

OBSTACLES TO THE GOSPEL IN YAUREL, PUERTO RICO

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

Library

6633 W. WARTBURG CIRCLE
MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53092

James R. Connell

Church History

Prof. Fredrich

April 15, 1981

--PREFACE--

A few words of introduction are in order before reading this paper: by the grace of God, the author was privileged to serve as a Latin American vicar to Puerto Rico from November, 1979, to August, 1980. A great deal of time was spent in studying the culture, language, and customs of the people. It was a year of learning and growing in the appreciation of a foreign people and their culture. The author lays aside all claims to be an expert in the field of sociological studies, nor does he claim to be writing the definitive statement on the work being done in the Puerto Rican mission field. Instead, this paper should be regarded as some general observations in the obstacles facing the Christian Missioner Corps in Puerto Rico.

A casual reading of this paper may leave the reader with a negative attitude toward the Puerto Rican people or the work being done in the Latin American field. This is not the intention. Every pastor, teacher, missionary, or visitor to a world mission station will tell you there are certain obstacles that must be met and overcome in order to effectively preach the Gospel in that foreign culture. This paper intends to highlight those obstacles in an effort to create an awareness of the day-to-day problems facing our Missioner Corps in Puerto Rico. The tone may be negative. But at the same time there are joys watching the Word of God germinate and grow in the hearts of young believers. The Holy Spirit is actively

working to call His Church together. For nearly every obstacle or moment of frustration found in the world mission field, there is a positive account to outweigh the negative.

A question may arise as to the selection of Yaurel as the focal point of this paper. This choice was made on the basis of the author's limited nine-month tour of duty in Puerto Rico. In Yaurel, he was assigned a weekly catechism class of three students, worked with the Sunday School program, taught one week of Vacation Bible School, assisted, observed, and taught some adult instruction classes. However, in every area of contact with the people in Yaurel, there seemed to be somewhat of an obstacle that needed to be handled. Whether it ranged from the lack of education to the ever-present machismo, Yaurel had the problem. Conceivably it could be the future sociological paradise of an Oscar Lewis.

A word of appreciation is also in order to the Missioner Corps in Puerto Rico. It is to their untiring missionary zeal that this paper is dedicated. Special thanks to Pastors Ralph Martens and Paul Hartman for taking time from their busy schedules to organize some Church Council minutes and the sharing of personal experiences.

S O L O A N D I O S S E A L A G L O R I A !

OBSTACLES TO THE GOSPEL IN YAUREL, PUERTO RICO



Mention the town of Yaurel, Puerto Rico, to a native Puerto Rican, and one gets looks of bewilderment and doubt. "Where is that place," "Never heard of it," and "I've never been there," are all common answers from the citizens of Guayama. Yaurel is a little burg ("barrio"), that is a bit out of the way. Standing at a Caribbean beach front in Arroyo, one can look west and see the dome of the catholic cathedral in downtown Guayama, five miles away. But Yaurel, a couple of miles due north, is invisible because it is neatly nestled behind the mountains. To get there, one travels on a well-paved asphalt road that winds along a river bed -- sometimes dry, sometimes blocking traffic with a flood -- into the cool foothills. The road is lined with mango trees and, at certain times of the year, fiery red flamboyant blossoms which are native to the tropical climate. Yaurel possesses a certain quietness, a real down-home atmosphere that can be especially soothing and relaxing.

The town itself is populated by maybe six to eight

hundred inhabitants. The fortunate few hold jobs. Nearly all receive U.S. food stamps or some sort of government aid. The few middle class homes are scattered among the predominant poverty level homes. Yet, the homes are generally all clean and neat on the inside. The children are well bathed -- at least to start with. Driving along the main street in "downtown" Yaurel, the North American missionary can receive looks and stares of distrust from the native men who are seated in the shade with their rum and beer. It's almost as though your presence is a threat to their peaceful continuity. They are accustomed to things their way. They are open to little change. One wonders, either to himself or out loud, what is there that has attracted the Lutheran Church in Guayama to this small "barrio" seven miles away?

During the summer of 1978, a sketch of the work area in Yaurel was prepared and presented to the Project Joy workers (Lakeside Lutheran volunteers). We quote the summary:

"Sometime around 1970 Dionisia Marínez moved her family from Gran Stan Bran de Guayama to Yaurel. Devotions, Bible studies and worship services have been held in her home since then. The time of services has changed several times. For a time we conducted Sunday School here also.

