

## *Latin American Democracies at the Crossroads*

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It is man who is in bankruptcy. Man who is, before all, a moral being; today [some people] intend him to be an exclusively economic being. A philosophical and spiritual formation is more urgent than an economic formation.

—Eduardo Frei Montalva

Politics demands the presence of men capable of working for ideals, with honesty and devotion.

—Rafael Caldera

“Revolution” and “rebellion” have been more common political terms than “democracy” and “stability” in Latin America. Since Independence, the continent has been disrupted by *coups d'état*, rebellions, and revolts many times. Indeed, Latin American political history since the nineteenth century has been polarized by two seemingly irreconcilable ideologies. The conservatives, supporters of the privileges of the Catholic Church, the army, and the landed oligarchy, have claimed to be the natural heirs of Spain. The liberals, defenders of the rights of individuals, the secularization of society, and the idea of liberal democracy, have espoused the ideals of endless progress and modernization.

This rivalry demonstrates that an essential problem for Latin America is the search for a modernizing ideology which can unite its Hispanic Catholic tradition with the ideal of republicanism and democracy. The apparent “schizophrenia” between Catholic conservatism and anticlerical democracy has been a persistent conflict in Latin America’s modern history, particularly from the 1830’s to the 1920’s.

In the 1930's, however, Jacques Maritain's *Integral Humanism* inspired a new political model for Latin Americans. The New Christendom was democratic and Catholic at the same time. Maritain was critical of the individualism and secularism of modernity, yet he did not propose either a return to Medieval Christendom or the rejection of democratic values. His new approach, as the Uruguayan historian Alberto Methol Ferre suggests, incorporated "within Thomism the modern subjectivity, democracy and criticism toward capitalism."<sup>1</sup>

From the early thirties until 1968 (the year of the Third Conference of Bishops of Latin America in Medellin, Colombia), Latin American Catholicism in general was markedly influenced by Maritain's political thought. This period, which became known as the era of the "New Christendom," was characterized by attempts to establish a new, distinctively Christian civilization. The influence of Maritain's political philosophy reached its peak in the 1960's when two Maritainistas—Eduardo Frei in Chile (1964) and Rafael Caldera in Venezuela (1969)—won presidential elections.

This decade was also a time of fateful political confrontations. The most extreme elements of the Latin American Left opted for violent solutions. Some priests and members of lay associations, concluding that Catholics and Marxists shared the same goals, joined "guerrilla" movements.<sup>2</sup> In other cases, reactionary and dictatorial military governments toppled long-standing democracies. Authoritarian "revolutions"—such as the military governments established in Brazil (1964), Chile (1973), Uruguay (1975), and Argentina (1976)—implemented the so-called "Doctrine of National Security" to defend the values of "Christian Western Civilization." Polarization between authoritarian militarism from the left and from the right seemed to replace the old dichotomy between liberals and conservatives. Both leftist and rightist approaches to solving Latin American economic and social problems were mockeries of a true Christian humanism. Unfortunately, after 1968, Maritain's approach, as Alceu Amoroso Lima gloomily

<sup>1</sup> "Y en relacion a la historia, *Humanismo Integral* donde busca recuperar dentro del tomismo la subjetividad moderna, la democracia y la critica al capitalismo. Esto acaece durante la Gran Depresion, en la tumultuosa deacda de los 30." Alberto Methol Ferre, "El Resurgimiento Catolico Latinoamericano" ("The Resurgence of Latin American Catholicism") in *Religion y Cultura* (Bogota, Columbia: Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1981), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> The late sixties and early seventies witnessed the cases of "Christian Socialism" of the priests Camilo Torres Restrepo in Colombia and Carlos Mugica in Argentina. Both were killed by military forces.

said, "play[ed] no role except among . . . sequestered and powerless forces."<sup>3</sup>

During the early eighties and nineties, however, Latin American countries, one after another, recovered their political liberties. In 1983, after decades of political repression and instability, Argentina elected a president, Raul Alfonsin. Similarly, the 1985 election of Jose Sarney in Brazil and the election of Patricio Alwyn in Chile ended military dictatorships that had stood for twenty and seventeen years, respectively. In Paraguay, the first free elections in four decades were held in 1989 after a bloody *coup d'etat* led by Andres Rodriguez deposed the thirty-eight year old Stroessner dictatorship. The fall of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 contributed to the consolidation of these new democratic regimes.

