



An echo from Latin America

The Awareness of Being with Others

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As in other parts of the world, the Church's journey in Latin America and the Caribbean is continually marked by alternating moments of darkness and light. Its unique nature manifests itself in a multitude of ways, among which is a deeply rooted awareness of being People of God, something not easily found in many other parts of the world. We could also speak of a profound sensitivity with regard to what it means to relate to another, to 'be in relationship with others', also from a societal perspective. Various initiatives of institutions spanning the entire continent, as well as the vast, interconnected networks that form the lifeblood of our peoples, give witness to this.

Among the many challenges facing our continent and the Church today, one in particular stands out: *How can evangelization itself become more integral and capable of offering an active, creative response to a continent so rich in natural resources, yet at the same time, so tragically marked by injustices?*

Through its Latin American Episcopal Conferences (Medellin, Puebla, Santo Domingo, and Aparecida) and by virtue of its unique capacity for relational dialogue, the continent finds itself in strong solidarity with the Second Vatican Council's teachings and insights. Among the most significant landmarks: Medellin made a powerful impact by highlighting the plight of the poor in Latin America and the Caribbean, resulting in a number of concrete initiatives. Puebla focused on communion and participation modeled on the light of the Trinity. Santo Domingo made a particularly important contribution regarding culture and the enculturation process. And Aparecida marked steps forward towards an ever-greater communion, in which all those gathered contributed to the final document's drafting and, as such, it was not just the work of a small group of experts. Focused upon Jesus' universal call to missionary discipleship, it leads all the faithful to an indispensable pastoral conversion. Now, ten years later, although we can say that much has been accomplished, there is much that still remains to be done.

Then Cardinal Bergoglio played a fundamental role at Aparecida, one he would later carry with him to Rome as a source of inspiration for his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), and for many other aspects of his pontificate. He is a son of this Latin American continent, and now a gift for the universal Church, enriching Her with those positive experiences

and practices of the Latin American Church, and at the same time still continuing to challenge that very same Church in Latin America today.

Undoubtedly, a light along this ecclesial journey has been the prophetic experience of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM). Founded in 1955, prior to Vatican II, it paved the way for collegiality and communion among Latin American Bishops.

In conclusion, a few other observations:

- a) During these years of Pope Francis' pontificate, one cannot help but note a growing dialogue and points of encounter between a theology of the people and that of liberation theology.
- b) Of similar significance is greater accompaniment of the Latin American and Caribbean social movements dating back to liberation theology, with ecclesial communities at their heart, and rooted in the pedagogical teachings of Paulo Freire. In the past, the Latin American Church struggled to recognize in these social movements those same seeds that the Church, herself, had planted. Pope Francis has emphasized and brought to light the fact that these social movements are able to reach everyone and to transform ideas into political actions.
- c) There is also growing awareness around the need for formation. In this context, we should mention the joint initiative of CELAM and Sophia University Institute (Loppiano, Italy) to establish and promote a group of recognized theologians in their study of a Trinitarian anthropology. In fact, this group has already held six seminars across the continent, and published two books, with two others soon to be released, including one written for a more general audience. They have also made themselves available to assist in formation wherever requested by parishes, groups and Episcopal Conferences throughout the various regions of the continent.
- d) The encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, was enthusiastically welcomed in Latin America and the Caribbean. This was facilitated by networking and joint initiatives between groups such as CELAM, CLAR (Confederation of Religious in Latin America and the Caribbean), ecclesial movements and communities, *Amerindia Caritas*, and through linkages between universities in various regions. One specific ecological project was carried out in the Amazon via *Red Panamazonica* (REPAM), a network connecting central America and Mexico (RECAM), and the *Red del Sur para el Acuífero Guaraní y los Glaciares* (REICOSUR). This endeavor included both projects at a more theoretical level as well as public manifestations in defense of human rights and the environment. Moreover, it resulted in a new style of evangelization: one of working together rather than in isolation. Undoubtedly, through such networking, *Laudato Si'* is undoubtedly mapping out possibilities for geopolitics of unity in diversity, which was at the heart of Aparecida's aspirations for this continent.
- e) The synodal dimension at the core of the Latin American Church is coming strongly into evidence during preparations for the Synod on the Amazon, convoked by Pope Francis. All voices are being heard in this process: starting from those in dioceses, religious communities, ecclesial Movements, and, most importantly, the voices of those living in the Amazon region, itself.

The Church's relationship with Latin American society was further strengthened by the recognition of Archbishop Romero's martyrdom and recent canonization. He, and other such martyrs, have sowed a rich harvest for the Church. These dramatic events serve to shed positive light on the Church, showing Her willingness to call things by their proper names, and to journey onward in truth.