

find Jesus Christ in their fellowman, especially in the poor and the oppressed.<sup>50</sup> This idea is starting to become popular in Latin America. Assmann points out that Christology is “one of the most neglected themes in theology today.”<sup>51</sup> This is certainly the case in liberation theology, and the same thing could be said of its pneumatology. p. 51

## CONCLUSION

This overview of the theology of liberation shows that this theological movement is far from being, strictly speaking, a *biblical* theology, and is therefore not satisfactory for those who have the Scriptures as their supreme rule of faith. It is a relativist theology, because it takes lightly the firm foundation of biblical authority, because its contextual starting point is the changing reality of Latin America, and because its proponents opt for the insecurity of a future that is always open.

If theological liberationism has brought any benefit to evangelicals in these countries, it has been that of prompting them to rediscover in their faith certain elements they have not incorporated as they should have in their message to the Latin American people. In answer to the liberationist challenge, some members of the Latin American Theological Fraternity have dedicated themselves to serious reflection on the biblical text, taking into account the reality in which evangelicals live here.<sup>52</sup> It is hoped that their efforts will contribute to the formation of an *evangelical* answer to the serious problems which face believers in this continent.

---

**Dr. Nunez is Rector of the Central American Theological Seminary, Guatemala City, Guatemala and a member of the W.E.F. Theological Commission. p. 52**

# Evangelism in a Latin American Context

by ORLANDO E. COSTAS

ALL OVER contemporary Christianity we find a growing awareness of “context” as a fundamental concept in the church’s understanding of its mission in the world. This growing preoccupation with “contextualization” is linked to the focus on the “now of history” in contemporary theories of biblical and theological interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Not that the

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196–203.

<sup>51</sup> Assmann, *Opresion-Liberacion*, p. 76.

<sup>52</sup> The Latin American Theological Fraternity has published in Spanish and English some of the articles written by its members. See also the Latin American papers presented at the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (1974).

<sup>1</sup> Cf., among others, H. M. Kuitert, *The Reality of Faith: A Way Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Existentialist Theology*. Translated from Dutch by Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968); E. Schillebeeckx, *Interpretacion de la fe: Aportaciones a una teologia hermeneutica y critica*. Translated from the German edition, with the author’s revision and approval, by Jose M. Mauleon (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1973); Emilio Castro, “La creciente presencia de criterios de interpretacion historica en la evolucion de la

context has been foreign to theology. Indeed, it has been around for a long time. Its role, however, has been circumscribed to that of clarifying the biblical text or the dogmatic formulations of the church. Only in recent years has the historical context really been taken in full seriousness as a category of biblical and theological interpretation.

On the one hand, it has become increasingly clear that both the biblical text and the dogmatic formulations of the church constitute, at the bottom, interpretations of interpretations. As such, they have their historical conditionings which need not only to be understood but critically analyzed.<sup>2</sup> This implies that not only our “forefathers” but we ourselves are conditioned by the historical forces in the midst of which we carry out our theological task. The truth of faith is consequently mediated through our particular socio-cultural contexts.<sup>3</sup> p. 53

If this is the case with the interpretation and understanding of the faith, it is no less so in the case of that task *par excellence* that characterizes the life of Christians in the world: communicating the faith to those who stand outside its frontiers. Just as the gospel arises from within a concrete historical situation, so its communication takes place in a particular context. To evangelize one needs to understand the world of those that are to be evangelized, interpret the gospel in the light of their historical reality and transmit it in terms relevant to their life experiences, culture and social situation.

This is why in our pursuit of the question of evangelism in Latin America we must begin with an overview of the context. As we view this continent three characteristics stand out.

