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## **MEDELLÍN: FERTILE SEEDS OF PASTORAL CONVERSION IN THE UNITED STATES**

*Medellín: sementes férteis da conversão pastoral nos Estados Unidos*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the way in which the event of Medellín as well as the document have played a significant part in the unfolding of pastoral and social ministries with and for Hispanic/Latinos in the United States over the past fifty years. The reception in the United States of Medellín in the wider context of the follow-up to the Second Vatican Council has been wide and deep in terms of several developments outlined here. Faith-based social ministries in Hispanic/Latino communities in the form of grass root community organizations in the tradition of Saul Alinsky found inspiration in Medellín's option for the poor and *pastoral de conjunto*. Many other examples of Medellín's impact are placed in the wider historical context of the past fifty years, the half century in which Hispanics/Latinos emerged as the majority of U.S. Catholics under the age of 35.

**KEYWORDS:** Pastoral Conversion. Historical Context. Encuentro Process, U.S. Hispanic Presence. Leadership.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo investiga a forma pela qual tanto o evento como o documento de Medellín tiveram papel significativo na evolução dos ministérios pastorais e sociais da população de origem latino-americana dos Estados Unidos nos últimos cinquenta anos. A recepção de Medellín nos Estados Unidos, dentro do contexto mais amplo que se seguiu ao Concílio Vaticano II, foi ampla e profunda, e é aqui delineada em seus muitos desdobramentos. Naquelas comunidades de origem latino-americana, na forma de organizações comunitárias de base conforme a tradição de Saul Alinsky, os ministérios sociais de cunho confessional foram influenciados pela opção pelos pobres e pela pastoral de conjunto lançadas por Medellín.

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Vários outros exemplos do impacto causado por Medellín são aqui situados no seu contexto histórico mais amplo da última metade de século, período no qual a população de origem latino-americana despontou como majoritária entre todos os católicos norte-americanos na faixa etária até 35 anos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Conversão pastoral. Contexto histórico. Processo *Encuentro*. Presença latino-americana. Liderança.

## *Introduction*

The election of Pope Francis on March 13, 2013 signaled the beginning of a new period of reform and renewal for worldwide Catholicism in continuity with the vision of the Second Vatican Council. With his call for “pastoral conversion” this pope “from the ends of the earth” has contributed to the ongoing reform with “new wine for new wineskins” taken from his own Latin American vineyard. By pastoral conversion is meant a tectonic shift of ecclesial mentality and tone, an ecclesiological and pastoral/theological change rooted in the approaches to evangelization taken by the Church in Latin America over the past fifty years as well as in certain features of the Holy Father’s Jesuit formation, especially the practice of discernment (DECK, 2016a; *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 25-33). This ethos of reform and renewal grounded in spirituality is particularly well-suited to the contemporary challenge of building bridges as the Church reaches out to the world and its peripheries in the pursuit of synodality, de-Westernization, and a more just socioeconomic and political order. The fiftieth anniversary of the Medellín Conference provides an opportunity to step back and assess at least one important source and milestone in the remarkable process that explains the originality and cogency of Pope Francis’s energetic and creative Petrine ministry. As Massimo Faggioli points out, the reception of Vatican II by the Church in Latin America was “the most robust and enthusiastic of any region of the world” (FAGGIOLI, 2012, p. 53-55). In connection with this, Medellín stands out as emblematic of this entire period and unquestionably sets the tone for fifty years of unprecedented development in the Church’s pastoral praxis throughout Latin America and now beyond as it penetrates the heart of global Catholicism (BUDDE, 1991, p. 1-10).

Here I wish to reflect on Medellín’s legacy from a particular angle, specifically from that of the Church in the United States. The 2016 visit of Pope Francis to that country and the canonization of Franciscan missionary and founder of California Junípero Serra highlighted the profound roots of U.S. Catholicism in the movement of Christianity north from Mexico and the Caribbean (DECK, 2012, p. 457-464; TUTINO, 2012, p.1-35). The joyful faces of millions of Hispanics/Latinos in all the events of the Pope’s

U.S. visit confirmed the fact that one out of every two U.S. Catholics is of Hispanic origin.<sup>1</sup> This remarkable development suggests the need to explore the sources of influence and inspiration behind the coming of age of Hispanic Catholicism in the “land of the free and the home of the brave,” as Pope Francis, citing its national anthem, referred to the United States. Medellín’s vision constitutes a seminal, early influence which has had an impact on generations of U.S. Church leaders – bishops, priests, women religious, and laity.<sup>2</sup>

