

SCP 2306



Seventy-fifth  
Anniversary  
Series

**Latin-America**

# THE CASE FOR MISSIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

ROBERT E. SPEER

Our concern is with Latin America. Let us ask and answer four questions. (1) Are our missions in Latin American lands legitimate and necessary? (2) If so, can they be conducted without encountering the antagonism of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America and in the United States? (3) If not, what course are we to pursue? (4) If we are to go forward with the missions how are we to get for them that interest and support at home to which they are entitled, not less than our missions in Asia and Africa?

## I.

*Are our missions in Latin American lands legitimate and necessary?* We answer *yes*, and for the following reasons:

(1) The moral condition of the South American countries warrants and demands the presence of those forms of evangelical religion which will war against sin and bring men the power of righteous life.

According to the census of Brazil in 1890, 2,603,489 or between one-fifth and one-sixth of the population are returned as illegitimate. In Ecuador Mr. Curtis says that more than one-half of the population are of illegitimate birth. At one time in Paraguay, after the long wars, it was estimated that the percentage of illegitimate births was over 90 per cent. In Venezuela, according to the official statistics for 1906, there were that year 47,606 illegitimate births, or 68.8 per cent. In Chile the general percentage is 33 per cent. and the

highest in any department a little over 66 per cent. In England the percentage is 6 per cent., and in France and Belgium 7 per cent. In Bolivia, on four random pages of the Military Register of the Republic, I counted 158 names; of these names 97 are stated to be legitimate and 61, or 38.6 per cent., illegitimate. There is no shame about the matter in this Register. The names of father and mother and their occupations are given in the case of each illegitimate born, as well as in the case of the legitimate. In Uruguay in 1906, 27½ per cent. of the births were illegitimate. In South America, as a whole, it is safe to say that from one-fourth to one-half of the population is illegitimate. "Male chastity," says Mr. Hale, now connected, I believe, with the Bureau of American Republics, in his very temperate and fair-minded book, "The South Americans," "Male chastity is practically unknown."

It is the right and duty of evangelical Christianity to go in with morally cleansing power upon this moral need.

(2) The Protestant missionary enterprise with its stimulus to education and its appeal to the rational nature of man is required by the intellectual needs of South America.

There is a brilliant upper class, many of whom have been educated abroad, but the continent may justly be called an illiterate continent. The educational systems are worthy of no small praise, but they want conscience, adaptation, morality, and especially is there need of the solid education of the masses of the people. In 1901, 70 per cent. of the conscripts for the Chilean army could neither read nor write. The proportion of illiteracy in the recruits for the German army is .04 per cent. In Brazil, the census of 1890 returned 12,213,346 of the population, or approximately 85 per cent., as illiterate. In Chile, 1,951,061 were returned in 1907 as illiterate, or approximately 60 per cent. These two countries would dispute with Argentine the



Market Scene in Cartagena

first place in educational enterprise. And in Argentine 50.5 per cent. of the population over six years of age and in Bolivia nearly 80 per cent. of the population over seven years of age are illiterate.

Agencies which will bring home to these nations the duty of educating all the people and of doing it with sincere thoroughness, of setting right standards, and of relating religion rightly to education, are justified in extending their help to South America.

(3) Protestant missions are justified in South America in order to give the Bible to the people.

There are Roman Catholic translations of the Bible both in Spanish and in Portuguese, but the Roman Church has discouraged or forbidden their use. Again and again priests have burned the Bibles sold by colporteurs or missionaries even when they were the Roman Catholic versions. Again and again they have denounced the missionaries for circulating the Scriptures and have driven them out of villages where they were so employed, and have even secured their arrest. It is safe to say that not one person out of a thousand in South America would ever have seen a Bible but for the Protestant missionary movement. The priests themselves are ignorant of it. A few ecclesiastics, like the one Roman Catholic cardinal in South America who was formerly the Archbishop of Brazil, have written approvingly of the circulation of the Bible in Portuguese, but nothing has been done by his Church to promote the circulation in Spanish, which is the language of two-thirds of South America. The Archbishop of Bogota requires all who have Bibles in their possession to deliver them up to their priests. Only a few months ago, the priest in the church on the main plaza in Chillan, where the great markets are held, boasted openly in church of having burned seven Bibles.

