



**THE LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH IN THE WOJTYLA'S ERA:  
NEW EVANGELIZATION OR "NEO-INTEGRALISM"?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focus on two related topics: the ideological production of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) during the last two decades, and the dominant element that characterizes John Paul II's project for the Latin American Church. It attempts to show the institutional reaction to recent changes taking place in Latin American Catholicism. The author analyzes first how the conflict over Liberation Theology resulted in a program of systematic re-elaboration of the Social Doctrine of the Church, in which essential components of preconciliar Catholicism have re-emerged. Secondly, he examines the ideological foundation of what has come to be known as the "new evangelizing process." Here, he concentrates particularly on the analysis of the Theology of Culture and in the role it plays in the design of the new evangelization. Finally, the paper analyzes the "neo-integralist" elements that have emerged under the papacy of John Paul II.

## **RESUMEN**

Este trabajo se concentra en dos temas relacionados: la producción ideológica de la Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana (CELAM) durante los últimos veinte años y los componentes centrales que caracterizan el proyecto eclesial de Juan Pablo II para la Iglesia Católica Latinoamericana. Se destaca la reacción institucional que acompañó a los recientes cambios del catolicismo latinoamericano. El autor analiza primero cómo el conflicto sobre la Teología de la Liberación implicó un programa de revisión sistemática de la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia, en donde han reaparecido elementos esenciales del catolicismo pre-conciliar. En segundo lugar, examina los fundamentos ideológicos, la denominada "nueva evangelización," deteniéndose especialmente en el estudio del rol desempeñado por la Teología de la Cultura dentro de este proyecto. Finalmente, analiza los elementos "neo-integralistas" que han surgido durante el papado de Juan Pablo II.

In the last two decades, a vast literature has appeared on the changes that have taken place within the Latin American Catholic Church. This literature has basically focused on the account of a phenomenon that—in its first manifestations—was somewhat surprising: the Church was modifying its secular political attitudes. After having been for so long a privileged ally of the dominant sectors and of the state, the Catholic Church was beginning to get closer to the oppressed and marginal groups of society. In general terms, these studies dealt with the experiences that arose as a result of Vatican II (1962-65) and, especially, of the second conference held by the Latin American Bishops Conference in Medellín in 1968.

Obviously, the intensity and the importance of these transformations varied according to the peculiarities of each Church and each national political context. In spite of such differences, however, it is possible to make some generalizations about the nature of these changes. First, it can be argued that there was a transformation in the role played by the Church vis-à-vis the authoritarian state. Secondly, this new position resulted in the reduction of the Church's role as a legitimator of state policies and in the reorientation of its links with civil society. At the same time, on a theoretical level, recent literature has changed in the way in which it interprets the relationship between politics and the Church. This has implied a shift away from the institutional emphasis (the relationship between state and Church) that had characterized earlier studies towards an interpretation that defines the links between politics and religion in a dynamic and dialectical fashion. From this new perspective, both dimensions—"the religious" and "the political"—are conceived of as important sources for action. Consequently, the analyses of the existing relationship between religion and politics in Latin America have changed substantially (Smith 1975, 3-34; Levine 1978, 517-44, and 1979, 5-29). This modification in the orientation of studies was, on the one hand, a recognition of the specificity of the religious phenomenon and of its relative autonomy from other variables that shape political behavior. On the other hand, it was a reaction against the studies based upon the so-called "sociology of modernization" that emphasized the relationship between modernization and the increasing process of secularization.

Though there were some exceptions, this rich literature on the changes in the Latin American Church was concentrated mainly upon matters such as Liberation Theology, the formation of ecclesiastical grassroots communities, the relationship between Christianity and

Marxism and, on a broader scope, the organizational experiences of the “Popular Church.”<sup>1</sup> Although this perspective was promising, it failed to analyze the Church as a whole, concentrating instead on the most spectacular changes. Undoubtedly, the scope of the transformations and the emphasis given to them somehow blurred both the continuity and the resistance that characterized this process. Furthermore, owing to the complexity of the Church as an institution and to the great diversity of contexts in which its members work, it is not always possible to distinguish between the specificity of particular situations and the more general institutional tendencies.

This article focus on two related topics: the ideological production of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) during the last two decades, and the dominant elements that characterize John Paul II’s project for the Latin American Church. It will attempt to show the institutional reaction that accompanied recent changes undergone by Latin American Catholicism. The participation of CELAM within the ideological debate in Latin American Church, through a vast and continuous series of publications, has been one of CELAM’s most salient tasks. That material is the main source of this paper.

We will first try to analyze how the conflict over liberation theology resulted in a program of systematic re-elaboration of the Social Doctrine of the Church—where essential components of preconciliar Catholicism have re-emerged. Secondly, we will examine the ideological foundations of what has come to be known as the “new evangelizing process.” Here, we will particularly concentrate on the analysis of the “Theology of Culture” and the role it plays in the design of the new evangelization. Finally, we will analyze the elements of the “neo-integralism”<sup>2</sup> that has emerged under the Papacy of John Paul II.

