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**Evangelical
Review of
Theology** p. 99

takes place. It is not the prerogative of a professional theological elite alone but is open to all God's people. The church as the body of Christ with the Spirit given diversity of gifts of ministry ensures that this dynamic process of contextualising theology and practice takes place. Its goal is conformity to the image of Christ in character and conduct. The historic dimensions of the church universal mean that God's dealings with the church fathers, the reformers and revivalists, the prophets and social workers of other ages are also relevant to the contextualizing process today. A purely existential view of contextualization is a truncated view of God's mission in the world. Historical and dogmatic theology when tested against the givenness of Scripture are foundational to a more contemporary contextualizing of theology.

Commitment to Christ, to the Bible as the Word of God and to the church inevitably means commitment to the *missio Dei* in the world. The Church as the Kingdom community is called to be a model of the coming redeemed society where truth and grace reign and where justification and justice belong to each other. The Church is both a signpost and an agent of this coming Kingdom. It gives hope, courage and endurance in the midst of suffering and oppression. The Church is also like salt and light permeating every part of society restraining evil by prophetic rebuke and non-violent conscientization and preserving all that is good in society. Commitment to God's mission is a commitment to Christian transformation of the world; commitment to conversion to Christ, to peace and goodwill among men, to justice and harmony in and between the nations. Such commitment also calls for the faithful stewardship of the resources of creation for the good of all mankind.

True contextualization warns against the dangers of syncretism in theological beliefs, religious practices and ethical lifestyles, but it is not driven to inertia or to maintenance of the status quo by fear of this p.106 danger. A willingness to take risks and commitment to clear missiological goals enables the communicator to overcome this fear. The Holy Spirit as the divine communicator is the pioneer and enabler, in the fulfilment of this task.

In this dialogical relationship between the biblical text and the human context all forms of idolatrous beliefs and practices, whether religious or secular, are judged and stand condemned. The church is committed to their destruction. Though all of culture is tainted with sin it still reflects the truths and beauty of God's general revelation. Therefore that which is compatible with the law of God must be purified, transformed and put under the Lordship of Christ. Finally, contextualization culminates in the Good News showing its relevance in every situation, with the newness of redemption from sin, guilt and demonic power and eventual liberation from human despair and social injustice and the actualization of faith, hope and love. Thus contextualization is a central task of the Church in its mission in the world.

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Evangelical Theology and Praxis for Latin America

Emilio A. Núñez

Reprinted with permission from his book Liberation Theology (Moody Press, 1985)

(This article is the concluding chapter in Núñez's latest book, Liberation Theology. Called by many 'the wise man of Latin American Evangelicals' Núñez gives here an evangelical alternative to Liberation Theology, preserving both the best of both the Liberations Theologies as well as the traditional Theologies, and yet holding on unquestionably to an evangelical stance. He sketches what the Latin American Evangelical response to Liberation Theology would be in the coming years. In the process there clearly emerges not only Núñez's understanding of what theology is all about, but also how to do it. The text is slightly edited for stylistic purposes.)

Ed.

Liberation theology is essentially political and clearly reflects a Marxist influence. It is a new way of doing theology. Its point of departure and hermeneutical norm is not the written revelation of God, but the social context of Latin America and the revolutionary praxis striving to create there a 'new man' and a 'new society' within a socialist system as a supposed manifestation of the kingdom of God.

Naturally this theology comes into conflict with capitalism and neocolonialism; but it also differs sharply with conservative evangelical thought in the matter of biblical interpretation of the Christian faith. We have seen that liberation theologians do not have a high view of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. They accept modern exegesis uncritically and subject the biblical text to an ideology; as a result of that hermeneutical conditioning they give to fundamental doctrines such as Christology and ecclesiology an interpretation that is far from satisfactory for those of us who feel seriously committed to the gospel.

It is worth noting that the Vatican continues to react against liberation theology without opposing its aspirations for social justice. A recent document prepared under the direction of John Paul II and published five days before the interrogation of Leonardo Boff states:

The 'error of liberation theologians' consists in the identification of 'scientific analysis' with 'Marxist analysis' without critical examination. They do not take into account the fact that this analysis depends on ideological premises which are incompatible with the Christian faith and which carry a logic that leads to the 'perversion of Christianity.'¹ p. 108

Jospeh Ratzinger, principal author of the document, has stated that it was not particularly directed at Boff and the 'conversation' he was about to hold in Rome 'to verify the ecclesiastical meaning of his writings.'

