



THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEW MAN

A cultural approach to
the Latin American scene

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by

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The Intellectual Responsibility of
Specialists on Latin America

Latin America--New Art for the New Man
--Responsibility of the Intellectual

Answer to the poet

PAN AMERICAN UNION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

1964

Cover: Argentine dancer Graciela Martinez

This book was prepared by the
Department of Cultural Affairs,
Pan American Union, Washington, D.C.
General Secretariat of the
Organization of American States

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the generous hosts who made these lectures possible, Mr. Thomas Messer, Director of the Guggenheim Museum, Professor John U. Nef, Chairman of A Center for Human Understanding, the authorities of the group of specialists from Latin America that gathered in the Library of Congress. Also Mr. Juan J. Mathé, First Secretary of the Argentine Embassy in charge of Cultural Relations and my colleagues in the Pan American Union whose stimulating company has helped me to develop my thoughts. Special thanks are due to Mrs. Flora Phelps for revising the manuscripts and trying her very best to make them readable.

*"To reform a world, to reform a nation,
no wise man will undertake: And all but
foolish men know that the only solid, though
a far slower reformation is what each man
begins and perfects on himself."*

Carlyle

*"Nil actum credens, dum quid superesset
agendum."*

Lucan, of Julius Caesar

*"And have put on the new man, which is
renewed in knowledge after the image of
him that created him."*

Colossians-3:10

*St. Augustine says that evil is to be less
than we are, a tendency to non-being.*

An address delivered at the

State of Virginia on May 15, 1963

The Intellectual Responsibility of Specialists on Latin America

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An address delivered at the
Library of Congress on May 16, 1963

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I remember, among other examinations that took place in our Faculty of Law in Buenos Aires, one which dealt with rural law and where the student was asked to discourse on fences dividing one rural property from another. One student, who had obviously neglected that particular aspect of the curriculum, far from feeling lost because of his ignorance on the subject, looked his examiners straight in the eye and, making a sweeping gesture with his arm in an effort to gain time, started his explanation thus: "In the beginning all was land, there were no fences."

Needless to say the examiners, who were quite experienced in this type of approach, did not allow him to continue any further and he was promptly flunked.

In dealing today with a subject like the intellectual responsibility of specialists on Latin America, I feel like introducing my subject with the same ambitious gesture as the unfortunate student in my anecdote. But there are two differences. First, my examiners are not in a position to stop me and flunk me at the start. Second, I do not necessarily follow this approach because I am trying to stall for time, but rather I think that making some general statements might in this case be of value, and ultimately mean saving time.

For better or for worse, I feel it my obligation to make myself known to you as best I can under the circumstances. This implies allowing my own particular views to be expressed as a general introduction to my theme.

It is very much in the fashion today, and in this country in particular, to speak about facts and objectivity. A strong school of historians, artists, and writers stick up for this neo-realism that found its way into the cinema via Italy. I question this idea of objectivity--that simple straight facts alone will necessarily give a more truthful and objective picture than any arrived at through an interpretation of facts. However subjective it might appear to be, an individual's interpretation may be considered objective as long as we realize it is the product of an objective mind. Objectivity does not lie in the choice of method but in the objectivity with which the method is used. My contention is that since a selection of facts must be made, the act of choosing implies a particular interpretation of reality, with the danger that claims of objectivity based on the method employed will lead many people to believe the conclusions without further questioning.

It is a fact, for example, that people brush their teeth every morning in the United States. But were I to present a picture of life in the United States by devoting myself exclusively to its citizens' activities in the bathroom, although I would not necessarily be lying, and although the pictures and documents I might produce would be accurate, and even though many of these facts might prove quite interesting and enlightening within a wider context, presented all by themselves they would constitute a huge lie about the panorama of life in this country.

When I speak then of intellectual responsibility, with particular reference to specialists on Latin American subjects, I must explain, to begin with, what I mean by intellectual responsibility, and my own understanding of objectivity. I do not think that intellectual responsibility is a simple matter of good will in gathering facts. I believe it implies good will to start with, and obviously an intellect to start with. No mentally deficient person can be intellectually responsible, but in addition to good will and intellect and the gathering of facts, there must be other conditions that allow the pursuit of the subject with true intellectual curiosity, which, according to Trevelyan, is the lifeblood of real civilization. The thinker must divest himself of all the idols to which Francis Bacon made reference. In speaking of social and political matters he must rid himself in particular of the idola tribus, which are the prejudices that often come from environment, from our own particular heritage. However glorious this heritage may be, if we fail to take its own characteristics into account, these prejudices can prevent us from understanding people and their behavior when they live in different environments and have different traditions. This becomes very specifically true when it comes to understanding moral issues in particular contexts of time and place. Many historical figures we admire, whom mankind admires, and who have come down to us as the heroes of the past, would shock our moral standards today.

Abraham, if I remember rightly, hid the identity of his wife Sarah, allowing the Egyptian

tians to believe she was his sister, in order not to displease Pharaoh, who was keen about the lady; David, that magnificent poet and king, whose psalms are read in the Mass every day, thought nothing of it when it came to plundering and slaying the tribes of the Philistines, who did not belong to the Jewish people. I cite these examples because these are men whom I truly admire, and I admire them because I exercise the necessary imagination to realize that, with all their shortcomings, at that particular time in human history they represented highly moral consciences, which makes them great for all time even though we may know better in many respects today. Historical judgments must be carefully made and cannot be arrived at without the exercise of the imagination. Facts are the colors with which we paint a picture, but the picture we paint must be born from our loving mind and imagination. Colors are meaningless without the artist's responsible approach to them.

It is difficult for civilized men to accept the cosmic justice of nature, in all its crudity. Minerals and plants have their own justice. Since Rousseau's idyllic conception of the natural state as the paradise from whence man was expelled by society, which keeps him in fetters, many are the happy ideologists who cannot be intellectually responsible in facing the truth about man. These ideologists are responsible for all the beautiful Utopias that inevitably lead mankind to a disastrous end, having started from a false beginning. This is true whether they be Utopias springing from an extreme right-wing

position like Nazism, or whether they be Utopias springing from an extreme left-wing position like communism. What they have in common is this lack of intellectual responsibility in the consideration of man as he is, this wishful thinking that replaces serious thought. The idea that man is naturally good and that society corrupts him does not coincide with man's behavior, unless we are ready to defend the goodness of the beast. History shows us the long and strenuous march of mankind to redeem itself from its egotistic natural impulses and, by the cumulative efforts of generations, to improve man's material and moral condition so that he may become a better creature than his predecessors. That is the whole history of the struggle of the human race. This is no pessimistic conception of man. It coincides with all religious insight of all time: To better ourselves we must make an effort. Betterment does not come naturally. To make this effort we must exercise our will power.

During these stages of struggle for a more complete and better manhood, intellectual responsibility obliges us to consider each step without undue pride or undue shame. I do not feel today like a foreigner speaking to strangers. I feel like a man speaking to other men. I do not believe we have different destinies as a race, which is the human race. There are different levels of achievement in different fields, but our struggle is common, our goal, which is a better manhood, is the same. No destiny of any man living on any part of the earth can be alien to our own. To capture this sense of responsibility

is part of the effort of our times. In order to advance toward this goal, the first step is to see ourselves and others as we really are. Not to read our own peculiarities or worse, our own prejudices, into our neighbor. We must allow the richness of all idiosyncracies to flourish, if we really want to achieve this common human destiny of which I speak.

This approach to our subject--which I would dare call the humanistic approach--is the only one that, in the final analysis, can be of real help.

The fact that humanists and artists are allowed to exist within the framework of free societies is precisely what distinguishes these societies from those that fear truth as it springs from reality--social, economic, spiritual reality.

The fact that free societies allow for the existence of such men does not mean that as a whole--as societies--they have reached this ideal brotherhood of man which humanists keep pointing out as the guiding star.

