Chapter II

A NEW AWAKENING

Church and politics in Latin America evolved together over the years taking material and symbolic support from each other. The Church's notion of hierarchy, authority and obedience reflected and reinforced the pattern of existing social and political arrangements to such an extent that the two orders often seemed indistinguishable. Historically, the weight of the Church's influence, both material and symbolic, has reinforced existing social arrangements in Latin America. However, changes were inevitable both in Church and politics as well as the social fabric they jointly built. The gradual but profound changes in the social thought of the Church was one of the factors that contributed to the emergence of Catholic elites of different socio-economic and political perceptions.

Changing Catholic Social Thought

The institutional Catholic Church throughout the world shares a common official teaching. This is best represented by the pronouncements, oral and written, by its head, the Pope. His teaching contained in such documents as encyclicals, bulls, messages, etc., does not convey the fullness of the Church's life
and thought much of which, in fact, is embodied in its social ministry and pastoral care. It does, however, represent an important area of Church's life because the social teaching of the Church flows as a response to the conditions of the world in which it lives; at the same time, it heightens ecclesial self-awareness and social consciousness.

Joseph Gremillion, in his introduction to a collection of documents which embody the most important thrusts of Catholic social teaching since Pope John XXIII, points out that the Catholic Church, through the Holy See has been a social actor and has provided a Christian voice and a platform, since the time of Charlemagne. The Church from its very inception has shown great concern for the poor and suffering through works of charity, often paternally administered, extolling at the same time the virtues of poverty and suffering. However, an awareness of change has not always characterised official Catholic thought. It was only towards the close of the nineteenth century that the Church became really concerned with social problems and their underlying causes.

In 1891, faced with the growing alienation of the working class from the Church in the wake of the industrial revolution of Europe, and the rising tide of atheistic and materialistic

ideologies, Pope Leo XIII felt compelled to issue the encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*[^2] in which the Church, through its highest teaching authority, addressed itself for the first time to the underlying causes of some of the social tensions of the day in general, and the problems of the working class in particular.

*Rerum Novarum* pointed out the glaring evil consequences of "the vast expansion of industrial pursuits" which produced "the enormous fortunes of some few individuals, and the utter poverty of the masses", and condemned the situation in which "a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the working masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself"[^3]. It denounced the cruel exploitation of the workers and maintained that "the first concern of all is to save the workers from the cruelty of the greedy speculators who use human beings as mere instruments"[^4]. The Pope was convinced that "there can be no question whatever, that some remedy must be found, and found quickly, for the misery and wretchedness pressing so heavily and unjustly on the vast majority of the working classes"[^5]. As a solution the encyclical proposed "just family


[^4]: Ibid., p.185.

[^5]: Ibid., p.167.
wages" and advocated the right of the workers to organise trade unions, and to resort to strikes to redress their grievances and to obtain just wages, a position that was quite radical in the nineteenth century.

The encyclical condemned in no uncertain terms the communist and socialist remedies and upheld the sanctity of private property. *Laissez faire* capitalism also was condemned. However, as Smith points out, the condemnation of communism and socialism in the encyclical was not matched by an equally vehement condemnation of capitalism.6 This is understandable because communism and socialism were perceived as greater threats to the Church than capitalism. While upholding the right to private property it stressed the necessity of social accountability. It took a firm stand against the Marxist theory of class struggle and the notion of collectively owned property. Because of its condemnation of *laissez faire* capitalism and socialism, it pointed implicitly to the possibility of a "third way". However, the encyclical, as Hales writes, was concerned with the problem of economic justice without having come to terms with the broad framework of modern society itself.7

Rerum Novarum was hailed as the magna carta of workers, and it had a profound impact in Europe. It initiated in the Church a social awareness and an ideological reformulation which produced impressive results. As a follow up of the encyclical, Catholic Action was organised in Italy and France towards the close of the nineteenth century and the rest of Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century and received official recognition by Pope Pius X in 1905.

Rerum Novarum did not have an immediate impact on Latin America where conditions were quite different from what existed in Europe. Industrial revolution and its resultant social problems had not yet reached Latin America at the time when the encyclical was issued. However, acute social problems existed especially in the latifundias where the workers were exploited and their conditions were even worse than their counterparts in Europe. The Church in Latin America was not faced with the rise of Communism and the alienation of the industrial workers as such. There was alienation of the peasant workers and the masses in general from the Church. This was evident from the fact that the masses did not rally to the support of the Church in its conflicts with anticlericalism in Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, etc. The Church in Latin America, however, did not pay much attention to the alienation of the peasants.

Catholic Action in Europe itself was organized within the concept of neo-Christendom. Because the Church had rejected liberalism, laissez faire capitalism, communism, socialism and progressivism, there was no place for Catholic Action to go for inspiration except the Middle Ages. Having rejected radical
overtures to a classless society as well as the liberal ideal of dominance by bourgeoisie, the Church maintained that the society was by nature and divine ordination, a fellowship of classes, one that must be hierarchically organized, and that not class struggle or hatred but loving kindness must guide the relation among the various classes. In this sense it aimed at reconstitution of medieval polity.

In 1931, on the occasion of the fourtieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Pius XI issued another social encyclical *Quadrogressimo Anno*. The situation had been more complicated on account of the economic depression. So the theme was on reconstructing the social order. The encyclical reiterated the earlier teachings of *Rerum Novarum*. It criticized "unbridled liberalism" and "concentration of wealth in the hands of a few", but upheld the sanctity of private property. Its rejection of both *laissez faire* capitalism and the Marxist doctrine of class struggle and dictatorship of proletariat implicitly suggested some other more moral "third way" without, however explicitly elaborating it.

Gremillion comments:

Socialist proposals for public ownership of means of production were already resisted by Church teaching, partly on philosophical grounds, but especially if they demanded class struggle and dictatorship of the proletariat. *Laissez-faire Capitalism* of the Manchester school was also opposed. In their stead, the Church advanced an intermediate corporative

---

8 Leo XIII in his encyclical, *Grave de Communi* (1901) Pius X in a motu proprio (1903), and Pius XI in his encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), persisted with the concept of hierarchically ordained society with distinction of classes.


10 Ibid., p.234.
system in which the state would play a regulative, common-good role, while workers participated with management in decision-making at various levels from factory to national industry categories. This was at the heart of Quadragesimo Anno (On the Reconstruction of the Social Order) in 1931. 11

Justice as the foundation of peace in a preconceived corporative order is a concept which underlay papal social thoughts in the subsequent years. Pope Pius XII reiterated the importance of putting truly into practice the norms and demands of justice to achieve a better distribution of wealth. 12 Communist and social doctrines were firmly opposed because they were perceived as debasing the dignity of the human person. 13 Pius XII went beyond a description of the ills which affect humanity and suggested that one ought to look at their causes. "Their root", he said, "is deeper and more hidden, for it deals with religious beliefs and moral convictions". 14 However, one cannot but take notice of the fact that the quest for justice was within the framework of a preconceived corporative order, a status quo model of society.

This is understandable because, as Gremillion writes, for thirteen centuries the mindset of the West was embodied by St. Augustine's

11 Gremillion, n.1, p.11.


13 Pius XII, Evangelii Praecones", Ibid., p.1880.

14 Pius XII, "Summi Pontificatus", Ibid., p.1557.
neatly defined images—the City of God and the City of Man. It was not until the social encyclicals of Pope John XXIII that man's needs and aspirations were clearly articulated and a radical departure from status quo models of society envisaged. His encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961) took up the theme of change and development for the first time in an encyclical. In a radio message in September 1962, he identified himself with the poor and the oppressed, and with the developing countries. In his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963), John XXIII revealed his approach of openness to the world and acceptance of pluralism in society, for the first time by a Pope. He proposed dialogue including communists. He distinguished between Marxism as a philosophy and as a historical movement with economic, social and political objectives and admitted that as a movement it contained some positive elements.

