

CHAPTER II

THE LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE

One of the fundamental aspects of the human ontological structure is that of corporality. There is nothing about the human being that is unrelated to his body —not to his actual physical body, but to his corporal existential condition in regard to everything in the world that confronts him. Theology includes this level of being when it speaks of *sacramentality*. The corporal human condition always demands concrete mediations. Man is not an angel; all that he understands, hopes for, loves, and works for is measured corporally. The totality of these mediations at the level of corporality, such as the physical transformation of the cosmos, we call “culture.” Latin American culture is still in a pre-Christian stage —although it has been affected in many respects by Christianity —and yet it will be the means by which Christian faith and praxis become authentic. Faith can never be equated with culture, but the meaning of the Incarnation (which is fundamentally a Christian belief and affirmation of corporality) is that faith is authenticated to the degree that it affects a culture. Culture is the necessary, inevitable avenue for the outworking of the Christian faith.

I. UNIVERSAL CIVILIZATION AND REGIONAL CULTURE

When we speak of culture, especially our Latin American culture, we want to make explicit those principles that are guiding our exposition. Culture is one of the dimensions —and we will specify which —of our historical existence. It is a complexity of elements that radically constitute our *world*. This *world*, which is a concrete system with its own particular meaning, can be studied, and it is the responsibility of the social sciences to do so. “Man,” declares Paul Ricoeur, “is a being capable of realizing his desires and wishes in the mode of disguise, regression, and stereotyped symbolization.”¹ All these intentional efforts, these “idols that incumber our false cults ...as the ‘daydreams of mankind’ —could well be the subtitle of the hermeneutics of culture.”² Hermeneutics and exegesis —designed to reveal the hidden meaning of culture —is the aim of this discussion, and we will indicate in this brief section some of the steps necessary to begin the study of culture, especially the culture of Latin America.

“Mankind as a whole is on the brink of a single world civilization representing at once a gigantic progress for everyone and an overwhelming task of survival and adapting our cultural heritage to this new setting.”³ It would appear that a world civilization already exists in contrast to individual traditional cultures. Before continuing and in order to apply these ideas to the Latin American situation and national cultures, we should clarify the terms that we are using.

I have already explained in some of my previous writings the meaning of civilization and culture.⁴ What follows is a summary with some additional considerations.

1. Civilization

Civilization⁵ is the system of instruments invented by man, accumulated and transmitted progressively through the history of the species, that is, through humanity in its

entirety. Primitive man, let us say, for example, the *Pithecanthropus* who lived a half-million years ago, possessed the ability to distinguish between a mere “thing” and a “means.” Likewise he was able to distinguish between *this* thing and *that* thing and to adapt a thing as a means to achieve some end. From his beginning man surrounded himself with a world of “instruments” with which he lived, and having these at hand he developed the context of his being-in-the-world.⁶ The “instrument,” that is, the means, ceased to be simply a thing of the present, and became something nontemporal, impersonal, abstract, transmissible, accumulative, and capable of being systematized according to its varied uses. The so-called high civilizations are instrumentally super-systems that mankind has been able to organize since the Neolithic age after a million years of innumerable experiences and additions stemming from technical discoveries. Nonetheless, from the primitive's use of a rough stone to the modern satellite which dispatches to earth photos of the surface of the moon, there is only a quantitative difference of technification. But there is no qualitative distinction, for both spheres are useful to the degree that they produce the effect which is something apart from the “thing” as such. Both are elements of the human world.⁷

The system of instruments that we call civilization has different levels of complexity ranging from the most simple and evident to the most complex and intentional. This is a part of civilization as the instrumental totality available for mankind's use: the climate, vegetation, and topography. Human achievements such as roads, houses, cities, and all the rest, including tools and machines, are a part of civilization. By discovering their multiple uses, new inventions and the systematic accumulation of other instruments are possible through technology and the sciences. All these levels and the elements that constitute them are a cosmos, a system—more or less perfect—with different degrees of complexity. To affirm that something possesses structure or is a system is the same as indicating that it possesses meaning.

