

**TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES
FOR ECUMENISM AMONG HISPANIC CHRISTIANS**

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Donohoe Ecumenical Forum
Tucson, Arizona
June 1 and 2, 1994

"Trends, Challenges and Possibilities for Ecumenism Among Hispanic Christians"
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(Keynote address given at the Donohoe Ecumenical Forum, Tucson, Arizona, June 1 and 2, 1994)

Part I — A Historical Overview of Hispanic Catholic-Protestant Relations

If you came today to hear the definitive history of Ecumenism among Hispanic Christians, I can assure you from the outset, you will be sorely disappointed. There is no history of ecumenism among Hispanics available. The reason is that this history does not exist because it has yet to be written. Part of the reason is that there has been relatively little ecumenical activity in Spain, Latin America, the Caribbean and among Hispanic or Latino churches in the United States.

An adept and professional Church historian could trace the very interesting, and sometimes tragic, history of how Hispanic Christian traditions, Catholic and non-Catholic, have interrelated over the past five hundred years. I am not that adept and professional Church historian that is going to do that for you today, but I will offer a few reflections based on reading and observations, and this I hope to do from a pastoral perspective and concern.

The sixteenth century is the necessary starting point. It saw the extensive exploration, conquest, and colonization by Spain of the vast reaches of what is now the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America, and the Philippines. The sixteenth century experienced the greatest era of evangelization in the history of the Church since the Christianization of Europe. At the same time this was happening, Protestantism had its origins and began its own expansion especially in northern Europe.

The same century saw the defensive stand the Roman Catholic Church took vis-à-vis Protestantism through the Catholic monarchs of Spain and its ecclesiastical and civil rulers in the New World. The Council of Trent, also held in the sixteenth century, began an aggressive, and

sometimes brilliant, response on the part of Rome to reform, defend and strengthen the Church. Much of its teaching and the restructuring of its organization was effective in countering the advances of Protestantism. The catechisms of that age were defensive and apologetic in character. Missionaries in Latin America fervently preached a strong anti-Lutheran theology. They wanted to make sure that the Indian people would be ready to defend their Catholic faith, in case some Lutheran preacher might appear at their doorstep.

But for a Lutheran to appear at their doorstep was hardly likely. The State had absolute control over the ports and who could disembark. It also had complete control over the press. The State worked hand in hand with the Tribunal of the Inquisition to make sure that the ideas of the Reformation would not be diffused in New Spain.ⁱ

From 1526 to 1549 Charles V had authorized German and Flemish subjects to enter the Spanish colonies legally, but in 1537 Pope Paul III, in his Bull Altitudo Divini Consilii, prohibited the entrance of apostates into the Indies and ordered the colonial authorities to expel those who might be there.ⁱⁱ

The Spanish Inquisition was effective in keeping out heretics and in creating an antagonism on the part of the Spanish and Spanish-Americans towards all Protestants. Autos de fe were the public ceremonies surrounding the proclamation of sentences that terminated Inquisition trials, especially those in Spain. These acquired a harsh, show-trial atmosphere, probably not unlike the public hangings held in the wild west of the Pecos. These autos de fe were meant to impress and instruct the populace.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to Dr. Jean-Pierre Bastian, Lutheran pastor and historian, there were five moments that marked the heights of Protestant repression in colonial Latin America; these were the famous autos de fe of 1574, 1601, 1659, 1768 and 1807. These autos de fe were most effective in spreading and maintaining anti-Protestant sentiment.^{iv}

Dr. Tomás Gutiérrez, a Peruvian Protestant minister and Church historian, has done ample research on the Inquisition in Latin America at Los Archivos de las Indias in Seville, Spain, and at the Lima Archdiocesan Archives. I listened to him read one of his papers entitled, "Herejes, Piratas, y Locos." He described how in Peru and in Mexico, any pirate from England who was caught and imprisoned, was not judged for his piracy, but for his religious convictions. These pirates, being English, were usually non-Roman Catholics, and therefore heretics. Some of these pirates, related Dr. Gutiérrez, refused to recant and suffered the consequences of torture and death. When they would not recant of their Protestant beliefs, they were thought to be insane. The most brilliant Roman Catholic theologians would be brought to these so-called heretics and they tried every theological discourse to convince the heretic of his error and of the logic of Roman Catholicism. If they still did not accept what the theologian was saying, their only conclusion was that this person was crazy.

