

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WLM-5

21 July 1988  
Lima, PERU

Peter Bird Martin  
Executive Director  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
Wheelock House  
4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, NH 03755

Dear Peter,

I often ask the new missionaries, "I realize you have thought about serving in a foreign country, but did you consider that you would be stepping back into the 16th Century?" With this question, Father Jeffrey Klaiber, a North American Jesuit, introduced me to the underlying theme of his new and disputed book, The Church in Peru: Its Social History Since Independence.

Klaiber is in a position to know. He has served as a Jesuit in Peru for 25 years, teaching and writing from his post in the history department of the Pontifical Catholic University in Lima. In 1977, he authored Religion and Revolution in Peru, and has also penned subsequent articles on the state of religion and politics in Peru since then. The appearance of Klaiber's latest publication on bookshelves earlier this spring has rekindled the ever smoldering debate over the proper role of the Catholic Church in Peruvian society. The first printing has sold out already and another edition is in the works.

Why has the sometime cloistered and obscure world of Church history leapt into the limelight here? The answer lies in Klaiber's assessment of the Church from his vista as social historian. During the epoch of the Vice-Royalty and Spanish dominion over Peru, the Church modelled itself on a corporatist society. There were "high priests and low priests, Creoles and Indians, rich and poor." The highest positions in the Church were reserved for men born into the upper stratum of society. To Klaiber, the contemporary Catholic Church has retained this disjointed character in the years after Independence in 1821. The most debatable point of Klaiber's study is his classification of today's Church into three distinct sub-Churches. In the Center, there is the traditional Church, wedded to ceremony, but conscious of the need to adapt itself to the social and economic challenges facing Peru. On the Left, the popular Church has grown up. Its constituency is the pueblo joven, or shanty town of the poor. Its inspiration comes from the teaching of Liberation Theology. On the Right, the modern Church has arisen. In the main, it draws its followers from the middle and upper classes. This modern Church is exemplified by two organizations, Opus Dei and Sodalitium.

The controversy surrounding Klaiber's history comes at a time when a power struggle is developing for ideological control of the Peruvian Church. Cardinal Juan Lándazuri Ricketts, Archbishop of Lima and titular head of the

---

William L. Melvin is a Fellow of the Institute studying South American Indian societies and Andean affairs.

Church here, will turn 75 this year. The Cardinal has indicated already his readiness to retire. This means that the race is on for his successor in 1989. To observers here, the future of the Peruvian Church may be at stake. Cardinal Lándazuri has provided the even hand of compromise in the Church since his appointment to the see in 1955. He has steered the Church here through the tumultuous years of change that occurred after Vatican II (1962-65), the Medellín Episcopal Conference in Colombia (1968), and the Puebla Episcopal Conference in Mexico (1979). Vatican II and Medellín were hailed by clergy on the Left as pivotal points in the process by which the Catholic Church adjusted to the reality of the 20th Century. These same clergy bemoan that Puebla was a step backward for Liberation Theology.

Vatican II was attended by approximately 600 Latin American bishops who were able to turn the attention of the Vatican to the condition of the poor in Latin America. Pope John XXIII could not move too fast, too quickly, however, and Vatican II ended with a significant number of clergy in Latin America desirous of an unequivocal and direct Church stance against violence in the region, coupled with a stronger commitment to work on behalf of the poor. This commitment was realized at Medellín; Pope Paul VI even made the first papal visit to Latin America to convene the Conference. Present at Medellín was the diminutive Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez. In 1971, Gutierrez burst upon the international scene with the publication of The Theology of Liberation. Gutierrez drew from the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, comparing the plight of Moses and the Jews in Egypt to the condition of the poor and oppressed in Latin America today. Central to the thought of Gutierrez was the notion that idea of praxis was an integral part of understanding the Gospel. That is, the Gospel was dead if not brought to life. A Christian had a duty to exhibit a preferential option for the poor, and to prove his commitment by engaging himself in community action to abolish poverty in the pueblos juvenes or remote rural areas of Latin America. To console the poor with the promise of riches in the hereafter was not enough. Gutierrez developed his argument using Marxist methodology. The concentration of wealth -- and by implication, power -- in the hands of a small elite called into question the existence of economic justice in the region. The unwillingness or inability of this elite in Latin America to create ways to transfer wealth downward to the poor moved Gutierrez to write of "social sin." No longer was sin a personal matter, but entire classes were responsible for the misery of others.