Several of the points made in this article are developed further in a forthcoming volume to be published by Convivium Press. Tim Matovina (2018) provides a well-researched overview of how Medellín’s vision was taken up in various circumstances by leaders and organizations for half a century now. I will not repeat his findings or those of several other authors in this collection, but attempt to look at Medellín more broadly as an underlying and emblematic source that called forth an entire generation of Hispanic/Latino leaders and set in motion processes – particularly the five *encuentro* processes – which continue to inspire ecclesial developments in the United States. Indeed, one may argue that the legacy of Medellín globally and regionally in the U.S. is undergoing a remarkable renaissance in the age of Pope Francis’s “revolution of mercy.”

## *1 Setting the Stage*

The groundwork for Medellín’s impact on the U.S. Church was laid in the decades of the 1950s and 60s in the context of what Tom Quigley has called “the great North-South embrace.” The respective national bishops conferences of the U.S. and Latin America initiated an exchange of visits and contacts that began in November 1959 with a meeting of eighteen bishops (six from the U.S., six from Canada and six from Latin America) at Georgetown University. The meeting had been suggested by the Italian Archbishop Antonio Samoré of the Vatican Secretariat of State who had been papal nuncio in Colombia and had been involved in the inaugural activities of CELAM (QUIGLEY, 2009).<sup>3</sup> The urgency of calling this meet-

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article I will use the term Hispanic/Latino, Latino or Hispanic interchangeably as is the practice among many scholars in referring to people of Hispanic or Latin American origin in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> The reference to “land of the free and home of the brave”, taken from the U.S. national anthem, comes from Pope Francis’s address to the U.S. Congress on when he used the endearing phrase to refer to the nation he was visiting.

<sup>3</sup> It is somewhat ironic and shows how the Holy Spirit works in the Church that Archbishop Samoré who was said to be aligned with the archconservative Cardinal Ottaviani and who later served to retard the growth of liberation theology and base ecclesial communities under

ing derived especially from the success of Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba. Fidel's success put the spotlight on the challenge of socioeconomic and political injustice throughout the Americas and as well as the threat of international communism. How would the Church respond to this?

The Georgetown gathering set in motion a number of developments. The U.S. Bishops established the Latin American Bureau directed by Maryknoll Father John J. Considine. After that they established the Fund for Latin America which continues to operate to this day out of the offices of the U.S. Bishops Conference. Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston established the Missionary Society of St. James made up of diocesan clergy who volunteered for periods of service in Latin America in response to Pope St. John XXIII's 1959 appeal to priests and religious in the U.S., Canada and Europe to volunteer for missionary service in Latin America. Another organization called the Papal Volunteers for Apostolic Collaboration in Latin America (PAVLA) was initiated in 1961. Initially the religious congregations were asked to dedicate ten percent of their personnel and other resources to the Latin American mission. Many responded, but never as positively as first thought. Nevertheless thousands of U.S. priests and religious men, women and laity were assigned to various Latin American missions in the decades of the 1960s and 70s. For example, in 1966 Cardinal Cushing reported that there were more than 4,000 "ecclesiastical, religious and lay personnel from the United States" in Latin America (QUIGLEY, 2009). The Latin American Bureau at the U.S. Bishops Conference was certainly one of the principal conduits for information regarding Latin American church realities and specifically CELAM's activities. Many other events in Latin America were now gaining the attention of international audiences.

Fr. Considine also organized the Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program (CICOP) in 1964 which held international conferences that brought bishops together with missionaries and academics over a period of ten years. CICOP was a source for dissemination of Latin American pastoral/theological developments before and after the Medellín Conference.<sup>4</sup> Tom Quigley rightly points out that the decade of CICOP gatherings from 1964-1973 convened the largest number ever to be gathered then (or perhaps even now) of bishops with missionaries, academics and laity to focus specifically on the Church's presence in the Americas. For example,

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Pope St. John Paul II, would be one of the initiators of the exchanges between the U.S. and Latin American churches, exchanges which, as these reflections on Medellín demonstrate, contributed to moving both the U.S. and Latin American churches in a markedly more progressive direction.