2. *The Ethos*

Before indicating the direction of the meaning of the system that develops the values, we should first analyze the role of the transmitter of civilization with respect to the instruments that constitute it. "In everything that is done and accomplished there is a hidden important and peculiar factor: life always moves according to a determined attitude—the attitude in which and from which the work is done."⁸

Every social group develops a means to manipulate the instruments of civilization, a means of utilizing the tools. Between the pure objectivity of a civilization and the pure subjectivity of freedom there exists an intermediate plane, namely, the *modes*, those fundamental attitudes and experiences of every person or people which make them what they are and which predetermine as an *a priori* inclination their behavior.⁹

We would therefore define the *ethos* of a group or a person as the total network of attitudes that predetermines behavior and that constitutes an habitual or systematic pattern of action, the spontaneity of which in certain instances is limited. A weapon (as a simple instrument) was highly prized by the Aztec and was readily used in battle to defeat the enemy, to capture, and even to offer him in sacrifice to the gods. For the Aztec, the weapon was a means of survival. In contrast, the Buddhist monk eschews weapons because he sees war as a source of intensifying desire, the human appetite, the source of all evil. We see, therefore, two distinct attitudes in regard to the same instrument. To one it can be a means of survival while to the other it can be the source of all that is evil. The *ethos* is that which makes a civilization different and is to a large degree incommunicable. It remains always just below the level of subjectivity or within what may be called regional or partial intersubjectivity. The modes which together

form the individual character of a group are acquired by ancestral education in the family, the social class, or the larger social configurations, but within the scope of all those with whom a people live. These modes constitute what a group recognizes as a *we*. An element or an instrument of civilization can be transmitted by written information, by journals or documents; and learning to use it may require no more time than comprehending it intellectually or technologically. An African can leave his tribe in Kenya, for example, pursue studies in one of the highly technological countries, and later return to his native land and build a bridge, drive an automobile, operate sophisticated electronic equipment, and dress as a Westerner. His fundamental attitude, however, will remain virtually unchanged —although civilization obviously will have an effect on him to a greater or lesser degree —as one can readily observe in the case of Gandhi.¹⁰

The *ethos*, therefore, is the world of experiences, that existential and habitual disposition that is transmitted unconsciously by the group without being analyzed or criticized either by the person on the street or even by the scientist, as Edmund Husserl clearly demonstrated. These systems of guiding principles, as distinct from civilization that is essentially universal or at least capable of being universalized, are experienced by the participants of a group and can be assimilated but not transmitted. In order to experience them it is necessary that one first become adapted to and assimilated by the group that determines one's behavior.

For this reason civilization is universal, and its progress is continual — although with some secondary ups and downs —in world history. Meanwhile the attitudes that constitute what may be correctly called culture are by definition distinct whether they are the attitudes of a region, nation, family, tribe, or group. Furthermore, they are in the most radical sense individual (the personal *So-sein*).¹¹

3. *The Project*

In the final analysis the whole system of instruments as a network of attitudes is ultimately a veritable kingdom of aims and values which justify all action.¹² These values are disguised in symbols, myths, and structures with double meanings and purposes, and as a part of their content they include the ultimate ends of the intentional system to which we referred at the beginning as *world*. To refer to them as world, however, we are following Paul Ricoeur who was influenced in part by the German thinkers.¹³ *world* refers to the ethico-mythical nucleus, to the symbolic concretion of the fundamental existential understanding, that is, to the system of values that a group consciously or unconsciously possesses and that it accepts but does not analyze. “According to this morphology of culture, we should force ourselves to investigate which is the central ethical and religious ideal”¹⁴ of a culture. For as Rothacker declares, “Culture is the culmination of values, and these prevailing or ideal values form a coherent kingdom in themselves which one must discover and fulfill.”¹⁵

To discover these values, however —to become aware of their origin, evolution, and hierarchy —it is necessary to know the history of culture and the phenomenology of religion, for until a few centuries ago it was the divine values that sustained and nourished and gave meaning to all human systems. Following Ernst Cassirer and Sigmund Freud, Ricoeur declares:

Images and symbols constitute what might be called the awakened dream of a historical group. It is in this sense that I speak of the ethico-mythical nucleus which constitutes the cultural resources of a nation. One may, therefore, think that the riddle of human diversity

lies in the structure of the subconscious or unconscious. The strange thing, in fact, is that there are many cultures and not a single humanity.¹⁶

The concrete effects of this methodological distinction we will discuss later .

