

THE CHALLENGE OF PLURALISM AND PEACE

The Changing Relationships Among the Churches in Colombia ❏

El desafío del pluralismo y de la paz. Las cambiantes relaciones entre las iglesias en Colombia

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Resumen:

Este trabajo es fruto de una investigación de campo realizada en Colombia por el autor. Se presenta una corta historia del ecumenismo colombiano, las cambiantes relaciones entre la iglesia y el estado, los desafíos de la educación y lo que implicó para el movimiento ecuménico colombiano la recepción del Concilio Vaticano II. Este artículo ayuda a entender la complejidad de situaciones en América Latina, conocer la variedad de trabajos ecuménicos en Colombia y conocer que en este país hay algo más que violencia de todo tipo. Se plantea que en el reciente panorama de pluralidad, los protestantes tienen que aprender que su labor no es contra el catolicismo, y los católicos aprender que no deben depender tanto de las instituciones políticas tradicionales, y ambos a confiar más en el Señor y testimoniarlo de manera unida.

Palabras clave: Ecumenismo – Iglesia – Concilio Vaticano II – Pluralismo religioso – Religión - Iglesia.

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Abstract:

This work is a fruit of a field research realized in Colombia. It presents a short history of the Colombian ecumenism, the changeable relations between the church and the state, the challenges of the education and what implied for the ecumenical Colombian movement the receipt of the II Vatican Council. This article helps to understand the complexity of situations in Latin America, to know the variety of ecumenical works in Colombia and to know that in this country there is something more than violence of all kinds. There appears that in the recent panorama of plurality, the Protestants have to learn that their labor is not against the catholicism, and the Catholics to learn that so much of the traditional political institutions must not depend, and both to trusting more in Christ and witness him in a united way.

Key words: Ecumenism - Colombian Churches - ecumenism in Colombia - History of Ecumenism.

Often, the year 1910 and the Edinburgh World Conference on Mission are given as the initiating moment in the modern ecumenical movement. There was minimal Catholic (a letter from one Italian bishop)³ and Orthodox involvement in 1910. The constituency was still largely North Atlantic Anglican and Protestant missionaries. Among the ecumenical consensus statements reached at Edinburgh was one that would exclude Orthodox lands, and Latin America as a Catholic land, from the evangelizing activity of the churches, since Christianity was already active there. Some considered this theological and ecumenical decision political⁴.

At a 1916 Mission Conference in Panama (part of Colombia until 1903) the United States Protestant churches dissented from the consensus of the 1910 Edinburgh Conference. These churches decided to see Latin America as an open mission field, and to partner with the United States government's "good neighbor" policy, building on the hegemony proclaimed in the 1823 Monroe Doctrine. Some considered this theological and non-ecumenical decision political⁵.

A catholic and some ecumenical readings of the theology of Panama, and its implicit politics, saw its decision as an anti-ecumenical counter commitment to the modern ecumenical movement, based on negative judgments on the Christianity and social policy of Catholicism, and on a commitment to the theology of empire dominant in American foreign policy.

³ DELANEY, JOAN. "From Cremona to Edinburgh: Bishop Bonomelli and the World Missionary Conference of 1910", in *Ecumenical Review*, v. 52, n. 3 (July 2000) 418 - 431.

⁴ GONZÁLEZ, ONDIA - GONZÁLEZ, JUSTO. *Christianity in Latin America: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, 236.

⁵ PIEDRA, ARTURO. *Evangelización Protestante en América Latina: Análisis de las razones que justificaron y promovieron la expansión protestante*, CLAI, Quito 2002.

In 1955 when the Latin American bishops founded the Council of Latin American Bishops' Conferences (CELAM) there were three primary concerns: Communism, Poverty and Protestantism. Both Catholicism and historic Protestantism have grown more ecumenical and more self critical in the last half century.⁶ However, the majority Protestant community in Latin America including the fourth largest Spanish speaking community in the hemisphere, the United States, is composed of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians of a variety of traditions and origins, most without an ecumenically informed Christian faith⁷.

Catholic perceptions of pluralism, ecumenical outreach and the reception of the second Vatican Council vary widely among the 18 Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries of Latin America and 22 members of CELAM. Colombia is a useful case to explore, in discerning the complexities and challenges of ecumenism on the continent.

Colombia

Unfortunately, today Colombia is often more widely known around the world for the chronic violence of its guerrilla warfare, paramilitary groups and drug traffic. There have been important ecumenical initiatives to decrease violence and studies of the relationship of violence and religion, but these will not be treated in this essay⁸. As Catholic ecumenist, Carlos Arboleda notes:

We have to recognize that Catholics as the majority religion do not feel the urgency for dialogue and for this reason it is not a pastoral priority. In reality, we do have urgent situations like conflicts, social insecurity and violence, but ecumenical dialogue is strategically important for confronting these other problems⁹.

⁶ RESTREPO, JAVIER DARIO. *40 Años Sirviendo e Integrando: Datos Para Una Historia*, Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, Bogotá 1995.

⁷ BONINO, JOSE MIGUEZ. *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1997. MALDONADO, DAVID, ed., *Protestantes/Protestants*. Abingdon Press, Nashville 1999; ROBECK, CECIL. "Evangelization or Proselytism: A Pentecostal Perspective", in *Journal of Latino/Hispanic Theology*, 4:4 (1997) 42-64; KARKKAINEN, VALI-MATTI. "Proselytism and Church Relations: Theological Issues Facing Older and Younger Churches", in *Ecumenical Review*, v. 52, n. 3 (July 2000) 379-390.

⁸ See, for example, http://www.usip.org/pubs/working_papers/wp4_colombia.pdf ARBOLEDA CARLOS, ed., *Guerra y Religión en Colombia*, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Medellín 2005; *El Ocaso del Diablo*, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Medellín 2007. Also LEVINE, DANIEL "Popular Voices", in *Latin American Catholicism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992.