## I. THE WORLD OF LATIN AMERICA

### A Complicated Mosaic

First of all, Latin America represents a multiplicity of situations. It is a complicated mosaic of people with all sorts of ethno-cultural backgrounds. Indian aborigines, African descendants, Northern, Central and Southern Europeans, Middle Easterners and Orientals combine to make up a truly cosmic race. They form ethnic clusters that challenge geographic and political boundaries. Thus the transnational ties that exist between the Indian communities of Yucatan and Guatemala and of the Andean countries, the Afro-Caribbean communities of the Atlantic coast of Central America, and the Ukranian and Germanic communities of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. This also explains the fallacy of defining *Latin America* in geo-political terms, as being made up of the people who dwell in the lands south of the Rio Bravo and in the Spanish and French-speaking Caribbean. For as a matter of fact, they have long extended themselves (even before their Anglo-

---

hermeneutica biblica,” in *Pueblo oprimido, Señor de la historia*, Hugo Assmann, ed. (Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1972), pp. 213–218.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. Pannenburg, ed. *Revelation as History*, trans. from the German by David Granskou (London: The Macmillan Co., 1968). Cf. also G.C. Berouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Holy Scripture*, trans. and edited by Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), *passim*; C. Rene Padilla, “The Contextualization of the Gospel” in “A ‘learning in Dialogue’ Experience” (Abington. Pa.: Partnership in Mission, 1975), (mimeographed); Daniel von Allmen, “The Birth of Theology: Contextualization as the Dynamic Element in the Formation of New Testament Theology,” *International Review of Mission*, LXIV: 253 (January, 1975), 37–52.

<sup>3</sup> On this, see the excellent discussion on “Hermeneutics Truth, and Praxis,” in Jose Miguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 86–105. See also, Severino Croatto, *Liberacion y Libertad: Pautas hermeneuticas* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Mundo Nuevo, 1973); Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberacion de la teologia* (Buenos Aires: Carlos Lohle, 1975).

saxon counterparts) across the River into what is today the (USA) South and Middle West and over the Caribbean sea into the (USA) North and Southeastern seaboard.

The majority of Latin Americans, however, have a geographical identity: they are attached to the land mass that extends from the northern Mexican frontier to the bottom of Argentina; they are also found in the French and Spanish speaking islands of the p. 54 Caribbean Sea plus many islands in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. These lands constitute a vast topographical mosaic: huge mountain ranges, large tropical forests, arid deserts, coastal lands and fertile valleys and plains; hot-humid climate, cold-freezing weather and spring-like temperature; rain forests, lakes, rivers and volcanoes.

The topographical varieties affect the culture and lifestyle of the Latin American peoples. They contribute to internal political conflicts and socio-cultural contrasts within and between nations and regions. These conflicts and contrasts, in turn, make specific demands upon the evangelistic message. Concepts such as reconciliation, justice and peace take on a special significance in this environment. The evangelistic approach is decisively affected. The way to evangelism varies considerably between the high and the low lands, the interior and the coast, the jungle frontiers and the arid desert. Effective methods in one are often ineffective in another. This is so, not merely because the cultural and social circumstances of people vary from place to place, but also because the geophysical condition p. are different and affect their behaviour in peculiar ways, especially, but not exclusively, in the way they respond to and express religious faith.

The Latin American world represents also a linguistic mosaic. Of course, the great majority speak Spanish or Portuguese. There are, however, significant pockets where Spanish or Portuguese are not the predominant languages or where they must compete with other European, Asian or aboriginal languages and dialects. Such is the case in areas of Southern Brazil, where in addition to German and Dutch speaking groups, there are Japanese and Korean speaking blocks. This too is the case in Paraguay, where there is an *official* non-European language (*Guarani*). In addition, German, Ukrainian, Japanese and Korean blocks which use their respective languages as the primary vehicle of communication. In Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, for decades large European colonies use primarily their mother tongues. Note also the influential role which the English language has throughout the Continent: in some sectors (the Atlantic coast of Central America, the eastern section of the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and the Hispanic USA) English either competes with Spanish as the primary vehicle of communication or functions as a second official language. p. 55

### A Common History

But while Latin America is a continent of contrasts and diversity, its history has been shaped by similar circumstances. Indeed Latin Americans find their common identity in their history.