The documents directed to social justice that came out of Medellín and provided the basis for Gutierrez's Liberation Theology met with a conservative reaction at Puebla in 1979. According to Klaiber, a "European" vision of Latin American reality was superimposed on the Puebla Conference. Instead of attacking injustice in the region, the conservative bishops singled out secularism, in direct reference to the scientific materialism, or Marxist methodology, employed by advocates of Liberation Theology. Though Pope John Paul II encouraged the Left with his explicit condemnation of violence and social injustice when closing the Conference, the years since Puebla have been years of conservative reaction from the Right. This reaction reached its height in 1984 when Cardinal Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in Rome, issued a firm denunciation of the Marxist methodology employed in Liberation Theology. In his "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation,'" Ratzinger wrote, referring to Marxist inspired governments, "This shame of our time

cannot be ignored: While claiming to bring them freedom, these regimes keep whole nations in conditions of servitude which are unworthy of mankind. Those who, perhaps inadvertently, make themselves accomplices of similar enslavements betray the very poor they mean to help."

He who succeeds Cardinal Lándazuri will have a great deal of influence in determining whether the Church here shifts to the Left of the Right. Three Bishops are being mentioned as possible successors. They are Monsignor Luis Bambarén, Bishop of Chimbote; Monsignor Augusto Vargas Alzamora, Secretary to the Peruvian Episcopal Conference; and, Monsignor Fernando Vargas Ruiz de Somocurcio, Bishop of Arequipa. Monsignor Vargas Alzamora is considered the most likely candidate, as he is the most moderate of the three. Monsignor Bambarén has been called the "Red Bishop" for his support of squatters in Lima during President Juan Velasco's military regime, 1968-75. Monsignor Vargas Ruiz is identified with the Right because of his opposition to Liberation Theology.

Whichever of the Bishops is chosen in Rome, the surge in violence brought about by the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso has given new life to the conservatives in Peru. Gustavo Gutierrez has been under attack; in one recent interview here, he was asked if he did not feel uncomfortable in the cassock of the clergy. 1988 marks the 15th Anniversary of the translation of The Theology of Liberation into English. The newsweekly Caretas published this month an open letter of solidarity from Church scholars and intellectuals around the world. A second letter of support, which has not circulated publicly, contains the signatures of over 1400 priests and nuns who work in Peru. To Father Klaiber, the message is clear. "If the conservatives in the Church view the nomination of a new Archbishop as the opportunity to undo all that we [the Liberation Church] have achieved in the last 20 years, they are mistaken."

Today, the most conservative elements in the Peruvian Church pertain to either Opus Dei or Sodalitium. Opus Dei was founded by Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer in Spain, 1928. Klaiber maintains that Opus Dei replaced the Fascists as the most important pillar behind General Francisco Franco's dictatorship in Spain after World War II. In 1959, Opus Dei could count among its membership only six priests in Peru. Nearly three decades later, Opus Dei has gained ground. The newly appointed Bishop of Ayacucho, Monsignor Juan Luis Cipriani, is a member of Opus Dei. Another is the Bishop of Chiclayo, Monsignor Ignacio Maria de Orbegozo y Goicoechea. Orbegozo has been unwavering in his criticism of the ideas espoused by Gustavo Gutierrez. In 1985, Orbegozo celebrated Pope John Paul II's first visit to Peru with the publication of his essay, "The Seven Errors of Liberation Theology." Among these errors, Orbegozo singled out the concept of social sin in Gutierrez's writings. The Bishop of Chiclayo insists that Gutierrez has not used Marxism as one of many analytical tools; on the contrary, Gutierrez has made Marxism his primary tool. In so doing, Monsignor Orbegozo accused Gutierrez of encouraging class conflict. The Bishop argues that the option for the poor should be neither exclusive nor divisive. The Catholic Church in Peru need act only a moral guide in spiritual concerns. To Monsignor Orbegozo, sin will always be a personal matter. To confuse personal sin with social sin is to propogate class warfare.

