

The Church in Latin America

A Major Force for Change and Reform

By JAIME FONSECA
NC News Service

The Church in Latin America is casting its fate with the poor.

The assembly of the Latin American Bishops at Medellin, Colombia, last summer approved a crash program of pastoral renewal geared to social justice.

One of its resolutions stated that "it is our mission to denounce unflinchingly those facts of life which run contrary to the spirit of the Gospel."

True to that mission, the Church in Latin America is turning from charity-giving to demanding for men what is due them as workers and citizens. The bishops' statement reflected the urgency and anguish of countless priests and lay leaders who are bent on pushing radical change in lands where 70 per cent of the population live in dire poverty and uncertainty.

In becoming more and more a leading force for change and social justice, the Church is confronted with many areas of violence and is itself threatened by such situations.

In the Dominican Republic, at La Vega, a fertile valley in the central province of the country, Bishop Juan Flores

is locked in a struggle with wealthy landowners over the right of poor farming families to stay on the tracts they cultivate.

Where the rich are strong and unenlightened, and have the connivance of the government—civilian or military—reaction has often been open conflict and reprisal.

In Brazil, Latin America's biggest country and the largest "Catholic" nation in the world, the conflict involves men like Archbishop Heider Camara of Olinda and Recife and a host of priests whose efforts at social reform are branded as "communist subversion." Arrests, expulsions, confinement and murderous attacks have been the order of the day.

Military and conservative leaders say they are defending "Christian traditions of property, family and society." Some prelates lend them militant support, such as Archbishop Geraldo de Proenca Sigaud, of Diamantina.

The social pendulum has also struck to the right in a dozen countries, including Argentina, Panama and Peru, while strong conservative movements are gaining momentum in Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay. This does not deter Christian reformers.

The Mexican bishops denounced the "partial" progress obtained by the Mexican Revolution of 1917, leaving "the greatest poverty in the rural and often marginal sector: the small farmer and the Indians."

In Peru more than 100 priests and lay leaders issued a call to correct "the chronic conditions of injustice, backwardness, oppression and immorality that wither the life of our country," where 12 million Peruvians live on \$13 a month while some 24,000 have a monthly income of \$5,400 or more, often because they have a monopoly of land or evade taxes.

The Brazilian Bishops' Conference is backing the priests recently arrested for their outspoken defense of the poor. The priests themselves say they were imprisoned "because of our fidelity to the Gospel." Bishop Jorge Marcos de Oliveira of Santo Andre told a television audience that the government is ignoring the dire poverty of the majority of Brazilians.

