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Christianity and Latin America

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As an alternative Skillen proposed a "proportional representation system that would represent people, as we define ourselves, rather than representing geographical districts."

In summing up their effort in the courts, Downie said, it is "primarily a call for public justice." He said we are "com-

manded by the Lord to seek justice," and we have a responsibility to "utilize that which God has given us to advance the Kingdom." In conclusion he stated we must "consider the very roots of our consumeristic life-style in order to be truly social stewards in this pioneering effort."

by Kevin Kelley

Christianity and Latin America

Dr. Sydney H. Rooy, Professor of Church History at the Evangelical Faculty of Theology in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and teacher in the Seminary by Extension for church members and pastors, challenged Dordt students and faculty last February with several gripping lectures to present a relevant Christian witness in Latin America.

The present problems in Latin America, Dr. Rooy explained, find their origin to a large extent in what Roman Catholicism did between 1500 and 1800, and also in what Protestantism believed and practised during the Nineteenth Century. Spanish and Portuguese kings and soldiers, assisted by royal patronage, conquered, civilized, and "christianized" Latin America. The goal was the ideal of a corpus christianum and its implied feudalism. The 1810-1820 Revolutions resulted in the conflict between church and state. Roman Catholicism became divorced from the state, and the doors to Protestant evangelism opened up.

With the arrival of traders from North America and Northern Europe, many Protestant churches were transplanted into Latin America between 1850 and 1920. These foreign churches, eager to retain their original cohesiveness, functioned as "social islands" in a strange world. As late as 1910 the Edinburgh Conference excluded Latin America as a mission field. Only in 1915, it was decided at the Panama Mission Conference, organized by U.S.A. Protestantism, that Latin America must be evangelized. The Protestant mission churches and their

missionaries did not understand, however, the political, social, and economic conditions of Latin America. They preached a truncated gospel: "Know these things; be baptized, and live together." The mission churches became a-political "spiritual islands," retreats for the refuge of the masses, who expected Christ to return soon.

During the last several decades, many indigenous churches have arisen. These churches, often with pentecostal leanings, and at times tinged with spiritism, have caught the attention of the numerous socio-economically oppressed. These masses of poor people have discovered a measure of dignity in their church gatherings, where they can, through free participation, be fully human.

Dr. Rooy described the three main cross-ecclesiastical, sociological, and political forces, viz. (1) the "law and order people" who are supported by the Roman Catholic, ultra-conservative rich and culturally influential intelligentsia, and who are backed up by the 90-95% fundamentalist, pietistic Protestants who, in most instances, are also pre-millinnarian and dispensationalist; (2) young, radical dissidents, who look for liberation from a ghetto-life and from an oppressive and rigid establishment; (3) the "seeking church" which refuses to compromise or to revolutionize; wanting instead to reform and restructure life and culture in an indigenous and authentic manner.

Dr. Rooy warned against the belief

that Christianity and Communism are in some way equals between which a person has to make a choice. Both Capitalism and Communism are materialistic and atheistic. The leftists in Latin America are not Marxist or Communist, although the leftist wing has sensed something of the greater relevance for the poor of certain neo-Marxist themes. The dissidents in Latin America reject the religious nature of Marxism—95-98% of Latin Americans are, at least nominally, Christian—, but they are intrigued by the structural socio-economic concepts of this enemy of Capitalism. Dissatisfied with mere orthodoxy, these people are looking for orthopraxis. Right doctrine is not enough. Right action is needed. The “Liberation Theologians” of Latin America are stressing the notions that one part of humanity may not live at the expense of another part of society, and that the conflicts between the rich and the poor must, somehow, be resolved through the Liberating Jesus. Rejecting the neo-Marxistic notion of the liberation of theology, these theologians, mainly Roman Catholic, emphasize the importance of a Theology of Liberation, —e.g. the Peruvian theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, who has written A Theology of Liberation (New York, Mark Knoll, 1973), Jose Miguez Bonino, who has published Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Philadelphia,

Fortress Press, 1975), Juan Luis Segundo, who is known for his Liberacion de la Theologia, and also Samuel Escobar, of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, who rejects Communism and Capitalism and is moving in the direction of the idea of a Christian leavening of all social and economic areas of life.

Dr. Rooy warned against settling for introducing mere surface-corrections. The basic issues must be attacked, he emphasized. We must listen to the claims and concerns of the (guerilla-inclined) dissidents, who often reject membership in the rich Communist Party, and who regard the U.S.A. Foreign Aid program as not much more than a Self-Aid program (e.g. 40% of U.S.A. Foreign Aid to Latin America comes in the form of military goods, 30% in the form of priority—what is meant is surplus—items in the U.S.A.; and the rest comes in the form of exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor).

Any keen listener could hear the loud and clear “Macedonian cry” from the South to the North, “Come down and help us.” Dr. Rooy’s call to us to extend our helping hand at the same time implied, however, a pleading for us to make sure that our own hands are not leprous but Christianly clean.

by John C. Vander Stelt

Christians Lectures on Christian Communications

In an attempt to develop a Christian perspective on communications and communications research, Dr. Clifford Christians presented three lectures to the Dordt College faculty for their critique.

Assistant research professor of communications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Dr. Christians has been touring various colleges in a Reformed College Consortium. At Dordt he also spoke to several classes.

Dr. Christians contended that too much communications research relies solely

on statistics. In a study of the effects of television violence on crimes, too many researchers simply ask how many crimes the following day are related to a certain number of killings or sluggings on a specific television crime drama.

While recognizing the importance of statistics, Dr. Christians stated that researchers must also consider the historical, philosophical and cultural framework of such a survey. Empirical data must not be elevated above all else, according to Dr. Christians.