The Brazilian anthropologist, Darcy Ribeiro, has shown, in *The Americas and Civilization*,<sup>4</sup> how the history of Latin America was shaped by the Mercantile and Industrial Revolutions. According to him, these two revolutions set in motion several successive civilizational processes which condemned the people of Latin America to a history of backwardness and under-development by structuring them into nuclei of exploitative production. This process went through several stages—from the purposeful decimation of parcels of aborigines and the deculturation of the rest, to a stage of acculturation, where elements taken from the master European culture and from the subjugated aborigine culture shaped a body of common understanding, to an

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Darcy Ribeiro, *The Americas and Civilization* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1972), pp. 89–429.

enculturation of persons torn from their original societies (slaves and their descendants as well as the agents of domination and their descendants). Out of this, a new culture emerged which could have become “authentic” (integrated internally), but became instead “spurious” (traumatized internally and dependent on alien decisions).

American societies were thus enslaved and integrated into the world economic system. This has created a situation of cultural dependence which serves as the basis for the present situation of backwardness and underdevelopment. It does not matter whether the majority of American nations have become formally better off than others. The fact is that while the northern Anglo-Saxon nations (the USA and Canada) managed to emancipate themselves by an evolutionary acceleration that enabled them to develop autonomously as a new focus of expansion, enabling the majorities of its peoples to enjoy a superabundant and luxurious style of life, the great majority of the Latin American nations and peoples passed from colonial to neo-colonial status by way of historical incorporation. Accordingly, now they are not only economically and culturally backward but are underdeveloped because they are dominated by foreign powers and the constricting p. 56 role of internal dominant classes. These agents of domination deform the very process of renovation, transforming it from an evolutionary crisis common to peoples affected by technological revolutions into a paralyzing trauma.<sup>5</sup>

To speak of Latin America is to speak of a continent whose history is one of economic and cultural exploitation. Indeed the Latin America of today is the offspring of a 500 year rape by Western culture and civilization, a rape which began with the Spanish conquistadores and was continued by the English, the Dutch and the French and was successfully concluded by the North Americans.

### A “Christian” Continent

This tragic reality is made worse by the fact that Latin America is supposed to be a Christian continent. The overwhelming majority of its people profess at least nominally to be Christian. Its culture and value system is basically Christian. It has had a longer Christian presence than any of the continents of the Third World and even longer than North America

This is a continent, nevertheless, in which the Christian church has been guilty of a traditional alliance with the dominant classes and/or external powers responsible for the perpetuation of a state of injustice, domination and institutionalized violence. This alliance has been reinforced by an ethic of neutrality oriented toward the justification of the *status quo*. The faithful have been taught to separate reconciliation from the demand of justice. The rich have been permitted to “give to the Lord” with one hand and exploit the poor with the other. The poor have been taught to accept their poverty and exploitation passively. The weak have been encouraged to be politically passive while the strong have been supported in their political aggressiveness.

This highlights the superficiality of the so-called Christian “advance” (Latourette) in Latin America. After five centuries of missionary history Latin America remains an unevangelized continent. Many of its people have never had a reasonable opportunity to consider the gospel as a *personal* option. Others flatly reject any religious faith. Yet others profess what could p. 57 be characterized as a syncretistic faith, being followers of such movements as Macumba, Candomble and Umbanda in Brazil and Voodoo in Haiti. Even among those who profess themselves Christians by virtue of baptism, many have never personally experienced the gospel. In the words of Bishop Samuel Ruiz-Garcia, they “go

---

<sup>5</sup> See also Ribeiro’s earlier work, *The Civilizational Process* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968).

through life without being truly converted to the Gospel, without a personal encounter with and commitment to Jesus the Saviour.”<sup>6</sup>

Something has gone wrong somewhere when the gospel has been experienced so little, when so many still stand outside its boundaries and when it has been used as an ideological tool to keep so many in bondage to the privileged classes. Throughout all of these years of so-called “Christian” history, has the gospel indeed been held in captivity? The Bible tells us otherwise: “The word of God is not lettered bound” ([2 Tim. 2:9](#)). What then has happened? What has gone wrong?

I submit that what has happened is that evangelism and the evangel have been distorted beyond recognition. Evangelism has been confused with Christianization, which is a historico-sociological process that brings people of other faiths within the bounds of the Christian church. Evangelism, however, is something else. It is the sharing of the gospel with men and women in such a way that not only are they able to understand it, but are led to accept it and incorporate it into their lives through faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. But how can this message be shared when in fact it has been overshadowed by the structures of Christendom, the notion of a Christian society centered on the Christian Church and oriented by a set of supposedly Christian principles and values?

We need desperately to re-discover the lost threads of the gospel if we are to effectively evangelize the oppressed Latin American world. Let us, therefore, take a look at the material of the Gospels to see even if schematically, the meaning of its message is in the context of Latin America. [p. 58](#)

## II. THE GOSPEL IN THE CONTEXT OF LATIN AMERICA

### The Source of the Gospel: the Father who Sends

The Gospel of Mark tells us that “Jesus came ... preaching the gospel of God” ([Mk. 1:11](#)) and Paul tells us that he was “set apart for the gospel of God, which he *promised* beforehand through his prophets in the holy scripture” ([Rom. 1:1-2](#)). Such texts place the gospel in the framework of God’s action in history. It is a message promised beforehand. It is the announcement of the fulfillment of that promise. It is good news from God.

Who is this God who sends good news and what is the content of his message?

The N. T. tells us that he is the great unknown of the Athenian philosophers ([Acts 17:23](#)), the creator and provider ([Acts 17:24-26](#)), the saviour and judge ([Acts 17:27-31](#)) of the world. He is the God who spoke in the O. T. through many different ways to the Hebrew fathers; the God who revealed himself as the creator and redeemer of Israel and the world ([Is. 43:1](#); [44:24](#); [45:5-6](#)), the Lord and judge of Israel and the nations ([Is. 43:16ff.](#)). He is the great missionary shepherd who goes before his people, feeds, gathers and carries them in his bosom ([Is. 40:10-12](#)) and sends them “to be a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” ([Is. 42:6-7](#)). He is the Father who has spoken redemptively by the Son through the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit ([Heb. 1:2](#); [In. 1:1-3](#), [14-18](#), [32-34](#)). The God of the gospel is thus the creator and redeemer of the world,

---

<sup>6</sup> The Most Rev. Samuel Ruiz-Garcia, “Evangelization in Latin America,” in *The Church in the Present Day Transformation of Latin America*, Vol. 1 (Bogota: CELAM, 1970), p. 160.



the provider and judge of the universe, the first and the last, whose undivided action in history witnesses to his oneness.

### **The Content of the Gospel: the Revelation of the Son**

The gospel announces the unique presence of God's rule in our one human history ([Lk. 17:21](#)). The guarantee of this announcement is Jesus Christ who is the only begotten of the Father ([Jn. 1:18](#)). In him the Father has revealed his true identity: grace and truth ([Jn. 1:14, 18](#)). Through him he has made known his will for the world: "not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" ([Jn. 3:17](#)). He is the embodiment of God's rule ([Lk. 7:22-27](#)). Little wonder John of Patmos after describing in [Rev. 1:4](#) the Father as the presence of [p. 59](#) the future ("he who is, and who was and who is to come") refers in verse [5](#) to Jesus Christ as "the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth." In other words, the whole of history is centered on the revelation of Christ. He is the *focus* of the gospel.

This is in fact Paul's argument in [Rom. 1:1-6](#). The gospel, he says, is concerned with the life and work of Jesus. It is the announcement of who Jesus is and what he did; namely, that he was born a Jew ("descended from David according to the flesh"), that he died, was raised from the dead and was made Lord over all things ("designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead") and, finally, that through him grace has been given to the nations for "the obedience of faith" (Vv. [3-5](#)).

Thus Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God, a new order of life characterized by the liberation of creation from its bondage and captivity; the restoration of humanity and the cosmos to its original vocation; a new creation. This is why Jesus associates his mission with those who bear the greatest evidence of the tragedy of sin: the poor, or those who have no one to look after them; the captives, or those whose freedom has been curtailed; the blind, or those who are physically hindered from contemplating and enjoying the good things of God's creation; the oppressed, or those whose humanity has been crushed by other human beings through the abuse of power. To all of them Jesus announces the year of jubilee: the new age of God, the liberation of history!

Because of this, it follows that the new order is oriented by the law of love—of giving oneself to others without counting the cost. To quote Paul again: "Christ died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" ([2 Co. 5:15](#)). This living "for him" is not a privatistic I-thou relationship, but rather a living in the world, in the service of the others for whom Christ died. It is a salvation whose evidence *par excellence* is participation in the ministry of reconciliation ([2 Co. 5:19](#)). Therefore, the writer of Hebrews exhorts us "to go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him" because "Jesus ... suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood" ([Heb. 13:12, 13](#)). [p. 60](#)

The cross of Christ stands as the basic sign-post of the new order of life which the gospel proclaims. Rather than being an alienating escapism to a comfortable other-world reality, the gospel is a call to service "outside" the comfortable circle of the redeemed fellowship. True that the gospel calls us to a living hope ([1 Pe. 1:3](#)). But it is equally true that in our journey to "the city which is to come" ([Heb. 13:14](#)) we are to bear "abuse" for Christ. And this abuse is not simply a suffering on account of our faith, but especially a suffering on behalf of the world. For the cross is not a place of self infliction, but of suffering for and in behalf of others. Indeed, it is a place of commitment and mission.

The cross represents both the way of salvation and judgment. It is "folly to those who are perishing" while being "the power of God" for those "who are being saved" ([1 Co. 1:18](#)). It involves both the disclosure of the mystery of salvation and God's critical assessment of

the wisdom of this world; his judgment of all human strategies of salvation. God has “made foolish the wisdom of the World ...” by the preaching of the cross ([1 Co. 1:20](#)).

The ministry of reconciliation, the proclamation in word or deed of the message of the cross, is, at once, a word of salvation and judgment. To those who, like the Jews, may demand a supernatural or an out-of-this-world verification, or who, like the Greeks, may demand scientific evidence, the gospel is foolishness. They thus respond with scorn and disbelief. They refuse to follow “the way of the cross,” namely, the acceptance of God’s reign in Christ and an unconditional commitment to others, especially, those who have no one. Instead, they go on living “unto themselves.” For those “who are called,” however, the message of the cross is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” ([1 Co. 1:22–24](#)).

What does it mean “to be called”? How is one called? When does this call take place?

### **The Agent of the Gospel: the Witness of the Spirit**

Obviously we have entered the territory of the Holy Spirit, the *agent of the gospel*; he through whom the message is actualized. We are reminded of Jesus’ Johannine sayings: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him ...” ([Jn. 6:44](#); [p. 61](#) Cf. [Vv. 63–65](#)). The “Spirit of truth ... whom I shall send ... from the Father ... will bear witness to me ... he will teach ... all things (and) guide ... into all the truth ... and ... convince the world of sin ... of righteousness and ... judgment ...” ([Jn. 15:26](#); [14:26](#); [16:13](#), [8](#)). Paul, for his part, tells us that “... any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him ... all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God ...” ([Rom. 8:9](#), [14](#)). But who are the ones that are led? Those who hear the gospel and believe ([Eph. 1:13](#)).

A mystery saturates the proclamation of the gospel. Through it the Spirit endows men and women with the gift of faith, calling and, thereby, enabling them to accept and commit themselves to the foolishness of the cross. A miraculous event takes place. The cross is transformed into the power and wisdom of God as the Spirit bestows the gift of faith upon those that hear the gospel. A passage takes place—from suffering and death to life and resurrection. And yet it is a passage that does not dismiss the principle of suffering. On the contrary, it brings the cross to its correct position: as the place wherein God’s reign of love becomes efficaciously present in the service of others. Because of faith we can now face the future in hope and are, therefore, *free to give* ourselves sacrificially in the service of the world.

Through the action of the Holy Spirit, and only through it, men and women can respond to God’s claim upon their lives. This claim, which is made in virtue of the fact that they were created by God and are ultimately responsible to him for their life and work, is made uniquely relevant in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In him God makes known the basis of his reign and the criterion for the reconciliation of men and women with him. Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom leads to the exhortation: “repent and believe the gospel” ([Mk. 1:15](#)). But what makes possible Jesus’ embodiment of the rule of God, what makes possible the response in repentance and faith to the gospel is the dynamic operation of the Spirit. Indeed, he is the very breath of God, he in whose power Jesus came and ministered ([Lk. 4:18a](#)), through whom he offered himself at the cross ([Heb. 9:14](#)) and by whom he was raised from the dead ([Rom. 1:4](#)). The Spirit is also the one who makes God’s rule in Christ present in the world ([Jn. 16:12](#); [2 Co. 1:22](#); [3:17–18](#)) and, especially, in the proclamation of the gospel [p. 62](#) ([1 Co. 2:4–5](#)).

