

CULTURAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC REALITY OF IBERO-AMERICA

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By means of this paper I will attempt to present cultural and demographic facts that come from official documents of the Organization of United Nations, the concise reports over “Growth, structure and population distribution”, the report, “Latin American Demography Year 2000” and reports from UNESCO that were reported in the “World Report about Culture 2000-2001” and in “Cultural Identity, Integration and Creation in Latin America”.

DEMOGRAPHY

The second half of the 20th century produced unprecedented demographic changes, especially those in the last 25 years, following the World Population Conference held in 1974 in Bucharest. World population increased from 4 billion to almost 6 billion people. Between 1970 and 1975 it was found that the numbers of children per couple was 4.5 and during the period 1995 to 2000, this was reduced to 2.7 per couple. Life expectancy grew from 56 to 65 years. The percentage of the world’s population that lives in urban areas grew from 36% to 47%. The number of mega-cities, those inhabited by more than 10 million people or more, has grown from 5 to 18. The number of people who have moved from their country to another has surpassed 125 million or approximately 2.1% of the world’s population.

Population growth

The current size of the world’s population is the result of an unprecedented and historically brief period of accelerated demographic growth that has been a phenomenon of the last century. In 1804, the population passed the 1 billion mark, 123 years later, in 1927 it reached 2 billion, 33 years later, in 1960 it reached 3 billion; 14 years later, 1974 it reached 4 billion; 13 years later, in 1987 it reached 5 billion and in just 12 years later, in 1999, it reached 6 billion. In the last 100 years the world’s population has grown by more than 4 billion people.

The current population of Latin America and the Caribbean has gone from 74 million in 1900 to 504 million in 1998, which represents an increase of 430 million during the past century. While the United States and Europe slowed their population growth rates since 1970, the rest of the world including Latin America and the Caribbean maintained a growth tendency as the following figures show:

World Population 1750-2050

<i>Year</i>	<i>1750</i>	<i>1800</i>	<i>1850</i>	<i>1900</i>	<i>1950</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>2050</i>
World Total (population in millions)	791	978	1,262	1,650	2,521	3,696	5,901	8,909
Latin America and Caribbean (population in millions)	16	24	38	74	167	285	504	809
Latin America and Caribbean (% of World Total)	2%	2.5%	3%	4.5%	6.6%	7.7%	8.5%	9.1%

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Latin America and the Caribbean are the only geographical areas that have maintained a tendency of growth until they have become 8.5% of the world's population with an addition of 8 million people per year.

Until 1998 Brazil was the only country in Latin America to have a population greater than 100 million. It is projected that Mexico will join this group by 2050.

During the past 30 years the birthrate has dropped from 4.5 children per woman to 2.7 during the period between 1995 and 2000. The rates corresponding to Latin America and the Caribbean are between 2.6 and 2.7 births per woman which are in harmony with the birthrate decrease in all parts of the world. The reasons for this decrease can be seen in factors such as: socio-economic development, decreased mortality rates, increased schooling for women, the process of urbanization and family planning programs. In Latin America and the Caribbean the decreased birthrate is due almost exclusively to the increased use of contraceptives.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, 62% of the countries are satisfied with their rates of demographic growth.

Population distribution by ages

Currently in Latin America, children under the age of 15 represent 33% and young people represent 20% of the entire population, which results in over half the population.

According to projections, the group composed of people 15 to 24 years of age will decrease from 1998 to 2050 from 20% to 15% of the total population.

People who are 60 years of age or older currently represent 8% of the population but it is projected that by 2050, they will represent 21% of the population. This is a sector that is growing rapidly.

Persons who are 80 years of age or older represent about 1% of the population but will be a group with rapid growth as by 2050 they will represent 5 or 6% of the world's population. In this age group there are more women than men.

Population distribution, urbanization and internal migration

Throughout humanity's history the population has lived primarily in rural areas. An important transformation that occurred during the 20th century was the growth of urban centers and the concentration of the population in them, so that by 1998, 47% of world's population lived in urban areas. It is projected that by 2030 approximately 57% will live in urban areas. In 1998, 68% of the urban population lived in developing regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean. It is projected that by 2030 that proportion will have increased to 80%. In 1997 the urban population of Latin America and the Caribbean was 65.32% and the rural population was 34.68%. In all of the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean the percentage of women in the urban population is higher than that of men.

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In spite of the growing concentration of the urban population in large agglomerations it is worth pointing out that half of the world's urban population continues to live in smaller cities of less than 500,000 inhabitants.

During the 1970's there was a tendency in developed countries against urbanization but the latest facts collaborate that the tendency of concentrated growth in large urban areas has returned.

The net migration from rural to urban zones reached 34% of the population. In many countries, population policies have tried to reduce, or even reverse migratory patterns, but the data indicates that these policies haven't always had the desired effect.

