The Crucial Hour in Latin America

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Father, the hour hath come. Glorify Thy son, that he may glorify Thee.

Those who attended the wonderful meeting of the Men and Millions Movement at St. Louis remember how these words of our Lord were burned into our hearts, as applying to us as a people. In all the twenty-two thousand miles of travel around Latin America through Porto Rico, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, Chili, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, crossing the great ocean to Portugal and England, back to New York and down to Mexico again, as I saw the wonderful material advance and the awful spiritual neglect of these Latin-American lands, the words continued to ring in my ears, “Father, the hour hath come.”

The hour hath come for us to recognize the importance of these lands in the future development of the world’s life. Too long have we thought of Latin America as only a place of revolution, inhabited by uncivilized Indians, where eighty-five per cent. were illiterate and the other fifteen per cent. of no account in the world’s work.

No one can travel through these countries and meet the earnest leaders who are doing
serious work in science, literature, government and education; see their wonderful cities, surpassing in many respects any other cities of the world; the great increase in railroads; the great untouched forests and plains, the mightiest river system in the world—without feeling in complete accord with the judgment of keen observers who are telling us that just as the most remarkable development of the nineteenth century took place in North America, so the greatest awakening of the twentieth century will be in Latin America.

In that great stretch of country beginning at the Rio Grande, running down through Mexico, Central America, across Panama and down through South America to Tierra del Fuego, we find the largest body of undeveloped fertile land in the world. These twenty Latin-American Republics with their seventy millions of population, speak largely the same language. They have the same form of government; they inherit the same traditions; they are practically a homogeneous people. All the peoples of the world could be put in these countries, and then the density of population be only one-third of that of some of the small countries of Europe. Brazil alone is larger than the United States. It contains more undiscovered land than does Africa. Argentina is leading in the rejuvenation of the decaying civilizations of Latin Europe, just as our own land led in revivifying the arrested development of Anglo-Saxon life of the Old World.
The opening of the Panama Canal changes the map of the world. It inaugurates a world movement toward Latin America. This movement has already begun. In Rio de Janeiro I met a party of fifteen North American University professors visiting the South American Universities to increase their friendly relationships. In Buenos Aires there was a company representing North American Commercial Clubs studying the South American markets. On the boat going down the west coast there were ten mining engineers of the Guggenheim Syndicate going to develop the largest copper mine in the world. Five American automobile men were taking their machines to open a transportation line in the mountains of Bolivia. The magazines and book reviews are full of Latin America, giving eloquent testimony of the universal interest felt in her affairs.

Only the Church of Jesus Christ has so far refused to join in this great world movement. When one visits the Panama Canal, the mighty work which Ambassador Bryce calls the greatest liberty man ever took with nature, and sees the remarkable completeness of that undertaking where our government has spent $400,000,000 to carry out the dream of the ages and unite the world's two greatest oceans, he comes away a living, breathing Fourth of July. And yet, do you realize that in the whole republic of Panama, in spite of the fact that this little country owes its very existence
to Christian United States, there is but one missionary of the Cross speaking the language of the people? The whole northern half of Peru, a stretch of territory as large as the thirteen original colonies, has not one single voice raised in favor of our Christ. Argentina, pulsating with new commercial life, has only one ordained missionary to every one hundred seventy thousand people.

Here is the opportunity before us to do a great commensurate service for the Kingdom in leading the Christian forces of North America in a mighty move toward these needy lands of the South. As the story of the Men and Millions Movement was told in these countries, the Christian forces took new hope. They felt it meant that the Disciples of Christ were coming to their aid in a commensurate way. We must not disappoint them. "Father, the hour hath come."

The beginning of our interest in these lands must be marked by a sympathetic study of the life of the people. The hazy ideas that most people have concerning Latin America are confined to three things—revolutions, the abuses of the Roman church, and illiteracy. As to revolutions, far from being simply a question of the outs wanting in, they usually involve matters of real principle and mean the advancement of the country. The revolution in Mexico was a most justifiable uprising against the abuses of the land barons and the priests. If Christian America sends immediately a sufficient reinforcement of missionaries, we may
expect an era of progress in Mexico that will astound the world. In such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, revolutions are already a thing of the past, and they only need the help of Jesus Christ to make their progress sure.

