¡Mañana! (2/2)

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(2 out of 2)

Mañana is an ambiguous term. It means tomorrow, as is well known. But it also means morning, and, in everyday usage, dawn. And it is not only in the first sense that Spanish-Americans are a people of mañana; they also have the confidence that their mañana, their new dawn, has come. They have been watching with interest and sympathy the struggle of the Black man to assert his rights and have decided that a similar struggle must be theirs. This in turn means that there is now even less probability than ever that Spanish-Americans will simply be absorbed into the mainstream of American society, as the Irish and the Italian were. From the Black man, and from his own traditional sense of self-esteem, the Spanish American has concluded and decided that if he is to be received into the mainstream of American life this will be on his own terms. The ideal of many a Spanish-American some years back was to be accepted by Anglo-Americans as one of their number. This is no longer his ideal. Now he wants to be accepted as different and appreciated precisely because he is different. And he does not wish to be accepted out of the kindness of Anglo society but out of the need that that society has for him. This does not mean that kindness will not be appreciated; but as long as kindness is necessary to accept a fellow man, there is still a hidden feeling of superiority.

Mañana is today. Our new dawn has come. And we claim our place under the sun. This is what César Chávez and his followers are saying through his grape boycott; this is what Reyes López Tijerina is saying through his legal action to recover lands in New Mexico and Colorado; this is

what Hernan Badillo is saying as he campaigns in the Bronx; this may even be what Joe Kapp is saying every time he calls a play!

Does our mañana include the Church? If it does, what form of Christianity will be ours, or rather, what form will our Christianity take? This is the first and basic issue to which I would like to address myself this afternoon.

I shall not attempt to answer this question, for I am neither a prophet nor the son of one. Rather, I would like to approach it from several angles, with suggestions drawn from the four basic characteristics of the Spanish language and culture that I mentioned this morning.

First, as to the openness of our language and approach to things. Spanish American emotions are always close to the surface. It is probably not that we are more emotional than other people but simply that we are not ashamed to show it. And furthermore, we are not sure that it is always best to follow our reason over our emotions. It is said that one of the reasons why bullfighting is possible is that a bull closes his eyes when he charges, and that cow-fighting would probably be more dangerous, since a cow keeps her eyes open. I have never attempted to corroborate the fact, but still most Spanish-Americans would rather charge into a problem like a bull than like a cow. Reason is good, yes; but man is more than a thinking machine. When it comes to religion, the man who speaks with a, e, i, o, u, wants to be able to worship with ah!, eh!, oh! He cannot very well understand, less share in, the religiosity of the man who sits like a

stone in a worship service and shouts like a heathen in a baseball game. He finds it hard to believe the sincerity of a man who tells him over a cup of coffee, in such quiet tones that he seems to be ashamed of it, that he believes in Jesus. And it is inconceivable to him that someone would say that his faith is the greatest thing in his life but that he does not discuss religion with others because he does not wish to offend them. He figures that, if religion makes any difference at all, it must make all the difference in the world. And he would rather seem fanatical or be called a show-off than be led to doubt his own sincerity.

It is here that traditional Protestantism has found one of its greatest stumbling blocks in Latin America and among Spanish-Americans in this country. Its appeal and success in various places can be partially measured by the degree to which it has become open in its expression. Whatever slight hold the Roman Catholic Church still has, it has by allowing its faithful to express their faith—by making the sign of the cross at every turn, by not eating meat on Fridays, or even, until a recent date, by throwing stones at Protestants. The phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism is partly due to this. One can accuse the Pentecostals of being divisive, of being superficial, or of not showing a social concern. But one certainly cannot accuse them of stifling their emotions nor of being wishy-washy about their faith.

Second, as to our view of sex: Protestants have often accused Spanish Catholicism of being unduly concerned with Mary, and even of worshiping her. For the most part, these accusations have been grounded on fact, for the devout Mexican lays his trust first in the *Virgen de*

Guadalupe and then in God, while the average Cuban will not hesitate to curse God with the most blasphemous words but will only speak of the *Virgen de la Caridad* with the greatest love and respect. What Protestant critics of these practices have not understood, however, is that their message has often simply cancelled the positive feminine traits which Spanish Catholicism has placed in the Virgin. The God of traditional German-Anglo-Saxon Protestantism has often been little more than a mellowed version of Thor. I have always been a great admirer of Luther. But nevertheless, his Deus pro me was the overwhelming discovery that somehow Thor, with all his might and his thunder, had forgiven him. God was always the loving enemy, as psychology has since shown that a father often is to his son.