No formal canvass of the area has been made. The area would appear poorer than Blandet. There is a Catholic church near Dionisia's. There may be a Pentecostal 'house church' in the area."

Mission work in Yaurel was not included in the original plans for establishing a Lutheran church in Puerto Rico. Guayama proper was the target city of Pastor Roger Sprain in 1967. But where to begin? Sprain selected a small community of poor people in Gran Stan Bran, a "barrio" without a church or a spiritual

shepherd. The homes in this area consisted of tin and plywood; the in-coming water was from two spigots on each end of town. In an act of benevolence, the government tore down the shanty town and relocated the people in various "barrios" around Guayama. But at the time of the relocation, a small nucleus of Lutheran believers and a greater number of contacts had been made. Doña Dionisia Martínez was one such member; her family consisted of many of the contacts. The pastors and vicars continued ministering to these people by means of devotions and Bible studies. There was no formal strategy in connection with Yaurel, nor was there a significant investment of time and effort by the Corps, nor did the Executive Committee issue directives in regard to the "barrio." We were, in effect, "treading water" from 1970 to 1978, while concentrating on more pressing priorities.

In the Church Council minutes of July 27, 1978, Yaurel was assigned to Pastor Hartman as a regular part of his duties. The Vacation Bible School for that summer had seen 17 in attendance. September through November of 1978, saw some positive results through a "Sunday School/witness" program. The S.S. averaged in the low to mid-twenties. Adult instructions and at home Bible studies were offered. The worship services were held in Guayama, with transportation provided by the Corps. A list of the members and contacts as of May 17, 1979, appears as follows:

Members

Dionisia Martínez Figueroa
Luz Vázquez Martínez (daughter of Dionisia)
José Luís Martínez Vázquez (son of Luz)

Santiago del Valle Martínez (son of Dionisia, but living in Cidra)
 Manasé del Valle Martínez (son of Dionisia, but living in Rochester, N.Y.)

Participants in classes, not communicant members

Paquita Cintrón Pabón
 Noel Ortíz Cintrón
 Luís Martínez Vázquez (son of Luz)
 Wilfredo Martínez Vázquez (son of Luz)
 Ramón Martínez Vázquez (son of Luz)
 Delores Ramos Torres
 Eli (daughter of Delores)
 Wanda (daughter of Delores)
 Sandra Peña Díaz
 Carmen Martínez Vázquez (daughter of Luz)
 Lino

Contacts added after 1979

Carmelo and Madeline
 Doña María } two sisters
 Doña Santa }
 Chu (son-in-law to Delores, husband of Eli)

Tuesday Lenten services were offered in Yaurel in 1979.

The V.B.S. increased slightly to twenty. All of this was very good. However, the fall of 1979 and the spring of 1980 marked a period of non-growth: the S.S. classes were sparsely attended; few new contacts were established; and other contacts moved away or dropped out of classes. In the minutes of March 4 and May 8, 1980, we find:

"The Yaurel situation is still in transition, the major problems being the lack of male leadership and family instability. Pastor Martens plans to talk with members and interested people in Yaurel to see if they are willing to make the necessary effort to attend and support worship services there."

The results of Martens' investigation did not bear much fruit. The '80 V.B.S., however, did. There was a daily average attendance of over fifty-five students. The V.B.S., as in years past, was held in the Centro Headstart building in

Yaurel. In August of 1980, weekly worship services were offered in the same building on Sunday afternoons. The services included a joint abbreviated liturgy, followed by a simultaneous S.S. for the children and Bible study for the adults. The service closed with joint prayers and hymns. Attendance was near twenty and hopes were high. During the September 18 Church Council meeting, a \$10,000 building projection was made for Yaurel in 1981. However, in February of 1981, the weekly services were discontinued: the Centro Headstart building was unavailable due to remodeling. No one in Yaurel offered an alternative home or place of worship. The Church Council minutes read as follows:

"Pastor Martens does not recommend the purchase of land or chapel in Yaurel at this time, nor until a congregation is organized in Yaurel."

What happened? Why is there a roller-coaster effect in the statistics? The surge...the recession...the resurgence... the reversal. Why? What is there about the "barrio," or the people to cause such hot and cold results?