A drawing nearer together, which was formerly deemed unopportune or unproductive, might now or in the future be considered opportune and useful...for the achievement of economic, social, cultural and political ends which are honourable and useful. 17

Gremillion writes:

In *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), Pope John gave new weight to social issues, including

15 Gremillion, n.1, p.4.


standards of living, educational opportunity, and political equality as having values both in themselves and as pre-requisites for spiritual development. In more practical terms, however, Pope John's emphasis on the social uses of private property and on the legitimacy of some form of public ownership...seemed to move Rome toward neutrality in the ideological cold war between capitalist individualism and socialist collectivism. In the search for peace and for a more just moral order, indeed, Pope John seemed to regard...even traditional enemies like socialists and communists as political allies. 18

Even though some radical departures from status quo models of society are attributed to the social encyclicals of John XXIII, the fact remains that the social encyclicals did not differ significantly from the classic liberal belief in gradual reform of the existing structures. The intent of their statements was to describe the terms of the ideal society--New Christendom, in which more equitable distribution of wealth would go hand in hand with the protection of the religious and civil freedom of its people. Gary MacEoin is critical of the papal documents for their failure to confront the issue of the Church's role in radical change. 19 They raise the question of what MacEoin terms "social capital" those things which modern capitalism has fenced off under corporate ownership. In raising these kinds of social questions the encyclicals provide a good analysis of the problems, but when it comes to social solutions they have never gone beyond

18 Gremillion, n.1, p.37.
a perspective which is both developmentalist and capitalist. The Church, as MacEoin notes, has consistently seen capitalism as reformable and claimed that Marxism is not because of its materialist, un-spiritual world view.²⁰

The greatest contribution of Pope John XXIII was his initiating a process of updating the doctrines and the structures of the Church. The Second Vatican Council (1962-66) which he convened was an effort toward it. Though he died before the Council came to a close he had set it on a somewhat progressive course. The progressive character of the documents was as much due to his initiative and inspiration as the leadership later given by Pope Paul VI and the endeavours of a set of participants and theologians.

Of the several documents Vatican II produced Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) and Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) contain most of the social teaching.²¹

The Vatican Council sets about "scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel".²² It sets forth a new ecclesiological perspective by speaking of the Church "as a sacrament or as a sign and instrument".²³ The idea

²⁰ Ibid., p.189.
²¹ Vatican II, Documents of Vatican II (Allahabad, 1966), pp.172-83 and 17-105. References made hereafter are to the number of articles in each document.
²² Ibid., no.4.
²³ Lumen Gentium, n.1.
pervades many other documents also. It means that the Church is to be understood only in relation to the reality which it announces to men. The Church abandoned the ecclesiocentric perspective. Its existence is no more "for itself" but rather "for others". Its centre is outside itself; it is in the work of Christ and in his spirit. The clear distinction between the Church and the world within the unity of God's plan as taught by the Council, abandons once for all the Christendom view according to which the world outside the Church is not autonomous since society is ordered towards serving the ends of eternal salvation according to rules determined by the Church. The Council clearly upheld the autonomy of the world. It said:

If by autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. 25

Gaudium et Spes dedicates a whole section to the theme of development, a subject not broached before except in the encyclicals Mater et Magistra and Pacem in Terris of Pope John XXIII. It speaks of the need "to establish a political, social and economic order which will growingly serve man and help individuals as well

24 An ecclesiocentric perspective leaves no room for a world outside the Church which is regarded as the sole repository of all religious truth. Every man has to be either with or against the Church.

25 Gaudium et Spes, no.36.
as groups to affirm and develop the dignity proper to them", and the benefits which no one should be "deprived of through injustice or unequal distribution". It envisages "a true cultural and social" transformation. 26 About international dependence it says:

Nations on the road to progress, like those recently made independent, desire to participate in the goods of modern civilization, not only in the political field but also economically, and to play their part freely on the world scene. Still they continually fall behind while very often their economic and other dependence on wealthier nations advance more rapidly. 27

The need to be free from such dependency is stressed. But liberation as contemporary liberationists of Latin America advocate is not explicitly taught. But the discussion in the section implicitly suggests it. On two occasions Gaudium et Spes touches on liberation and laments the fact that it is seen exclusively as the fruit of human effort. It laments the fact that "many look forward to a genuine and total emancipation of humanity wrought solely by human effort; they are convinced that the future rule of man over the earth will satisfy every desire of his heart". 28 It is concerned that the liberation be reduced

26 Ibid., no.4.
27 Ibid., no.9.
28 Ibid., no.10.
to a purely economic and social order. "Not to be overlooked among the forms of modern atheism is that which anticipates the liberation of man especially through his economic and social emancipation". 29 Commenting on these Gutiérrez writes: "These assertions presuppose, negatively speaking, that liberation must be placed in a wider context; they criticise a narrow vision. They allow, therefore, for the possibility of a 'genuine and total' liberation". 30 The Council accepts pluralism in society and the spirit of dialogue. It says:

While rejecting atheism, root and branch, the Church sincerely professes that all men, believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live. Such an ideal cannot be realized, however, apart from sincere and prudent dialogue.

The Council upholds the right of private ownership but this right "is not opposed to the right inherent in various forms of public property. Goods can be transferred to the public domain". 32 It proclaims, "a new humanism in which man is defined first of all by this responsibility to his brothers and to history". 33 Pope Paul VI in his closing homily summarised the

29 Ibid., no.10.
31 Gaudium et Spea, no.21.
32 Ibid., no.71.
33 Ibid., no.55.
objectives of the Council as "a pressing and friendly invitation to mankind of today to rediscover in fraternal love the God to turn away from whom is to fall, to turn to him is to rise again ...."34

The social perceptions of the Vatican Council may not have been as progressive as some might have wanted it to be. The perspective was from Western capitalism and the presupposition was Western polity where conflict in society was not as pronounced as in the Third World. Conclusions would have been different if things were viewed from a Third World perspective where conditions were quite different from that existed in Europe. But, there is no denying the fact that Vatican II inaugurated a new era in the Church.

The Council showed tendencies to generalize rather than give specific guide lines for action. Gutierrez writes: "It is an oft-noted fact that Gaudium et Spes in general offers a rather ironic description of human situation: it touches out the uneven spots, smooths the rough edges, avoids the more conflictual aspects, and stays away from the sharper confrontation among social classes and countries".35 Juan Luis Segundo points out: "The great difficulty is that Vatican II juxtaposes assertions without working out a perfectly coherent position".36

35 Gutierrez, n.30, p.34.
Hans Kung has noted that the Latin American bishops who formed the single largest group in the Vatican Council, surprisingly proved themselves to be remarkably progressive.\textsuperscript{37} The bishops and theologians of Latin America, as Jose Comblin thinks, may have taken only a modest role in the affairs of the Council, but they were really caught up in the Council spirit which suddenly forced upon them an acceleration previously unknown in their history.\textsuperscript{38} Vatican II was to have a profound influence in the Latin American Church in the subsequent years.\textsuperscript{39}

Pope Paul VI in an allocution at a general audience in January 1966 indicated that the Second Vatican Council was but the beginning of a process of revolution. More was yet to come in his encyclical \textit{Populorum Progressio} (1967). It discusses development as its central theme and from a Third World perspective, for the first time in a Church document. As noted above, the encyclicals,

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{39} While discussing the outcome of the Council the contribution of many European theologians who had already taken theology in a progressive direction and the inputs they provided in the formulation of the various documents cannot be forgotten. It is not possible here to enter into a discussion of the positions and contributions of each. The writings of Jacques Maritain, Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Emmanuel Mounier, Teilhard de Chardin, to mention a few, have had profound impact in the deliberations of the Council and also on socio-political developments in Latin America as will be explained below. The Latin American theologians had not yet caught up with the European theological development, and so, could not have made but a very modest contribution.
\end{itemize}
Mater et Magistra and Pacem in Terris and the Vatican Documents broached the idea but not from a Third World perspective, and not with the same clarity and force of Populorum Progressio. It speaks forcefully of the necessity "of building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control". It advocates integral development which is marked by a change from a less human to a more human living condition:

Less human conditions first affect those who are so poor as to lack the minimum essentials of life...then they affect those who are oppressed by social structures which have been created by abuses of ownership or by abuses of power, by the exploitation of workers or by unfair business deals....More human conditions of life clearly imply passage from want to the possession of necessities, overcoming social evils, increase of knowledge and acquisition of culture. Other more human conditions are increased esteem for the dignity of others, a turning towards the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, and the will for peace. Then comes the acknowledgement by man of supreme values and of God their source of finality....Finally, and above all, are faith, a gift of God accepted by man's good-will, and unity in the Charity of Christ, who calls us all to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men.