On our part, although we reject the non-biblical foundations of liberation theology, we need to recognize that this theological system gives us conservative evangelicals a warning with regard to our social responsibility and a challenge to study the Scriptures to see what they have to say to us about Latin American social problems. Even if liberation theology goes out of style as a system or is condemned by the Vatican, its impact on the theological consciousness of Latin American Christianity may be lasting.

We conservative evangelicals can no longer afford the luxury of doing theology in social isolation. We must not answer the challenge of liberation theology by simply

¹ *Prensa Libre* (Guatemala), 4 September 1984.

repeating the political arguments of its enemies in other latitudes. The hour in which we live is crucial for our society and for the church which the Lord redeemed with His blood. We need the wise counsel of our brethren in the world-wide evangelical community. But more than anything we need to lay hold of the written word of God, depend as never before on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and truly live the gospel.

The evangelical response to liberation theology has to be both theological and 'praxiological'. It is not enough for us to become entrenched in a conservatism that closes its eyes to social reality and limits itself to repeating dogmatic formulas without explaining them or applying them to the new situation that confronts us in Latin America. We need to proclaim faithfully the gospel in terms that are relevant to that situation and live it to its final consequences. If we fulfill those conditions, we will be responding positively—much more than to liberation theology—to the teachings and exhortations of the written word of God and to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our new life. After all, that is what is most important.

THE THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

For the evangelical Christian there is on the one hand a theology that does not admit change because it is the word of the Lord which 'abides forever' ([1 Pet. 1:25](#)). On the other hand, we are engaged in a theological task the product of which can be modified with the passage of time. It is imperative to maintain the difference between the merely human word and that which the Holy Spirit inspired, availing Himself of godly men who lived, thought, felt, and acted in close **P. 109** relationship with their cultural and social environment ([2 Pet. 1:21](#); [2 Tim. 3:14-17](#)).

Whoever studies carefully the history of theological thought knows that theology as human reflection is to a great extent the result, directly or indirectly, of the cultural and social circumstances of the different periods in which particular theologians have lived and laboured. Evangelical theology is not exempt, as human reflection, from the influence of its social context. It is very difficult, therefore, to predict what Latin American theology will be like in ten or twenty years. Latin America is torn by transforming forces that could destabilize its countries and create a new social order before the end of this century. We don't exactly know where Latin America is headed if the Lord does not come soon. But we are sure that it is possible to deepen our theological roots now and suggest guidelines that should be followed in the ministry of communicating the word of God to the new Latin American society which is in gestation before our very eyes.

The evangelical theology of the future will definitely have to be *biblical* in its foundations, *ecclesiastical* in its close relationship to the community of faith, *pastoral* in its attempt to be an orientating voice for the people of God, *contextualized* with regard to that which is Social and cultural, and *missionary* in its purpose to reach with the gospel those who are not Christians.

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Authentically evangelical theology seeks to become grounded in the Written revelation of God. Therefore, the Bible must be the main source of knowledge for the evangelical theologian and his maximum authority as well. The basis for genuine evangelical thought is not what a particular theologian says, but what the Lord says in His written Word.

It is obvious that in order to formulate a biblical theology, an effort must be made to draw out the meaning of the Scriptures. Exegesis is necessary; but exegesis demands preparation, dedication, intense work, perseverance, and above all, submission to the

Holy Spirit in order to be illuminated by Him. It is very easy to impose upon the Scriptures a theological scheme, whichever it might be, instead of patiently and conscientiously studying the sacred text to discover in its words both what the sacred writers wanted to express under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and what the original readers were able to understand.