4. *What is Culture?*

One may attempt a definition of culture —and this is of course important —but what is more important is comprehending adequately the constituent elements of culture. Values are the contents or the teleological center of attitudes. According to our previous definition, it will be remembered that the *ethos* depends on the objective nucleus of values. And one's values determine his or her daily behavior within the social institutions and functions. The individual manner of human conduct as a totality, as a complex structural organism with a plurality of meaning, we call *life-style*. The life-style or temperament of a group is the coherent behavior that results from their system of values, which in turn is determined by certain attitudes with regard to the instruments of civilization.¹⁷ One's life-style is systematically and simultaneously all of these things.

The objectification of life-styles in cultural objects, in specific observable ways, constitutes a new element in culture which we are analyzing, namely, in works of art such as literature, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, dress, food, and behavior in general. But also life-style is objectified in the so-called social sciences of history, psychology, sociology, and jurisprudence. Language itself objectifies the system of values of a people. All this network of cultural realities —which is not the same as the integral comprehension of the culture —is referred to by the German philosophers as the *objective spirit*, if one follows the direction of Hegel and more recently of Hartmann. It is easy to confuse these cultural objects with the tools of civilization. A house, for example, is both an object of civilization and an instrument developed through the technique of construction. Yet at the same time it is a work of art as much as if it had been produced by a sculptor. In this same sense the architect is an artist. We can affirm, therefore, that every object created by a civilization is transformed into a mode and an object of culture. For this reason, in the last analysis, the whole human world is a world of culture that expresses a life-style reflecting the technology or impersonal, neutral, objective instrumentality of a cultural point of view.

Culture may be defined, therefore, as the organic accumulation of behaviors predetermined by the attitudes manifested toward the instruments of civilization whose teleological content is composed of the values and symbols of the group and based ultimately on their ontological understanding. Culture is the composition of life-styles that are manifested in the works of those who transform the physical environment of the human world, the world of culture.¹⁸

We are aware that this description is confined to the structural level and that it is founded on the ontological level. In the philosophy of culture one speaks of the values, structures, contents, and *ethos*. All these notions can be absolutized and assume a metaphysical connotation, thereby opening to us the ontological level. A discussion of the ontological foundation of culture is not, however, within the scope of this chapter .

5. *Latin American Culture?*

Some insist that a Latin American or national culture does not exist. It may be confidently affirmed —and we could readily justify it but for the fact that it is in part evident— that no people or group of people can avoid having a culture. Latin America not only has a culture, it has its *own* culture. And as no human group can avoid having

a culture, Latin Americans cannot truly possess a culture which is not theirs. The problem in regard to our culture stems from the confusion of two questions. First, do we Latin Americans have a culture? And second, is our culture a great original one? As will be evident, these are two separate issues.

It can be said that not every group of people has a great culture; neither has every group created an original culture. But every group of people unavoidably has a culture, be it contemptuous, inorganic, imported, unintegrated, superficial, or heterogeneous. And paradoxically there has been no great culture which from its beginning had its own original classical culture. It would be nonsense to expect a child to be an adult, although many times people who are culturally children pass to an anemic cultural adulthood without ever developing a noteworthy culture. When the Achaeans, Dorians, and Ionians invaded Hellas (Greece) more than a thousand years B.C., they did not possess a great culture. Rather, they appropriated and copied from the beginning the culture of the Cretans. The same can be said of the Romans in respect to the Etruscans; of the Accadians in respect to the Sumerians; and of the Aztecs in respect to the infrastructure of Teotihuacán. Certain cultures become great cultures because together with their vigorous civilizations they

create a literature, sculpture, and philosophy as a means of organizing their life. And this is accomplished by a continual stream of human beings and represents a human self-interpretation ...Life then manifests an advanced stage because the art, poetry, and philosophy are created as a mirror of self-formation and self-interpretation. The word culture comes from *colere*, to take care of or to refine. It is the means of self-interpretation.¹⁹

What has been said in another way can be expressed thusly: a people that attains the level of self-expression, self-consciousness, the awareness of its cultural structures and ultimate values by the cultivation and development of its tradition possesses identity in itself.