<sup>4</sup> The present writer vividly recalls attending the 1969 CICOP Conference at the New Yorker Hotel in New York City where he met Archbishop Avelar Brandão Vilela (later Cardinal Archbishop of Salvador), Cardinal Pablo Muñoz Vega of Quito, Archbishop Marcos McGrath of Panamá, and Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas, Mexico, all important players at Medellín and its aftermath.

3,000 persons attended the 1967 meeting in Boston! Not only were these gatherings well attended; the quality of the participants was remarkable as this short list of participating luminaries demonstrates: prelates Helder Camara, Manuel Larraín, Juan Landázuri Ricketts, Marcos McGrath, Pablo Muñoz Vega, Avelar Brandão Vilela, Samuel Ruiz, Affonso Gregory, and Catholic theologians Gustavo Gutiérrez and Juan Luis Segundo, as well as Protestant theologians José Míguez Bonino and Rubem Alves. Most of these influential men participated in the 1968 Medellín Conference and for many if not most of them, the CICOP gatherings were their first real exposure to a United States audience. Subsequently, many of them were to return to the United States where their activities and writings after Medellín caught the attention of many U.S. Church leaders, a rising number of Hispanics among them (DECK; SOTOMAYOR, 2016, p. 148-150).

## *2 Symbiotic Relationships with Latin America*

Contacts and exchanges between and among U.S. religious, priests and committed laypersons with Latin America grew exponentially for three decades 1960-1990. Certainly this is one of the more obvious channels of Medellín's influence in the United States. Medellín and subsequently Puebla were key moments in the history of this ongoing encounter. What is significant to note is that U.S. missionaries arrived in Latin America during a period of extraordinary ferment precisely in the context of Latin America's response to the appeal for reform and renewal of the Second Vatican Council. It was an exciting period of learning and "pastoral conversion:" for many of these U.S. missionaries – clergy and religious women and men as well as laity – whose lives were never the same after having been exposed to the reality of Latino religion, spirituality culture, and to glaring examples of structural injustice. Some of these missionaries never returned to the United States, some even lost their lives fighting for social change together with the people they served. Most, however, did return. A rising new generation of U.S. Hispanics together with many of these missionaries contributed to the birth of an organized Hispanic ministry inspired by concepts of evangelization, catechesis, worship/liturgy, and concern for social justice and fascination with Liberation Theology acquired in their rich Latin American experiences.

### *2.1 The Encuentros as Catalytic Forces*

Medellín and its aftermath set in motion the *encuentro* processes which have continued to unfold now for almost fifty years. As Timothy Matovina argues, these processes are the clearest sources of Medellín's transformative influence on the U.S. Catholic Church for half a century: the *Encuentros*,

sponsored by the highest ecclesial authorities of the region, have implanted in the heart of the U.S. Church the pastoral methodology – simple but powerful, of “see-judge-act.” If pursued carefully this methodology and orientation captures the essence, gets to the heart of what the Document of Aparecida and later Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* call “pastoral conversion.” A Fifth Encuentro which has involved tens of thousands of Hispanic leaders in its planning process is scheduled to conclude with a national gathering of thousands of select lay delegates in the Fall of 2018. The *encuentro* processes of the past fifty years with their inspiration in Medellín contributed to the establishment of Hispanic ministry offices throughout the nation, some of the first sustained organizational efforts of Hispanic ministry in the country. Imbued with Medellín’s vision which was re-affirmed and expanded ten years later at the Puebla Conference, an energetic group of Hispanics arose for service in Church and society, and contributed to the emergence of a U.S. Latino theology and other important developments. As Tim Matovina maintains quoting Luis Tampe’s impressive study of the first three *Encuentros*: “Liberation theology and the Latin American Bishops Conference at Medellín provided the whole Church with two significant ecclesial principles: the preferential option for the poor and a *pastoral de conjunto*.”

By *pastoral de conjunto* Medellín raised up an idea that continues to influence contemporary discussions about how pastoral care and ministry are carried out in the Church. *Pastoral de conjunto* refers to coordinated pastoral planning and action that seeks to establish better communication and relations (more horizontal than vertical) among the various units or cohorts of the faithful and their leaders, clerical, religious and lay.