⁹ ARBOLEDA, CARLOS. "Ecumenismo, Prioridad de la Iglesia, Colombiana," in Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia, *El Ser y Quehacer del Movimiento Ecuménico*, Universidad de San Buenaventura, Bogotá 2005, 28. The author goes on, in more detail: "Violence does not distinguish between Catholics or Protestants, believers or unbelievers. The churches must put their institutional resources at the service of those affected by violence, poverty and exclusion, and must put their moral authority behind the work of seeking reconciliation. In this sense, the churches must act as mediators and intermediaries between all parties. Spiritual ecumenism is a union of hearts and a force of continual prayer asking the Father that the Colombian people may encounter the path of peace. This is the most urgent form of ecumenism for all believers", 35.

This nation is among the four largest Spanish speaking countries of the Western hemisphere, along with Argentina, the United States and Mexico. It is also a center of an amazing religious, racial and cultural diversity and a long heritage of Christian evangelism and witness since the 16th century. However, it has inherited a history of Christian tensions which are a burden on its ecumenical future.

In this brief essay by an outside observer, I will highlight: 1) the church – state history, which has created a new context since the 1991 Constitution; 2) the Protestant reality in this predominantly Catholic country; 3) educational changes as they relate to emerging pluralism, 4) the Catholic reception of Vatican II, and 5) some selected ecumenical initiatives.

In a previous essay I have outlined the importance of the Catholic Church's embrace of religious freedom, and its different reception in different parts of the Catholic world especially Latin America, as the condition for any viable relations among the churches¹⁰. As a very traditional country with a history of Catholic hegemony and an established Catholic Church until 1991, for Colombian Catholics adaptation has been challenging, and for Protestants ecumenism has been especially difficult. But, for this very reason, ecumenism is an urgent priority; education for pluralism a need for the total society as well as for those, like Catholics, committed by faith to ecumenism and interreligious outreach; and recognition of religious freedom in both law and catechetical formation is essential.

The Catholic Church in Colombia has a long history of advocacy for the poor and involvement with the rights of the workers and rural peasants. Today there are strong programs, both Catholic and ecumenical, to bring peace among the violent factions and to reintegrate both rebels and paramilitary persons, who have only known a culture of violence, into the mainstream of society.¹¹

Yet, like many places in Latin America, the Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* is much better known and appreciated than the Council's teaching on religious freedom and ecumenism. Catechetical, liturgical and social reforms far outstrip ecumenical outreach. For this very reason, it is important to listen to the ecumenical initiatives that are emerging.

¹⁰ "Struggle and Reconciliation: Some Reflections on Ecumenism in Chile", in *International Review of Mission*, v. 97, n. 384, 385 (January/April 2008). For a survey of these changes in all of the Latin American countries see See Fernando Retamal, "La libertad de conciencia y la libertad de las religiones en los grandes sistemas contemporáneo – América Latina," in CORRAL, SALVADOR, MANUEL, CARLOS, (eds.), *El IX Congreso Internacional de Derecho Canónico sobre la libertad religiosa* (Ciudad de México, 21-25 de septiembre de 1995), in *Estudios eclesiológicos*, v. 71, n. 276, (Ja-Mr 1996).

¹¹ For the recent work of the Catholic Bishops in Colombia see http://www.cec.org.co/menu2/asambleas.htm?AA_SL_Session=60f7cfbe6368f32adb1853a16d7f0171&scr1=1&scr_scr_Mv=-1#.

I. CHURCH AND STATE

The laws of the Spanish empire developed out of the Justinian code (534), where the Constantinian wedding of church and state was integral to the unity of the society. The Church carried out the functions of education, marriage, health care, registering births and deaths for the society; and the State was both protector and overseer of the Church and saw the Church's mission as part of its responsibility. On the eve of the Reformation, the Catholic kings, Ferdinand and Isabella had begun reforms, before Luther or the Council of Trent, that would provide models for Catholicism for centuries afterward. Among these reforms was the ability to nominate bishops and reform religious orders, powers to obtain which Henry VIII of England found it necessary to separate from the universal Church¹².

When the 19th century revolutions came in the Spanish New World, the states often continued this relationship, and spent decades negotiating with Rome on how the royal powers of the Spanish kings would be transferred to the new republics, and how the local churches would be governed to enhance the mission of the newly independent, often democratic – at least in name – states¹³.

Catholic leadership in the former colonies was divided and often conflicted. In this Colombia was no exception, with enlightenment oriented clerics championing a French Revolution style bill of rights, and royalist clergy resisting independence or returning to the homeland when independence arrived.

Even secular, laicist anticlerical governments in Colombia insisted, as a missionary states, on controlling the content of education, appointing (or exiling!) bishops, and encouraging missionary orders in pacifying the areas of the country, especially among the indigenous populations, where government administration seemed impossible. These debates included civil wars, from time to time, with a religious component, as in 1876¹⁴.

During this same 19th century period, with parallel revolutions in Italy in what were then the Papal States, Pope Pius IX condemned modern ideas, including democratic governments, religious freedom and other liberties emerging from the French Revolution. The Colombian Constitution of Rionegro of the 1860s is the striking polar opposite of the papal teaching of the period¹⁵. This era of Liberal Party leadership,

¹² For a detailed treatment of the evangelization of Colombia see CÁRDENAS, EDUARDO Y MANTILLA, LUIS CARLOS. "Colombia," in BORGES PEDRO, (ed.), *Historia de la Iglesia en Hispanoamérica y Filipinas*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 1992, 281-374.

¹³ For an overview of church state relations before the 1991 Constitution see RESTREPO, JUAN PABLO. *La Iglesia y el Estado en Colombia*, t.I, II, Banco Popular, Bogotá 1987.

¹⁴ See ARBOLEDA, *Guerra y Religión en Colombia*, o. c.