The circulation of the Bible in South America is still dependent upon the Bible

Societies and the Protestant missionaries. If it were not for them the people of South America would to-day be without the Bible. Is it wrong to give it to them? Must we justify a movement without which 40,000,000 people would be ignorant of the Bible?

(4) Protestant missions are justified and demanded in South America by the character of the Roman Catholic priesthood.

I fought as long as possible against accepting the opinion universally held throughout South America regarding the priests. Ever since reading as a boy the "Life of Charles Kingsley," the enforced celibacy of the priesthood had seemed to me a monstrous and wicked theory, but I had believed that the men who took that vow were true to it, and that while the Church lost by it irreparably and infinitely more than she gained, she did gain nevertheless a pure and devoted, even if a narrow and impoverished, service. But the deadly evidence spread out all over South America, confronting one in every district to which he goes, evidence legally convincing, morally sickening, proves that, whatever may be the case in other lands, in South America the stream of the Church is polluted at its fountains.

(5) Protestant missions in South America are justified because the Roman Catholic Church has not given the people Christianity.

There are surely some who find peace and comfort and some who see Christ through all that hides Him and misrepresents Him, but the testimony of the most temperate and open-minded of the men and women who were once themselves earnest Roman Catholics is that there are few whom they know in the Roman Catholic Church who know the facts of Christ's life and fewer still who know Christ. The crucifixes, of which South America is full, inadequately represent the Gospel. They show a dead man, not a living Saviour. We did not see in all the churches we visited a single symbol or suggestion of the resurrection or the ascension. There were hundreds



Ox-cart in Chile street

of paintings of saints and of the Holy Family and of Mary, but not one of the supreme event in Christianity. And even the dead Christ is the subordinate figure. The central place is Mary's. Often she is shown holding a small lacerated dead figure in her lap, and often she is the only person represented at all. In the great La Merced church in Lima, over the whole chancel is the motto: "Gloria a Maria." In the oldest church in Barranquilla, there was no figure of Christ at all in the altar equipment, but Mary without the infant in the centre, two other figures on either side, and over all "Gloria a Maria." In the wall of the ancient Jesuit Church in Cuzco, known as the Church of the Campania, are cut the words, "Come unto Mary all ye who are burdened and weary with your sins and she will give you rest." They are many, I am sure, who learn to love and reverence the name of Christ, but Christ as a living moral and spiritual power the South American religion does not proclaim.

(6) Protestant missions are justified in South America because the Roman Catholic Church is at the same time so strong and so weak there.

The priesthood has a powerful hold upon the superstition of the people. As we rode along one day in Brazil in a drizzling rain with bare heads and rubber ponchos, an old woman came running solicitously from her hovel, mistaking us for priests and crying, "O most powerful God, where is your hat?" To the people the priest stands in the place of God, and even where his own life is vile the people distinguish between his function as priest in which he stands as God before the altar, and his life as man in which he falls into the frailties of the flesh. Not only is the priesthood the most influential body in South America, but the Church has a hold upon politics and family life and society which is paralyzing. Its evil is not weak and harmless but pervasive and deadly, and the Chris-



tian Church is called by the most mandatory sanctions to deal with the situation. But on the other hand the Roman Catholic Church does not have a fraction of the strength and power in South America which we had supposed it had, and the inefficiency of its work is pitiful. With enormous resources, with all the lines of power in its hands, it has steadily lost ground. The churches, save on festivals, are mostly ill-attended. The priests are derided and reviled. The leading newspaper in Chile, which bitterly attacked some statements which I made upon returning about the character of the priests, a few weeks later printed a denunciation of the priests in northern Chile more sweeping than anything I had said. The comic papers gibe at them. This spectacle of a continent of men losing all respect for religion and leaving it to women and to priests, whose moral character they despise and whose religious character they deride, is a grave and distressing spectacle. There is no sadder sight to be found in the whole world.