It does mean that they must not allow the star to be lost. That however urgently less lofty considerations may come into play, the door must be left open to the highest spiritual goals, so that we can continue to strive after them.

Shutting this door means the death of freedom. The death of man's ultimate possibility to redeem his fallen nature, to put it in theological terminology.

On account of their intrinsic structures, non-free societies cannot afford to leave this door open.

The paradoxical situation arising from this contrast that distinguishes free from totalitarian societies is this: That by allowing for human imperfection, free societies--as long as they are free--that is, as long as they respect the freedom of their intellectuals, can and do advance toward the attainment of a more complete and ever higher state of manhood.

Totalitarian societies, on the other hand, arising from a closed conception--a closed idea about man which implies he is perfect within the limits of the particular conception--do not allow room for moral progress. They shut all doors to the freedom of the spirit, and since the spirit is freedom, they shut all doors to the spirit.

Allowing for imperfection allows for betterment.

Perfect conceptions do not allow for imperfection, and therefore produce moral stagnation. This is a subtle paradox between free and totalitarian regimes.

A recent example of this stagnation occurred not long ago. For a moment it appeared that poets and artists would be allowed free expression in Soviet Russia. It was only for a moment. Freedom of expression is by nature contagious. As soon as that free expression started to become contagious--freedom came to an end.

This is an important reflection to keep in mind for all the "well-meaning idiots" who believe that "their" freedom would be spared if their respective countries came under this type of regime.

I spoke of a common human destiny.

It is important to realize that the appeal communism as an ideology has for many people of good will lies in the fact that it does purport to be a philosophy that will redeem mankind as a whole.

The idea of redemption has a religious appeal. Many of these so-called atheists are in fact very mystical characters, who are trying to fill the vacuum in their souls that is produced by scepticism bred of true faith without true practice, which in fact ceases to be true faith.

If we add that there are certain aspects of injustice--mainly in the economic and social spheres--for which the communist leadership is seriously trying to provide a solution, we shall realize that this appeal cannot be dealt with by just speaking beautiful words.

Words have different meanings in different contexts. The alternative: communism-democracy--may prove enough in the United States, for example, to bring about in the minds of people a clear realization of what both philosophies stand for.

In the Latin American countries it is not enough to make matters quite so clear.

Communism is a creed, democracy a form of government--to Anglo-Saxons it mostly means parliamentary democracy, which seems not to function quite as smoothly in the Latin countries.

And I am not thinking only of Latin American countries. I am also thinking of the European Latin countries that have a tendency to understand democracy in a different way. The Latin's plastic imagination would appear to crave the embodiment of principles in the human individual. Latins are inclined to follow the man.

Look at Spain, Portugal, even France, even Italy. No doubt the leader is expected to act within some kind of legal framework but the role he is expected to play goes far beyond that which leaders play in parliamentary democracies.

If by democracy as opposed to communism we simply mean democracy as understood by the Anglo-Saxons, I must warn that the term becomes weak--it lacks the necessary appeal to provide that mystique without which communism cannot be overcome because it has its own mystique, with true religious strength. The importance of mystique can be well illustrated by what happened in Argentina during the revolution that toppled Perón.

During his period of government all sorts of democratic pillars were tampered with or even destroyed with relative immunity by his regime: the Supreme Court--freedom of the press--fundamental civil rights in general.

The main body of the people didn't seem to mind too much.

We might venture to say they almost welcomed the attack on institutions that did not appear to spring from their innermost convictions or defend their interests. All attempts to depose Perón under the banner of saving democracy failed. Yet, when the regime in its final stage of moral decomposition started burning churches, a relatively small minority did manage to overthrow Perón with the acquiescence of the vast majority of the Peronist population, who had a clear realization that their leader was going too far in his folly and who let him fall.

Peronism had and still has a mystique. Yet Argentines experienced in those days the unmistakable feeling that Christianity (Catholicism in this case) had a stronger mystique. It proved to have. The so-called democratic forces joined in this successful revolution. They were unable to produce it themselves. In fact they failed every time they tried.

It so happened that once the revolution had triumphed and Perón was ousted, the "democratic" forces took over, with the results that subsequent history has shown.

Even when the democratic forces were in power, democratic ideals proved weaker than Peronism as a mystique. Once the religious conflict was no longer an issue, Peronism rapidly regained its former strength and is today numerically speaking the strongest political force in Argentina.

It is no accident that Perón's only real worry since his exile has been to regain the confidence of the Church, and that, like Henry IV at Canossa, he wears a penitent look before the Holy See.

The need for having a mystique and the danger to the promotion of reforms that its lack poses have been well perceived by the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil, Lincoln Gordon, whose new book A New Deal for Latin America: The Alliance for Progress expresses his concern about the obstacle this presents to the success of the Alliance for Progress. Without a mystique of its own, the Alliance is too remote, too cut and dried to spark the Latin imagination.

Other books recently published about Latin America are far more alarming than Gordon's, but alarming in a different sense. Amongst those ably reviewed by Tad Szulc in The New York Times Book Review I was particularly perturbed by John Gerassi's The Great Fear, published by Macmillan, a firm we are led to believe of high intellectual responsibility.

I will not go into a minute discussion of the assertions in this book.

The author approaches his subject with a rather simple formula in mind: the right--to-be identified as the reactionaries--and the left, to be identified as the progressives. Since it is difficult to identify these during the first phase of our national history (as it no doubt would also be in the United States), this formula allows him to condemn as unpatriotic all leadership in Ar-

gentina since our independence. All sides were, in his words, "out to milk the poor."

Little does it seem to matter to the author that some of our presidents did not have enough money to buy their formal clothes and were obliged to borrow them. Or that oligarch Manuel Belgrano--creator of our flag--on his deathbed had to pay his Scottish doctor with the only possession he had left--his watch--because whatever money he had received he had donated for the creation of schools.

Our most respected and honored patriots like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (a good friend of the United States by the way), who established compulsory primary education by the 1870's, thus ridding Argentina of the problem of illiteracy that far back--appears in this book as a man lacking moral principles and a coward to boot. We learn that he fled the country in terror during the yellow fever epidemic. It might help the author to clarify the reasons that might have led him to leave if he considered other facts: that from boyhood Sarmiento fought tyranny, that as a youth he kicked his way out of jail when he was about to be executed, that he worked as a miner in Chile, that he often caned people like the author of this book in public, that he returned to Argentina to join the military forces fighting the dictator Rosas, and a hundred other feats of endurance, bravery, and talent, including authorship of Facundo, a classic of Hispanic literature, plus a life so rich in overwhelming excellence that it has served as the inspiration for many of our countrymen in much the same way as Frank-

lin's has for Americans. For people with their little formula derived from Marxism, we imagine, without reading Marx, we also imagine, none of this counts.

It reminds me of an English theater critic, quite famous by the way, who disparaged Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream because it portrayed nothing of the class struggle of those days.

Gerassi's book has one thesis, which it is out to prove and which I shall summarize for your benefit. Latin America is one long story of corruption. The Abrahams and Davids of our history are little better than criminals. Revolution is inevitable. The only ones who can bring about this revolution are the Marxist nationalists or the communists themselves.

Ergo--since we do not want the communists (on what grounds, the author doesn't make at all clear) we must be ready to support the national Marxists. They will in the end be the non-enemies of the United States. Friends? Yes, insofar as this means friendship with China and Russia as well.

This, he holds, is true independence for Latin America--its only possible form of independence.

What of the fact that there are institutions in Latin American countries as old as the countries themselves? The Church? The military? They are corrupt, reactionary. Good riddance to them all.

The fact that the Castro revolution in Cuba started very much like this should worry no one.