It is a call to integral change based on the single vocation of man in the world and not on the continuity between what is "natural" and grace. As Gutierrez points out, what is affirmed here is "a profound integration and an ordering toward the fullness of all that is human in the free gift of the self-communication of

40 Paul VI, "Populorum Progressio", in Gremillion, n.1, p.39, article no.46. References hereafter will be to article number.
41 Ibid., no.21.
God.\textsuperscript{42} The encyclical energetically denounces "situations whose injustice cries to heaven",\textsuperscript{43} such as "the international imperialism of money" and the growing gap between the rich and the poor countries.\textsuperscript{44} Very importantly, it concedes that violent revolution may sometimes seem to be the only way to bring about change in oppressive social structures. Pope Paul was in no way endorsing revolution as a desirable way to counter violence perpetrated under cloak of legality. He was quick to add that this temptation be avoided "save where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country".\textsuperscript{45}

Theologians as well as social scientists concerned about Latin America extolled the positive contribution of the encyclical for change and liberation in Latin America. By identifying it with the Third World, the encyclical cut the ground from under those who defended the status quo in the name of Western civilization and Christianity.\textsuperscript{46} It was acclaimed by the Catholic revolutionaries

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Gutiérrez, n.30, p.172.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Populorum Progressio, no.26.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., no.49.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., nos.30-32.
\end{itemize}
as the magna carta of revolution, legitimizing even revolutionary insurrection against systems that keep people in poverty and misery. However, Gutierrez points out that the encyclical fights shy of the term and the actual concept of liberation which would have given a more decided and direct thrust in favour of the oppressed, encouraging them to break with their present situation and take control of their own destiny.47

Pope Paul realizing the revolutionary implications of the encyclical seems to have retraced his steps during his visit to Bogota, Colombia in 1968, where he emphatically said that "violence is neither evangelical nor christian". But he maintained: "We shall continue to denounce the unjust economic inequality between rich and poor, the abuse of officialdom and administration".48

Thus, a gradual evolution took place in the social teachings, of the highest authority in the Church. Integral development of man became the goal which was not to be secured by acts of charity but through profound transformation of society and its structures. Once for all the Church abandoned the Christendom concept, old and new, and taught the clear autonomy of the temporal realities and distinction between the Church and the world within the unity of God's plan in which the Church was to be at the service of the world.

47 Gutierrez, n.36, pp.34-35.

Impact on the Latin American Church

The encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, as noted above, did not have any immediate impact on Latin America when it was issued in 1891. For over a century after independence well into the second decade of the twentieth century the Church in Latin America remained insured against any progressive ideas. During this period i.e., from independence to about 1930, according to Dussel, the Church was marked by a traditional conservative position and a neocolonial theology which was always behind the time.\(^4^9\) Scholastic theology was an intellectual discipline born of the meeting of faith and reason. Its primary function as an ancilliary discipline of the magisterium of the Church was to teach revealed truths authoritatively by defining, presenting and explaining them. Its secondary function was to examine, denounce and condemn false doctrines and to defend true ones. In its relation to the temporalities, it persisted with the old Christendom mentality even though the Church in Europe had abandoned it and adopted the new Christendom mentality towards the close of the nineteenth century.

It was only in the second decade of the twentieth century that some changes began to take place in the theological and social thought of the Latin American Church. Dussel describes the period from about 1930 to about 1962 as the 'New Christendom' period in Latin America. This period was marked by populism and developmental activities in the political field, Catholic Action in the social field and a passage from a traditional scholastic theology to a developmentalist reformist theology, at least in some sectors, of the Church, in the theological field.

The neo-colonial liberal state of the traditional oligarchies continued well into the second decade of the twentieth century in all the republics. In some attempts at formal democracy had been made by setting up an executive and a Congress (with senators and deputies). But, in reality power was always exercised by the oligarchies (land-owners, exporters and importers or merchants). The First World War and the economic crisis of 1929 created problems for the traditional oligarchies and they could not continue in power any longer. The replacement of imports

50 Old Christendom mentality was a mental outlook or mode of action which had its roots in Augustianianism which taught that grace had overpowered nature, thus leaving no more autonomy for temporalities. Everything had to be subordinated to the Church which was the repository of salvation. The task of Christians (including politics) was to assist the Church in its evangelizing mission. This was possible in an era where union of Church and state existed. New Christendom mentality has its roots in Thomism which taught that grace did not suppress or replace nature but rather perfected it, thus leaving possibilities of autonomy for temporalities.

footnote contd.
required a process of industrialization (which had already begun by the end of nineteenth century in some parts of Latin America) and this gave rise to an industrial bourgeoisie. The phenomenon of populism from the third decade onwards, with Cardenas in Mexico, Vargas in Brazil, Peron in Argentina, can therefore be explained by the alliance of the industrial bourgeoisie (as the emergent class) with the growing proletariat class and the peasantry (thus weakening its enemies, the land-owning oligarchy and the importer bourgeoisie). There was, thus, a mobilization of the "people" in the 1930s. But it was ultimately the industrial bourgeoisie that benefited from it. However, not long after, populism, another possible form of dependent capitalism, revealed its limits and in the end betrayed the popular cause.51

From the start the Church looked with favour on the populist states. Generally speaking all the populist states

(Previous footnote contd)

Maritain built his 'Christian Humanism' on this foundation. He distinguished between acting "as a Christian as such" and acting "as a Christian". In the latter he acts apart from the institutional Church, but under the influence of Christian principles which are to permeate the world. See Jacques Maritain, New Humanism. (New York, 1938), p.291.

51 For a discussion on the phenomenon of populism see Octavio Ianni, La Formacion del Estado Populista en America Latina (Mexico, 1975).
including Venezuela under Gimenez, Colombia under Roja Pinilla, Ecuador under Velasco Iberra and Peru under Haya de la Torre, the first theoretician of alliance between classes, were on good terms with the Church. That was the time when the Catholic Church in Latin America came out from the cloisters, and Catholic Action flourished throughout Latin America.

Catholic Action that was already well spread in Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century found its way to Latin America through the efforts of priests who had their training or higher studies in European universities. In Chile, as early as in 1910, Father Fernando Vives of the Society of Jesus and some of his confreres gathered around them in Santiago a group of young Catholic laymen to study the social teachings of the Church especially that of Rerum Novarum. This resulted in the formation of groups for students, teachers, peasants, workers, etc. They were later organized into a national association of Catholic Action. Social research and social action were coordinated through Centro Bellavista which the Jesuits directed, and social ideas were spread through their journal Mensaje from Santiago.

In Brazil, some bishops in the 1920s urged the clergy to concern themselves with the social question. But, it was archbishop Sebastiao Lema of Rio de Janeiro who took concrete steps to organize Catholic Action. He set up Catholic Action Groups such as Ação Universitária Católica for university teachers, Juventud Universitária Católica for the university students, Estudantil Católica for secondary school students, and
Confederação Operaria Católica for workers, and brought them all under Confederação Católica in 1923. Soon many other bishops in Brazil organized similar Catholic Action groups and eventually they were all brought under one national organization of which Amoroso Lima was the first president.

In Mexico Catholic Action was organized under the specific suggestion from Pope Pius XI contained in his pastoral letter Constantiam Firmississam to the Mexican bishops on 28 March 1937. It was suggested as a means to re-Christianize their country. By the end of the decade Catholic Action was well established throughout Latin America. As Drekonja points out:

Catholic Action became the magic formula for the rest of Latin America. Thanks to the supporters of Catholic Action, Latin American Church problems were discussed and strategies for survival prepared. After all, because of the Church-State conflicts of the nineteenth century, the Church had stumbled into the twentieth century without real training or preparation for modern pastoral practices. 52

Catholic Action was organized in Latin America as in Europe on the basis of the medieval concept of hierarchical society and within the New Christendom mentality. Its activities were chiefly study circles and seminars, traditional works of charity and demonstration of faith through mass rallies. Its primary purpose was to spread the Church's social message and thereby counteract the growing alienation of the masses from the Church and the increasing influence of materialistic and atheistic ideologies.

Later, it became a forum for lay apostolate in general, i.e., Christianization of society through activities of the laity. Though Catholic Action was a movement of the laity, it was organized and strictly controlled by priests and bishops in Europe as well as in Latin America. In practice it became a movement to extend the Church's spiritual influence.

The simple pedagogy advocated by specialized Catholic Action groups of observe, judge and act, had far-reaching implications. For, it focussed the attention of the practitioner not on precepts to be observed or on study of laws that demanded compliance, but on reality, the surroundings, the world upon which each individual had some power for transformation. A cyclical behaviour pattern was proposed. One was to observe, judge and act, then immediately repeat the process so that each subsequent observation was also an evaluation of past performance. As such it acted as a feed-back.

Besides focussing the attention of young Catholics and the clergy who acted as moderators in Catholic Action groups, upon the social, economic, cultural and political problems surrounding them, Catholic Action had other effects. It cut across parish and diocesan boundaries and brought together a number of Catholics interested in exploring the social implications of the Gospel and

---

willing to act. This had not happened before in Latin America. The observations of the various Catholic Action groups amounted to very simple, perhaps not too accurate surveys of their reality. However, their actions were consciously transforming. The seeds were being planted for the application of the principles of justice and peace which the Church had always embraced but generally had failed to suggest as effective means of implementing. (Charitable palliative aids were the only means the Church had suggested).

