

# Latin religious seen moving to non-Marxist liberation theology

By Tracy Early  
**New York (NC)** — Latin America's 150,000 Religious are generally moving toward some form of liberation theology, but they are more critical of Marxist models than in the past, said the new head of the Conference of Latin American Religious.

Jesuit Father Luis Ugalde, a sociologist at the Catholic University of Caracas, Venezuela, was elected to a three-year term as CLAR president at its assembly in Guatemala last April. CLAR represents men and women Religious throughout Latin America. The priest was interviewed while attending the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Major Superiors of Men Aug. 11-15 in New York.

Father Ugalde said he found the current of thinking at the CMSM assembly similar to that of CLAR.

He said Guatemala had been chosen for the CLAR assembly because the political situation there was the worst in Latin America, and CLAR wished to show support for the Guatemalan church and Religious. Guatemala's government views as "dangerous" any church personnel working with the 60 percent of the population that is Indian, he said.

At the assembly, Father Ugalde said, delegates spent a lot of time in reflection on their experience with "the very poor" and preparing a document on "how to reinterpret our original charism in this new situation."

In the past the poor have commonly been viewed as objects of assistance, he said, but Religious now are focusing on helping the poor become "subjects" in church and society, people who express their own ideas developed out of their own experience. The key issue, he said, is not theology, liberation or otherwise, but letting the poor speak and "change the life of our church."

Father Ugalde said Religious now believe they and other church leaders sometimes went too far in trying to reform popular religious practices after the Second Vatican Council, and they now give more respect to the "religiosity" of the people.

In that earlier period, he said, some Religious trying to bring changes in society were attracted to the Soviet model. But today, he said, they know more about Marxism, and so have a different view.

"Fifteen years ago, some people made statements that were not mature," Father Ugalde said. "When people get a new idea, sometimes they are not able to make many nuances, and sometimes they are a little naive."

He noted, however, that he still considered it valuable for Catholics to study Karl Marx's critique of religion and to guard against situations where the church might be functioning as an opiate, as Marx claimed it did.

Father Ugalde said the attraction of Cuba, which he has visited twice, as a model for other countries in Latin America has so

diminished that he did not think even the Sandinista rulers of Nicaragua wished to take that route.

Regarding Nicaragua, Father Ugalde said Latin American Religious were about evenly divided, half favorably inclined toward the present government and half opposed. But he said even some Religious critical of the Sandinista government, including those serving in it, consider the alternative represented by the guerrillas worse. They argue, he said, that overthrow of the present government would mean a civil war costing thousands of lives, and the outcome would be a Chilean-style military dictatorship.

Father Ugalde, like the noted liberation theologian, Jesuit Father Jon Sobrino, and like the Jesuit founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola, is a Basque, and he was ordained at Loyola with Father Sobrino. Comparing Nicaragua with the Spanish experience, he said problems in such areas as freedom of the press and religious liberty were no worse than they had been in Spain at the time of its civil war.

Though Latin America formerly received many of its Religious from other countries, Father Ugalde said, it is now producing large numbers of vocations to the religious life. This has brought a need for more institutions for educating Religious, he said.

On the liberation theologies growing up in Latin America, the Vatican has acknowledged that liberation is a legitimate Christian

theme for theological reflection but has cautioned strongly against a tendency to adopt Marxist forms of thinking. It recently silenced a leading Brazilian liberation theologian, Franciscan Father Leonardo Boff.

CLAR was not directly involved with that case, Father Ugalde said, but Latin American Religious "are convinced that what Father Boff has to give to the church is very important -- not the absolute truth but very important. It is important to be able to discuss without saying the last word. Sometimes the Vatican has to say the last word, but in these issues we need more intermediate discussion."

There are different views among religious orders and within each order, Father Ugalde said, but overall, the Religious of Latin America show a concern to present God as "liberator," not as a God who supports ostensibly Christian dictatorships or is indifferent to the killing and torture often inflicted on the people.

"For us, the first point is that we need to show clearly that God is the God of life, not of death," he said. "But then the second point of mediating faith and social change is not so evident. There are many hypotheses. We make mistakes and we accept correction."

## Obituaries

### Sr. St. Bernard Witzel, SSJ

A life-long teacher, Sister St. Bernard Witzel, 88, died at Park Ridge Hospital on Tuesday, August 6. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Thursday, August 8 by Father Thomas Mull in the Motherhouse Chapel.

For 44 years Sister St. Bernard taught in diocesan parochial schools, including Corpus Christi, Holy Apostles, St. Mary's Boys' Home, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Immaculate Conception, St. Augustine and Mother of Sorrows in Rochester. Sister also taught in Penn Yan, Ithaca, Dansville, Brockport and Seneca Falls.

Her last teaching post was at Mother of

Sorrows School in Rochester before retiring in 1965 to the St. Joseph Convent Infirmary. She remained active there until failing health forced a complete retirement six years ago.

A native of Coldwater, N.Y., she entered the congregation from Holy Ghost parish in 1920 after working for several years as a department-store clerk. Sister St. Bernard earned a bachelor's degree from Nazareth College as well as several teaching certificates from the State of New York.

Sister is survived by many nieces and nephews, including Sister Madeleine Louise, S.S.J. She was buried in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery on August 9.

### Sr. Elizabeth Vincent Mulcahy, SSJ

Although she retired from active service in the 1960's, Sister Elizabeth Vincent Mulcahy, who died on July 30 at the age of 89, never retired from life. Friends say she was always ready to assist others and tried to bring joy into the life of anyone with whom she came in contact.

During her years as a Sister of St. Joseph, she served in a variety of ways. For 15 years, she was bookkeeper for St. Agnes Institute and supervisor of children. She was floor supervisor at St. Ann's Home for seven years before moving to the S.S.J. Infirmary in 1963 as a staff member.

A native of Geneva, Sister Elizabeth entered the congregation in 1937 from St. Stephen's parish. She had previously been a comptometer operator for the American Can Company.

Sister Elizabeth is survived by her sister-in-law, Mrs. John (Mildred) Mulcahy of Ithaca, N.Y., a cousin, Herbert Yates, of Rochester, and several nieces and nephews.

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated in the Motherhouse Chapel on Thursday, Aug. 1, by Father Peter Bayer. Sister Elizabeth was buried in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery on August 2.

### Sr. Febronia Kosmicki, SSJ

A native of Pennsylvania who taught in Catholic schools for 50 years, Sister Febronia Kosmicki, S.S.J., died on Monday, August 19, at the age of 93. Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Wednesday, August 21, by Father Peter Bayer and Monsignor William Shannon.

Born in Antrim, Pa., in 1891, her family moved to Elmira and then to Rochester where she entered the congregation from St. Stanislaus parish in 1915.

Throughout her career, Sister Febronia taught at St. Casimir and Ss. Peter and Paul

in Elmira, St. Stanislaus and St. Lucy in Rochester, St. Hyacinth in Auburn, St. Mary in Canandaigua, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Brockport, St. Agnes in Avon, Holy Trinity in Webster, St. Stephen in Geneva and St. Anne in Palmyra.

In 1967, Sister Febronia retired to the S.S.J. Infirmary as a staff person and in 1971 failing health prompted her full retirement.

She is survived by one brother, Leo Kosmicki, two sisters, Mrs. Frances Zaremski and Miss Helen Kosmicki, all of Rochester, and many nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews.



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