The Protestants who did reside in New Spain in the sixteenth century were regarded as "foreigners;" they worked as miners, tailors, gem cutters or weavers whose places of origin were from Germany, Holland, as well as England. Since they at times gathered, they were seen a conspirators and as dangerous heretics who could lead the Roman Catholics astray.

Simón Santiago, a German Calvinist and rug weaver in Mexico City, tried to pass as a crazy person during the purges of 1598. He was accused as a heretic, apostate and Calvinist. On January 13, 1601, after being subjected to torture, he admitted faking insanity to avoid being accused as an avowed Calvinist. Four times the Tribunal of the Inquisition attempted to convert him. He refused and was finally executed during the auto de fe of March 25, 1601.

Another significant historical factor that has contributed to the hostility, suspicion, and mistrust between Hispanic Protestantism and Roman Catholicism is that of the infamous "Black Legend." The Black Legend is an insidious series of myths that were deliberately made up in the 16th and 17th century to create anti-Spanish sentiment. Everything that was Spanish was made to appear less than human and to be abhorred, including its culture, behavior, and religion, namely Roman Catholicism. These myths were based mainly on exaggerated portrayals of Spanish behavior in the colonies, including the Inquisition and the treatment of the Indian people of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Black Legend was useful to Britain and other powers in the 18th and 19th centuries by pointing out how bad the Spanish were in comparison to the failures of the British in their colonies. If English colonists killed Indians, it was nothing in comparison with that those Spanish were doing in their colonies. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas' writings in defense of the Indians were useful to the British in the creation of the Black Legend. One of the negative and unfortunate

consequences of all this has been a strong and seemingly inextricable bias against the religion of the Spanish and of the Latin Americans, namely Roman Catholicism.

These attitudes, events, policies and practices set the stage for all future Roman Catholic-Protestant relations for centuries to come. Roman Catholicism remained one of the identifying and essential characteristics of the Hispanic or Latino. To be Latino meant to be Catholic. To deny one's Catholic roots was to deny one's very self.

It is not surprising, because of the cultural, social and religious pluralism and our tradition of religious freedom in the United States, that Protestantism would make its first inroads among Latinos here in this country.

Protestant Christianity made its initial contact with Hispanics in the United States in Texas. Anglo colonization in Texas began after Mexico separated from Spain in 1821. Even though Anglos were required to become Roman Catholics, the practice of Protestantism was tolerated. Protestant missionaries went from colony to colony to serve their Anglo brethren and only coincidentally ministered to the Mexicans. At first the missionaries limited their activities among the Mexicans to the distribution of Bibles. Later, especially after the Texans won their independence from Mexico in 1836, these missionaries began more active work among the Mexicans. They saw their work as a step to future missionary activity in Mexico.^v

The first Protestant groups to minister to Hispanics in this country were the Presbyterians and the Methodists. In 1853 the Methodist Episcopal Church began working in Northern New Mexico. Ambrosio Gonzales from Peralta became a "class leader" and developed a class of 42 converts. The first ordained Hispanic Protestant clergyman had been a Catholic priest; he preached his first sermon as a Protestant on the Plaza in Santa Fe on November 20, 1853.^{vi}

It is very important to keep this history in mind. In our day, for ecumenical reasons, we must acknowledge that there have been families with Protestant roots that go back several generations. Theirs is a unique faith and spirituality that has been passed from generation to generation in these families. It is a rich heritage that enriches the total Body that is the Christian Church.

It will help also to know what the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America has said through its bishops. There have been four landmark meetings or conferencias of the Latin American episcopacy: Río de Janeiro, 1955; Medellín, 1968; Puebla, 1979; and Santo Domingo, 1992. The theme of ecumenism has been prominent in the conclusions of the last three. It is important to know that after the Río de Janeiro meeting, the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM) was formally structured with a department of ecumenism as one of its offices.