We Latin American evangelicals boast that we are people of one **p. 110** book: the Bible. But in reality we have not studied that book as we should in order to evaluate and improve our theological activity, in general, our theology has only been an echo of that which has been forged in other cultures. We have lacked the interest, preparation, time, and financial backing for the theological task. Besides, the conservative evangelical community has shown a preference for men of action and a certain disdain for men of reflection. There are even those in theological education who defend a functionalism that has little esteem for academic progress: 'it doesn't matter if the quality of theological training for leaders goes down as long as they are able to function.' As the Latin American evangelical theologian Samuel Escobar has well stated, in some evangelical sectors 'theological reflection as a form of obedience to the Word of God disappears, enslaved by an enthusiastic and effective but uncritical activism that has no time to think about the faith.'²

It is high time for us to sit down to study the Word of God exegetically, not only in order to prove or defend our theology, but especially to discover what the biblical text has to say to us about the critical situation in which we all live. We have to go beyond systematic theologies that simply quote biblical texts in support of a particular theological system to an exegetical theology that grows directly out of the Word of God.

On the other hand it is very easy to run from our social problems by taking refuge in a meticulous exegetical exercise that does not produce a theology for the here and now of our people. We can feel very comfortably wrapped up in the study of remote biblical cultures while we turn our backs to the crude reality surrounding us. We may also take refuge in the future and become eschatologists who say little or nothing about the present reality that troubles the Latin American people. By escaping to the past or to the future, we draw a theological arch over the distressing problems of Latin America. If there is a reference to those problems it is superficial, not deep.

We need, therefore, a greater number of *evangelical* Latin American theologians who are rigorously trained in the biblical and theological sciences and are able to interpret the signs of the times in the light of written revelation, to instruct adequately the future pastors and teachers of God's people, and to stimulate Latin American evangelical thought.

AN ECCLESIASTICAL THEOLOGY

What has just been said does not mean in any way that we should **P. 111** throw overboard everything that has been produced in the field of theology throughout almost twenty centuries of Christianity. It would be presumptuous to believe that the Holy Spirit has kept silence during all that time and that He will not begin to speak except through us—in other words, to think that no Christian before us has had the assistance of the Paraclete in the study and exposition of the Scriptures. There is a whole doctrinal heritage, a tradition—in the best sense of the term—that we should neither despise nor exalt above the written revelation of God. The evangelical theologian should not be a stranger to any of the centuries-long process of doctrinal reflection of the church. Exegetical theology should be accompanied by historical theology.

² Samuel Escobar, 'Identidad, misión y futuro del protestantismo Latinoamericano.'

It would be foolish to ignore the wealth of teaching in the early Church Fathers, to underestimate the great creeds of the universal church, or to take lightly the hard work of biblical exegetes of more recent times in order to gain the approval of iconoclasts who only destroy without building anything positive from a biblical point of view.

It is also necessary to be up to date with regard to what is happening in the theological world and to take advantage especially of the contributions that others make to the advance of evangelical theology in Latin America. We are indebted to the past and to the present for our theological task in Latin America.

By ecclesiastical theology we also understand a theology formed in close relationship with the community of faith. It is one thing to talk about *ecclesiological* theology, and something very different to refer to an *ecclesiastical* theology. Ecclesiological theology can remain on a purely theoretical plane, analyzing the doctrine of the church in the Scriptures and in the reflective work of theologians. That theology can be produced in isolation, apart from the community of faith. In his ivory tower the theologian thinks about the church, and from there he sends his message without seriously committing himself to any ecclesiastical group. He speaks about the church and talks to the church from outside, as a stranger.

We need the communion and the advice of our brethren in the faith, especially the advice of our colleagues in the ministry of the gospel. Evangelical theology should arise from the warmth of that fellowship and under the light of that counsel. The academic theologian should also be an ecclesiastical theologian, fully identified with the people of God.

A PASTORAL THEOLOGY

If theology is produced within the community of faith it will **P. 112** necessarily be pastoral because it will emerge in answer to the questions and needs of the Christian people. It will be a theology carried out from the written word of God to the concrete situation of Latin American evangelicals. This theology will not be aloof to human existence, occupied only with technicalities that are interesting to academic theologians but not to the rest of the evangelical people. An esoteric theology produced for experts is useless from the point of view of the interests of the kingdom of God if it does not come down from its highly academic pedestal in order to spiritually edify the people who occupy the pews in the churches.