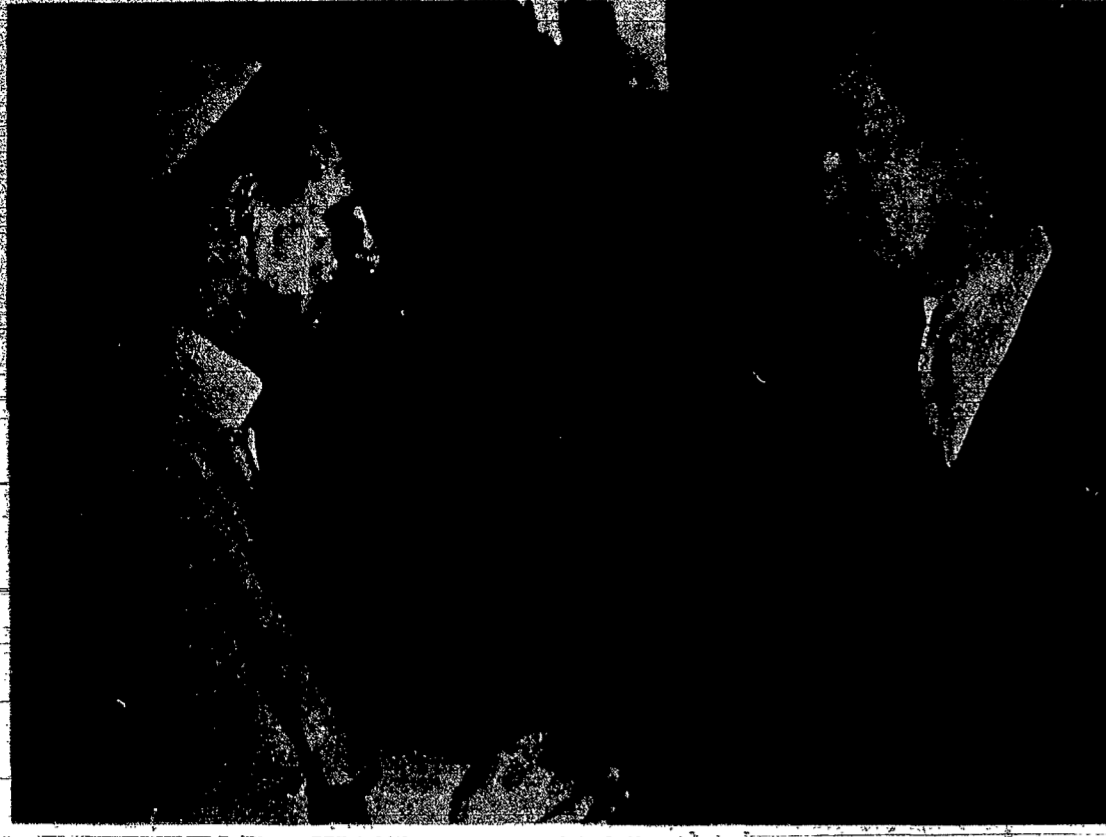
More than 800 priests in Argentina have protested against "the violence of starvation, inequality and underdevelopment, of persecution and oppression of the poor, of ignorance and organized prostitution, of unwritten but effective social, economic and cultural discrimination."

In Colombia, Bishop Gerardo Valencia of Buenaventura led 50 priests calling for "a revolutionary front (to break) domination by a privileged minority" and "seek greater social justice" in the

face "of repressive forces of violence coming from the top of the power structure."

In Bolivia, priests and bishops are engaged in efforts to make the powerful state-owned Corporation Minera Boliviana, insure decent living conditions and wages for the Indian miners.

Latin American priests are outspoken in condemning the wretched conditions and situations in which the great majority of the people live in their areas. But in Latin America—From Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain and the United States—are special targets of government moves to defend the status quo.



Pope Paul greets Canada's Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau at a private audience. (RNS)

Canada - Vatican Speculation Stirs Controversy

Toronto, Ont. — (RNS) — Church-state controversy looms here as speculation grows that the Canadian government may establish formal diplomatic ties with the Vatican.

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's visit with Pope Paul VI at Vatican City on Jan. 16 accelerated reports that an exchange of diplomats is planned by Canada and the Holy See.

The lay moderator of the United Church of Canada, Dr. Robert Baird-McClure, announced that his denomination is opposed to the appointment of an envoy to the Vatican.

Opposition also came from the Inter-Church Committee on Protestant-Catholic Relations, which is made up of the Anglican, United, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches, the Salvation Army and the Church of Christ (Disciples).

In his statement, Dr. McClure listed reasons that he said militate against appointment of an envoy to the Vatican:

1. The government admits it must cut expenses and has, in fact, cut back on its winter work program across the country. Appointment of a Vatican envoy would mean a second embassy in Rome.
2. It would not be effective. Some years ago, the moderator said, President Roosevelt had a personal representative at the Vatican. During those 18 months, he claimed, the envoy had had only two interviews with the Pope, one of which was of five minutes' duration.
3. "We already have excellent cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church," the moderator said.

Vatican Paper Assails Some Hierarchies on Humanae Vitae Stands

By PATRICK RILEY
NC News Service

Vatican City—The Vatican City daily newspaper has criticized "some national Bishops' conferences" for diluting Pope Paul's condemnation of contraception.