This paper is an attempt to answer those questions. It is an attempt by one person's view and experience to show the obstacles to the Gospel in Yaurel, Puerto Rico. We will be looking at the problems posed by the influence of the Roman Catholic church, "espiritismo" (spiritism), the lack of education, machismo and mobility of the people. In addition, insights and suggestions will be offered as to how these obstacles may be met and overcome. Let's begin by looking at the Roman church--the predominant force in Latin American religion.

In Mark 12:34, Jesus told a young lawyer who had shown remarkable perception of the law: "You are not far from the kingdom of God." With this answer, Jesus meant the man was very close to understanding and comprehending the kingdom of God, yet he had not fully understood everything. Therefore, he was outside the kingdom. In accessing the Puerto Ricans and their Catholic faith, it could be said that they, also, are close to the kingdom of God. Close...but yet so far away. "Close" in that the Catholic church is present in every city, village and "barrio." "Close" in that 90% of the population is officially Roman Catholic. "Close" in that there is an abundance of religious pictures, crucifixes and statues of saints decorating even the poorest of homes. But, "far away" in the superficialness of the religion: church attendance is very low; all a "good Catholic" needs is baptism, first communion, marriage (if so inclined), and last rites; Bible knowledge and Gospel knowledge is non-existent. It is a small wonder, then, that the Puerto Ricans are described as "a religious people in search of religion." How does all this offer obstacles in the work of Yaurel?

One example is the distinction between mortal and venial sins in the Roman church. Big sins (pecados) involve murder, divorce, and stealing (especially from the poor). Little sins (pecadillos) are lying, fornication, and drunkenness. Murder, divorce, and stealing are rare occurrences for the barrio in Yaurel. On the other hand, lying, fornication, and drunkenness seem to be the three most prevalent activities.

A quote from Pastor Martens is apropos regarding the Sixth Commandment and young Wanda:

"Wanda is back from the states, that is Delores' daughter from Yaurel; she was just 16. Yes, she lived with her husband for a short while after the baby was born, but he thought she would allow him to have another woman live with them. In other words, two wives (loosely so-called). Is that machismo?? Paganism might be better. One is tempted to fault the RC's doctrine of marriage and adultery, but that may not be fair. The idea, however, seems to be common among the people that it is better to live together without getting married so that if it should happen to fall through at least one wouldn't have to get a divorce and be therewith thrown out of the church--mortal sin."

The Roman Church has seen to it that legal divorce is next to impossible for the poor man in Latin America to obtain. If divorce is gained, the man may become excommunicated from the church. Living under this law of the land and the rule of the church, adultery and fornication are brushed aside as small sins. They are winked at, bragged about in taverns, and considered good and healthy for the male (machismo). An interesting exception to this system was Luíz Muñoz Marín, the ex-governor and statesman from Puerto Rico. When he died in the spring of 1980, he was declared by the Roman hierarchy of Puerto Rico to be "right with God and the church," in spite of his divorce and re-marriage.

There is confusion on the part of the common people in regard to this double standard. One couple, who had been living together, came to Pastor Martens for a church wedding. After a study of the Sixth Commandment and God's will in marriage, they said something to this effect:

"We thought that because we weren't married, the Sixth Commandment had nothing to say to us. That only applies to married couples."

So much for adultery; let's turn to lying.

In the Latin American, Puerto Rican culture, it is generally considered better to lie than to embarrass someone or make him feel uncomfortable with the truth. For example:

A lost tourist: "Excuse me, sir, where's the post office?"
A bewildered native (having no idea of where the post office is): "Right over there, across the street."

Tourist (relieved and happy): "Thank you very much!"
Native (equally relieved and happy): "You're welcome."

The culture that is relatively "time-less," where little thought is given to convenience or efficiency, will gladly lie to make a person happy in place of hurting him with the truth. This can be a frustrating obstacle when canvassing the area of Yaurel for V.B.S. or a special service. Many conversations follow along these lines.

Pastor: "We hope to see you at our service."
Native: "Yes, sure."

Pastor (smiling): "And your children?"
Native (also smiling): "Yes."

Pastor: "Can we give you a ride?"
Native: "Sure, why not?"

But the day of the service, fifteen minutes prior to the service, the Pastor stops and sees no one is ready.

