

INCARNATE WORD COLLEGE

"THE HISPANIC PASTORAL PLAN: A GIFT TO THE U.S. CHURCH"

San Antonio, Texas

INTRODUCTION

First of all, I wish to thank Assumption Seminary and Incarnate Word College for inviting me to be part of the 75th Anniversary Lecture Series, "Evenings with the Bishops." This event gives me the opportunity to express my deep appreciation to the Church of San Antonio, for all that it does to vitalize the Church in the Southwest and beyond. I often refer to San Antonio as the "Vatican of the Southwest." The Catholic Church is present in so many powerful ways in this part of the world. The Church of San Antonio is indeed itself a gift to all of us; from the outside it is a strong edifice founded on the cornerstone which is Jesus Christ our Lord and with the living stones that have come from so many Catholic cultural traditions. The Church here really tries to march according to the drumbeat provided by the rich cultural and social contexts in which it is situated. I want to render tribute to the Catholic institutions of San Antonio, particularly Assumption Seminary, Oblate School of Theology and Incarnate Word College for what you are doing in the incarnation of the gospel among the peoples that you serve.

When I was here in San Antonio ten years ago, I was deeply affected by what was going on around me. I can truthfully confess

that my own personal Christianity has never been the same since. It was an enriching experience having been a part of you and it is out of that richness that I now serve in my own local Church. I am proud to say that because of the educational and formational opportunities that San Antonio has given through Assumption, Oblate School of Theology and the Mexican American Cultural Center our diocese of Las Cruces is definitely being influenced by what you teach, and what you do in San Antonio. The bonds that exist between us go beyond the sentimental - they are real, tangible and strong.

At the same time, I must say that we in the hinterlands of the Southwest, namely the desert lands of the Chihuahuan desert of Southern New Mexico might just have something to offer to other sister Churches. Perhaps what we most have to offer is our barrenness. What I mean by this is that our particular desert land provides a kind of mystical setting for Christian spirituality. I am more and more convinced that Jesus' attraction to the desert was no coincidence. Life somehow seems simpler, yet more dramatic in the desert. Life, human and otherwise, takes on a different and elevated dimension of value. During this time of the year, for example, everything seems to die and earth tones dominate the landscape. Nevertheless, because we have experienced the various seasons, we know that life will return to the desert. We also know from our desert experience that life is abundant even in apparent barrenness. I am told that we have in the Chihuahuan desert more kinds of flora and fauna than there are in

New England. I invite you to the desert and be enriched by the natural phenomena and by people imbued with Gospel values that can lead to insight and reflection on the Paschal Mystery.

I would like to talk to you about the Hispanic Pastoral Plan, but rather than explain it, I would like to use it as a frame of reference and as a springboard for aspects that can enhance of contemporary Church life and that may not be spelled out in the Plan. I invite you to look upon the Plan as a gift and to see in it elements that enrich the Universal Church and not only the areas generally seen as particularly Hispanic. It must be read together with the Pastoral Letter on Hispanic Ministry of 1983 - there the Hispanic presence is recognized as a grace and the virtues of its people are enumerated, such as the riches of popular religiosity.

I. The methodology and processes in the formulation of the Plan.

Looking at the Hispanic Pastoral Plan in the context of other Church documents produced by the United States Bishops in the past several years, allows us to notice something new in the elaboration of episcopal teaching. The pastoral letters on Peace and Economic Justice have been commended not only for their rich content but also for the method whereby they were produced. It just so happened that documents regarding Hispanic ministry have been somewhat using the methodology for almost 20 years since the first encuentro of 1972. What specifically characterizes this new methodology of producing teaching documents is the process of

consultation and dialogue. Some might question this methodology from the viewpoint that bishops are not supposed to ask questions, they are the ones with the answers, so why are they going around asking people what they think? As a matter of fact, the question according to Aristotle, is the "Universal instrument of all good teaching". It also happens to be in the best tradition of the platonic method of educating, that is, leading the students themselves to arrive at the truth. These processes of consultation, moreover, remind us of what St. Augustine said, "For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian." While we are the designated leaders, we too, search, question, have our own humanness with its inquisitiveness and limitations of wisdom, and need others to help us grasp the data of present, socio-human and moral realities. Moreover one small group of people in the Church can never have all the answers; and since we are all in this enterprise of making Church happen and function, we need one another in any project that demands human skill and expertise.

The encuentro process leading up to the elaboration of the Pastoral Plan was a necessary step in the Bishops' response to the needs of the Hispanics in the Church in our Country. It literally involved tens of thousands of people in the consultation process.