Today, all Latin American countries (with the exception of Cuba) are democracies. It must be noted, however, that these new regimes are mere formal political democracies. Not only is the military threat still alive—many of them are only "tutelaged democracies" (*democracias tuteladas*)—but they are going through severe political and social tensions. The process of democratization appears to have led to political instability.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, this democratization process came in the middle of one of the worst financial and economic crises since the thirties. To solve this crisis, new economic policies of privatization, with a reduced role for the state in economic and social policies, have been implemented. An emergent "laissez faire" neo-liberalism is rampant even in those countries where parties which historically have been "pro-workers and pro-peasants" are in power, such as the Mexican PRI, Argentinean Peronism, the Paraguayan

<sup>3</sup> "In Peru and Bolivia, the local "Christian Democratic Parties" support these political movements of the military forces of the "left." Of a left, moreover, as anti-communist as the right. Whereas in Brazil and Argentina, the "Christian Democratic Parties" are dissolved; and its members or sympathizers, are accommodated to the military regimes; are exiled; or are leading, in the tolerated opposition, a patient and difficult struggle." Alceu Amoroso Lima, "Personal Testimony: On the Influence of Maritain in Latin America," *The New Scholasticism* 46 (Winter 1972): p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Paraguay and Peru are typical examples of these new democracies in that, though they are governed by civilian presidents, they are "guided" by the military. The Venezuelan democracy, one of the most solid in the continent, has also been threatened by the military over the past two years. Even in Chile, where the influence of the Christian Democratic Party is determinative, the military still retains the "last word." Although General Augusto Pinochet resigned the presidency and allowed the elections of Patricio Alwyn and Eduardo Frei's son, he has reserved for himself the post of "commander in chief" of the armed forces.

Colorado Party, and even the Chilean and Venezuelan Christian Democratic Parties. Retaking the individualistic Latin American liberal tradition (which dominated from the 1850's until the 1920's), the new regimes defend the idea that the common good is but the sum of individual private interests and satisfactions. In general, these policies have resulted in significant economic growth, a controlled rate of inflation, and a flow of international investment.

At the same time, however, these economic policies have made a tremendous impact on the Latin American cultural ethos. These new "utilitarian" democracies emphasize the role of government as a neutral rule maker which encourages private initiative. They do not take the cultural and moral dimensions of a democratic system into account. Quite the contrary, consistent with their emphasis on individual freedom, these new regimes have advocated a sort of *laissez faire*, where almost anything goes in the moral and cultural arena. A new, radical and individualistic "morality" has emerged in the political landscape and some unpleasant consequences are being felt: a loss of the sense of social justice (the unemployment rate has risen visibly and the gap between rich and poor has widened), a lack of civil citizenship, increasing fraud, and above all, widespread corruption.

In this context, the new generation has been introduced to a moral relativism which comes from post-industrialized countries with a post-modern culture: the culture of rock videos, violent films, sexual license, and the cultivation of desire, along with the innovation of the right to choose (abortion) and even the temptation of euthanasia. Along with political liberties and free market economy, this self-centered moral outlook (new to the Latin American ethos) is one of the three most important characteristics of the new democracies; and where it increases, the role of government as a moral leader is diminished. Any concept of the common good which can diminish individual freedom is seen not only as a threat to political liberties but as a reactionary assault from the right.

The culture and political system are so consumed by a positivistic and materialistic mentality that the formation of humanistic leaders is inhibited. It would seem that technology, free trade, and economic individualism have revived the problematic of the 1930's: the need for a new moral political leadership, a new revival of a politics of Christian inspiration. The theologian Oscar Rodriguez Madariga recently pointed out the lack of true leaders. Overwhelmed by lack of resources, the continuing process of secularization, a culture of consumerism, and the invasion of Protestant

fundamentalist sects, the Church "seems to have exhausted its resources to a degree and so we must find a new missionary impetus."<sup>5</sup>

Within this context doubts remain as to whether these new democracies will survive. Are they a viable model for the survival and growth of the Latin American Catholic cultural tradition? And if they are not, what would an alternative political model look like at this crossroads? I have already suggested that, although the flourishing of these new democratic regimes is encouraging, their major challenges are not economic but rather moral and cultural. In what follows I shall argue that the key to transforming these systems into "integral" democracies is a return to their historical roots. And I believe that Jacques Maritain's political philosophy is the most important part of these roots. A "renaissance" can only occur, however, if Maritain's legacy is interpreted first and foremost as an educational and cultural heritage and not as exclusively political.<sup>6</sup>

Jacques Maritain was, as his disciple and friend Yves R. Simon pointed out, a "nonspecialized philosopher." He wrote with the same intellectual rigor about the different branches of philosophy from metaphysics to aesthetics. Although it was his political writings that gave him international recognition, particularly in Latin America, Maritain felt himself to be neither a politician nor an ideologue of any particular group. Rather, he hoped to be considered a philosopher who inspired and illuminated the world of politics, and who was interested in democracy as the most suitable form of government for Christians.

