perhaps I should start out with two rather simple anecdotes which will serve as texts. A student at the Catolica in Lima had done various things for me. She was not at all well-to-do, not exceptionally clever, and certainly not what anyone would call beautiful. But she was a wholesome girl whom anybody would like to have around. When I asked her if there was anything I could give her as a token of gratitude she took me to a phonograph shop window and pointed rather shyly at a German recording of Orff's Carmina Burana. Not an American jazz tune, or even the Lenore Overture! I was impressed by what benevolence can sometimes accomplish. The second tale is of a somewhat more violent character. I was riding in a car driven by a Chilean rather well known as an arch-conservative. He had the window next to him open. We drove past a truck filled with oranges. The driver and handy man took one, hurled it at the car, and as disaster would have it the missile came through the window. I was hit on the head with a terrific wallop. I was left to believe that a mute, inglorious Juan Marischal would go unrecognized in his grave while the real target, the North American, had mysteriously attracted the orange.

As you know I am neither a social scientist nor a diplomat, at least in the Latin American sense of the term. Therefore I must concentrate on what I know most about, though to be sure it is very little. My subject is the inevitable ego, the Ich, as the humanistic disciplines have caught at least a glimpse of it. The introductory words are taken from one of Paul Weiss's books:

To achieve civilization, we must not aim directly and fixedly at a civilized world, but at the attainment of beauty, of religious insight, of an understanding of basic ethical principles in such a way that their outcome is their exemplification in this world. If we aim at civilization, what we will eventually attain is not civilization but people sharing in it at various degrees less than the optimum.

If I have quoted this from one of the most distinguished Jewish thinkers of our time it is in order to hazard the guess that what has robbed so many of the good deeds we North Americans have done in Latin America of true creative effectiveness is just this: we have presented ourselves to others as exemplars of what we want them to be, and not as men and women whose real interests lie in fact side by side with theirs beyond the area of technological civilization. This last they know is really what we most deeply revere. It is quite natural that we should do so because we are very skilled in this kind of civilization. Latin Americans relatively seldom are. Whereas the Japanese have learned from us and from the Europeans all that can be taught about technology; and indeed sometimes do better than their masters, Latin America is, despite its immense natural resources, still lacking, for example, in sufficient industrial strength to make a Common Market possible, though this is something Simon Bolivar thought of long ago.

Let me illustrate. I have seen North Americans smuggle suitcases full of birth prevention coils into South America and distribute them at random. Looked at from the highest ethical level, they were substituting a technological device for eminently rural recourse to abortion, which in all probability has been practiced for centuries. But as far as I have been able to tell, such devices have a strong anti-humanistic implication for Latin Americans. Women have relieved themselves of unwanted growth in their wombs since time immemorial,

utterly alien though this is to Christian moral teaching. But the proposed new way is peculiarly technological, peculiarly North American.

I shall now step back into history. The basic cultural impulse in so far as the United States is concerned derives from the idea of freedom. The word is used here in the sense that Toqueville understood it. Perhaps as has often been said the basic ethic was Protestant. But one must immediately add that the Catholic immigrant was almost everywhere placed in a situation which made his religious and vocational liberties dominant concerns. In the mill towns of New England Catholics and Negroes were alike creatures to exploit; in the Middle west Germans had again and again to struggle for their civil rights. The culture (not the economic institutions) of the United States bred the great war of the 1860s; and it has ever since been bent on liberating someone from something -- at home from predatory capitalism, disease and even potential exploitation by agents of subversion; abroad from Communist control and the four great evils of poverty, ignorance, disease and overpopulation. We have done, still do, these things with great uneasiness and of course with some lapses into predatory exploitation. He whom Latin Americans call the Yankee is a curious blend of braggadocio and humility. The examinations of conscience to which he subjects himself almost continuously, coming up with such self-characterizations as Ugly American are, however, seldom taken seriously abroad. What our friends usually see is a man with a conscience and a pocketful of libidos. At any rate, I do not believe that we ourselves or anybody else can understand our present stance unless he grasps what is so deeply rooted in our culture. We are really at heart inveterate do-gooders, in spite of our current affluence and obvious ethical decay.