The religious teachers of South America have made the men of the continent irreligious. They have discovered that what was taught them is false and with that discovery they have flung away the faith which they now call superstition. One cannot but feel toward them as the author of "Ecce Homo" felt toward the Pharisees. "It would be better that the Jews should have no teachers of wisdom at all than that they should have teachers who should give them folly under the name of wisdom. Better that in the routine of a laborious life they should hear of wisdom as a thing more costly than pearls but beyond their reach, than that it should seem to be brought within their reach and they should discover it to be paste . . . If a divine revelation be the greatest of blessings, then the imposture that counterfeits it must be the greatest of all evils." It is not easy to understand the morality of the view which would deliver the whole situation in South America to the



Cross supposed to possess healing powers, San Paulo, Brazil. The cross is covered with representations of things connected with Christ's betrayal and crucifixion: the cock that crowed, the nails, the spears, etc.

agency which has created it, an agency whose influence unless reformed from without is waning for everything but evil.

(7) The Roman Catholic Church in South America needs the Protestant missionary movement.

There is good in that Church in South America. There are good men and women in it. In spite of the falsehoods and vicious elements in it, there is truth also. That the good in it may triumph over the evil, there is need of external stimulus and purification.

The presence of Protestant missions alone will shame the Church into a self-cleansing and introduce the forces, or support whatever inner forces there may already be, which may correct and vivify it. There are some who think the South American religious system is simply to be swept away, that it cannot be reformed, but there is another view open to us and that is that against whatever odds and with whatever deep cutting excisions the good may be strengthened and enabled to eliminate the evil. Already Protestant missions have wrought great changes. They are altering, in Chile and Brazil at least, the ostensible attitude of the Roman Catholic Church toward the Bible. They have been among the influences which have secured a very fair text book of Sacred History in the public schools in Chile. They have elevated the standard of education in the schools conducted by the Roman Catholic Church and have greatly stimulated that Church in its establishment of schools. "His praiseworthy efforts," says the ex-Minister of Justice and Public Instruction in the Argentine, Dr. Federico Pinedo, of Mr. Morris, the founder of the Argentine Evangelical Schools, "have had the virtue of awakening the Catholics, who not to be left behind, have also founded numerous schools, so that in every way the most needy children are being benefited." They have steadily widened the sphere of freedom and hedged in the Church more and more to a true Church ideal. To restrain or abate the forces which have done all this is not an act of true friendship toward the Roman Catholic Church. It is a betrayal of her best interests and her best men and women who need all the help that can be sent from without to cleanse the South American soul and to purge its chief institution.

(8) And lastly, though it seems to me that I have only begun the argument, evangelical Christianity is warranted in going to South America because it alone can meet the needs of the Latin American nations.

Many leading men in South America realize this. Again and again South American statesmen or governments have sought from Protestant lands what they recognized could come alone from them. The Argentine Government gave \$1,000 gold toward the present building of the American Church in Buenos Ayres. When Sarmiento became president of Argentina he commissioned Dr. Goodfellow, a missionary returning to the United States, to send out a number of educated women to open Normal Schools. Evangelical Christianity is required to meet the intellectual, moral and social needs of South America as well as its religious necessities. Fundamentally, it is demanded by their moral necessities. The South American Church system has not met these. It has produced them. It has resulted in stagnant populations, some of which have diminished in numbers. It has inspired no moral reform. It has created no solid basis of commercial and political character. It has done nothing to uplift the Indians. Its great wealth has been employed neither in education nor in works of charity. Its philanthropies are insignificant in comparison with those of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. The power which Protestant missions alone can introduce is needed to awaken a benevolent love of the unfortunate and the needy, and to make the character without which free institutions cannot endure and the resources of nations must lie undeveloped.

In the discussion over the religious rights of foreigners in the Argentine, Alberdi, a publicist and an advocate of freedom, resisted the idea of excluding this power from his country. "Spanish America," he wrote, "reduced to Catholicism, with the exclusion of any other cult, represents a solitary and silent convent of monks. The dilemma is fatal—either Catholics and unpopulated, or populated and prosperous and tolerant in the matter of religion. To invite the Anglo-Saxon race and the people of Germany, Sweden and Switzerland and deny them the exercise of their wor-



Procession of Corpus Christi, Bogota, Colombia.

ship is to offer them a sham hospitality and to exhibit a false liberalism. To exclude the dissenting cults from South America is to exclude the English, the German, the Irish and the North American, who are not Catholics, that is to say, the inhabitants whom this continent most needs. To bring them without their cult is to bring them without the agent that makes them what they are, and to compel them to live without religion and to become atheists."