In the early thirties, the imagination and intelligence of Latin American intellectuals and politicians were challenged by a crisis that rocked the liberal capitalist democracies as a result of the Great Depression. In that period, the political thought of the Social Christians joined the Latin American Catholic tradition with universal ideals of modernity. For them, the problematic of the democratic crisis was clear: it was the decline of a cul-

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Rodriguez Madariga, "A Church of Silence?," interview by Andrea Torielli, *30 Days* 3 (1995): p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> This is also the opinion of Professor Edward Lynch. But he seems to attribute the Christian Democrats' failure mainly to the "wrong" public policies they established, such as stateism. "Having spent most of the 1960's and 1970's finding one reason after another to increase state economic power, Christian Democrats faced the new challenges of the 1980's liberalism without any coherent ideological basis for response. Squeezed between more radical statists and the rising liberals, the movement threatened to disappear altogether. . . . If Christian Democracy has a future, it lies in rediscovering the potency of the philosophy that gave it birth." Edward Lynch, *Latin America's Christian Democratic Parties: A Political Economy* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1993), p. xvii.

ture, the breakdown of a moral order. In order to provide a solid intellectual foundation to their new organizations and their countries' political systems, these young Catholic militants decided to adopt and, above all, to adapt the political thought of the French philosopher Jacques Maritain.

These Latin Americans—among whom were the Brazilian Alceu Amoroso Lima (1893–1973), the Chilean Eduardo Frei Montalva (1911–1981), the Venezuelan Rafeal Caldera (b. 1922), and later the Paraguayan Secundino Nunez (b. 1920)—believed that Maritain's political thought was the most useful intellectual tool for "healing the schizophrenia" between liberals and conservatives, and creating a Latin American democratic thought without rejecting the Catholic tradition. These young politicians proposed an alternative political project to overcome the critical situation of unemployment, fear of reactionary *coups d'état*, and the emergence of extreme nationalism. They felt that a new revolutionary political attitude should be established, to lead to the spiritual and moral transformation of their societies. The political structure would change afterwards.

The decade of the thirties was a defining political moment for Latin American intellectuals. For many secular anti-liberals, the ideological alternatives were Italian Fascism, German Nazism, or Russian Marxism. For Catholics, however, the choice seemed to be more difficult. The conservative majority leaned toward *criollas* forms of Fascism, influenced mainly by the Falangist movement of the Spaniard Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera. Those Catholics who wished for a democratic alternative without resorting to an ideological extreme saw Maritain's ideas as a possible third alternative.<sup>7</sup> The Brazilian thinker and writer Alceu Amoroso Lima interpreted Maritain's philosophy as a new dawn for Latin America. He saw Maritain as a "link between the elite and the people, in the sense of the revolutionary future, and also as a rallying-point between the past and the present, in the sense of a traditional equilibrium."<sup>8</sup>

Maritain visited Brazil in 1936 and spent a short time in the capitol, Rio

<sup>7</sup> "From Europe the influence of Jacques Maritain began to excite the dream of a "New Christendom" for Latin America, and particularly as a result of Maritain's philosophy, Christian Action emerged as a significant force. Christian Democracy was a reaction to the rightist propensity of the Spanish Fascist government of Francisco Franco, who came to power in 1936, the year when the Christian spirits divided in a germinal way, a division that would be accentuated during the time of the Second Vatican Council." Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492–1979)*, trans. and rev. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 107.

<sup>8</sup> Amoroso Lima, "Testimony: On the Influence of Maritain in Latin America," p. 75.

de Janeiro. There, he was introduced as a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters by Amoroso Lima himself, and gave a lecture on "Action and Contemplation" at the Dom Vital Center; this later became a chapter of his book, *A Question of Conscience*. After visiting Brazil and Uruguay, Maritain went on to Argentina, arriving in Buenos Aires on August 14, 1936. Invited by the "Cursos de Cultura Católica" and the journal *Sur*, he lectured for two months, until October 16, and was later named Honorary Professor. Some of those attending Maritain's lectures were nationalists identified with the Old Spanish Catholic tradition, who claimed to represent the most genuine form of Catholicism and the depository of the national conscience. But there were others who held Maritain's pro-democratic positions. Nevertheless, the philosopher was seen by most people, friends and foes alike, as the most important thinker of the European Thomistic renaissance.