¹⁵ DE ROUX, RODOLFO RAMÓN; DUSSEL, ENRIQUE, ET AL., *Historia General de la Iglesia en América Latina: Colombia y Venezuela*, v. VII, Sigueme, Salamanca 1981, 362-373. For Pius IX's text see <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm>.

beginning in 1853 introduced the first experience of separation of church and state in Latin America but not for long. This move entailed the confiscation of church property, exile of a number of bishops and secularization of education¹⁶.

When the Conservative Party returned to power, the one, holy, catholic, apostolic and Roman Church was reestablished in the 1886 constitution, and in the following year a treaty was signed with the Vatican, doing away with divorce, installing Catholic education in the public schools, giving civil status to Church courts, and insuring government participation in the appointment of bishops and other internal Church affairs. This treaty, called a Concordat,¹⁷ remained in force, with revisions in 1953 and 1973, until the constitution of 1991 in which the establishment was removed from the constitution. A 1993 adjustment was made as a result of court judgments about the constitutionality of some of the Concordat provisions, but that moves ahead of our story.

A period of liberal republican leadership from 1930 – 1946 left some of the provisions of church establishment unenforced, and opened up some civil liberties suppressed by the Conservative Party, some of them enhancing the religious freedom of non-Catholics. However, following 1946 a period called *La Violencia* erupted with civil war and anarchy in many parts of the country which lasted until 1958¹⁸. Protestants and other minorities often identified with the Liberal Party in politics because of its commitments to pluralism, human rights and control of the power of the Catholic Church.

During this period many Protestants died, churches were burned and properties taken. Many churches count their martyrs of this period. Those denominations that lived through the time were very relieved when the Second Vatican Council promulgated its *Declaration on Religious Freedom* and *Decree on Ecumenism*. In fact, these documents of the Catholic magisterium may be better known among Colombian Protestants than in some Catholic communities¹⁹.

We will talk in more detail about Protestant developments and the reception of the Catholic Council in the next sections. However, this long history of Catholic hegemony, the Catholic struggles in the face of liberal, anticlerical governments in the 19th and 20th centuries and a certain prejudice about the United States and missionaries arriving from

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹⁷ URIBE BLANCO, MAURICIO; MARTIN DE AGAR, JOSÉ. T. "Concordato Y Jurisprudencia Constitucional En Colombia", in *Civilizar* (8 Junio, 2006). <http://www.usergioarboleda.edu.co/civilizar/ConcordatoJurisprudenciaConstitucionalEnColombia.htm>

CAVELIER, GERMAN. *Las Relaciones entre la Santa Sede y Colombia*, t. I, II, Editorial Kelly, Bogotá 1989. In the 1886 Constitution the Catholic religion, apostolic, holy and Roman, is that of Colombia; but the language of the 1973 Concordat says only that the traditional sentiment of the Colombian nation is Catholic, while recognizing the guarantee of religious freedom for all citizens. II, 1126.

¹⁸ DE ROUX, 530. See also BRUSCO, E. "Colombia: Past Persecution, Present Tension," in SIGMUND, PAUL E., (ed.), *Religious Freedom and Evangelization in Latin America*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1999, 235-253.

¹⁹ SARANYANA CLOSA, JOSEPH. *Teología En América Latina*, v. III, Iberoamericana, Madrid 2002, 177-179.

there after the 1903 separation of Panama from Colombia with the help of President Theodore Roosevelt's gun boats, make Catholic and Protestant relations an important challenge to Gospel reconciliation.

The final chapter in church state relationship, noted here, is the formulation of the 1991 Constitution²⁰. Though the intent of the Constitution was to provide a more open basis for democracy to include more sectors of Colombia society and to give the people more access to protection by the legal system, it did in fact finally end the hegemony of the Catholic Church, separated church and state, and gave the courts the opportunity to judge whether or not provisions of the 1973 Concordat were in conformity with the new Constitution. However, some continue to hold the identity of Colombian culture with Catholicism²¹. Among the arguments the leadership of the hierarchy made at that time was that to allow civil divorce and not to provide Catholic religion in the public schools was to violate the religious freedom of Catholics²². Needless to say, not all Catholic agreed with the bishops in leadership at the time.

As a result, Catholic canon law, which had been the marriage law of the land for Catholics, was replaced by Colombian civil marriage as the norm, Catholic education was removed from the public schools (though as we will see, laws of 2004 have modified that provision somewhat), and vast territories which had been under the jurisdiction of the Church as "mission territories" from colonial times, as beyond the government's ability to provide services like education and health care, were incorporated into governmental oversight. Of course, the irony of the latter change is that the government is still ill equipped to provide resources in many of these poor, rural and indigenous areas, so church schools and clinics continue their service, but often with less efficient bureaucratic and fiscal accountability from the governmental systems.

The attempt to expand the democratic base of the Assembly drafting the Constitution included two Protestants, one of whom was Cumberland Presbyterian minister Jaime Ortiz, who was also a civil lawyer and who went on to become a representative in the new parliamentary assembly²³.

²⁰ <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Colombia/col91.html> For some background, see BEJARANO, ANA MARIA. "The Constitution of 1991: An Institutional Evaluation", in BERGQUIST, CHARLES ET AL., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace*, Scholarly Resources Inc., Wilmington 2001, 53-74. HOYOS, ILVA MARIAM. *La Libertad de Religión en la Constitución de 1991*, Editorial Temis, Bogotá 1993.

²¹ For example RESTREPO LÓPEZ, HUMBERTO. "La Religión Católica y la Identidad Nacional", in *Revista Eclesiástica Académica Colombiana de Historia*, 47(2004)13-34.

²² CAVELIER, II, 1255. The logic of this view is that democracies must conform themselves to the position of the majority, which in Colombia is held to be Catholicism as articulated by the bishops, while making provision for the minorities as a subordinate matter. 1256.