The abuses of the Roman church in these countries have been as strongly denounced by Roman Catholics of North America as Protestants ever dared do. The immorality of the priesthood is unbelievable. Stopping at the best hotel in Pueblo, Mexico, I found that next to my room was a priest with his concubine. They ate in the public dining room together, and on Sunday morning he left her to say mass at the finest cathedral on the American Continent. The last time I visited the church at Las Esperanzas I found the woman who lived with the parish priest on the pretext of being his aunt had to take refuge with the neighbors because he had beaten her in a drunken brawl. Over the door of the church next to the National University in Cuzco, the ancient capital of the Inca Empire, is written “Come unto the Holy Virgin all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and she will give you rest.” Walking through beautiful Santa Lucia Park in Santiago de Chile, one passes the spot formerly used as a dumping ground and burial place for Protestants outlawed from the cemeteries. When the place was cleared for a park, a kind friend placed a marble slab at this point which reads: “To the memory of those who are exiled from heaven
and earth." One sees even today in a historic old building at Lima, Peru, the instruments of torture used by the Inquisition which put scores to death as heretics. And yet, let me say very positively that I do not conceive our work in these lands to be the negative kind of opposing the Catholic church. Her own abuses are reacting upon her and bringing about her defeat.

In twenty-two thousand miles of travel, conversing with men of all classes, from University professors to hotel porters; on boats, on trains, in colleges, clubs, stores and hotels, I did not speak with one single man who defended the Catholic church. In Mexico the whole country is in revolt against that church. The Governor of Nuevo Leon has recently decreed the abolition of the confession in all churches in his state. General Villa has made the most scathing attack on the priests as oppressors of the people, and sent many hundreds from the territory under his control. In Piedras Negras a mob entered the church, seized the confessional box and took it to the plaza eight blocks away and burned it. In the great procession of welcome in honor of General Carranza, on his entry into Mexico City, banners were carried which read: "The Revolution will not treat with the Church." "The priests must go." In Santiago de Chile is shown the mutilated image of what was formerly one of the most sacred possessions of the Catholic church, standing opposite the House of Congress. A few months ago the students
of the university, joined by a large number of prominent young business men, organized a demonstration against the Papal Nuncio. This mutilated image is only one of the results of this infuriated mob. The spectacle of the most cultured young men of a great capital marching through the streets, night after night, mocking, deriding, insulting the state church, shows its absolute lack of spiritual influence on the educated men of the nation.

Worse conditions still exist in Buenos Aires, where, out of a population of a million and a half, it is estimated that there is hardly an average of two hundred men in the Roman churches Sunday mornings.

In Uruguay the government is in an open fight with the church, and openly humiliates its representatives on every possible occasion.

This revolt against the old religion brings a mighty challenge to evangelical Christianity. "Father, the hour hath come."

Illiteracy is the third thing most often mentioned in the discussion of Latin America. It is appalling. In such countries as Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, where the Indian population is large, more than three-fourths of the people cannot read and write. The government school systems are entirely inadequate for the dissipation of this awful ignorance. I can hear, even tonight, the wail of an old man on whom I had called to sell a Bible. It was in a very fanatical town. In hardly one house in a dozen was anyone found who could read. Two old men in a straw hut
begged me to read something to them from this book I claimed to be so wonderful. As I read that marvelous third chapter of John, they listened with bated breath. Every word seemed to bring new life to their starving souls. With an awful wail one said: "Oh, Senor, Senor, you can read; you can understand, but what is to become of us poor people who have no one to tell us what God says to us. Oh, Senor, you who are wise, tell us what will become of us? Where will we go?" You and I must answer that question—Where shall these benighted creatures go?

And yet, friends—and now I am going to make a statement that may surprise you—even here I do not find the greatest call, the supreme need of Latin America. These ignorant classes are not the ones that are determining the destinies of these nations. Though so tremendous in number, they are negligible in forming the political, social, educational and international policies. We must wait for a long time, indeed, to influence these policies, if we delay until we have educated and converted these seventy-five to eighty-five per cent, who constitute the lower classes.

If we are to convert Latin America, we must convert her leaders. We can never get away from the appeal of the three-fourths who have nothing but drudgery, ignorance, and superstition in their lives. But what about the one-fifth who can read and write, those who are the lawyers, physicians, the government officials, the merchants, the bankers, the
school teachers, those who are shaping the destinies of these growing, plastic nations? Is our religion incapable of convincing and converting those who have swung from religious fanaticism to French agnosticism? As all the way from the Rio Grande to the equator and down to the Straits of Magellan one meets this class, so brilliant in mental attainments, and yet so full of black pessimism and fatalistic philosophy, his heart goes out to these people for they are as sheep without a shepherd. Theirs is the appeal I bring to you. Think not of weak nations, tossed with revolution. Forget, if you can, the heart-rending wail of ignorance and superstition. But remember the awful abyss of spiritual darkness into which the leaders of these nations are plunging. Let the Disciples of Christ begin a sacred ministry in this great neglected field. This work will take prepared men, good material equipment, and much patience. But winning the educated classes means the winning of the whole nation.