## 2.2 *The Hispanic Presence: Historical Developments*

An awareness of the rootedness of the Catholic faith and culture of the United States in Mexico, the Caribbean, and other points south began to dawn only gradually, and it still needs to be emphasized. The Anglo-American founders of the United States arose almost one hundred years *after* Spain had left numerous footprints on the North American continent throughout what is now the United States. Nevertheless, it was only in the twentieth century that the Hispanic presence began to receive the recognition it rightly deserves from both U.S. society and the Church (DECK, 2016b, p. 263-280). The stirring of new life in the Latin American church in the years following Vatican II was arguably a significant, *synergistic* incentive for the occurrence of something similar in the United States. This is true in light of the fact that Hispanics who had a certain affinity for the message and style of Medellín have continued to grow demographically due to migration and births. They now constitute the more dynamic, numerous, and youthful cohort of the Church in the United States and have

been called “leading indicators of the Church’s future” in that country by renown social scientist Robert D. Putnam (2008) at Harvard University.

A period of notable immigration from Mexico began during the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and it persisted for a century, although it has now slowed down as a result of several factors, notably the anti-immigrant climate in the U.S.. Another significant moment in the continuous migration from Latin America occurred in the 1940s and 50s—this time from Puerto Rico. Other significant migrations from the south occurred during and after the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and in the decades of the 1970s, 80s and 90s as Central America was hammered by revolutionary guerrilla wars and military oppression. Local U.S. churches became more aware of the realities and trends of Latin America as they scrambled to respond to new diasporas and dramatic demographic changes. All of this laid the foundations for contact and dialogue with the Church in Latin America on the part of North Americans as never before (DECK, 2016b, p. 263-280).

An early and interesting example of this is the influential thought and work of Monsignor Ivan Illich, a colorful and impressive intellectual and pastoral leader born of Catholic and Jewish parents in Austria. As a newly ordained priest he was assigned to a Puerto Rican parish in Manhattan in the early 1950s. Thus began his life-long interest in the encounter between Hispanic cultures and the dominant Euro-American culture of modernity. He pioneered cultural orientation programs, received the support of New York’s Cardinal Spellman, and ended up rector of the Catholic University of Ponce in Puerto Rico. His writings and radical ideas stimulated many thinkers who were enthusiastic supporters of the Second Vatican Council, especially its commitment to engagement with cultures and modernity (HOINACKI; MITCHAM, 2003, p. 5-15). Illich contributed to the dialogue between missionaries and bishops. His ideas – broadly disseminated – helped prepare the ground for Medellín’s reception in the U.S. by proposing the need for dialogue regarding critical questions about Catholic social teaching, education, health care, and evangelization. As discussed above those linkages became more pronounced in the decade just before and during Vatican II and Medellín (DÍAZ-STEVENSON, 1993, p. 131-133).

A singular moment in the history of Medellín’s impact on the United States occurred with the arrival of Edgard Beltrán, a Colombian priest who had worked for the Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) and later for the Division of the Spanish-Speaking of the Bishops Conference. Beltrán had been part of the planning of the Medellín Conference, was expert in its content and methodology, and was an unusually effective spokesperson. He introduced an entire generation of U.S. Hispanic leaders to the vision of Medellín (SANDOVAL, 1994, p. 131-165; *Id.*, 2006).

Another key figure for at least the past four decades is a Chilean immigrant to the United States, a devoted layman by the name of Mario Paredes. He served for several years as director of the Northeast Hispanic Pastoral Center in New York and was intimately involved in the first three *encuentros*. He has written a vivid memoir which captures the way in which important priorities of Medellín were integrated into each of these processes (PAREDES, 2014). The *encuentros* took place in 1972, 1977 and 1985; they improved in effectiveness of process and in attendance and quality of participation over this stimulating period of 14 years, “stimulating” because it involved a highpoint of influence of important accomplishments such as the establishment and growth of many base ecclesial communities, growing familiarity with Liberation Theology, and expansion of Hispanic/Latino pastoral and social programs and leadership in dioceses and regions of the country.