### **From Puebla to Santo Domingo**

The fourth General Conference of the Latin American Bishops is going to be held in Santo Domingo in 1992. It will be mainly focusing on the “new evangelization” of Latin America.

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<sup>1</sup> The bibliography on these issues is too vast to be enumerated here. See for reference the collections edited by Levine (1979, 1986) and by Mainwaring and Wilde (1989).

<sup>2</sup> By the term “integralism,” I understand a current in Catholic social thought that emerged in France, Italy, and Spain at the end of the 19th century as a reaction to modernity, and as an alternative to both liberalism and socialism. See Poulat 1969, 78-81, and G.J. O’Brien, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, Vol. II, col. 552-53.

Certainly, the subject for discussion and the time chosen suggest a coincidence with the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Spanish colonization and the “first evangelization” of the continent. Nevertheless, the direction of the changes that the Vatican is implementing within its specialized organizations in Latin America indicates that this “new evangelization” constitutes a broader project for Latin American Churches.

The recent reorganization of the Papal Commission for Latin America (CLA), the predominantly conservative character of its members, and the importance attributed to CELAM are all part of a process aimed at increasing the control of the Vatican that had already started long over a decade ago.<sup>3</sup> After an era characterized both by strong innovative tendencies and a deeper involvement of progressive groups in political developments, Latin American Churches began to feel the pressure coming from influential groups in the Roman Curia and in the Latin American Episcopate. In general terms, these pressures were also present in Europe and were one of the last manifestations of the institutional crisis that had affected the Church after Vatican II.

In Latin America, this reaction started in 1972 after the appointment of Alfonso Lopez Trujillo—the then Auxiliary Bishop of Bogotá—to the Secretariat of CELAM. From that moment on, the conservative sectors utilized CELAM to launch their offensive against Liberation Theology. One of the first tasks developed by Lopez Trujillo was the preparation of the agenda for the following conference of the Latin American Episcopate. All his efforts were directed towards a reorientation of the tendency initiated in Medellín, to the depoliticization of the conference, and to the creation of an ideological alternative vis-à-vis the increasing influence that some progressive groups had gained in the churches of the region. Thus, during the seventies, CELAM started a profound revision and reformulation of the Social Doctrine. This revision was

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<sup>3</sup> The CLA had been created in 1958 by Pio XII as an institutional link between CELAM (1955) and the organizations of the Roman Curia. Its recent reorganization implies the elimination of the General Council of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (COCEGAL) that had been created by Paul VI in 1963 as an advisory organism for the CLA, and staffed by some members from the latter, from CELAM, and from the Latin American Confederation of Religious Families. The president of the new CLA is the Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, who will be assisted by advisors directly selected by the Pope in the Roman Curia and in Latin America as well. Finally, its members are the secretaries of the Curia Dicasterios, two bishops representing the CELAM, and three diocesan bishops from Latin America. Among the already chosen bishops, we can mention cardinals Ratzinger, Lopez Trujillo, and Freire Falção. See, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Spanish weekly edition, XX (26), June 26, 1988; p.1 and 24. The list of members of the new commission—as of June 1989—was handed to me during an interview with Mons. Cipriano Calderón, who is vice-president of the CLA in Rome, October 10, 1989.

based upon a reevaluation of tradition together with the inclusion of new ideological elements of Latin American origin. At the same time, a systematic purge of CELAM's bureaucracy took place.<sup>4</sup>

Briefly described, this was the ideological conflict that permeated the Catholic Church when the Third General Conference was held in Puebla in 1979. Meanwhile, the continent's political horizon had once again changed dramatically since 1968. In the interim years between Medellín and Puebla, democracies in the Southern Cone of Latin America had collapsed under a new wave of authoritarianism. These new regimes enforced policies of extreme repression and elaborated a set of economic policies whose objective was the drastic transformation of the social structures. On the other hand, the success of the Sandinista Revolution brought about a different set of conflicts within the Church which sharpened the ongoing debate about the extent to which the involvement with promoting the interests of the poor should be tolerated by the institution.

The legitimacy granted by some national churches to these new military interventions—the case of Argentina, undoubtedly, was the most pathetic one—contributed to increase the conflicts that were taking place in the preparation of the agenda for Puebla. The division was clear-cut. On one side were the supporters of the “liberation” positions and on the other those who defended the views of the CELAM Secretariat. Hence, Puebla turned out to be the stage of a battle for the ideological hegemony within the Latin American Church.

Some churches—notably, those of Chile, Brazil, and Peru—had already shown their intentions to oppose the dictatorships. Others had blessed, once again, the arrival of the “times of the sword.” Nonetheless, an event of critical importance was going to alter the correlation of forces in the conflict. In October 1978, John Paul II became the first Polish pope in the history of Christianity, and immediately initiated a new movement towards the restoration of Catholic unity.