Yet the work of the Spirit does not take place up in the air, in a vacuum, in an abstract world, nor just in the inner life of believers. His sphere of action is history, the concrete history of men and women. It is in the contextual process of everyday life where his dynamic action is ultimately verified.

The evangelistic consequence of this pneumatological maxim is quite obvious: The proclamation of the good news of God's rule of love in Christ needs to be accompanied by concrete signs. The weakness, yet power of the cross, must be verified in concrete historical situations. In the words of the Lausanne Covenant: "... a church which preaches the Cross must itself be marked by the Cross." Preaching without life, words without deed, love without efficacious sacrificial service is not only theological nonsense, but a historical alienation.

This is precisely the tragedy of evangelism in the Latin American world. On the one hand, the gospel has not been proclaimed in its fullness, as the reign of the Father in the Son made dynamically present through the Holy Spirit. Christ has been divorced from the Father and both from the Spirit. The gospel has been separated from the kingdom, redemption from creation, salvation from history. The work of evangelism has been limited, accordingly, to the sphere of a privatistic, I-thou relationship. Congruent with the latter is the fact that the proclamation of the gospel has not been adequately validated by efficacious historical signs. The church in Latin America has not shown the marks of the cross of unconditional engagement in the struggles and agonies of the suffering oppressed majorities. To be able to fulfill its evangelistic task today, the Latin American church needs, in consequence, not only to recover the fullness of the gospel, but, especially, to authenticate its truth and power in a life of unconditional obedience.

### III. THE CHALLENGE BEFORE THE CHURCH

From the foregoing, it follows that evangelism in the Latin American world *today* requires engagement in its concrete history. It requires an "immersion" into the *living* issues before each and all of the different parts of the Latin American mosaic. This implies a fundamental commitment to its cause; solidarity with the P. 63 ongoing struggles of society; the embodiment of the history of rejection, exploitation and domination of the Latin American peoples; participation in their present state of repressed frustrations and silent protests; and the articulation of their future hopes and aspirations.

Such commitment can only be expressed by taking the identity of those who are the representatives *par excellence* of this Latin American history: the beggars who crowd the streets; the peasants who tirelessly work the land only to get a meager part of their labour in return; the prostitutes in the red-light districts of the cities; the under-paid factory workers; the social, economic and/ or political expatriots; the convict, the naked and the hungry; the helpless widow and the lonely aged, the homeless orphan, the sick and the shut-in; in short: the weak and disenfranchised, which comprise the over-whelming majority of Latin Americans.

Taking upon oneself the identity of the poor is the only way to effectively authenticate one's engagement. This takes us beyond the mere adoption of Latin American cultural categories. For often what is recognized as "culture" are the natural expressions, customs and creations of the *dominant* classes of society. We must cross, therefore, the frontiers of the "acceptable" culture and make the *counter-culture* of the disenfranchised our fundamental cultural reference. This means, basically, becoming one with them, renouncing the power, prestige and privileges of the dominant culture and making the life's concerns of the outcasts of society one's life's commitment.

Is this not what Paul was referring to when he said that Christ took "the form of a slave" ([Ph. 2:7](#)) or that he "became poor" for our sake ([2 Co. 8:9](#))? Was this not the direction in which Jesus was pointing when he described the kingdom as a place of solidarity and service for the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and naked, the sick and the prisoner ([Mt. 25:31-46](#))?



Indeed, a fundamental test of my commitment to the gospel is measured by my engagement in the cause of the poor. Likewise, the test of my engagement lies in the real, *effective* place which the poor occupy in my life and ministry.

Yet, it is a fact that my engagement can only be realized in and through the community of faith. The same principle applies to the evangelization of Latin Americans: it can only be realized p. 64 *today* from within the historical engagement of the body of believers.