Surely we sympathize with the concern for redressing the wrongs that Marxists point out. It could not be otherwise for any progressive person. But our way of going about it is not necessarily the same. Our philosophy is different.

Spiritually as well as physically, nature abhors a vacuum.

Societies will not tolerate a state of spiritual vacuum.

Once we have set aside our history, once all religious feeling has been eliminated, other forms of worship take its place.

Take away the image of the Saints, and you will get the image of Lenin in no time.

Communism overruns any country that does not have its own mystique.

Maybe Castro did not start as a communist, but having no mystique of his own to offer it was inevitable that he adopt the communist faith.

Let this also be a warning of the peril of playing with fire. The type of revolution based on a Marxist ideology that the left-wing socialists dream of for Latin America is fire. It belongs to the Marxist faith.

Is it true that these revolutionaries are of-

fering the only alternative to communism? Should this be considered an alternative? I personally do not believe so. The step between national and international Marxism is far too short for the type of stride people are capable of taking these days.

That there are wrongs to redress in Latin America, some of them really severe and urgent, nobody can deny.

That the redressing of these evils will take on a revolutionary character unless something is done about it, and done about it quickly, is also true.

That the Alliance for Progress is an excellent IDEA to bring about more urgent reforms through more pacific means--without waiting for matters to get out of responsible hands--is also very true.

The question is, what is actually needed for this IDEA to work? The IDEA will work as soon as it has the full spiritual and moral support of the people amongst whom it is meant to work.

And who are the people who can provide this spiritual support without which reform is doomed to failure?

The answer is obvious: they are the cultural leaders of the countries involved. Latin America is underdeveloped economically and socially but Latin America is not underdeveloped culturally.

In fact, Latin American countries have a lot to offer in the realm of creative achievement. Some of the best artists, composers, writers, and intellectuals can be found in Latin America. This is something Latin Americans are justly proud of.

These men are the new men.

As the Director of the Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires, I have taken part in this struggle to foster the new in the realm of art, and we have won.

It is not easy to break through the barriers of the old in any sphere, but it can be done.

The principal leaders of the workers' movement in Argentina are not Marxists. They have a Christian outlook and philosophy of values.

I know and have worked with some of these leaders. A mural painting movement has been started in some of the unions in a desire to bring culture to the people and to unite the spiritual strength of the cultural forces to that of the workers' movement.

New men, with a progressive outlook that is not Marxist, are not the exclusive patrimony of Argentina. For example, not long ago I read an article in a Colombian magazine that closely coincided with this trend that I have tried to bring to your attention.

To find these men, to encourage and support

them should in my opinion be the true concern of those in charge of the Alliance for Progress.

A new mystique is beginning to appear in Latin American countries. The sources are to be found, as is quite logical, in the world of art and culture. Creative artists and thinkers in Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, or Mexico hold in their hands the keys to this new perception, this new spirit with which to carry out reform.

This does not mean just a little clique of intellectuals divorced from social reality. It means much more than that.

These men are the spiritual strength of our countries, automatically representing the aspirations of the great bulk of the population, the true yearnings of our people.

Artists and thinkers are the natural spokesmen of the people. Cultural movements can never pretend to abolish history, national or universal.

Culture is a growing plant. It springs from the ground and like trees gives fruit by sucking strength from the earth. Communication between the culturally creative men and the people is a natural communication.

The new men I am talking about are not difficult to recognize.

They do not speak in terms of right and left. They speak in terms of the old--which must go--and the new, which has to be brought forth.

They do not equate the United States and the totalitarian states in their concept of friendship. They realize that the United States is a free community and that communist countries are not.

And they see this distinction as a very important one.

Whether this means trading with communist powers I cannot say. It would be good to look at the policy of the United States in this sphere to find an answer--I believe it trades with them.

New men do not necessarily speak of going to the masses. They prefer to talk about people instead of masses. They do not believe the people should be considered as a mass, without form or conscience.

And there is no need to go to a group if you belong to it. New men belong to the people. Those who make the distinction between themselves and the people are not new men.

New men don't have ready formulas to answer all questions belonging to past, present, or future. They believe new problems require new solutions, and that problems must be studied before any answer can be given. They realize that institutions with all their shortcomings have a reason to be, or else they wouldn't exist. But they also realize that institutions are meaningless without the vital force that living men must give them. That each generation must therefore give new life to the spirit of those institutions, that this struggle for awareness must start with-

in each man's inner self. The first conquest and victory the new man is concerned with is that of his own self. Since history exists, nations exist as nations, with their own traditions to be respected and made vital, not in order to dwell in the past but to use them as the first step in a ladder that must be climbed toward the future.

Respecting tradition means being always ready to change. The people who make tradition are those that bring about change.

But change must not be change for its own sake.

It must spring from a wise vision of what men are about, where they want to go, and where they have come from.

The new men put their trust in democratic rule as the expression of the will of the majority of the people but they respect the rights of those who happen to think differently (and they accept the idea that democracy can be other than parliamentary in its form). The new man subscribes to the Christian idea of charity as the highest human attitude in our dealings with fellow men. That is, charity understood as love.

To bring all this to a final synthesis I will say that the new man believes that only by having a creative attitude can we hope to achieve our own particular destiny and that of our human race.

These and no others are the men who will

In a famous lecture Paul Klee delivered at the turn of the first quarter of this century, at Jena, he expressed the opinion that talks about art are most profitable when the intent is to enrich the public's knowledge from a new angle, one distinct from that afforded by the work of art itself. The visual arts speak through the language of vision and words can do little to modify or enrich visual perception. On the other hand, words may be of service in opening new vistas that enrich the basic soil from which vision and all else springs: the consciousness of man. This as a first justification of my words.

Secondly, in speaking of the latest developments of art in Latin America I would point to specific characteristics that make Latin American expression differ from other artistic manifestations arising in other parts of the world. But before I do this I would like my audience to remember, however obvious it may seem, that whatever the degree of diversity, it is always man that is to be found at the bottom of all artistic endeavor. And that man, although accidentally different, to use Aristotelian terminology, is essentially the same everywhere. I find it only too important to remind you of this because there is a tendency nowadays to think in terms of differences to the point where we forget the more basic similarities. And this is very much so in a country like America that, for historical reasons, has lived somewhat isolated from the rest of the world and tends to look at the foreigner almost as if he were a different species from that of the only too charming anthropos known as the American citizen.

Not too long ago, startling conclusions about racial superiority were reached by ideologies that have happily met their doom. But even now some of the less brutal aspects of this physical and metaphysical error still exist. Latin America has certainly been one of the areas more greatly damaged by false prejudices of this nature throughout its history. Shortly after the discovery of the New World had taken place theologians in Europe were arguing whether the native Indian had a soul. In other words, whether he was a human being. And although the discussion in the end was favorable to the conclusion that indeed he was a human being, the stigma that the question posed then has, to our horror, left a mark to this day.

Let us start with a brief recapitulation of the historical factors that account culturally for this large area of the American continent known today as Latin America, which starts geographically at the northern border of Mexico and runs right down to the Antarctic Pole, a land that, however barren, is very much in dispute these days. Although minor cultural areas could be found spreading from different centers at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards at the end of the fifteenth century, history is agreed that the two most important seats of culture were that of the Aztecs and the Mayas, centered in the countries which today we call Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, and the Inca Empire, which extended on the Pacific Coast from Peru north into present-day Ecuador and south through Bolivia and part of Chile and into the Argentine

Republic. Here our differences start vis-à-vis North American civilization. While the Pilgrim fathers and their successors met only simple agricultural tribes, lacking any kind of advanced culture, the Spaniards, on the other hand, found at least these two areas of rather high cultural development. If to this we add the fact that while the Anglo-Saxon waged a war of expulsion against the Indian tribes he encountered, the Spaniard and the Portuguese, on the other hand, married and intermingled with the native population, we already have starting points so obviously diverse that the results could hardly be the same.