And Latin Americans? Of course we will agree that in an important sense there are no such people. Anyone who has spent some time in Rio or Sao Paulo knows that the breath of the tropics fills every cranny of men's souls, and that here is an entirely different world from that of Chile stretched out like an eel from one cluster of mountains to another. Nevertheless one can from another point of view conclude that there is a Latin American. He is aware that his culture is of European origin and still in significant ways pre-Western.

It seems to be that just as the cultural thrust in the United States has been made in terms of freedom, so also the thrust in Latin America has been towards independence. Simon Bolivar was perhaps the most constructive and Platonic genius in modern history, for all that he dreamed of a kind of Pan American UN. Perhaps if this country had been prepared at the time to consider some of Bolivar's proposals in practical terms the course of history might have been different. At any rate, his dream faded, while that of our founding fathers did not. Their union was imperfect, has had to be fought for in one manner or other to this very day. But however real and decisive Bolivar's campaign against Spanish rule was, the love for Spanish culture survived. And independence? Of course it is regrettably true that the United States made predatory assaults on Latin American states, sometimes military in character. Yet in the end an impressive amalgam was created -- first in the form of an Organization of American States and then in that of the Alliance for Progress.

I have thought about the matter a good deal and though such statements as that which follow must be quite tentative it seems that while the North American service of freedom is not free of traits of imperialism, consciously realized or not, the Latin American idea of independence has been nationalized to the point of no return. How to

get the two in tandem so that real progress can be made is the conundrum. Certainly many people in Latin America today are better off than they have ever previously been, romantic views of Inca culture to the contrary notwithstanding. But we all know that improvement is no palliative when a people starts from a predominatingly low base. The movement can be kept going only through team work; and precisely this is lacking. For instance the attitude of organized labor towards the poverty of the unorganized has sometimes been far from exemplary in Europe and the United States, but in most of Latin America I have seen it is crass. The average thoughtful person to the south of us realizes all this and is painfully aware that as a result he remains inefficient in comparison with North Americans, Europeans and the Japanese. It is obvious to him that none of his major problems are anywhere near being solved -- education, industrialization, agricultural production.

His great continent is also buffeted by culture-forming forces. Pre-Western civilization bubbles up from the subsoil, for example in the weird Pentacostal religions in Brazil, mixtures of pagan rites and superstition-ridden Christianity. But it is the European culture which counts most. We need to take a candid look at its character. It was first felt when the conqueror in the name of profit arrived side by side with the conqueror in the name of the Cross. We can only dream of what the Church in Latin America would have been like if the liberating, civilizing influence of the Jesuits had been felt everywhere instead of being suppressed. What was it actually sometimes like?

Dr. H. Willis Baxley, who as a special commissioner for the United States, visited some parts of the West coast of Latin America during the early sixties of the last century, quotes the comments of a European Catholic observer on the prevalent monastic life:

It is shocking to find them in the processions, while bearing the cross, banners, and candles, having no respect for their robes, nor for the sainted images they carry, nor for religion, nor for decencies demanded by the occasion....On returning to the church two lines of monks are are often formed at the portal, through which the crowd pass into the interior, and there too they indulge themselves without restraint, in jest and sarcasm, compliment and repartee; alluring complacent senioritas, white, black or copper-colored, and addressing to them shameless gallantries; the spectator, I will not say religious, but merely of proper delicacy, turning away with disgust from such unblushing libertinism.

To such depths did the religious establishments of the Conquistadores tumble, largely perhaps by reason of the close union between Church and State, served during many years by the Inquisition.

