

***Report of the Mission on Behalf of
the Society of Catholic Social Scientists:
Central America, June-July 1995***

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During the last weeks of June and early July 1995, I traveled to Central America in connection with my long-term academic research project on the origins of warfare and political systems in Mesoamerica. During this trip I also visited with several bishops in the following communities in three countries on behalf of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists (SCSS):

Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

Guatemala City, Guatemala

San Pedro Sula, Honduras

San Jose, Costa Rica

Each bishop who received me was very cordial and eager to learn more about the helpful possibilities that may be available through our Society. Each also took time to explain to me the local conditions and how the Society may be of assistance. During each audience I covered the following points:

1. Introduced myself as a Catholic lay professor of political science at the University of Colorado, USA, with a specialty in politics and warfare in antiquity, including Mesoamerica.
2. Presented credentials as Society of Catholic Social Scientists' International Representative Liaison with the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (PASS) as per President Stephen Krason's introductory letter.
3. Explained SCSS's goals compared with those of the PASS's.
4. Brief on the history and activities of the SCSS, including annual conference.
5. Inquired about local Catholic social scientists and Catholic universities.
6. Proposed to develop relations, based on scholarly exchange, including possibility of attending SCSS annual conferences.

In addition, each audience covered other points which were more particular to each locality.

A summary by locality follows, along with some recommendations.

Monday, June 19, 1995: First Audience

Su Excelencia Monseñor Victor Hugo Martínez Contreras, Bishop of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

Brief description of locality:

Quetzaltenango (“Xela”), one of Guatemala’s thirteen dioceses, is Guatemala’s principal industrial center and the second largest city in the country, covering a diocese of 1.2 million inhabitants, mostly poor and growing in numbers. The Guatemalan business elite, formerly Catholic, is presently alienated and unsupportive of the Church. The MINUGUA (United Nations Mission in Guatemala) is present everywhere with teams of human rights observers. Kidnappings and sporadic fighting between government forces and guerrillas are still somewhat frequent and widespread, particularly in the countryside, although decreasing since last year. The city of Quetzaltenango has several Catholic universities, but none of them has an organized association of Catholic faculty. Knowledge of English is scarce. Bishop Martínez met Archbishop Stafford in Memphis several years ago. Bishop Martínez is a devout supporter of His Holiness and was very cordial.

Principal issues of current episcopal pastoral attention:

- (1) Participate in designing Guatemala’s agrarian reform, currently in legislative phase.
- (2) Acculturation and Catholicity of the indigenous Mayan population, including priestly formation and maintaining the Catholic identity of priests.
- (3) Identity of Catholic universities, including Universidad Católica Landívar (Jesuit).
- (4) All aspects of indigenous culture and the current conflicts. His Excellency is assisting in a new translation of the traditional Mayan holy book, *Popol Vuh*.

Principal areas of possible SCSS exchange:

- (1) Agrarian reform studies and Church social policy: Some of our economists, demographers, and sociologists, may be able to provide expertise on the socio-economic impacts and models of reform.
- (2) Mesoamerican studies, including Maya history and theology.

Follow-up:

- (1) Write to thank His Excellency for the audience.
- (2) Send materials on agrarian reform and related topics written or recommended by SCSS members.
- (3) Send materials on Mayan studies, including Schele & Fridel’s *Maya Cosmos*; my paper with Monsignor Thomas Herron.
- (4) Discuss with SCSS the possibility of providing financial support for a guest to attend annual SCSS meeting.

Additional notes:

His Excellency expressed an interest in hosting a workshop on a topic of common interest, but he has no funds. All foreign attendance would have to be self-funded.

Wednesday-Sunday, June 21-25, 1995: Second Audience

Su Excelencia Monseñor Prospero Penados del Barrio, Archbishop of Guatemala City, Guatemala. Guatemala City has the largest Catholic university in the country, Universidad Católica Rafael Landívar, and one of the largest in Central America. Unfortunately, repeated faxes and calls to Archbishop Penados's office failed to confirm an audience.

Follow-up:

- (1) Write to express regrets.
- (2) Announce the 1995 Annual Meeting of the SCSS.
- (3) Express the desirability of a future meeting on my next trip.
- (4) Request an alternate contact if His Excellency prefers; recommend one directly at Universidad Landívar. Also request contacts with Catholic faculty at Universidad Marroquín.
- (5) Contact Bishop Gamalero; see below.

Additional notes:

Bishop Martínez (Quetzaltenango; see above) advised me that Archbishop Penados has no direct links with academics in Guatemala. A better contact would be Monseñor Fernando Claudio Gamalero, S.J.

