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ADDRESS BY
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To be delivered Tuesday a.m., January 21, 1964, at the First Annual
Conference of the Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program, Edge-
water Beach Hotel, Chicago, January 20-21, 1964.

THE CATHOLIC PROGRAM IN BRASIL'S NORTHEAST.

A pastoral experiment in an underdeveloped area.

Introduction.

The Northeast of Brazil includes the 9 most northeastern States of the country, with one and a half million square kilometers (one fifth of the national territory) and twenty five million inhabitants (one third of the national population). In this area correspond 9 ecclesiastical Provinces with 51 Dioceses.

With the exception of the littoral zone, the Northeast suffers periodically from prolonged droughts - sometimes of more than one year - provoking dramatic migrations towards the center of the country, i.e. towards Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo and towards the new Capital, Brasilia.

The Northeast, more than any other area, leaves its im-

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print of underdevelopment on Brazil. The most eloquent indications of this underdevelopment of the Northeast are: 1. the high index of illiteracy - 80 percent of the adults, and in the interior 90 percent; 2. the high index of child mortality - in Recife 232 and in the interior about 500; 3. the low average age of only 30 years, and 4. the exceptional high birthrate, for instance in the State Ceara 53.

In order to promote socio-economical development in this area - until a few years ago systematically neglected by the Federal Government - there was recently founded the SUperintendency of the DEvelopment of the NorthEast, the famous SUDENE, which elaborated a gigantic plan - one of the most important in the world - which may, within a few years, change completely the socio-economical and consequently the moral-religious aspect of the area.

At the moment, the Northeast is the most explosive area of Brasil - and perhaps of the whole western hemisphere - which communism tries to subvert, for instance by means of the "Digas camponesas", the leftist leagues of the rural workers.

The socio-economical underdevelopment is one of the main reasons, why the Church has not been able to develop normally, so that the Northeast is also a spiritually underdeveloped area.

However, what nobody could have expected, happened: in this poor Northeast started the pastoral renewal of Brasil with an important catholic program, perhaps the most successful pastoral experiment in underdeveloped areas in the world.

I. The origin.

This catholic program arose from the Movement of Natal,

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Capital of the most northeastern State, Rio Grande de Norte, and
See of the Archdiocese, which has about 700,000 souls and only 45
secular and 20 religious priests.

The Movement started when in 1948 6 secular priests,
under the leadership of Father Eugenio de Araujo Sales, began to
meet periodically in Natal, in order to face together the alarming
problems particularly of the rural zone. In 1954, 33 year old,
Father Eugenio was consecrated auxiliary Bishop of Natal and took
over from the blind Archbishop the government of the Archdiocese.
Thus he was able to extend his apostolic leadership to the whole
secular and religious clergy of the Archdiocese, bringing them to-
gether, every month, in a countryhouse on the beach for recollec-
tion, relaxation and pastoral study. Not only the suffragan
Bishops of Caico and Mossoro, but also the other Archbishops and
Bishops of the Northeast, gradually found their way to Natal, in
order to study with Bishop Eugenio the common pastoral problems of
the area. In 1962 there was officially established the Regional
pastoral Office of the Bishops of the Northeast, including more
than 50 ecclesiastical circumscriptions, with Bishop Eugenio as
the responsible Secretary.

II. The activities.

The Natal Movement is a pastoral movement with apostolic
as well as socio-economical activities. Bishop Eugenio is accus-
tomed to say: "I have long abandoned the idea that religious in-
struction, preaching, celebration of Mass, administration of Sacra-
ments and spiritual guidance are sufficient for evangelisation. In
an underdeveloped area it is indispensable for evangelisation to
give people general human promotion. Otherwise we will miss the
mark!"

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Among the apostolic activities of the Movement we mention: religious instruction on all levels, biblical and liturgical movement, renewal of sacerdotal ministry, of parish life and of the educational system, adaptation of mission-preaching and campaign for vocations.

The socio-economical activities include: basic primary education by means of radio-schools, secondary education - soon, we hope, by television-schools - unions, cooperatives, handicrafts, maternities, agricultural clubs, interior migration, press, radio and soon television.

III. The personnel.

The main support of the Movement is a team of about 250 persons - part of them paid, the others volunteers - which Bishop Eugenio built up gradually. Except for about 20 - mostly Sisters of the Good Shepperd - all are laymen of both sexes, including several university graduates and a fair number of social workers. A hundred of this team work, scattered over a dozen social centers, in the working class districts of Natal; 39 compose the team of basic education by radio, 31 form the printing and press team, and 73 the Service of rural assistance.

Bishop Eugenio himself is the leader and soul of this small but valiant army, assisted by an international team of experts, sociologists, economists, agronomists, pastoral theologians and other specialists.

Since the foundation of the Regional pastoral Office of the Northeast, each ecclesiastical Province and each Diocese is building up its own pastoral office, composed at least of two priests, two sisters and two laymen. In order to promote the ex-

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pansion and intensification of the Movement, the members of the Natal-team fly throughout the whole Northeast, giving technical assistance to start and to perfect the apostolic and socio-economical activities of the Program in the different Dioceses.

IV. Characteristics.

Among the characteristics of the Natal Movement the following may be mentioned.