The power which gave these people what good they have and which sustains the moral element in their national character is the power which South America needs. The Protestant mission is the main channel through which it is to be given. Let me put this last consideration in the words of the Anglican Bishop of Argentina, whose seat is in Buenos Ayres and whose work lays on him the burden of South America's real need. "The needs of South America," says he. "How great and pathetic they are! The world's empty continent—the hope of the future—the home to be of millions of Europeans, who are already beginning to flow there in a steady stream—it is without true religion, and does not realize its danger! The form of the faith prevalent is the weakest and most corrupt known, and it is impossible to believe that the rising young nationalities of the continent can long be content with it. Indeed they are not content with it now. Yet a faith they must have. What hope is there for Argentine, for example, that Spanish-speaking United States of the future, without true religion? Of what use are vast material resources, rapid development, wealth, knowledge, power, without that? Surely God has a place in the world for these brilliant Southern races. They are still full of vitality. We have no right to speak of them as effete and played out, especially when we know the marvelous recuperative power of the human race. Well, where should this place of development be but in the free air and temperate climate and

wide spaces of the New World, far from the social tyrannies and religious superstitions which have hitherto retarded their proper growth? It is nothing less than axiomatic that South America needs true religion, if its future history is not to be a disappointment and its development a failure. . . .

“South America needs what Christian England, if the Church were but moved with more faith and love, could easily give—true religion, viz., Reformed Scriptural, Apostolic Christianity. Our own people need it, that they may be saved from only too possible degradation. The Spanish and Portuguese-speaking people need it, that they may develop into the strong free nations they desire to be. The aboriginal races of Indians need it, that they may be saved from extinction and find their place, too, in the kingdom of God.”

If missionary work is not warranted and demanded in conditions like these, where is it legitimate?

## II.

But if our missions in Latin America are justified and necessary, *can they be conducted without encountering the antagonism of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America and in the United States?*

Well, as a matter of fact, they do not escape and never have escaped this antagonism, no matter what the care and spirit with which they have been conducted. I could quote criticisms by Roman Catholics of the American Episcopal Missions in Brazil and the Philippines, although in the latter the Mission has sought carefully to protect itself from the suspicion of proselytizing among the Roman Catholic Filipinos. And you all know how the Protestant missions in all parts of Latin America have been assailed by the Roman Church and how the organs of the Church in the United States have dealt with any who have dared to state the facts regard-



Church and Congregation at Mandary, Parana, Brazil.



ing Latin American conditions. Now is all this inevitable?

History helps us to answer this question. There was a time when in the Philippines and in all Latin America there was no religious liberty, no free speech, no public education, no civil marriage, no burial rites or interment in a cemetery for a Protestant, no valid baptism for Protestant children and consequently in some lands no right of inheritance. These intolerable conditions have passed away. Did they pass away without the antagonism of the Roman Catholic Church? It fought every one of these reforms. It is fighting some of them still. Not one advance has been made toward free institutions and free education and freedom of opinion and speech and religion in Latin America without encountering the relentless opposition of the Roman organization. In 1852, the Pope denounced the movement in New Granada toward religious liberty, which decreed the expulsion of the Jesuits, a curtailment of Church revenues, free education, freedom of the press and freedom of public and private worship. These "nefarious decrees," the Pope condemned and declared to be "null and void." In October, 1864, Pius IX wrote to Maximilian, "Your majesty is well aware that in order effectively to repair the evil occasioned by the revolution and to bring back as soon as possible happy days for the Church, the Catholic religion must above all things continue to be the glory and mainstay of the Mexican nation to the exclusion of every other dissenting worship; that the bishops must be perfectly free in the exercise of their pastoral ministry; that the religious orders should be re-established or reorganized; that no person may obtain the faculty of teaching false and subversive tenets; that instruction, whether public or private, should be directed and watched over by the ecclesiastical authority, and that in short the chains may be broken which up to the present time have held the Church in a state of self-dependence and subject to the

arbitrary rule of civil government." Now if every step thus far toward the emancipation and enlightenment of South America has been antagonized by the Roman Catholic Church, we must not be surprised or intimidated if we continue to meet with opposition.