It was fashionable for a time in writing the history of Latin America to give little or no importance to our pre-Columbian past. But to the measure in which this past becomes more and more present, the art historian and the sociologist, the ethnologist and the archaeologist have found it increasingly necessary to take it into consideration. If it is true that the Spanish conquistadors tried to erase all forms of native Indian culture and superimpose their own, it is no less true that the stubbornness with which the natives of the soil have preserved some of their characteristics make it now impossible to ignore their influence any longer. The point I am making can be illustrated certainly in more than one example.⁽¹⁾ Basic economic legacies in terms of food and domestic animals should be cited. The potato, for example, originally domesticated in the Andean highlands, which today is one of the basic food products consumed in the world; the whole economy of countries like Ireland is practically dependent upon it. The native turkey,

which has given a name to a European nation. There is also the tomato, and even one of the more elegant vices, today undergoing heavy attacks--tobacco smoking; all these are but a few instances of what these cultures passed on to Western civilization. The vocabularies of the Spanish and Portuguese tongues were enriched with Aztec, Carib, Quechua, and Guaraní terms.

All this there was, without counting what we owe to the direct contact between conquerors and native Indian populations, which in some cases certainly must have colored the imported forms with very different tonalities from those of their original models.⁽²⁾ Inter-marriage between the European and the Indian had both an obverse and a reverse side, as we gather from Garcilaso de la Vega, the Peruvian historian who died the same year as Cervantes and who recounts the following anecdote in his Royal Commentaries. It appears that a marriage had been arranged between one of the Spanish captains and an Inca princess. As a civilian the Spaniard had been a barber (Sira Camayo), a profession not highly regarded among the Incas (who liked their hair long), so that when during the ceremony the princess was asked whether she would take the captain as her lawful wedded husband, she answered in the Quechua language: "Ichach munani, ichach mana munani," which means: "maybe I do, maybe I don't." This very simple anecdote is perhaps an eloquent illustration of the whole attitude that underlay complete acceptance or non-acceptance of European civilization by the already existing hierarchy of value. Maybe I do, maybe I don't. And

this "maybe I do, maybe I don't" is probably a key to the understanding of the attitudes that permeate the whole of Latin American culture today.

This question creeps into the baroque architecture that the Spaniards imported during colonial times⁽³⁾--angel imagery that suddenly has the hieratic attitude of a corn god or the sensuality of an African goddess. To complete the racial picture it should be recalled that, after the defense that Father Las Casas made of the native Indian against the major forms of exploitation by the Spanish lords, Negro slaves were imported from Africa in great numbers, especially by the Portuguese into Brazil, and that this final racial element would be incorporated with the autochthonous and the European, giving the final flavor to this café au lait which is the resulting color composition of the Latin American population.

Throughout the following centuries new waves of immigration arrived, mostly European. Of these the most important in the last century were the Italian groups that settled in Brazil and Argentina.

With this brief glance backward we may now start to wonder about the whys and the hows of the attitudes that define the Latin American approach to life and its expression through the arts. Unless we bear in mind the simple factors I have sketched, it will be impossible to understand the manifestations of our spirit. It is true that Latin American countries differ widely from one another. That from the jungles that envelop

the Mayan monuments of Chichén-Itzá and Uxmal to those depicted by José Eustasio Rivera in the Colombian scenario of La Vorágine, to the tropical atmosphere that permeates Brazil down to the pampas of Uruguay and Argentina or the beautiful fjords of Chile, many are the accents that can be detected and taken into consideration.

But apart from language--Spanish is common to all these countries with the exception of Brazil, which speaks Portuguese--there is a common reality shared by the Latin American man that gives him an identifiable personality, original and distinct from those of other sectors of mankind. Some of these characteristics I shall investigate in an attempt to discover whatever basic qualities define a Latin temperament and philosophy of life as compared with those in the United States; needless to say these will be broad generalizations and exceptions can always be found, but even so I believe they will prove useful for understanding the more finished product of Latin American culture.

The influence of religion cannot be underestimated. The conquistadors introduced Catholicism as they understood it, a pattern quite different from the Protestant traditions that underlie many of the basic attitudes of North Americans. This Catholicism of the Spaniards was of a special brand, since their country had been occupied by the Moors for almost eight centuries and it is difficult to believe that some of the beliefs and customs belonging to that proud race had not found their way into the Spanish way of life. Many were the conquistadors who had

their seraglios, in the best Moorish tradition. Domingo Martínez de Irala, a typical Spanish figure who ruled what is today Paraguay and part of Argentina, had a dozen Indian wives. The first historian of that era, Ruiz Díaz de Guzmán, was the grandson of Irala, and an Indian called Leonor.

Let us now turn to basic attitudes. And let us use contrast as a means for emphasizing these attitudes:

It is perhaps valid to say that North American civilization is primarily oriented toward the attainment of truth as its highest aspiration. Truth as an abstract concept belongs primarily to the realm of reason. The purest form of truth in this sense belongs to the exact sciences and also to their application in the field of technology. Truth becomes human in the sense that it is the patrimony of the human mind to investigate truth and to apply it in the practical realm. In American everyday life, truth translates itself into sincerity as the supreme virtue in social communication. A tremendous value is placed upon saying the truth over and above any other consideration. The doctor will tell the patient exactly what is wrong with him as part of this religious belief in the truth. Government will take the form of a rationally worked out system that in order to function will need the rational support of its citizens.

As a good starting point for understanding a primordial difference between the States and Latin America I would say that the Latin Ameri-

can philosophy of values does not concern itself primarily with truth as its goal in the manner I have just described. Latin American culture has as its main objective the preservation and expansion of life, which is a much broader and also a very contradictory concept. Life on the biological level is intimately connected with the cycles of nature. Woman is the living example of this assertion. All philosophies that are primarily vitalistic are also primarily static; static in the sense that they are bound to the cyclical concept of reality. The Aztecs and the Incas and the Mayas were greatly concerned with astronomy.⁽⁴⁾ It would perhaps be more exact to say with astrology, inasmuch as they viewed the stars and the heavens as the sanctuary that held the key to recurrent human events. They had calculated the years with great precision and their festivities, intimately bound with planting the seed and raising the crop, partook to a great extent of this cosmic concept of life.

Whereas the search for truth is dynamic and might be drawn symbolically with a straight line clearly defining the past, the present and the future, the preservation of life is cyclical and could well be symbolized by a circle, where natural events repeat themselves encircling man and concentrating him instead of projecting him toward the outer world. The existence of mandalas, taking the form of calendar stones, revealed by Aztec and Quechua art, can help us very much to understand the static condition of both these cultures.

A perceptive study by the Argentine sociolo-

gist Rodolfo Kusch⁽⁵⁾ essays a semantic interpretation of Quechua culture. He distinguishes the dynamic Western attitude symbolized in the word ser, "to be," which is derived from the Latin esse and means to be in essence, actively and dynamically, from the attitude embodied in estar, also translated as "to be," which stems from the Latin stare and denotes being in terms of location, state, or condition. To be, in the first sense, which has reverted under Heidegger's influence to its classical meaning implying the quality of aspiration toward perfection, is a word found only in Western philosophy. The Quechua's attitude, which stresses the mystic importance of fasting, makes man withdraw into himself. The awesome feeling that he is at the mercy of the world's cosmic forces leaves no other road but contemplation and its consequences: inaction, quiescence, a state of mere existence, the essence of estar. The Quechua solution is an internal one. He can only adapt to the environment by modifying himself, whereas the Western solution disassociates the subject from himself and loses the self in action.