Pastor: "Are you going?"
Native (waving him on): "Yes. Right away (ahora mismo)."

The service has been completed and the native did not come. The Pastor stops back.

Pastor: "We missed you at the service. What happened?"
Native: "I forgot." (The kids, family troubles, or the flu are also common excuses.)

Pastor: "I understand. (Smiles.) Next time?"
Native (smiling back): "Yes."

All along the latino may be consciously or subconsciously lying. He has no intention of attending a service or of sending the children. Yet, he lives for the moment; he lives to make someone else happy (especially if that someone is a man of God--"padre, cura, o sacerdote"). This type of lying is a "white lie." It is not considered to be a big sin.

What may be particularly bothersome, though, is the outwardly pious manner of leaving the matter in God's hands. Such an encounter frequently occurs with our members in Yaurel.

Pastor: "Will you be coming to church tomorrow?"

Member: "Si Dios quiere." (If God wills or wants it.)

Again whether consciously or subconsciously, the person is not telling the truth. He may not want to come; there may be no intention of coming; alternative plans may have already been made. But the matter is left up to God. If for some reason--whatever reason--the person is not able to attend, God must not have wanted it to happen. "Punto" (period)! For a defeated people, often maligned and mastered by the aristocrats or some unknown, unseen force, lying (fatalistic-type lying) is often a means of absolving oneself of responsibility. However, there are other means of wiping out and forgetting about responsibility.

Puerto Rico is a small Caribbean isle of thirty by sixty miles. The recent census estimated the inhabitants at 3.2 million. Yet, in spite of its minuteness, Puerto Rico is ranked third in the world for alcohol consumption. (Only Poland and Russia drink more; the U.S. is fourth.) Naturally,

the ugly head of alcoholism can and does raise itself in Puerto Rico--especially in the poorer barrios, such as Yaurel. It is an obstacle that is difficult to combat for various reasons: drinking is accepted by the Roman church and drunkenness is ignored; "viernes social" (Social Friday) is an ingrained custom of men going out with other males for an evening of carousing; and social drinking is almost unknown, i.e., one drinks to get drunk.

Going down the list of members and contacts in Yaurel, there is not one family that is not affected in some way by alcoholism. Doña Dionisia's present husband is one who drinks heavily and is frequently seen sitting on the curbside wearing a paper bag hat and singing unintelligible songs. Doña Dionisia's son, Francisco, is notorious for ripping it up on "viernes social" and then coming home to cause quite a disturbance. Don Tití, the husband of Doña Luz, has been hospitalized several times due to over-indulgence. Neighbors have predicted that he will most likely ^{be} the next one to die from alcohol abuse. The husband of Doña Maria, a recent contact, has been classified by his wife as being "decent when drunk...he just comes home and falls asleep on the couch without beating me or the kids." One afternoon, Chu, the husband of Eli and son-in-law to Ramos Torres, unintentionally interrupted an instruction class with his mother-in-law, ~~asister-in-law~~ and the author. He had been celebrating at a neighbor's fiesta, but in all sincerity mentioned: "Yes, and let's get started on those Bible studies soon." The author replied: "By all means. You mention the time

and I'll be here to teach." Chu nodded...smiled...but no appointment was made. The situation remains the same to this day.

Into this religious and cultural mixture, where the Roman church condones or disregards such sinful behavior, comes the Lutheran church's denunciation of socially accepted behavior. Our message is looked upon as being new, foreign, and strange. One is told he must not get drunk (in reality, not drink), lying is bad, and sexual immorality of all kinds is sin. Unfortunately, these are not the only obstacles caused by Roman Catholicism.

Of all the religious holidays and festival in Puerto Rico, Good Friday (Viernes Santo) is by far and away the most revered. A year ago, one radio disc jockey was remembered to say: "Today is for all the beautiful, religious people in Puerto Rico." How true! The churches are packed to overflowing. People crowd the streets to watch re-enactments of Jesus' walk to Calvary. Women weep, mourn, and wail for their Savior. It is a day when the people are deeply reminded of their sin. It is a day when the people flock to see a bruised, beaten, and battered man. There is compassion, but no understanding. No one really wants to identify with such a man. He is about to die. He can hardly inspire hope or confidence in the minds and hearts of the people.