Soon Catholic Action was looking for the sources and not just the effects of injustice and hatred. Existing unjust and oppressive socio-economic and political structures were identified as the source. The young Catholics in the movement began to realize the futility of Catholic Action without corresponding political action for change which was now a conscious deliberate goal. This brought them into frequent conflicts with the Church authorities in many countries. Members of Catholic Action groups referred to themselves as "militants". (They took seriously the obligations assumed through the reception of the sacrament of confirmation which made them "a soldier of Christ", a fighter against evil). In some countries, notably in Chile and Venezuela the activists in the Catholic Action sought a forum for political action in political parties of Christian inspiration especially Christian Democratic party. Many leaders of Christian Democratic party were one time activists in Catholic Action. In some countries both Catholic Action and Catholic political parties cooperated, sometimes under common organizations like the Catholic Union of Argentina.
There were several factors that contributed to the social awakening and the deliberate and conscious attempt at change in some sectors of the Church, especially during the years after the Second World War. First and foremost was the experience of thousands of priests and Catholic Action members in the shanty towns and poverty-stricken rural areas where they came face to face with actual misery, subhuman living conditions, exploitation, oppression violence, etc. They were quick to realize that charitable palliatives and paternalistic aids were not the real solution to the problem. A solution had to be found at much deeper level at the level of the social structures. The necessity for social transformation of the structures of the Latin American society was obvious to them.

New socio-political and theological ideas emanating from Europe began to find acceptance in some sectors of the Church. The experiences and thinking especially of the French Church had a great impact at least in some sectors of the Latin American Church. Maritain's 'Christian Humanism' provided the basis for a better definition of Church-World relationship devoid of the Christendom mentality which gave the Christian greater freedom in his political commitments and exclusive personal responsibility for his actions.

It was on the basis of the political philosophy of Maritain that Christian Democratic parties were organized in Latin America. Argentina was one country where Maritain's thought was much discussed and was very influential among Catholic lay leaders, though it was not translated into a Christian Democratic movement as powerful as in Chile. In Brazil Tristao de Athayde (Alceu Amoreso Lima) spread Maritain's thought in the 1930s. But, it was in Chile and Venezuela that the political philosophy of Maritain was transformed into powerful Christian Democratic movements.

The more advanced movement of Catholic Action in Latin America received its inspiration from the writings of Congar. The works of Congar were most representative of the distinction of planes—Church and the world, within the unity of God's plan. This distinction was the central point of the more advanced movements of the lay apostolate in the 1960s. Other modern theologians like Karl Rahner, and Emmanuel Mounier and Teilhard de Chardin also influenced Latin American social and theological thinking. Among the Latin American thinkers Paulo Freire probably had the greatest influence and appeal.

The best known channel of European, especially French, ideas on the subject of development, was perhaps the Dominican friars Louis G. Lebret and Jean Cardonnel, and the Lebret Centre for

---

56 See Fernando Martinez Paz, Maritain, Politica e ideologica: Revolucion cristiana en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1965).

Socio-economic Studies in Brazil. A major concern of these two social reformers was human promotion understood as development of cultural values in and by any social group.\textsuperscript{58} Lebret's teams on economics and humanism were successful in promoting the convictions that the solutions to social problems were rooted in the social, political and economic context of those seeking development, and that hence it was important to develop a sense of distinctiveness of the area as well as of national problems. Lebret's contribution may be summed up as the creation of a more objective Brazilian social science and a sense of responsible humanism in social action.\textsuperscript{59}

Jean Cardonnel stressed the duty of Christians to work for "conscious life" among the passive and oppressed masses. His strongly existential teachings were critical of the hypocrisy he perceived within the Brazilian Church. He favoured openness to culture and questioned anti-communism as a legitimate Christian attitude.\textsuperscript{60}

Roger Vekemans, a Jesuit priest and his team in the Centre for Economic and Social Development of Latin America (DESAL) in Santiago, Chile, did pioneering work in socio-religious research as well as spreading the message of change and development in

\textsuperscript{58} Denis Goulet, \textit{A New Moral Order} (New York, 1974), p.35.


Latin America, especially through the journal *Mensaje* (Santiago). Venkeman's role, however, became suspicious during the elections which brought Salvador Allende to power in Chile in 1970. He and DESAL are well-known for the enthusiasm with which they spread the Christian Democratic ideals.

Latin American priests returning to their countries after having been trained in secular sciences such as sociology and economics at prestigious universities in Europe, especially at Louvain, such as Camillo Torres and Gustavo Gutierrez, contributed to a new social awakening and commitments in the Latin American Church through the institutions and organizations to which they were attached. The FERES Institute (International Federation of Catholic Institute of Social and Socio-Religious Research) with headquarters in Fribourg and Bogota collected social and ecclesiastical data which highlighted the need for change. At a later stage François Houtart working with FERES began to probe the revolutionary aspects of the developments in Latin America.

The influx of foreign Catholic missionaries into Latin America after the Second World War contributed to the spread of new social and developmentalist ideas. Not all missionaries had this openness to change. Ivan Illich pointed out that many of the North American clergy brought with them "an Alliance for Progress mentality, dominated by anti-communism and unable to appreciate movements of the political left that want to alter radically the present structures under the stimulation of new ideologies". 61

Still, they were not as conservative and opposed to change as at least a section of the Latin American clergy was.

In the 1940s, a new social awareness and commitment for social change and development was sufficiently created in some sectors of the Church so as to require a new forum for political action that would avoid the evils of both capitalism and Marxism. The social encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI had implicitly suggested a 'third way'. Thus a new political movement in the form of Christian Democracy based on Maritain's political philosophy was launched in the 1940s and quickly gained adherents throughout Latin America. In some countries the Catholic Action movement was transformed into Christian Democratic movement and in others Catholic Action supplied leadership to the new political movement. 62

Christian Democracy was thus a lay Catholic political movement based on Christian inspiration. 63 Velasco, one of the leaders of Christian Democrats in Chile (PDC) describes and identifies the various sources of inspiration for Christian Democracy, viz., Christian philosophy, social problems of the modern age and contemporary Catholicism, and concludes that the

best that is in Christian Democracy is Christian and Catholic in its origin and orientation. 64

Christian Democracy claimed to be a distinctly unique and self-contained political philosophy, and an ideological position to be sharply distinguished both from capitalism and Marxism as well as Democratic Socialism of Europe. It not only rejected all the three but also repudiated any suggestion that it was a synthesis of any two or all of them. 65 Mario Zanartu of the Centro Bellarmino (Santiago) explains the economic theory of communitarianism based on a critique of capitalism and socialism as a pluralistic or mixed economy with emphasis on the good of the community and the Christian understanding of man. 66 Christian Democrats rejected mild or paternalistic reforms as insufficient to solve the socio-economic problems of the continent and advocated "a change in the entire social structure requiring new orientation for family, education, state and man". 67 But, it insisted on peaceful and democratic means. The Chilean PDC adopted 'revolution with liberty' as its slogan and its counterpart in Venezuela 'basic reforms with democracy'. But, their actual performance

64 James Castillo Velasco, Las Fuentes de la Democracia Cristiana (Santiago, 1963).
65 Ibid., p. 18.
67 Frei, n. 63, p. 37.
while in control of the government was nothing more than paternalistic reformism.

The necessity for rapid economic development and reform of social structures was widely felt in the Latin American Church in the 1950s, by bishops, priests and laymen. Elites began to articulate it and create a climate conducive to it. Various Church sponsored social and developmental activities began to take shape. There were also sectors in the Church which believed that nothing more than a mild reform or adjustments within the existing capitalist system was called for.

The success of the Cuban revolution in 1959 played a catalytic role in Latin America. It revealed the possibility of similar revolutions in the rest of the Latin American countries. The already existing guerrilla and revolutionary movements felt encouraged. The conservatives as well as the newly emerged reformists perceived danger. The hemispheric hegemony of the United States felt threatened. While the guerrillas stepped up their activities the United States, the conservatives and the reformists joined in an attempt to ward off the danger through rapid economic development. Thus, increased developmental activities and guerilla struggles of the 1960s, could be attributed in large part to Fidel Castro's successful revolution in Cuba.

In the 1960s, "development" became the chief concern of politicians, economists, social scientists, Church authorities and social action groups. UN Secretary General U. Thant inaugurated the "First Development Decade". In 1961, Alliance for Progress
was born. Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* spoke of his concern for the development of the poorer countries. In 1962, the Second Vatican Council opened and took up the theme of development. The bishops of Northeastern Brazil helped in organizing a government sponsored development agency SUDENE to eradicate poverty from the region. The Latin American Bishops, meeting in an extraordinary assembly in Mar del Plata, Argentina declared that their pastoral programme would emphasize cooperation in the integral development of the continent. From anti-liberal conservatism the Church passed into the stage of anti-socialist national developmentalist neol­liberalism. In 1964, Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei was elected President of Chile on the basis of his electoral promise of development. Populist governments that promised development were elected in Argentina, Brazil and Peru though without a specifically Catholic hue.

The Alliance for Progress was intended to build into the prevailing political structures of the inter-American system a new dimension that would facilitate badly needed economic and social reform while avoiding revolutionary changes. The programme was inaugurated with much fanfare in 1961. The first report on the progress of economic and social development in Latin America under the Alliance, for the year 1961-1962, indicated that the contemplated changes were non-systematic, and that massive and continuous structural and institutional changes were considered imperative in the social as well as the economic areas. 68

Instruments of change the alliance prescribed were development planning, social investment, commodity stabilisation, land reform and a considerable increase in foreign investments. The presupposition was that a satisfactory mix of these elements would produce progress toward specified goals. But the goals were gradually altered under pressure from the US corporations and social reform was less and less emphasised by the United States, a fact acknowledged by Rockefeller in 1964. The programme served the US corporate interests more than Latin America. It neither improved noticeably the region's economic performance nor produce a redistribution in wealth. The subsequent yearly reports on the progress of the Alliance gave periodic evidence of the growing gap between the objectives outlined in the Charter of Punta del Este signed on 13 August 1961 and the concrete results obtained. The failure was abundantly clear to such social scientists and economists as Andre Gunder Frank, Celso Furtado, Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Theotonio dos Santos, Helio Jaguaribe and Osvaldo Sunkel; to such observers of Latin America as Ivan Illich, John Gerassi, Mariano Grendona (Vision) Jose Luis Cecena (Siempre) and Hugo Assman (Cristianismo y Sociedad), to such bishops as Helder Camara (Brazil), Antilio Parilla

69 Ibid., p. 79.
70 Simon Henson, Five Years of the Alliance for Progress (Washington D.C., 1967), p. 188.
Bonilla (Puerto Rico), Geraro Valencia Cano (Colombia), Samuel Ruiz Garcia and Arceus Mendez (Mexico); and to such priests as Gustavo Gutierrez, Jose Comblin, Juan Luis Segundo and Gonzalo Arroyo. Even Eduardo Frei and Caroles Sanz de Santamaria who served as Chairman on the Inter-American Committee pointed out that the programme fell far short of the expectations it had aroused in Latin America. ⁷¹ In 1969, the Rockefeller Report on the Presidential mission to Latin America confirmed the opinion of the Latin American critics. ⁷² The failure of the developmental approach to make any meaningful economic and political advance led to the very use of the term developmentalism (desarrollismo), a word derived from development (desarrollo) in a pejorative or divisive sense in Latin America. ⁷³

The developmentalist or reformist elites had set much store for Alliance for Progress. Developmentalism was much articulated during the 1960s. It was considered the archtype of development strategies for Western hemisphere. Its formulation gave expression to the so-called rising expectations. But, in its capacity of the model of unfulfilled hope, it has served as a galvanizing or


motivating force, at least in part, for those who have put forward a more radical solution to the ills of Latin America. The failure of developmentalism within the capitalistic structures led some to believe in the futility of any such attempt and the necessity of a socialist approach.

The same thing happened with the expectation that the Christian Democrats had raised in the 1960s. The reforms they proposed seemed to be sufficiently radical to attract dissident members of the upper and middle classes, as well as sizeable sections of the working class. Frei's 'revolution in freedom' was a type of the articulation of the elites of progress through development. They did attempt at some reforms, especially agrarian after they captured power in the 1964 elections in Chile. But their actual performance in power fell far short of the expectations 'revolution in freedom' had raised. The more radically committed Catholics parted company with Christian Democratic Party (PDC) and formed a Movement of Popular United Action (MAPU) in 1965.

Dissenting Church Elites in Latin America since 1960s

The success of the Cuban socialist experiments stood in contrast to the failure of the developmental experiments in Latin America within the capitalist structures. In a short period after 1959, Cuba was able to make significant achievements in every level of society, education, health, housing, citizen participation in decision making, and over all economy of the country. Its greatest
significance was that it succeeded in those social and economic reforms which the developmentalist strategies never attained, and the implication for other Latin American countries was clear. Socialism came to be seen as a viable means of eradicating the breach between the rich and poor, of upgrading standards of living and education and most importantly, of becoming independent of foreign economic control. The subsequent US economic blockade of Cuba pushed it into the Soviet block. But the actual achievements in the socio-economic and political sphere in Cuba was an inspiration for many to commit themselves for similar radical and socialist experiments in the rest of Latin America.

The transformation of Catholic social action movements which was thought to be innocuous, into politically committed movements, at least in some sectors of the Latin American Church, took place already in the 1950s. In some sectors they led to further radical commitments in the 1960s. Radicalization of these movements were more pronounced and articulated in Brazil than in the rest of Latin America, in the early 1960s.

By 1960, the various students organizations in Brazil at the university level were united to form Juventude Universitaria Católica (JUC). The first national congress of JUC held in 1960, decided to involve the students more actively in the social factors of Brazil. It denounced capitalism, both national and international,

74 Stavrianos, The Promise of the Coming Dark Age (San Francisco, 1976), p.177.

75 Much has been written about the Cuban revolution and its achievements and effects on Latin America. See among others, Ernesto Cardenal, In Cuba (New York, 1974).
and upheld the primacy of labour over capital. It demanded a basic restructuring of the Brazilian society and proposed university reforms as part of it. In 1960-61, JUC changed from the "historical ideal" reminiscent of Maritain to the "historical awareness", obviously influenced by Henrique de Lima Vaz, a progressive Brazilian theologian. The National Conference of JUC in 1961 decided to collaborate with other leftist movements at the university level and outside it. In the same year JUC captured National Union of Students (UNE) in collaboration with Marxist student unions, and came out of the student milieu to organize political and agitational programmes. JUC soon came into collision with the Brazilian Church hierarchy. The Episcopal Commission for Catholic Action forbade JUC from making any radical statements and engaging in "undesirable" political activities. Many bishops condemned it for its radicalization. But, a few bishops and most of the priests directors stood by JUC. Under such circumstances many activists in JUC abandoned it to form independent organizations with no formal links with the Church and engaged in radical political and social activities. After the military coup in 1964, the activists in JUC became a target of repression by the military government.

Ação Popular (AP) which the militant students helped to launch in 1962, was a secular movement of the laity with radical social objectives. From the beginning it avoided any formal links

with the Church hierarchy. Though it preferred to abstain from explicit reference to Catholic teachings yet, it was well known that its ideology was of radical Christian parentage.

AP was quite popular among university students, intellectuals and professionals who found in AP an acceptable forum for protest, not entirely outside the Church. Though the hard core of AP numbered not more than five thousand by 1964, AP had an influence far beyond what its membership indicated. By 1964, it had many sympathisers and was very close to the centre of political power. AP had clear ideological formulations. In its analysis of society in terms of polo dominante (the dominant pole) and polo dominado (the dominated pole), AP was influenced by the Marxist concept of the dialectics of domination based on the means of production. It stood committed to the elimination of capitalism which produced domination and alienation both within nations and between them. It had to be replaced by socialism in which each person could affirm himself in freedom, dignity and cooperation with his fellow men. With this objective, AP organized the peasants and workers and gave leadership to MEB (Movement for Basic Education). It believed in conscientizing people


79 Emmanuel de Kadt, Catholic Radicals in Brazil (London, 1970), p.120.

80 AP, Documento do Base, no.1, (1962).
and let them find solution of their own for the problems they faced rather than impose a particular solution on them. By 1964, AP was so much identified with militant radicalism that it became the first target of repression after the coup in 1964.

