

APPENDIX

A Latin American People in the United States

More than 25 percent of the Catholics in the United States are Spanish-speaking. Besides the more than 15 million *chicanos*, or "Mexican Americans," there are other *latinos* from nearly all the Latin American countries, especially Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba. Demographic projections based on birth rate and immigration indicate that by the year 2000, 50 percent of U.S. Catholics will be of Latin American origin.

Since the Second World War the *chicanos* have become increasingly aware of their situation:

*I am joaquin,
lost in a world of confusion,
caught up in the whirl of a
gringo society,
confused by the rules,
scorned by attitudes,
suppressed by manipulation.¹*

In 1962, the year the Vatican Council opened, Cesar Chavez began his work with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) in California. In 1963 Reiss Lopez Tijerina founded the Alianza Federal de Mercedes in New Mexico. Thus began the confrontation between the *chicanos* and the established economic power that would lead to police repression, jail, and the assassinations of *chicano* leaders. In 1965 the *long huelga* took place in California and in the San Joaquin Valley we saw the

dramatic 300-mile march from Delano to Sacramento. Elsewhere, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez organized the Denver Crusade for justice. In Texas José Angel Gutierrez and fellow activists established in 1967 La Raza Unida, a political party which mobilized schools, neighborhoods, and universities, and also founded the United Mexican American Students organization (UMAS).

Such activity increased in intensity and scope. The first chicano bishop was named, Patricio Flores, Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio. (Chicanos, who make up 25 percent of U.S. Catholics, thus had one bishop, while those of Irish extraction, representing 12 percent of U.S. Catholics, have over half the U.S. bishops.)

In 1971 the Mexican American Cultural Center was established in San Antonio; MACC has become a center for the preparation of chicano apostolic workers. Somewhat previous to this, priests and sisters began to unify their pastoral approach through their organizations, "Padres" and "Hermanas."

The chicanos are indeed a Latin American nation which is becoming aware of its mission.

The reflections which follow were written after conversations with chicanos:

TOWARD A STRATEGY FOR ACTION OF THE LATIN AMERICAN-CHICANO CHRISTIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

1. *The Latin American-Chicanos are a "people"*

A "people" is not simply a class, for it can represent many classes. A "people" is not a nation or State. A "people" is a group of individuals, a human community with the same language, culture, religion, race. The Latin American-Chicano "people," therefore, represents a specific part of a nation, but at the same time it is something eschatological, beyond, the otherness which summons.

2. *The Latin American-Chicanos
are a "dependent and oppressed" people*

A "dependent" people is one which has no possibility of exercising power over its own destiny. It is a people whose "center" of decision is outside of it, above it. A dependent people is "oppressed" when political, cultural, economic, religious, and human power is exercised against it and on behalf of the oppressor. The Latin American-Chicano people is an "internal colony," a repressed community. Its neighborhoods, its organizations, its classes, its people are "second class." They are despised, humiliated, and degraded. The consciousness of the Latin American-Chicano people is the "consciousness of the colonized."

3. *The Latin American-Chicanos
are a dependent and oppressed people
within an "imperial nation"*

Latin American-Chicanos live in and are part of the United States, their historical fatherland. The United States is the most powerful nation of the "center," a center which exercises its power over the periphery-Latin America, black Africa, the Arab world, India, Southeast Asia, China. Its enormous military, economic, and political power not only determines its hegemony over the poor nations; it also establishes through an unequal and unjust interchange an international situation which is obviously sinful. The chicano must not fail to keep this fact in mind, for if one accepts the "system" of the United States as given, one becomes an accomplice to the imperialism which is being exercised on the poor of the world.

4. *The Latin American-Chicanos must become "aware"*

Since they were annexed to the U.S., or since they have come here to work, the Latin American-Chicanos have lived ingenuously under a system of dependence and op-

pression. Being poor, wretched, exploited, and despised has come to be accepted as a *natural fact*. It is time they became aware that their condition is one of antihuman injustice and that they themselves, their children, their people must self-consciously take control of the situation to which they have been assigned within the "system."