A major influence on CELAM with its inclusion of ecumenism as part of its mission was probably Cardinal Bea. At a preparatory meeting for the Medellín conference, he stated, "The great problem of Latin America is to define attitudes towards certain Protestant missionary groups. This presupposes a previous and mature study, with regards to the distinction among the legitimate forms of spreading the gospel message and those which do violence to religious freedom."^{vii}

In the conclusions of Medellín ecumenism is included in several of the sections. It teaches that families need to be open to families of other Christian confessions (3, 20); that Catholic schools be open to ecumenical dialogue (4, 19); that ecumenical initiatives be encouraged among the young (5, 19); that ecumenism be included in catechesis (8, 11); that ecumenical celebrations

of the Word be held (9, 14); and that there be collaboration with other Christian confessions in matters of social concern (2, 26.30).^{viii}

It must be said at this point, that Medellín was a dramatic turning point in the history of the Church in Latin America. Before 1968, the Church had the reputation of being for the elite groups, the wealthy, and being aligned with the political powers. It had the image of a conservative organization and connected firmly with the Spanish royalty and the Vatican Papacy. After Medellín, the Church in Latin America begins to be the Church for the poor, and many of its representatives, clerical and lay, became powerful exponents and even martyrs for the causes of the oppressed.

Allow me to try to clarify a frequently-expressed myth. This has to do with the now famous, "Rockefeller Report." In a section called, "The Cross and the Sword," Governor Rockefeller's report reads:

"Although it is not yet widely recognized, the military establishments and the Catholic Church are also among today's forces for social and political change in the other American republics...Few people realize the extent to which both these institutions are now breaking with their pasts. They are in fact moving rapidly to the forefront as forces for social, economic and political change."

The report includes an implicit criticism of the church, which, because of its "profound idealism" might leave it in some cases "vulnerable to subversive penetration; ready to undertake a revolution if necessary to end injustice, but not clear either as to the ultimate nature of the revolution itself or as to the governmental system by which the justice it seeks can be realized."

This language could lead some to think the church was heading to start revolutions all over Latin America. Others would infer that the U.S. government was setting up the church for attack. Others would falsely conclude that the report was calling for more conservative religious groups to take over the Catholic hegemony in Latin America.^{ix}

One of the results of Medellín that has had a major influence in ecumenical affairs was the organization of the Comisión de Estudios de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina (CEHILA). It started in Quito in 1973 under the auspices of CELAM. CELAM did not seem to be ready for CEHILA, so the latter became an independent entity. From the very beginning CEHILA has been an ecumenical project. For over twenty years, members of CEHILA have done research, published books, periodicals and many articles on the history of the Church in Latin America from an ecumenical perspective. The international meetings are held regularly in Latin America and always include Protestant church historians. "Church" is always taken by CEHILA to include all the Christian churches; this is of course, in keeping with the ecclesiology of Vatican II. CEHILA is probably the most successful ecumenical project in Latin America. I am glad to say that there is a CEHILA-USA group of church historians that meets annually. We could use some Hispanic Protestant church historians.

The third conference of Latin American bishops held in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979, treated the theme of ecumenism more amply. "Ecumenical activity, which finds expression in dialogue and joint efforts in human development, is part of the move toward the unity for which we yearn" (no. 108). Puebla includes an entire chapter on the question of Christian unity. I particularly like its opening statement of that chapter: "The mandate of evangelization of which all Christians are trustees, prompts a common effort under the impetus of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to our hope before the whole world" (no. 1097).^x

Puebla describes the ecumenical activity taking place in Latin America and encourages further dialogue. At the same time, it laments the ignorance of ecumenism and the mistrust among Catholics arising from proselytism (no. 1108).^{xi}

Pope John Paul II opened the Fourth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America in Santo Domingo. He described the Protestant sects as "rapacious wolves" that are devouring Latin American Catholics and "causing division and discord in our communities." He went on to stress the danger of underestimating "a certain strategy" employing notable economic resources to crack the Catholic unity of Latin America and weaken the bonds that unify Latin American countries.^{xii}