But Rafael Caldera and Eduardo Frei represented the highest points of Maritain's influence in Latin America. Maritain was the intellectual mentor of both of these founding fathers of the Christian Democratic movement. A careful reading of their political writings indicates a clear "Maritainian" character. The apparent success of totalitarian ideas, Caldera explained, "confirmed that the democratic ideal is suffering a tremendous crisis in Europe. The fascist fashion and the Communist fashion try to divide the political camp, as the most valorous brigades of the new generations. At that moment, it seemed impossible to think in a democratic formula to solve problems."<sup>9</sup>

Despite this apparent impossibility, Caldera rejected any authoritarian solution. Unlike other Latin American thinkers, secular and Catholic, he favored a democratic formula based on a cultural—Christian—revival. In pursuing this, he immersed himself in the study of Latin American reality through the "lens" of Don Andres Bello.<sup>10</sup> The young Caldera looked at the

<sup>9</sup> "[L]a idea democrática está padeciendo en Europa una crisis tremenda. La moda fascista y la moda comunista tratan de dividirse el campo, como las brigadas más aguerridas de las nuevas generaciones. En aquel momento parece imposible pensar en la fórmula democrática como la solución de los problemas de esos países y del mundo." Rafael Caldera, *Especificidad de la Democracia Cristiana* (Caracas, Venezuela: Editorial Dimensiones, 1987), p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> The Venezuelan Andres Bello (1781–1865) was one of the most brilliant Latin American intellectuals during the first half of the nineteenth century. Heavily influenced by Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism, he was the ambassador of Latin American pro-independence groups in London during the 1820's. His talents covered many fields. He was the author of the Chilean Civil Code and a study of classical Spanish grammar—and the founder of the University of Chile. For information about Bello, and the Chilean Generation of 1842, see Harold Eugene Davis, *Latin American Thought: An Historical Introduction* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), pp. 80–87.

great Venezuelan thinker as a role model, that is, as a "synthesis man"—"a true spiritual epitome of Latin America"—a man who could join philosophy and political reality.<sup>11</sup> Bello's openness to the world, his ability to join universal ideas and regional political circumstances, appealed to Caldera. Bello believed in political freedom and self-determination: he did not reject European philosophical traditions.<sup>12</sup> "Imitate the spirit, but not the total product of European culture," he would often say. Caldera would follow this advice during his lifetime by being revolutionary without rejecting the value of tradition. His political ideas sprung from two poles: an inherited European Social Christianity which came from Jacques Maritain, as well as from Luigi Sturzo, L.J. Lebreton, and Emmanuel Mounier, and the Latin American context.

Caldera believed that the impact of the Russian revolution on the European continent, with the consequent expansion of communist ideas as well as the spread of Fascism in Italy and Germany, showed the impotence and moral emptiness of Western liberal democracies. It was on a trip to the United States, in New York, during the summer of 1942, that the young Caldera met Maritain for the first time. The French philosopher made a tremendous impact on the Venezuelan deputy. Caldera saw Maritain as a "coherent thinker who opened clear and definite paths in the middle of the thick fog."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, he was a political theorist for whom "the concept of democracy is not constrained within its formal mechanism but springs from the dignity of the human being and transforms people into an organic entity, true models of their own destiny."<sup>14</sup>

As the leader of the Christian Democratic Party, COPEI, Caldera was one of the builders of the Venezuelan democracy in the late fifties and early sixties, following General Pérez Giménez's dictatorship.<sup>15</sup> After his first

<sup>11</sup> Rafael Tomás Caldera, "Introducción General," in *Ideario: La Democracia Cristiana en América Latina* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1970), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Rafael Caldera, *Derecho del Trabajo*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Ateneo, 1960), pp. 19–20.

<sup>13</sup> Caldera, "Personal Testimony," p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> "In the 1958 Pact of Punto Fijo, AD [Democratic Action Party] and COPEI [Christian Democratic Party] were joined by the Democratic Republican Union (URD) of Juvito Villalba in pledging civic collaboration as the means of nurturing the fledgling democratic system. . . . Only the persuasiveness and moral authority of the two principal founders of the democratic system, [Romulo] Betancourt and [Rafael] Caldera, discouraged a military seizure of power." John D. Martz, "Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador," in Jan Kippers Black, ed., *Latin America, Its Problems and Its Promise: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 438–39.



presidency of the Republic (1969–1973), Caldera, as an elder statesman, was chosen for a second time as president of the Venezuelan people in 1994.

The example of the Chilean President Eduardo Frei is no less striking. Frei met Maritain in Paris in 1934, and was at once impressed by Maritain's revolutionary idea of integral humanism. From then on, Frei became a faithful political echo of Maritain's teachings in Chile. After Frei became President of Chile in 1964, he was called, by Maritain himself, one of the few truly revolutionary men, and the best example of putting a Social Christian agenda into practice. In 1965, Maritain wrote that President Frei's tenure in Chile was,

the first time in centuries that an authentic and real Christian politics has been established. . . . Personally I have very good friends in Latin America, especially in Uruguay (Esther de Caceres), and in Brazil (Amoroso Lima), but it is only in Chile that I see a positive accomplishment inspired by a profound political philosophy very conscious of itself, of its principles and its ends.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of a crisis of civilization was the starting point of Frei's political thought. The Chilean believed that any political crisis is basically a "spiritual" crisis, a breakdown of the human soul, a cultural and anthropological failure. This was Frei's assessment of the thirties. If there is a crisis of Western civilization today, the Chilean affirmed in 1934, it is because the idea of man behind this civilization has failed or his image has become obscure, tarnished, unintelligible.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "Es la primera vez, desde hace siglos, que se ve surgir en la historia, una politica autentica y realmente cristiana. . . . Personalmente tengo muy buenos amigos in America Latina, especialmente en Uruguay (Esther de Caceres) y en Brazil (Amoroso Lima), pero es unicamente en Chile donde veo una realizacion positiva procedente de una inspiracion suficientemente profunda y animada por una filosofia politica muy consciente de si misma, de sus principios y de sus fines." The complete letter that Jacques Maritain wrote to Professor Gregorio Peces-Barba, in which he explains some aspects of his thought as well as his apparent influence in Latin America, can be found in Gregorio Peces-Barba, *Persona, Sociedad, Estado* (Madrid: Edicusa, 1972), pp. 312–16.

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to notice that this diagnosis of Europe's decline was not only pointed out by Maritain and his Latin American disciples Frei and Caldera, but it was also a widespread assumption among European thinkers themselves. From *The Decline of the West* (1918) by the German Oswald Spengler, to *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930) by the Spaniard Jose Ortega y Gasset, the message was the same: liberal democracy was a system incapable of achieving socioeconomic progress and political stability. The various thinkers' proposed solutions, however, differed substantially.

The idea of man to which Frei referred was the Enlightenment anthropology. Frei believed the Enlightenment project had converted human beings into mere economic and material units with an illusive idea of progress. It was a naturalistic and, in some cases, materialistic anthropology. In his view, the separation of man from God brought about by the pride of Enlightenment thinkers led not only to a loss of religious sentiments but also to selfish individualism, social injustice, and ultimately totalitarianism.<sup>18</sup> Maritain analyzed the weaknesses of liberal democracy and the rise of totalitarianism in Europe as the results of a crisis of intelligence inaugurated by the modern anthropocentric humanism propagated by the Enlightenment. Frei did the same with Latin America.

Caldera and Frei's have been the most formidable attempts to create the theoretical basis for—and the practice of—a Latin American Social Christian thought grounded in a cultural and moral awakening. Their political philosophy begins with cultural ethics, nurtured by Christian principles, and builds up to the political and economic system.<sup>19</sup>

Another example has been Paraguay where Maritain's ideas influenced a generation of young intellectuals who established the Social Christian movement in 1960 and, five years later, transformed it into the Christian Democratic Party. One of the mentors of this generation, Professor Secundino Nunez, had been the most articulate Latin American exponent of Maritain's ideas. Through his lectures in the Catholic University in 1960, as well as through articles and books, he has labored to popularize Social Christian ideas for more than forty years. In 1989, after the overthrow of Alfredo Stroessner, Nunez became the first Christian Democratic presidential candidate in Paraguayan history. Today, Professor Nunez is a senator representing a third political force, the "National Encounter."<sup>20</sup>

Like the crisis of the new Latin American democracies today, the political crisis of liberal democracies in the thirties was a cultural crisis, a problem that had concrete ideological roots. It was rooted in the heritage of the nineteenth-century liberal positivism—so pervasive in countries such as Brazil, Paraguay and Venezuela—which had crippled the democratic spirit.