On Easter Sunday, the Roman church has business as usual. The throngs have disappeared. The churches are nearly as empty as the tomb of Christ on that first Easter day.

What's missing? The doctrine of the resurrection! The hope, confidence, joy, peace, and victory that this message brings are missing, as well. Perhaps it can be said that the reason for the emphasis on Mariology in Latin American catholicism is to partly offset the morbid picture of Christ. Think of the contrasts portrayed: Mary, a beautiful, young virgin; she is alive and living; it is she who intercedes between God and man; it is she who is all compassionate and understanding. How are these two notions displayed in Yaurel?

The portrayal of Christ as a beaten man is a little intangible, but it nevertheless exists. It can be detected in a sparsely attended Lutheran Easter service in Yaurel. This attitude can be detected in the downtrodden existence of many of the poor people. They live a life devoid of hope, victory, or confidence. Their life is not filled with a sense of well being. On the other hand, upon entering even the poorest home in Yaurel, one is amazed at the number of pictures and statues of, for example, the Virgin Mary. The author recalls making a particular sick call with the dying mother of Paquita Cintrón. He couldn't help but take a close look at the pictures of Mary and ornaments of saints surrounding her on the wall and bed posts. Who or what is to blame? The Roman Church? Folklore? Superstition? Perhaps, as we will see in our next obstacle, it is a combination of the three.

Guayama is commonly known as the "ciudad bruja" (witch city). This tradition has been handed down and turned into a means of giving the city a reputation. "La ciudad bruja"

greet you on sign posts as you enter the city; T-shirts proclaim "los brujos" (the witches), the nick-name of the semi-professional basketball team of Guayama; and "brujeria" (witchcraft) is sung in songs and portrayed in folk-dances. Walking the streets of downtown Guayama, one is impressed with the number of "botánicas" where one can buy incense, candles, potions, and figurines to help practice this witchcraft or "espiritismo" (spiritism).

To the outsider, espiritismo appears to be rather complex. It is a homogeneous mixture of Christian, African, and Oriental symbols, along with superstitious folklore. Espiritismo is consulted to cure illnesses, predict the future, and ward off evil influences. In essence, it is a lot of misinformation and lack of knowledge. But by no means does this limit espiritismo to the poorer classes. There are cases of even doctors and lawyers becoming involved with and interested in spiritism.

Under such circumstances, there is little difficulty in believing every kind of doctrine or teaching. "Whoever talks about God or religion is OK," is a common expression. It is common because spiritism does not conflict with the catholic faith and religion. By practicing espiritismo, one is not renouncing his faith in the church. There is only a slight twist in direction. As a result, espiritismo is widely practiced on the isle.

Guayama is reputed as the city of witches. Yet, it is common knowledge that Arroyo is actually the hotbed for

spiritism. And Yaurel? Pastor Martens quotes a young, English speaking boy from Chicago who "remarked about the families in Yaurel who practice or practiced spiritism." His grandfather, a Puerto Rican who is familiar with the area, agrees. And how is it manifested among the people with whom we work?

In April 1979, a special problem was recorded in the Church Council minutes: Doña Luz Vázquez Martínez, a member, was reported wearing a habit to fulfill a vow. Here is Pastor Hartman's personal recollection of what happened:

"Luz's oldest son José Luís ran off one day -- or he might have been kidnapped. We never really found out. At any rate, Luz was naturally upset. Then she consulted an espiritista to find out where he might be. As part of the deal for obtaining delphian oracles from the espiritista, she made a vow to wear a habit. That made it necessary for us to consult with her, in order that she might recognize her sins against the first and second commandments, reject her vow and take off the habit. Eventually she did. José Luís also eventually was found. He turned up at his uncle's in Cidra...Santiago."

Still this is not the only instance. The people who believe and trust in spiritism are living in a hostile, unfriendly world. There is constant fear of the "mal de ojo" (evil eye) that can be placed upon a baby by someone with special powers. In order to ward off such evil influences, nearly all babies have a little black fist with the thumb protruding through the index and middle fingers pinned to their shirt. Pastor Martens was instructing Eli shortly after giving birth to her second child and reports:

"We are at the Second Commandment. Under the first, I challenged her (Eli's) use of the 'manita de asabache,' that little black fist they pin onto the baby's shirt

to ward off the evil eye. 'Does that indicate that we fear, love and trust in God above all things, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did?' No answer, but a smile of recognition."