When a people rises to a superior culture the most adequate expression of their own structures is manifested by those who are most aware of the total complexity of the elements. There will always be a group, an elite, that is responsible for objectifying the culture of the community in material achievements. In this elite the whole community views what it spontaneously lives as a result of its culture. Phidias in the Parthenon and Plato in *The Republic* were cultured members of the elite of their times who were able to manifest to the Athenians the hidden structures of their own culture. Netzahualcoyotl, the Aztec king of Texcoco, and José Hernández with his Argentine classic *Martín Fierro*²⁰ served the same function in their cultures. The cultured individual is, therefore, one who possesses the cultural conscience of his people, the self-consciousness of the structures and values, who “is completely prepared, ready, and quickly moves in any concrete situation of life; for whom it is second nature to understand a concrete or a specific problem and what is demanded at the time.... In the course of experience, regardless of the class from which one comes, the situation demands for the man of culture a cosmic totality, articulated according to the meaning [of his own culture].”²¹ “A cultural consciousness is fundamentally an awareness which is totally spontaneous.... Cultural consciousness... produces a radical structure fundamentally pre-ontological” according to Ernesto Mayz Vallenilla in his *Problema de América*.²²

We will see that there is a synergy between a great culture and a cultured person. The greatest cultures have had legions of cultured individuals, and even the masses manifested a style of life which made them aware of their past tradition and the possibilities of their future. This awareness was transmitted by education in the family,

the tribe, the city, and the institutions, because “education always signifies the rejection of methodical development having in mind the vital structures earlier accepted.”²³ No education is possible apart from a fixed custom previously established.

II. LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE AND NATIONAL CULTURE

The individual accounts or narratives of our Latin American nations in their neocolonial configurations have a rather short history. In most cases their bodies of fundamental laws were developed hardly more than a century ago. The cry of independence, sounded at the beginning of our nations’ struggle for political freedom, incited a response not because of our strength but primarily because of the Hispanic weakness. The old viceroyalties —at times only courts (*Audiencias*) or military headquarters (*Capitanías generales*) —were economically and culturally autonomous principally because of the distances that separated them from Spain rather than because of their intrinsic importance or the number of their inhabitants. Following an historical analogy, these peoples began organizing themselves into nations in 1822, thus completing the dual process of revolution. Only three of our nations, however, had in their prehistory a cultural foundation sufficiently established so as to justify a national personality and adequate history. We refer specifically to Mexico, Peru, and Colombia, which incidentally were the geographical centers of the only three advanced Latin American cultures. Colonial life allowed for the birth and development of two, or at the most, three nations: Mexico in the sixteenth century, Lima in the seventeenth, and Buenos Aires in the eighteenth century. Yet today we see more than twenty different nations, none of them with an “intelligible field of historical study” as Toynbee would say. In other words, none of these nations is able to give an adequate account of its culture, not even of its national institutions, which were unified during the Christian colonial epoch, and which were really the seed beds of the revolutions. Attempting to explain our national cultures in themselves is an impossible task because they represent a nationalism that should be surpassed. But the challenge is to overcome not only the national boundaries and divisions but also the historical limits produced by a periodization far too restricted. We cannot explain our national cultures if we only go back to certain recent revolutions, if we begin for example in the nineteenth century or even in the sixteenth century. And even the Amerindian cultures provide only the context of certain residual elements of the succeeding Latin American culture. If we are to comprehend the meaning of our culture, we must see it from the perspective of universal history.²⁴

1. Prehistory

To discuss adequately the profound and universal meaning of our Amerindian culture, we must include a discussion of mankind from the time of his origin, moving progressively from the African and Euroasiatic Paleolithic peoples, in order to see the later development of the indigenous people in America —those beings who, while so frequently ignored were yet the most Asiatic of the Asiatics, the most Oriental of the Orientals —not only in race but also in culture. The fact is that Columbus discovered Asiatic peoples. And to comprehend the advanced American cultures we must begin with the civilizations organized four millennia before Christ in the Nile valley and in Mesopotamia. For it was from these cultures that mankind moved through the Orient, and it is in them that we catch glimpses of the great Neolithic American cultures that began after the initiation of the Christian era. In these Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures we find our *prehistory*. There is no evidence to indicate that all of these

advanced cultures had direct contact, but if there was social intercourse between them it was through the Polynesians. And these cultures were the results of structures already configurated in the Paleolithic peoples when the ancestors of the Americans were migrating through east Asia and the islands of the Pacific.

