*A Journey from the **Gospel** Toward the Reality of **Latin America***

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The announced apostolic journey of Pope Leo XIV to Uruguay, Argentina, and Peru, scheduled for November 6–17, subject to his health following his recent surgery, gives us an opportunity and context to reflect on the current social and political realities of Latin America.

This will be the longest trip of his pontificate and his first visit to our continent, including ten cities in twelve days. No pope has visited Argentina since 1987 or Uruguay since 1988, and Pope Francis never managed to visit either country.

But this trip, beyond its pastoral significance, is also a political and geopolitical event. It comes to a region where voters are increasingly expressing their discontent, trust in institutions is eroding, and Latin America is again becoming a battleground for competing global powers. And this trip is being undertaken by the first US-born pope, also a Peruvian citizen.

Therefore, this visit invites us to pay closer attention to the moment Latin America is experiencing and to ask ourselves what Christian humanism has to offer the politics of our nations today.

A change of era that politics has failed to come to terms with.

To examine the current situation in Latin America, I turn to the analysis offered by the Latin American bishops at Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007. There, they reminded us that we are living through a change of era, worldwide, driven by the concentration of capital beyond the reach of nation-states, by globalization reduced to its economic dimension, and by a culture of consumerism, individualism, and hedonism. Nearly twenty years later, that diagnosis remains valid, and today it can be understood more clearly through a political lens.

One of the most significant contributions of Aparecida is its distinction between exploitation and exclusion. The issue is no longer simply exploited peasants or workers, but people directly excluded or “discarded” by the system of production. This is the reality of informal employment, urban outskirts beyond the reach of the State, and young people who are neither in education nor employed. In Argentina, for example, informal employment hovered around 52% in 2024.

Two additional realities compound these challenges, and the region has yet to find a way to manage either of them. On the one hand, cities are growing without social cohesion, where new lifestyles coexist with anonymity, loneliness, and marginalization. On the other hand, the region's immense natural wealth, from the Amazon and the Andes to its water resources, is being exploited without rules or limits.

What Aparecida could not have foreseen was how quickly organized crime would move in to fill those voids. Where the State is absent, illegal mining, drug trafficking, extortion, and a powerful underground economy take hold, one in which millions of people operate outside the law and beyond the reach of the State. Social exclusion has thus become a national security issue.

The Crisis of Representative Democracy.

The political situation in Latin America deserves separate consideration. It is marked by fragile institutions, corruption and impunity, public distrust, and the resulting crisis of democratic representation.

Peru is the most extreme case. President Keiko Fujimori, who took office on July 28, is the ninth person to hold the presidency since 2016. She won the runoff by fewer than 50,000 votes, following a first round that featured 35 candidates. Such extreme fragmentation reflects not so much pluralism as the erosion of political parties that have ceased to represent the citizens.

With some variations, the same pattern is repeated across the region. Personalist leaders, on the right and the left, promise quick solutions against "the establishment" or "the elites," while fragmented congresses fail to reach agreements and the judiciary operates under a cloud of suspicion. In just a few years, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina have shifted to the right, after having shifted to the left in the previous political cycle. When the vote swings from one extreme to the other, it expresses not so much an ideological conviction as a desire by citizens to punish those in power.

Corruption and impunity fuel this cycle because they confirm to citizens that politics is a private business. The answer cannot be to choose the least bad populist option. The answer is to rebuild political parties with a clear platform and a commitment to public ethics, capable of governing from the center with conviction. Historically, this has been the mission of Christian Democracy, and today it has once again become an urgent task.

A Pope of Both Americas on a Fractured Continent

All of this is well known and deeply felt by "*the Pope of the Two Americas*." Born in Chicago, Illinois, Robert Francis Prevost arrived in Peru in 1985 as an Augustinian missionary and served as bishop of Chiclayo from 2015 to 2023. He has also held Peruvian citizenship since 2015. He knows the north and south of the continent from the inside, and his life story is a political message.

This dual identity is especially important because the region is once again becoming a geopolitical chessboard. Washington has renewed its interest in the region, with policy focused on bilateral

agreements, the most visible example of which is the $20 billion currency swap agreement with Argentina. But there is also the so-called Shield of Nations, through which the United States, under

its new foreign policy (DONROE), seeks to make all the nations of the Global South look only to the North and surrender their resources and their sovereignty to the brute force embodied by Donald Trump.

China, for its part, has become one of South America's leading trading partners and has an increasingly strong presence in ports, energy, and mining. Meanwhile, Latin American governments negotiate separately and compete with one another; regional integration has stalled, and foreign policy shifts with each new administration.

For this reason, Pope Leo XIV's North American origins and the years he spent in Peru position him as a bridge for dialogue and mutual understanding between the north and south of the continent. He can help remind us that Latin America is not obliged to choose between one side or the other, but can engage with all parties on its own terms, provided it has strong institutions and a unified voice. The Holy See does not conduct anyone else's foreign policy, but it can lend legitimacy to the idea of a region that takes responsibility for forging its own path.