For let us candidly and fearlessly face the real facts. It is very well to seek to justify some of our work in South America by pointing out the atheism and unbelief which needs to be dealt with and also the great aboriginal population which is to be reached, but neither of these considerations will save us from the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, for, as the recent investigations of the delegates from the English Baptist Church have shown and as all who have looked into the subject know, the work of the Roman Catholic Church in South America claims almost all the accessible Indian population, so that our work among them is resented by the Roman Church as much as work for the rest of the population, and, curious as the fact may appear, the atheism and unbelief and immorality of South America are nominally Roman Catholic. In no South American country have the men of the land more completely thrown off religion than in the Argentine, and yet nominally these men are Roman Catholics and the constitution of the Argentine requires that the President of the Republic shall be a Roman Catholic. I believe there is the same requirement under similar conditions in Uruguay. In Chile, where a third of the births are illegitimate and 60 per cent. of the population is illiterate, the government census gives 98 per cent. of the population as Roman Catholics, while in Brazil, where the government census of 1890 gave a percentage of illegitimacy of 18 per cent. and of illiteracy of 80 per cent., the official returns gave 98 per cent. of the people as Roman Catholics. In other words, by the declaration of the official census in Brazil and Chile, practically all the illegitimacy and illiteracy is Roman Catholic illegitimacy and illiteracy. You cannot do anything for



Going from Bahia to San Felix and Cachoeira.

the people of Brazil or Chile that is not on the face of it work for Roman Catholics. We do not believe that that fact puts them beyond the pale of enlightenment and makes any effort to relieve them unwarrantable, but the simple fact cannot be escaped that whatever missions are operated in these lands, or indeed in any Latin American lands, are operated among nominal Roman Catholics; for the Roman Catholic Church claims them all as its own.

And the situation is not relieved by that view of our mission work in these lands which would acquit it of all responsibility for establishing Evangelical churches and would be satisfied to conduct it simply as a moral and educational influence, seeking by its example to awaken the Roman Catholic Church to better standards and a purer life. The Roman Catholic Church approves of such Protestant missions no more than the other kind. It has opposed such work as earnestly as it has fought evangelistic effort. In the Argentine House of Deputies it assailed, through one of its bishops, the remarkable schools of Mr. Morris in Buenos Ayres, and in Brazil American Catholics have lamented the work even of Protestant institutions which, although in this they were in error, they declared had no evangelistic purpose or influence.

As a matter of fact our missions are welcomed in every Latin American land, but not by the Roman Catholic Church. Both in South America and here that Church steadfastly resents and opposes every such effort. We may lament this. We may believe, as I believe, that it is the height of folly for the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and Canada to seek to deny or cloak the indisputable facts regarding Latin America. But the cold truth is that we cannot carry on any Protestant work of any sort whatever in Latin America without encountering the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church both there and here.

### III.

If, then, this opposition is unavoidable, *what course are we to pursue?*

(1) We are to do our duty. It is our duty to minister to human need. We are to maintain our missions in Latin America and to seek to evangelize the people of Latin America with the Christian Gospel just as we seek to evangelize the Japanese Buddhist sects whose doctrines and rites are scarcely less Christian than those of many of the Latin American peoples.

(2) We are to seek to build up Evangelical churches in Latin America and to receive into these churches converted men and women, whether these men and women have been nominal Roman Catholics and actual atheists and unbelievers, or whether they have been open repudiators of all religion, or whether, as will usually be the case, they are men and women who have sought for moral and spiritual satisfaction in the Roman Catholic Church as it is in South America and have been disappointed. Most of the earnest members of the Evangelical Churches in Latin America have been devout Roman Catholics who were discontented with their vain search for life and peace. If it is said that this is proselytism, my reply is that I abhor proselytism as much as any man when that proselytism is the effort to win a man from one form of Christian faith to another, but the Latin American form of Christianity is so inadequate and misrepresentative that to preach the truth to it is not proselytism, but the Christian duty of North American Christians both Protestant and Catholic.