In 1960, various radio schools operating on a diocesan basis were brought under a national organization RENEC. The government showed a keen interest in the education programme of the Church. As a result of an agreement between the government and the Brazilian Bishops Conference Basic Education Movement (MEB) was launched in 1961 by the bishops with the help of the government. Education of the masses was the objective of MEB. But it differed in its approach to education from programmes whose emphasis was on functional literacy, i.e., which tied learning to read and write, to the acquisition of marketable skill or trade. MEB assimilated the core ideas of education as the "practice of freedom" as propounded by Paulo Freire.81 The official definition of the MEB programme states that it understands that basic education "forms man in his eminent dignity as a person from which flows, as the first condition, his right to live humanly".82

MEB advocated conscientização (conscientization) as the best means of its educational action. To conscientize, the programme documents indicate, is to offer a person the tools

---


necessary to become aware of who he is, of who others are, and of the world. The effect of this awareness is that he will commit himself to his own world, his own culture, his particular historical circumstances, to be a creative agent. The documents further explain that, for this reason, MEB tries not to use the conventional schemes of a stratified society, but rather encourage man to place himself within it as the only agent capable of transforming it. 83

The leadership of MEB came largely from the radically committed social activists. Hence, MEB's potency for a social revolution was obvious. MEB's links with the Brazilian Bishops Conference prevented its utter destruction after the coup in 1964. But, it had to be reorganised and made innocuous. Its history since then has been one of compromise, if not betrayal of its original objectives. 84

Church-sponsored peasant organizations were set up in Brazil in the 1940s as part of Catholic Action. In the 1950s, priests like Francisco Iage Pessoa and Alipio de Freitas organized a number of militant peasant unions especially in the Northeast of Brazil. The extent of radicalization among the peasant organizations by 1963 can be seen from the fact that in the national convention of peasants and rural workers held in 1963 under the auspices of the state agency National Commission for Rural Organization (CONSIR), out of the twenty four national federations of peasants and rural workers only six were found to be moderates. Of the

83 Ibid.
84 de Kadt, n.79, p.271.
rest ten were led by Marxists and eight were under the leadership of Catholic radicals. These two groups came together to wrest the leadership of the National Commission and collaborated with each other with a view to hasten the radical social revolution until the coup of 1964. Similarly, the worker movements were transformed into agents of social revolution in the 1960s.

Similar radicalization of movements for students, workers and peasants that had been organised, as part of the Catholic social action movement, was noticeable throughout the continent in the 1960s. Gutierrez explains the reasons:

---

85 de Kadt, n.79, p.282.
86 For a detailed description of the role of lay Catholic movements in the Brazilian revolutionary left, see. Candido Mendes, Memento dos Vivos (Rio de Janeiro, 1966) and Marcio Moeira Alves, O Cristo do Povo (Rio de Janeiro, 1968).
87 Regarding University apostolic movements and their radicalization see Gilberto Gimenez, Introducción a una pedagogía de la pastoral universitaria, MIEC-JECl service de Documentación (Montevideo) Series 1, doc. 19 (1968); Buenaventura Pelegri, Introducción a la metodología de los movimientos apostólicos universitarios, MIEC-JECl, series 1, doc. 20-21 (1970). For peasant movements see Silvio Sant' Anna, Una experiencia de concientización, MIEC-JECl Series 2, doc. 7 (1969). For Catholic Action in general see Jose A. Díaz, La Crisis Permanente de la Acción Católica (Barcelona, 1966); Enrique Lopez Oliva, Los Católicos y la Revolución Latinoamericana (Havana, 1969).
...many have discovered in these movements evangelical demands for an ever more resolute commitment to the oppressed peoples of this exploited continent. But the inadequacy of the theologico-pastoral plans which until recently were considered viable by these movements, the perception of the close ties which unite the Church to the very social order which the movements wish to change the urgent albeit ambiguous demands of the political action, the impression of dealing with the 'concrete' in the revolutionary struggle all these factors have caused many gradually to substitute working for the Kingdom with working for social revolution or more precisely perhaps, the lines between the two have become blurred. 88

A letter written jointly by Latin American Federation of Workers (CLASC) and Latin American Federation of Peasant Workers (FCLA) and signed by the executives of both, sent to Pope Paul VI on the occasion of his visit to Colombia in 1968, reveals the extent of radicalization of the workers in Latin America. It pointed out the futility of any capitalist reformism and the collaboration of the Church with capitalism and the military regimes and said:

It is not possible to give priority to the human advancement and overall development of our peoples without making any commitment as to the political means for achieving them. The total development of the peoples of Latin America, and the overall advancement of the Latin American man both depend on the preliminary condition of social revolution. And that is why that every thinking Latin American and every genuine Christian recognizes that, given the demands of love and solidarity, this social revolution is too necessary to be put off any longer. 89

The letter makes it clear that violence cannot be ruled out in this social revolution precisely because/...
powerful in the existing social order would resist any attempt at revolution through violence that was at their command. The truth about violence was: "It exists not in the hearts of those who want to make the revolution, but in the hearts of those who in their selfishness oppose it". The numerous letters the Pope received on that occasion from several individuals as well as organizations and movements manifested the extent of revolutionary commitment in different sectors of the Catholic Church in Latin America prior to 1968.

This revolutionary commitment in large sections of the Catholic population was, in no small measure, due to the revolutionary fervor that existed in some sections of the clergy and Church hierarchy. These groups and individuals were characterised by their determination to commit themselves to the process of liberation and by their desire for radical change. Their commitment, for them, was a logical consequence of their Christian faith and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the social encyclicals particularly Populorum Progressio.

Father Camilo Torres was one who believed that "the duty of every Christian is to be a revolutionary and the duty of every revolutionary to make revolution". He proved the sincerity of his revolutionary commitment by the sacrifice of his

90 Ibid., p.78.
91 See Gheerbrant, pp.30-117.
life. He thus became, in the words of Fidel Castro "the symbol of revolutionary unity of the people of Latin America". Priest and Sociologist in the Catholic university of Bogota, he was drawn into social action and was associated with the agrarian reforms under the aegis of Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reforms (INCORA), a joint Church-State venture. His own experiences and analysis of the Colombian social problems made him realize the futility of paternalistic reforms undertaken by the ruling oligarchy which could not solve Colombia's real problems. What was needed was deeper structural changes which could be brought about only through a social revolution. He maintained that "in poor countries the Christian not only can but must commit himself to the process of structural change" but this "revolutionary commitment for the Christian should be a commitment in charity".

He declared that as a Colombian, a sociologist, a Christian, and a priest he was a revolutionary. But he stoutly denied that he was a Communist. However, he had no hesitation to cooperate with the Communists to bring about a social revolution. He brought all the leftist political parties together under the United Front for a while. Having failed in the political attempt he joined the guerilla ranks of the National Liberation (FILM) and was killed in action on 15 February 1966.

---

93 Fidel Castro, Speech delivered January 4, 1969 cited in Gutierrez, n.30, p.120, footnote 10.

94 Camilo Torres, "Revolution: Christian Imperative", in Gerassi, n.92, p.208,300.
The life and death of Camilo Torres for the cause of revolution became a source of inspiration for many. Alceu Amoroso Lima called him "the first martyr of the Christ of tomorrow". Father Carlos Perez Herrera of Colombia praised him as the one who has "opened up a high road on which many idealists who seek justice will walk". Juan Garcia Elloria, an young Argentine priest moved by the heroic death of Camilo Torres publicly dedicated himself to the unfinished task of revolution which Camilo had begun. For this purpose he started a journal Cristianismo y Revolucion (Buenos Aires) which spread revolutionary ideas. Eduardo Arango Traillo, a Franciscan friar praised Camilo Torres on Radio Juventud and accused the Colombian Church hierarchy of his death because of its link with the establishment.

German Guzman Campos, a friend and biographer of Camilo Torres, Juan Carlos Zafroni, a Jesuit professor of Philosophy and many other Catholic revolutionaries attended the cultural congress held in Havana in January 1968 under the auspices of Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS). On their return from Havana they organized the 'Camilo Torres Movement' as the vanguard of Christian inspired revolution in Latin America. Its first Latin American Conference was held in Montevideo in January 1968. Montevideo and Bogota became its centres, and German Guzman Campos, Juan Carlos Zafroni and Juan Carlos Elloria were its acknowledged leaders. In the first convention in Montevideo,

95 Amoroso Lima and Perez Herera cited by Gerassi, n.92, pp.40-41.
Zafroni outlined the circumstances that lead to the formation of the movement and its objectives. He pointed out that the time had come when a Christian could not but take a definite stand either to be with or against those struggling to be liberated. Neither evolution nor reformism could solve the problems of Latin America, only a genuine revolution could do that. He did not think that violence was necessarily against Christian teaching. It "may actually become in some cases a supreme act of love for millions of one's fellow men". Zafroni revived Frente Unido (Bogota), a journal which Camilo Torres had started with the objective of spreading the message of revolution and bringing about a unity among the various revolutionary groups. In one of the issues before the visit of Pope Paul VI to Colombia its editorial demanded that the Pope should unequivocally condemn the violence imposed on the masses by the oligarchy, and uphold the right of the masses to resort to effective means to liberate themselves.