Thus, the Puebla meeting was the most critical instance of a confrontation in which the conservative sectors of the Latin American Episcopate decided to advance an alternative view to the increasing influence of progressive groups. The CELAM Secretariat had elaborated a program clearly designed to reverse the tendency originating with Medellín.<sup>5</sup> For their part, the progressive groups prepared a counter-offensive to neutralize the CELAM program. International press accounts of the dispute were reminiscent of coverage of a soccer match. Despite the fact

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<sup>4</sup> On the shift of the Latin American Church to rightist positions see P. Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, New York: 1982.

<sup>5</sup> On this question, see P. Lernoux, “The Long Path to Puebla” and M. Sandoval, “Report from the Conference” in Eagleson and Scharper 1979, 3-43.

that both sides claimed victory, it has been apparent since Puebla that the Church is determined to restrain a debate that is, to say the least, inconvenient, and to punish those who are not prepared to obey the call for moderation.

A good part of the conservative strategy at Puebla consisted of the use of the Theology of Culture as an alternative vision to that of Liberation Theology. In fact, a significant proportion of the documents derived from the meeting are based upon the Theology of Culture. The progressive groups, however, succeeded in including the "option for the poor" in the final resolution. The point was more important than it might seem, since most of the debates focused on the "preferential option the poor" as it had been designed in Medellín.

Events over the years that followed only consolidated the tendency towards greater institutional control that had initiated before Puebla. Together with the strengthening of the role of CELAM, the control that the Vatican exerts over the appointment of bishops has played a central role. Della Cava (1986, 29-38) and Mainwaring (1986, 242-53) have demonstrated the important effects of this on the Brazilian Church which is, perhaps, the most innovative Church in the whole region.

Undoubtedly, it is not easy to assess influence CELAM has beyond the context of the national episcopal conferences. Presumably, in the cases where the correlation of forces favors them, progressive sectors maintain sufficient strength to resist pressure from the Vatican and its organizations. Nevertheless, in an institution built upon the foundations of a tough episcopal hierarchy, there are few avenues for averting the increasing centralization of power that has characterized the papacy of John Paul II.

Nonetheless, the next Conference of the Latin American Episcopate will be held within a renewed political context of democratization in many countries of the region. This change of context seems to promise a new challenge for regional churches. In as much as authoritarianism or revolutionary warfare wither away, the situations that have favored the role of the Church as an instrument for political participation or as a vehicle for social demands will also disappear.

Gustavo Gutiérrez recently expressed his desire that the "new evangelization" and the Conference of Santo Domingo recover the experience of the last twenty years.<sup>6</sup> He made an explicit reference to Medellín as the starting point of the new evangelization process. However, the Vatican does not understand the project in the same fashion. Cardinal Sebastian Baggio, a senior agent of Vatican diplomacy for Latin America, referred to the recent developments of the

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<sup>6</sup> Speech delivered by Gustavo Gutiérrez at the Medellín-Puebla Conference, University of Notre Dame, March 16, 1989 (p. 9-14).

Latin American Church in the following manner: “Rio de Janeiro was the birth, Medellín the vitality of childhood, and Puebla the maturity of adulthood.”<sup>7</sup> In even clearer terms, Cardinal Ratzinger (1985, 37-38) alluded to this process as the “restoration” led by John Paul II:

if by restoration we mean the search for a new equilibrium after all the exaggerations of an indiscriminate opening to the world...then restoration, in this sense, is desirable and it is already underway within the Church.

### **CELAM and the Reformulation of the Social Doctrine of the Church**

The elaboration of the Social Doctrine of the Church as a systematic reflection was initiated with the publication of *Rerum Novarum* (1891) by Pope Leo XIII. The Catholic Church had interpreted the long process of Western secularization, with its double dimension of autonomy and rationalization, as an extirpation of the sacred from people’s lives. The incompatibility between the development of the sacred and the autonomy of scientific rationality was explicit throughout the 19th century. The rejection of integrating into modernity, as manifested in the *Syllabus* of 1864, constitutes the most conflictive moment within a process of divergence between the Church and the world that had begun right after the French Revolution. The historical development of modernity—which was characterized by the emergence of national states and the increasing hegemony of scientific thought—afforded “the religious” no more than a subsidiary character. Furthermore, reference to the sacred in daily life matters was considered to be detrimental.

In this context, the condemnation of modernity and the rejection of the liberal state on the part of the Catholic Church favored a rapprochement with the “social question” that permeated industrial Europe by the late 19th century. Just when the Church was separated from political power and its moral authority reduced to the private sphere, the Church reasserted its social role. As Poulat (1986, 242-43) has explained, the papacy of Leo XIII implied the transformation of the Church’s role from a “defensive” position to the “conquest” of society. From then on, the evolution of the Church’s social thought has been characterized by its tensions and conflicts with liberalism (and subsequently, with liberal capitalism) as well as socialism.