²³ RAMÍREZ, MARCO FIDEL. *Diálogo Abierto con Jaime Ortiz Hurtado: Los Cristianos Evangélicos frente el País*, " Documentos Pedagógicos Unión Cristiana, Bogotá 1994; BRUSCO, o. c., 250. This Protestant commitment to constitutional change did not, of course, mean that there was a common approach to politics in the new, more pluralistic context.

As one Catholic theologian assesses the situation of pluralism:
In Colombia we must say that we have not had and do not have a positive approach to religious pluralism, but we are advancing in the legal field, but not in the social realm. Nevertheless, in the legal field we are beginning the debate over what pluralism is and the relationship of the state to the believer²⁴.

II. THE PROTESTANT PRESENCE

Simón Bolívar, the liberator of Gran Colombia, had no interest in becoming a Protestant himself. . . his own religious perspectives and relationship with the Catholic Church is an interesting study in itself, but will not divert us here.²⁵ However he encouraged freedom of religion as part of his enlightened vision of human rights for the newly liberated continent, welcomed support from English and North American Protestants, especially in the field of education and, of course, resistance to the Spanish crown²⁶.

Since 1610, with the establishment of the Inquisition, it was practically impossible for Protestantism to establish itself outside of certain enclaves around the Caribbean islands²⁷ and coast. With 19th century independence this began to change, in spite of Catholic establishment.

In fact, as late as the Panama Mission Congress in 1916, Protestant churches in Colombia reported only 326 communicant members and 558 Sunday school attendees. However, with the 20th century Liberal Party interlude, the targeting of North American missionaries and the dramatic social changes of the next fifty

²⁴ ARBOLEDA MORA, CARLOS. *El pluralismo religioso en Colombia*, Arquidiócesis de Medellín Secretariado de Ecumenismo, Medellín 2000, 10.

For the Colombian Episcopal Conference response to the 1991 Constitution see http://www.cec.org.co/img_upload/646f63756d656e746f732d2d2d2d2d/1991_LVI_Asamblea_Plenaria_2.doc

and ten years later

http://www.cec.org.co/img_upload/646f63756d656e746f732d2d2d2d2d/2001_LXXI_Asamblea_Plenaria_1.doc

²⁵ See GONZALEZ, F. "Bolívar ante la Iglesia católica," in DE ROUX, o. c., 273-275.

²⁶ See NEELY, ALAN. *Protestant Antecedents of the Latin American Theology of Liberation*, The American University, Washington 1977/Ann Arbor: University Microfilm International, 204.

²⁷ On the ecumenical exception of these islands, one Evangelical historian notes: "Speaking of this the Catholic writer Brother Justo Ramón, FSC expressed the situation: 'The three principle islands are densely populated. The islands are clean and vigorous, civilized with a strong sense of honesty: Catholics and Protestants live together with mutual respect of their religion. Their current language is English.' [Geografía de Colombia, Segundo Curso, p. 73] We are very happy that a Catholic writer was able to give this honorable testimony concerning a territory where the Protestants are in the majority". ORDOÑEZ, FRANCISCO. *Historia de Cristianismo Evangélico en Colombia*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, Cali, 1956, 14, unfortunately the author does not report the same where the Protestants are a minority.

years, both the number and the variety of Protestant communities burgeoned by mid-century²⁸.

The groups that do develop, other than the Presbyterian Church, are often from the evangelical wing of United States Protestantism: the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Gospel Missionary Union, Southern Baptists and the like.²⁹ A Church, like the Cumberland Presbyterian Church whose mission began in the 1920s, developed into a mainline, if small, denomination in the United States, with a Reformed polity and an Arminian soteriology. In Colombia it grew into an evangelical denomination, putting aside its infant baptism³⁰. However, it has had an ecumenical impact among evangelical Protestants far beyond its numbers, being part of the four collaborating denominations in 1929³¹, providing the first president of the initial ecumenical agency, Confederación Evangélica de Colombia (CEDEC), José Fajardo in 1950³², the restructured Confederation in 1978, Luciano Jaramillo³³, and leadership for the first country wide Protestant network of Christian schools, Asociación de Escuelas y Colegios Evangélicos de Colombia, in 1953³⁴.

Christian communities that underwent the difficult days of *La Violencia* during the 1950s are more sedate and tolerant of the new situation in the second half of the 20th century, while the majority of Protestants emerging from the middle of the century are more assertive and evangelistic. In fact, the predominance of independent and Pentecostal churches makes the priority for much interchurch collaboration, the professionalization and support of these ministers who came into leadership without formation or denominational support.

²⁸ See SINCLAIR, JOHN. "Hacia un Protestantismo Colombiano y Venezolano", in DE ROUX, o.c., 590-593. ORDOÑEZ. JUANA DE BUCANA, *La Iglesia Evangélica en Colombia*, Bogotá: Asociación Pro-Cruzada Mundial, 1995. For the development of pluralism in Colombia see JEAN-PIERRE BASTIAN, "Las dinámicas contemporáneas de pluralización del campo religioso en América Latina," in PABLO MORENO, ed., *Protestantismo y vida cotidiana en América Latina*, Cali, Fundación Universitaria Seminario Teológico Bautista Internacional, 2007, 9-24; ARBOLEDA MORA, CARLOS. *Historia del pluralismo religioso en Colombia*, SECUM, Medellín 2003; "Factores Sociológicos de la Religiosidad Colombiana," en *Cuestiones Teológicas*, v. 26 (1983) 36-49; http://www.arqueologia.com.ar/congreso2000/ponencias/Carlos_Arboleda_Mora.htm

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³⁰ BARNETT GONZÁLEZ, BERNICE. *In the Valley of the Cauca*, Memphis: Board of Missions of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1981. For a somewhat more systematic analysis see William Rawlins, *A History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Mission to Colombia, South America: 1925-1958*, Fort Worth: Perkins School of Theology, 1969, MST Thesis.

³¹ ORDOÑEZ, 355.