The stage for this approach to the theme of ecumenism at Santo Domingo was set months before the conference began. Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez, Archbishop of Santo Domingo and one of the conference's three presidents, admonished the local Protestants not to misbehave during the Pope's visit. It did not help matters that during the conference, two officially invited Protestant observers were made to feel uninvited from the commission working on ecumenism.^{xiii}

The final document of Santo Domingo speaks of ecumenism as a "priority for the Church's pastoral activity in our age," echoing words of John Paul II (no. 135). The document devotes a good deal of attention to fundamentalist sects. It makes this interesting statement: "Although they are only weakly committed to the temporal realm, they tend to become involved in politics with a view to taking power" (no. 140).^{xiv}

A little over two years ago, I was invited to address a National Workshop on Christian Unity in Denver. At that time, I stated, "I would see a tremendous urgency for a summit meeting

that includes United States Catholic Hispanic bishops, Catholic bishops from Mexico, members from the BCEIA, and representative Protestant leaders, including Hispanic ministers."^{xv}

Since making the statement, both the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs and the Bishops' Committee on Hispanic Affairs, have discussed how they could respond to this challenge. The two committees agreed to pursue the possibility of an ecumenical meeting with other Christians active in the Hispanic community. The committees decided that the next step would be to invite representatives from the Sección de Ecumenismo y Diálogo Religioso (SECUM) of CELAM. An invitation was sent to the head of SECUM at the CELAM headquarters in Bogotá, Colombia. A positive response was received from CELAM.

I am happy to report that a meeting has been scheduled for spring, 1995. It will include the chairmen of both committees, representatives of SECUM, myself, and staff people from the National Conference of Bishops. I very much look forward to those meetings and know that the dialogue that some of us wish to take place with Protestant leaders is one step closer.

Part II — Challenges Facing Hispanic Churches Today

One of the great and paramount challenges of the Gospel is work for Christian unity. We all agree with Pope John Paul II when he calls ecumenism a "pastoral priority." It is not only a pastoral priority, it is a Gospel imperative. We, Christians, are all supposed to be ecumenists because this is demanded for by the Gospel itself. It is a mandate that is there not just simply because we want to be at peace and in harmony with one another, but because Jesus Christ, our founder, demands it.

I truly believe that one of the signs that we have really understood the Gospel is an understanding of the ecumenical imperative. As Brother Jeffrey Gros says it, "as one deepens one's

own faith in the Gospel and the Church, one comes to understand the ecumenical imperative."^{xvi} Among the best Christians that I know are those who have a deep yearning for Christian unity. But not only is there a yearning there, there is also a deep commitment and a way of life that goes with it. Those with the ecumenist spirit, are people with a wide vision, they are non-judgmental, are not afraid to be open to others' influence in their lives, and do not worry about the risk of "losing one's faith." There are far too many people who profess their faith in Jesus Christ and who are unashamedly exclusivist in their vision of salvation. When a religious group attacks another, one is made to wonder whether these people might really be after the destruction of the religious expression of another group. What is needed is not mutual destruction, but the building of the Body of Christ as one family.

I would like to list several challenges in the area of ecumenism that we face in the Hispanic communities of the United States.

First of all, we are not praying together enough. We are not praying enough for Christian unity. What I mean by this is that even in our own Roman Catholic Church, prayers for Christian unity are usually held only once a year during Christian Unity Week in January. But even this occasion is crowded in with other matters that come around that time of the year, such as Migration Week, the birthday observance of Martin Luther King, Jr., and pro-life matters. There is also a lack of prayer events among Hispanic church leaders of the various confessions.

Another problem is that the various denominations of Christians may be doing quite a bit of talking among themselves but not with each other. Among Roman Catholics, there is quite a bit of grumbling regarding the proselytism approaches of the other denominations. The other denominations, on the other hand, are grumbling about the way we Catholics exercise in our faith. Some times belligerent language is used on both sides, and this, of course, will do more

harm than good. I come back to the same problem caused by an exclusionary Christianity. It does not help matters when Roman Catholics claim that only Catholics can be saved, even though you do not hear that too often any more. But other groups do preach that Catholics cannot be saved; that Catholics have dead faith; that Catholics are the Whore of Babylon; that one becomes Christian in the measure that one stops being Catholic.^{xvii} In our area of Las Cruces, Catholics' beliefs are stereo-typed: the Christ that Catholics believe in is dead and that we worship idols.

