
Covid-19 Emergency Manifesto in Latin America. Guzmán Carriquiry: "A remarkable event of great significance, scope, hope"

"I hope that this time of danger will free us from operating on automatic pilot, shake our sleepy consciences and allow a humanist and ecological conversion that puts an end to the idolatry of money and places human life and dignity at the centre", Pope Francis wrote in the Easter Sunday letter to members of social movements worldwide, sending out a message for the post- Covid-19 world. The Pope's appeal was welcomed with special attention in Jorge Mario Bergoglio's native continent. And probably the Pope refers especially to Latin America, marked by inequalities of outrageous proportions, where over 50% of all workers are precarious or "informal", when he writes, for example, about women "who multiply loaves of bread in soup kitchens" who "make up a delicious stew for hundreds of children" with a scanty supply of food. *These situations led to the emergence of the popular movements, which, according to Francis, are called to play a role in the process of "reconstruction" after this global trauma.* Indeed, precisely in Latin America, the Pope's prophetic agenda has been, at least in part, welcomed by approximately 170 Catholic political leaders from 16 countries, who for the first time jointly drew up a Manifesto on the coronavirus emergency. These two texts, that of Francis and that of the political leaders, although obviously different and distinct for various reasons, share the same concern and a number of proposals, such as that of a universal basic wage. *Could these two texts, then serve as a cornerstone for a humanistic, ecological, collective renaissance of the Latin American continent, hit by the Covid-19 pandemic amidst profound rifts, divisions and inequalities?* SIR addressed this question to leading experts in this field: historian Gianni La Bella and the Vice-President Emeritus of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour, who is also a signatory of the Manifesto.



[The Pope awakens 'sleeping' conscience, calls for a new paradigm, humanistic and ecological, and he does so by addressing the social partners, those who know for themselves that the only hope of survival is the community, those whom he considers to be the sprouts of a new season." La Bella mentioned the situation of the Latin American continent in the current Covid-19 emergency: "The Presidents of various Latin American Episcopal Conferences whom I spoke with voiced deep concern over the current situation of a vulnerable continent, a continent without services, without hospitals, without public schools. If the virus spreads, from the cities to the vast countryside to the most underdeveloped areas, it is bound to cause a carnage. The Pope addresses all those excluded from globalization and is not against the free market, as ignorant and pseudo-intellectual thinkers infer. The Pope is aware, however, that its structure must be rectified, he has seen with his own eyes, in Argentina, the consequences of Menem's unbridled liberalism and the damage it caused." The experience of Latin American Catholic leaders is encompassed in their Manifesto: "I find that, in this context, they perceive the importance of a pressing need for politics, and that Latin America has no chance of saving itself and playing a role unless it embraces the idea of the Patria Grande, which is not an ideal dream, but a historical opportunity and a responsibility. It seems to me that both documents, the Pope's letter and the Manifesto of Catholic leaders, are marked by a deep radicality, delineating the profile of a new civilization."](#)



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, Vice-President and Executive Secretary Emeritus of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, promoter, in that capacity, together with CELAM, of a round of meetings of Catholic politicians, gave a similar interpretation: "This Manifesto - he said - is a remarkable unprecedented achievement. I perfectly remember the words of Pope Benedict at the Aparecida Conference in 2007, when he asked how it could be that in a continent like Latin America the presence of Catholics in politics, universities and social communications was minimal, lacking in incisiveness and coherence. The concluding document, in whose redaction Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio played a major role, clearly reiterated that question.

This Manifesto is an unprecedented event of great significance, scope and hope.

In fact, it was endorsed by Catholic personalities involved in different areas of responsibility and with different perspectives. I would like to point out that it is an initiative of lay Catholics, in a continent where Pope Francis has often spoken of 'clericalism', and of personalities from a number of countries, indicating that no one can save himself and that more than ever there is a need for cooperation and integration within the Latin American Patria Grande." Of course, the present moment is equally significant: "Today, at the peak of the pandemic, the fragility of Latin America's institutional, economic, social and health care system becomes even more evident. The fact that it arrived later, making it possible to learn from the successes and failures of other countries, is the only advantage. But the underlying circumstances are very grave: unsatisfactory health care spending, with inadequate structures, not to mention major social vulnerability. I am thinking of the elderly, but also of that extended 'unofficial' labour world marked by poor living and hygiene conditions working mostly in city streets. It is no coincidence that Pope Francis asked for a minimum basic wage for all those people." Moreover, it should not be forgotten that this situation is weighing on countries that "experienced spontaneous popular uprisings last year, expressing widespread social malaise. Reconstruction will be a difficult albeit necessary process, most certainly amidst serious social unrest, provided that the focus is not only on the recovery of sustained economic growth, but that it is accompanied by profound transformations concerning social inclusion. In fact, *the peoples must be the protagonists of this reconstruction.*" Moreover, Carriquiry concluded, the reconstruction "will be possible only if supported by a true cultural revolution and religious renaissance."

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