In the last few years, these same conflicts have re-emerged within the ideological framework of CELAM. From the beginning of the seventies, most of its efforts concentrated upon

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<sup>7</sup> See *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in Spanish, October 1, 1989, p.7.



the systematic revision of the Social Doctrine of the Church. These efforts attempted to offer an alternative to the growing influence of Liberation Theology and to the experiences of the Popular Church in the period after the Medellín Conference (1968).

It is not surprising that this orientation was reinforced in 1978 with John Paul II's ascension to the papacy. As regards the Social Doctrine, Wojtyła's papacy appears to be a renewal of the origins of social Christianity as envisioned by Leo XIII. Obviously, after Vatican II the Church was not a defensive institution in the same way that it used to be during the times of Vatican I. Vatican II, certainly, partially eliminated the prejudices the Church had against modernity. Furthermore, the Church abandoned the pretension of dictating norms for the constitution of a world that had already become autonomous. Nonetheless, with the papacy of John Paul II the emphasis upon the social question has been followed by the insistence on certain premodern issues. Thus, secularization and "secularism" (as in the language used by Puebla) are perceived as the main problems the Church has to face today.<sup>8</sup>

There is an understandable temptation to see the ideological project carried out by CELAM as representing no more than a reaction by the conservative groups in the organization: a return to tradition, a need to recover the control that had been partially lost to the increasingly strong progressive forces. As a matter of fact, although the reactionary factor cannot be overlooked, the CELAM project turned out to be a highly innovative response to such forces. The program recovers elements from preconciliar Catholicism but it also integrates—though in modified form—some aspects that can be easily found in the heritage of Medellín. At the same time, the role given to the Social Doctrine has coincided with the guidelines set forth by the Vatican since the inception of John Paul's papacy.

The characteristic element of CELA's action in these last few years is the permanent tension between the premodern and the "integralist" elements of its discourse in the attempt to recover the recent experience of Latin American popular Catholicism. In other words, it *is* a conservative reaction, but it is also innovative because of both its form and its institutional strategies. For example, one of its most important representatives, the former CELAM secretary Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, proclaims the "option for the poor" but at the same time insists that it must be liberated "from foreign assumptions that are incompatible with faith" in order to bring it back to the tradition of the Social Doctrine (Lopez Trujillo n/d, 63).

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<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of John Paul's mission from a conservative viewpoint, see P. Johnson, 1981.

A clear example of this tendency may be found in the proposals made by the Colombian Center of Studies for Development and Integration of Latin America (CEDIAL) and by its publication *Tierra Nueva*. Both the center and the journal have maintained a close relationship with CELAM. They have constituted a vehicle for the discussion of the Social Doctrine and, especially, for the confrontation with Liberation Theology. (See, for example, Vekemans and Lepeley 1980).

CELAM's critique of Liberation Theology basically focuses on the relationship between the latter and Marxism. In fact, from its origins the Social Doctrine has been strongly influenced by antisocialist positions. However, the crucial difference between present and past antisocialist positions lies in the fact that, by the end of the sixties, the debate over Marxism has taken place within the institutions of Latin American Catholicism itself, rather than between the institution and external Marxist intellectuals and organizations.<sup>9</sup> It is not surprising that alternative positions and corrective attempts emerged within the institution to confront the crisis. In this sense, the *Instrucción sobre algunos aspectos de la Teología de la Liberación* (Instruction on Some Aspects of Liberation Theology) by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith coincides with the critique developed in CELAM by Lopez Trujillo. In its more extreme moments, it proclaims the total incompatibility between Liberation Theology and the faith of the Church. (Lopez Trujillo 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1980).

The critique of the use of some Marxist postulates has been followed by a call for the depoliticization of religion. Thus, the Vatican has insisted on the risks of clouding the spiritual message of the New Testament—which is an appeal to the salvation of man in general—with partial political commitments.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to point out that while Liberation Theology is attacked on the grounds that it subordinates faith to politics, CELAM has made an effort to develop the inverse strategy. It reduces “the political” to “the religious.” Therefore, notions such as “popular” and “liberation” change their meaning and get integrated as positive elements within the framework of the Social Doctrine for the Latin American experience. The mechanism has consisted in recognizing the existence of more than one single “version” of Liberation Theology. Moreover, a “correct” version has been picked up so that it could be integrated with the social tradition of the Church.

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<sup>9</sup> One of the most obvious targets of CELAM during this period was the movement *Christians for Socialism* that had been established in Chile in 1972. At the same time, the work by Gustavo Gutiérrez, Paolo Freire, Leonardo Boff, Enrique Dussel, Jon Sobrino, and Julio Girardi constitutes the core of the debate led by Lopez Trujillo (1980, 171-204).

Consequently, CELAM also speaks about “liberation” and “popular evangelization” (“pastoral popular”) but with different connotations. It also stresses the need for structural reforms, for the promotion of justice, and for the struggle in favor of the poor. (See, for example, Scannone 1987, 23-80). The difference, ultimately, lies in the projects and in how the relationship between religion and politics is conceived.

