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Evangelical Theology in the Two Thirds World

Orlando E. Costas

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Parallel to Glasser p. tracing of evangelical mission theology, Orlando Costas traces the development of the two-thirds world evangelical theology. He argues that while the western theological development was more or less exclusively shaped by the formal principle of Reformation (the Sola Scriptura*), the corrective from the two-thirds world is to use also the material principle of Reformation namely, salvation by grace through faith. Though one may not agree with all of Costas' interpretation, his conclusion, that 'The ultimate test of any theological discourse is not erudite precision but transformative power' cannot be sounder.* Editor

The last decades have witnessed a resurgence of evangelical theology and action. Indeed, one could argue that evangelicals have ceased to be a marginal sector of Protestant Christianity, and have moved into the mainstream of contemporary society. However, we err if we assume that the so-called 'evangelical renaissance' (Bloesch) is just a Euro-American phenomenon, or that it is theologically, culturally and socially homogeneous. As Emilio Castro, General Secretary of the WCC, has stated in a recent essay on 'ecumenism and evangelicalism': 'In the past … evangelical perspectives on spirituality and [theology] Came basically from theologians in the North Atlantic region'; today they are coming from all over the world (p. 9). He also points out that evangelicalism is going through the same process and change which the ecumenical movement has experienced in the last decades, because of the diverse socio-cultural settings of its adherents. Castro's comment is verified by the published reports of several world gatherings during the last decades and by a growing body of publications.

It is my contention that while evangelicals around the world share a Common heritage, their theological articulation is by no means homogeneous. To be sure, evangelicals in the North Atlantic world have had an enormous influence in what I like to call the 'two thirds world'—that planetary space which is the habitat of most of the poor, powerless and oppressed people on earth, which are to be found in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Caribbean and continental Latin America. One cannot deny the strong presence and pressures exercised by Euro-American p. 66 evangelicalism on the Two Thirds World through the missionary movement, literature, the electronic media and theological institutions. Notwithstanding this reality, however, there seems to be developing in the Two Thirds World a different kind of evangelical theology which not only addresses questions not usually dealt with by evangelical mainstream theologians in Euro-America, but also employs a different methodology and draws out other conclusions.

To argue my case, I propose, first, to outline briefly, as I understand it, the nature of evangelicalism and its leading theological tenets, especially as it has developed in the United States. I shall then proceed to analyze the emerging evangelical theological discourse in the Two Thirds World, taking as reference representative statements from several theological conferences held within the last five years. I shall conclude With some observations on the mutual challenges of evangelical theology north and south and east and west.

EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN THE ONE THIRD WORLD

If there is one single characteristic of evangelical theology, it is its missionary intent. Evangelicalism, as its name suggests, has a burning passion for the communication of the Gospel, especially in those areas where it has not yet been proclaimed. It is not surprising that the Wesleyan Movement, which made such a dramatic impact in the British Isles during the 18th century and in many ways became the basis for Britain's world mission in the 19th century, has been described as 'the evangelical awakening'. Nor is it accidental that Joan Jacobs Brumberg's scholarly study of the life, career and family of Adoniram Judson, the American Baptist pioneer foreign missionary, is used as the key to her analysis of 'evangelical religion' in the U.S. during the 19th century. Wesleyan and Baptist preachers, evangelists and missionaries aptly demonstrate the burning passion of the evangelical movement for world mission and evangelism.

This missiological characteristic is undergirded by four theological distinctives: the authority of Scripture; salvation by grace through faith; conversion as a distinct experience of faith and a landmark of Christian identity; and the demonstration of 'the new life' through piety and moral discipline. The first two are derived from the Protestant Reformation. The other two are tied to the so-called Second Reformation (the Pietist Movement, including the Evangelical Awakening, which sought to complete the First [or theological] Reformation by advocating the reformation of life). The last two principles are also connected with American Revivalism and the Holiness movement. p. 67

These four theological distinctives have in various ways affected the historical development of the evangelical movement. Thus, European Protestant confessional families, like the Lutherans and the Reformed (including Congregationalists and Presbyterians), define their evangelicalism in terms of the first two distinctives. But for their 'pietist' adherents particularly in Lutheranism (who claim to be *with* their churches but never *under* them), it is especially the latter two that really matter (at least in practice, though not necessarily in theory). Likewise in North America, those churches and Christians who want to stress the orthodox nature of evangelicalism will point to the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformation and those who stress its practical and experiential side will focus on Pietism and Revivalism.

Gabriel Fackre has developed a five-fold typology of contemporary North American evangelicalism, using the four distinctives mentioned above as criteria. He classifies evangelicals into the following groups: (1) Fundamentalists, (2) Old Evangelicals, (3) New Evangelicals, (4) Justice and Peace Evangelicals, and (5) Charismatic Evangelicals. In Fackre's view, *Fundamentalists* are characterized both by their view of the authority of Scripture ('plenary verbal inspiration of the original autographs'), their separatist ecclesiology and their doctrinal militancy against all foes. *Old Evangelicals* are those 'who stress the conversion experience and holiness of life and seek to nourish these in the revival tradition and in congregations of fervent piety'. *New Evangelicals* 'insist on the ethical and political relevance of faith as articulated by broad guidelines, stress the intellectual viability of a born-again faith and of orthodox theology, and seek to work out

their point of view within, as well as alongside, traditional denominations'. Fackre identifies as *Justice* and *Peace Evangelicals* the new generation of Christians who 'express their faith in more radical political and ecclesiastical idiom', who come from an Anabaptist, Wesleyan or high Calvinist stock, and 'call into question the accommodation of today's culture and churches to affluence, militarism, and unjust social and economic structures'. *Charismatic Evangelicals* are identified by their experiential faith, reaching out 'for highly visible signs of the Spirit, primarily the gifts of tongue-speaking (glossolalia) and healing, and intensity of prayer, mercy and communal life' (pp. 5–7).

All of these groups, and their corresponding theological articulations, have made their way, in one form or another, into the Two Thirds World. In terms of *theological production*, the most significant group is the New Evangelicals, and in a lesser way, the Justice and Peace group. The fact that Fackre associates the New Evangelicals with *Christianity Today* (and, one might add, other theologically similar p. 68 periodicals, publishing houses and schools), and links the Justice and Peace Evangelicals with journals like *Sojourners* and *The Other Side*, is an indication of the theological influence of these two groups.

The New Evangelicals, by and large, represent the North American leadership of the Lausanne Movement, the World Evangelical Fellowship (and its North American counterpart, the National Association of Evangelicals), as well as the two large missionary consortia, the Independent Foreign Missions Association (IFMA) and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA). They also have the most visible presence in theological (and missiological) educational institutions. During the last several decades they have been the largest exporters of North American evangelical theology.

On the other hand, the Justice and Peace Evangelicals represent a new generation of scholars and critics with special interests in and ties to the Two Thirds World. Their criticism of North American religious culture and socio-economic policies, their commitment to a radical discipleship, and their solidarity with the Two Thirds World have made them natural allies of some of the most theologically articulate evangelical voices in that part of the globe. Given the leadership and influence of New Evangelicals in mainstream North American church and society, however, I shall limit my analysis to them.

NEW EVANGELICALS AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

For the New Evangelicals, the heart of evangelicalism is its faithfulness to the Reformation's formal principle of biblical authority, as well as its material or content principle of salvation in Christ through faith. But as Kenneth Kantzer (former editor of *Christianity Today*) has stated in an essay on 'Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith':

> The formal principle of biblical authority is the watershed between most other movements within the broad stream of contemporary Protestantism and the movement (or movements) of twentieth-century Protestantism known as fundamentalism, which is a term often poorly used for the purpose it is intended to serve, or evangelicalism or conservative Protestantism (p. 39).

Put in other terms, though the New Evangelicals have claimed both principles of the Reformation, their primary principle has been that of biblical authority. This formalistic emphasis does not bypass the need to do theology from the text of Scripture. As Kantzer has also stated: 'The evangelical … seeks to construct his theology on the teaching of the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible; and the p. 69 formative principle

represents a basic unifying factor throughout the whole of contemporary evangelicalism' (p. 52).

In actual practice, nonetheless, the greater energies of evangelical theological formulations, during the last decade at least, has been focused on the formal question of the authority and inspiration of Scripture rather than on its teachings. It is no surprise that the most widely published representative of this brand of evangelicalism, Carl F. H. Henry (another former editor of *Christianity Today*), entitled his six-volume *magnum opus*, *God, Revelation and Authority*. Nor is it any surprise that Kantzer, in the same essay previously quoted, likens the debate over the authority and inspiration of Scripture to the debates over the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ's person in earlier periods of Christian history.

EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN THE TWO THIRDS WORLD

Recognizing that many contemporary evangelical theologians in the Two Thirds World have been formed and informed (and sometimes even deformed!) by New Evangelical theologians, they do not appear to be as concerned over the formal authority question as they are over the material principle. To be sure, one can find evangelical theological formulations in the Two Thirds World that reveal a similar concern over the authority of Scripture. However, such formulations are neither the most authentic expression of evangelical theology in the Two Thirds World, nor the most numerous. To validate this assertion, I will turn to the concluding statements from three major theological conferences on Evangelical theology in the Two Thirds World held in Thailand (March 1982), Korea (August 1982) and Mexico (June 1984).

The Thailand and Mexico meetings had a missiological thrust and a theological content. They were sponsored by a loose fellowship of Evangelical mission theologians from the Two Thirds World. The Thailand conference revolved around 'The Proclamation of Christ in the Two Thirds World'. It produced a final document ('Towards a Missiological Christology in the Two Thirds World') and a book (*Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*), published first in India and most recently in the United States. The Mexico meeting focused on the Holy Spirit and evangelical spirituality. It also produced a final statement ('Life in the Holy Spirit') which will be part of the book soon to be published with the conference papers. The Korean Third World Theologians Consultation was sponsored by the Theological Commission of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar, the Asia Theological Association, the Latin American Theological Fraternity p. 70 and the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. Working with the theme, 'Theology and Bible in Context', it produced the Seoul Declaration ('Toward an Evangelical Theology for the Third World').

All three documents express a clear commitment to Scripture as the source and norm of theology. They express an unambiguous commitment to its authority, not only in terms of the content of the faith and the nature of its practice, but also in the approach to its interpretation. The Scriptures are normative in the understanding of the faith, the lifestyle of God's people, and the way Christians go about their theological reflection. Yet the Scriptures are not to be heard and obeyed unhistorically. Indeed, the normative and formative roles of Scripture are mediated by our respective contexts. These contextsa are, generally speaking, characterized in these documents as a reality of poverty, powerlessness and oppression on the one hand, and on the other, as religiously and ideologically pluralistic spaces. Thus a contextual hermeneutic appears as a *sine qua non* of evangelical theology in the Two Thirds World.

Thailand, for example, reported that the participants 'worked with a common commitment to Scripture as the norm … but … were also … deeply aware that the agenda for … theological activity … must be given … by [the] respective contexts' (Samuel and Sugden, p. 409). Nevertheless, such a contextual reading of the Scripture should be equally informed by 'the biblical passion for justice, the biblical concern for the 'wholeness' of salvation, and the biblical concept of the universality of Christ' (*Ibid.*). In other words, the Bible has its own contexts and passionate concerns which must be taken seriously into account in the movement from our socio-religious situation to the Scriptures. The text is equally active in the setting of the theological agenda. One does not simply come to it with any issue that arises out of reality but especially with those that coincide with the concerns of biblical faith. One must also bear in mind those issues that arise out of the text itself and pose questions to one's socio-historical situation.

Thailand's central concern was Christology and its relevance for the proclamation of the gospel in the Two Thirds World. It underscores 'the historical reality of Jesus … in his concrete socio-economic, political, racial and religious context'. It also acknowledges that he is 'the Incarnate Word of God' and affirms his 'universal lordship'. Thus while expressing 'solidarity with the poor, the powerless and the oppressed …, with those who are followers of other religions and with all people everywhere', it also recognizes the universality of sin p. 71 and the universal significance of Christ's saving work for all people. 'We are all under the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we are committed to proclaim to all, especially our brothers and sisters in the Two Thirds World' (*Ibid.*, p. 412.). Thailand's Christological concern was, therefore, informed by the historic evangelical passion for the communication of the gospel.

Mexico followed the pattern and perspective of Thailand. It assumed what Thailand had said about Scripture, context and hermeneutics, affirming the Bible as the fundamental source of knowledge concerning the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Beyond this formal statement, the final report was limited to a summary of how the Conference understood what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit. It demonstrates an overwhelming interest in the *content* of the Scriptures rather than on its formal authority.

The purpose of the Mexico Conference was 'to understand how the person and work of the Holy Spirit relates to the context of other religious traditions and movements for social transformation….' With regard to other religious traditions, the final document states:

> No religion is totally devoid of the Spirit's witness. But no religion is totally receptive to the Spirit's promptings…. The Gospel … provides a measure to evaluate all religious traditions, that measure being Christ himself (and not any form of Christianity). The encounter of Christian revelation with other religions is therefore not that of mutually exclusive systems. Persons of other faiths have been known to discover in Christ the answer to questions raised within their own traditions. We believe that such experiences indicate the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit with other religions (Acts 14:14–18; 17:22–31; Rom. 1:18–25; 2:7–16).
>
> Thus, when we bear witness to Christ in dialogue with persons of other faiths, we can accept their integrity whilst we also affirm the ultimacy of Christ.

This posture reflects a positive attitude toward people of other religions. At the same time, it retains a distinctive Christian character and the evangelistic edge so characteristic of evangelical theology.

The Mexico Report points to the category of 'justice' as the criterion for evaluating the Spirit's work in movements for social transformation. It states that the Spirit is discerned to be at work in such movements when the transformation they help bring about 'results in justice with and on behalf of the poor'. The document goes on to assert that

> To be faithful bearers of the Spirit who 'comes alongside', we are called to 'come alongside' such movements not with unqualified acceptance of their agenda, but with the agenda of the Spirit. p. 72

This agenda is described in terms of 'democratisation, the socialization of power and the just distribution of wealth'. The Spirit calls us as followers of Christ, 'to serve as witnesses against the self-interests among those involved in … struggles for power, and as channels of communication for rival factions having common goals'. However, our witness must also 'retain its distinctive Christian character and its evangelistic edge' (*Ibid.*, p. 4).

The Korea Consultation, with a much larger participation and external (Euro-American) influence, does reflect a concern for the formal aspects of biblical authority. It states emphatically:

> We unequivocally uphold the primacy and authority of the Scriptures … We have concertedly committed ourselves to building our theology on the inspired and infallible Word of God, under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. No other sources stand alongside. Despite our varying approaches to doing theology, we wholeheartedly and unanimously subscribe to the primacy of the Scriptures … (p. 3).

Yet the Seoul Declaration also states that the commitment to the authority of Scripture 'takes seriously the historical and the cultural contexts of the biblical writings'. Moreover, it asserts: 'For us, to know is to do, to love is to obey. Evangelical theology must root itself in a life of obedience to the Word of God and submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ' (*Ibid.*). Finally, the Declaration argues that

> A biblical foundation for theology presupposes the church as a hermeneutical community, the witness of the Holy Spirit as the key to the comprehension of the Word of God, and contextualization as the New Testament pattern for transposing the Gospel into different historical situations. We affirm that theology as a purely academic discipline is something we must neither pursue nor import. To be biblical, Evangelical theology must depend on sound exegesis, seek to edify the body of Christ, and motivate it for mission. Biblical theology has to be actualized in the servanthood of a worshipping and witnessing community called to make the Word of God live in our contemporary situations. (p. 3).

Even in those passages where the Seoul Declaration uses formal authority language, it checks it against a contextual and communal hermeneutic, and a Christological and pneumatological underpinning: the Scriptures are under the authority of Christ and depend on the Holy Spirit for the communication of its message. Furthermore, the Declaration balances its authority language with its emphasis on Christian obedience, faithfulness to the biblical message and the imperative of mission in the life of the church. p. 73

This 'material' check and balance helps us understand the two-fold theological critique of the Declaration—against Western (by which is meant mainstream Euro-American) and Third World theologies, respectively. Western theology, 'whether liberal or evangelical, conservative or progressive', is criticized for being, by and large, obsessed with problems of 'faith and reason'.

> All too often, it has reduced the Christian faith to abstract concepts which may have answered the questions of the past, but which fail to grapple with the issues of today. It has consciously or unconsciously been conformed to the secularistic worldview associated with the Enlightenment. Sometimes it has been utilized as a means to justify colonialism, exploitation, and oppression, or it has done little or nothing to change these situations. Furthermore, having been wrought within Christendom, it hardly addresses

> the questions of people living in situations characterized by religious pluralism, secularism, resurgent Islam or Marxist totalitarianism. (p. 2).

This statement may lack precision. However, it does articulate a well-known criticism of Western theologies from both the Two Thirds World and minority voices in Europe and North America. Moreover, it has the merit of including the Evangelical critique of Euro-American mainstream theologies. This makes all the more meaningful the call for liberation 'from [the] captivity to individualism and rationalism of Western theology in order to allow the Word of God to work with full power'. (p. 2).

The Seoul Declaration also criticizes some of the emerging theologies of the Two Thirds World, though it does recognize similarities in their respective socio-historical struggles. Both have suffered under colonialism and oppression, are currently struggling against injustice and poverty in situations of religious pluralism, and acknowledge the need 'to articulate the Gospel in words and deeds' in their respective contexts (p. 3). Yet, the Seoul Declaration is equally uneasy with some of the basic premises of these theologies. It is particularly critical of some liberation theologies. While heartily admitting that liberation theologies have raised vital questions which cannot be ignored by Evangelicals, the Declaration nevertheless rejects the tendency 'to give primacy to a praxis which is not biblically informed …' Likewise, it objects 'to the use of a socio-economic analysis as the hermeneutical key to the Scriptures'. And finally, it rejects 'any ideology which under the guise of science and technology is used as an historical mediation of the Christian faith' (*Ibid.*).

The positive yet critical posture reflected in the final documents of these three meetings demonstrates the authenticity of the Evangelical theological reflection which is currently taking place in the Two Thirds p. 74 World. Evangelical theologians in these parts of the world are appropriating the best of their spiritual tradition and are putting it to use in a constructive critical dialogue with their interlocutors in and outside of their historical space. For them the Evangelical tradition is not locked into the socio-cultural experience of the West. They insist that they have the right to articulate theologically the evangelical tradition in their own terms and in light of their own issues.

Evangelicals North and South, East and West

So far, I have argued that though Evangelical theology emerges out of European and North American Protestant Christianity and has been carried to the Two Thirds World by the missionary movement, theological institutions and publications, there is an identifiable difference between its most influential and visible contemporary expression (New Evangelical theology) and the emerging Evangelical theological discourse in the Two Thirds World. This difference lies in the latter's concern with the formal principle of Protestant theology. The emphasis on the content of the gospel and the teaching of the biblical text rather than on formal questions of authority and the philosophical presuppositions behind a particular doctrine of inspiration, is freeing Evangelical theology in the Two Thirds World to employ a contextual hermeneutics patterned after the transpositional method witnessed throughout the New Testament. This also explains why Evangelicals in the Two Thirds World are more willing to deal with questions of religious pluralism and social, economic and political oppression than most Evangelical theologians in the One Third World.

Without putting all mainstream Evangelicals in the One Third World in the same bag, it seems quite clear to me that mainstream Evangelical theologians are too obsessed with the Enlightenment and not enough with the explosive social, economic, political, cultural and religious reality of most people in the world. As Bernard Ramm has stated quite

candidly in the opening pages of his book, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology:*

> The Enlightenment sent shock waves through Christian theology as nothing did before or after. Theology has never been the same since the Enlightenment. And therefore each and every theology, evangelical included, must assess its relationship to the Enlightenment. (p. 4).

It should be pointed out that this obsession with the Enlightenment as an intellectual challenge to the faith pertains basically to its p. 75 seventeenth and eighteenth century phase which revolved around the issue of freedom from authority through reason. This obsession is shared by practically all Euro-American theologies. Indeed it can be argued that all mainstream theologies in Western Europe and North America, 'from Immanuel Kant to Carl F. H. Henry', have been, by and large, discourses on the reasonableness of faith. Their primary concern has been the sceptic, atheist, materialist-heathen—the nonreligious person. This is why the second phase of the Enlightenment, associated with the nineteenth century movement of freedom from political, cultural, economic and social oppression, has been on the main a peripheral issue in Euro-American theology, including Evangelical theology. Yet, this is one issue of fundamental importance in the theological agenda of the Two Thirds World. For all its missionary passion and experience, mainstream Evangelical theology in North America has yet to learn from its missionary heritage how to ask more central questions to the destiny of humankind, the future of the world, even the central concerns of the Scriptures.

In airing this criticism I do not mean to belittle the fact that there are always two sides to the problem of unbelief: (1) the absence of faith, and (2) the denial (practical or theoretical) of faith. Theology in North American and Western Europe has been generally concerned with the absence of faith and its theoretical denial. But it must be acknowledged that from the Evangelical Awakening to the present, there have been mainstream Euro-American theologies and theological movements that have sought to address the problem of the practical denial of faith in the unjust treatment of the weak and downtrodden. This is the case with the theology of the Wesley brothers, the Oberlin theology of George Finney, the theology of the Social Gospel, the practical theology of the early Reinhold Niebuhr, the political theology of Jurgen Moltmann and J. B. Metz, and the prophetic theologies of mainstream ecumenical theologians, like Robert McAfee Brown and the Peace and Justice Evangelicals. These theologies have attempted, in varying degrees and in their own peculiar ways, to deal with the problem of social oppression and alienation. In so doing they have built a modest bridge toward a fundamental concern of any theology in the Two Thirds World, namely, the cry of the oppressed and its disclosure of the practical 'unbelief' of professing Christians who oppress their neighbours.

My critique is, furthermore, not intended to obliterate the modest dialogue which has been taking place during the last several years around the question of poverty, powerlessness, oppression, and religious pluralism between some mainstream Evangelical theologians p. 76 and their counterparts in the Two Thirds World. Indeed, during the Thailand meeting there were two theologians representing European and North American Evangelical thought. And while they came to the meeting with questions pertaining to traditional theological issues of the North Atlantic,[1] they had to cope with other theological agendas (and did so positively and constructively). They realized that

[1] Ronald Sider (U.S.A.) presented a paper on 'Miracles, Methodology and Modern-Western Christology' and David Cook on 'Significant Trends in Western Christological Debate', Cf. Samuel and Sugden, pp. 351 ff., 371 ff.

their particular agenda was pertinent to a rather small sector of humankind. They also acknowledged that their agenda was even different from that of the two 'minority' participants from North America for whom North American Evangelical theology had dealt especially with the truth of God's justice.[2] As one of them commented:

> The issue that divides me from mainstream white evangelicals is not whether I believe the Bible to be the Word of God which I do, but … that I want to … read [it] from my situation … of oppression….
>
> I stand in a dialectical tension with the system which has kept my people in oppression … I coincide … with mainstream white evangelicals … about belief in Jesus Christ. We … are committed to Jesus Christ [as] … Lord and … Saviour. We … are judged by the same Word. But when we [ask] what does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ, and … 'who is this Jesus that we confess as … Lord and … Saviour and what does [he] command us to do?' at that precise point we start departing from one another.[3]

In March 1983, a consultation was held in Tlayacapan, Mexico, between several types of Evangelical theologians from North America, and their counterparts in Latin America and the minority communities of the U.S. This consultation focused on 'Context and Hermeneutics in the Americas' and established a methodology that permitted Evangelical scholars to wrestle with concrete biblical texts and debate such questions as whether our interlocutor is really the 'atheist' (as Evangelical theologians who wrestle with the questions of the first phase of the Enlightenment argue) or the alienated (*i.e.*, the non-person who may be religious but has been exploited, marginated and dehumanized by religious institutions, as many theologians in the Two Thirds World and North American minority communities would argue). The latter issue was not resolved, but the hermeneutical exercises were very fruitful. Afterwards, Grant Osborne, from Trinity Evangeical Divinity School, wrote in *TSF Bulletin*: p. 77

> Everyone present felt that the conference … was extremely beneficial. Ways of extending the dialogue were suggested…. All in all, it was felt that North Americans need to enter a Latin American setting and do theological reflection in the context of poverty. Those from the North, before passing judgment, should be willing to enter a Nicaragua or an El Salvador and experience those realities from the inside. (p. 22).

(One might add that this could apply just as well to the urbanghettoes of North America.)

Lest I be misunderstood, let me conclude by saying that it has not been my intention to idealize Evangelical theology in the Two Thirds World nor endorse the tendency to generalize, avoid precision and even belittle the significance of Western theological debates. It is readily admitted that Evangelical theology in the Two Thirds World is represented by many voices with divergent views. Indeed, it has a long way to go, and in the process it will have a lot to learn from its counterpart in the One Third World.

However, I submit that the ultimate test of any theological discourse is not erudite precision but transformative power. It is a question of whether or not theology can articulate the faith in a way that it is not only intellectually sound but spiritually energizing, and therefore, capable of leading the people of God to be transformed in their way of life and to commit themselves to God's mission in the world. As the Apostle Paul

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[2] Cf. George Cummings, 'Who Do You Say That I Am? A North American Minority Answer to the Christological Question', in Samuel and Sugden, pp. 319–337.

[3] Comment by a minority North American participant in the discussion with George Cummings.

reminded the Corinthian church many years ago, 'the kingdom of God is not talk but power' (1 Cor. 4:20).

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Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism - II

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This is the second of the two parts of the thirty-eight page document produced by the task force of the Theological Commission which was entrusted with the study of Roman Catholicism. As mentioned in the last issue, this statement was adopted by the World Evangelical Fellowship General Assembly in its last meeting at Singapore, June 1986.
Editor

VI. MODERNISM/THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

Both of these concepts, 'liberalism' as well as 'modernism', are difficult to define clearly. This holds true of contemporary Roman Catholicism no less than of contemporary Protestantism. Yet together these two concepts do reflect to a large degree the crisis of twentieth century Christendom—within Roman Catholic as well as Protestant churches. The term 'modernism' indicates that we are dealing with issues born of the post-Enlightenment 'modern mind'. By 'liberalism' we mean that widespread movement during the past two centuries which is known more precisely as 'theological liberalism'. It calls into question fundamental articles of the historic Christian faith.

From the decrees of its latest councils (1869–70 and 1962–65) and its many papal encyclicals over the past century, the Roman Catholic Church has clearly identified what it understands by the threat of modernist/liberalist heresies within its circles—which parallel closely positions held by some outside of Roman Catholic circles and which we as Evangelicals would also regard as heretical. These include attacks upon such biblically-based doctrines as the inspiration, authority, and infallibility of Scripture; the deity of Christ; the virgin birth; the reality of miracles; the bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ; the doctrines of creation, original sin, and the last things; together with major aspects of Christian ethics. Modernism/liberalism also launched assaults upon typically Roman Catholic traditions, such as papal infallibility, the immaculate conception and heavenly assumption of the virgin Mary, celibate clergy, the exclusion of women from priestly ordination, and the denunciation of artificial birth control methods. Our concern at this point is with the former catalogue of errors.

Such modernist/liberalist intrusions into the thought and life of the church are traceable to the radical and sweeping impact of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. By the middle of the nineteenth century this movement had created a major crisis within the Roman Catholic Church. The hierarchy viewed the church as a fortress under p. 79 siege.