



# NATIONAL COUNCIL for the SPANISH SPEAKING

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April 8, 1963

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*File under  
Fr. John A. Wagner*

**Dr. Hector P. Garcia**  
3024 Morgan  
Corpus Christi, Texas

Dear Dr. Garcia:

Thank you ever so much for your kindness in meeting me last Friday night and giving me the opportunity of a very wonderful visit in your home with your family. It was a real privilege to discuss matters with you and to be inspired again by your constant dedication to the principles you have espoused for so many years.

Enclosed is a copy of "Community of Tomorrow" which I mentioned to you during my visit. I would deeply appreciate your comments on the matter contained therein so that I may make some necessary changes to bring this up to date. I feel that the principal objective of the National Council for the Spanish Speaking must be one of acting as a marriage broker in bringing about the union of the Anglo and Latin American cultures so that all of us might benefit from the many good things both cultures have to offer us. I would deeply appreciate your comments on this.

Thank you once again for your hospitality and I want to apologize for calling upon you so late in the evening.

Sincerely yours,

*John A. Wagner*

Father John A. Wagner

## COMMUNITY OF TOMORROW

by Father John A. Wagner, Bishops' Committee for  
the Spanish Speaking, San Antonio, Texas 1/

The movement of people from one land to another has become a common occurrence of our time. Displacement, migration, expulsion, flight, the voluntary pursuit of a better life are creating a situation where uprooting is a widespread experience and the meeting of people of different cultures and the possible conflicts that may result are affecting the shaping of our communities. Nevertheless, in spite of rapid change, the people who will be the community fifty years from now in the year 2011 are already here. They are the ones who will be exactly what we make them now. What the church and the community will be depends upon the direction certain men give it today.

Undoubtedly an element that will affect the community of tomorrow is the great influx of Latin Americans into this country. This influx is really shaking us up. Never before has this country been faced with such a large migration of people united by a common language. We have the large immigration of Puerto Ricans into New York, the Cubans, South and Central Americans into Florida, and the Mexicans into Texas and the Southwest. In the Southwest our problem is really twofold. On the one hand, there are those American citizens of Mexican origin who have been in the United States for generations. On the other hand, there is the large number of new immigrants coming in every year from Mexico. The Mexican migration into the United States is the largest in the States today. Some 50,000 new Mexican people come to the United States to seek permanent residence each year.

With the coming of the Latins in such large numbers we can ask ourselves the following questions: How will the majority react in accepting the new minority culture into its way of life? How will the minority react in integrating itself in the form of life and culture to which it has come? What impact will the coming of the Latins have on the community of tomorrow?

In the face of this large and ever increasing Latin-American population we must reevaluate both ourselves and the Latins and this is an effort to determine what we should do. This is especially true in the southwest. Mexican people have been here a long time. Large numbers have resisted assimilation for generations. Prior to World War II there was, in fact, very little assimilation. Since World War II we have seen very definite efforts being made and we have seen a large number of American citizens of Mexican origin take their place in the American community.

A lot of new Mexican immigrants are coming in daily. It would seem that they, by force, must form something of a Mexican community, at least during the first generation. I don't mean that we should start Mexican parishes for them but it seems that in order to save their faith efforts must be made to administer to them by priests who understand them. Even in the integrated parishes there should be some consideration for the newcomers to this country. Nevertheless don't think that they will refuse assimilation into American culture. Nothing yet has proved effective in resisting assimilation of any group of people who have migrated to the United States. Integration will take place. The sad thing in the American

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1/ Delivered at Christ the King Church, Lubbock, Texas, July 9, 1961  
( Amarillo Diocesan Conference for the Spanish Speaking)

community is that in order to integrate you must go up the economic ladder and become at least a middle-class type of citizen. The big problem is that as the people of the Mexican community go up the spiral to the middle-class American economy, will the church be with them on this transition or will they divorce themselves from the church and attempt to make this leap through secular institutions?

The Mexican people have an inescapable contact with American life. We must work not only for but also with them. The school of today is the transmission belt to the American way of life. The child cannot escape, through its schooling, from being exposed to the American way of life. Political action must also come about and the more political action the better. I know that the political action of the Mexican community today is criticized, but every immigrant community that established itself went through a period of political pressure. It is this political power that will drive Mexican people to obtain citizenship, to be organized, to be caught up in the main stream of life. All immigrant groups did it. You can expect a lot of political action in the Mexican community.

However, no matter how strong the Mexican community may be, before long it will and it must have contact in some way with the American way of life and the process of assimilation is inevitable, but the path of integration is by its very nature slow. The first generation of Mexican immigrants is difficult to reach outside its community, and as we look upon the old Mexican community about us, what shape will it take once integration sets in? What community will replace the old ethnic community? For what kind of American community will we prepare them?

We find the following reactions in the community that comes to a strange country and begins the problem of assimilation:

First, there is withdrawal. The newcomer finds insecurity, anxiety. He rationalizes the American community and while he is trying to figure it out he holds on to the old Mexican community. These newcomers will decide to stay in the Mexican community for various reasons, and only in the second generation will a newcomer live, as it were, in both communities. Usually by the third generation he begins to live and become an integral part of the community into which he came.