Eli's mother, Delores Ramos Torres, also lives in superstitious fear of many things. On one particular afternoon, the conversation turned to superstitions that exist in both cultures. We mentioned: "Friday the thirteenth, for example, has a bad significance for superstitious people." Her reply was: "For us a Tuesday the thirteenth is very bad. It hardly pays to get out of bed. And if a black cat is seen near the house, then for sure something evil is going to happen."

Fear is the key word. Fear of the unknown and a lack of trust in the confidence and power of God as expressed by Paul in Romans 8. Often sociologists point to a lack of education as being the main factor behind superstition. We would agree. But what are the educational obstacles that have to be overcome?

This quote is from the handbook The Christian Missioner Corps in Puerto Rico, page 7:

"Great strides have been made toward educating the young during the last generation. By the early seventies the literacy rate had climbed to 89%. Already by 1964 fully 90% of Puerto Rico's children were in school. This compared with only 16% of the children in the neighboring Dominican Republic. Much remains to be done, however. There is still a high dropout rate as children reach their high school years. Libraries are poor. The equipment, buildings and teachers need to improve."

Puerto Rican education is relatively good; it has improved. But it has a long way to go. Many of the adults in Yaurel are illiterate. For example: Doña Dionisia, Maria, and

Santa are unable to read. For this reason, Maria and Santa had trouble completing the first two lessons in adult instruction and could not recall the five points of a TAS presentation. Doña Delores is able to read, but has little reading comprehension. As far as the young people are concerned, we quote Prof.

Prof. Maria V. Hernandez in the San Juan Star:

"About 92% of the students attending public schools here (Puerto Rico) live below the poverty level! Therefore if we consider disadvantaged all students who are born into a culture of poverty, which affords little opportunity for advancement and which is essentially out of touch with the mainstream of middle class American culture, then the majority of students attending public schools in PR are disadvantaged (the rural population being even more disadvantaged than the urban one). The families are usually large, with other relatives living at home; are missing one parent, usually the father due to death, desertion, illegitimacy, or divorce, thus leaving the female as the head of the house; lack adequate models for the children to imitate, and use poor language patterns.

Authorities in the field point out that most of these students resist training, consider most important those things that produce immediate results, are not aware of opportunities offered by our technological society, have psychological problems or illnesses that affect learning ability, and value concrete objects and situations. They have a tendency to learn better by manipulating objects or by audiovisual materials than through abstract methods." 01-29-79

Let's leave the heady knowledge of applied linguistics and turn to some practical applications. Pastors Hartman, Martens, and the author have all been recently involved in a catechism class instructing three of Doña Luz's children. Pastor Martens makes these accurate observations:

"Ramón can't read (age 15) though fairly attentive. Fredo reads, but easily distracted. Luis is here today and in San Juan next Saturday. No male model to follow for sure! Neither older brother or uncles or father."

The problem of the lack of education is an immense

obstacle. Suddenly abstract words, sermons, discussions, and TAS presentations are obsolete. One cannot talk in theoretical terms about sin and grace. We are left without the conventional means of communicating--reading and speaking--and forced to find or create instructional materials fitting our purpose. Unfortunately, that takes time. As Pastor Martens laments:

"It takes a long time and a lot of visits to grow a Christian and my personal preference for investing that time and effort would be in Guayama where I think our present instructional materials and approach would find a more likely audience. A-V's would help here in Guayama, too, but I think to really communicate in Yaurel I am going to have to develop a lot more A-V material."

In discussing the problems of education, yet another hindrance to the Gospel was touched upon. This was also hinted at in the article from the San Juan Star where it said, "The families...lack adequate models for the children to imitate..." The problem? Machismo.

In recent years, the terms machismo and macho have crept into our own language and culture. Although machismo is another rather intangible term, we all know what is involved in making a man "macho:" he wears gold chains; his shirt is halfway unbuttoned; he smokes a certain cigarette; he drives a car with a macho name (i.e. Mustang or Cordoba, as opposed to Sunbird or Rabbit). Machismo is a word that drips with virility, masculinity, muscle-flexing and hairiness. But while this is a recent development in our own culture (perhaps a reaction to the opposite action begun by the feminists), it is something that has existed for centuries in the Latin American culture.