For the present, these men have abandoned all religion. When you talk with those who are leaders in social reform and philanthropy, you naturally expect them to be interested in religion. But they will tell you that it is the one thing in which they have no interest. They say: "Religion has been the thing that has fostered political intrigue and kept our people in ignorance and poverty since the beginning of of our history. Many things we may need, but in the name of progress, deliver us from relig-
ion.” In the capital city of Paraguay, where, by the way, the only representatives of evangelical Christianity are two Salvation Army officers, posters are fixed on the street corners which read, *Abajo con la religion* (down with religion). While listening to encouraging reports in a great conference of Christian workers in the city of Montevideo, a leading editorial appeared in the government daily headed *Bancarota de la religion* (bankruptcy of religion), showing how science had taken its place.

The well-known author, Dr. Nin Frias, a loyal Christian, told me with trembling emotion that in the diplomatic service he was not allowed to attend either Protestant or Catholic church, and that the Uruguayan Government had even requested him to desist from all writing of a religious character.

In Argentina religion is made light of on every hand. The advertisement of a certain cigarette, that appeared in a daily paper on Good Friday, consisted of a picture of Christ, and in the background two of the apostles smoking. One of these was Judas who was represented as saying, “If we had had this brand in our time, I would not have betrayed Him.” An Argentina student who came to the United States to attend one of our universities wrote back home: “It is my firm and deliberate belief that religion is based on ignorance and superstition, and I have taken a solemn vow that I will do what I can in my short life to smash religion.”
These are the kind of men who are leading Latin America today, and the kind of men that we must win. We must first learn to sympathize with them by studying the things in their history that have brought them to this position and then lead them to the saving knowledge of our Christ. No greater challenge has ever been presented to any person. What shall our answer be? Let it not be given hastily or flippantly, but after long facing of the facts and much prayer to Him who must ever be our strength in a task that is too great for human strength.

Some of the strongest appeals come from Young Men's Christian Association leaders who have been working with university students and others till they have them awakened to their spiritual needs. But there is no church to which they can take them where they will get the kind of presentation of our religion that is needed in this crucial stage of their development. It is easily seen that to take them to the average Protestant church in these countries, composed of unlettered people, to listen to sermons prepared for these childish minds, presents grave difficulties. These men of Latin culture value much more than the average Anglo-Saxon, refined manners, artistic taste, philosophic discussion, poetic literature, and richness of rhetorical figure. The need is for specially trained men who will organize churches and give themselves to the ministry of just this class.

Dr. Sautter, Secretary of the World's Alli-
ance, says that South America’s greatest need is the creation in the people of a desire for God. This can be done, he insists, not so much by an appeal to the Bible, for it has little authority with them, but by living with them, knowing their attitude, and appealing to them from their own point of view. Where there is such a large per cent. of uneducated, the upper class has much greater power than in countries where nearly every one thinks for himself. This is seen in the government of these countries, which is so absolute because most of the people are incapable of forming opinions. The winning of the educated classes, then, is of primary importance. “To do this,” continues Dr. Sautter, “the very best men are needed.” Mr. Mott told me that he thought we ought to send higher-trained men to South America than even to China. The man who has just ordinary success at home should not be sent to Latin America.

A member of the Christian church, in his thirteen years’ work as Young Men’s Christian Association Secretary at Pernambuco, has studied longer this particular problem than has any other man in South America. Here are some of his burning words: “Time fails me to tell of the heart-breaking need of this student class. Certainly no one could exaggerate its importance. As we think of its tremendous influence, so insignificant in numbers, but so tremendously powerful in governmental, social, literary, and professional life, one wonders if it would not be better for the church to
direct its whole attention to these men, knowing that in the end it will be they who will control and give character to these plastic republics. I pray that you may be able to put it on the hearts of your great people to set apart some of their choicest pastors as apostles to the South American literati.”