Second, there is the abandonment of the Mexican community. The reaction of the person who wants to become an American as quickly as possible, frequently will change his name, move away from the old Mexican community, get away so that he might identify himself as quickly as possible with the American community, cutting all ties with the Mexican community. This is a classic reaction and much pain takes place as a result because if a person does this he finds himself in serious difficulty. If he is not immediately accepted by the new community, he will be caught in a bad experience and you know of these cases better than I - - how unhappy a person of Mexican origin is who, in the process of trying to be accepted by the American community, gave up his old culture to attain the end.

The third approach is the standard, ordinary reaction. At first the newcomers are not ashamed of their backward ways. They retain their immigrant background and by the third generation they are basically American. In this standard process of assimilation the second generation is the difficult one. This generation still lives in pretty much of a Mexican culture and is being, at the same time, brought up in the American culture. Delinquency usually strikes in this group. Some of the problems of this group may be outlined as (1) conflicts of the customs and codes of social

behavior between the Mexican and the North American, between the traditional and the new, between lower-class and middle-class customs and codes. (2) Uncertainty and confusion about occupational plans whether to stay in school or to migrate, how high to aim, what path to follow; (3) Doubts and conflicts with respect to religious and political identification; (4) For many young people lack of competent parental guidance or an adequate substitute for it; (5) Lack of opportunities for employment and political participation.

No matter what you and I might do or what you and I might think best, the Mexican will become American. Will the American change to adapt themselves to the new community? Some change will take place. For the most part, it is believed that the newcomer will have to adapt himself to the American community as it seems to be developing.

What forms will the community in the next fifty years take? What will it be? We cannot answer this with definiteness. There are certain indications that point out to us, to a large extent, the type of community in which we will live. Here are some indications: (1) The community of the future will be highly urban. Almost eighty percent of Americans now live in urban areas. No longer will you have the small community as such built around the church. The development of a Christian community in an urban area is much more difficult than in the rural area.

(2) High mobility. This mobility will be both horizontal and vertical. The horizontal mobility is tremendous. About five percent of the population, from seven to eight million people, move every year at least across county lines in the United States today. With this modern nomadic life, which seems to be on the constant increase, there will have to be a lot of flexibility. This again presents a problem in the development of the Christian community which is built on stability. Then you have the upward mobility - the great class struggle in American society. About the only drive the Americans have left is the drive to better themselves. All seek social upturns. What kind of middle-class will America have in the future? What will happen when large numbers of the Mexican community begin to move into the middle-class American society as we know it now? Vertical mobility splits the community because of the gap between classes. How will the community of the future bridge this gap between the upper and lower classes?

(3) Another indication in the community of the future is specialization. Life, for the most part, will be divided by functions - doctors, businessmen, educators, etc. Many of these working away from the parish boundaries and the parish is the place where people come to sleep. The parish and the community in urban areas are no longer a single unit. Also, specialization has changed our way of life. Men are dedicated to specialized services and as a result little else binds them together. If this specialization continues, it might be that in the church of the future many organizations will disappear along parish lines and flow along specialized lines. This is beginning already, as indicated by the Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking, the Physicians' Guild, the Lawyers' Guild, the Council of Nurses, the Catholic Teachers' Guild, etc.

(4) The next aspect of the community of tomorrow will be a high degree of organization. This will make life completely complicated. More and more things will be done for us. There will be less and less responsibility for the community to do things for itself. That is why there will have to be steps in more centralized control in government, welfare, transportation, eventually leading even to world government. Entertainment used to be centered in the family. Now it is done by organized groups. Cooking was a family affair. Now

it is bought done up. The individual will become less important. How will we maintain the dignity of the person unless some sort of Christian community is created in the organized community of tomorrow?

If the community of tomorrow takes on these aspects, the work of assimilation will not be accomplished by the minority alone. The majority too must be awakened to its responsibility in analyzing its own position and making it possible for the new immigrant to assimilate himself into the American way of life. The new immigrant must likewise make sacrifices in order to adapt himself to the community in which he intends to live. I think it is clear that eventually the immigrant culture will give way to a form of life which is predominantly American but it is also recognized that this occurs most regularly, most harmoniously, when the culture of the immigrant is respected, when it is not despised, when it is given every opportunity to survive to the satisfaction of its members in the midst of American society.

However, it is one thing to ask a man to become American. It is quite another thing to tell him that in order to become American he has to discard the deepest values of his life, set aside as foolish all the traits that gave life its meaning and adopt a pattern of ideas and attitudes and customs which seem to have no relationship to the things that had made his life and the lives of his father and grandfather worthwhile.

We must have patience in the process of assimilation and realize that any disintegration of a culture is always attended by instability, insecurity, unrest and even hostility. In exercising this patience and restraint, no strong effort should be made to disorganize the community which immigrants and migrants may form as they move into the area of new culture. They should be permitted to form communities of their own where they will have security, stability and order as they gradually learn American ways.

The immigrant should be helped to preserve respect for his own culture as well as acquire knowledge of the new one. Similar efforts should be made to cultivate in the older residents a respect for the culture of the newcomers.

Opportunities for association with older residents must not be blocked for the newcomer. The job and school being the two which will be first in order of time, the neighborhood second as the immigrant community begins to weaken and its members disperse. In this situation the immigrant community will not shut its members off from a gradual integration with their new culture; neither will it be blocked off in a gentle-like segregation by the resistance of the old residents.

The unceasing efforts of the Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking will be to bring together the best in the American community and the best in the immigrant community to develop the best American community possible.