1. The program is the result of commun pastoral planning, with participation of representatives of the whole Northeast. Every year, in January, Bishop Eugenio organizes a ten day meeting of about 150 persons - Bishops, secular and religious priests, brothers and sisters, and laypeople of both sexes - in order to deepen the vision on the problem of the Northeast and to adapt, more and more, the existing program of action to the Northeastern "reality", mobilizing all the forces of the Church available into a "Pastorale d'ensemble". Last year two specialised meetings took place, one to establish the strategical points and the vital sectors of the Pastoral of the Northeast, and another to adapt mission-preaching to the specific situation of the area.

2. The fundamental law of the Movement is the integral vision on the human being, on all points of view, natural as well as supernatural, in perfect equilibrium, according to the hierarchy of economical, political, social and religious values. Christianity has to be incarnated in all dimensions of human life.

3. The basic method of the Movement is community education, on the human as well as christian level, because education of the individual is generally conditioned by the education of the group

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or family; education, however, of group or family doesn't stand up without education of the community. This is the transposition of modern social techniques and methods to pastoral Theology. All efforts are made to create real human and christian communities and to help them to realize their own development. Bishops, priests, sisters and laymen frankly discussing together the pastoral problems in the diocesan spirit of a family, is one of the best expressions of this mentality.

4. Principal attention is focused on the formation of leaders on all levels. Bishop Eugenio built with the aid of MISEREOR a training center for leaders, where specialized courses succeed without interruption, throughout the whole year, for every kind of activities of the Movement. Last November there was given a course for sisters, during a whole month, to introduce them to new apostolic tasks, for instance to take over, as far as possible, the whole care of souls in a vacant parish. The fundamental inspiration of all these courses is the spirituality of the Movement for a Better World, which contributes in Brasil mostly to awaken the pastoral renewal of clergy and laypeople.

5. Poverty leaves its specific imprint on the whole Movement, as suitable to an underdeveloped area. There exists an unwritten law: "Don't invest in constructions, unless it is indispensable, because it is the worst investment existing; the most efficient way to invest, is to invest in formation and education!" Bishop Eugenio gave the example, when he stopped, immediately after his consagracion, the construction of the new Cathedral in Natal. The example was followed by the parish-community of Sao Paulo de

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Potengi, the model-parish of the Natal-Movement, which decided, when the roof was on the new church: "Our Lord and ourselves have now a roof over us, and we are out of the rain and the sun. Provisionally we can't spend more money on our church. We need it for more urgent apostolic activities". Cathedral and parish-church remained unfinished until today!

6. Means of divulgation, press and radio, play an important part in the efficiency of the Movement, particularly the radio-school system. These radio-schools, each with 10 to 20 pupils, of 7 to 70 year olds, are run by the so called "monitoras", generally girls of about 16 to 17 years, who are the link between the radio-speaker in Natal and the pupils. Selected with great care among the local leaders, these "monitoras" occupy a key-position in the small communities of the interior. The Archdiocese of Natal has about 1,500 of these radio-schools.

V. Results.

Passing over in silence the results of the single activities, I call your attention to the most important result of the catholic Program as a whole.

The Movement of Natal is demonstrating to the people of the Northeast, living in sub-human conditions, that they may expect from the Church not only a better life hereafter, but also here on earth. The results of the Movement inspire in them confidence, since the Church is, at the moment, the main factor of systematical human promotion in this area. Let us never forget, that underdeveloped people follow those who give them better human conditions. If the Church gives them, they will follow the christian creed; if communism

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gives them, they will follow the red creed! Because communism, at least in Brasil, has until this moment only agitated the masses, proclaiming human promise, without realizing it, has the Church a splendid chance to save the Northeast for Christ and civilization.

The Natal-Movement has already extended its influence not only to the other ecclesiastical Provinces of the Northeast, but to the whole country. We mention only: 1. the unionizing of the rural workers, 2. the basic education by radio-schools, 3. the "conscientization" of the rural workers, making them conscious of their human dignity and human rights (with all the risks of it!), 4. the creation of the 7 Regional pastoral Offices of the Bishops-Conference of Brasil, and, last but not least, 5. the dynamic renewal of pastoral methods in general.

I must concede, that the results of the Movement have also their limits. Not everybody in the Northeast has already awakened to this pastoral renewal. There are priests and even Bishops who continue to sleep. Not all the Dioceses have already organized their pastoral staff as in Natal, nor have all parishes as in Sao Paulo de Potengi. But the Movement is growing and spreading rapidly under the leadership of dynamic Bishop Eugenio of Natal, who is already the convergent point of national and international visits of specialists in development, of sociologists and pastoral theologians.

Conclusion.

The Church in the Brazilian Northeast is awake to the tremendous human and christian problems of the area. Its Bishops form the most progressive group of Bishops in Brasil, some of whom

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and many of their clergy as well - are marked by reactionnary elements as philocommunist!

Their Pastoral contains a precious lesson for the whole Catholic Church, because the main task of Pastoral today is not to multiply the traditional types of works: parishes, schools, hospitals, orphanages, houses for the aged and asylums. What we want is a creative Pastoral, going courageously new ways and looking towards the future to be able to accompany the rapid transformation of society.

This will only be possible by renewed theological reflection on the contents of Revelation on one side, and by continuous analysis of the socio-religious "reality" on the other, because these are the two poles of all authentical Pastoral, which by definition is: the incarnation of the Divine Message in a concrete existing human community.

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