The Latin American Church of today is a greatly improved, in some respects certainly a heroic Church. It has very much to its credit in terms of religious communities, of education, of popular catechetics, of laborious concern with poverty. It has great and sometimes eloquent bishops. There are Catholic laymen and lay women who can set for all of us an example in terms of service and religious dedication. Of course there are not enough. But sometimes I wonder these days whether the never-ending controversial cantankerousness which now seems to characterize the Church in the United States would not profit from exposure to the kind of men and women I have just signalled out.

Of course it has been greatly assisted for a long time. The same Dr. Baxley from whose book I have quoted wrote on his own behalf:

I have not seen anywhere a dispensary at all comparable with that of San Andres (in Lima)....It may be said that the botica of San Andres Hospital is not surpassed by the apothecary shops of the chief cities of the United States. Although admitted -- by special courtesy to a stranger -- to the private apartments of the Sisters of Charity, a sense of propriety forbids a reference to the arrangements for their seclusion, other than to say that these are remarkable for the perfection of order....characteristic of these good Samaritans everywhere. The sisterhood having

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charge of this hospital....came from France a few years ago on this special mission of benevolence. The Superior, bearing the appropriate name Angelica, and who illustrates her title by her good deeds, is a lady distinguished alike by her accomplishments, exalted character, disinterested charity, and administrative ability.

What this staunch Protestant New Englander did not realize is that Sister Angelica represented the Post-Revolution aggiornamento in France, which despite its sterling virtues and readiness to serve did not dispel the fascination of the ideology of the Revolution for great parts of Latin America. But in France as elsewhere the Revolution was a bourgeois and intellectualist movement and concerned itself with the abjectly poor scarcely at all. None of the society-changing doctrines of the Anglo-Saxon world played any role. On the day of President Vargas's funeral I stood on the veranda of a hotel in Rio looking out over a deployed machine gun company to the tiny military airport from which his body was to be borne, and beside me was Marton Zabell, Chicago University professor and poet, who had spent several years in Latin America as a cultural attache. "How tragic it is for this country," he said, "that it has never had the tradition of the British Constitution and the Federalist Papers. All it had to fall back on are a Feudalism and a Revolution both ruined by their excesses."

And so it was eminently natural that when Eduardo Frei fashioned the theory of Christian Democracy in Chile it was again a French thinker, Jacques Maritain, who supplied the philosophical background. In part this is no doubt due to the dominance of ideological parties. But probably the main reason is that the doctrine of social change, whether in terms of evolution or revolution, continues to bear the stamp of France and Spain. So also does social conservatism. My Notre Dame colleague John Santos, who probably knows Brazil as well as anybody in the United States does, feels that the basic social unit is

the family held together by strong ties. This is also a concept French, Portuguese and Spanish in character. Professor Santos believes that it is difficult to proceed from a pattern of intense feeling of family responsibility to a sense of responsibility for the larger society, and proposes a heavy infusion of the behavioral social sciences. He may be right. I am not qualified to judge. But we might observe that the United States has never been able to export the theory in the light of which the American Labor Movement has grown so strong, doubtless because its principal component, collective bargaining, recognizes the entrepreneur as an equal partner. In some parts of Latin America he is simply the enemy.

The United States has of course been no stranger to Latin America in either the philanthropic or religious sense. What the great Foundations have accomplished in fostering the improvement of medicine, agriculture and engineering certainly adds up to one of our great national achievements. Recent improvements in agriculture in Mexico are, for example, really spectacular. Nor will anyone who has observed the educational and pastoral mission of the Church question the very moving sublimity of its purpose and the reality of its achievement. But we have not been able to break the grip of the revolutionary ideology even with the help of the Peace Corps. Perhaps -- there is no use raking over old coals -- Catholics were poorly prepared for the mission in Latin American countries. Exceptions having duly been noted, we were prone to append the Fourth of July and Armistice Day to the list of religious feast days. We naively assumed that Latin America is a Catholic continent. There was superstition, yes, but that was infinitely better than no religion at all. We made quite a hullabaloo over Protestant missionary activities, not noting that their occasional successes must have been caused by something. And most failed to see thirteen year old girls soliciting on dark streets in Lima, saying

Ave Marias lest they go home without having earned anything.