The subjects that pastoral theology should treat in the context of the Latin American evangelical church are many. Among them are those related to the nature and mission of the church itself and the duties of Christians in their daily relationships with the family, the church, and society.

All of the fundamental elements of the evangelical creed should be expounded biblically with special reference to the Latin American church. Even the theological basis of our evangelical liturgy will have to be evaluated by means of a careful and objective exegesis of the biblical text. We will need to ask, for example, whether in our public worship we ought simply to imitate the liturgy of other cultures or whether there is freedom in the gospel to worship the Lord in ways that will better respond to the feelings of our own people. One of the more important questions that pastoral theology has to answer on the basis of biblical exegesis is what it means to be the church of the Lord in countries troubled by the process of social change.

A CONTEXTUALIZED THEOLOGY

Contextualization may be understood as the effort we must make in order for theology to be relevant to our own culture. This relevance cannot be achieved apart from dialogue between theology and our social and cultural context.

In the case of evangelical theology and its emphasis on biblical exegesis it must be remembered that exegetical work can fulfill the requirement of investigating what the sacred writer communicated to his original readers. But the bridge must still be laid between the culture of biblical times and our own. That is true cross-culturalization. We have to investigate what the biblical text meant for those readers and determine what the meaning of that text teaches us at the end of the twentieth century in the Latin American context.

The report of the Willowbank Consultation on the Gospel and [p. 113](#) Culture (January 1978) states that for a contemporary understanding of the Word of God it is necessary to go beyond the popular method that approaches the words of the biblical text 'without any awareness that the writer's cultural context differs from the reader's,' and to go beyond the historical method which 'takes with due seriousness the original historical and cultural context.' The contextual method of approaching the Scriptures that the report recommends 'takes seriously the cultural context of the contemporary readers as well as of the biblical text, and recognizes that a dialogue must develop between the two.'³

In Latin America we need to ask the biblical text not only the traditional questions related to the needs of the individual and to the hereafter. We also have to ask the questions of a social nature that are heard outside the church. There are fundamental questions that concern every human being, in any time and place; but each generation and each social group also has its own questions which must be answered. It may be that some of the questions of yesterday do not have the same importance today, and that the questions of a particular society are not the most important ones for another social group.

Latin American evangelical theology should represent at least an attempt to answer questions troubling Latin Americans. The biblical meaning should be studied in interaction with those questions, but it will not be replaced by them or by an answer that might violate the sacred text. The dialogue between Scripture and the social context should not have the purpose of injecting meaning into the biblical text. That text already has a meaning of its own which we have to relate to our own Latin American situation.

The goal is not to attribute to the text a meaning foreign to it, but to draw out the meaning it already possesses and to relate it, without distortions, to the needs of the individual and society. If it could be modified by the whim of the interpreter or in response to social transformations, Scripture would cease to be the supreme and abiding norm for the faith and conduct of the church in every time and place. Biblical meaning would be at the mercy of different moods of the interpreter and different situations in society. We would not have a stable meaning on which we could depend in order to make the right choices and live in this changing world in a way that is pleasing to God.

It should also be pointed out that by 'the biblical text' we mean 'the whole counsel of God.' One of the main problems in traditional [p. 114](#) evangelical theology has been its tendency to use only certain biblical sections and to limit the meaning of the Scriptures to the sphere of the individual and to 'spiritual' things. Thus, for example, prominence has been given to the New Testament to the detriment of the Old Testament, and only the spiritual, individual, ecclesiastical, and eternal aspects of the salvation of Christ have been emphasized. In some cases even the sense of community that the New Testament teaches with regard to the church has been lost.

³ *The Willowbank Report: Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture*, pp. 10–11.

Two decades ago the majority of Latin American evangelicals gave no importance to 'the social implications of the gospel.' Meanwhile, a new theology was taking form on the continent with a pendular movement towards the political left. Theological liberationism offered to fill the void that the preconciliar Catholic church and traditional evangelical hermeneutics had left in Latin American Christianity. Deluded by the splendour of an ideology robed in theological pronouncements, liberation theologians urge people to take refuge in a hermeneutic that ends up distorting the meaning of the biblical text.