Theologically speaking, evangelism is a task of the church, not of individual believers. Of course, the church carries it out through its respective members. The personal witness of believers, however, is undertaken as part and in representation of the church. This is so not only because there is just “one body” ([Eph. 4:4](#)), but also because the church is a fundamental, though, admittedly, provisional, goal of evangelization. Beyond and because of this, she plays herself an indispensable part in the evangelistic task as a *communal paradigm* of the gospel. She is called to embody in her very life the qualities of the gospel. She is to be a community of love, justice and peace; “first fruits” of the new order of life proclaimed in the gospel. This, however, is to be *lived* and not just “be-lieved” (assented to). Only in engagement can the church be an efficacious sign of the gospel.

This becomes even more essential in a situation like that of the Latin American world where the institutional church far too often has been a *counter-sign*, a contradiction of her message. Indeed, rather than representing the interests of the power-less grass roots, she has defended the rights of the power-ful elites. Her art, architecture, music, liturgy, theology, pastoral structures and group life have reflected by and large the worldview and lifestyle of the dominant classes and of their North Atlantic colonial and neocolonial allies.

To overcome this communication barrier, the church needs to be transformed into a truly prophetic, engaged community. This, however, is more easily said than done, given the heavy institutional equipment which its historical manifestations as denominations and congregations carry along. Thus the relevance of small groups, or what the Catholics call base-communities, or what the Pietists used to call *ecclesiolae* (little churches), not as counter-church structures, but as prophetic models or catalysts *within* the churches, and effective links *between* them and the world. To accomplish this noble objective, these ecclesial grass roots or base-communities must meet three basic requirements: (1) They must be engaged in and with the sociologically poor. (2) They must maintain a Christian (Evangelical) fellowship. (3) Their fellowship must be defined in function of their “*prophetic ministry*” in the p. 65 secular world.<sup>7</sup> In other words, these communities need to truly represent the state of the poor from within an engaged, prophetic poverty. They must be effective paradigmatic communities and must maintain a liberating evangelistic ministry in the world.

#### IV. METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The methodological consequences of my argument can now be briefly outlined. If, as I have said, the Latin American world represents one global reality with multiple variants, then the evangelistic task must have a comprehensive, yet concrete approach. That is, the announcement of the evangel must have a global historico-cultural focus. The history of oppression and exploitation of the Latin American world must serve as a fundamental reference to any evangelistic effort. To have such a reference, the evangelistic enterprise

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Enrique Dussel, “La ‘base’ en la teología de la liberación (Perspectiva latinoamericana),” *Concilium*, No. 104 (April, 1975), 84, 85. In the same place, see Jose Marins, “Comunidades eclesiales de base en America Latina,” pp. 27–37; and Jose Comblin, “Las comunidades de base como lugar de experiencias nuevas,” pp. 90–100.

needs to be disassociated from the traditional international and national centers of power. When we see, for example, evangelistic campaigns, which in themselves have nothing culturally or psychologically wrong, fashioned after the Anglo-American pattern, with the same hymnody, language, preaching style and content, organizational and promotional schemes, financial backing, rightist political support, and undergirded by middle-class, privatistic religious values, we know that we are up against an approach that does not take seriously into account our present global reality, let alone our oppressive and violent past.

This applies not just to evangelization proper, but to all aspects of the life of the church and ministries. If evangelism is not something which the church does in her spare time, if it is central to her life in the world, if all of her functions have their point of convergence on the evangel, if the church witnesses not only by what she says but by what she does, then she must see to it that *all of her activities*, indeed her whole life, have a Latin American historico-cultural frame of reference. The church must be reminded, time and again, that when she gathers in worship to [p. 66](#) celebrate God's work in Christ, she does so as the community for others, as representative before God of the world of which she is part—in this case, the oppressed Latin American world.

When the church teaches and disciples the faithful, she must bring before them the context in the midst of which they must live their Christian life and witness to Jesus Christ. Indeed, among the many tasks of so-called Christian education some of the most important are making the church aware of the crossroads of life, enabling the faithful to become authentically engaged in the struggles of the world, helping them to become more human and to keep life human; in short, leading the church into a deeper involvement in the liberating struggles of the poor and oppressed. This means, inevitably, a more profound, engaging evangelistic witness and a total re-organization of priorities, which affects not only the use of one's personal resources of time, abilities and earnings, but the collective resources of the church as well.