In this attitude can be read the whole difference that underlies the approaches to human destiny that Latins and North Americans have. The American, who is without a doubt the ultimate representative of Western culture in its final consequences, believes in modifying his environment through action. He believes in surgery as the solution to man's illnesses. The Latin, on the other hand, is oriented inwardly toward an empathy with nature. Even illness he will try to overcome passively by living with it,

by coming to terms with it, or, at the most, by using those herbs that spring from nature itself to counteract its malevolent influences. Destiny will not be something to be laid hold of so that it can take on any shape or form that the human will decides. It will be something already there, existing before man came into the picture and to which man will try to adapt himself. Such is the only way that man can achieve his destiny. It is no exaggeration to say that this approach is much nearer to what has been defined as the mystical approach to human existence. One of devoiding the self of all exterior trappings till the new self is ready to adapt to powers that lie beyond it, either through acquiescence or through rejecting those powers but never by acting as if those powers would be forced to become different through the exercise of the human will.

As you can see, we have entered a field wherein can be perceived two basically different approaches to the mystery of life. It would perhaps clarify matters to say the American is the more Occidental approach and the Latin is much nearer the Oriental one, if we take into consideration the philosophy preached by Buddhism, by Hinduism and by Taoism, all of which coincide in viewing this essential passivity as a means of achieving wisdom. I am defining extreme positions in order to clarify these ideas. As I said at the beginning they are generalizations and as such all kinds of exceptions can be made to them, but basically I believe they remain valid descriptions of two different cultural inheritances and two different cultural approaches.

The versions of Christianity north and south of the Rio Grande have been adapted to these basic temperaments. On the one hand, Protestantism stresses the role played by the individual, shoving the whole weight of responsibility on the individual soul and thus producing this almost tragic figure that the American appears to me, torn by the problems of conscience and carrying them with a strain and a dignity that translate themselves only too often into the apparently less dignified forms of all kinds of psychological tortures and physiological disturbances. The Latin, on the other hand, using the kind of Catholicism meant for local consumption, shifts all responsibility to the cosmic mother, the Church, which in his belief has taken the place of the Pacha Mama (Mother/Earth), and continues to live his life in an attitude untroubled by considerations of past sins; these become part of life itself, and bother him very little as problems of the individual man.⁽⁶⁾

Naturally, attitudes such as these are reflected in the world of aesthetic expression. Form becomes a primordial consideration to the Latin insofar as form is one of nature's exquisite manifestations.⁽⁷⁾ This idea of form manifests itself in ritual and human relations. The search for truth dispenses with the consideration of vital form. The scientist or the technologist can afford to eat a hamburger in his motorcar and go on with his job regardless of all else. The man who has made the preservation of life his goal cannot dispense with any part of it to reach his destiny. Food and manners will be of primordial importance to his life.

Art as an expression of life will also be submitted to formal considerations. Life follows patterns. The cosmic forces have cycles. Even animals of the lower species will be seen to respect these forms in the wooing of their mates. The bee is a good example. This openness to the forms of nature will necessarily translate itself into an art that is respectful of form. I am not necessarily saying that this art shall follow specific patterns. Forms in nature vary from the mineral and geological world of the geometric to the freer echelons of natural life. But whatever the stage of the manifestation, there will always be a form to be respected, one emerging from life itself.

In the social world this is translated into the observation that Count Herman Keyserling⁽⁸⁾ aptly pointed out when he spoke of Latin delicadeza, which means delicacy in manners. Certain actions will be considered offensive when they do not respect this essential form. And, on the other hand, people can get away with murder as long as they are ready to be well bred about it. And this is more than a metaphor, as anyone reading Keyserling may find out.

This concern with form has been greatly misunderstood by the critics of Latin American art. The acceptance of foreign patterns has usually been more a matter of politeness than of inner conviction. I would like to recall the Quechua reaction: "Maybe I do, maybe I don't." Latin respect for imported traits and models has been more on the surface than internal, and this statement embraces the totality of Western cultural

values. No thorough investigation has yet been made of exactly what Christianity, for example, means in Latin America. I personally have the conviction that it means something quite different from what it means for a European or an American. A symbol of this may well be found in the meditations of the poet Fernando Demarfa⁽⁹⁾ while contemplating, somewhere in the Andes, a cross that bears on either side the engraved forms of the sun and the moon. Sensitive souls have perceived the conflict I refer to; one of the classics of insight into the Latin's religious emotions is D. H. Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent.

The problem becomes even more complicated when we acknowledge the fact of the tremendous influence and impact of the European himself in our picture. Logically, for the immigrant or the man not far removed from the European immigrant, the underlying matrix of Indian culture of which I speak is not one that is necessarily perceived at first sight. Like the reptiles in the jungle or the partridges in the expanses of a wild and vast pampa, whose forms blend with their surroundings, the Latin American has shown real genius in blending himself into those patterns which were originally superimposed upon him without consultation. Although redundant, I will repeat that the final cultural product of the Latin American spirit does have a decisive ingredient that derives from European tradition, and no man of culture in our milieu would either deny this or resent it or decry it. We are proud to feel that this inheritance belongs to us. But the important point is that, to a far larger extent than with the European tradition in the

United States, our inheritance has been enriched and modified by the indigenous patterns, and today we affirm our roots with undaunted eloquence. An artistic parallel of what I am trying to say might be that of the distinction between a work of art by Roy Lichtenstein and a comic strip. It is only too obvious and too wrong to mistake one for the other. The external characteristics are the same, or apparently the same, but the significance of one is completely different from that of the other. Perhaps this is why I personally feel so very attracted to the work of Lichtenstein, to the images he employs to express his personality. In fact, what he is doing shows an attitude that is very Latin indeed.

My formulation will explain and, I hope, help to destroy the myth that Latin American art is derivative.

When derivativeness is used in the pejorative sense it means art that is imitative, that lacks original insight, and that repeats with servility the imagery and the style of another culture. It would be highly unfair to restrict the sources of inspiration of the Latin artist to those of his pre-Columbian past. Again we must recall the racial elements that came into play within our milieu, particularly those of European origin, and surely this gives us the title of rightful heirs of European culture as well. Besides, for a long time the peculiar situation of the conqueror and the vanquished gave to our societies a kind of inferiority complex regarding the use of the more native idioms of pre-Columbian art. The artist felt that if he wanted to belong to the

dominant stratum of society he would be most successful if his art could be identified with that of Europe, and therefore by painful degrees he managed to hide the less European traits of his art. That does not mean that those traits are absent. It simply means that a subtle eye is required to identify them; and if it be true that during the better part of the last century and the beginning of this one the ignorance of the learned conspired against the clarity of the artist's message, it is no less true that as we have grown in self-assurance the originality of the Latin spirit has become and is becoming ever more manifest.

The question may be raised how does one detect the difference between forms that are so intimately related to the European and those that belong to the Latin imagination? How does one distinguish between a Lichtenstein and a comic strip? The answer must be in terms of the spirit. In other words, to penetrate into the deeper reality it is spirit that must recognize itself and therefore the authenticity of the work it purports to judge or enjoy. By using the term spirit we do not mean to hide our ignorance in words too vague to be precisely defined. We speak of the spirit as a domain wherein lies the possibility of communication between all cultures and all values that transcend the provincial in order to become universal, and which pertain to all men. I believe that this possibility of spiritual transcendence lies in the intensity with which we are willing to support our feelings and ideas. This capacity to seek truth with intensity or to preserve life with intensity is what

ultimately allows the meeting ground to be intensity itself. Borrowing from the philosopher Berdiaeff I would like to depict this peculiar new form of existence in a symbol in which the straight line of mathematical time touches the circumference of the circle of cyclical time at a single point, thus symbolizing this new time that is challenging man to become the new man.