There is no need to distort the Scripture in order to answer the questions of our countrymen. But we must bring back into focus those biblical elements that we have forgotten. The Bible abounds with teachings about the dignity of the human being (including both sexes); liberty and slavery; personal and social justice; private property; wealth and poverty; labour relations; peace and war; family responsibilities and privileges; the origin and nature of the State; the duties and limitations of civil power; civic duties of the Christian; Christian philanthropy ('good works' as a fruit of salvation); and human relationships within the family, in the community of faith, in the civil order, and on the international scene.

The Scriptures contain great ethical principles which the Christian community should follow and proclaim in order to truly be the salt and light of the earth. It is worth noting that non-Christian leaders have emerged as spokesmen for those biblical principles that the church has not communicated. Contemporary movements of social vindication have borrowed from the Bible some of their teachings about the dignity and freedom of men. While the church has kept silence, others have raised their voices. All we have to do to remedy the situation is restore the teachings of the Bible, 'announcing the whole counsel of God.'

A MISSIONARY THEOLOGY

Theology has to enter into dialogue with the cultural and social **P. 115** context in order to communicate the gospel effectively. In other words, it has to become a missionary theology. That should be the purpose of contextualization. Otherwise, as C. René Padilla says, theology loses the balance between faithfulness to 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' ([Jude 3](#)) and the relevance to the social situation. It either becomes merely an effort to preserve a theological tradition, or it accommodates itself to the social context, thus losing its Christian identity. 'If theology in the Two-thirds World is to be both relevant and faithful, it must be based on a missiological hermeneutic.'⁴ We have to contextualize the gospel in order to fulfill the mission that the Master has given us ([Matt. 28:18-20](#)).

Everything said here about a Latin American theology suggests that our task will not be to add something to the gospel or to take something away from it, but rather to emphasize those biblical elements that have not received enough attention in our theological task or to recover those that we have forgotten. Our task will be to provide a biblical answer for the questions and needs of the Latin American people.

THE ANSWER OF CHRISTIAN PRAXIS

Jesus did not come to establish another religious group or another political party, but to establish a new community, the community of the kingdom of God, sustained and characterized by love, humility, justice, peace, service and harmony among men of good

⁴ C. René Padilla, 'Toward a Biblical Foundation for a Two-Thirds World Evangelical Theology', p. 35.

will. We understand as evangelicals that that community is made up of all those who have been born again by the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit. It is the community of those who have become sons of God by believing in the name of the Lord Jesus ([John 1:11-13](#)). This is the church, the Body of Christ, called to live and proclaim the gospel in the midst of society, not apart from the world but in the world, yet without letting itself be contaminated by the world.

The church is the people of God in this era, between the two advents of the Lord Jesus on earth ([1 Pet. 2:9-10](#)). The church is the community of the kingdom of God in the midst of 'the kingdoms of this World.' The apostle Paul says that believers in Jesus Christ have been liberated from the power of darkness and 'transferred ... to the kingdom of His beloved Son' ([Col. 1:13](#)). We also read in [Revelation 1:6](#) that Christ has made us 'a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.' p. 116 The church is the agent of the present kingdom of God. At the same time, it is called to proclaim and exemplify the virtues of the kingdom to come. If that kingdom is to be characterized by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all humanity, by universal justice, peace and brotherhood, the world should see here and now, in the conduct of each individual Christian and of the church in its totality, an anticipation of those and other blessings that Messiah will bring in fullness for all the peoples of earth.

How can we talk of that future outpouring of the Spirit and not allow Him to fill us now so that we may be able to live authentically the Christian life in the home, in the congregation, and in society? How can we talk of a justice that will reign among all peoples of the world and not be just today in our personal, family, and social life in order to support the cause of justice in society with God-given authority? How can we talk of the peace that all human beings will enjoy and not follow today peace and holiness in our personal, family, and social life? How can we talk about future universal brotherhood and love and not love each other today as the Master has commanded us?

The church is the agent of the present kingdom of God and the standard-bearer of the kingdom to come. All of that places on us a serious ethical responsibility before God and before society. We have a heavenly calling to fulfill on this planet: to live and proclaim the kingdom of God. That is what it means to be the church today in the midst of social whirlwinds. The world should *hear* the gospel, but it should also *see it* incarnated in the life of those of us who proclaim it.

