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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This special issue of the *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* covers a topic which the editors have had under consideration for three years. Its realization at this opportune time, together with the cohesion and breadth of coverage, is the work of Guest Editor Daniel H. Levine whose own research in the field has brought him into close contact with scholars concerned about and writing on the role of the Church and religion in the contemporary politics of Latin America. Preliminary versions of the articles appearing in this issue were presented at a two-day session on the topic held at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., under the sponsorship of the Woodrow Wilson Center's Latin American Program directed by Abraham F. Lowenthal. The sessions were effectively cochaired by Alexander Wilde and Daniel Levine. Many specialists from government, the press, and religious organizations, in addition to scholars in and out of universities, were in active attendance. The final versions of each contribution benefited from the questions and observations of the participants, as well as the organizational and critical acumen of the guest editor. Many of the sources on which the articles are based are not readily available for editorial verification. Mrs. Gerry Machovec, the Journal's editorial assistant, wishes to thank the contributors who cooperated fully with her in an effort to make all citations verifiable by readers, especially those not easily accessible.

The impact of the Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) on contemporary life and politics in the Western Hemisphere is inherent to much of what follows, with particular reference to its second conference held in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968. The extent to which its conclusions have been implemented and absorbed by the hierarchy of the Church, as indicated by preparation for CELAM's third conference in Puebla, Mexico, in October 1978, is the subject of Father Poblete's article.

The May 1979 issue of the *Journal of Interamerican Studies* will contain a critical review of the articles in this issue by Alexander Wilde, who will have the opportunity to draw upon his own extensive research on the Church and religion in Latin America. He will also comment on the discussion in Washington and the developments from that time to the inauguration by Pope John Paul II of the Third General Council of Latin American Bishops in Puebla, Mexico, which is scheduled to begin on January 27, 1979.

—*John P. Harrison*
Editor