

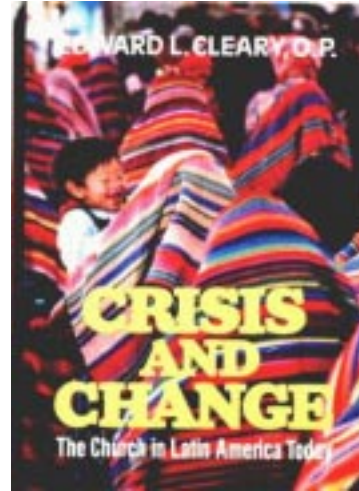
# *Crisis and Change*

The Church in Latin America Today

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## Preface

A few years ago a U.S. Army general who had been active in Latin American affairs and then dropped out to devote his time to other parts of the world was reassigned to duty that would take him to Latin America. The Pentagon thought it was a good idea to bring the general up to date, so a one-hour briefing session was arranged for him.

The colonel who did the briefing, an academic person, was aware of the absurdity of trying to bring someone up to date on twenty-two countries over a ten-year period. Nonetheless, both men went ahead. The general bore manfully the onslaught of disparate events and conflicting tendencies. He never took a note but his attention never wavered.

At the end, the colonel took a deep breath and asked the general if he had any questions or observations. "No," he said. "No questions. It's the same old story: the leftists trying to start something, the military stepping in, and the church running between the both of them trying to conciliate."

But it is not always the same old story. The following pages document why one cannot presume Latin America remains unchanged. For one thing, essential changes have taken place in political factors in Latin America, and the social and political situation in the region will never be the same again.

This book has been twenty-two years in the making. It results from living in Latin America for a number of years and of revisiting there many times, often as editor of a social science journal dealing with Latin America. When the writing was being done, many experiences of those years were relived, so that joys of friendship special to Latin America, pleasures of an expressive culture, and the frustrations and hopes of many Latin American friends came vividly to mind.

But personal experiences had to be overshadowed by the larger drama taking place in Latin America. One cannot study, interview, interpret, and reconstruct the contemporary history of Latin America and its institutions without feeling joy at changes and growth, sorrow over death or disappearance, frustration over fated collisions. The sensitive reader, too, will experience many of these joys, sorrows, and frustrations.

One cannot read of events of recent years in Latin America without sharing in the lives of the characters in the drama. Nor are the persons involved in Latin American conflicts faceless symbols of a struggle of good and evil; moreover, they often share many basic values. Generals Hugo Banzer of Bolivia and Augusto Pinochet of Chile are men of deep Christian convictions. During the writing of this work they became as real to me as my grandparents. Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador and Father Luis Espinal of Bolivia were men of profound Christian commitment. They were known through personal contacts over the years. Both were murdered, probably at the order of or with the toleration of the military.

As a result of sharing in the drama, one may wish to do something about the situation, by way of passing on to others knowledge of the situation, of helping to change U.S. foreign policy, or even of living more simply. But the only direct intention I had in mind was recounting what is taking place in Latin America and in the Catholic Church as accurately as possible. The story is so powerful and dramatic that it needs no embellishment of imagination or rhetoric.

The main elements of the contemporary situation are social and political. It is a drama of social conflict, social movement, and large-scale institutions. It is also a story of networks and ideology. Hence, the chief tools of description and interpretation are those of social science, especially anthropology and sociology.

The groups to which this work is primarily directed are students in social sciences, religious studies, and Latin American studies.

Debts of gratitude for assistance in the completion of the work are extensive due to the travels of two years that took me to Miami, Pittsburgh, New York, and Latin America. I am deeply grateful to the Dominican Province of St. Albert (U.S.A.) for grants received, and to the communities at Pleasantville and New York for fraternal support.

The book was written while I was a research associate at the Columbia University Institute of Latin American and Iberian Studies and at the Research Institute for the Study of Man. I express profound gratitude to Vera Rubin of the Research Institute for the Study of Man and Lambros Comitas of Columbia University, Mark Rosenberg of Florida International University, and also to Carmelo Mesa-Lago of the University of Pittsburgh. As directors of institutes or centers, each offered environments that facilitated the completion of a complex task. They and their staffs offered warm reception, generosity, and encouragement.

A number of colleagues at those institutions helped in the formulations of ideas expressed herein; they cannot be blamed for inadequacies that may exist. Construction of the work was aided by discussions with those mentioned above and with James Malloy, Cole Blasier, José Moreno, Anthony Maingot, Harold Sims, John Risley, and Lawrence and Mary Hall. Thomas O'Meara helped substantially in planning the book. Thomas Quigley of the U. S. Catholic Conference and William Wipfler of the National Council of Churches assisted at various times.

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