It is this capacity for authenticity that ultimately defines the new man, in whom the antagonisms are finally overcome and the contradictions come to an end. It would be wrong to believe that Latin American cultural values are necessarily the same or necessarily harmonious with those that the American culture of the North has reached. I believe it would be better to consider them different and in some cases even antagonistic. I do not believe that the man true to Latin spirit and tradition can help feeling a state of spiritual upheaval when he comes into contact with the essential values of this northern civilization. But I do think that the greatest contribution that we Latins can make to this civilization is to bring you our disagreements with it, our differences with it, and our conflicting viewpoints. We come to clash, if clash we must, because we believe that in this clash lies the secret to the glowing richness and strength of the human spirit. It is precisely the intensity with which we each live our own beliefs that will make us meet in the existential time of our human tempos. The new man of which I speak is not the patrimony of one culture or the other. He is the patrimony of all who have the courage to be what they are and proclaim, like Pistol in Shakespeare's Henry IV, "I am what I am." In fact,

we cannot afford sincerely to be ourselves while continuing to be as we were yesterday, when today is offering us new possibilities of being. Both North Americans and Latins have lost their isolated state of innocence. Non-communication is ceasing to be an excuse. History obliges us to see each other as we are. If we discard one another through prejudice or ignorance, this great revolution that the marriage of two cultures implies will be lost. It will dwindle into formulas of politeness or impoliteness, leaving nothing behind. We Latins do not want artificial insemination. We are out to have a real love affair. I believe that through love, whose course never did run smooth, we will meet in the new man.

Notes

1. For a careful enumeration of the pre-Columbian legacy in terms of economy, language, etc., see Pedro Henríquez Ureña, *Las Corrientes Literarias en la América Hispánica - Biblioteca Americana - Fondo de Cultura Económica - Mexico City*, and *Historia de la Cultura en la América Hispánica - Colección Popular - Fondo de Cultura Económica - Mexico City*, by the same author (first edition 1947).
2. Examples of the impact of the New World and its inhabitants on the Europeans can be traced from the very first letters of Christopher Columbus and the instances narrated by the first chroniclers of the Conquest, especially Bernal Díaz del Castillo: *Nueva Historia de la Conquista de Nueva España*. (There are several English translations). This influence can be symbolically followed at its best in the

Intellectuals all over the world, and particularly in the Latin American countries, are making more and more of a habit of appending their signatures to documents that set forth this or that political ideology or even at times support this or that form of economic development. They believe that perhaps on account of their well-earned laurels (we hope) in their respective intellectual fields they are entitled to be heard in other spheres of human endeavor. As a good example I recall a dialogue that took place last year during which Jean-Paul Sartre debated with his Soviet friends the convenience or inconvenience of translating Kafka into Russian, with a matter-of-factness that one might use when discussing whether some particular herb should be recommended in the diet of a lady seeking to lose weight. Be it said that Sartre was in favor of translation, but the mere fact that such an issue could be discussed so lightly is what struck me to the point of alarm. Since when, I asked myself, do intellectuals feel that in order to remain such they must lend their support to this or that political ideology, this or that economic or military strategy?

I think the moment has come to try to clarify our cultural goals and, with the honesty that the theme demands, to make some contribution however modest to the problem of the intellectuals' attitude that only too often is the result of a kind of moral blackmail practiced against them by less scrupulous interests.

The Artist and Society

The famous alternative "ivory tower" or "engagé intellectual" is to a large degree responsible for the state of affairs I have just mentioned. Those who speak in favor of the ivory tower (art for art's sake) hold the view that the artist must concern himself with his art, which in itself is quite something to be concerned with, and lay aside completely and even shun the social problems that surround him and that are better left in the hands of the specialists dedicated to them. The engagé artist, by contrast, holds the view that art is the product of a certain social reality to which the artist cannot afford to remain indifferent; therefore, the creative man should be aware of and involved in the socio-political struggles taking place around him and should use his art to make his voice heard in the service of the noble ideals under debate. And this is not all; the artist and the intellectual must also take a stand outside the particular sphere of his art. Through pamphlets and manifestos that will give weight to those ideals, he is to bring pressure on society, thereby fulfilling the role of responsible leader expected of him. It is my thesis that both the ivory tower attitude and that of the engagé intellectuals are wrong and that the error stems from a lack of meditation regarding the true nature of the creative endeavor.

The Ivory Tower

Regarding the would-be inhabitants of the tower it should be recalled that the creativity

they emphasize is only one aspect of art. The difficulty of any art lies not so much in overcoming the technical and formal instruments of the métier as in overcoming the barriers that separate us from life, of which art is the distilled expression. An environment in which artists and intellectuals are separated from the fountains of vitality may produce great artisans and even great artificers. It will hardly produce great artists. Long is the roster of tower-dwellers admired by the academic world; a world increasingly in danger of becoming the congregation of the dead. Time takes care to bury the mummified results of such admiration, and those who survive do so more as curiosities than as permanent lessons to mankind.

As societies become decadent they would appear to produce growing numbers of these library termites, these jugglers of the mind that transform art into something equivalent to solving a crossword puzzle.

If it be true that art has among its many aspects that of entertaining, it has as well other attributes far more transcendent, and the artist, therefore, is something more than a juggler or a magician. Should Schlegel's terminology sound too religious when he says that the destiny of the artist's activity is to awaken the supernatural vocation of the soul I would translate it into less controversial terms by quoting Henry Miller when he says that it is the mission of the artist to make unbearable the limits that the everyday world imposes upon us. I myself would add that the purpose of art and thought is

to reveal to man his true essence, putting him face to face with his deeper self. Art is like a mirror and that is why every man reacts to a work of art according to what he himself is. Very often what art reveals to man regarding his being is something that he would prefer not to see, and that explains why art has so many detractors.

The Engagé Intellectual

It might appear that the answer to this purported antiseptic isolationism of the devitalized would be found in the attitudes of the engagé. For him a sort of noblesse d'esprit would demand that the artist be the reflection of the social problems that surround him, and in this reflection would be found the solution to these problems. The artist, owing to his peculiar sensibility, is more aware of reality than is the rest of society and this obliges him to state his opinions on the urgent political, economic, and social problems that challenge his community. According to the engagé intellectual, the artist's work must be at the service of the solution of these problems. He must, like a good responsible citizen, use his talent to solve these riddles. Not to do so is to betray his responsibility as a member of the community.

It is true that this then is the mature attitude worthy of the intellectual? I do not think so. If on the one hand it be true that the attitude of the ivory tower juggler appears to me to show only a partial understanding of the real nature of the creative endeavor, neither can I agree to reduce

or limit the creative act to the needs and levels of sociological considerations. The poet must be a part of the world, but he cannot be its creature. "The poet," says Leopoldo Marechal, "is a bramble bush in a sociological field of scallions."

The Bramble Bush

The poet is a bramble bush. The poet is neither the politician, nor the economist, nor the sociologist. The poet is the poet. The poet--and we are using the term in its widest sense to mean the intellectual, the artist and the creative mind--does not adhere to this or that partial aspect of man but to man himself, to the whole man. As Unamuno would say, to nothing more and nothing less than the whole man. And when we say the whole man we implicitly mean all men. If today we are still moved by the drama of the Greeks it is not because the characters in those plays are noblemen and kings, nor do we cease to be moved because the proletariat does not hold the limelight. The drama of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides or Aristophanes moves us today because it presents man with his problems, his pains, his joys that are far more lasting than his social, political, or economic condition. All these are partial aspects of reality that play their part in artistic creation as something added to it, accidentally, in the Aristotelian sense, but that do not constitute the primordial goal of the artist. What I say about the drama of the Greeks may be said of their sculpture and in turn may be said of all the great legacies of any culture, whether their creators

be called Shakespeare, Cervantes, Kafka or Picasso.