<sup>18</sup> Oscar Pinochet de la Barra, *El Pensamiento de Eduardo Frei* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Aconcagua, 1983), p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Caldera, *Ideario*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> The Paraguayan Christian Democratic Party was declared illegal by Stroessner's dictatorship. From its founding in 1965 until the fall of the dictatorship in 1989, the party was viewed as subversive and an "agent" of Moscow; its leaders were persecuted and many of them arrested, tortured and killed.

Out of this diagnosis Social Christian Maritainistas tried to rehumanize the world of Latin American politics by providing a reasonable moral foundation for democracy, a task that today again seems to be necessary.

One aspect is clearly reiterative: the real danger is cultural and moral, not economic. Although a democratic system strengthens political liberties and the free market economy, it will eventually fail if it neglects culture. That is why the goal of the 1930's Maritainistas must be revived today: to develop a sound personalistic political philosophy which can be an alternative both to authoritarianism (the politics of strong men: *caudillismo*) and to secular individualism. And the means to achieve this, I believe, is an educational process of the sort that Maritain hoped for: the conquest of individual and spiritual freedom; the liberation of the human person "through knowledge and wisdom, good will and love."<sup>21</sup>

Thus, an "integral education" which can reestablish the value of communities in order to rebuild intermediate institutions (family, unions) is the way to defend the social fabric from the aggressive adversary culture. Working against this humanistic approach will be the ideology that, as Maritain already warned in the early forties, considers "technical" education the only means to democratic progress. "The present war creates an immense need for technology and technical training," Maritain wrote in 1943, and then added, "it would be an irremediable mistake not to return to the primacy and integrity of liberal education." I would argue the same of today's new Latin American democracies. There, too, "the educational system and the state have to provide the future citizens not only with treasure of skills, knowledge, and wisdom—liberal education for all—but also with a genuine and reasoned-out belief in the common democratic charter, such as is required for the very unity of the body politic."<sup>22</sup>

This educational and cultural project must avoid two extreme attitudes: anti-intellectualism and a spirit of corporativism. First, the tendency toward anti-intellectualism, which has clear populist overtones, is suspicious of any educational reform which may enhance the perfection of intellectual and ethical virtues. It assumes that any education in the virtues is aristocratic rather than democratic, seeking only to establish the government of a tiny elite. Secondly, the spirit of corporativism, which has long been part of Latin American culture, is dangerous because it dismisses any effort at personal growth as individualistic and selfish.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1943), p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 120.

The historical evolution of the New Christendom in Latin America passed through five main stages between 1936 and 1968. First came the moment of the intellectual formation of the leaders. Young Catholics were taught about the social principles of the Catholic Teachings, and how to put these principles into practice. That was the task, primarily, of Catholic Action. Then, after these young men became social activists, they abandoned Catholic Action and joined political parties, generally conservative ones, which were believed to be the only ones which could provide a truly Catholic political view. Next, the Social Christian views of these leaders collided with the old, conservative Catholic practices. They realized that these parties were obsolete in the changing times, and decided to establish new political institutions. Thus, in the following stage, the Social Christian leaders founded Christian Democratic parties, and tried to become political players in each country. Some of them accomplished their dream, and seized political power. And, finally, due to diverse circumstances, internal and external, these Christian Democratic parties started losing influence, and the New Christendom as a model went into decline. Do we have to start all over again?

I believe that a renewed Christian politics in the upcoming third millennium should not be "official" and "clerical." This model of Christian political groups, whether they are formed by Christian Democratic political parties or by liberationist theological groups, is exhausted. Instead, I would rather support the participation of individual Christians in the public arena. This approach would allow Christian values to be introduced within different political parties regardless of their Christian "confessionality." Today, even political parties of Christian inspiration in Latin America have become prisoners of corruption and ambition, combatants in a Machiavellian struggle for power—something that Maritain totally rejected. The only way to change this "style" is to replace the "power politics" cultural climate that made it possible.

As Maritain pointed out, in this reconstruction of the social fabric, three components will be unavoidable: the recreation of a sound Christian humanistic philosophy, the building of a renewed Christendom, democratic and pluralistic, and the establishment of a new educational commonwealth. After the restless political experimentation of the 1960's and the harsh and inhumane politics of the 1970's, these new democracies need to find a firm foundation: the rediscovery of ancient truths, the reassertion of fundamental values, and, above all, the redefinition of what is good and what is evil, in absolute and not merely relative terms. In this task, Maritain's Christian humanism may provide a viable political alternative.