In the few exceptional places where this field has been entered the results have been surprising. The Instituto Ingles of Santiago is filled with the sons of the most prominent families of Chile. They go out—if not always members of the Protestant church—acquainted with the Bible, friends of the Gospel, and imbued with the moral principles of Christ. They are picked out in public places as being different from other young men. McKenzie College in Brazil is recognized by the Government as being superior to other schools in the formation of character. It has every consideration possible. Started as a mission school, it is now self-supporting, paying from its income on the field the salaries of more than sixty instructors. When the late president, Dr. Lane, died, he had the largest funeral ever held in the city of San Paulo. The state senate and house adjourned, after passing suitable resolutions. More than a thousand floral tributes were laid on his grave. When Secretary Ewald, of the University Young Men's Christian Association in Buenos Aires, announced his leaving for another work, the University authorities offered to create a new position on the faculty for him, as moral adviser to the
students, with perfect liberty to teach what he thought best for the young men. The most influential citizen in Brazil today has just accepted a place on the Board of Directors of the South American Alliance of the Young Men's Christian Association. The President of Granbury College, a Methodist institution, with sixty of his students, traveled in special cars last summer at the expense of the Brazilian Government, to visit state educational institutions in Rio de Janeiro and San Paulo. Dr. Browning, director of the Instituto Ingles, was offered recently, by the President of Bolivia, the superintendency of all the government schools in that republic.

Something of an experiment has been carried out in the People's Institute of Piedras Negras, Mexico. We are just now beginning to realize the wide influence the Institute has had in the remarkable struggle for Democracy in Mexico. The work was organized for the purpose of seeking a point of contact with the higher classes, whom we could never get to our religious meetings. The methods used were those which would interpret Christ's message as a force to uplift the community and national life, rather than direct pressure on individuals to join the church. The Institute soon became the center of the social and educational life of the city. The members of the debating club became leaders in the new political life of the district, and the pupils of our night classes won continued promotion in the commercial world. The Government was at-
tracted to this work and, without solicitation, gave a subsidy of $100 a month. Today we find a large number of the Government officials of the new regime are men who have in different ways been connected with the Institute, and best of all, have thus become acquainted with the Gospel and favorable to its propagation. Don Venustiano Carranza made his first speech as Governor of the State of Coahuila, in the People's Institute. Sitting in the private apartments of the Director, he said that twenty-five such institutions scattered over the country would soon banish all revolution from Mexico. Many men prominent in the affairs of Mexico have seen the work of the institute and have declared their willingness to do all in their power to help spread the work. There are probably one hundred pupils of our night classes and members of our debating club who have enlisted in the Constitutional Army. Many of our boys have been promoted for their bravery, becoming lieutenants, captains and majors. Thank God some of them gave their lives to Christ before going to the front. Thus, everywhere in Mexico today we find friends who are anxious to help us in the propagation of the Gospel.

There is great need in the city of Buenos Aires for institutional work of the kind we have tried out in Mexico. You have heard of the wonders of Buenos Aires, but the half has not been told. In its municipal improvements, its artistic emphasis, its fine streets, its beautiful parks, its display of fash-
ion, it is not excelled by any city on the globe. What Paris is to Europe, and New York is to North America, Buenos Aires is to South America. And yet no capital of the whole world, including those of India, China and Japan, is so neglected religiously as is Buenos Aires. Altogether, in this city of a million and a half population, there are less than one hundred churches, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Mohammedan. There are only fourteen evangelical churches, one to every one hundred twenty thousand people, none of which touch vitally the pulsating life of that great city. A month's careful investigation and consultation with Christian forces indicated clearly that the need could best be met by the establishment of a great social and educational center, where the religiously indifferent people could be brought to Christ by first meeting them on the basis of their own recognized needs.

This is peculiarly an American task. When the long-standing boundary question between Argentina and Chile was finally settled by arbitration instead of war, it was decided to erect the now famous monument, "The Christ of the Andes," on the border line of the two countries, as a testimony of the triumph of peace. The question arose as to which way it should face. Neither nation would agree to have its back turned toward them. Neither would it do to let it face the cold bleak regions of the Antarctic. So they turned its face North. And there it stands in its silent solitude, on
the roof of the continent, the hand of the Christ outstretched toward our own country, as though appealing to us to come and help the Prince of Peace establish his reign in these benighted lands.

The erection of this Institution in Buenos Aires is the one big thing we must do to announce our entrance into this great world movement toward Latin America, and our permanent interest in her salvation. The man who is big enough to lead this work, and another, or others, who are able to finance it must be found. "Father, the hour hath come. Thou hast glorified thy son. Thy son will glorify Thee."