In our border area, the Catholic bishops complain that even the mainline churches are involved in proselytism. Whether this is true or not, is beside the point. The problem is that people are not speaking to one another. This causes great antipathy and mistrust on the part of all sides. In our area there seems to be a conflict in the definition of terms. What may be considered proselytism for one group, another may consider it evangelism. What others call ecumenism, the other side may consider it opening the door for "sheep stealing."

The greatest fear that I note among brother bishops and other Catholic leaders, is that they fear that if Catholic leaders are seen praying, working, or dialoguing with Protestant ministers, that the impression will be given among Catholics that all faiths are the same and that it does not matter what approach one takes to God.

Perhaps Fr. Ed Cleary is correct when he says that one of the reasons for this mistrust could be that most Catholic bishops in Latin America, for example, grew up with only Catholics around. We, in the United States, may have an advantage in that we were raised in a pluralistic society and we have many Protestants as close friends.^{xviii} For many Latin Americans, both in the south of us and in this country, "to have non-Catholics around in abundant numbers is a new experience, with nothing in their background to help them deal with it. To them it does seem like violence and calls forth an instinctual need to defend."^{xix} If this analysis is true, then we Hispanic Christians of

the various denominations have the responsibility of being witness in the Latin world of at least an incipient and seminal ecumenism.

There are so many things in the social concerns agenda that we should be working on together. In our border area, there is the enormous task of social and environmental justice. This common task requires a common witness of preferential option to the poor. At a recent meeting of church people of various denominations held in Sunland Park, New Mexico, on environmental justice, we were told that it is the churches that will play the key role in bringing about environmental justice along the border. It is my conviction that if anything is done, it can only happen if we work together. One denomination cannot do it alone. We need to pool our resources and ideas together in order to be more effective in countering the enormous and complex problems that affect the poor along the border and on both sides. The Church, after all, is the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ has no borders, political or otherwise.

One of the things that disturbs me is the crises among families when some of their members convert from Catholicism to Protestantism or vice versa. I can speak for the Catholic families. When members of their families convert to Protestantism, for example, this can cause a terrible trauma in the family unit. The converts are seen as traitors and betrayers to the cause of family unity and to the ancestral tradition of Catholicism in the family. There can be mutual accusations of erroneous faith. On the part of the Protestant convert, there can be insistent nagging of the Catholic portion of the family to join his or her Protestant group. The problem surfaces during Hispanic traditional "rites of passage." There is no problem when the whole family is Catholic or Protestant, but when the family is divided along religious lines, such occasions as weddings and funerals can be terrible moments of crisis in the family. I have been at funerals when the Protestant side refuses to pray with the Catholic side. We are beginning to have "bi-religious" funerals that are compromises between the Protestant and Catholic sectors of the family.

The rosary may be recited the night before a Protestant funeral, or vice versa, the Protestant minister may come to the evening service, and the next morning the body is brought to the Catholic church for Mass.

Part III — Ecumenical Hopes for Tomorrow

I now come to the fun part of this presentation. Up to now, I have felt like Jeremiah in the middle of his blue funk, writing the Lamentations.

I am happy to say there is hope for Hispanic ecumenism.

One of the great sources of hope for me is that Christian Hispanic theologians have organized two professional associations that cut across denominationalism. In the long run, this may prove to be one of the great achievements of ecumenism in the latter part of the 20th century. In place now are La Comunidad of Hispanic scholars of theology and religion, and the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS). These groups meet regularly, publish important papers on Hispanic theology, and serve as mutual support for Hispanic theological scholars.