2. *Protohistory*

The most important aspect of our background is our protohistory —our “first” constitution or the formation of the most radical elements of our culture —which began in Mesopotamia and not in the arid Euroasiatic wastelands of the Indo-Europeans. The protohistory of our culture, namely, the Semitic-Christian beginnings, originated in the fourth millennium before Christ when, by successive invasions, Semitic tribes infiltrated the whole Middle East: Accadians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Aramaeans, Hebrews, and Arabs who from a cultural point of view and together with Christians all form the same family.

This Semitic-Christian man dominated the Roman and Hellenistic Mediterranean and later evangelized the Germans and Slavs as well as the Indo-Europeans such as the Hittites, Iranians, Hindus, Greeks, and Romans. Finally, the Semite conquered and controlled the Iberian peninsula both in the Calif of Córdoba as well as during the reign of Castile and Aragon. The fundamental attitudes and supreme values of the conquistador of the Americas are to be found —if one desires a full explanation —in the Syrian-Arabic deserts four millennia before Jesus Christ. From this cultural womb carne Byzantine, Latin, and Russian Christianity.

3. *History*

Our Latin American *history* began with the arrival of a handful of Hispanics who possessed, in addition to a national messianism, an immense superiority over the Indians not only in regard to the instruments of civilization but also in the coherence of their cultural structures. Our Latin American history began then in 1492 with the incontrovertible domination by the Hispanic —who was a product of late medieval Christianity —over tens of millions of Asiatics or of Asiatics and Australoids who for thousands of years had inhabited an enormous land area, but one terribly deficient because of its ahistoricity. The Indian possessed no history because his world was one of atemporal, primitive mythology with its eternal archetypes.²⁵ The conquistador began, therefore, an American history and in the process forgot his European history. Hispanic America began at point zero in the distressing situation of being a dependent culture.

4. *The Latin American Nation*

There are nations in the world that are distinguished by their totality or unity of culture such as Russia, China, and India. There are others that possess a perfect coherence in regard to their past, and still others that were constituted by an original culture such as France, Germany, and England. Conversely, there are nations that are absolutely artificial in that they possess neither a linguistic, religious, nor ethnic unity, such as South Africa. What of the Latin American nations ? The truth is, we are more or less in the middle of the road. We have our nation-states with their century and a half of autonomous histories, and we manifest certain distinctive modalities of the same life-style and common culture. We even boast of our own poets and literary movements, our architecture, sculpture, philosophers, historians, essayists, and sociologists. What is more, we maintain certain attitudes in regard to civilization and hold

certain values. But are the differences between one Latin American country and another so pronounced as to allow us to think in terms of distinct cultures? There are obviously significant differences between Honduras and Chile, between Argentina and Mexico, and between Venezuela and Uruguay. But is there not greater similarity between the residents of Caracas, Buenos Aires, Lima, and Guatemala City than there is between those of the Latin American urban culture and the *gaucho* of the Argentine Pampas or the Orinoco, or between the Indian in the Peruvian jungles and the Indian of modern Mexico?

Our national cultures can only be said to possess distinct personalities within a limited scope manifesting a certain consistency which could be legitimately designated by the name "culture." That is, our individual national cultures are constituent parts of the overall Latin American culture. Furthermore, these same regional cultures have for four centuries in one way or another—as all germinal cultures have—manifested secondary and marginal characteristics of European culture, and at the same time they have become consistently more autonomous. Despite the sociopolitical, economic, and technical underdevelopment, Latin America has become aware of its life-style and has tended to separate itself from European culture. Our hypothesis is, therefore, the following: to comprehend fully the individual national cultures, one must consider the structures of Latin American culture as a whole. It is a serious mistake to postpone an analysis of Latin America until the study of our national cultures has been completed, for the structures of the *whole* can be explained by the morphology of the individual parts. Physiology begins with a study of the body as a functional totality so that one can analyze and understand the complementary activities of the individual organs and systems.

Regional, national, or local studies of culture add to our understanding of the multiple forms of life and formation of common human values as well as helping to explain the attitudes of the larger group and the life-styles of Latin Americans. If one is to understand historical development on a national or international level, it is necessary to have some knowledge of history at a more restricted level. The same applies to an understanding of cultural structures. To understand the common cultural structures, one needs to comprehend the essential components of individual cultures. From these common structures, then, the national particularities will be clearly evident. Otherwise one is likely to confuse as something national that which is a part of the total Latin American heritage, and miss altogether that which can be correctly distinguished as national. In Argentina, for example, there does not exist a single institution which is dedicated to the study of Latin American culture as a whole. Paradoxically, entities such as Berlin's *Iberoamerikanische Institut* or the Latin American Library in Austin, Texas, do not exist in Latin America. Latin America has yet to find its place in the world history of culture, and our national cultures are like fruit without a tree. They are like something which sprang up by spontaneous generation. There does exist a kind of cultural "nationalism" in our countries; but if we are to preserve these national cultures we must move beyond nationalism as such and discover for ourselves that which is truly Latin American.

