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THE SYNOD FOR AMERICA
Occasion for Lasallian Solidarity
(2/2)

Brother Jeffrey Gros

Lasallian Contributions

If a Synod is to be fruitful, like the Vatican Council, the extraordinary Synod of 1975, or the CELAM conferences beginning with Medellin in 1968, careful preparation, time for debate and discussion and skillful drafting will have to accompany the meeting. Therefore, an occasion for all of the sectors of the Church to learn about other parts of the Church in the hemisphere will be important. Educators, especially those with a preferential option for the poor, will have a particularly important challenge in this process.

The twenty four Episcopal Conferences have very different experiences. Twenty two of them have experiences of these sort of gatherings, in CELAM, and in preparing Episcopal Conference responses to questions similar to those developed here. The United States and Canada have experience with Roman Synods, but not with regional ones of this sort.

Undoubtedly, in the interecclesial matters, the discussion will be focused by the Latin American majority. On issues of ecumenism, interfaith relations and the "sects," the Caribbean, Canadian and United States bishops will be in dialogue with the Portuguese and Spanish speaking bishops, since the experience, priorities and resources for dialogue are so very different. Here the different catechetical experiences and work with pluralism in schools and ministries will be as important resources for interlasallian, as for episcopal, sharing. On matters of economics and politics, one suspects that the US bishops will be expected to make important contributions, along with their Latin American and Canadian counterparts.

Brother John Johnston has already noted how he came to conversion on some of the values of shared mission through seeing its incarnation in the lives of lay Lasallians in Latin America and in the programs of formation and school leadership pioneered there. In the United States, some dioceses have adapted the family

catechesis developed in Chile for work in the Hispanic apostolate. There are many areas of development in Lasallian youth, lay and Brother formation, catechesis, service to the poor, higher education, work with our fellow Christian and even non-Christian Lasallians, pastoral ministry, cross cultural ministries, and the like where there is much to be learned from one another, North and South. The experience of ecumenism and pluralism has developed quite differently and will benefit by sharing of different pastoral and theological approaches.

The *Lineamenta* are very diffuse and trace out many issues, ecclesial and social. It is likely that concerns about neo-liberal economics; employment; exchange of pastoral agents and migration; ecumenism and religious pluralism; sharing of pastoral plans, materials and public policy approaches; displacement and deportation concerns; arms and drug traffic; human rights; cultural diversity and inculturation; youth and the mass media will be high on the priority list for conversion and solidarity. InterAmerican exchange on processes and priorities in education for justice will be important.

In Europe, the memories of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Wars of Religion and the establishment of certain churches are an enduring heritage etched in the very monuments of history. It is ironic, given the history of the Inquisition, Crusades and Roman Catholic dominance, that it is only Protestant and Orthodox churches that remain established among the European states. In North America, where so many, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox, fled what were restraints on their faith in the Old World, there is a great appreciation not only for religious liberty, but also the separation of church and state. Pluralism has created the possibility of Catholics internalizing their faith, supporting their institutions, and reaching out in common cause with other peoples of faith in public policy debates and common witness.

In Latin America, pluralism of religion is a new phenomenon for many. On the other hand, in places like Mexico and Central America, there has been an experience of anti-clericalism and religious persecution alien to most North American history. The diversity of histories of the enlightenment, government relationships with the Catholic Church, and civil wars creates very different roles for the Church in society in the different states of Latin America.

A sensitivity to the differences of these histories, the perceptions of the appropriate relationship of the Church and the culture in which it finds itself, and with the different churches and religious movements, means that a common understanding of Catholic history, Catholic culture, Catholic religious liberty priorities, and Catholic ecumenical agendas, cannot be presumed. The review of the reception of the Council's Decree on Religious Liberty, for example, makes a very interesting study in the foundation for social witness, communion, solidarity and ecumenical outreach.

Providing educational materials which give a fair, but intelligible, treatment of the diversities of Catholic history and experience in the hemisphere, and point out the challenges to solidarity is a continuing struggle that will require Lasallians and others to find structures to give vitality and continuity to the bonds of communion among us.

It goes without saying, that the Roman Catholic Church's affirmation of religious liberty has been a necessary prerequisite for any fruitful dialogue to occur among Christians and for the New Evangelization. What Pope John Paul says about the differences in history as part of the ecumenical challenge in *Ut Unum Sint*, also has applications among Roman Catholics in the Western hemisphere: "Christians cannot underestimate the burden of long - standing misgivings inherited from the past and of mutual misunderstandings and prejudices. Complacency, indifference and insufficient knowledge of one another often make this situation worse."

While much US history begins with the Puritans in New England, early European communities established in what is now the United States date from Spanish exploration in sixteenth century Florida and the Southwest. In fact, there was already a bishop appointed in New Spain (Mexico) before the Reformation was crystallized in the Augsburg Confession (1530). It was only in the nineteenth century, when half of Mexico was annexed to the US, that this Catholic population began to be integrated into a non - Hispanic Church and began to learn a history that featured the sixteenth and seventeenth century events of an alien culture as somehow primary.

The United States, as they now exist, and their Christian heritage can be seen as rooted as much in Spanish Catholicism as in British Protestantism and the host of other Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox communities that have contributed to its culture. Views of Latin America, from the various religious perspectives in the US, are often distorted by the

reporting of a secular press, or the lack of information. Undoubtedly, similar distortions occur about the United States and Canada in various press outlets in Latin America. We find unfounded stereotypes surviving, even in episcopal documents, long after their factual bases have been disproved. Educational solidarity can build on the communion that we profess, if appropriate structures of communion and dialogue emerge out of this Synod process.

Both the regions of Latin America and the United States have traditions of collegiality, expressed in conciliar life until the centralization of the nineteenth century. The last council of bishops in the United States was 1884 in Baltimore. Our scholars will serve the Synod process well by tracing out this rich history, synthesizing and comparing it, and displaying for us the resources for a collegial, if not conciliar future for the Church in the Western hemisphere. The experience of general and regional chapters and assemblies among religious will be useful resources as the principles of subsidiarity develop in Catholic life.

The conclusion of the *Lineamenta* is a call to personal engagement in this New Evangelization and a confident face toward the future: "In order to be good evangelizers, one must first be evangelized. Only by preparing the way with a genuine **conversion** will it be possible to set out confidently toward the goal, which is **communion** with God in Christ, and to be able to yield the abundant fruits of love and solidarity in the Spirit...In this age which has many causes for concern and, likewise, many signs of hope, the occasion of the Special Assembly for America invites the entire People of God to abandon fear and discouragement and to listen attentively to what the Spirit is saying to the Pilgrim Church on the continent: 'America, open your heart to Christ.'"

Indeed, this is merely a further and concrete expression, for our time and one place in our world, of the spirituality outlined by John Baptist de la Salle in his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. •