Since 1945 the U.S. bishops under the leadership of the Archbishop of San Antonio Robert Lucey had organized a national Office for the Spanish-Speaking, first in San Antonio and later in Washington DC. These contacts after Vatican II and Medellín, however, gave a powerful impetus to establishing regional pastoral offices, and one was organized in the 1960s in New York City (MATOVINA, 2000, p. 224). Early in the decade of the 70s several other Hispanic pastoral centers came into existence: the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) in San Antonio, The Northeast Hispanic Catholic Center in New York, The Southeast Pastoral Institute (SEPI) in Miami, the Midwest Hispanic Center at the University of Notre Dame, and in California the Region XI Commission of the Spanish Speaking (RECOSS) which was not a center but a committee involved in designing and executing evangelization activities throughout the region (SANDOVAL, 1983, p. 413-438). What all these centers had in common was considerable familiarity with the creative response of the Church in Latin America to the pastoral concerns of Vatican II and to the need for new pastoral methods and expressions. The centers were sometimes modeled on Latin American counterparts such as the Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano (IPLA) established by CELAM in Quito, Ecuador, where many Hispanic leaders studied in the 1970s. These centers became beehives of activity in the promotion of Hispanic laity as pastoral agents, as well as resources for pastors, permanent deacons and men and women religious and laity training to serve in ministries in the most populated Hispanic areas of the nation – California, Florida, Texas, New York and Chicago. By the year 2000, moreover, Hispanic ministry had become a truly national work as Hispanic immigrants as well as second and third generation Hispanics dispersed themselves to almost every corner of the United States.

During these years of renewal basic ecclesial communities were established throughout the United States and the see-judge-act pastoral circle was incorporated into pastoral planning nationally, regionally and sometimes



locally (USCCB, 2012). Along with pastoral developments inspired by the spirit of Medellín there was also a pronounced explosion of apostolic movements such as the *Cursillo de Cristiandad*, the Christian Family Movement, and most notably the Charismatic Renewal. One might say that the commitment to Catholic social teaching grew stronger and showed itself in the rise of strong advocacy for migrant farm workers and urban immigrants, the vast majority of whom were of Hispanic origin (SANDOVAL, 1983, p. 354).

In these years a number of pastoral and theological leaders and teachers, proponents of the visions of Vatican II, Medellín and later Puebla, arose. Certainly the most revered and influential was Virgilio P. Elizondo, a Mexican American diocesan priest from San Antonio, who was an enduring and endearing source of inspiration in both pastoral and theological developments in service of U.S. Hispanics/Latinos. Throughout his lifetime Elizondo spoke with pride about being one of the few North Americans to have actually participated in the Medellín Conference. He often harkened back to this profound formative experience at the critical moment of his early formation in theology and pastoral care. He participated in Medellín as translator and secretary for Archbishop Robert Lucey.

Much of Elizondo's impact was due to his founding of the above-mentioned Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) which served as a place of encounter, learning, prayer and fiesta for at least two generations of Hispanic leaders.<sup>5</sup> It was one of the principle venues for encounters between U.S. Hispanics and a many outstanding Latin American pastoralists and theologians, for example, Enrique Dussell, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Justo L. González, Juan Luis Segundo, and Jon Sobrino<sup>6</sup>. Through these and many other pastoral/theological leaders, the letter and spirit of Medellín was enthusiastically communicated to the fledgling leadership of the U.S. Hispanic Catholic communities (MATOVINA; POYO, 2000, p. 224-225).

Even though he did not work in Latin America, the Spanish pastoral theologian Casiano Floristán shared his expertise on Vatican II and his broad familiarity with trends in Latin America, including Medellín and the other work of CELAM, with Hispanic/Latino leaders who attended his workshops at the various pastoral centers mentioned above. Floristán imbued at least two generations of Hispanic/Latino permanent deacons in the Archdiocese of Chicago with the inductive pastoral vision of *Gaudium*

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<sup>5</sup> In 2008 MACC changed its name to the Mexican American Catholic College.

<sup>6</sup> One of the features of U.S. Latino/Hispanic theology has been its strong ecumenical orientation. Several Latino Protestant theologians, notably Justo L. González, a Methodist, have been colleagues of the Hispanic/ Catholic theologians for decades, and great admirers of Medellín. González, a church historian and historical theologian, is one of the most prolific writers of all U.S. Latino Theologians with many books and hundreds of articles, chapters in books and reviews (See GONZÁLEZ; GONZÁLEZ, 2008, p. 245-249).