We hear of grassroots ecumenical efforts among Hispanic Christians. In my own diocese, there is an annual Christian encampment that includes various denominations. It is organized by the charismatic prayer groups of the area. I have also given permission to preachers of the Asamblea de Dios to speak to some of our groups. So far, there have been absolutely no problems. A few have wondered why I have given permission, but when I ask them if they have heard these preachers preach anything against the church, they answer in the negative, and on the contrary, they say that they are quite pleased with their explanation of Holy Scripture. I, myself, look forward to further collaboration with these Asamblea preachers and others. Incidentally, one of

them called me last Palm Sunday to see if I had any extra palms. I also understand that this particular preacher celebrates quinceañeras, posadas, and has a special love for Our Lady of Guadalupe.

There have also been excellent examples of collaboration among community organization efforts, particularly those being done by the network of the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) of San Antonio, the United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO) of Los Angeles, Valley Interfaith in the lower Rio Grande Valley, and those in Houston are proofs that Hispanic Catholics can unite their efforts with their Protestant brothers and sisters in confronting the social, educational, and environmental issues of our day. What will probably prove to be a landmark statement was issued by the Cardinal of Mexico City, Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, Bishop Antonio Chedraoui, bishop of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, Bishop Sergio Carranza-Gómez, the Anglican bishop of the Diocese of Mexico, and the Rev. Jaziel E. López, President of the Lutheran Synod of Mexico. They signed an ecumenical agreement, and among other things, they say, "the task of evangelism is not exclusive to any one church in particular. Moreover, the spiritual and material needs of the Mexican people are enormous; because of this, it is urgent that we unite our efforts and energies to share the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only through words, but also through our decided option to live in truth and honesty, and to work for the relief and promotion of the neediest. We are sure that in these actions we shall also meet many brothers and sisters of other beliefs, who, inspired by the kindness of the God of all, want to fulfill their mission of being each day more just and more human."^{xx}

In our own country, last April, an agreement between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics to end their "loveless conflict" was welcomed by all ecumenists. The agreement was signed by Evangelical leaders, including Pat Robertson, and by Catholic bishops.^{xxi} The statement entitled, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," admits that it is understandable that Christians who bear

witness to the Gospel try to persuade others that their communities and traditions are more fully in accord with the Gospel. Nevertheless, the statement goes on to say, "there is a necessary distinction between evangelizing and what is today commonly called proselytizing or 'sheep stealing.' We condemn the practice of recruiting people from another community for purpose of denominational or institutional aggrandizement. At the same time, our commitment to full religious freedom compels us to defend the legal freedom to proselytize even as we call upon Christians to refrain from such activity."^{xxiii}

The statement lists areas of dialogue:

The church as an integral part of the Gospel or the church as a communal consequence of the Gospel.

The sole authority of Scripture (sola scriptura) or Scripture as authoritatively interpreted in the church.

The "soul freedom" of the individual Christian or the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the community.

The church as a local congregation or universal communion.

Ministry ordered in apostolic succession or the priesthood of all believers.

Sacraments and ordinances as symbols of grace or means of grace.

The Lord's Supper as eucharistic sacrifice or memorial meal.

Remembrance of Mary and the saints or devotion to Mary and the saints.

Baptism as a sacrament of regeneration or testimony to regeneration.^{xxiii}

Dr. Wally Ford, Executive Director of the New Mexico Conference of Churches, would add another to these. The difference in the regard to the authority of lay ministry: is it based on delegation or on a mandate received individually?^{xxiv}

Most people are probably not aware that a formal Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue has been taking place. Since 1972, the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity has sponsored a series of five-year consultations with what are called Classical Pentecostals.^{xxv}

In the city of Las Cruces, we have had a series of drive-by shootings. The people of Las Cruces are afraid that the phenomenon "kids killing kids" will continue, and that we will see more and more violence. The civic and religious leaders of the community are trying to come together to meet the challenge of violence in our streets. Victory Outreach from San Antonio offered to come through the auspices of the Asamblea de Dios communities in the area. They needed a place to hold a rally, and the only place available was St. Genevieve Hall in Las Cruces. They wanted to use it in order to try to do something to prevent kids from joining gangs and becoming involved in drugs and violence. We knew that Victory Outreach often includes recruiting for their churches, and there was some fear from our priests that some sheep stealing would take place. We finally concluded that we, Catholics, do not have a program to prevent drugs, violence, and gangs, so that if Victory Outreach could save at least one life, then it would be worthwhile. They had their rally and attracted over 1,000 people. One of our priests was present, and he was invited to participate in the program as well.

