

Balancing the Books

Transformation

By Father John S. Kennedy

A wide-ranging, sharply probing book about a subject of incalculable importance to the United States is "The New Latins" by Georgie Anne Geyer (Doubleday, \$7.95). Miss Geyer, a newspaper correspondent long resident in Latin America, makes an impressive case for the thesis that a tremendous, perhaps world-changing step forward is being taken in the republics to the south of us.

She maintains that, for the first time, the Latin American is discovering an identity of his own, that this is being grasped by millions of people, and that a new order and a new unity can be expected in the whole area.

As have others before her, Miss Geyer observes that a chief instrument of change is the transistor radio: "Suddenly the poor Indian in the sierra was walking with a transistor host of foreign propagandists, glued to his ear, listening to a all trying to woo him."

Miss Geyer finds that almost everywhere in Latin America the teeming majority who never before have been involved in the political process, never a social force, never an element to be reckoned with, have now been awakened. What was always considered a static continent is moving. Organization that had not previously existed is taking place, and people never credited with the ability to do things for themselves are proving that they have this ability and are working constructively together.

She gives considerable space to Cuba, where she sees something like social equality being achieved. She is no uncritical admirer of Castro, but she is convinced that he has demonstrated that Latin Americans He had no fixed ideology at are receptive to modernization. first, she believes, but as his revolution succeeded, he and his followers "became Marxists, step by step, and, at least partially, because there was no other place to go."

But it is by no means inevitable that the rest of Latin America will go the way that Cuba has gone. In Chile, for example, the Christian Democrats "are men trained with modern tools. They have modern minds and they use modern tools to handle social realities . . . They are the most pro-American, the most New World managerial types." They set out to transform Chilean society, and brought about remarkable reforms.

The fact that there are military dictatorships in so many of the Latin American countries does not, to Miss Geyer's mind, mean those in power are of the same stripe as, say, Trujillo. The new military are not from the upper classes, but from the

hitherto marginal people. They have had training in economics and some in technology. They stepped in as social reformers when the situation seemed to be hopeless.

Miss Geyer discerns extensive change in the Catholic Church in Latin America. Social awareness and the meeting of social responsibility are far more in evidence than was the case not long ago. There are those in the Church who, like Camilo Torres in Colombia (where there is nothing novel about violence), believe in "demonstrating the inherent violence of constituted society through the example of counterviolence." But there are also, more numerous, the progressives who abhor violence and yet effect radical change. Because of them, "the Church had become, by the 1960s, the most important force for the development of man against both the dictators and the technocrats."

Miss Geyer's conclusion, as she rounds off her fact-filled and soberly interpretive book, is that many forces are converging to produce a substantially

altered Latin American society, which will prevail over all borders, be modern and classless, and find expression in a personality as distinctive as the North American, but as different from the latter as it is from the old, outmoded Latin American personality.

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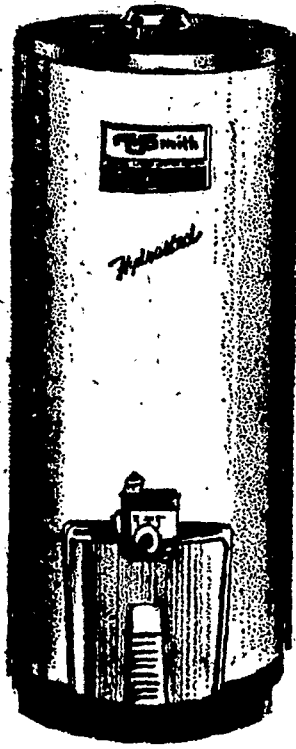
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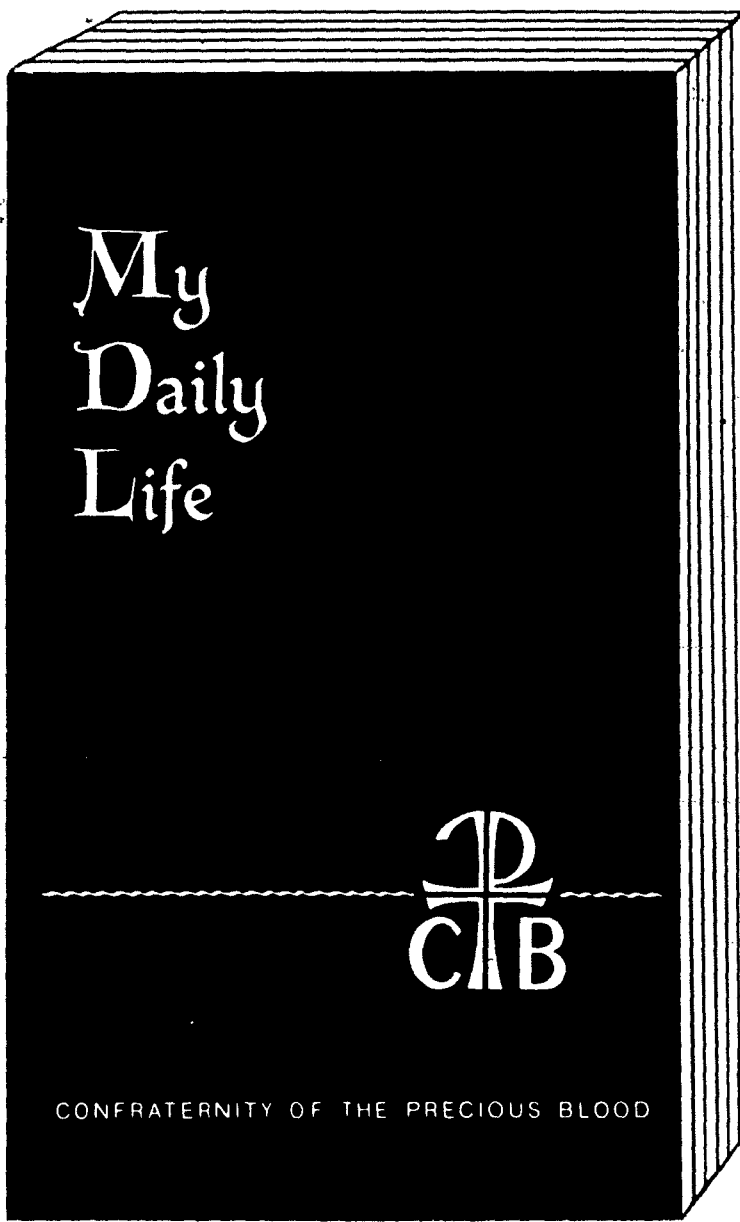
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