*et Spes* and *Medellín*. Likewise, for at least two decades, the Peruvian Jesuit Ricardo Antoncich inspired clergy, religious, and laity with his engaging workshops on Catholic Social Teaching, the Documents of CELAM, and Ignatian spirituality in the key of liberation. While residing in Peru or Brazil, Antoncich regularly taught in the Southeast Pastoral Institute in Miami, at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio and made frequent journeys to California to give retreats and workshops. Similarly the work of Brazilian pastoralists José Marins and Teolide Trevisán introduced the concept of base ecclesial communities central to the letter and spirit of *Medellín* to a significant group of laity and clergy in the Oakland, California area, at SEPI in Miami, Florida, and in several other urban centers of the United States. For four decades the team of Marins and Trevisán returned to the U.S. in order to form and update laity and clergy to the emerging reality of base communities and other ecclesiological and pastoral developments (RAMÍREZ, 2016, p. 60-64).<sup>7</sup>

### ***2.3 Faith-Based Community Organizations***

While the emergence in the United States of vigorous community organizing efforts in the 1960s and 70s resulted from internal U.S. causes and not events in Latin America, it can be argued that *Medellín* represents a clear, even dramatic break with the Church's reputation in Latin America and elsewhere as an ally of conservative causes and of the socioeconomic and cultural *status quo*. Consequently, the surprising developments in Latin America in the wake of the Second Vatican Council brought a new vitality and created a supportive climate for pursuing the agenda of Catholic Social Teaching. In connection with events like Vatican II and *Medellín* that had an impact upon social and ecclesial movements, one must mention the contribution that grass-roots community organizing in the tradition of Saul Alinsky has had on the public policy, especially local and regional affairs, over the past fifty years. The Campaign for Human Development (CHD) funded by the Catholic Bishops of the U.S. from the annual contributions of U.S. Catholics was the *de facto* instrument for the rise and endurance of community organizations such as the PICO National Network, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), and the Gamaliel National Network, ecumenical, church-based action centers which address the needs of the underserved poor, especially blacks and Hispanics/Latinos in many urban settings throughout the United States.<sup>8</sup> *Medellín's* emphasis on "human promotion," transformative social action against inequality, may have

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<sup>7</sup> As a witness and participant to the events of the past forty years, Ricardo Ramírez, Bishop Emeritus of Las Cruces, New México, provides a memoir rich in references to the vitality of *Medellín's* central message throughout this period.

<sup>8</sup> The CHD is now called the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) and is organized under the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

contributed to the rise of church-based, grass-roots political movements in the United States (WOOD; FULTON, 2015, p. 10). Medellín's focus on solidarity with the poor, social science analysis of local and national reality, and preference for ecumenical, inter-faith activities were synergistic with the goals of greater participation and empowerment of the poor in church and society espoused by these community organizations. These organizations have grown tremendously over a period of half a century now and their purpose and underlying visions coincide with Medellín's in many respects. It is not surprising, therefore, that popular, grass-roots community organizations have been singled out by Pope Francis through special gatherings convened by him. They have taken place in Latin America and Rome, and U.S. community organizations listed above and others have actively taken part.<sup>9</sup>

#### **2.4 U.S. Hispanic/Latino Theology**

Speaking of the various influences contributing to the rise of U.S. Latino theology Orlando Espín notes that "there is the evident impact of such Catholic ecclesial texts as the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and of the Latin American bishops' conferences of Medellín, Puebla, and Santo Domingo." Medellín's option for the poor is fundamental to the thought of Gustavo Gutiérrez, who made major contributions to the Medellín Conference, and laid the foundations for Liberation Theology immediately after the Conference with the publication of his book *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas* in 1971. Gutiérrez like Medellín articulated a hermeneutical lens which opted to side with the poor. This methodology of liberation was also one of the more obvious characteristics of U.S. Latino theologies which does theology rooted in the realities of daily life and its struggles (ESPÍN, 2007, p. 753). Espín notes other characteristics as well that also connect Latino theology to the spirit if not the letter of Medellín: (1) popular Catholicism as a privileged methodological, epistemological, and thematic source; (2) sensitivity to the contributions of the social sciences and analyses, and willingness to dialogue with them; (3) the incorporation of history into the interpretation of the people's faith; (4) a methodological recognition of the values of the daily and family life of the community; (5) a pastoral sensitivity and conscious interest in reflecting pastoral and social realities; (6) respect for ecumenism and a desire to find ways to work with other Christians collaboratively (ESPÍN, 2007, p. 753).