This is where the common witness is so crucial. We need to work together. Somehow, these Pentecostal groups are better equipped to dealing with the marginal members of our society, gangs, prison inmates, single parents, children of single parents, the urban poor, and school drop-outs. Most of our own Roman Catholic programs for youth are dedicated to preparing our "best" kids for Confirmation. We do not seem to have room nor time for our societal drop-outs.

I repeat what I said in Denver, that I like the approach that some of our Roman Catholic missionaries take in countries that are mostly Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. There, these missionaries respect the native non-Christian religions and make it their goal, not to proselytize nor to convert, but to make them better Muslims, better Buddhists, better Hindus. It would be beautiful if those who are presently aiming to convert Roman Catholic Hispanics to some other tradition, would take a similar approach and help us make Hispanic Catholics better Catholics. It would be equally beneficial if those Catholic pastoralists with an evangelizing thrust would also be respectful of Hispanic Protestants, whose religious preference may have been inherited from many previous generations. This would be the best way to avoid further partitioning and division among Christians, and would lead to a powerful witness of a united Christian Church.

Hispanic culture and its peoples have much to gain from an ecumenical spirit. We need to come to terms with religious pluralism in our families and in our Latino countries. We, Roman Catholics, have to accept that many who are no longer Roman Catholic, will never return and will pass on their religious beliefs to future generations. What is required is respect and mutual trust. We need to learn from one another. No one religion or denomination has an exclusive monopoly on the totality religious truth and religious experience. I am sure that there are saints in heaven from every denomination. There may be even a few saints among us now who are not of our religious tradition. The mandate to work for Christian unity is based ultimately on the sacred mandatum of caritas. We Christians have no option but to love one another, notwithstanding how different we might be in our approach to Jesus Christ and God. When we learn about the other and especially share what is in our hearts by way of faith, we cannot help but begin to love the other. It is that love that will allow us to go beyond the barriers of denominationalism and sectarianism. The power of love, after all, is from the common Spirit which we all share, and this Spirit is able to melt the walls of mistrust and suspicion, and lead us to the unity towards which Jesus Christ prayed. In loving one another, we will discover Jesus Christ in our midst, our love for

Him will deepen, we will become one with Him, and one with one another, for after all, we become what we love.

NOTES

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- iv. Bastian, p. 82.
- v. Moisés Sandoval, On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1990, pp. 116-117.
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- vii. Dr. Hernán Parada, Crónica de Medellín, Indo-American Press Service, Bogotá, Colombia, 1975, p. 64.
- viii. Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, USCC Latin America Division, Washington, D.C., 1973.
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- xi. Ibid., p. 260.
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- xiii. Dean Peerman, "CELAM IV: Maneuvering and Marking Time in Santo Domingo," Christian Century, February 17, 1993, p. 182-183.
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- xv. Most Rev. Ricardo Ramírez, C.S.B., "The Challenge of Ecumenism to Hispanic Christians," Ecumenical Trends, September, 1992. p. 129.
- xvi. Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC, "The Unity of the Church: A Central Message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ", NCCE Newsletter, Easter Season, 1993, p. 2.

- xvii. Ed Cleary, Report from Santo Domingo, "John Paul Cries 'Wolf' Misreading the Pentecostals," Commonweal, November, 1992, p. 8.
- xviii. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- xix. *Ibid.* p. 8.
- xx. Translation of Ecumenical Agreement between Cardinal Ahumada, Bishops Chedraoui and Gómez, and Rev. López, Mexico City, November 4, 1993.
- xxi. Las Cruces (N.M.) Sun-News, Friday, April 8, 1994.
- xxii. "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," First Things, May, 1994, pp. 15-22.
- xxiii. *Ibid.*, pp.15-22.
- xxiv. Interview with Dr. Wallace Ford, Executive Director of the New Mexico Conference of Churches, May 25, 1994.
- xxv. Report from Santo Domingo, "John Paul Cries 'Wolf' Misreading the Pentecostals," Commonweal, November, 1992, p. 8.