Camilo Torres was not at all a unique case in Latin America. Already in his days political commitment of a similar type was found in differing degrees among many priests and religious. There were priests of such persuasions in Brazil, Peru, Chile, Argentina and the rest of Latin America. Francisce


97 "With the Oppressed or with the Oppressors", Editorial Frente Unido, (Bogota), nos.7-8, (August, 1968), in Gheerbrant, pp.45-47.
Lage Pessoa, a Brazilian Jesuit, had been committed to the liberation of the peasants and workers in the Northeast of Brazil. He was a known social activist and an elected member of the Congress who organized the peasants and workers. After the coup in 1964 he was arrested, imprisoned, tortured and condemned, for 'subversive' activities. But he managed to get asylum in the Mexican embassy and now lives in exile but without abandoning his revolutionary commitments. He maintains that capitalism has to be replaced by socialism. A Christian "not merely can, but in proportion to his degree of awareness of the social problem he must be one (i.e. a socialist) if that socialism is adapted to present circumstances, and there is no other hope for the progress and welfare of peoples every where". 98 As a theologian who has observed the institutional Church in Latin America he says: "We must destroy the Church in order to resurrect it". 99

Salomon Bolo Hidalgo, a priest in Lima, was so shocked by the living conditions of the poor and by the inability and unwillingness of the ruling elites to better their lot that he joined the clandestine National Liberation Front to liberate them in 1964, and became one of its co-presidents. He was jailed in 1965. He was denounced by the Church authorities for being a Communist. From his prison cell he wrote an open letter to the

98 Francisco Lage Pessoa, "The Church and the Revolutionary Movement in Brazil", in Gheerbrant, n.89, p.345.
99 Ibid., p.355.
cardinal of Lima in which he reminded him that Christ's order "if you want to be perfect go, sell what you have." (Matthew 19:21) was specifically aimed at the Bishops and Cardinals who lived in luxury. He continued:

You talk of country, but I must remind you that 'country' does not mean the hundred privileged families. Country, besides history, traditions, and territory, means people, the people who labour to fertilize fields, open roads, move machines, serve in the army, and create scientists, artists and heroes. These people deserve the best. But you, Mr. Cardinal, by your deeds, prefer one hundred superficial and exploiting families who organize balls while the people wail over their dead, who attend races, blessed by you, where the horses receive better care than the children of Peru. The patriots are not those who send their millions to foreign banks but those who, ignored by the Church and state, take their place in the sublime struggle against exploitation....

Alipio de Freitas tried to organize the people of the favelas (slums) of Rio de Janeiro, and for that the cardinal stripped him of his pastoral duties. He then went to the Northeast and joined Francisco Juliao in organizing the peasantry for their liberation. In April 1964, he was arrested by the military regime and condemned to twenty five years in jail for 'subversion'. But he managed to go into exile to Mexico.

These were not isolated cases. Social and even political commitment of a radical nature was fairly spread among the priests and religious throughout Latin America by the close of the 1960s. The extent of radicalism prevalent among them was manifest in the numerous letters received by the Pope at the time of his visit to Colombia and the Latin American Bishops who assembled in Medellin.

100 Salomon Bolo Hidalgo, in Arauco (Chile) no. 70, November 1965, cited in Gerassi, n.98, p.21.
in 1968, and the various radical statements emanating from individuals and groups of priests and religious. In a manifesto signed by no less than nine hundred and twenty priests throughout Latin America and submitted to the Second Conference of the Latin American Bishops in Medellin a section of the Latin American clergy made no secret of their revolutionary commitment. After pointing out the oppressive situation in which the majority of the population of Latin America lived it said:

We cannot condemn an oppressed people when it finds itself obliged to use force to liberate itself. Otherwise, we would commit a new injustice upon the people. On the other hand, not opposing the violence of the oppressors is equivalent to provoking indirectly the legitimate violence of the oppressed. 101

The manifesto further wanted the bishops not to compare and confuse the unjust violence of the oppressors with the just violence of the oppressed, but to denounce unequivocally the state of violence imposed by the powerful and to "exhort all Christians of Latin America, clearly and firmly, to work for everything that contributes to the real liberation of man in this area and to the establishment of a just and fraternal society". 102

Thirty-five Peruvian priests issued a declaration with the endorsement of archbishop Landazuri of Lima (and Primate of Peru) which called for an all out war against all forms of exploitation

101 "Latin America: Lands of Violence", in Gerassi, n.92, p.445.
102 Ibid., p.446.
and oppression. In Bolivia, eighty priests in an open letter to their bishops advocated revolution to solve the pressing problems of the poor of Bolivia. In another statement three hundred and fifty priests and religious in Brazil stated their revolutionary option, which they admitted might scandalize some, but which they believed was the result of purest act of conscience.

It was a clearer perception of the oppressive realities of Latin America and the new climate created by Vatican II and the latest papal social encyclicals that made priests and religious one of the most dynamic and restless groups in the Latin American Church. These groups were characterized by their determination to commit themselves for radical change both in the internal structures of the Latin American Church as well as in the manner in which the Church was present and active on the Latin American continent of revolution. Many considered their revolutionary commitment as part of their pastoral commitment. It often brought them into conflict with their bishops. Some chose to abandon their priesthood. But, many continued in their priesthood and maintained that revolutionary commitment was part of their priestly commitment. The letter written by the permanent secretariat of the 'Third World Priests' in Buenos Aires to the "Exchange and Dialogue Movement" in France, reflected this attitude of a majority of the clergy of

---

105 Ibid., pp.68-72.
106 Gutierrez, n.30, p.105.
revolutionary commitment. It said: "Our main objective is not to put an end to our status as clergy but rather to commit ourselves as priests to the Latin American revolutionary process." 107

It was clear by the time of the Medellin Conference of the Latin American Bishops in August 1968 that a large section of the clergy was firmly committed to the process of liberation. 108 However apart from the Camilo Torres Movement there was no serious attempt to organize and coordinate the revolutionary efforts of the clergy. It was only after the Medellin Conference that such attempts were made.

The bishops in the Latin American Church were traditionally conservatives not only in ecclesiastical matters but also in relation to socio-political realities. It was only in the 1930s that some of them began to show concern for the growing social problems. Even then they sought to a paternalistic solution through social work for which they organised the Catholic Action. But as and when Catholic Action assumed revolutionary postures the bishops opposed it.


108 Many of their statements have been published in collected works such as, Cheerbrant, n.89; Peruvian Bishops' Commission for Social Action, Between Honesty and Hope: Documents from and about the Church in Latin America (New York, 1970); and Signos de Renovación (Lima, 1969); Centro de Estudios Publicaciones, Signos de Liberación; Testimonios de la Iglesia en América Latina 1969-1973; and La Iglesia en América Latina: Testimonios y Documentos 1969-1973 (Estrella, 1975); Ronaldo Munoz, ed., Neva Consciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina (Salamanca, 1974); and many compendia of liberation theology.
In the 1950s, there existed national conferences of bishops like National Conference of the Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) but there was no organization or forum for all Latin American bishops. In 1899, they had come together for the first time in Rome, at the instance of Pope Leo XIII. But, it was only in 1955 that they met again in Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress. The meeting was of no consequence except for the establishment of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) with the approbation of the Pope. But, the activities of CELAM were confined to traditional model. A change occurred in 1963 under the orientation of Dom Manuel Larrain bishop of Talco, Chile, during whose presidency various departments of CELAM were created. They assumed different pastoral areas and brought together bishops and experts. This collaboration produced impressive results especially after the Vatican Council. Beginning in 1966 when Dom Avalar Brandao was president, meetings of these various departments were organized which produced surprisingly progressive conclusions. They provided inputs to the Medellin Conference in 1968. The documents of the department of Education (Buga, 1967) and Social Action (Itapoan, 1968) are particularly noteworthy, because they proposed profound social transformations of the structures of Latin America. Much more revolutionary documents were to emanate from these departments after the Medellin Conference.

The creation of CELAM gave concrete form for the collegiality of all Latin American bishops. The Second Vatican Council provided an occasion for the six hundred and fifty bishops of Latin America (the single largest group outside Italy) for the exercise of collegiality. They met for months on and were able to work closely together, thanks to the leadership of archbishop Larrain, President of CELAM. The dynamic elements among them got to know each other intimately and learnt to work together, thus acquiring a cohesion and solidarity on a continent scale. Thanks to these consultations the Latin American Bishops proved to be remarkably progressive in the Vatican Council.