³² *Ibid.*, 357. CONFEDERACIÓN EVANGÉLICA DE COLOMBIA. *Los Evangélicos en Colombia*, Confederación Evangélica de Colombia, Medellín 1977. The modesty of ecumenical expectations of the period is stated clearly "It is necessary to say that organic union is nearly impossible to contemplate." What was desired was a sincere respect, collaboration and an open attitude against old competitions. 49. This volume also outlines the social, pastoral and evangelical program of the agency, Protestant analysis of the Catholicism of the period and ecumenical difficulties, as well as strategies for widening religious freedoms for Protestants. For the present agency see www.cedecol.org.

³³ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁴ ORDOÑEZ, o. c., 365.

A large sector of the Protestant Christian population belongs to the successful Seventh-day Adventist and "Oneness" Pentecostal churches. The latter are so called because of their practice of baptizing in the name of Jesus only, as they see the Scriptures directing them.³⁵ Both of these bodies are not included with other Evangelical Christians and do not participate in ministerial associations and ecumenical agencies. Therefore, even within the Protestant community ecumenical links are weak, though there are many collaborative efforts on human rights, peacemaking and work for religious equality.

Anti-Catholic perspectives have deep roots, from the United States dissent from the ecumenism of 1910 and the World Council, attitudes augmented by centuries of Catholic hegemony and the devastating violence of the 1950s, and a perception of Catholic control even after 1991 disestablishment and subsequent laws favoring equality and pluralism. As one Protestant opined, what the Catholic Church lost in the courts and Constitution, it has regained in the Ministry of Education, the Communications Department and elsewhere through the influence of Opus Dei and other such movements. Some saw the country, under the Concordat of 1953, as a colony of the Vatican.

On the other hand, an ecumenically sensitive Catholic opined that the situation of Protestants in Colombia is something like that of African Americans in the US South before civil rights. There are new laws, as of 1999, guaranteeing Protestant pastors access as chaplains to hospitals, the military and prisons to minister to their people, but prejudices on the ground make the laws difficult to enforce. Protestant licenses for local radio stations seem only available in the Caribbean islands that are majority Protestant.

There is a lingering anti-Protestant mythology stretching from the Marxist left to integrist Catholic right, that the US based groups: Mormons, Witnesses, Evangelical and classical Protestants are all somehow part of a CIA plot, with US funding to undermine Colombian Catholic culture, since Teddy Roosevelt's taking of Panama.

Whatever the laws of the land or the policy of international Catholicism, massive education will be needed to provide a culture open to religious pluralism and to equip the Catholic majority for its ecumenical outreach and its advocacy of the rights of all. Many memories will need healing, and bridges will need building, but more on these initiatives below.

³⁵ REED, DAVID. "Origins and Development of the Theology of Oneness Pentecostalism in the United States", in *Pneuma*, v.1, n.1 (Spring, 1979) 31-37. Cornelia Butler Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia : baptism by fire and spirit*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976. In the United States there has been a dialogue between these Oneness and the classical, Trinitarian Pentecostal churches: "Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Final Report, 2002-2007", en *Pneuma*, v. 30, n. 2 (Fall 2008). For the largest of these denominations in Colombia see <http://www.ipuc.org.co/>.

III. EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

An example of the changed reality ushered in by the new Constitution is in the field of public education. There were a variety of Catholic perspectives on the new Constitution, from "it is about time that we, as a Church, become disentangled from the state," to "the state does not have the right to change the Constitution, because the Concordat with the Vatican has standing in international law and cannot be changed unilaterally"³⁶.

Among these, I would like to single out the attitude of Catholic educators, which vary widely as well, but which have for the most part taken the new situation as the context in which Catholic catechesis and public education must go forward practically, educating the Colombian public for pluralism, globalization and harmony among the variety of religions and secular points of view. As one author puts it:

In a national like Colombia in its dramatic contemporary situation, evangelization will not be credible if it does not set out on the Way which is rooted in Reality and which brings Life.

It is therefore indispensable to take account of the new social situations which are the context for evangelization itself.

The profound changes of the end of the century throughout the world, and concretely here in Colombia call for an evangelization and evangelizers who are reflecting on the historical, social, economic and cultural reality in which evangelization is carried out by the power of the Spirit of the Lord³⁷.

The 1991 Constitution and subsequent Constitutional Court decisions required a revision of the 1973 Concordat with the Vatican, to include a 1993 addendum that acknowledged changes in divorce law, the supervision of "mission territories," and the changed role of the Catholic Church in education. For the first time, the Catholic Church will become responsible for the catechesis of its own members without the support of Catholic religion classes in the public schools. In fact, the Church had been obliged to provide the teachers, certification and materials for public school religious education even

³⁶ For example CASTRILLÓN, CARLOS FELIPE. *El Concordato y la Constitución de 1991*, San Pablo, Bogotá 1995.

³⁷ PARRA, ALBERTO. *Evangelizar a Colombia desde su Nueva Realidad*, San Pablo, Medellín 1994, 6. In this volume the Jesuit author lays out a response to the new Constitution and laws covering divorce, the confessionality of the state and education in the light of a Catholic ecclesiology of the People of God, commitment to Catholic social teaching on the economic order, and religious freedom in historical and biblical context. For the initial official response of the bishops see CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL DE COLOMBIA, *Orientaciones Pastorales y Contenidos de Los Programas de Enseñanza Religiosa Escolar*, Departamento de Catequesis, Bogotá 1992. "Religiosa Escolar" signifies academic, nonproselytizing religious studies taught in public schools for either confessionally grouped classes, or for students who do not opt out of the program provided.

before these changes. With new, 1994 laws covering education in the public schools, the Colombian Episcopal Conference began to devise a new program³⁸.

Now all religious groups have the right to provide instruction and worship opportunities for their members. A new 2004 law mandates that the public schools will provide nonproselytizing, nonconfessional religion classes for students who do not decide to opt out of these. On the one hand, in many cases the Protestant and other religious communities are not prepared to partner with public education systems to provide teachers, resources and administration for the religious education of their students in public schools.

