

CELAM V

Topic: CELAM V: Pastoral Implications for the Global Church
Convener: Robert S. Pelton, University of Notre Dame
Moderator: Margaret Pfeil, University of Notre Dame
Panelists: Carlos Quintana, Secretariat for Latin America
of the United States Bishops
Robert S. Pelton, University of Notre Dame
Virgilio Elizondo, University of Notre Dame
Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini, Diocese of San Marcos, Guatemala

Carlos Quintana, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Latin America of the United States Bishops, presented his paper entitled "Methodology in the Preparation for CELAM's Fifth Conference." He explained that CELAM is a gathering of 22 episcopal conferences in Latin America for mutual discernment and dialogue on the signs of the times and the pastoral priorities that are needed in Latin America. Each conference is planned as a continuation of previous conferences. The theme of CELAM V, "Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that Our People in Him will have Life: 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life' (Jn 14:6)" was announced by Pope Benedict XVI on July 7, 2005. The pope chose the expression "in Him" and the scriptural text, as well as Aparecida Shrine as the conference site. CELAM V met from May 13-31, 2007. Cardinal Re, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America insisted on having a small number of participants: one representative for every eight bishops in each bishops' conference. That formula produced 160 bishops with a right to vote. An additional ten nonvoting bishops were added, together with 75 invitees from the ranks of the clergy, laity, members of consecrated life movements, representatives from aid offices, experts, and observers.

Robert Pelton spoke the topic of "CELAM V and Basic Ecclesial Communities." He notes that at CELAM V, there was a return to the earlier inductive methodology of CELAM II and CELAM III, with a stronger emphasis upon the role of Basic Ecclesial Communities. After three days of intensive discussion, the delegates concluded that the Basic Ecclesial Communities are doing quite well despite external handicaps in some dioceses. They found that these communities are sincerely striving to meet the call of Vatican II. The Final Document of CELAM V reiterates the important roles that Basic Ecclesial Communities play in the life of the Church, as the following quotes highlight: "The communitarian dimension is intrinsic to the mystery and reality of the Church, which is called to reflect the Holy Trinity" (n. 289), "For the new evangelization ... the Basic Ecclesial Communities have a privileged place ..." (n. 290), and "These communities need a solid spirituality based upon the word of God while remaining in full communion with the mission of the local Church" (n. 291).

Virgilio Elizondo's paper, "CELAM V and Early Implications for the Church of the United States" highlights the importance from the conference's Final Document of the issues of undocumented aliens, inculturation, mestizaje, and popular piety. He also discussed the implications of themes discussed in the Final Document,

including Christian identity, evangelization, family ministry, indigenous people, Mary, migrants, movements, option for the poor, scriptures, and youth ministry.

In his presentation, "CELAM V and its Pastoral Implications for the Universal Church," Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini shared three challenges that related to the mission of the Church: (i) the response of the Church to the profound cultural change of globalization, especially from the economic point of view, (ii) the environmental challenges in the present situation, and (iii) the increasing assertiveness on the indigenous and Afro-American peoples. Bishop Ramazzini explored the challenges and implications of unrestrained globalization and the concentration of economic power and wealth in the hands of a small elite, leading to much social and economic inequities. In his opinion, the growing assertiveness of indigenous people and Afro-Americans, the problems of landless peasants, together with the challenges posed by ecological and environmental damages are important issues that the Conference sought to address. He highlights concrete steps in CELAM V's Final Document on the issue of indigenous people: (i) accompanying the indigenous in strengthening their identity, (ii) defending their lands, (iii) promoting bilingual and intercultural education and defense of their rights, (iv) creating an awareness about the indigenous people in society, (v) speaking out strongly against those who oppose these ideals, and (vi) continuing the work of evangelizing the indigenous.

ROBERT S. PELTON
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana