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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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living.*

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One will probably argue that this paper restricts itself to missiological issues rather than seeking to discuss wider theological concerns. I will readily concede this. But in doing so I want to emphasize that what India needs is not a cold callous restatement of doctrine and dogma but a potent and productive affirmation of its biblical beliefs. The urgency of the mission and the staggering needs of the country grow before us in greater and greater magnitude. Theology must produce men for this mission.

However, the synthesis of the worship and the witness of the Church which has been used above as a model will demonstrate my real concern for theology. The accent should be on the holding together of the content of theology so that it will both equip and edify as well as motivate for mission. Neither function should be allowed precedence over the other.

The treatment above is far from exhaustive. There are far more accents that one may be able to discuss. For instance, one could go on to develop the need for an accent on community which is so [p. 122](#) much part of the peoples of Asia, and historicity which runs counter to the anti-historical nature of our major religions. But the whole stress ought to be on the fact that theology must be faithful to God and His revelation in the Bible and not relax its terms in any context. This kind of faithful biblical theology within the Indian context will challenge, equip and raise up many more servants of God to set out on the task of confronting their countrymen with the claims of Christ.

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# **Towards an Evangelical Latin American Theology**

**Emilio Antonio Núñez C.**

*This article is abridged.*  
(Editor)

## **INTRODUCTION**

Now that we have heard a criticism of our theology and an exposition of the Biblical basis for theological reflection, we need to ask ourselves where we are going in our efforts to produce an evangelical Latin American theology. In answer to this question we will refer first to all the need for that theology. Then we will have a general description of what we understand by “*evangelical* theology;” and finally we will present what the term “*Latin American*” means to us in a theological context. In this way we hope to cover all the elements included in the title of this paper: *Towards an Evangelical Latin American Theology*.

## **TOWARDS A THEOLOGY**

The word “towards” in our topic suggests immediately that after more than one hundred years of evangelical presence in Latin America we still do not have a theology which can be called evangelical and Latin American. That is, an evangelical theology produced by Latin Americans for Latin Americans.

The tragedy is that many have not been aware of the lack of such a theology, and others claim that it is unnecessary, saying that theology is universal and that to give it a regional or cultural tone would disfigure or corrupt it. It is rather strange that the same people who react with horror to the possibility of formulating a Latin American theology feel comfortable speaking of German theology, continental European theology, or North American theology. The question is raised as to whether the opposition to a possible Latin American evangelical theology is not an indication of the paternalistic attitude which some leaders have assumed toward the Latin American Evangelical Church. That is to say, the idea that the evangelicals in these countries are still children unable to think for themselves and to express the Christian faith within the context of their own culture.

The phenomenon of dependence is seen also in the area of theology. We suffer from a theological underdevelopment which is largely a product of our theological dependence. Many of us have been satisfied to receive an imported theology, sometimes without evaluating it in the light of Scripture and of our cultural and social imperatives. p. 124

This does not mean in any way that we look down on the doctrinal treasure accumulated by the Universal Church through the centuries, or that we pretend to begin something which has already begun, believing foolishly that the Holy Spirit will start speaking through us, after nearly twenty centuries of absolute silence. We already have an evangelical theology which is universal in its nature. We are Christians as a result of the teaching ministry of the Church. We are a product of the great missionary movement which by the grace of God reached our lands with the message of the Gospel. We welcome, therefore, the theology produced in other latitudes by thinkers who are also members of the Body of Christ. However, we should not be simply an echo of what others say, without trying to express the immutable truth of the Gospel in response to the reality of Latin America.

In regard to theologies of Latin American origin, it is our responsibility also to examine them on the basis of God’s written revelation. The fact that a theology may have had its origin in our continent does not automatically give it a place in the Latin American evangelical church. A case in point is the theology currently articulated by Latin Americans under the influence of a certain European ideology. In answer to this theology the evangelical Christian affirms that the Word of God stands high above all ideologies, no matter what their emphasis is.

In our midst are found, then, a traditional evangelical theology, forged on other continents, and theologies which in spite of being called “Christian” are rejected by the great majority of evangelicals. What we are lacking is an *evangelical* theology which is systematized and authentically *Latin American*. But there is a group of evangelical thinkers in pursuit of that theology. With great effort they have begun to make progress in the theological field and are on the road of serious reflections, with the intense desire to hear the Word of God and pronounce that Word for the people of Latin America. The word “towards,” which is part of our topic, has a dynamic meaning; it suggests direction and movement, and indicates a goal which should be reached. The theological journey has begun, and there are better days ahead for evangelical thought in this part of the world.

## **TOWARDS AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY**

It is important to always put the evangelical emphasis before the Latin American. Our culture is human, and as such imperfect; but it is also regional and changing. The Gospel, which has its origin in the mind **p. 125** and heart of God, is universal and unchanging. It is fitting, then, to give pre-eminence to the evangelical aspect in the theological process. Our goal is an *evangelical* Latin American theology. But, what do we mean by “evangelical theology”? How can this theology be distinguished from other systems of thought in the contemporary mosaic which also uses the term “evangelical”?

### **Evangelical Theology is Theocentric**

The word theology (theos, logos) speaks of God, his person and his works. This means that theology is not first of all cosmology, nor anthropology, nor sociology, but rather the study of God and his creative, revelatory and redeeming acts. That is to say, God as the initial and final point of theological thought, and between both extremes the fulness of his person and his works.

Biblical theology is theocentric, not anthropocentric. God is at the centre and man at the circumference, to which divine grace radiates. There is interaction between God and man on the basis of grace, but God does not abandon the place which corresponds to Him as Sovereign over all creation. God does not stop being God, even when He is made flesh ([John 1:14](#)) to save man who was made in his own image.

To truly be theology, our discourse must give God the preeminence and see all things, beings, and life itself from God’s point of view. In this way our worldview is transformed into a *God view*, something which becomes possible as we grow in the knowledge of God. John Calvin was not out of line when he stated that to know ourselves we must first of all attain the knowledge of God. We understand man better when we know the One who created him. From there stems also the theocentricity of Biblical theology. The first requirement in the study of theology is to grow personally in the knowledge of God.

### **Evangelical Theology is Bibliocentric**

Theology is, certainly, a *logos* (word, discourse), regarding God and his works. But this discourse should consist not so much of what we say about God, as of what God says about himself. The most important thing is not our word but his, his logos, his self-revealing discourse. Someone has defined divine revelation as the communication of which God makes of himself. He exists and has made himself known. The *logos* of God is now the Word incarnate—the Lord Jesus Christ—and the written Word: the Bible. We know the incarnate Word through the written Word which the Holy Spirit inspired. Consequently **p. 126** God’s self-revelation is also Christology and Pneumatology. We find ourselves here facing an eminently trinitarian theology.

There is no authentic Christian theology apart from this self-revelation of God in the Scriptures. Much more important than the discourse of theologians about God is the revelation He has made of his person and his works in the Bible.

It seems that from the beginnings of Christianity there has been an inevitable relationship between theology and philosophy, to the extent that in different periods of church history human reflection has usurped the place of divine revelation and theology has become the handmaid of philosophy. While it could have become a great ally of theology, philosophy has come to be in certain cases an obstacle to the free expression of God’s thoughts. It is easy to detect, for example, the powerful influence of Greek philosophy in the doctrine of the church fathers. That influence can be seen even today in the theological world. But, what can we say about rationalistic theology, or the existential theology of more recent times?

It is not always easy to discern between Biblical revelation and the philosophic robes in which it is clothed. Moved by the desire to communicate effectively the Christian message of their contemporaries, some theologians have used certain philosophic terms; but at times Christian theology has come out disfigured from this effort to communicate, as the above mentioned theologies show.

In Latin America today, theological thought is often constructed of a sociological foundation. As with philosophy, sociology can be a valuable tool for the contemporary theologian, as long as it remains in subjection to God's revelation. It is well known that today serious efforts have been made to force an ideology on the Biblical content, to manipulate theology whether in favour of capitalism, or socialism. The ideological battle which is being waged around the world has entered the field of theology. At the present time, theology stands in grave danger of becoming the handmaid of sociology or of specific political interests. To say that in the past theology became subject to philosophy in no way justifies its becoming enslaved to sociology.

If we believe that God has spoken through the Scriptures, we need to make an effort to hear in them his voice, apart from our ecclesiastical, social or political prejudices. To become open in this way to God's revelation is certainly difficult, but not impossible. Otherwise, the Bible would lack its intrinsic power to communicate its message, and the Holy Spirit would be impotent to carry out his ministry of illumination. The Bible itself would then be the hiding and not the [p. 127](#) revelation of God. But we know that by the grace of God it is not so.

### **Evangelical Theology is Christocentric**

It is impossible, of course, to offer even a synthesis of Biblical Christology in this paper. We will limit ourselves to some of the Christological themes which are of great importance in the contemporary theological scene. For example:

*The deity of Christ.* He is pre-existent. He comes from eternity and goes to eternity ([Mic. 5:2](#); [Is. 9:6](#); [John 1:1](#)). Since he himself is God, He has always been face to face with God. There is no beginning or end in Him. He is the Omega point of history, and the Alpha point in creation. Because He is the originator of all that exists, "without him nothing was made that has been made" ([John 1:3](#); [Col. 1:15-20](#), etc.). We can fall prostrate before Him and say, "My Lord and my God" ([John 20:28](#)), because He is worthy to receive glory and honour and power for ever and ever. Amen ([Rev. 4:11](#); [5:13](#)). His deity is a touchstone of our faith.

*The humanity of Christ.* He is the true God-Man. When the fulness of time established in the council of Deity arrived ([Gal. 4:4](#)), the eternal Logos was made flesh ([John 1:14](#)) and humbly limited himself to the plane of human history.

Recently the Incarnation has become a subject of great interest in the Latin American scene; but there has been a tendency to emphasize only the humanitarian or philanthropic implications of this Christological portent, that is to say the full identification of the Son of God with human misery, with the poor of the earth. This is a very important aspect of the Incarnation, an aspect which had not been emphasized enough, particularly in our underdeveloped countries. But there are other aspects of this doctrine which should not be passed over. For example, the fact that the Incarnation presupposes the pre-existence, and therefore the deity of the Son of God. It is also necessary to take into consideration the other purposes of his coming into the world, "made in human likeness" ([Phil. 2:7](#)).

One of those great purposes was to reveal the Father: "No man has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" ([John 1:18](#)). In response to the request of the apostle Philip, who desired to see the Father, Jesus says: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone

who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" ([John 14:8-9](#)). He is "the image of the invisible [p. 128](#) God" ([Col. 1:15](#)), Immanuel, "God with us" ([Matt. 1:23](#)) and among us, manifesting his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ([John 1:14](#)).

Of great importance also is the soteriological purpose of the Incarnation. Christ himself reveals to us the saving purpose of his first coming to the world. He claims to have come to preach his message of the kingdom ([Mark 1:38](#)), and to give witness to the Truth ([John 18:37](#)). His desire is that those who believe in Him should not remain in darkness ([John 12:46](#)). He clearly affirms that He has come not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many ([Mark 10:45](#)); that He has not come to condemn the world ([John 12:47](#)), but to seek and save what was lost ([Luke 19:10](#)), and to give abundant life to his followers ([John 10:10](#)).

Today as never before it is necessary to emphasize the fact that the Gospel includes all those who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation and excludes all those who refuse to believe in Him. The Gospel is not universalist. Any theology that overlooks the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, or that tends to dilute that uniqueness in dialogue with other religions, runs the serious risk of being left without the Gospel.

Evangelical theology is "the word of the cross," a word of scandal and stumbling to those who are lost, but the power of God for those who are saved by believing in the Lord Jesus. The cross of Christ is a sign of union and division for the human race. In it are united all who humbly receive the Gospel, and it marks the abysmal difference between those who believe and those who do not believe in the Son of God.

Furthermore, the cross is the symbol of the radical nature of Christian discipleship. Christ called people to follow Him taking up their cross, in the presence of a society which in general admired beauty and strength, riches and fame, earthly power and wisdom, but not those who carried on their back the instrument of their own death. The situation can be the same today for those who choose to follow Christ to the ultimate consequences, carrying their cross.

*The resurrected Christ.* The resurrection of the Son of God is another great distinctive of evangelical theology. No commentary can equal, much less surpass, that of the apostle Paul's in his First Exposition Letter to the Corinthians, chapter [15](#).

The resurrection of Christ guarantees the forgiveness of our sins (past tense) and the resurrection, or the transformation, of our body (future tense). But there are also great consequences of Jesus Christ's [p. 129](#) triumph over death for the present. For example, the authority for our ministry is based on the resurrection of the Lord ([I Cor. 15:15](#)). We have a new quality of life communicated to us by the One who arose the third day from the dead. He gives us power to walk in this newness of life ([Rom. 6](#)). The new ([II Cor. 5:17](#)) has been made possible by the victory of the resurrection. A new era was inaugurated for mankind the moment God's Son broke the bonds of death and stepped triumphantly from the grave. The Church, the Body of Christ, emerged as a fruit of the resurrection of her Lord and Saviour ([Eph. 1:20-23](#)). The Holy Spirit came as a result of the resurrection and ascension of the Son of God ([John 16:7-15](#)).

We do not serve a dead Christ, nailed to the cross, but the Christ who lives for ever. Jesus of Nazareth has been made Lord and Christ and is exalted at the right hand of God, interceding for us, waiting for his enemies to be made his footstool ([Acts 2:32-36](#)). He has the absolute right to reign in our lives, here and now, for his glory. He also has the right to exercise his lordship over all creation. He is King and Lord, and we should proclaim his lordship to our contemporaries. The message of the Gospel is not only an offer; it is also a mandate which comes from the throne of God, and must be obeyed for salvation.



*The returning Christ.* He reigns and He will reign. His promise is that He will come again ([John 14:3](#)). Prophets and apostles, and even the angels, announce in the Scriptures that He will return to consummate his purpose on the Earth. Only Christ will be able to fulfill the most golden dreams of mankind in regard to a better world, a world of justice and peace. On the other hand, the return of the Son of God is the hope of the Church, a blessed hope ([Titus 2:14](#)) that will not fail ([Rom. 5:5](#)), because it rests on God and not on man. Its fulfilment does not depend on the changing circumstances of this world, but rather on the immutable purpose of God.

### **Evangelical Theology is Pneumatological**

We have already referred to the trinitarian character of evangelical thought. We also mentioned that the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures and enlightens man's mind so that he may understand the written revelation of God. But there are other ministries of the third person of the Trinity in the fulfilment of God's purposes in this world.

The Holy Spirit participates in creation and in the many-faceted works of providence. He also has an important function, along with the Father and the Son, in the history of salvation. For example, He is **p. 130** in the world to make effective the work of redemption in the lives of men ([John 16:7-11](#); [I Cor. 2:6-16](#); [Titus 3:5](#)). And in a very special way He comes to the believers in the Gospel, imparting to them his wisdom and power, giving to them the spiritual gifts which are necessary for the building up of the church ([John 14:16](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [I Cor. 12:14](#)). The fruit which pleases God in the lives of his children is also produced by the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)).

It is in the fulness of the Spirit that Christians can faithfully fulfill their responsibilities in the local church, in the home, and in society ([Eph. 5:18-6:20](#)), and carry out the task of evangelization ([Acts 2:4](#); [4:21](#); [6:3](#) with [8:5-8](#); [9:17](#), [20](#)). The Church must go in the dynamic of the Holy Spirit to make disciples of all nations. The best proof that a person is filled with the Spirit is his obedience to the Word that He himself inspired.

The Holy Spirit should not be grieved in the personal life of the believer ([Eph. 4:30](#)), nor quenched, nor hindered, as regards spiritual gifts in the local congregation ([I Thess. 5:19](#)). But it should be remembered that He will never lead his people in contradiction to what He himself has revealed in the Scriptures. The internal testimony of the Spirit and the external testimony of the written Word (the Bible) work together to guide the sons of God. There is perfect harmony between the revelation of God the Holy Father, the revelation of God the Son, and the revelation of God the Holy Spirit.

Christian theology is not static, but dynamic, in the sense that the revelation of God himself is a living word ([Heb. 4:12](#)) which exhorts us continually to grow in the knowledge of Him ([II Pet. 3:18](#)). Furthermore, the nature of our ecclesiastical and social context obligates us to examine the Scriptures anew in the search of an orientating word for our generation, and it impells us to communicate the Biblical content in such a way that we respond adequately to the question of our time.

It is precisely this challenge which comes from our own culture that makes us feel the urgent need to formulate an evangelical theology of Latin Americans for Latin Americans.

### **TOWARDS A LATIN AMERICAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY**

There can be a Latin American theology which is at the same time evangelical, just as there exists an evangelical theology produced in other parts of the world; but it should not be merely a reproduction made by Latin Americans of evangelical thought imported from other latitudes. This takes us inescapably to the field of hermeneutics. For **P. 131** traditional evangelical hermeneutics, the Biblical text is primary, while today the social

context is becoming so preponderant that in some cases it is arrogantly imposed on the text of Scripture.

If in existential hermeneutics the personal feelings of the interpreter prevail, so to speak, in the hermeneutics of certain liberationist theologies in Latin America can be seen the preponderance of an economic, social and political thesis. The Latin American evangelical theologians necessarily desire to avoid such extremes, but at the same time they feel the responsibility to “make theology” in response to their own ecclesiastical and social context. We are not able to discuss here in any depth the hermeneutical problem. But at the risk of being too simplistic we need to say something about the task of interpreting the Scriptures in relation to a Latin American *evangelical* theology.

### **Primacy of the Biblical Text**

Before anything else we must reaffirm our confidence in the Scriptures as the written Word of God, and as the supreme authority for our Christian faith. We cannot abandon the principle of *Sola Scriptura* and continue being evangelicals, in the sense that we have always used the term. We know that should we put aside the authority of the Bible, what awaits us is theological relativism.

On the other hand, we recognize that we inevitably come to the Biblical text with certain presuppositions. We are children of our culture, we find ourselves within a specific social context, and we have an ecclesiastical, denominational formation, besides our own interests or personal preferences. We also find it easy to let ourselves become obsessed with a doctrinal peculiarity, or with some religious practice which is of tremendous importance to us. It is natural that we should tend to impose on the Biblical text all of this cultural society, social, psychological and religious burden.

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## **Towards an Evangelical Caribbean Theology**

David Ho Sang and Roger Ringenberg

*In the second half of this abridged article the authors outline the thinking of ecumenical Caribbean theologians in the relation of context and praxis under the categories of The Bible, God, Christ, Man, Sin and Salvation, The Church, Eschatology. They suggest in general terms possible lines of an evangelical alternative but without reference to the writing of contemporary evangelical Caribbean theologians. They appeal for a theology that is faithful to Scripture and relevant to the needs of the Caribbean.*

(Editor)

### **THE CONTEXT OF CARIBBEAN THEOLOGY**