If Picasso's Guernica is a great work of art, let us not be deceived. It is not because it portrays the suffering of one of the factions during the Spanish Civil War but because through this inspirational motif Picasso reaches into the suffering of man over and beyond all factions. If instead of Guernica the picture had the title of any other battle or massacre it would still have the same value. This does not mean that the true artist does not take his inspiration from the circumstance that surrounds him; what it does mean is that the artist is such in the measure in which he transcends this circumstance, in the measure in which his sentiment is deep enough to redeem not only the creature of the circumstance that inspired him but all men who would sooner or later be brought into communion with his work of art. The artist does not paint or write for a sector of the community. The artist works for all; his message is for all. His loyalty is to man, to man's human condition, to man's dignity, to man's freedom, precisely because it is in his freedom that his dignity and his human condition reveal themselves most clearly. This freedom of which I speak is something more than the freedom to do this or that, to say this or that; it is the freedom of man to be himself. That is why there is equivalent human dignity in a Bottom of A Midsummer Night's Dream to that of a Hamlet, both sprung from the same imagination. This is why Don Quixote would be lame without Sancho Panza; this is why Calderón saw the King and the Beggar as equally

important in their roles in his Great Theater of the World.

Man's freedom is something that belongs to each man. It is in this freedom that he is reborn. It was his freedom of choice in the dilemmas of his conscience, including the freedom not to be, that tormented the Prince of Denmark as it does today the whole school of the Nadasistas in Colombia. Because of this the artist's concern with man goes deeper than that of the politician, the economist, or the sociologist. At the same time, it includes the problems of these specialists, and it deals with them not as discrete aspects of man that can be dissected out with an intellectual scalpel but rather as inseparable aspects of the whole man.

The reason creativity has always been the most stubborn enemy of all forms of tyranny and oppression is, simply, that the artist cannot allow himself to be fettered by minor or partial visions of man. The conflict between the artist and the tyrant is precisely because the tyrant must prescribe standards and set permissible limits while the artist must create for and of the whole man. Thus creativity is in itself a denunciation of tyranny. It is no mere chance that Nazi Germany should have persecuted the creative minds of the Bauhaus School or that Soviet totalitarianism must every now and again launch its purges of artists and intellectuals who attempt to make their voices heard within that society; nor will it ever be mere chance that those who attempt to impose totalitarian regimes must as a logical consequence silence the testi-

mony of the intellectuals. Those who accept the hard vocation and responsibility of being poets and intellectuals, those who have pledged themselves to the major revolution of the spirit must firmly refuse the compromise of minor revolutions, the distraction of partial goals. And it is hard indeed to be accosted by all forms of extremes, by the "temptations of the rich and the tears of the poor," without conceding one inch in this supreme mission of giving testimony of the whole man for all men.

The New Revolution

There is no political revolution and no form of government that can claim for itself the servitude of the intellectual and the work of his creative spirit. If it be a healthy government or a healthy revolution it will try to put its strength at the service of the creative mind in the measure of the possible. And when I say in the measure of the possible I am pointing to the fact that it is enormously difficult for governments of men at a single stroke to fit themselves completely to the claims of the spirit as revealed by the intellectual. It is not an unhealthy skepticism that leads intelligent governments to propose more modest ends than the goals that the spirit proposes, to be reached through stages of gradual education, since governments are not formed necessarily by artists and intellectuals. Only when society as a whole reaches the stage where physiological egotism is changed into spiritual generosity could we hope to think in terms of a more perfect integration of the artist and the community. In the meantime we must allow for

the fact that societies are healthy not necessarily because they realize in full the aspirations of their intellectuals but because they allow their intellectuals to exist and express themselves with all the freedom and integrity of their unusual personalities. What we may ask then of governments is to have this humility: the hygienic humility of knowing themselves to be partial in their accomplishments and of looking with respect to those sectors of the population--the artists, scientists, and intellectuals--that mold the highest aspirations of mankind. I think this is a characteristic that, with all their vices and short-comings, democratic governments preserve and one that, with all their achievements and conquests, totalitarian regimes lose.

From these bases we may deduce that for the true intellectual the activities of pamphleteering and appending his name to political manifestos are very secondary. I can see such activities as justified only when freedom of expression itself is under attack, when the creative spirit is muffled, because as long as this does not occur the rest of the criticisms and claims that the artist feels obliged to state should be implicit in his creative achievement. Were this not so his work would fall short aesthetically because it would not reveal him in all his completeness. A good number of those who shift from a vital art to an art at the service of politics are nothing better than artistic failures trying to camouflage their lack of talent by winning renown through a more superficial channel.

I hope these thoughts will contribute to clari-

fyng the problem of the responsibility of intellectuals in general and of those working in the New World in particular. On our fertile soil we must preserve an atmosphere in which men of imagination and creative capacity can find congenial lodging. I can see no higher privilege for a society than that of having in its midst the intellectual and the poet.

Answer to the poet

I am writing to you... the poet... the answer...

I am writing to you... the poet... the answer...

When you asked to think the way to help... the poet... the answer...

**Address delivered at the First
Inter-American Meeting of Directors of
Cultural Affairs on September 19, 1963**

"I am writing to ask you whether I should remove the nails of this cross that I bear. All of us are crucified today: on one side, there is tenderness; on the other, the solidarity of man; hope is above; and despair is on all sides.

"I am living, forgive me--suffering through one of those nights that seems like an endless tunnel with no dawn in sight. How long eternity is when there is no desire to live and when the awareness of an overwhelming hopelessness gnaws at us like a worm. But don't worry, brother of mine. My life does not deserve the expenditure of a bullet; it deserves much more. Whatever happens, the thread of life will endure, and one of these days the sun will shine, let us hope.

.....

"Whoever wishes to make the journey to hell, let him come to us. We issue the passport free of charge, not even demanding that you believe in us. It is enough that the newly chosen believe in themselves and that they pray to their blessed creative spirit, which is the spirit of the universe, to give them each day the holy life everlasting.

.....

"But our strong desire to live does not desert us. The brightness of the air takes us by the hand, and we fly onward with the wind, resisting atomic holocausts, wandering stars, and the screams of the murdered, for one hears every-

thing in this world. And we have two ears, one for the noise of the cannon and the other for the song of the birds. As you can see, nature is saintly and is good to us. She wounds us, and at the same time, she heals us; she destroys us and she also rebuilds us.

"But I do not believe that we can deliver ourselves up to the rare and tender melody of the birds and forget the cannons. The cannons must be hushed, silenced, in order that the birds may reign supreme. But must we also, perhaps, use the cannons to make way for the triumph of melody?

.....

"Do you not think that if we appeal to the cannons in defense of the spirit and of melody we shall drive off the birds forever and make their supremacy impossible?

"Do you not agree that this cursed, eternal turning back leads to nothing, and that life is passing us by while we spin within the vicious circle of hope and despair?

"And if we were to remain silent, or to be pacifists, neutrals, or undefiled poets--would that not mean compromising with the interminable rule of the cannon?

"And finally, is there no hope for mankind or for its hymn of salvation?

"There is no good in doubt, impotence, or endless despair. I think this is why I am so de-

pressed; here, under this ceiling of misery, in this spiritual dead-end street, I wait in agony for the sun that never shines.

"What shall we do, my little friend--you who are older, have suffered more, and have known more 'pan American union'? What is there to say, while waiting for the spoken word to regain its prestige and dignity in the crazed and beclouded human mind? Ah, I see less than a mole in daylight. I am confused by the darkness that holds no future. Do you see any light? Let it shine...."

.....

The foregoing paragraphs are taken from the work of the Colombian author Gonzalo Arango, one of the major figures in contemporary literature in our hemisphere. Thus speaks the tormented spirit of the writer of our time. Through his words, I have wanted to convey the living presence of the lion around which this First Inter-American Meeting of Directors of Cultural Affairs is being held. Far too often have I seen a ferocious beast pining away behind bars--bars that are comforting to the spectator walking through the zoo but that are far from pleasant for the miserable inhabitant of the cage. Far too often have I seen the professorial pointer indicate, with academic coldness, the beauties of that fabric whose author had perished in the madness that comes of helplessness and destitution.