Against an opposition to an interpretation that emphasized conflict—among classes, between the poor and the rich, between the center and the periphery—CELAM has presented a view that combines “human development” with the ideal of reconciliation as developed by the Social Doctrine. Lepeley (1989, 8-9), one of the most influential authors of CELAM is elaborations, explains that the Social Doctrine emerges as the only alternative for reform after the failure of both socialism and capitalism. Although the resort to a “third option” is not new (Stepan 1978, 26-45), the novelty of recent CELAM proposals lies in the way this option is conceived of as an alternative project to both liberal capitalism and to socialism.

From the perspective of CELAM, the right of the Church to design a doctrine and to act in the world is firmly reasserted with the help of preconiliar traditions. However, at the same time, there is a refusal to sketch specific projects because the postulates of the Social Doctrine do not belong to the world.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Social Doctrine should be taken as a set of general principles for action rather than as a model to be applied to a specific reality. It constitutes an ethical pattern of utopian character.

Once again, the Social Doctrine is constituted as “external” to the world. According to CELAM’s elaboration of Catholic social thought, the Church does not attempt to meet the demands for a mediating role that results from the participation of the institution’s members in a secularized world. Quite the contrary, the Church reaffirms a totalizing vocation towards the integration of the social world into the realm of faith. Likewise, the Social Doctrine is conceived of as an instrument for a critique of modern culture (critique of values) and as an inspiration for a renewed social initiative of intervention in the political and economic contexts. This vision has characterized the action of John Paul II in Latin America and in other parts of the world as well. (See CELAM 1986).

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, L. Ross “Teologías políticas y doctrina social de la Iglesia” in *Tierra Nueva*, (39), October 1981; and L. Bambaren (1979).

According to this view, the process of secularization is seen not only as an indicator of the Church's loss of influence, but also as a sign of the general crisis of values in modern times. This is the crisis upon which the evangelizing project of John Paul II is founded.

Vatican II, which took place during the years of "desarrollismo," was hopeful and optimistic about a world that was favoring social justice and political democracy. Medellín was a shift from the predominantly European vision of the Concilio. It analyzed the limits of the "desarrollista" (developmental) model and stressed its oppressive consequences for peripheral countries. Since Puebla, and specifically under the papacy of John Paul II, the Church has abandoned its mediating role. It has played, instead, the role of an ethical alternative to the crisis of modern society. The "integralist" perspective does not materialize the way it did in the past. The question is no longer searching for the identity of Catholics as a "party in civil society." Today, the goal is to develop Christianity in such a way as to penetrate public institutions on the cultural, economic, and social levels.

The difference between this new project and the older ones is, precisely, the characterization of the old adversary. From the Church's perspective, modern lay society has not fulfilled its own utopian promises either in the socialist nor in its liberal capitalist versions. Moreover, the historical evolution of modernity has also exhausted the meaning of human existence.

The diagnosis of the crisis of modernity has been one of the central concerns in CELAM publications (see, for instance, Bigó 1976, and Lepeley 1989). Likewise, it has also been discussed in Puebla and it was dealt with by John Paul II later on. These publications—among which the encyclical *Laborem Exercens* is the most well known—have stressed the similarities between Marxism and liberal capitalism as opposed to the postulates of Christian humanism which would become the basis for a "new society" (Lopez Trujillo 1978).

Traditionally, the Social Doctrine had rejected economic liberalism more than capitalism itself. However, in CELAM's reformulation, some authors oppose capitalism as a system and as an ideology. In general terms, this rejection is accompanied by a strong anti-Marxist position together with a defense of private property. It is argued that the combination of an anticapitalist discourse with the principle of private property can be justified in terms of the various explanations about the origins of property. While capitalism guarantees the absolute right of property, the Social Doctrine would only favor a relative right to it. Furthermore, capitalism claims the supremacy of capital over labor while the Social Doctrine proclaims the opposite. Lopez Trujillo (1982, 48ff) clearly

expresses the ambiguity and tensions implied in this view. According to his interpretation, the Social Doctrine is neither capitalism nor socialism. Certainly, Trujillo's view is consistent with the final resolution of Puebla (495)—where both, capitalism and socialism, are referred to as “institutionalized injustice”—and with John Paul's encyclical on human labor.

In spite of the existing gap between general principles and specific programs, it is possible to elucidate some general orientations in the production by CELAM. With this reformulation of the Social Doctrine, the Church presents an alternative model to overcome the problems of the region. The central concern is to promote substantive reforms, though there is no consensus on the scope and direction of such reforms. Nevertheless, social reform is a permanent issue. In this sense, it would not be accurate to say that the conservative reaction is only a revival of spirituality or a mere recovery of evangelic action. On the contrary, there has been a reaffirmation of the social contents of the Church's action.

Broadly speaking, an explicit defense of representative democracy may be found in CELAM's studies. This is an important difference and an advance if compared with previous models of “integralism.” The notion of democracy that CELAM has developed is accompanied by the adjective “participatory.” Following this approach, a special role is attributed to intermediate organizations in civil society (Jiménez 1982, 90-120).