Moreover, we must be aware of the existence of multiple similarities between the countries of Latin America, especially at a regional level. For example, there exists a Latin America of the Caribbean, another of the Andes (including Colombia and Chile), still another of the Amazon region, and a fourth of the River Plate area. These subgroups cannot be ignored in the study of individual national cultures. To put it even more simply, it is possible to speak of a Latin America of the Pacific—which

takes into consideration a prehistoric past —and another of the Atlantic, which was far more susceptible to foreign and European influences.

5. *The different levels*

How can we develop and possess a cultural knowledge, a conscious reflection on the organic structures of our Latin American and national culture? It will come only by a careful and patient analysis of each of the levels and each of the constituent elements of our culture.

The symbolic or mythical nucleus of our culture, the values on which the whole edifice of attitudes and life-styles are founded, forms an intentional complex that has its own structure, content, and history. To do a complete historical and morphological analysis would at this point be impossible,²⁶ but we can indicate some fundamental hypotheses and conclusions.

There have been several important studies of the history of ideas in Latin America.²⁷ I do not minimize the value and importance of these works, but what is needed is a concrete understanding of the ideas of the man on the street in his daily life. And we will find the ultimate values of our pre- and protohistory as well as our current history —at least until the beginning of the nineteenth century —in the symbols, myths, and religious structures. To discover these values we should use principally the tools of the historians and phenomenologists of religion, because until the recent secularization of culture, fundamental values and primary symbols of a group were always a part of their teleological structures, that is, a *logos* of what they perceive to be divine.

In America the study of the values of a cultural group should begin with an analysis of the primitive awareness of the Amerindian mythical structure in whose rites and legends are found the intentional contents and values for which we are searching²⁸ — as Karl Jaspers and Paul Ricoeur have both indicated.²⁹ Philosophy is nothing more than the rational expression (at least until the seventeenth century) of the theological structures accepted and adhered to consciously by the group.³⁰

In the second place, one should observe the clash between the value systems of the Amerindian and the Hispanic not only during the period of conquest but also during the time of the evangelization. The domination of the Semitic-Christian values are colored by the medieval and Renaissance Hispanic messianism, which did not avoid a syncretism with the surviving Amerindian myths in the popular conscience. One can discern the configuration of these two values systems in the history of colonial Christianity in Latin America. After the revolutions a crisis developed as a result of the conflicting currents of thought proceeding from Europe beginning in 1830, which ultimately produced a generation of positivists in Latin America beginning about 1870.

The most significant phenomenon that developed was that of the secularization of a society which was in part culturally Christian —certain values were common among Latin Americans, and there was a relative intolerance for alien values —and Latin America became a kind of pluralistic and secularized society. Nevertheless, the basic content of the mythical nucleus, though secularized, continued unchanged. The view of man, history, the cosmos, the transcendental, and liberty, continued —with minor exceptions —to be the ancestral. Positivism completely disappeared, and the models which were inspired by the North Americans, French, and English came to be regarded as alien to the Latin American culture, that is, Latin America rejected them as foreign.

For our part we believe that it is necessary to analyze consciously the world of ancestral values —to discover their basic contents and to differentiate between the

permanent and essential and the transient—in order to move toward the development of our own culture and civilization.³¹

One can say precisely the same thing about our *ethos*, this organism of fundamental attitudes that constitute our values.³² Here the situation is even more delicate: Latin Americans do not possess the same tragic *ethos* of the Indian upon whom an inevitable destiny is quietly forced. Neither does the Latin American have the same *ethos* of the Spaniard about whom Ortega y Gasset clairvoyantly wrote as follows:

The Spaniard is that person who has no ultimate or real needs, and who can accept life and face it with a positive attitude of not needing anything. The Spaniard needs nothing to live. In fact, he does not even need to live for he has no great stake in living. This is precisely what frees him to live and what permits him to be the master of his life.³³