Fortunately, I can say to those who listen to me and to those who hear the echo of my words

that this has not been the case at this first inter-American meeting of those responsible for encouraging cultural activity.

This, gentlemen, has not been merely one more meeting of bureaucrats. As modest men (because the human condition is modest), we have met because of a genuine and honest concern with finding some answer to the urgent and pressing demands of men of the spirit who look to us. They want to believe in us. They want to believe in the supremacy of the birds. They want to believe in statesmen. They want to believe in international organizations.

It is up to us to show them that that wish is not in vain. That we, as well as they, are conscious of crisis. That if they are bleeding in the solitude of their retreats, we bleed no less over our typewriters as we sit at our office desks.

We shall not answer them with excuses. Neither shall we answer them with the lies of those who promise a paradise on earth, which turns out to be no more than a paradise of cows and pigs. Because that is the price that must be paid in order not to suffer. To be spared suffering, one must sacrifice the quality of being human. Freedom carries with it imperfection and struggle, but it is also the essential expression of man and of man's soul. To renounce it, therefore, is tantamount to renouncing membership in mankind.

We are modest men and modest officials, who work in systems of government in which

imperfection is an inevitable part. But let us not be mired in this certain but gloomy aspect of our human condition. Imperfect we are, but we are capable of becoming less so. And it is on this potentiality for improvement that the emphasis of our message should be placed. Because we have a message; we have our answer to suffering and death.

Our answer and our message are based on the constant battle that we wage to improve ourselves in the performance of our daily work. We believe in the obligation of civil status. We believe in individual responsibility. And we believe that this pattern of perpetual struggle that, except for temporary interruptions, we the people of the Americas have chose as a way of life, is the one most appropriate to our vocation as men and as peoples; the vocation of being, with all the dignity and suffering implicit therein.

In this aim we must not try to wrench tears or to gain favors. What we must try to do is to turn all our attention to helping the helpless, because we know that to whatever extent and for whatever reasons the dignity of man is impaired, so is our own dignity impaired. We see ourselves reflected in the oppressed and the injured. They are men, and so are we.

We said that we believe in the obligation of civil status, that is, in the responsibility of the citizen. If from the Orient we have received the mysticism of religious faith, from Greece we have inherited that Apollonian, enlightened concept of individual responsibility. If we can de-

mand of an artist quality in his work, so can the artist demand of us efficiency in the performance of our administrative duties. If we were so lacking in responsibility that all we did was to keep one more chair warm at public expense, then we would deserve to be considered unworthy of our jobs and to be replaced by others who would be more conscientious.

Every country in the Americas, without exception, is in one way or another confronted by situations whose solution can no longer be postponed. We, who believe in the virtues of ancient Greece and of Oriental mysticism, are no longer the only ones who offer solutions. Other highly powerful forces challenge our philosophy of life and conquer those who feel that they have nothing to lose in the game. By the time the conquered ones finally stop to think and realize the value of what they have lost, it is too late, because freedom, like health, is not fully cherished until that dreadful moment when we are deprived of it.

This, then, is a double-edged message. On the one hand, it is directed to those who look to us, asking themselves and asking us whether within our respective organizations we are capable of achieving the aspirations of the people of the Americas which are defining a new kind of humanism. On the other hand, our message should go to those who hold the most responsible positions in our governments and organizations, so that they may be made to see where the greatest needs lie, and so as to stir the powerful administrative machinery within the democratic state to fulfill our peoples' just aspirations, now raised

to the highest rank by their artists, men of letters, and thinkers. The time has come when it must be acknowledged that art and thought are more than just a luxury. They are the abstract symbol of a community's deepest longings, and those who ignore these voices are, by the same token, ignoring the vocation of being of each and every one of our peoples.

Longings for economic and social betterment are undoubtedly a partial expression of this spirit, which, for this reason, does not quarrel or conflict with them. But we shall certainly be careful not to place those longings outside the human context, raising them above the level where they naturally belong, for when that happens we shall have succumbed to the pathetic idolatry of the golden calf, the biblical punishment for which we have not forgotten.

We believe that America is the depository of that faith that is not extinguished because it is made of the transformed life of those of us who dare to live in the spiritual dimension. The spirit does not fear what is material, because it recognizes the latter as a useful part of itself. Neither does the spirit depreciate what is material, because it knows that without the material it would scarcely be able to express itself in this mystery that is man. But it is one thing to incorporate what is material and submit it to the highest dictates of our creative will, and quite another to subject ourselves to the sadness and fear that materialism imposes, as the consequence of disorder.

We men of culture do not view even the most gross stupidity of men and peoples as something completely alien to ourselves. We view it as a painful and temporary interruption in that battle that mankind must wage with itself. We are pained by ignorance. But not so much by the ignorance of those who cannot read, as by the ignorance of those who cannot see. We are pained that a man is harassed, but even more than by the one harassed, we are pained by the one who harasses him for he is the more ignorant of the two. We are pained that an artist should be silenced, but we are even more pained by the stupidity of the tyrant who silences him. But if salvation from stupidity requires denunciation and anathema, then we shall not hesitate to denounce and to anathematize. But without hatred. Our enemy is not man but stupidity.

It is this responsible, humane attitude toward what is human and what is inhuman, toward our condition as fallen beings but one capable of improvement, this faith in man's capacity to help himself and to help others, that defines what we have chosen to call "the American new man."

And when we say American it is not because we believe that this new kind of spirit exists exclusively in our hemisphere. We know that there are new men everywhere, fighting to be themselves, fighting to fulfill their destiny as men, fighting to express the demands of their spirit, even when this brings them only imprisonment or death. We know that death is the highest challenge, the one that confirms our belief in what we are--for what we are is, precisely, what we are willing to die for.

If we say "American new man," it is because we know that he also exists here in the Americas, and we are aware of his particular responsibility in the countries of the New World. We know of marvelous civilizations that still expect new marvels. We know of grandparents to whom we owe a large part of what we are, but we know that they also expect something of us. The great nations of Spain, Portugal, England, Scotland, Ireland, and other European countries have given being to our communities and, happily for Latin America, in combination with the native Indians. The blood of the Indian peoples runs through our veins, and their strength, no less affectionate for being forgotten, sustains and nourishes us. It is in this sense that we have not only the right but the special obligation to testify to the never-ending newness of spirit, which gives us our destiny as American new men.

In our countries we also have the old, not as something worthy of respect simply because once having been new it will always continue to be new, since to us the new is a dimension of being that once reached is never lost and that we adhere to in respecting and defending our traditions, our folklore, and our simple and complex customs. The old that we condemn is stagnation, a brake, a chain, denial of our being. Stagnant waters become foul, and it is that aspect of the old, the decayed and the rotten, that must irremissibly clash with our condition as men whose spirit is one of movement and of constant rejuvenation, like the fire of Heraclitus.

It is a curious mixture--this deeply sincere love for our tradition, which is the life stored

up in the past, and for our present, which is the life stored up for the future--and our renunciation of what is a dead letter, which means something from which the spiritual dimension is missing.

Gentlemen and colleagues, we have assumed a grave responsibility. Only great humility will enable us to shoulder it. But this must not be a passive, sheeplike humility; this must be active humility of the master who did not hesitate to use the whip to drive the money-changers from the temple.

All of us meeting here have promised to wage a battle, and I am completely certain that no one will violate that promise.

From here we return to our offices with even greater enthusiasm for our task, which we know determines the course of our own lives and also that of our communities. We have adopted resolutions and we have outlined goals. Just as those questions raised by the poet have reached us as stimulating works of art, so let us each do his duty creatively. That must be our watchword. No other redemption is offered us. Therefore, let our own achievements answer the poet.