Such a God is obviously incomplete. Certain Protestant traditions have attempted to solve this problem by placing the loving Jesus vis-a-vis the judging Father. But this in turn has resulted in an effeminate Jesus. And such a notion is abhorrent to the Spanish mind. Give me the suffering, bleeding Jesus on the cross. Or give me the all-powerful Jesus *pantokrator*. Or the Jesus who drinks with his disciples. But give me not a delicate Jesus whose eyes are turned to heaven like Juliette would look at Romeo!

The Virgin cannot simply be abolished. There must be a place in the Spanish God for the feminine. I suspect that this is another of the reasons for the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America, as well as among Spanish-Americans in this country. Although I am quite certain that my own Pentecostal friends would declare me to be anathema for holding

such views, there is a long tradition from Elkesai in the second century to Berdiaef in the twentieth, which ascribes femininity to the Holy Spirit. To this, one might add that in the Spanish tradition the dove is not only a symbol of the Holy Ghost but also of unspoiled feminine innocence. And even though, as I have already stated, a Pentecostal would be shocked if one were to tell him so, there is no doubt that the Holy Spirit plays a motherly role in Pentecostal piety. It is the Holy Spirit that gathers the believer to its bosom and rocks him to ecstatic oblivion of all his wants and his cares. Although it is God the Father that provides all things in creation, it is the Holy Spirit that somehow turns this into spiritual nourishment for the faithful. Once again, it seems that on this point Pentecostalism has the edge over the historic forms of Protestantism.

Thirdly, as to our subjunctive view of life: While the most common sin of Anglo-Saxon Christianity has been activism, the most common sin of Spanish Christianity has been quietism. The only thing that has allowed Spain to produce such active Christians as Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila has been an overwhelming sense of authority, which for these believers, and in very specifically religious matters, has cancelled the “ifs” of life. The astounding missionary zeal of Spain during the sixteenth century was due to an equally astounding certainty, grounded on ecclesiastical authority, that this was what God wanted done at this time. But these very missionaries were quite unable—or unwilling—to evolve a long-range plan as to what they wished to accomplish in these lands. On the immediate they placed their concern and did not dare plan or consider a future that, after all, belonged to the realm of the subjunctive. This is

why such a humanitarian man as Las Casas, tremendously and deeply concerned for the welfare of the Indians, could suggest that slaves be brought from Africa to relieve the burden of the Indian. This is probably another of the reasons for the different approaches followed by Spanish and English colonizers. The English came for land to settle in and to cultivate. The Spanish came for gold. It was not that the Spanish were lazy and wanted to get rich easily. There was nothing easy in the campaign of Cortes in Mexico, nor in the riding with a handful of soldiers, in hot Spanish armor, all the way from the Caribbean to Peru. It was rather that the type of venture for which the English became known was too “iffy,” it took a great deal of faith in the future. Venturing into unknown lands in search of gold and empire was just as risky. But the risk was short-lived. One either became rich or died in the enterprise. In either of the two cases, there was no need to trust continually in an uncertain future. The English “tomorrow” is the time when one will see the fruition of today's efforts; the seemingly corresponding Spanish mañana is the time when one will see the futility of those efforts. Therefore, my love for procrastination—and I adore it!—may seem to you mere laziness, but I take it to be a simple form of realism that acknowledges the fact that most of what seems urgent, necessary, and positive today will prove unnecessary, futile, and even negative tomorrow.

There are two basic ways in which the resultant quietism and seeming conformity with the status quo can be overcome. One is the challenge of immediacy, and the other is the certainty of authority. I have already said that it was the certainty of authority that allowed Ignatius and Teresa to be who they were. Other great Spanish Christians—men like Bartolome de Las Casas,

Antonio Montesinos, Pedro Claver, and others were moved by the challenge of immediacy. They saw an injustice and moved to correct it, not with far-reaching plans full of “ifs” but with a concentration on their own particular concern that often made them blind to other implications of their actions.