Latin Americans, in contrast, have another *ethos*, which Mayz Vallenilla describes saying that “facing the pure Present—here is our primordial affirmation—we feel on the margin of history, and we function with a mood of radical precariousness,”³⁴ and this “only after a prolonged familiarity and adjustment within our world by means of a spirit of a constant and reiterated *expectation* in regard to the future.”³⁵ Another has put it even more succinctly when he says,

Latin America is immature. Perhaps the fact that a Latin American—and I am speaking of more than one—tolerates this immaturity without embarrassment is an indication that he has taken the first step toward maturity. What is more important in my way of thinking, if one is to move toward maturity, one must be conscious of one's immaturity. In our case, unless we are aware of our condition, we are ignorant of the real situation on our continent, and we are unable to progress a single step.³⁶

Ortega y Gasset lamented: “The Creole soul is full of broken promises; it feels pain in members which it does not have and which it has never had.”³⁷

We should not, however, think of our *ethos* as a collection of deficiencies simply because “Latin America does not appear to be tranquil in regard to her judgments.”³⁸ Our *ethos* possesses without doubt a fundamental attitude of “hope,” and as a result of this revolutionaries for example are sometimes victorious because they are infected with doses of vitality stemming from their anticipation of something better.

We are not attempting in this work to undertake an exposition of the network of attitudes that constitute the Latin American *ethos*. To do so it would be necessary to include a study of the phenomenological method, for it is in the particular modality of our people that the human conscience in general is determined by a world view distinctly our own, the product of circumstances that are irreducibly the components of communication.³⁹ Besides a structural investigation, one should always consider the evolution of the phenomena, which involves, of course, an historical investigation.

Finally, we should see the third aspect of the constituent elements of culture, namely, the total life-style together with its objectifications in artistic and cultural works.⁴⁰ It is this level that has already been studied most and about which we possess the majority of recorded investigation. This includes the histories of art, literature, folklore, architecture, painting, music, and the cinema, and there is a concerted attempt to understand the originality of these expressions of our way of life. Evidently a clear comprehension of this life-style can only be achieved by the analysis of the nucleus of values and organic attitudes of the *ethos*, a work which we have barely outlined in the two preceding paragraphs. What is lacking to the present is a perspective of the whole, in a coherent and evolutionary manner, of all the levels of the cultural objectifications, that is, a work that will bring together all the Latin American arts and cultural

movements and that will show their interrelations and the values on which they are founded, the attitudes by which they are determined, and the historical circumstances that modify them. As of yet, we do not have an exposition of our own cultural world, that is, a history of Latin American culture.

6. *Is national history particular?*

If we could undertake in this context the study of the development of our national culture, and if we could examine individually every nation, it would be possible to apply analogically what we find in all the rest of the Latin American nations and affirm analogically that there are shades, grades, and levels of diverse applicability.

First, however, we must reject the understanding of our separate cultural extremes such as *nationalism* and the ideas of those who maintain utopian positions, whether of the right or of the left, be they conservatives or liberals. The absolutization of the nation is a fallacy which in one way or another goes back to the French ideologists of the eighteenth century or to Hegel in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Likewise we should move beyond any form of racism, even that of those who, longing for a pure indigenization, speak “of the race...” For all forms of racism, be they German or Amerindian, propose the primacy of the biological over the spiritual and tend to define the human being at the zoological level. At the same time we should leave aside any facile Europeanism which simply postpones our taking the responsibility for our own culture and continues the ancestral transatlantic alienation.⁴¹

We should, therefore, place each of our nations in Latin America, our smaller country in our larger country, not only so that we might understand ourselves as a people, but also so that we can participate with some influence and meaning in the world dialogue of cultures and in the integral development of our civilization. What is needed is the ability to discern, separate, and distinguish the nations to enable us to unite and integrate them. We should know which of the levels of our culture are historically and structurally dependent on other peoples and at which levels one encounters individual styles and individual temperaments. If we attempt to make everything autochthonous, we will appear to be ridiculous —much like the well known Argentine anthropologist who declared his desire to objectify Argentine originality even to the level of physical anthropology, proposing in the process an “autochthonous race of the Pampas.” This is the height of myth carried to its zoological extreme. We should know where and how to look for our originality not only as Latin Americans but as national cultures.