The Vatican Council devoted considerable attention to the problem of development. It affirmed a new relationship between the Church and the World. It stated emphatically that the Church was at the service of the world. On return to Latin America the bishops perceived that this world in Latin America was different from the European world. It was an underdeveloped world, a world full of poor, exploited and oppressed people. In order that the Church be kept at the service of this world the bishops lent their full support to the various developmental activities already under way and initiated new ones. The bishops cooperated with the governments in various developmental and reform agencies. The CELAM conference held in 1966 in Mar del Plata, Argentina, supported the process of development in Latin America.¹¹⁰ But, as

Pablo Richard points out, a vast majority of bishops held anti-socialist national developmentalist neo-liberalism. They showed an aggressively anti-socialist character as at the turn of the century they had been aggressively anti-liberal. But the studies of various departments of CELAM revealed the futility of reformist approach to the Latin American problem.

Many priests were already committed to a much deeper social transformation. The attitude of the bishops towards them varied. Some condemned them, some supported them and a few gave them leadership. There were a few bishops here and there in Latin America who showed genuinely progressive tendencies and who supported the radical commitment. Of all the National Bishops Conferences in Latin America, it was only the Brazilian Bishops Conference (CNBB) that had manifested genuinely progressive tendencies.

CNBB was founded in 1952 chiefly through the efforts of bishops Helder Camara, a known progressive, who was its secretary general till the coup in 1964. It was largely promoted and directed by a dozen young bishops from Northeast who had similar progressive tendencies, and who were able to give a totally new and revolutionary orientation to it. Through many pastorals the bishops lent their support to structural changes, development plans, agrarian reform, rural unionization, mass education and politicization.112

112 Thomas C. Bruneau, "Power and Influence: Analysis of the Church
But the situation changed with the coup of 1964 which was supported and welcomed by conservative bishops like Siguad of Diamentura. The increasingly fascist direction of the military regime stifled all serious attempts to promote socio-political change. Even the CNBB was destroyed in all but form when bishop Camara was replaced and more conservative bishops inducted into it. But the whole social orientation of the Church could not be reversed. Some bishops like Camara Antonio Fragosa and Candido Padim persisted with their social commitments. This invited repression on some Church personnel including bishops, bringing the Church in sharp conflict with the State. These acts of repression united most of the bishops against the repressive military regime. By the time of the Medellin Conference, and even more after that, CNBB has been playing a prophetic role in Brazil denouncing the repression of the military regime and the exploitation and oppression of the masses. CNBB's "Pastoral Message to the People of God" (16 November 1976) is a clear proof of it.

(Previous footnote contd)


114 Bruneau, n.112, p.42.

Dom Helder Camara is, probably, the best known progressive bishop in Latin America. Archbishop Camara is a prophet who defies one of the most ruthless governments in the world, denounces injustices that others do not dare mention, and nervy enough to preach revolution and socialism, and deny, at the same time, the need for violence. As a priest and later as a bishop, his life has been dedicated to the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. He came to the limelight particularly after his elevation as an archbishop. He took charge of his archdiocese of Olindes and Recife in the Northeast in 1964 soon after the military seized control of the government avowedly to save Brazil from Communists and subversives. In his message to his flock on that occasion he reiterated his determination to fight against all forms of injustices and identified himself with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. Since then he has been condemned to death by the Commandos for the Hunt of Communists (CCC) and the squadron of death (EM). His Church and his residence have been the targets of bombs and machine-guns several times. He has been receiving threats of death frequently. Undaunted by all these, he continues his crusade against injustice and against the repression of the government. His enemies actually do not dare lay their hands on him. Instead, they have tried to intimidate and demoralize him by kidnapping, torturing and murdering his co-workers and assistants.

116 Helder Camara, "Address to the People of Olindes and Recife", in Camara, Church and Colonialism (London, 1969), pp.6-34.
It was chiefly through the efforts of Dom Camara that a group of bishops from the Third World met in Recife in 1967, and issued a joint pastoral letter, "Gospel and Revolution, A Pastoral letter from the Third World", in August 1967. The pastoral points out the existence of three worlds:

The Western powers grown wealthy in the last century; the two communist countries transformed into great powers; and, finally the nations of the Third World which are still trying to escape domination by the great powers so that they can develop themselves freely....Although the majority of the nations of the world have succeeded in gaining their political freedom, there are still few countries economically free. There are just a few in which the people live in the social equality that is indispensable to true brotherhood; peace is impossible without justice. The nations of the Third World are the proletariat of mankind today. They are exploited by the great powers.

The pastoral reviews the role of revolution in the history of mankind and advocates the most radical and complete revolution involving man in his totality. It criticizes the past role of the Church in society and maintains: "The Church is not married to any system whatsoever, and least of all to the international imperialism of money". It exhorts the Christians of the Third World to be loyal to their country, and tells them: "Far from working against it let us learn to embrace socialism with joy, as a way of life better adapted to our time and more in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel...God and true religion are always on the side of those who seek to build a more equitable and

---

117 "Gospel and Revolution: Pastoral letter from the Third World", in Gerassi, n.92, pp.429-41.
118 Ibid., p.429.
119 Ibid., p.431.
brotherly society among the sons of God in the great human family".  

The meeting of some of the Third World bishops and their pastoral pushed Dom Camara into the international arena. Since then he has identified himself with the cause of the Third World and has been one of its eloquent spokesmen in Church forums.

Dom Camara communicates his ideas through discourses and interviews and an occasional pastoral. He repeatedly reminds the people of the Third World of the dangers of dependence on either of the other two worlds. He is a staunch believer in socialism, but not the socialism of Russia and China. He decries those who play on the fear of Communism in order to postpone changes in structures that are keeping millions of God's sons and daughters in subhuman conditions.  

Camara is concerned about the spiral of violence in which Latin America and the Third World is caught up. The unjust institutionalized violence imposed upon the oppressed evokes violence from them which in turn invites more violence from the establishment. "Violence attracts violence", he points out. 

120 Ibid., p.435.


He says that faced with the unjust violence of Imperialism and Capitalism "it isn't hard to understand the possibility of thinking, speaking and acting in terms of liberating violence, of a redemptive violence", and adds:

I respect those who feel obliged in conscience to opt for violence not the all too easy violence of armchair guerilleros but those who have proved their sincerity by the sacrifice of their lives. In my opinion the memory of Camilo Torres and of Che Guevara merits as much respect as Martin Luther King". 123

But he personally prefers for himself the "path of non-violence". He says: "My personal vocation is that of a pilgrim of peace...personally I would prefer a thousand times to be killed than to kill". 124 But he adds that non-violence is by no means a sign of weakness of passivity. "Non-violence means believing more passionately in the force of truth, justice and love than the force of wars, murder and hatred". 125 As for the role of the Church in the process of revolution he says: "With us, without us, or perhaps despite us, the masses are going to wake up. Woe to Christianity if tomorrow the awakened masses feel convinced that their religion, out of fear of governments and the mighty of the earth, abandoned them". 126

124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., p.110.
At the time of the Medellin Conference there were quite a few bishops in Brazil, Chile, Peru and other countries of Latin America who were as committed to a process of revolution as Camara was. Some of them like Dom Fragoso of Gateus, Brazil, and Gerardo Valencia of Buenaventura, Colombia are not so committed to non-violence as Dom Camara. The extent and influence of this new sector in the Latin American Church was manifested in the Medellin Conference and its conclusions.

To conclude, the 1960s began with high hopes of development for Latin America. The Church allied with the State in the developmental activities. The populist nature of some of the states made this collaboration easy. Hopes were raised about the possibility of development within the capitalist system following the European and North American political patterns. Some bishops and priests as well as some intellectuals questioned the premise of the capitalist development. Contrary to predictions, the development programme did not noticeably improve the region's economic performance, and much less, produce a redistribution of wealth. With the end of populist government and the rise of neo-fascist regimes, first in Brazil and later in other countries the situation changed. Latin American critics, including Brazil's Celso Furtado had earlier expressed scepticism about the advantages of development. The widely published study by Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy in 1966 provided hard data confirming Latin America's worst suspicions. The "development
of underdevelopment" was further elaborated by Andre Gunther Frank. In order to understand and explain the Latin American situation critical Church leaders and some theologians had recourse to Hegel and Marx. They accepted Hegel's interpretation of history as nothing more than the process of the liberation of man, and the Marxist analysis of domination and dependence. Accepting the data provided by the social scientists they began to construct a new theology, a theology of liberation, based on the reality of Latin America, the reality of poverty and expression, aided by the Hegelian and Marxist analysis. Theology of liberation provided the newly emerging socially committed Church elites with a theological frame-work within which they could pursue their revolutionary commitment.