(3) We are to pursue in all this work the most irenic course. We are not to attack the Roman Catholic Church. That is not good policy and it is not good principle, and it is to many of us practically impossible. We grew up here with many friends in the Roman Catholic Church and we have many friends



Gateway of old house at Arequipa.

in it now. We believe that here and even in Latin America it holds some great fundamental Christian truths. We respect the piety and consecration of many of its men and women. We are appalled at the mass of evil which has overcrusted it in Latin America, but even so we cannot wage a war against it. Our purpose and desire are to preach Christ and to set forth the positive truth in love. This course will result in the destruction of error. Even this course will be opposed by the Latin American Church, but nevertheless in spite of such opposition, in spite of the insults and slander by which all who try to show the actual conditions in Latin America will be assailed in the United States, we must not be provoked into unkindness or injustice toward that which is good and true in the Roman Catholic Church, both among its people and among its leaders.

(4) We must be patient and hopeful. If we have the truth it will prevail, and all the forces of human progress are with us. Indeed, there are some entirely too free and radical forces awaking within the Roman Catholic Church or among the Latin American people. We must beware of sympathy with anti-clerical movements which rest on principles which are anti-religious, and with tendencies of thought which not only destroy tradition but by the same token dissolve history. We have no easy path. The true path is never easy in the midst of conflicting extremes. To be a rank partisan is far simpler than to extricate truth from error in antagonistic views and to travel on even ways.

(5) We must recognize sympathetically the problem with which the Roman Catholic Church has to deal. It is stupendous. One's heart goes out to the earnest men who have to bear this burden. It remains to be seen whether the capacity of adjustment to new and unavoidable conditions is in the Church, or whether it is incapable of being reformed. There are many who assert that it is. We

venture to believe otherwise, regarding large sections of it at least, though in other large sections a work of destruction and regeneration must be done as radical almost as any needed in heathenism.

#### IV.

And now, lastly, if we are to go forward, in this spirit of good will and friendliness with undaunted determination; *how are we to get for these missions adequate interest and support at home?*

Those who are now interested in such missions are interested, as a rule, from ultra-Protestant and militant anti-Papan convictions, and their argument for missions in Latin America would involve as an inevitable corollary a great propaganda in the United States and Canada against the Roman Catholic Church. I do not believe we ought to take up the matter in this way. It is true that the Roman Catholic Church in the United States makes it very difficult to take it up in any other way. It insists that the Roman Catholic Church is one in all lands and in all ages, and that to state what we know to be the facts about Latin America is to libel and attack the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and Canada. This is a terrible responsibility to assume, and one longs for the day when the Roman Catholic Church in our land will be as bold as Cardinal Vaughan and Father Sherman and many another ecclesiastic has been, and denounce and renounce the evils and abuses which flourish under the name of the Roman Catholic Church in all Latin America. And we must anticipate this day and be wise enough and generous enough not to allow the American and Canadian Roman Catholics to shoulder the shame of Latin America in blind denial of indisputable facts.

Our propaganda must be carried on, I believe, on the basis of these facts, namely, the



conditions of need in Latin America which unanswerable evidence can establish.

(1) First of all we must set forth these conditions and prove them by evidence which cannot be gainsaid.

Whenever evidence creeps into our presentation which can be gainsaid or disputed, we are in danger of damaging the case which must be made. Such faulty evidence cannot invalidate the sound evidence, but it diverts attention and it compromises the argument. It is no easy matter to be faultless here when we review all the testimony which is current. But we must take pains to be absolutely accurate, and then we must speak out unflinchingly the facts which demand attention and which dare not be obscured.

(2) We must challenge the conscience of Great Britain and America specially.

*The South American Journal* states that Great Britain has £555,142,041 capital invested in South America, and that her dividends from this investment in 1909 were £25,437,030. That is more each month than the total expenditure on evangelical missions in South America in a hundred years. In the face of such a statement as I quoted at the outset from the Bishop of the Falkland Islands, can a nation conscientiously do such a thing as this, draw a stream of national wealth from these lands and contribute to them no moral or spiritual treasure, or next to none?

(3) We must temperately but firmly dispute the position that the whole Church is facing the whole world task or is entitled to claim the divine resources available for a world emprise alone, if it excludes from its view the need and appeal of Latin America.

Board of Foreign Missions  
of the  
Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.  
156 Fifth Ave., New York

Price, 2 cents

1865

Nov. 1, 1912

THE WILLIAM DARLING PRESS, NEW YORK