On the other hand, in many parts of the world where there is religion in public schools, a body of law has been developed, known as "ecclesiastical state law," which regulates church education in public institutions and a host of other areas where church and state law has been traditionally intertwined. These debates over education are inherently related to the question of religious freedom and the rights of parents³⁹.

However, this is a new phenomenon in Latin America, so the churches or at least the Catholic Church is drawing on the experience of Italy, Spain and other European contexts to design a program that gives an objective, religious studies approach to Christianity, providing the catechetical and commitment side of religious instruction in the parishes. Adapting to educational pluralism is an integral part of realizing religious freedom whether or not a state has an established religion.

As the governments of the provinces in Colombia develop their programs, some are relying on the well developed educational infrastructure of Catholic dioceses, like Medellín for example, to provide this program. This enables the Catholic archdiocese to develop a program that is nonconfessional and objective in parallel to one that is catechetical and commitment oriented to be made available in parishes to supplement the public school curriculum⁴⁰.

In the contemporary pluralistic environment and with the post-Vatican II commitments to ecumenical dialogue and interreligious outreach, an ecumenical

³⁸ CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL DE COLOMBIA. *Escuela y Religión: Hacia la Construcción de un Modelo de Educación Religiosa*, Sección de Educación, Bogotá 2000.

³⁹ See PAIER, FLAVIO. "Libertà di credere, diritto di conoscere, dovere di formare Il diritto alla libertà religiosa e la competenza educativa della scuola pubblica," in *Ubi Petrus ibi Ecclesia. Sui 'sentieri' del Vaticano II: Miscellanea offerta a S.S. Benedetto XVI in occasione del suo 80° compleanno*, Editrice LAS, Roma 2007, 758-771. For an English summary of the European situation see <http://www.lasalle.org/English/Resources/Publications/PDF/Education/Cahier6.pdf>.

⁴⁰ CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL DE COLOMBIA. *Lineamientos y Estándares Curriculares para el Área de Educación Religiosa*, Comisión Episcopal para la Evangelización de la Cultura y la Educación, Bogotá 2004.

and interreligious element is integral to this public school curriculum⁴¹. Ironically, for those who do not opt out, Colombian public school students may know more about the history of the World Council and the modern ecumenical movement than some seminarians of member churches.

Catholic initiatives have brought some ecumenical insight in what was formerly an ecclesial monopoly in public religious education. Undoubtedly the transitions, debates and advocacy for the rights of parents to form educational policy for the children will continue. It remains to be seen if collaborative ventures in this field can develop, or if Catholic catechesis for religious freedom, pluralism, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue will transform the behavior and culture of the Colombian Catholic people.

IV. RECEPTION OF VATICAN II

The Catholic Church in Colombia is one of the most vigorous in Latin America, with a relative abundance of vocations, a track record in supporting workers during the industrialization of Colombian society, and work on the present difficult situation by promoting peace and justice. For example, the Archdiocese of Medellín has a full seminary and sends over 150 missionaries around the world to places like Cuba, the United States and Africa.

However on the eve of the Council, in the 1950s, there was no great feeling of urgency for change and reform of the Church as the country was recovering from *La Violencia*⁴². At the Council, Colombian bishops were not in the forefront of Latin American bishops advocating the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*⁴³. On their return some limited their priorities to liturgical matters⁴⁴. However, their discussion of religious freedom raised issues they had not addressed before, and they found ecumenism a particularly challenging topic to deal with⁴⁵.

On the eve of the Medellín Conference of the international Council of Latin American Bishops Conferences (CELAM) in 1968, the Colombian Catholic Church

⁴¹ ARQUIDIÓCESIS DE MEDELLÍN. *Ecumenismo y Educación Religiosa Escolar: Notas para una Clase de Religión Ecueménica*, Medellín: Secretariado de Pastoral Catequética y Educación Religiosa Escolar, 2006.

⁴² VARGAS, I.M. "Colombia," in José Beozzo, ed. *Cristianismo e Iglesias de América Latina en vísperas del Vaticano II*, Departamento Ecuménico de investigaciones, San José 1992, 165-172. See also DE ROUX, 559.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 568.

⁴⁴ Cardinal LUIS CONCHA CORDOBA: "the only thing that must be put into execution immediately from the Council directives is the liturgical reform. . . . Nothing more is obligatory for religious observance from the Council's prescriptions from what is present in its teaching." 181, AGUDELO GUILLERMO, *Los Arzobispos de Bogotá que conocido: Cuatro Arzobispos que han Marcado Nuestra Historia*, Bogotá, 1986, quoted in LAROSA, MICHEL. *De la derecha a la izquierda: La Iglesia católica en la Colombia contemporánea*, Planeta, Bogotá 2000, 181.

⁴⁵ BOTERO RESTREPO, JUAN. *Breve Historia de la Iglesia Colombiana*, Copypress, Bogotá 1983, 205. See also de ROUX, RODOLFO. *Una Iglesia en Estado de Alerta*, Servicio Colombiano de Comunicación Social, Bogotá 1983, 164.

had experienced an intense debate over the appropriate role of the Church in social change and revolution. The charismatic, European trained young priest Camilo Torres attracted large crowds and much attention, calling the Church to join the revolutionary forces for social change. When he left the priesthood and joined the guerillas, he was shot in 1966. In spite of his popularity, there was no massive movement in either the grassroots or leadership of the Church to take up his example. A fairly small progressive clerical movement, the Golconda group, lasted into the 1970s⁴⁶.

Many of the bishops retreated into a more cautious mode, and even criticized what they considered some of the more radical conclusions of the Latin American bishops who had met in their country.⁴⁷ Their input into the Conference reaffirmed Catholic cultural, social and religious hegemony as an essential for the continent⁴⁸.