Of course we have had our successes and it would be grave self-abasement not to recognize them. Just to mention one of them, anybody who has seen a little of the work of the sons and daughters of Maryknoll will never easily forget it. I believe that we have greatly improved our relationships with many of the Catholic universities, as we certainly have with students who come to study in this country. I can speak only for Notre Dame, but this does have loyal alumni in many parts of Latin America. Indeed one of the principal problems is to find the time to communicate with them. Our priests and religious are no strangers to the barriadas and the campos. Students from our colleges and universities have worked hard and sacrificially in the blighted rural districts.

But, and we might as well be frank about the matter, much of the Latin American present is disappointing from a North American point of view. Of course we ought to provide more economic assistance, perhaps as is so often suggested by subsidizing higher prices in world markets for staple agricultural products. It is naturally apparent that the great industrial and commercial centers of the United States generate so much wealth, even as the research establishments produce so much know-how, that it sometimes really seems that they could foot the bill for almost anything. What the vast military establishment costs makes such a suggestion as that just cited seem almost a penny put into the collection box. But by no means everybody in the United States thinks in those terms. Young couples and the retired elderly, swallowed up in a cloud of inflation, see life differently. The enormous need which exists in our country to solve the problem of rural and urban poverty -- a poverty sometimes as distressing as any one comes upon in Latin America -- rests on everyone's heart like a stone. Of course in

spite of all this we could do more for Latin America than we are doing. But we need better public relations. We should be encouraged in our expectation of results. We might advertise more effectively the things which are turning out well. What we hear far too much of is hatred for the United States and its institutions; and that sometimes corrodes the dispositions even of the benevolent.

There are real reasons for thinking that our relationships may deteriorate rather than improve. "Student power" in Latin America is not something new. It has led to complete stoppage of instruction for lengthy periods of time in some of the oldest and most distinguished universities. Of late it has begun to spread to Catholic campuses as well. We have, to be sure, witnessed a little of this ourselves, at the University of California, for example, and there exist on many public and private campuses groups of students who would like to do as well or better. The point here, however, is that in many parts of Latin America "student power" is anti-American and is becoming increasingly so. Perhaps the Camelot affair has helped to fan the flames, but stupid though it was one should not attach too much importance to it. I have tried hard to discuss the problem with student leaders in a variety of places. But the only conclusion to which I have been able to arrive is that we didn't speak the same language when there was a discussion of social change, or even of life goals. Theirs is traditional Spanish and French social philosophy, which may not be Marxist or Syndicalist (though it often enough is) but does attach central importance to these currents of thinking, which of course mean very little in this country. At any rate, it is clear that "student power" has become more and more averse to the United States. Currently some of our able scholars fear that professors in some Latin American universities and research institutions will not be able to share in cooperative

enterprises because of the fear of being blackballed by their students.

But all is not lost and there are certainly things we should think about hard. First -- and this seems the most important recommendation I have to make -- we should seek earnestly to correlate our efforts with those of our friends in Europe. The French effort is in some ways the least spectacular but everything one learns about it is inspiring because it derives from a unique consciousness of the missionary difficulty deriving from the estrangement of the contemporary world from Christianity. Let me quote a few words from what you doubtless have all seen, the recent bulletin of Dialogue et Cooperation: "Rio is perhaps the most beautiful city in the world. But it is a place where the joy of living, seven magnificent beaches and the Cariocan temperament do not awaken people specially to their apostolic responsibilities." German assistance through the great efforts of Misereor and Adveniat makes possible very impressive donations, to cite only the Catholic University in Rio. In general, for reasons too complex to analyze here, the Germans have entree to Latin America, true enough it be that the secularization of its youth has to some extent dried up the sources of religious vocations. Louvain has not only helped raise the sights for our universities but has created and staffed its impressive network of agencies and centers. I may add finally that although for more years that it is pleasant to remember, Spain did not provide what we could comfortably call companions, the situation has greatly changed. It may even be that Spain will become one of the principal centers for the efforts called for by the Second Vatican Council. This is a very cursory survey. For instance nothing has been said about Holland or Italy. But the conclusion is evident. We have not begun to think seriously about coordination, and in view of the general political and social circumstances it seems imperative that

we do so.

