

The Church We Imagine for Latin America: Faith and Identity in Today's Globalized World

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When we speak of *identity*, we are far from referring to an easily recognizable entity, much less to a measurable group of elements that make this “something” identifiable. In speaking of identity, rather, we refer to a specific period of *time* with a past, a present, and a future; to an *experience* that relates to a particular person or group of people and their environment; to a *history* that is made up of many histories; and to a *context* that is subject to all of the above.

We must keep this broad description in mind when we speak of our continent. The term “Latin America,” which is the most

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commonly used descriptor for our region, does not mean only a geographic area. It also implies a reference to a history with many changing manifestations, to a context that is continually in flux, to the accumulated experiences of the men and women who are a part of it and who “name” it, among many other elements. On the other hand, it involves adhering to *perceptions*: individuals and communities (however that individual or community perceives itself), in spite of reading written history and analyzing its socioanthropologic context in a deep academic way, will always see it from their own singular perspective and viewpoint. On that topic, Alan Rouquié succinctly expresses the following:

So we use this comfortable term [Latin America], but knowingly, that is, without ignoring its limitations and ambiguities. Latin America exists, but only by opposition and from the outside. This signifies that “Latin Americans,” in any category, do not represent any tangible reality beyond vague extrapolations or cowardly generalizations.¹

This quote leads us to consider some central aspects required to understand our region: What is it? What was it? What will it be? *Latin America is a continent whose identity was and is constructed by a collection of elements that do not only reflect “internal” aspects but also narratives, intentions, and dynamics that spill over its borders.*² In other words, Latin America is constructed as an “otherness.” By making this statement, we do not want to fall into a Manichaeism that separates reality into

1. Alan Rouquié, *América Latina: introducción al Extremo Occidente* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1989), 3.

2. Edward Said applies the same thesis in the case of the Orient in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).