We must avoid, however, being so global and comprehensive that we never land on the specific and concrete. For every local situation possesses particular problems to which the gospel must be addressed. The call to repentance and faith must be made in terms relevant to those to whom the gospel is being announced. Thus, for example, when Jesus witnessed to the rich young ruler he told him to sell all that he had, give it to the poor and follow him ([Mk. 10:21](#)). Jesus, aware as he was of this young man's context, confronted him with what he saw as the test of true repentance and faith: his *efficacious* disposition to open himself unconditionally to God and neighbor. On another occasion, when witnessing to an adulterous woman, Jesus limited himself to a simple: "Neither do I condemn you; go and do not sin again" ([Jn. 8:11](#)). We are confronted here with a radically different approach! Does it mean that Jesus had a double evangelistic standard? No. This woman had nothing, and she knew it! The rich young ruler was also helpless, but didn't recognize it. Conversion had to take a different form from that of the adulterous woman. The specific context in which the word of forgiveness was announced to the woman was totally different from that of the rich young ruler.

One of the key problems with evangelistic programming is that churches and missionary organizations fail to take into account [p. 67](#) the concrete issues and circumstances of those they set out to evangelize. They announce an abstract gospel to an abstract person in an abstract state of sin. The result is an evangelistic event that not only does not cause any offense, but that brings about little *effective* concrete change!

If we, as Latin American Christians, are to undertake seriously and efficaciously the evangelistic challenge which our world poses *today*, we have got to start evangelizing *the church*; i.e., calling her to experience a new conversion to the Christ who stands alongside

of the oppressed and exploited. We have got to uncover the liberating foundations of the gospel. Above all, we have got to approach the evangelistic situation comprehensively, yet concretely so as not to lose sight of the larger dimensions of our task nor the particular problems to which the gospel must speak. Thus evangelism will be able to contribute to the transformation not only of men and women personally but of the particular society of which they are part. p. 68

# **A Selective Bibliography for Christian Muslim Workers**

*by* WARREN W. WEBSTER

THIS BRIEF annotated listing of helpful books for Christian workers has been compiled from hundreds of volumes in English dealing with Islam and the Muslim world. The intent was to provide a basic list of 50–60 titles which is suggestive rather than comprehensive. It is recommended that interested Christian students of Islam and those beginning work with Muslims attempt to get well acquainted with at least one volume in each section of this outline while awareness gradually extends to some of the other titles.

Some valuable materials unfortunately are now out of print, but they generally can be located for research and study in one of the libraries majoring on missions or Islamic studies. Many hard to obtain volumes, especially some published in other countries, can be obtained through the Fellowship of Faith of Muslims (205 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5B 1N2).

It is perhaps understandable why no attempt could be made in this brief bibliography to include important works available in Arabic, French, or other major languages of the Muslim world, but the serious student should begin to acquire those materials for the areas in which he is interested. Also in the interest of brevity we could not include references to the many excellent articles on the Christian mission to Islam appearing in such periodicals as the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, the *Muslim World Pulse*, *Missiology*, the *International Review of Missions*, and *The Muslim World*. Magazines and journals, however, contain some of the best current reports and ideas and should be regularly consulted.

Hopefully, the bibliography and annotations which follow will provide a helpful introduction to some available materials which may contribute, directly and indirectly, to more effective communication of the Good News in Jesus Christ to Muslims. p. 69

## **I. INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM**

“Focus on Islam” booklets. Toronto: Fellowship of Faith for Muslims.

A series of inexpensive, informative booklets which may be useful in introducing laymen to the nature and challenge of Islam. Titles include: “The Muslim Challenge to the Christian Church,” “Islam: What is it?” “The Five Pillars of Islam,” “The Ahmadiyya Movement,” “The Life of Muslim Women,” “From Islam to Christ—How a Sufi Found His Lord,” and “The Qur’an Says....”