The immediate circumstances leading to the emergence of a U.S. Latino theology can be traced to the period of Vatican II and the Medellín

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<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis has given new energy to Medellín's early call for "solidarity with the poor" by convening World Meetings of the Popular Movements. His presence and speech at the July 10, 2015 gathering in Bolivia received considerable media attention.

Conference. One of the first U.S. Latino theologians, Marina Herrera, has observed in her analysis of the emergence of Hispanic ecclesial leadership in the United States that “at Medellín, the anthropocentric emphasis of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (GS) and the responsibility of human beings to transform their situation took center stage and were examined from every angle” (HERRERA, 1994, p. 184).

Virgilio Elizondo became the most effective proponent of the Christian anthropology of Vatican II and Medellín. He began his prolific career as writer in 1969 shortly after his return from Medellín with works that reflected his pastoral engagement with the people and their catechetical concerns as a diocesan priest serving the Mexican American faithful of his native Texas. He produced 4 books in the 1970s alone and was to produce many other works until his untimely death in 2016. Elizondo exemplified the ideal of an “organic intellectual” that inspired other Latinos to follow in the noble profession of theology but in a manner which demonstrated the qualities of pastoral care and concern for justice that Elizondo exemplified all his life (MATOVINA, 2000). From his office at the Mexican American Cultural Center and at national gatherings of Latino ecclesial leaders in connection with the First, Second and Third *Encuentros*, as well as in meetings of the Association of Hispanic Priests that went by the acronym of PADRES, and at many other occasions, Elizondo encouraged everyone he met to get involved in service and leadership in both the Church and society. He encouraged those who had a special interest in theology to study and gain academic qualifications in the field. He encouraged those who desired to write, among them the writer of this article, to become a U.S. Latino theologian, a category that hardly yet existed.

Two of these young aspirants to theological excellence, Arturo Bañuelas and Allan Figueroa Deck, took up Elizondo’s invitation and followed in his footsteps on a path of ecclesial and academic writing and teaching qualified by the characteristics listed above by Espín. So did several others, including a rising number of women. As a result, in 1988 Bañuelas and Deck were able to successfully convene Elizondo and six other companions, all with doctorates or close to completing them, in the first gathering of what became the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS) (DECK, 1992, xxi-xxiv). Thirty years later ACHTUS is thriving, led by new generations of Hispanic/Latino theologians – more than 100 members – teaching in university settings throughout the United States, producing original monographic studies on many areas of theological inquiry, as well as serving in positions of social and pastoral leadership in parishes, dioceses, and schools throughout the country. These scholars work with a methodology that is inspired on the documents of Vatican II, Medellín and subsequent documents of CELAM, Catholic Social Teaching, and Liberation and other contextual theologies.

## Conclusion

The discussion here has been broad and suggestive of the ways in which Medellín set in motion or abetted several significant trends which are very much part of the ecclesial reality in the United States today. The Fifth *Encuentro* is the most recent manifestation in the United States of the process first promoted by Edgard Beltrán, Virgilio Elizondo and others imbued with the spirit of Medellín. First, the option for the poor has received powerful encouragement from Pope Francis and he never has lost the opportunity to remind his audience during his U.S. visit that care for the poor is the *first and foremost sign* of the presence of Christ's authentic Church. Second, Medellín's strong call for a *pastoral de conjunto* has been modeled in Hispanic/Latino pastoral and theological contexts in the form of collaborative research and writing undertaken by members of ACHTUS, as well as by the National Symposia that have brought a wide array of U.S. Hispanic/Latino scholars and pastoralists together for reflection on the reality of the Hispanic community today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Along with the theologians, priests have been encouraged by Medellín's message to gather together into national associations, first PADRES and later the Asociación Nacional de Sacerdotes Hispanos (ANSH). Hispanic Permanent Deacons have formed a national association as have lay ecclesial ministers and non-profit organizations serving Latino Catholic causes through the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry (NCCHM). Hispanic/Latina women religious, catechists, and diocesan directors of Hispanic ministry meet yearly if not more often (SANDOVAL, 2006, p. 128-131).

In all of these collaborative endeavors as well as in the focus of the organizations – to advance pastoral and social goals that strongly resemble those promoted by Medellín – it becomes clear that the 1968 gathering in the far off city of Antioquía in Colombia is only beginning to resonate in the minds and hearts of the 35,000,000 Hispanic/Latino Catholics of the United States.

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