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Parolin's last interview before taking top Vatican job

John L. Allen Jr. | Aug. 31, 2013 NCR Today

The Italian web site *Terre d'America*, devoted to news from Latin America, today posted the transcript of an interview with Archbishop Pietro Parolin conducted by a Venezuelan journalist in late June, and published on August 4. In effect, it's the last public interview given by Parolin, who at the time was still serving as the papal ambassador to Venezuela, before his Aug. 31 appointment by Pope Francis as the Vatican's new Secretary of State.

The following is an *NCR* translation of the interview posted Aug. 31 by Terre d'America. It was originally published in the Venzuelan newspaper Ultimas Noticias, generally considered close to the governments of Hugo Chávez and now Nicolás Maduro.

For American readers, Parolin's definition of church reform to include the fight against "pedophilia," or child sexual abuse, may be significant, as well as his comments on social justice, "savage capitalism" and interreligious dialogue.

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What's happening in the church since March 13, when Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected as the new pope?

Parolin: I don't believe anything new is happening in the church, in the sense that the new is also ordinary.

[The church] is always well-disposed to renewal?

Exactly so, always, because the principal protagonist in the church is the Holy Spirit

How do you interpret the 'Francis phenomenon'?

What's struck me, and I consider it a miracle of the election of Pope Francis, is the sudden change of climate that was felt immediately. Before, there was pessimism ? unjustly, I would add, because Pope Benedict XVI did everything possible to reform the church, if we look, for instance, at his enormous commitment with regard to pedophilia.

Could it be said that the tension of facing pedophilia and corruption exhausted him?

Yes, I suppose so. We were focused on these problems, and it seemed that maybe the church didn't have the capacity for renewal. All of a sudden, after the election and the first pronouncements of the pope, the situation changed completely and a new climate of hope took hold, of renewal, of a future that beforehand seemed irreparably blocked. I truly consider this a great miracle. The courage and the humility of Benedict XVI to take a step back moves in the same direction as the courage and humility of Francis to accept the papacy, and the new air that he's brought.

What's struck you the most about the papacy of Francis?

What's struck me is that the perception of the church has been completely changed. From a church under siege with thousands of problems, a church that seemed, let's say, a little sick, we've passed to a church that has opened itself up.

He's revitalized it?

Exactly so, and now it's looking with great confidence towards God's future. That seems to me the most beautiful thing that's happened.

What does it mean that the pope made his first trip to Brazil?

It's a coincidence, because it had already been decided that World Youth Day would take place in Brazil. Correspondingly the pope, any pope, would be there.

Was it also a coincidence that Pope Francis chose the poor, and Brazil is the cradle of the Theology of Liberation?

On the Theology of Liberation, and I say this with all my heart because there was much suffering, things are much clearer now. Recent years, painfully, passionately, have served to make things more clear. The church, it's true, has a preferential option for the poor, and it's a choice the church has made at the universal level. But it's also always clarified that it's not an exclusive option, or one that excludes anyone.

But it's preferential?

Preferential, yes, but that means the church is for everyone, the church offers the Gospel to all, but with a special attention to the poor because they are the Lord's favorites, and also because we've learned anew that the Gospel can be embraced only with an attitude of poverty.

The simplicity proclaimed by Francis ?

Pope Francis moves in this direction. The attention that he's shown from the first moments of his pontificate puts this fundamental option at the center of the church, an option for everyone but with special attention to the poor.

That's a reading that applies to the Latin and Caribbean faithful. What reading of it can be made among the African faithful?

There are differences. The Theology of Liberation has had fewer repercussions in Africa with respect to Latin America.

Also, in Europe, with the worker priests ?

Yes, certainly, but not in Africa. Francis' concern for the poor is good news for Africa, which is living with conflicts in various countries and situations of injustice. I think that the emphasis of the pope is also important for Africa, for everything that regards the theme of social justice and peace, which were considered in the last two synods for Africa held in the Vatican.

For the church, poverty is a human subject. But it's also a classic theme for the Marxists ?

The church must not assume Marxist categories, or class struggle. One of the points among the different problems that arose [with the Theology of Liberation] was the use of Marxist categories and the idea of class struggle that was proclaimed. The church always proposes, as the first step, the education of persons in the idea of solidarity, a solidarity that allows the problems of society to be overcome both personally and structurally. On the subject of poverty, the church has an enormous patrimony in its social doctrine.

What weight does the church give to corruption as the base of these problems?

The pope has drawn attention to it. It's a theme that also concerns the church, because it knows that corruption damages the fabric of society and generates many consequences, such as those already mentioned. It's important that there be a fight against corruption, above all in education, which is a fundamental arena for the church. [We need] education of the person toward legality, honesty, coherence between words and deeds, in such a way that people are capable of rejecting these temptations and know how to build a healthy, positive society.

Pope Francis has encouraged interreligious relations, at least among the monotheistic religions ? what about Latin and Caribbean mixtures of beliefs?

On ecumenical dialogue among Christians as well as interreligious dialogue, the pope is following in the footsteps of his predecessors, for example John Paul II with his meeting in Assisi. Pope Francis is very clear that we have to move forward in this direction.

But what about Latin and Caribbean mixtures of beliefs?

The church follows the principle of St. Paul of taking note of everything and choosing what's good and healthy. Everything that's compatible with the Gospel can be taken up.

What view does the church take of the social suffering as a result of the economic crisis in diverse countries of Europe?

The church and all Christians, as the Second Vatican Council said, the fiftieth anniversary of which we're now celebrating, takes upon itself all the dramas of the contemporary world. The church has issued an appeal that human suffering be considered in any solution to the crisis Europe is currently experiencing.

What's happening with 'savage capitalism'? John Paul II criticized it, Benedict XVI criticized it, and so has Pope Francis. Is this tendency still dominant in Europe?

It's a worrying thing. The church continues to ask that in whatever needs to be corrected, human imperatives should take precedence over economic ones, the ethical and moral dimension. The human person must take precedence over the laws of the market. From there, a sense of love for the poor, of solidarity, of a truly human economy that helps people develop and doesn't humiliate them or damage their dignity, is born. This is a fundamental concern for the church, and we've got all the papal encyclicals from *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII in 1891 up to *Caritas in Veritate* of Benedict XVI in 2009.

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