One of the most important elements of the Pope's social project is the promotion of intermediate organizations. Here, some authors have traced back the influence of some experiences such as those of the Polish trade unions. However, the Pope's program also includes innovative guidelines established by the new Catholic movements like “Communion and Liberation” that have developed what Abbruzzese (1989, 230-34) calls a “Christianity of substitution”: the new appeal by the Catholic movement to some issue-oriented groups—cooperatives, unions, students' organizations—that are being partially neglected by political parties or the state.<sup>11</sup>

The support of democracy and of the liberties associated with it poses two conflictive questions: secularism on the one hand and market freedom on the other. When opposing the latter, associative social models are given a privileged role. Private property is supported but, at

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<sup>11</sup> The increasingly important presence of “Communion and Liberation” in Latin America has not been studied in detail yet. In fact, the organization has been working in Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia for a number of years now. On the relationship between the movement and the Pope see Abbruzzese (1989), Vitali and Pisoni (1988), and Ottaviano (1986). See also the speeches delivered to the members of the group by John Paul II (1989).

the same time, certain forms of social property such as communal enterprises are favored (CELAM 1985a, 263-64).

In this case, the role of the state is defined, according to the tradition of the Social Doctrine, in terms of the “subsidiary principle.” This characterization of the state has been one of the permanent elements of Catholic social thought. The notion is implicit in *Rerum Novarum* and it is specifically developed in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pius XI. It is assumed that the individual precedes any form of community and that communities precede the state. This argument implies that, on the economic level, the crucial tasks must lie in the hands of private actors and that the state should play a supplementary and ordering role (Lepeley 1981, 120).

It is worth noticing though that the “subsidiary principle” should not be taken for a strictly liberal rationality centered on the individual. On the contrary, social and economic activities are assumed to be channelled through intermediate organizations. In accordance with this view, CELAM has made systematic efforts to promote the development of the *Pastoral Social* in different countries of the region (see, for example, CELAM 1985b, 1986a, 1986b, and 1987). These initiatives have varied from case to case. Sometimes the programs have concentrated upon the organization of grassroots communities and on the promotion of popular religiosity and culture. On other occasions, the role of unions has been emphasized and the creation of workers' vicarages has been fostered.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, state action would be subordinated to two equally important rights: the right to property and to free association. Thus, the free initiative of individuals and of communities would establish the limits to state mediation (CELAM 1985a: 255-57). State functions would consist of reconciling among the interests of groups and classes in order to promote the common good (Lepeley 1981: 75-76). In most of the studies, the aim of the state's action is associated with the notion of an “arbiter” state that intervenes only to remedy social injustice and to distribute the economic surplus.

Therefore, in spite of the insistence on the need to implement substantive reforms, the Church seems to believe that it is still possible to rely on previous accumulation patterns that allowed the integration of social classes in the past. The notion of the welfare state in the

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<sup>12</sup> See, as examples, Razeto (1986) for Chile and the studies by the Groups of Social Evangelization for Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay (Conferencia Episcopal Argentina 1984; Estudos da CNBB 1978; and Conferencia Episcopal Paraguaya 1985).

Keynesian fashion still predominates; a notion that is hardly compatible with the economic programs that have been recently enforced in most Latin American countries.

The conviction that it is still possible to work out a harmonious distribution of the economic surplus, without altering the particular interests of groups in conflict, has led some Churches to become permanent mediators of social conflict. Specific organizations have been created for this purpose where entrepreneurs and workers can get together and where special efforts are made to systematically communicate the Social Doctrine.<sup>13</sup>

Apparently, this perspective does not modify the way in which the Social Doctrine of the Church has traditionally viewed the question of the state. However, recent developments—particularly, the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*—have introduced new elements that partially change the traditional approach. Those new elements specifically refer to property rights and to workers' participation in the entrepreneurial process, and perceive the economic system as a decisive instrument for power redistribution. All these aspects represent an ideal that, though it narrows down the acceptance of some liberties, implies an attempt towards some pattern of populist redistribution.

### **The Evangelization of Culture**

Since its inception, CELAM has become one of the bulwarks for the unity of Latin American Catholicism. In fact, the Secretariat of the organization became one of the Church's main instruments to recover the control of the region by an institution that had been deeply divided by successive crises after Vatican II. The development of this project was uneven and it was characterized both by innovative and traditional efforts. However, the tendency towards greater institutional control has been apparent since Lopez Trujillo was appointed to the Secretariat of the organization.

Later on, the project was implemented on a worldwide scale by John Paul II himself. Under his authority the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (the former Sacred Office), led by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, started once again to play an increasingly relevant role in disputing ideologies that undermined the unity of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Argentine Church has been particularly successful in starting out this kind of initiative.