Thursday, June 29, 1995: Third Audience

Su Excelencia Monseñor Angel Garachana Pérez, C.M.F., Bishop of San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

Brief description of locality:

San Pedro Sula ("Sula") is one Guatemala's ten dioceses and Honduras's main industrial center, with a diocese of approximately one million inhabitants. The diocese is poor and growing in numbers but, in contrast to Quetzaltenango in Guatemala, this area contains fewer Mayans and more blacks. Industrial and urban growth in the Sula valley is highly noticeable, with new infrastructure and foreign investments. Much is new since my last visit. The influence of the U.S. fruit companies (bananas, primarily) is always visible. Acts of terrorism are still somewhat frequent, particularly in the countryside at night, although here too the trend is decreasing since last year. A new museum of anthropology and history adds an important cultural asset. Unlike Guatemala, the local Honduran business elite is strongly Catholic and supportive of the Church. San Pedro Sula has a

fledgling Catholic university, founded last year and supported by a group of lay Catholics. Knowledge of English is relatively widespread. Bishop Garachana is from Castille, Spain, where he held several teaching and administrative appointments; he also served as a missionary for seven years in San Pedro Sula.

Principal issues of current episcopal pastoral attention:

- (1) Priestly vocations, formation, and development, because Ordination is sometimes seen as a comfortable and viable alternative for otherwise very poor men.
- (2) Growing influence (and disturbing success) of evangelical missions; including their virtually constant presence in the main public square opposite the Cathedral.
- (3) Identity of the newly established Catholic university.

Principal areas of possible SCSS exchange:

- (1) Solidify the identity of the new Catholic university.
- (2) Mesoamerican studies, including Mayan history and theology.

Follow-up:

- (1) Write to thank His Excellency for the audience.
- (2) Send materials to help strengthen the identity of the Catholic university.
- (3) Send materials on population and economic development (*War Against Population*).
- (4) Send materials on parish development models.
- (5) Discuss with SCSS the possibility of providing financial support for a guest from the new Catholic University to attend next year's annual SCSS meeting.
- (6) Respond to correspondence forthcoming from the president of the Universidad Católica, as discussed with His Excellency.

Additional notes:

His Excellency also expressed an interest in hosting a workshop or roundtable on a topic of common interest, but he has no funds. All foreign attendance would have to be self-funded.

Wednesday, July 5, 1995: Fourth Audience

Su Excelencia Monseñor Román Arrieta Villalobos, Archbishop of San José, Costa Rica. His Excellency was out of the city; met with Reverend Resty Moreno (Passionist).

Brief description of locality:

San José is Costa Rica's capital and Latin America's most literate city. The

Archdiocese of San José includes the capital city area plus Cartago and Heredia, totaling 1.5 million inhabitants. Although poverty and underdevelopment are still widespread, the differences with other Central American societies are noticeable because of the much higher level of education and technological advancement. San José has the largest number of higher education institutions in all of Latin America, from the Río Grande to Tierra del Fuego. The Catholic evangelization of the country was never complete or deep. By contrast, as in all of Latin America, various forms of entrepreneurial evangelicalism (Adventists, Mormons, free-lancer preachers) have made deep, significant inroads into this formerly Catholic society. The three most prominent Catholic educational institutions are: 1) the misnamed Pontificia Universidad Católica (UCA; Rev. José Manuel Salazar, Rector), which does not grant a doctorate; 2) Instituto Teológico Intercongregacional, affiliated with the *Angelicum* in Rome; and 3) Colegio Calasanz, in San Pedro Monte de Oca, C.R. None has a doctoral program, but 1 and 2 eventually may. Some faculty members have doctorates.

Principal issues of current episcopal pastoral attention:

- (1) Influence of non-Catholic Christian denominations, growing strong with numerous churches and well-funded welfare programs providing food and clothing.
- (2) Political balance in Church-State relations, increasingly unfavorable with the loss of national Catholic identity.
- (3) Erosion of the middle class, with increasing poverty, which in turn fuels items 1 and 2 above.
- (4) Future of Catholic universities.

Principal areas of possible SCSS exchange:

- (1) Materials on Catholic universities.
- (2) Research on pastoral models, similar to San Pedro Sula.

Follow-up:

- (1) Write to thank His Excellency for the audience.
- (2) Discuss with SCSS the possibility of providing financial support for a guest to attend annual SCSS meeting.

Additional notes:

Costa Rica is a paradox: the most literate population in Latin America and the weakest system of Catholic higher education. SCSS relations here may have to be made within the lay universities themselves, with individual professors.