A French Jesuit theologian, Father Joseph Greco, author of the three-part article in L'Osservatore Romano, did not cite any national hierarchy by name. But his strictures on "ambiguous formulas" in fact criticized the key argument of the French and Canadian bishops about "conflict of duties."

Father Greco, a professor of canon law and missiology at Rome's Gregorian University, also criticized the way some national statements of Bishops made unqualified appeals to the right of conscience over the demands of the encyclical.

Such unqualified appeals to the rights of conscience are a "tragic aberration," he said.

"Never is contraception a good. Always, in every circumstance, contraception is a disorder, if, in this field as

in every other field of moral theology, there can be attenuating facts, sometimes no subjective guilt is attributed to those who, lacking light or reflection or liberty should fall. Yet objectively the act remains sinful."

He continued: "To speak of conflict of duties is ambiguous. In itself it does not exist, because there is always a hierarchy of values that in fact overcomes the difficulty objectively. A correct conscience which confirms itself to God's law enlightened by the Church's teaching authority does not hesitate on the reality of its duty, although in some circumstances it feels itself painfully divided because of inherent obstacles or its weakness or the non-Christian demands of a less well-informed spouse."

After noting that the pastoral action "of bishops as well as of priests must be before all else begun by teaching spouses to do their entire duty well," Father Greco said that even from pre-marital instruction bishops and priests "must enlighten the people of God so that they refuse to call good what is evil."



Conversion Arrests Cancelled

Madras, India — (NC) — The chief minister of Orissa state has said he will drop court proceedings against a Catholic priest and five lay catechists charged with making "illegal conversions."

Chief Minister R. N. Singh Deo made this statement at the behest of C. Rajagopalachari, leader of Orissa's majority party.

The accused are Spanish-born Father Ibilileta Fernando and three Catholic and two Baptist catechists, charged under "the state's Freedom of Religion Act, which outlaws conversions by "force, fraud and inducement."

The catechists were arrested Sept. 25, taken handcuffed to Gunupur, a journey of nearly 50 miles, and kept in police custody for ten days.

Chile's First Deacon Ordained

Talca, Chile — (NC) — The ordination here of Chile's first deacon was called "the beginning of a new era for the Church" in this country.

The deacon is a married carpenter, Samuel Rebolledo, 50, of nearby Vilches.

Bishop Carlos Gonzalez of Talca said of the ordination in the cathedral, "I am thinking of a Church of tomorrow with a few priests, many married deacons and countless responsible Christians."

This diocese of 400,000 Catholics has 120 priests. It is training 25 men for the permanent diaconate. The training covers two years in theology, leadership and teaching.

Vocations Decline in Mexico

Mexico City — (NC) — The Church in Mexico is heading for a crisis because of a decline in vocations to the priesthood, according to Father Jorge Duran of the Mexico City Archdiocesan chancery office.

His report pointed out that the archdiocese, with 6.1 million Catholics, has only 700 diocesan priests and 105 seminarians. In addition, there are 700 Religious priests and about 300 scholastics.

Father Duran estimated Mexico's total number of priests as 10,000 and said this is too few for 45 million people. There are 2,600 seminarians and scholastics in the country.

Congo Suspends Catholic Paper

Kinshasa, The Congo — (NC) — The Congo's Ministry of Information has suspended the Catholic weekly *Afrique-Christienne* (Christian Africa). Editor Cyrille Momote has been arrested.

The suspension order said the weekly had published a "tendentious editorial, visibly inspired by subversive groups, with the goal of sowing confusion in the country and of provoking social disturbances."

The editorial stressed the contrast between what it described as the great misery of the Congolese masses and the luxury enjoyed by certain persons in high places.

Founded in 1961, *Afrique-Christienne* has a circulation of 20,000.

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