Three Countries, Three Messages.

For **URUGUAY**, from November 6 to 8, the main challenge is fostering pluralistic dialogue across a secularized society that is also home to one of the most stable democracies on the continent. President Yamandú Orsi personally invited the Pope, and the government hopes he will meet with representatives of all three branches of government. The planned visit to the Casavalle basin in Montevideo will showcase agreements between the State, the Church, and social organizations. It is a good example of subsidiarity, in which the State works alongside civil society without seeking to do everything itself.

In **ARGENTINA**, from November 8 to 11, with stops in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Luján, the Pope's presence could serve as a symbol of unity, dialogue, and social cohesion. The country is experiencing genuine macroeconomic stabilization, but at a high social cost, with growth failing to take off and political polarization already turning toward the 2027 presidential elections. The Pope is not coming to arbitrate between the government and the opposition. But his presence may serve as a reminder that no economic program can be sustained without at least a basic level of national consensus.

In **PERU**, from November 11 to 17, the Pope will visit Lima, his beloved Chiclayo, Cusco, and Pucallpa. He arrives in a country with a new government after a decade of crisis, whose authorities have promised a tough crackdown on organized crime. Security is a right, but it can only be sustained over time when it rests on the rule of law. Pucallpa could bring the Amazon to the forefront, highlighting deforestation, illegal mining, and the protection of Indigenous peoples. Cusco could convey a message to young people and celebrate Andean identity, while Chiclayo will mark the Pope's return to the diocese he once led.

What Christian Humanism Has to Offer.

Christian Democracy did not emerge as a confessional party, but as an alternative to both unrestrained individualism and collectivism that suppresses the individual. Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard translated its principles into government policy through the social market economy, while Eduardo Frei Montalva and Rafael Caldera brought it to power in Latin America. Its principles- the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity- do not require faith to be embraced.

In today's Latin American context, these principles translate into a concrete political agenda that includes, among other things, the following issues:

- ***The dignity of the human person*** amidst violence and organized crime, with security underpinned by the rule of law, a professional police force, an independent judiciary, and prisons that do not serve as schools for crime.
- ***The social market economy*** in response to informality and low productivity, recognizing that the economy must serve the human person and the common good, with open markets and clear rules, formal employment, and social protection free from political patronage.
- ***Subsidiarity*** in response to centralized and ineffective States, through genuine decentralization and partnerships between the State and civil society.
- ***The preferential option for the poor and vulnerable,*** focused on human development rather than welfare dependency, through education, job training, and decent housing.
- **Integral ecology and "care for our common home,"** by combating illegal economies and promoting sustainable development in partnership with local communities and Indigenous peoples.
- **The pursuit of the common good and "social friendship"** in the face of polarization, through long-term national agreements and reforms to political parties and their financing.
- ***Migration*** and the plight of displaced people, putting four principles into practice: welcome, protect, promote, and integrate, with shared responsibility among countries.
- ***Regional autonomy*** amid the rivalry between the United States and China, through regional integration and a foreign policy shaped by the State rather than by each successive government.

None of these proposals belongs exclusively to people of faith. And that is precisely why they provide a solid foundation for rebuilding a broad political center, capable of bringing together those who reject both authoritarianism and demagoguery.

Leadership Development: An Unfinished Task.

In my view, the region's most serious shortcoming lies not in its ideas, but in the people responsible for putting them into practice. Latin America is a continent whose population is predominantly

made up of men and women who identify as Catholic Christians, and most of its civic, political, and government leaders do as well. Yet those convictions are rarely reflected in the exercise of power.

As president of the ***International Academy of Catholic Leaders***, I see an urgent need to develop social leaders who understand politics as something every citizen engages in to pursue the common good, rather than as the holding of government office for personal gain and illicit enrichment.

Training in principles and values, but also technical training in public administration, economics, law, and communications. Most importantly, it means discovering a vocation of service dedicated to helping people achieve their full potential, free from all forms of self-centeredness.

All this runs counter to confusing one's convictions with a quest for power. Faith can and should inspire politics, but it must not replace politics or seek to take it over. It also runs counter to a "Christian" life expressed solely through rituals and devotions while remaining disconnected from social realities. This balance, rooted in the Christian Democratic tradition, is what distinguishes a Christian-inspired political party from a populist movement that uses religion as its banner.

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In summary, Pope Leo XIV's trip will, above all, be a pastoral journey. But it will leave a fundamental question in the public square: Who speaks today in Latin America in the name of the common good, rising above the pendulum swing between the extremes?

Christian Democracy has the history, principles, and methods to answer this question. What it lacks is rebuilding its political parties, developing its leadership cadres, speaking authoritatively about security, employment, and regional integration, and renewing its commitment to putting the human person at the center of political life. If it can do so, the Pope's visit will be more than an emotional memory. It will become the starting point for an agenda that shapes the future of our peoples.