<sup>14</sup> On this point, it would be worth looking at the warnings issued by this organization about the incompatibility between Marxist theory and the

Since the meeting in Puebla, CELAM has played a transforming role aimed at the elaboration of a new political project that would be compatible both with the Church's diagnosis of the crisis of modernity and with a Christian social order. According to the vision of its promoters, Latin America constitutes a privileged context for the implementation of the program owing to the peculiarities of the continent's historical experience. In principle, it was assumed that Latin America had entered into modernity without eliminating Catholic traditions—i.e., popular religion—inherited from the period of Spanish colonization. The ideological foundation of the project is the Theology of Culture, or the Evangelization of Culture.

In its formulations, the Theology of Culture uses the concepts of “people” and of “the popular.” However, they are not understood in terms of class opposition or conflicting groups. The elaboration of both notions results from an approach that emphasizes unity and consensus instead of conflict and the social and cultural rather than class analysis. From this point of view, there is a specific “Latin American culture” that, despite national differences, has an “historical unity” and common development that lead to the maintenance of its own “cultural ethos.” This “Latin American ethos” is fully expressed in the various forms of popular Catholicism. However, they have not penetrated into the network of social institutions because of internal and foreign domination.

The concept of culture is so broadly defined that it includes all the activities in which the individual participates: his/her social and political institutions, economic activities, science, different forms of religiosity, and so on. From this all-embracing perspective the social aspect is subsumed in the cultural sphere. Just as culture constitutes the core of the social sphere, religion becomes the core of culture. Consequently, culture would disintegrate without religion. In turn, secularization is conceived of as the most pressing social problem.

The issue of culture is not new within the post-Concilio tradition. Actually, it was present in Vatican II, particularly in *Gaudium et Spes*. It was brought up later on in the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Paul VI and the question was also discussed in Medellín. The difference between those perspectives and the new one as developed by CELAM is that, in the former, the notion of

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Christian vision, about the consequences of the “uncritical” adherence to dialectical materialism on the part of Liberation Theology, and also the “observations” made to the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff in reference to some of the theses in his book, *Iglesia, Carisma y Poder*. See *Instrucción sobre algunos aspectos de la teología de la liberación* or “Informe Ratzinger,” Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (Ratzinger with Messori 1985).



culture was not a totalizing concept for the understanding of the social question (see, for instance, Methol Ferré 1980, 44-51).

After the meeting in Puebla, John Paul II emphatically promoted the “evangelization of culture” with the help of international organizations and foundations created by the Vatican for that purpose. In 1982, the Pope established the Pontifical Council for Culture, and CELAM organized its own Department of Culture which held regular meetings with Vatican support.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, due to the scope given to the concept of “culture,” the reformulation of the Social Doctrine implies a profound revision of the relationship between church and politics, religion and society, Christianity and secularization. Within this framework, culture is the appropriate instrument to launch an offensive towards the recovery of the public sphere without having to resort to the state. As we have already mentioned above, modernity resulted in the separation between public and private spheres in the face of which the Church adopted a defensive strategy. The incapacity of previous neo-Christian alternatives to establish a Catholic order and the institutional crisis that followed the Concilio, have allowed the Church to design new strategies aimed at deepening its influence over society. Today, the over-arching concept of culture is designed to facilitate the task of organizing the public sphere upon the principles of faith.

This project, part of which had already been sketched in Puebla, has been clearly described by M. Quarracino (1985a, 22), former president of CELAM:

Don't we observe that we are living through the exhaustion of dominant cultural patterns, secularized and materialist, which have guided “modernity”? Myths and utopias are collapsing. The credibility of their ideologies is undermined. The proclaimed “death of God” leads to the “death of man” as a result of the inhuman tendencies of immanent humanism... That is why the evangelization of culture is directed towards a “new civilization.” The dawn of the third millennium, half of the millennium of Latin America, forces us to think of vast and radical perspectives for a civilizing refoundation.

Indeed, the goals of the CELAM project are far from modest ones. On the contrary, the concept of culture would not be reduced to the description of the Latin American “ethos.” The project is aimed at permeating the totality of the social sphere, including its economic structures and institutions. Lucio Gera, perhaps one of the most relevant authors within this tradition, explains the meaning of the Theology of Culture in the following fashion:

What does culture mean? It is a project about man as a totality, about man's whole life, not only on some of its dimensions. It is not economic or political

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<sup>15</sup> Among the important lay organizations that play a role in this strategy, it is worth mentioning the special participation of the Italian “Neo-integrationist” movement “Communion and Liberation.”

reductionism, it is about the totality of the dimension. Culture is, then, the organic set of dimensions within which a society lives.<sup>16</sup>

Paradoxically, although there is an effort to depart from the postulates of neo-Christian models by trying to appeal to new social sectors, the very same effort becomes an “integralist” model. Actually, this discourse is pervaded by the tension between the acceptance of pluralism—cultural as well as ideological—and the necessity to harmonize cultural experiences, with religion as an organizing principle. If the ultimate end is to build a new civilization, this will have to be, necessarily, Catholic. The rejection of pluralism clashes with the impossibility of accepting modernity and modern secularization. These two terms are causally related to each other and the Church conceives of them as its main challenge in present times (CELAM 1981).<sup>17</sup>

In the view of the theologian of culture, Latin American modernity has coexisted with popular religiosity. Thus, the region poses contradictory challenges in that part of this tradition has to be integrated even as its secular elements are simultaneously eliminated. It may be argued that the main confrontation is little more than a reformulation of the older conflict we have already described. The most illuminating example of this conflict was the opposition between clericalism and laicism at the beginning of this century. The goal then was to achieve a unity between the Church and the state. Today, the project is more ambitious. Though the Church has not abandoned its intentions of acquiring influence over the state, since the latter is part of the cultural heritage, the new strategy includes an evangelizing process that should be communicated to the society as a whole.