At the 1968 CELAM Conference neither the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* nor the *Decree on Ecumenism* were mentioned in the final texts. There have been important Colombian initiatives in ecumenism after the Council, often lead by the Jesuits at the Javeriana University in Bogotá, in common human rights struggles and in other academic venues.⁴⁹ Even though the 1968 meeting took place in Colombia, and the offices are in Bogotá, there was not a strong Colombian influence until 1972 and the change of CELAM leadership⁵⁰.

The worldwide change in the Catholic Church's relationship to societies as a result of the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* has been dramatic, especially where Catholics were a majority⁵¹. Almost 150 Concordats with the Vatican were revised by 2000, all grounded on Catholic commitments to religious freedom, even where Catholicism remained established as it did in Spain until 1980 and in Colombia until 1991. Religious

⁴⁶ TORRES, CAMILO. *Revolutionary Writings*, Herder and Herder, New York 1969; GERASSI, JOHN. (ed.), *Revolutionary Priest: the Complete Writings & Messages of Camilo Torres*, Random House, New York 1971.

⁴⁷ See LA ROSA, o. c., 185.

⁴⁸ "Latin American unity is presented as primarily due to its basic elements of cohesion: culture, language, race up to a certain point, but above all, the community of religion. It comes from a common heritage, which constitutes our strength in facing the world and its perversions...for this reason the precarious road to unity pursued in other places in order to obtain this level of unity is not proportional to its ultimate value." *Javeriana LXX*, 1968, 514, quoted in *ibid.* 202.

⁴⁹ MIRANDA, MARIO DE FRANÇA. "Misión Ecueménica en América Latina", in *Cuestiones Teológicas*, v. 31, n. 75 (2004) 141-160. For the official policies: EPISCOPADO COLOMBIANA. *Conferencias Episcopales de Colombia*, Bogotá 1984, t. III, 1962-1984; *Ecumenism*, 1966, 207-27, *Concordat* 1973, 769-815.

⁵⁰ See DUSSEL, ENRIQUE. *De Medellín a Puebla: una década de sangre y esperanza, 1968 - 1979*, Editorial Centro de Estudios Ecueménicos, México 1979. To get an accurate overview of the reception of Vatican II on a continental level it would be important to look at the four CELAM conferences: Medellín 1968; Puebla, 1979; Santo Domingo, 1992, and Aparecida, 2007.

⁵¹ MARTIN DE AGAR, JOSÉ T. *Raccolta di concordati 1950-1999*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2000. For a survey see Steven Bevans, SVD, GROS, JEFFREY. FSC. *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae*, Paulist Press, New York 2008.

freedom did not imply a commitment to separation of church and state, but in many situations like Colombia separation came.

The Catholic Church, in Vatican II, opened itself to the modern ecumenical movement, much to the surprise of many Latin American Catholics who felt put upon by the "invasion" of religious groups into what they considered their ecclesial hegemony. The Catholic Church has put dialogue as its priority in dealing with others, especially fellow Christians. It has come to understand the "one true Church as subsisting in the Catholic Church," and not univocally identified with its present institutional reality.

Catholic approaches to moving from a monopoly situation, to adapting to pluralism and to a posture of dialogue toward fellow Christians has to be worked out in each cultural context. For Colombia this was a cultural as well as a theological and educational challenge for Catholics. After centuries of claiming the necessity of one religion for one society from the Constantinian period, to a posture of advocating the rights of all in matters of religion, and seeing fellow Christians as in real, if imperfect communion, rather than competitors; requires profound conversion at every level of Catholic life.

When bishops committed to this vision alternated with bishops who still celebrated Catholic cultural hegemony and advocated an ecclesiology of "return" rather than one of dialogue and communion, one is not surprised that both Catholics and their ecumenical partners became confused. Furthermore, the vast majority of fellow Christians in Colombia had no ecumenical commitment, formation or theological basis for a positive evaluation of Catholicism. The reception of Vatican II was an uphill battle for Colombians both within and outside the Catholic Church⁵².

The concern for communism and the coming of the papacy of Pope John Paul II, who shared this concern, led to the emergence of very cautious bishops whose openness to social change and to ecumenical outreach was overridden by other priorities. In other Latin American countries, like Brazil and Chile, there had been a history of not only religious freedom but also separation of church and state. In these situations various pastoral initiatives laid the ground work for lay participation, collaborative advocacy of human rights and ecumenical initiatives. A similar situation did not exist in Colombia.

In fact, changes initiated by the government caused the Concordat to be updated in 1973 and again in 1993 to conform to the new Constitution. Books listing the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, or collections of statements of its teaching office, seldom

⁵² For Protestant reactions to Vatican II see. READ, W.R MONTERROSO, V.M. JOHNSON, J.A. *Avance Evangélico en la América Latina*, Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, El Paso 1971, 323 -344. For the English version *Latin American church growth*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1969, for Colombia see 124-130.

listed the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* in its social teaching.⁵³ Pope John Paul was a tireless advocate of religious freedom around the world, especially in Eastern Europe and the Muslim world, but seldom spoke to the theme in his Latin American addresses⁵⁴.

While the massive changes in global Catholicism and the Church within Colombia are well begun, the challenges for the future remain considerable.

V. ECUMENICAL INITIATIVES

There were ecumenical initiatives at the dawn of the new republic. James Thompson founded a Bible Society with the Archdiocese of Bogotá, the Dominican university rector and other Catholics involved in 1825, but the collaboration was discontinued because of tensions with Rome⁵⁵.

The reception of religious freedom for Catholics in Colombia was often more driven by the exigencies of the changing culture, demography and legal situation, than by Catholic leadership or concern for ecumenical collaboration. It is no wonder that ecumenical dialogue and outreach has been slow from the Catholic side⁵⁶.

In many contexts, the biblical renewal has been an important catalyst for Catholic Protestant ecumenism, especially where charismatics and Pentecostals can be involved⁵⁷. Since 1996 there have been regular observances of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, especially in urban dioceses. However, the suspicion remains among some Protestants that this is still a strategy of "return" focused on the majority Church, rather than seeking that unity for which Christ prayed, in full mutual respect and hope for the Holy Spirit's blessing on all churches.