Then again, if we return to Paul Weiss's maxim and ask ourselves just how having a concern with what is "beyond civilization" can affect the Catholic cooperative mission, I believe we shall find the answer in cherishing the hierarchy of values which well up out of a profound and sincere recognition of Divine goodness. This extends all the way from courtesy to generosity, from love of truth to love of goodness, from giving to receiving. Teaching and exemplifying these is now the mission of Catholic education in all its forms. Without having abandoned recognition of the significant importance of the Aristotelian categories or their embodiments in essential Catholic teaching, our outlook must be in essence Platonic or Augustinian. I think this is what is taking place in Catholic universities when they are aware of their true mission. Of course with very rare exceptions Catholic universities in Latin America do not resemble those of our country. They are private universities which assume that everybody around is a Catholic; and indeed one will meet excellent ones, perhaps more advanced spiritually than one could easily encounter in our establishments. Still at the Catolica in Lima one would have to look into every cranny of the academic labyrinth to find the torso of a School of Theology. The elaborate religious symbolism of North American Catholic universities is completely missing. On the other hand the Catolica in Santiago has a Faculty of Theology of high quality, though its housing during the Chilean winter is frigid beyond compare. But the liveliest thing I found anywhere about was a young North American priest who uses six texts in teaching religion to students, all of them translations of novels by Soviet authors. These, he said, represented six stages in the quest for God. The students in his jam-packed lecture room seemed to agree. Doubtless in religious teaching we need quite

simple things which are also profound -- as profound as the innermost rhythm of human life itself.

Finally, if Spanish culture plays so great a part in the complexity of the Latin American mind, it is certainly deeply to be regretted that the study of the great Spanish tradition has declined so markedly. We have been so concerned with the Generalissimo (and let me say that I likewise plead guilty to this) that we have on the one hand lost sight of the quality and importance of Spain's contribution to the store of cultural values and on the other to the situation which will exist when the man who led Moorish troops into Spain will have been the major performer in funeral rites. There is nowhere in the United States a genuinely distinguished center for the study of Spanish culture, and there is likewise none which is dedicated to the survey of the future Spanish landscape. I sadly fear that we shall end up in the political and social sense with some counter-intelligence escapade, unless preparations somewhat nearly adequate can be made. Meanwhile Spain has become, like Italy, far less antiquated in terms of economic and social structure, it has an impressive number of able and well-trained persons, and can indeed become a pillar of European society. But as I have said its ideology is not ours. Therefore a Catholic Spain, emancipated from the feudalistic corsets of days gone by, could be an ally of very significant strength. I do not much care where a center of Spanish studies is established. All I am suggesting is that one is vitally needed, particularly in terms of our relationships with Latin America. The Bishops of the United States do not need to underwrite it. But if their representatives will join with spokesmen for some Catholic University, and with their appropriate hierarchical colleagues in Spain, I am sure that appeals to foundations here and there would be fruitful.

I shall close with a brief biographical note. In the days of yore when I was a student of comparative literature and not an administrator or a servant of the Government of the United States, it was taken for granted that the riches of Spanish culture was one of the great heritages of man. The English seventeenth century and our own nineteenth century lived by it. A great vacuum has been created by reason of our current indifference to it. And this vacuum is one of the reasons why we do not seem quite adult to Latin Americans.

We do not all have to turn into revolutionaries. The history of some kinds of revolution is bleak enough. But we do somehow, in spite of very great difficulties, have to become those who put their shoulders successfully to the same wheel.

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