

How Latins Think and Behave

Helping Brits to understand them

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Perceptions

As we know, since 1980, Latin American missionaries have come to Europe to re-evangelize this continent. As a result there are some issues that need to be raised in order to perform a missiological analysis of this new situation. One of the issues relates to how we might come to understand each other better - why do we think differently and why do we do similar things in different ways?

In this way, we assume that we have different interpretations, perceptions and understandings of life, values, theology etc. We come from a background of Spanish colonialism, which has generated a kind of "mestizo" culture - a mixed culture of Spanish and indigenous Latin people.

Profile of a Latin American Character:

- a) **Enthusiasm** - as a poor continent we believe that tomorrow will be better.
- b) **Emotional** - we can express our feelings publically.
- c) **Religious** - Latins believe in God and different kinds of christs, saints and virgins like Crito de Corcovado, Virgen de Guadalupe, Virgen del Pilar, Virgen de Fatima etc.
- d) **Disloyalty** - Criollismo- Astuteness generates disloyalty.
- e) **Sensitive** - this is may be because of the Spanish oppression.
- f) **Rebellious** - because of the Spanish conquest.
- g) **Capable of doing different things** - many people have learnt many things due to the need to sort out problems at home and at work.
- h) **Capable of lying** - the different stories of how people enter the UK illustrates this idea.
- i) **Capable of helping others** - people stand alongside the needs of others.
- j) **Capable of overcoming conformity** - fighting against poverty, trying to discover new ways of improving lifestyle.
- k) **Patriarchal hierarchy** - authority lies with the father.
- l) **Hospitality** - we invite people in at home even though they may not have had a prior invitation.
- m) **Working by faith** - this means that people believe that God will provide on time.
- n) **Human Law is under God's Law** - it does not matter if you do not have permission to work legally, God bringing you here is what matters.
- o) **Feelings against imperialism** - political and economic situations exist because of Western imperialism.
- p) **Feeling that we are Immigrants** - we do not understand our role as immigrants in terms of mission theology, yet everything is because of the poverty in Latin America.
- q) **Spontaneity** - Latins tend to be very spontaneous; they can invite you today for tomorrow, yet today for tonight.
- r) **Authoritarian leadership** - we lack democratic understanding
- s) **A mentality that balks against structure** - Latins reject structures due to the influence of the Catholic Church.
- t) **Individualism** - Indian people are more integrative, they practice a community life through "mingas", but mestizo people are more individualistic and this characterizes the Christian Church.

- u) **Compassionate care** (Mike Berg, 1996:182) - Latins are more personal than institutional. According to Tomas Bamat in his book, "Will Latin America Become Protestant?", 1992:15) he mentions that Christian Latins offer the means for improving poor people's social and economic well being. And Mike Berg (1996:182) adds that the evangelical movement offers "simple answers and consolations to the suffering people, based on a literal understanding of the Bible; they affirm the dignity and importance of ordinary people in their prayer meetings and in the expression of their emotions".
- v) **Parades and massive street meetings** (Mike Berg 1996:145) - Latins love to express their faith through fiestas/festivals.

Difficulties in working together:

- i) **The challenge of learning the language** - Latins must learn English even though they often do not work in Christian ministry with Brits.
- ii) **The challenge of a long-term vision** - be patient.
- iii) **The challenge of avoiding simple criticism** - we cannot just criticise what is wrong the British culture, we must recognise too what is good.
- iv) **The challenge of being humble** - we can not change Brits, only God can transform them.
- v) **The challenge of overcoming individualism** - we cannot work as a free-lance; we are part of the body of Christ.
- vi) **The challenge of warm culture living in a cold culture** - Brits live on an island where the sun comes out for a few months.

Stories of misunderstandings

- Stopping bringing my own Bible to the services.
- Very systematic and well-organized liturgy just for one hour.
- Praying to God spontaneously.

Questions

- **Adaptability** - most Latins can adapt to a new culture with different language and new ecclesiastical liturgies.
- **Partnering together** - is it possible for Latins to be long-term partners?

Conclusions

It is mentioned (Bamat: 12-13) that more than 40% of Latin Americans do not have the resources, nor will have, to satisfy their basic need for food, health and housing and this figure rise to 55% after the year 2000. This is one reason why the majority of Latins leaving their countries come from this social context, a poor continent where few people are rich and unemployment is still increasing. However we cannot ignore the influence of the American style, seen in music, clothing and religion. Brits, you would understand the Latins more through a friendship relationship having a more emotional expression of love.