Historically, machismo can be traced back to the ancient days of chivalry in Spain. Proving one's valor and fearlessness was the call of the day. In the New World, this concept was passed down through the "conquistadores." These were men who came with the purpose of exploiting the people and the land, and then leaving. The result of this disposition can be seen in the "Don Juan-syndrome." Many latinos feel compelled to imitate their fathers in virility, hostility, and quarrelsomeness. The evidences of machismo are apparent in a drive through downtown Yaurel.

Latinos frequently seek the companionship of their fellow males in the bars or recreation area. Yaurel is no exception. It is in these groups of close friends that their assertiveness and aggressiveness is released. Traditionally, the male is the dominant force at home. He is in charge. The wife is married to him, but he is not necessarily married to her. If he provides a home, clothes, and food, he may be acting above and beyond what is expected of the average latin husband/father. What is expected in return is submissive obedience by spouse and children, meals, and a warm bed. Some, however, are not inclined to provide any of the necessities, but still expect the same obedience, care, and companionship. It appears to be a constant struggle in keeping one's freedom. Freedom from inhibiting responsibility...freedom from the church.

It is the freedom from the church that makes Gospel work in Puerto Rico difficult. The men perceive the church as an inhibiting force: no drinking, no sexual exploits, and a

need for responsible leadership. What's more, church is considered to be for women and old men. True, females, in their search for stability and acceptance, make up the larger portion of church attendance, and the old man has lived his life and is preparing to die. But the younger man has his friends and social recognition downtown. So why bother with church, Bible study, or caring about the spiritual life? Live for now...the moment...the "viernes social."

The obvious result is an unbroken chain: the children imitate their fathers. A teen-ager may obediently sit through a year or two of confirmation instruction to prepare for his first communion. Yet, mentally he has pictured the model of his father. "I can't wait 'til I'm old enough and don't have to listen to this," may be some latent thoughts. One example of this is José Luís, son of Doña Luz. The Church Council minutes of February 1981, report:

"(José Luís) was confirmed in 1975, but has not shown any interest in the Word over the last two years. Though he has a car he does not offer to bring the active members of his family to worship services, nor did he come when the services were held two blocks from his home."

But what "male model" does José Luís have to follow? José Hobe del Valle, his uncle, is listed as a delinquent communicant member. His father, Don Tití, has a problem with alcoholism and never expressed interest in the church. What will happen to his three younger brothers, Ramón, Wilfredo, and Luís, who are presently studying the catechism instruction? Will they, too, fall away? That is not for us to decide or judge. But to whom do they listen? To whom do they give

allegiance? A white missionary? Or "papá?"

The last barrier or obstacle to be mentioned is in the area of mobility. Although the people are located on a very small island, they are extremely transient. The reason for this is partly due to the governmental status in Puerto Rico. The island is neither a territory nor a state. It is an independent commonwealth in free association with the United States. The people are U.S. citizens, issued U.S. passports, and can come to or leave the U.S. as they please. As a result, close to two million Puerto Ricans have migrated to the U.S. Others have enlisted for military service or periodically come to the U.S. for money, jobs, or vacation. "Here today, gone tomorrow," is a phrase that applies all too frequently with many of our contacts and members in Puerto Rico.

In particular, two sons of Doña Dionisia, Santiago and Manasé, come to mind when speaking of mobility. Santiago was a very promising member. Pastor Sprain had spent time instructing him and grooming him as a possible S.S. teacher or evangelist. However, he went to Boston to seek fame and fortune. Upon returning, he was placed under church discipline until the matter of his live-in wife, Toni, was resolved. Upon the clean-up of the problem, Santiago set up home in Toni's hometown of Cidra, a one and one-half hour drive from Guayama.

The case of Manasé is very similar. He left for Rochester, N.Y., to find work. Before long, he returned home with his live-in bride. After their child was born, the marriage license and baptism were taken care of. Shortly

thereafter, the "chavos" (money) for the return trip was gathered and he was gone. It might be added, however, that while Manasé could be seen walking halfway up the eastern coast of the isle and was notorious for organizing rides, he rarely squeezed time for church into his busy schedule. The latest news on Manasé is that his second child was baptized by Pastor Gieschen in Rochester, N.Y.