The Pastoral Plan, while it has the unanimous approval of the Bishops, is owned not only by ourselves but also by all the people who had a part in the encuentro process. The Hispanic Pastoral Plan, therefore, must be seen as an authentic ecclesial endeavor.

II. Planning in general.

I do not know of any diocese that is implementing every last detail of the Hispanic Pastoral Plan but we do have the assurance from a recent survey that most dioceses are using as a frame of reference for the design of their specific diocesan plan to deal with Hispanic ministry. The fact that most dioceses are using this plan is an indication of the Plan's success.

The greatest teaching component of the Hispanic Pastoral Plan is that it is a Plan and planning is of crucial importance in the life of the Church today. More and more we see how important planning is and that we all have to be futurists for the sake of the Kingdom. The best plans are those that extend far into the future to twenty-five, fifty years from now. Planning is related to vision. We need to remind ourselves that the message of Jesus is the revealed message of God, revealed in terms of the Kingdom.

It is cosmic in its breadth. When it was first announced, it was exciting and blew the minds of its first hearers. Jesus answered the questions; "What does God want the world to look like at the end?" We are called to answer a much simpler question: "What do we want our parish, our diocese to look like in 50 years?!" Experts in planning are relatively few. We can't expect every other person in the Church to be a good planner, but we can use those relatively few experts to teach us and guide us through planning processes.

Dioceses as a rule do planning, we have to in order to survive. The difficulty that we frequently run into is at the parish level where planning does not often take place. Many parishes just now are starting to establish budgets for the fiscal year. That is always a good start, but I am referring more to pastoral goals and objectives and how these are going to be attained.

Whenever there is no plan, for example, the people in the parish, and especially lay ministers who have been raised to high expectations of Church life, are often frustrated when a change of pastor occurs and the new man does away with programs that had begun under the previous pastor. The parishioners get confused, frustrated and life is taken away from them. If there were a plan in place that everyone would agree to respect, then regardless of who would be in charge as pastor, the plan would have a continuity that is necessary for effective ministry.

Everyone talks about the scarcity of priests in the present and how much more acute things will get in the next few years. However, I see very few places preparing for what is really coming. People seem to be going along thinking that very soon we are going to be zapped with enough priestly vocations that women and married men will be ordained. Most of us are running our parishes from year to year and in some cases from month to month.

Something as sacred a trust as the Church simply cannot be run so haphazardly.

III. Pastoral de Conjunto.

Perhaps one of the greatest contribution of the Hispanic Pastoral Plan is the Pastoral de Conjunto concept. The Plan defines this concept as the "the harmonious coordination of all the elements of pastoral ministry with the actions of pastoral ministers and structures in view of a common goal, that is the Kingdom of God." The Plan points out that this concept is more than a methodology, it is the expression of the essence and mission of the Church which is to be and to make communion. The term is almost synonymous with collaborative ministry. The difference is that "collaborative ministry" has its emphasis the effect of pastoral programs, that is, on getting the job done. The emphasis in the pastoral de conjunto is that of the community effort involved in the process of getting something done. It is important that we get things done, but it is more important that we do it as Church, as people of God in communion with one another. We may understand pastoral de conjunto as operating out of the teamwork concept, but we must regard the team as a community and not just people working together. Pastoral de conjunto involves more than a poetic and sentimental approach with loving those with whom one works. The word love when in love can in fact be deceiving. Yes, we must love one another and be "nice" to each other, but sometimes pastoral de conjunto means that we might not be "nice" to one another in the usual sense of the word. Accountability is necessary in pastoral de conjunto, as well as

such things as evaluation of one another. It isn't always nice to hear about one's defects and limitations, nor to be corrected, nonetheless, in building Church sometimes we need to confront one another for the sake of the common project of God's Kingdom and this goes beyond good and warm feelings we all want to have.

No one has pastoral de conjunto established. It seems that this way of doing ministry is always in the making. No sooner do you think that you have it among you, when you realize how much is lacking for a successful community-team. It seems that there is always someone new on the scene who needs to be incorporated into the total group and every time someone new comes along, team-making begins all over again.

Prayer and reflection on God's Word is crucial to pastoral de conjunto. We are called to accountability to communion and commitment every time we break the Word open. Breaking open the Word of God as a group always brings fresh insight and ever-new applications of the same word. In this sense, the Word is never the same. It changes because we change, and that is why it is the living Word. The word broken open in a group has the healthy effect of levelling and lifting up: The haughty in us is brought down and the downtrodden in us is lifted up.

Prayer is also of the essence. There is such a thing as the spirituality of the team-community. It is essential that we invite the Risen Lord to be present among us. And there is a

special presence when we as a group invite Him: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst."