Finally, the implementation of the Social Doctrine is seen as a necessity if the modern crisis is to be overcome. Here we have, once again, the choice between a dehumanized capitalism and atheist communism. Modernity without religion would constitute both a menace and the negation of culture. Culture only exists to the extent that it is Christian culture. And this reductionism takes us back to the core of the “integralist” conception.

### **Towards a New Type of “Integralism”?**

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<sup>16</sup> Lucio Gera, “Conciencia Historica Nacional,” *Tiera Nueva* (39), October 1981 and Bambaren (1979).

<sup>17</sup> On this point, the words of M. Quarracino (1985b, 331) are highly illuminating: “Because culture is an all-embracing reality, every single element and relationship in human life belong to it... A culture where religion prevails truly incarnates the primacy of spirit over matter. On the contrary, a secular, atheist culture—which undermines the fundamental relationship with God—leads, in accordance with its internal logic, to materialistic explanations and theories... Culture and its evangelization together with the Social Doctrine of the Church are two concepts that should be intimately linked one to another and be put into practice accordingly.”

Liberal Catholicism and Vatican II had grasped the progressive nature of Western modernity. Today, that model—which opened up new patterns of participation and changed the relationship of the Church with the world—is undergoing a profound crisis. Moreover, modernity itself is held responsible for the existing crisis of values. This is the diagnosis and the starting point from which the Catholic Church elaborates the new utopia of the Social Doctrine.

More than twenty years after Vatican II, the limits of its initiatives are apparent. This is due not only to the re-emergence of preconciliar traditions—which go beyond M. Léfèbvre's positions—but also because of the evolution of non-European churches. In this sense, the case of the Latin American church is, undoubtedly, the most illustrative example.

The rejection of the structures of domination that was related to the project of modernity constrained the dialogue initiated by the Concilio. From this point of view, the revision of Vatican II has provoked an antimodern critique within both conservative and progressive circles.

The encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* published in 1977 in its own way announces the limits of the Vatican II philosophy. The encyclical considered the possibility of accepting secularism as an appropriate, nonantagonistic, cultural domain for the communication of the New Testament. At the same time, it implied a resignation to the impossibility of creating a Christian social order. Under the papacy of John Paul II, the Church started to criticize the postulates of the Concilio. The opening to the world was debated and the separation from the world was seen as the only, necessary, alternative to the moral desert of lay society (Ratzinger 1985, 83-91).

Again, secularism is perceived as the uncompromisingly radical antithesis to the communication of the New Testament. There is a sacralizing ideal embedded in this perspective that attempts to restore the Church's central role in the constitution of the world. However, to reinstate the sacred does not imply abandoning the political realm. It is the revival of an old recipe with new ingredients, among which the Pope's charisma is by no means the least important element. The ultimate goal then is to place the Church at the core of society and to transform the institution's Social Doctrine into an ordering and legitimizing principle for society.

At any rate, it seems clear that the Vatican's critique of the political, cultural, and ethical autonomy that emerged with modernity and its attempt to reconstruct doctrinal and intellectual unity within the Church are part of a process towards the unification of Catholicism. This process may be better understood as a response to the influence that divergent forces have upon the Church rather than as a nostalgic revival of the past.

Thus, the return to preconciliar tradition should not be perceived simply as a step back into the past or as mere conservatism. On the contrary, it is a complex process that entails a daring strategy aimed at re-evaluating the position of the Church itself. Although the critique of modernity is partially based on the legacy of tradition, the critique is not developed in the name of the latter. It is based on a “new humanism”: one that would provide an ethical meaning to human existence. Moreover, this ethical utopia is, in turn, constructed upon the failure of the myths of modernity and not upon their successes. The difference with the past lies precisely here.

The re-introduction of the Social Doctrine, strongly encouraged by John Paul II, is an overarching undertaking to recover for the Church the social and cultural influence that had been lost as the secularization and rationalization of modernity proceeded. The contradiction between a Church that both restrains internal debates and resists institutional change and the elaboration of an ambitious populist program is more apparent than real. In fact, these two elements are at the core of the novel developments within John Paul II’s project.

Finally, it should not be expected that the conservative reaction in the Latin American Church will involve a reconstruction of the alliances that were emphasized during the thirties and the forties. While the experiences that resulted from Medellín led to the establishment of a “Popular Church,” Puebla was the turning point towards founding a “Populist Church.”

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