Mobility of the natives is a problem in Yaurel. Manasé is gone. Santiago lives in Cidra. Even Dionisia Martínez has moved from Yaurel to a residence for the aging in Guayama. That leaves us with her daughter, Doña Luz, as the only active communicant member living in Yaurel. What is the future for work in Yaurel?

The immediate future of Yaurel does not appear very bright. With the number of members at a low ebb, the best possible strategy is to hold the line. This is what was recommended by the Church Council in February of this year:

- "1. Continue the instruction classes presently in progress.
2. Encourage the present members and prospects to either secure a worship facility for themselves in Yaurel (i.e. the Centro Headstart building, when available), or provide themselves with transportation to services in Dorado.
3. Work to regain the souls of our delinquent members.
4. Maintain contact with the homes of the S.S. children and pray for an opportunity to serve the heads of the household with the Gospel."

And the long-range future? Thus far we have outlined the obstacles encountered in our combined past experiences. For the most part, our future considerations and strategies will want to reflect an understanding from our past experiences. We

are dealing with a different culture, a foreign people, and a people influenced to a great extent by both Roman catholicism and superstition. But they are souls. Souls that without the saving knowledge of Christ as their Savior, will die eternally. How can we deal with these souls and hopefully overcome the obstacles to the Gospel?

To deal with the people is to understand them. We will want to learn their culture and their customs. We will want to learn their idiosyncrasies and beliefs. With this knowledge, we can then be effective preachers and teachers of the Law and Gospel. Our Law can become specific and pointed in showing them what is sin according to God's Word. Our Gospel can then be one of special comfort telling them that their specific sins are covered. And our application will be in ways to leave behind the sinful habits and turn to joyful service rendered for the glory of God. This is not to say this type of preaching has not been done previously. It has. But with every presentation of the commandments, the wary missionary will be making notes as to how the teaching was perceived, understood, and applied. In this way, a growing list of habits, customs, and beliefs can help him to better understand and to better serve the soul he deals with.

Regarding education, Pastor Martens has already hinted that more audio-visual aids must be developed for Yaurel. This is true. But it is almost fruitless to begin developing those aids without first possessing the understanding of what direction needs to be taken with each doctrinal point. This is difficult

for the missionary to plan, develop, and utilize. Perhaps the best suggestion would be to train national lay workers (i.e. evangelists and witness teams) who are receptive to our present teaching methods and then let them carry the message of the Gospel to the less-fortunate. This has already been intimated by members of the Missioner Corps, but again takes great amounts of time and effort for such training.

An overriding question throughout this presentation may go something like this: "Have the people of Yaurel rejected the Gospel?" Pastor Martens has this to say:

"I am not convinced the people in Yaurel have rejected our Gospel, because I'm not sure we have presented it to them (a few, yes), in terms they can understand. It takes a long time and a lot of visits to grow a Christian..."

The author agrees. Our message has not been totally rejected. Rather, we are dealing with people who have been relatively unchurched for most of their lives. For us to come in and expect to see regular attendance every Sunday, at every communion service, at every Bible study, or at every church function is unreal. There is no state-side congregation that can claim that kind of dedication on the part of her members. If we ride in like cowboys and attempt to drive the people, to change them, and to get overnight, instantaneous results, we will only scatter the flock. Instead, we are called as shepherds. Gentle, patient shepherds who lead, call, and care for God's flock. We will not want to get too far ahead of the flock, nor will we let them go astray. But go with them. Grow with them. And realize that they can and will grow and learn a good deal on their own.

Patience is an excellent virtue. Yet, in view of the landslide of obstacles in Yaurel, it is easy to lose one's patience. "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." This was the attitude of Paul and it does well to serve as our attitude, as well. We may never witness the fruits of our labors. That is entirely out of our hands. All we are asked to do is be faithful planters and faithful waterers. The rest is up to God. And we hinge on the promise of His Word: "It will not return to me empty."

May God keep missionaries everywhere in the true preaching of His Word and grant them all an extra measure of patience in their work of meeting obstacles to the Gospel.

James R. Connell

S U P P L E M E N T A L R E A D I N G

Nida, Eugene A., Understanding Latin Americans, Willian Carey Library, South Pasadena, CA, 1974.

The Christian Missioner Corps in Puerto Rico, a handbook prepared by the Executive Committee for Latin American Missions.