5. The Latin American-Chicanos must become aware in order to "liberate themselves"

Merely becoming aware is not enough. Organized action is necessary on various levels-unions, politics, culture, the Church. The *essential point* is the strategic goal of the action. It cannot be an action which tends merely to *assimilate* the Latin American-Chicanos into the system of U.S. life today. The struggle must not be merely to *integrate oneself*, into that system. Nor is it appropriate even to *participate* in the system. It is necessary to *liberate oneself* "Liberation" consists in leaving behind an oppressive situation, as the slaves in Egypt did, and moving toward "the Promised Land," that is, a more just fatherland, a more human social order, a reformed nation. It is not a question, then, of *entering into* the system as we find it, but rather of freeing oneself from oppression in order to change the totality of the system.

6. The Latin American-Chicanos must become aware in order to liberate themselves and "to liberate the poor nations of the world"

Living in the most powerful nation of the world, an imperial nation, the Latin American-Chicanos must not free themselves only so that the domination of their own country over the other nations of the world might become yet more powerful. On the contrary, since they know at first hand what humiliation is, what economic, cultural, political, and religious domination is, they must struggle so that their brothers and sisters to the south, from the Rio Grande to Antarctica, can also "liberate themselves." Otherwise

the Latin American-Chicanos soon will be the most dedicated participants in the imperial system; they will have

been integrated into that system which exploits the poor *on the outside*, forgetting that only recently they were the poor *on the inside*. If it is not perfectly clear about its strategy, the Latin American-Chicano movement will be simply "integrationist" on the national level, and counterrevolutionary and imperialist on the international level. If this were to be the result of the movement it would perhaps be better if there were no Latin American-Chicano movement in the United States.

7. *"Christian" Latin American-Chicanos
are part of a people who must become aware*

Christian Latin American-Chicanos make up the majority of their people. Christians have a very special mission within the task of defining the peculiar features of the people-their religion, culture, style, language, race, history, and self-awareness. The essence of Christianity is to announce prophetically the good news of the reality of liberation in Christ, a liberation which is achieved in history, not by killing Abel, but rather, like the Samaritan, by serving the person who has been beaten and robbed along the road. The Latin American-Chicano people is a beaten and robbed people. Love of *neighbor* is service in the concrete. Latin American-Chicano Christians and all Christians everywhere who want to serve with good will must participate in the process of becoming aware; and to this process they should bring the critical attitude of Jesus, the prophet of Galilee.

8. *Christian Latin American-Chicanos
are part of a dependent and oppressed people
who must become aware in order "to liberate themselves"*

The essence of Christianity, as we have said, is to announce liberation, but even beyond this it is to be ready to give one's life for this liberation. Thus Christians must go

beyond any task of assimilation, integration, or participation; they must be dedicated to the historical liberation of their people-an economic, cultural, religious, and political liberation-as a sign of the eschatological liberation in the

kingdom of heaven. Latin American-Chicanos have no other evangelizing sign to give to their brothers and sisters than commitment to the historical liberation of their people.

*9. Christian Latin American-Chicanos
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Charity is ecumenical, worldwide. The horizon for love cannot be simply our own people or our own nation; it must be the whole world. Christians could not witness to the kingdom of heaven if they worked only to free their Latin American-Chicano people-and thus reinforced U.S. domination over so many other peoples of the globe.

The faithful Christian follows Christ along a path which is made only in the walking. For the Latin American-Chicanos in the United States this means a strategy for action which inseparably combines the liberation of their people and the building of a new and more just national order on the one hand with the liberation of all the poor and dependent nations and the building of a new and more just international order on the other.

Thus it is not a question of "assimilation" or "integration," but rather of the "liberation" of the Latin American-Chicanos. Thus it is not a question of Christians trying to "assimilate" or "integrate" Latin American-Chicanos into the prevailing national or international system. Rather Christians must "participate" in the movement of Latin American-Chicano liberation as a sign of

the eschatological liberation of the coming kingdom of justice. Come Lord Jesus!

San Antonio, Texas
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1. Rodolfo Gonzalez, *I am Joaquín/Y o soy Joaquín* (New York: Bantam, 1972), pp. 6-7. Armando B. Rendon's *Chicano Manifesto: The History and Aspirations of the Second Largest Minority in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) represents an important point in the growing awareness of the