



Fr. Pelton began to work intentionally on Latin American-North American church relations from the late 1950s. To borrow from the Matthean parable, Fr. Pelton was hired early in the day to work in this particular vineyard of the Lord. In the 1950s there were not a lot of Catholics in the U.S. focusing on relations with Catholics in Latin America—formal relations between the hierarchy of Latin America and that of the United States would not be re-initiated again until 1959, and the U.S. Bishops' Latin America Bureau would not be established until 1960. While there is much to say about Fr. Bob's long career, in these remarks I would like to emphasize that he was someone who early on knew the importance of this ecclesial relationship for the faith life of Catholics throughout the hemisphere.

From those early days, Fr. Pelton grew in his commitment to hemispheric church relations through his friendship with two influential individuals: Archbishop Marcos McGrath and Fr. John Considine.

Fr. Pelton's interest in this Latin American-North American church relation began earlier—1942 was the year that he and Marcos McGrath (1924-2000; Archbishop of Panamá 1969-1994) began their formation for the priesthood in the Congregation of Holy Cross; they were lifelong friends. In those early years of their friendship and preparation for ministry, they watched Holy Cross open a mission in Chile and take up greater and greater responsibility for the pastoral care of Latin Americans residing in the U.S. Hearing about Panamá and Latin America from Marcos, Bob was made aware of the relevance of the life of faith of Catholics in Latin America for the church in North America.

In the mid-1950s Bob was first professor and then chair of the Notre Dame Theology Department (called the Religion Department at the time), and it was in those years that he set about to remake the Notre Dame campus into a high-profile center of concern for Latin American-North American church relations. In those days, even though several hundred US missionaries were serving in Latin America, there were not a lot of organized efforts to foster relations among the churches of the Americas. Under Bob's leadership, significant speakers, such as Maryknoll Father John J. Considine (1897-1982), were brought to Notre Dame to teach. Fr. Considine taught a summer course at the campus in 1960, a course in which he more fully developed his ideas on mission and the unity of the human race. Fr. Considine was the Director of the U.S. Bishops' Latin America Bureau 1960-1968.

Fr. Pelton and Fr. Considine were friends and collaborators for many years, and in 2002 Fr. Pelton was the main instigator in the establishment at Notre Dame of the Considine Award, a \$500 cash prize that is given during commencement each year to a graduating senior who has contributed to the study of the Catholic Church in Latin America. Created by Latin American/North American Church Concerns in the Kellogg Institute, the Considine Award not only remembers Fr. Considine but also invites Notre Dame students to be more aware of the church in Latin America.

Pope John XXIII's 1961 call to US religious communities to send ten percent of their members to Latin America was delivered at Notre Dame during a joint meeting of the leadership of men's and women's U.S. religious congregations, and Fr. Pelton and Fr. Considine were present at that historic gathering. The address delivered by Msgr. (later Cardinal) Agostino Casaroli contributed greatly to a doubling of U.S. missionary personnel serving in Latin America 1960-1968. Additionally, shortly after Msgr. Casaroli delivered that challenge to U.S. religious, Fr. Pelton took the fourth vow as a priest of Holy Cross, thereby committing himself to availability for a mission assignment. He was subsequently assigned by the Congregation to Chile.

On a personal note, I got to know Fr. Pelton when I had the privilege of being the biographer of Fr. Considine. Fr. Pelton read an early draft of the manuscript and made valuable suggestions for improving it. When Fr. Considine's biography was published (*A Worldwide Heart*, Orbis, 2013), Fr. Pelton arranged for a book launch at Notre Dame. It was always obvious to me that the friendship between Fr. Considine and Fr. Pelton was from those early years both close and highly productive—it could hardly have been otherwise, given the passion they both held for hemispheric cooperation among Catholics.

Whether he was in Chile or Panamá or El Salvador or on the Notre Dame campus, Fr. Bob has borne the day's burden and the heat in a single-minded focus on the good God could work in the churches of Latin America and North America. In a departure from the gospel parable, Bob has been about his mission in life joyfully, without any grumbling, and he has been fortunate to see his efforts bear much fruit.

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