Cultural analysis has shown that there has been a rich pluralism since the 16th century, with the indigenous religions, African religions in the Caribbean and Pacific coasts – often subsumed within a Catholic popular religion, and a variety of Catholic

⁵³ For example, SECRETARIADO NACIONAL DE PASTORAL SOCIAL DE COLOMBIA, *10 Transcendentales Mensajes Sociales*, Secretado Nacional de Pastoral Social de Colombia, Bogotá 1988; BENITEZ, OTTO MORELES. *Bases Históricas y Doctrinarias del Régimen Social y del Subsidio Familiar en Colombia*, Caja Colombia de Subsidio Familiar, Bogotá 2001, 170-301. And in *Cuestiones Teológicas*, 45 (1990): MÚNERA VÉLEZ, DARIO. "La Dignidad Humana, Fundamento de los Derechos Humanos", *o. c.*, 19-32; ESCOBAR, GUILLERMO LEÓN. "Los Derechos Humanos en la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia", *o. c.*, 33-60.

⁵⁴ RICO, HERMINIO. *John Paul and the Legacy of Dignitatis Humane*, Georgetown University Press, Washington 2002.

⁵⁵ ORDOÑEZ, (o.c.), 18-21.

⁵⁶ ARBOLEDA, CARLOS. "El Ecumenismo Colombiano en el Contexto de Posmodernidad", en *Cuestiones Teológicas*, v. 32, n. 77 (Enero-Junio, 2005) 119-134.

⁵⁷ JIMÉNEZ GÓMEZ, HUMBERTO. "Breve historia del movimiento ecuménico en Medellín", in *Pastoral Ecuménico*, 20: 58 (Enero-Abril, 2003) 115-119. "Que Todo Sean Uno, Como Tú, padre, Está Identificado conmigo y yo contigo: El Ecumenismo en Perspectiva Bíblica", in *El Ser y Quehacer*, 56 - 91.

spiritualities and devotions.⁵⁸ Protestantism and other new religious forms that have added to the cultural pluralism in the last two centuries have an inevitable contribution to make, once Colombia cultural identity is no longer tied to a Catholic uniformity. However, the fact that many Protestants have come from Catholic backgrounds with painful experiences and continuing family tensions over the faith makes reconciliation and dialogue difficult. A memory of public school classrooms of Catholic religion, in the pre-Vatican II period, reminds many Protestants of an intolerant anti-Protestant experience that is not easily forgotten or healed⁵⁹.

The postmodern situation is characterized more by a pluralization of religion than by secularization, by a crisis of authority in all institutions including the historic churches, and by the globalization of a culture of choice with its accompanying individualism. This new context in which Colombian ecumenism is developing is a challenge before all of the Christian communities as they face the future together. This is a future which requires recognizing the Gospel acting in other Christians, while it seeks to give testimony in an inherently pluralistic word⁶⁰.

Colombians have provided leadership for the CELAM office of Dialogue and Communion and its predecessor, the Section on Ecumenism, for the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican, as well as for the ecumenical project of the evangelical Latin American Theological Fraternity and the Commission for the History of the Church in Latin America⁶¹. In 2003 and 2004 the Episcopal Conference of Colombia sponsored a set of symposia on ecumenism with ecumenical partners. The latter lays out important historical perspectives, biblical and historical foundations for moving forward ecumenically and pastoral priorities for specific initiatives in the concrete situation of Colombian society⁶². In several parts of the country there are ecumenical fraternities which promote prayer and dialogue serving Christian reconciliation.

A key Catholic ecumenist enumerates seven challenges to all of the Colombian churches for the 21st century:

- How do the churches promote peace and reconciliation together in the midst of conflict?
- How do the churches live together in a secular state without allowing it to fall into a laicist state as a form of secular theocracy?
- How do the diverse confessions and religions develop a recognition of the universal validity of human rights as a common ethic?

⁵⁸ See ARBOLEDA, CARLOS. *El Politeísmo Católico*, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Medellín 2001.

⁵⁹ ARBOLEDA, CARLOS. "Ecumenismo, Prioridad de la Iglesia, Colombiana", *o. c.*, 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 - 39.

⁶¹ See, for example, MORENO, PABLO. "Baptists in Latin America and their Theological Contributions at the End of the Twentieth Century", in *Baptist History and Heritage*, XXXVI, (Winter/Spring, 2001), 273-296.

⁶² *El Ser y Quehacer*, *o. c.*, 180-181.

- How can a clear theology of religions be developed which both recognizes the salvation in the churches and continues open to dialogue in pursuit of the truth?
- How can the churches together dialogue with science and technology for building a better world with a spiritual sense?
- How to bring salvation to the world without a sterile competition for members or defensiveness about a particular ecclesiastical tradition?
- How to begin a Colombian dialogue between Christians and other religions, recognizing their contributions to the social and spiritual wellbeing of the country?⁶³.

Indeed, where history is burdensome, Christian reconciliation most challenging, and trust weakest, there is where the Holy Spirit is calling most clearly for ecumenical understanding, initiative, education and leadership.

In the emerging pluralism of Colombian society, Protestants will have to learn to center their identity on Christ and not against a Catholic majority, and Catholics will learn to rely on Christ and his Church for their identity rather than the protection of the state and a pervasive culture. Education, spiritual conversion and transformation to a Christ centered understanding of the Gospel will provide the challenge that can make an ecumenical future possible.

We can both learn from and be challenged by the future opening up before the churches in Colombia as a testimony to the Holy Spirit's potential in the Christian community, and the future to which Christ calls all his people.

63 ARBOLEDA, CARLOS. "Ecumenismo, Prioridad de la Iglesia, Colombiana," *o. c.*, 34.