The same is true, both within and without ecclesiastical circles, when one comes to Latin revolutionary attitudes. A Latin revolutionary is not moved, even if he claims to be, by his clear and certain understanding of utopian goals. He, too, is moved either by the certainty of authority or by the challenge of immediacy. He will not take it upon himself to conceive a plan for long-range action that will eventually bring forth a more just order. He rather places his faith in the blueprint of another—it is significant that Latin America has produced many revolutionaries, but not a single significant utopia—or he simply decides, out of the challenge of immediacy, that a certain condition must be changed—not changed into something, mind you, but simply changed.

Protestant Christianity in Latin America, as well as among Spanish-Americans in this country, has followed both ways to liberate the energies of its adherents. It has used the absolute certainty of Biblical authority being on one’s side to produce a zealously active evangelistic community. The typical Latin or Spanish-American may have been indolent in other matters. But the Latin and Spanish-American Protestant has been extremely active when it comes to evangelism. On the other hand, Protestant Christianity among us has used the challenge of immediacy to move

us to action in the fields of education, health, literacy, etc. Although most of this work has resulted in institutions excessively run and supported by foreign funds and personnel, still the average Protestant Christian has seen this as part of the mission of the Church and has been willing, when challenged, to move to its support.

But today both of these means to move us to activity are losing effectiveness. Latin and Spanish-American members of the historic Protestant churches are becoming increasingly aware that even in the very headquarters of their own denominations, there is considerable doubt regarding the authority with which evangelistic work is done. They are also sharing in this doubt. And thus, there is a trend in many denominations in the Spanish world to lose the evangelistic zeal for which they were known fifteen years ago. (And please understand that I am not advocating for a return to the "Old Time Religion" but simply stating what seems to me to be a fact.) On the other score—the challenge of immediacy—, the historic churches are also losing their motivation. More and more, we are spending a great part of our effort in supporting institutions rather than programs. As most of these institutions were founded some time ago, and as institutions are by nature not very flexible, most of them are no longer at the forefront of the present social challenge. Therefore, instead of becoming increasingly a part of the Latin and Spanish American churches, they are becoming more and more a foreign element supported by foreign funds and foreign views of what our mission should be. Our churches no longer have anything *sui generis* to offer to man in his needs and are therefore becoming increasingly divided by the opposite views of those that retrench into the cozy comfort of ecclesiastical life

and those who see the challenge of their times. But seeing nothing special in the Church, they simply wish to use it as another instrument of their social and political pursuits.

Roman Catholicism, as well as historic Protestantism, has lost a great deal of these two liberating factors, and, therefore, for several decades has been unable to move Latin or Spanish-American man to action. There is, however, a renewal taking place within that Church. Although it is still too early to predict what will be the final outcome of that renewal, it seems clear that there is a revival in the challenge of immediacy. In various ways, Catholics throughout the Spanish speaking world, as well as Spanish-American Catholics, are coming in closer contact with situations that need to be changed. The mass is losing a great deal of its mysterious aloofness and is taking dozens of new shapes in which the concerns of men are shared by the believers. Bishops and lay movements are challenging fellow Catholics to become involved in the business of helping others in different ways. Once again it is possible to be a Roman Catholic with the saintly zeal and concern for others of Las Casas and his fellow missionaries.

On the other hand, I do not know what the new trends in Roman Catholicism will mean for the certainty of authority. At first sight, those trends seem to be eroding that certainty. But on second thought, it is also true that that certainty was already badly corroded, so that perhaps the new system and understanding of authority will prove to be a stronger impulse to action than the older, stern, but no longer compelling, authority.

The tremendous growth of the Pentecostal churches is partly due to the energy that has been released by a combination of the certainty of authority and the challenge of immediacy. The Pentecostal is certain of his faith and of the authority with which he witnesses to it. He is also challenged by the immediate presence of his fellow man who does not know the joy of deep religious experience. He sees the immediate need before him; he is absolutely certain of the authority with which he responds to that need. No wonder he can display a zeal and a capacity for work far beyond that of the most industrious Anglo-Saxon! Whether he understands human need correctly, or whether his authority is as certain as he takes it to be, are not the issues here. All that I am affirming at this point is that these factors liberate the Pentecostal believer from the "iffiness" of mañana and thus compel him to action. He is taken out of the subjunctive mood and placed under the sign of the indicative and the imperative. If any other form of Christianity is to gain or retain a significant place in the Spanish world, it must find a way to do likewise.