Sodalitium represents the other half of the conservative religious front in Peru. It was founded in 1971 by a Peruvian lay volunteer, Luis Fernando Figari. Sodalitium comes under fire in Klaiber's book for its "verticalist" structure. Students are recruited from the better universities in Peru and in

Klaiber's mind, this smacks of de facto elitism divorced from the reality of poverty in Peru. Indeed, Cerveza del Sur, a beer brewing company in Arequipa, donated recently an old brewery to Sodalitium. Sodalitium plans to convert the brewery into the site of a new technical and business school, the Instituto del Sur. Hopeful students will be subjected to rigorous entrance examinations in order to limit the first year's class to 100.

Members of Opus Dei and Sodalitium freely admit they enjoy close ties to the Peruvian business community. Father Joaquin Diéz, a Spaniard who has been with Opus Dei in Peru for 25 years, defends his brethren. "Yes, we work through established institutions. The object of Opus Dei is to unify faith and work. If you look closely at the organizations run by the advocates of Liberation Theology, what have they achieved? We happen to think that it is more productive to prepare an individual so that he can act ethically, whether he is a businessman, a foreman, or a common laborer. If it is because we have something to show for our effort that we are called conservatives, then yes, we are conservatives. The Liberation [Church] is left with nothing but its ideology."

Father Klaiber acknowledges that some of the points raised by the conservatives merit discussion. Nevertheless, he laments that the shift to the Right could not come at a worse time for Peru. The conservative Bishop of Callao, fellow Jesuit Ricardo Durand Florez, was elected President of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference on 7 July. Monsignor Durand has just published his own book, titled The Utopia of Liberation: Theology of the Poor? In his book, Monsignor Durand reminds Peruvians that the Vatican has been careful to define a correct and an incorrect Theology of Liberation. To Klaiber, the distinction is an ominous one that signals the possible end of dialogue in the Church here. After three years of disappointment with President Alan Garcia and the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) government, Klaiber characterizes the poor as "depressed." On the extreme Left, Sendero Luminoso threatens to destroy everything in order to construct their own version of an utopian society in Peru. If the balance of power in the Church swings to the Right, he worries that violence will increase. "At this moment, the [popular] Church is the last institution in Peru that inspires belief among the poor. If the Right changes our mission in the pueblos jovenes and in the sierra, the poor will lose interest in the Church. The Church is the last institution that stands between Sendero Luminoso and the people."

In the end, the exposed position of the Church in the pueblos jovenes and the remote rural parishes may prove more dangerous than any threat from the Right. Earlier this year, the Peruvian priest Father Victor Acuña was shot and killed in Ayacucho while performing mass. Senderistas accused Acuña of stealing from CARITAS funds, the local Catholic social welfare organization. Yet, in the words of one priest here, the theft could not have amounted to much; he described Vicuña as a rather ordinary rural priest, neither exceptionally good nor exceptionally bad. Sendero Luminoso determined the gravity of Vicuña's crime.

Father Vicuña was the first casualty suffered by the Catholic Church since Sendero launched its war in 1980. Some priests here think it will only be a matter of time before Sendero wearies of competition for the hearts and minds of the poor. Vicuña's replacement as director of CARITAS in Ayacucho is a North American Jesuit, Father Carl Schmidt. Recently, Schmidt was driving alone outside the city of Ayacucho when he was stopped by a band of

Senderistas. Schmidt was forced to sit and listen for an hour as the Senderistas lectured him about the injustices perpetrated in Ayacucho and the promise of a rejuvenated Peru led by Sendero. After finishing the speech, the Senderistas demanded tribute. Father Schmidt got off lightly; he handed over his athletic kit bag decorated with the seal of Loyola University, Chicago. Not all the clergy have been so lucky. In the areas that have been designated "Red Zones," or Sendero-occupied territories, priests and nuns have received notes explaining, "We have nothing against you personally. If you are going to stay, however, then you must be with [Sendero]." The dilemma is the same for both conservative and liberal clergy. To leave the area is to concede to Sendero's reign of terror. To remain is to risk martyrdom.

Against this background, Father Klaiber counters the unfavorable judgements directed at him and the Liberation Church by the Right. "Yes, Sendero has given them the opportunity to point to us and say, We told you so. But let there be no doubt. Liberation Theology reaches out to the heart of mankind. It appeals to the ideal of a living Christ ... to our deepest roots of nobility. Sendero Luminoso appeals only to the deepest roots of hatred."

As ever,

*W.L. Melvin*

Received in Hanover 8/1/88