IV. Comunidades Cristianas.

Another gift that the Hispanic Pastoral Plan offers to the Universal Church is that of comunidades cristianas. In the formulation of the Plan the original idea was to -- specify Comunidades Eclesiales de Base. After much input from various bishops, it was decided to include other kinds of community groups such as those of charismatics, cursillos, and other organizations and movements. The original concept of comunidades de base nonetheless, should still be seen as the ideal, because it approaches reflection on the Word of God with the idea of applying it in the here and now... in every given situation. The original concept of comunidades de base has as one of its functions to transform the particular society in which a group of people finds itself. Comunidades, such as those found in many places of Latin America go beyond the personal spiritual and family needs of each of the members and take on the task of working towards a world that is more in keeping with Gospel ideals.

These comunidades have received official sanction not only in Latin American bishops' documents, but also by Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi.

I was recently in El Salvador where it is because of this type of community spirit that has enabled the returned refugees

and exiles to survive with dignity and hope. the people there have learned to share, organize and discipline themselves and all this out of inspiration from the Gospel.

In Brazil these comunidades have made it possible for many people to avoid helplessness and despair. There perhaps only two of five family breadwinners of a comunidad may be employed, but the spirit of sharing is such, that all five families are able to survive with the salaries of the two who are employed.

In the United States our poverty may be qualitatively or quantitatively different, but it is there, and I contend that the comunidades concept can be of enormous value in our situation as well.

We are more and more coming to grips with the awesome reality of widespread personal and familial dysfunctionality in our society. This "poverty of dysfunctionality" is seen among ourselves and in the lives of those we know and love in depression, addictions of various kinds and in the recurring discovery of the phenomenon of co-dependency. I would suggest that new forms of the twelve-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous will be needed and we would do well to come up with the best of the twelve step process and that of the comunidades one to create an approach to cope with our various dysfunctions. Father Richard Rohr, o.f.m., says that the twelve step program is perhaps the greatest gift from the U.S. to world spirituality.

I also think our ecological and environmental problems are going to become more acute and we will increasingly be affected by these problems close to home. The comunidad concept can help us cope, for only together can we tackle some of these new challenges.

V. Liturgy and Spirituality.

While Hispanic Pastoral Plan is divided into sections it is very difficult to see each section in isolation. Each section must be seen as dovetailing into all the others. This is particularly true of the section on Liturgy and Spirituality. The inclusion of the section on Liturgy and Spirituality at the end of the Hispanic Pastoral Plan could be seen as an afterthought. And, in point of fact, it was written after the other sections - it was written last. The reason given at the time of the formulation of the Plan, is that Liturgy and Spirituality never surfaced as an articulated priority in the Encuentro process. Nonetheless, if we go back and analyze the entire process, we will notice how much prayer and liturgy had to do with every step of the Encuentro process and in the elaboration of the Plan. The inclusion of the section on liturgy and spirituality must in all fairness not be seen as an artificial inclusion.

Hispanic spirituality, like the spirituality of so many other cultural groups in the Church, is an expression of the incarnation

of God's spirit among a particular people. In analyzing the spirituality of any group, God's Word and Revelation of Himself is a given; so is the given culture. When both come together an interesting dynamic takes place. A culture will receive that revelation according to its own historical background, cultural traditions, language and social predicaments. Certain aspects of the Gospel may be paid attention to more than others. The Word of God in a sense will "hit home" in some areas of its life than others. The other part of the dynamic is in the expression of the received Word. The expressions of faith will have their own uniqueness according to the way the Word has been perceived and in accordance with the cultural expressions of any given culture. Thus the living out of Christian community might vary from place to place, as well as family life, child-rearing and man-woman relationships. Liturgical expression might vary from culture to culture as well as in the way that liturgy is celebrated: the songs, the ambiances and environment in which liturgy takes place and the art that is produced out of reverence for God and devotion to the reminders of God: Mary, the saints and the angels. It is especially in liturgy that inculturation is beginning to happen. We seem to be going from the more superficial adaptations of liturgy to a deeper understanding of how the Roman liturgy can be related better, to Hispanic cultures; this is happening in the translations of new texts, (and new translations, period) in our rituals.

The emphasis in the Hispanic Pastoral Plan on liturgy in the

context of spirituality is important because it reminds us that the liturgy is at the heart of Vatican II spirituality. Fortunately, this is hitting home more and more and we are starting to get fully convinced that our Christian lives must revolve around the times that we set aside for praying as Church, and we pray as Church especially and in a preeminent way in the liturgy.

