The Hermit: A Prophetic-Pastoral Model for Latin America Today

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Introduction

In this article we intend to understand the hermit as prophet and pastor. We will also try to understand the true spirit of the hermit, although we know very well that while the hermit's asceticism was a rejection of what was acceptable, whether civil or religious, it was also a way of performing pastoral tasks towards the interior of the society which the hermit criticized. I personally believe that much of the hermit's practices can be restored as a way of emphasizing that the element of protest could very well be a clue to the development of a prophetic ministry in our Latin American social context.

One of the things which is clear and of great importance in Latin America today is that the church has discovered that, both its own life and mission, as well as every activity in the history of humanity, is totally and absolutely incomplete. That is to say, we are facing an open historical process. The church today, more than ever, is conscious of its capacity to write its own history. The previous history is the result of an epistemological rupture of the concept of God and history and of the increasingly anguishing and multiphasic crisis that we are suffering on our continent, where people have ceased to think with their head in order to think with their stomach. God is not a fixed and static God. He is both a moving and a mover God, a dynamic, open God. History is not a finished and closed act where everything that has happened and will happen was written before. Today history is seen, valued and undertaken as an open process in which we are all active subjects in the construction of our own life. At this moment, as members of the mystical body of Christ and as an integral part of our Latin American society, we understand and affirm that it is not only a matter of studying and comprehending history. This is the moment to transform history. Consequently, this requires a new conception in which God, the Lord of history, will impel the church through the instrumentality of those who are called by God to the construction of God's kingdom of justice and peace.

The previous words do not necessarily mean that our historical problems have already been solved. Rather they refer to the most

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transcendental challenge the church has faced since the Protestant Reformation, especially because, in the face of this Latin American reality, we detect that both in international politics and in the religious realm there is not a well-defined alternative project that will pay for the religious-moral and politico-structural deficits. Nevertheless, we have advanced in the sense that we have discovered we are free to create our own destiny as active historical subjects. It is precisely there, face to face with that political practice that has no humanizing direction and with that popular moral and popular religiosity (both Catholic and Protestant) which tries to legitimize the prevailing order, that protest, in the form of a hermit's ethics, can be suggested as an alternative to or as the genesis of change. It is from this perspective, which has the intention of responding on the basis of faith and orthopraxis to a new way of being and doing as church and mission, that the prophetic and pastoral models we are examining can help us present a well-defined option for our ecclesiological and missiological task, for, we insist, in Latin America everything is about to begin.

**Historical Antecedents**

When, during the last two decades of the Third Century, some Christians from Egypt and eastern Syria renounced their previous lifestyles of living in common with a family and within the Christian community, and withdrew to solitary places with the purpose of living a life of voluntary poverty and sexual continence, the first step was taken in the direction of what later would be known properly as monasticism, to which Christian asceticism gave a strong impulse. To be a religious recluse, a hermit, and later a monk, means to follow the path of Christ, the straight and narrow way of which the Bible speaks, in such a way that those who did so could repeat with the apostles: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed you ..." (Mat. 19:27). The hermit feels and knows himself or herself to be deeply stigmatized by the conviction that imitating the Lord always places the hermit under the cross. That is why the Pachomian monks, in order to make a constant memory of the reason for their existence, sewed a cross to their robes.

As we know, monks tried to keep their eyes always on their crucified model and took to themselves all the hardships of their lives, trying to live together and die together with Christ. As we understand it, both the hermits, and later the monks, knew themselves as incorporated into the great phalanx that long before them had lived according to that ideal. Their idea was that they were imitating Abraham, Moses and Elijah, and also John the Baptist, who frequently represented for them the idea of the founder of their lifestyle. The apostles and the primitive community in Jerusalem, whose life was marked by an ascetical enthusiasm, felt greatly moved to realize themselves as an authentic imitation-incarnation of Christ.