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## Historia de la Educación de la fe Católica en Chile

Enrique García Ahumada, FSC  
Tiberiades, 2009  
415 pages

*Reviewed by Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC*

The Church of Chile has made a unique contribution to the renewal of Latin American pastoral ministry, especially education, through leadership in the foundation and development of the Council of Latin American Bishops Conferences (CELAM) during the course of Vatican II, and in its subsequent reception. Along with Brazil, it pioneered the Christian Base Communities where family catechesis was developed for sacramental preparation, and early in the 20th century special educational programs for workers, students, and clergy on Catholic Social Teaching were developed. This volume by one of the leading catechetical historians in Latin America outlines the story of Catholic education from the initial missionary efforts through the recent CELAM General Assembly in Brazil in 2007.

The volume is laid out in five chapters, each covering a century from the conquest to the present. The treatment gives particular attention to the educational approaches to the indigenous populations in each generation. Chile is unique in this regard in that the tribes of the southern part of the country were not brought into control of the central government, colonial or republican, until the late 19th century, though the educational work of missionaries among these peoples was active from the 16th century. The chapters also give careful attention to the popular religious devotions of the peoples, which in Latin America is often a more relevant indicator of the transmission of the faith than the formal catechetical and school programs of the Church. In the characteristic fashion of contemporary Latin American history and theology, care is given to the reality of social, political, and economic contexts in which the faith is transmitted.

The fourth chapter, on the republican pluralism of the 19th century, is particularly important since it provides such a vivid contrast to the educational experience of North America. The new governments alternated between French Revolution style laicist regimes and clericalist conservative governments. However, both held a sense of mission to be carried out by means of the educational institutions of the country. This meant that the Church was

continually adjusting to the political context in which education and catechesis had to be exercised. The schools became the battle ground of secular ideology and Church influence. In Chile this struggle continued into the 20th century, between socialist and fascist ideologies, both of which had the Catholic Church and its own educational agenda to contend with. The 19th century is also a time of the proliferation of religious orders and their educational work throughout the country. The author is particularly attentive in this century, and throughout the history, to the role of laity in the educational mission of the Church.

The final chapter outlines the adaption of the Church's educational mission in the 20th century, with the coming of separation of church and state in 1925 but with continued state support of Catholic education. The modern catechetical movement, with strong continental influences especially from Louvain, the emergence of religious pluralism and eventually ecumenism, and the preparation for and implementation of Vatican II indicate the contribution of Chilean innovation to its own renewal and to continental reform. Already in the 1940s Jesuit educator, St. Alberto Hurtado, SJ, attempted to challenge the Church to realize that its Christendom domination was over; pluralism was inevitable, that it needed to take on responsibility for its own formation, echoing calls in France and Belgium; and to get beyond whining about the presence of fellow Christians and the loss of state favor. The role of the biblical apostolate, adult faith formation, Catholic Action and its influence on the formation of the Christian democratic party, social education during the difficult 1973-1990 dictatorship, and specialized religious education round out a complex and fruitful 5 centuries of educational service and catechetical development.

This volume is a useful window into the educational mission of all of Latin America. While Brazil and Chile experienced a certain separation of church and state early in the 20th century, Church responsibility for Catholic education has come slowly even there. It will be useful to study this one national development in the context of the 22 episcopates gathered in CELAM, and in the whole Catholic development in the western hemisphere. Some of these churches still cling to the hope of states taking up this Catholic responsibility, and to be able to live as if globalization and pluralism will not affect their people. Others adapt grudgingly to the inevitability of pluralism, while still others develop robust programs of catechesis, ecumenical dialogue, and interreligious outreach. There has been much collaboration in ecumenical social action and service. Educational collaboration is early on in its development. As all of the Catholic communities

face together a new pluralism, there is a call to ecumenical and interreligious outreach in the context of a globalized culture of choices and a lay-led educational mission for the Church. Many of the models developed in Latin America, pioneered in Chile, will become resources far beyond this one nation.

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