I do not think we need to fear protestant sectarianism if we work on making our liturgies better: making them more beautiful and attractive, especially the preaching. We have to have something worthwhile for people to back home to including a warm receptive community.

VI. The Church and the World.

There is a common thread that runs through all the documents that have been produced through the U.S. Bishops or through their sponsorship in the past eighteen years or so (since the First Encuentro). That common thread is a concern for social justice. Where does this concern come from? It comes first of all from a correct observation of the economic, cultural and social life of most of the Hispanic peoples of the country. It comes from an attitude of compassion that I believe runs deep in the Hispanic heart. It comes from the steady stream of social justice teachings from the pope for 100 years, since the promulgation of Rerum Novarum of Leo XIII. It comes from the heroic Church of

Latin America, which since Medellin has shifted its preferential option to the poor and victimized peoples.

The Hispanic Pastoral Plan resonate that same theme and makes it part of its essential message. I like to hear that we are in a new era of appreciating Church teaching on social matters. We U.S. bishops are trying to echo and parallel the papal focus on justice issues and want nothing less than to be a prime factor in influencing social change. The American Church has come of age, we are "insiders" in that we have left forever a ghetto existence in this country. The hostility, unease and suspicion experienced by our immigrant ancestors are now things of the past. But we are still "outsiders" in the sense that as American Catholics we have a distinct identity, an identity not at all un-American, but certainly pro-American in that we know we have a Catholic wisdom accumulated over centuries to offer debates on public issues.

We American Catholics have an acute interest in the commonwealth that carries with it the dream of the founders of this Republic. I agree with Charles R. Strain that the ideals of Catholic social teaching and the vision of the American republic in the imaginative design of the founding fathers are not far from each other. Indeed they are both rooted in the deepest of human aspirations for a community of citizens driven by the same yearnings for liberation, democracy and justice for all.

In this area I contend that we cannot look at the Hispanic

Pastoral Plan alone, we need to go to another landmark document of the U.S. Bishops, "Economic Justice for All", where a thorough theological rationale for works for economic justice is spelled out and specific recommendations are given as to how we as a nation need to confront the issues of poverty in our midst.

The most solid ground in the U.S. bishops economic pastoral is not in any particular economic theory nor in a particular partisan approach nor even does it lie in a unique episcopal insight, its foundation stone is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the traditional teaching that emanates from that Gospel. The Gospel calls us to love, but in truly loving we only have the example of God, a God who is rich in mercy and compassion (hesed and emeth). Our love of other men and women completes us and it makes us whole -- we are not made whole alone.

Nearly 400 years ago, the English poet-clergyman, John Donne wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent a part of the main; any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in humankind and therefore, never seek to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

We all know what solitary confinement does and what happens to a baby who is not cradled and rocked, who is not held in the warm arms of someone. We simply cannot survive without the other.

Let me take this one step further. The totally other is the other who is hurting, the other who is crying out of human pain

and sorrow. It is easy to love and touch those who love us and touch us, those who are immediately lovable. It is much more difficult to reach out to those who cannot touch us and cannot do anything for us. These are the totally other, the poor, the helpless and hopeless, those who shock me to my stomach, who make my heart bleed, whose misery moves my total being. In Spanish we use the word "conmover", which carries the implication that I am moved in a total way by the suffering other: emotionally, intellectually and behaviorally. Estar conmovido, to be totally moved, means that I must do something, do what I can, all that I can, in the classical spirit of Albert Schweitzer, Dorothy Day, John XXIII, Mother Teresa, St. Damian before the lepers, John Vanier in his treatment of the mentally handicapped and John Paul II in his compassionate love for the Aids' victims of San Francisco.

Don Helder Camara of Recife is another one who belongs in our list of those who champion justice. In a recent interview he shares that a prayer of Cardinal Newman is one that he prays constantly, often more than once a day. It goes like this, "Lord Jesus, I have the joy and responsibility of believing that ever since my baptism we are one. Do not extinguish the light of your presence within me. Oh, Lord, look through my eyes, listen through my ears, speak through my lips, walk with my feet. Lord, may my poor human presence be a reminder, however weak, of your Divine Presence. For, to the degree that others notice me, it is a sign that I am, unfortunately, still opaque and not

transparent."

We are called to be in the way Newman and Dom Helder, transparent enough so that Christ can be seen through our actions and words, so that others may see through our lowly human presence the divine presence of God. We can pray with Dom Helder that God take away whatever is opaque in us and help us to become transparent so that we will allow our works to shine before the world, that they may glorify our GOD who is in heaven. May God bless you.