Finally, a word as to the distinction between those two forms of being which we call "ser" and "estar." Before I put forth a few ideas regarding this matter, allow me to say that I am not completely sure of the exactitude of what I am proposing here. But in any case, as a sort of basis for discussion, I shall attempt to outline what this distinction has meant for Spanish religiosity.

When such a distinction does not exist, one is forced to think of the permanent and the transitory as two different modes within the general category of "being." But the moment one does this; one is then compelled to relate the two. Western philosophical and theological

thought has established this relationship in various ways. Some, such as Marcion and the Gnostics, have seen a radical opposition between the two. Others, such as the entire Thomist tradition, have conceived of the relationship between the two as a hierarchy in which the permanent stands high above the transitory. But even in the latter case, there remains a basic opposition between the two, so that one must overcome the transitory if one is to attain the permanent. Saint Augustine felt a burden of guilt because he had allowed his mind to wander from the contemplation of the Eternal to an idle and curious wonder at the activities of a lizard. In the same vein, Saint Anselm said that if for a single instant a man turns his gaze away from God and to the most brilliant star, he will not be able to pay for that sin in all eternity. And the same basic attitudes have informed the Puritan tradition, which has been so important a factor in molding the ethos of this country.

But such a stance inevitably leads to a schizophrenic culture. There are transitory things all around us to be enjoyed. And we feel inclined to do so. Yet we mustn't. And we admire those who seem to know how to enjoy them. Yet we condemn them. And we are proud that our nation has achieved such great wealth in transitory riches. Yet we are ashamed. Somehow our happiness must be sinful, for passing things should not produce such enjoyment.

But if one starts with the distinction between "ser" and "estar," things look very different. These are not really two orders of "being" but two realities as distinct from each other as apples and oranges. They are not engaged in constant warfare against each other, for the value conferred

to one does not diminish the value of the other. In a particular single occurrence, Don Quixote can serve the permanent while Sancho Panza enjoys the transitory. And they are both right. And they both exist together in me.

This has been the genius of Spanish Roman Catholicism. It is *fiesta* Christianity. Despite the commonly held view, it is not somber. The Inquisition may be a very somber matter from our point of view as heretics, but for the Spaniard of the sixteenth century an *auto-da-fe* was one more *fiesta*. It is true that Phillip Il and his Catholicism were indeed lugubrious but let us not forget that Phillip was the son of a German and that he spent a substantial part of his youth in the Netherlands. No. Despite the overwhelming atmosphere of its churches, Spanish Roman Catholicism is not gloomy. It spills out of the dark churches into the colorful *procesión*, the day of the *santo patrón* of a town, and a thousand other events. Traditional Roman Catholicism in the Spanish world is secular, not in the sense that it is not religious but in the sense that the distinction between the secular and the religious tends to be effaced. A bull fight is a religious ceremony in which the primeval chaos is gracefully overcome by the lord who rules over all. The religious feast in which a town's patron saint is celebrated is a very earthly occasion in which very earthly wine is imbibed, and very earthly children are conceived. Therefore, let me say in passing, the manner in which the question of secularization is posed by both Protestant and Catholic thinkers from the Germanic world is not altogether relevant to our situation.

This has been one of the main hindrances in the growth of traditional Protestantism in the Spanish world. It is too somber. It is too religious. It cannot rejoice in the world and enjoy it. And the solution is not for it to become secularized. The solution within our context is for it to become religiously secular, and secularly religious.

Pentecostalism has managed to grow partially because it has maintained an air of joy. But this joy is altogether too purely religious, too non-secular, too much influenced by Puritanism, to be deeply and permanently rooted in the lives of the Spanish people. Thus, Pentecostalism, too, in its process of maturing, must come to the point at which it will be able to rejoice in the secular while continuing to do so in the realm of religious experience. If it achieves this, nothing can stop it from becoming the religious future of Latin America.

Bringing together all of this, I may summarize it by saying that I believe that the future faith of the Spanish-speaking world, and, therefore, of Spanish-Americans in this country, will be a renewed Catholicism and/or a mature Pentecostalism. If denominations such as yours and mine have a mission within this context, it is not so much that of turning Spanish-Americans into Disciples or Methodists, as that of serving as a catalytic agent to help bring about these two developments: the renewal of Roman Catholicism and the maturing of Pentecostalism. But let not your heart be troubled, I may well be mistaken. Mañana will provide the answer.