External migration

Due to the great economic and demographic disparities that exist between developed countries and those in development, there has been sustained migration towards the developed countries. This is aggravated by the incapacity of the developing countries to absorb the growing increments in the labor force.

Some reflections

If our church began in 1908 and in 1927 the world's population was 2 billion people, now increased to 6 billion, how does the growth in the church compare with the population? If the yearly increase in Latin America and the Caribbean totals 8 million people, we have an immense challenge before us to witness to the people about Christ.

If more than half of the population is made up of children and teenagers, it is worth the effort to think about where the efforts of the church are focused, this, without taking into account that this group is in an important stage of development and have more possibilities in life. They will be the social actors of tomorrow. In my opinion, the church has lost the young people and we don't take into account the children.

If external migration is a predictable tendency, and knowing that this situation generally signifies the disintegration of the family, how should the pastoral focus change towards this? And in what way the disintegration of the church due, to the exit of members to other parts, should be an opportunity to do mission? What new challenges are facing us due to this historical circumstance from the perspective of the plan of God for this time?

If urbanization continues to grow, what are some elemental criteria that must be in the church to respond to this reality? What is the church model that will serve us during the coming years?

LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE

Is there a Latin American cultural identity? "Latin America should not understand itself as something already determined... and with characteristics defined forever, but as something that has been making itself" (Jorge Alberto Manrique).

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To talk about a Latin American culture is to talk about something very relative. We have a group of nations that are not homogenous, in each one there are cultures, or regional subcultures, provinces, urban areas, rural areas and indigenous cultures, with different aesthetic expressions, creations and myths; therefore, it is better to speak of a multi-cultural Latin America.

At the same time it is recognized that there is a family of beliefs, languages and traditions that allows different communities to be grouped together. The territory, language, shared history and like cultural models allow us to talk about a Ibero- America as a regional unit conformed by autonomous republics.

Ibero-America has too many elements and common peculiarities that make it possible for it to be seen from the outside as a community of brother nations while from the inside it looks more like a multi-colored mosaic.

Recognizing that it is impossible to mention the most outstanding aspects of this great cultural diversity, at least in this paper, I will mention three elements that need to be considered part of our reality:

- Westernity (*Occidentalidad*), which is nothing more than the recognition that every Latin American culture is impregnated with what we know as western culture.
- Americanism (*Americanismo*) or to say, all the contributions the Pre-Columbian culture that are present.
- Mestizo (*Mestizaje*). America in general has experienced the greatest process of transculturation and becoming mestizo that the western world has known.

Some cultural indicators of Latin American and the Caribbean that are important for us to recognize the reality in which we live:

- *Dominant religions*. The dominant religion is Catholicism and the second is Protestantism.
- *United Nations conventions*. Almost all of the countries have signed United Nations human rights conventions.
- *Communications*. Access to telephone lines within a country puts it into one of two categories. One group is above the average of the region and the other is below. The majority of the countries have the United States as the principle interlocutor.
- *New technologies in communication (1998)*. Half have cellular phones equal to or above the average.
- *Education (1997)*. 89% of the children have elementary education in the region. 59% of the boys and 62% of the girls have secondary education. 19% of the men and women studied in higher education between 1994 and 1997.
- *Higher studies in the exterior (1997)*. A third of the countries in the region have students studying outside of the country, equal or above the average of the region, and mostly study in the United States, or to a lesser degree, in Argentina.
- *Human Capital (2000)*. The literacy rate for individuals older than 15 is on average 88% for men and 85% for women in a little more than half of the region's countries. The remainder of the countries is below the half of this average.

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- *Health and demography.* In 1998 the population totaled 496 million people and 65% lived in urban areas. Life expectancy on the region is 70 years.
- *Economy (1997).* 84% of the men and 48% of the women between the ages of 15 and 64 in the region were employed.
- *Social Security.* All of the countries report having a social security program for the elderly, disablement, sickness, maternity and work-related accidents. Less than half of the countries report family subsidies.

Some reflections

If in Ibero-America there is such great cultural diversity, why at times is there insistence on transplanting ecclesiastical programs that assume all of our realities are homogeneous?

If access to technology continues to grow, in what way is the Church of the Nazarene taking advantage of this circumstance to share the gospel? What can be said about the possibility of a church that takes seriously electronic and informational advances?

If education is so deteriorated in our region, according to the literacy and educational indicators, what implications does preaching the Gospel in these circumstances have?

If the religion is predominantly Catholic, this makes the presentation of the gospel is developed in a “Christian world”, and different from other places when the gospel enters a “pagan world”, what special considerations should be taken into account to be more effective?

We live in a region where double talk is common. On one hand almost all of the countries have signed an accord in defense of human rights although in reality we know that Latin America and the Caribbean are places of great disrespect for these rights. The church is not free from this double talk, what corrective measures should be taken to solve this problem?