Our theological response to the Word of God and to the great problems of Latin American society should be backed up by an authentically Christian praxis. We have to be Christians like the disciples who were deservedly given that glorious name in apostolic days ([Acts 11](#)). In the Latin American evangelical community many of us run the risk of becoming accommodated to the prevailing situation and playing at being Christians on Sunday mornings in servile imitation of a middle class Christianity that comes to us from affluent western societies, strangers to the painful drama that millions of Latin Americans are living.

That kind of Christianity can easily convert the churches into 'self-edification clubs,' as a professor of Christian education said in a North American theological seminary. It can also become the Christianity of 'cheap grace,' of which the young German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke. It is sad to confess it, but there has been much of 'cheap grace' in our evangelizing efforts in Latin America. We have frequently preached a gospel of 'supply' without demands, motivated p. 117 in some cases by the desire to get 'decisions' and to publish statistics that in the final analysis promote a personality cult. The search for a church growth that is no more than numerical is also expressed in preaching that offers personal happiness, peace in the home, physical health, professional success, economic prosperity, and the solution to all the problems of this life. It is a preaching that

does not insist as it should on the fact that the Lord calls us primarily to solve the problem of our sin by means of faith in Him and His redemptive work, and that He is searching for *sinners* who are ready to become His *followers* in whatever circumstances of life may be theirs in this world.

The gospel is being so cheapened in our environment that there are those who prefer, in order to win converts, not to point out the abysmal difference that exists between the way of authentic Christian discipleship and those 'Christianities' that in their doctrinal schemes deny the foundations of New Testament faith. In that way an attempt is being made to soften the gospel so that a greater number of persons may accept it without difficulty. That is not what Jesus preached. He said: 'If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me' ([Matt. 16:24](#)).

Juan Luis Segundo has more than enough reason to say that the gospel is not 'cheap merchandise.' Genuine Christian discipleship has a cost that can be very high, according to the Lord's will. We are saved by the grace of God, by means of faith, to serve Him; and if the Master so demands it, we may also have to suffer and even die for His name. That is very strange language for those people who seek an evangelical church in order to be happy according to the world's idea of happiness.

Jürgen Moltmann quotes the Catholic theologian J. B. Metz, who describes the bourgeois church as a supermarket where products for all tastes are offered at very low prices. Moltmann says that in the New World there are so many varieties of denominations and so many churches that nobody has to worry about any problem that might emerge in his own congregation; it is very easy to go to another one that might be better suited to his taste. In the competition on the religious market, 'the winner—as in other markets too—will be whoever has the cheapest and most entertaining offer.' Finally, the church easily falls victim to the seduction of 'class' churches, in which 'social "like" is drawn to "like": birds of a feather flock together.'⁵

In Latin America there are evangelical churches that run the risk of becoming classists, indifferent to the great majorities who suffer the [p. 118](#) most deplorable results of our social and economic underdevelopment. It seems that the middle class, which has struggled to reach that height, easily becomes devoted to preserving its achievements and even to improving them by climbing one more step up the social ladder, all the while turning its back on the less privileged classes. The churches that emerge from that social mobility can easily forget the demands of Christian discipleship and the example of the Lord Jesus, who had compassion on the multitudes who were scattered and mistreated like sheep without a shepherd.

A North American evangelical pastor from the middle class noticed that his church was bound to itself, to its traditions in liturgy and work methods, to its social class, to its way of being a church in a great urban centre. Having a new perception of the city itself as a mission field, he encouraged the members of his congregation to take an interest also in the neglected groups, including hobos, drug addicts, and even homosexuals. His emphasis is more spiritual than social, but he had broken chains in the area of life and mission of an urban church that had not taken an interest in other social classes. His congregation is scattered throughout the city, serving the neediest sectors. The sanctuary can accommodate only 275 people, but the number of members came to more than one thousand in 1982, up from only one hundred in 1970.⁶ But the most important thing is

⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Power of the Powerless*, pp. 160–61.

⁶ Frank R. Tillapaugh, *The Church Unleashed* (Ventura, Cal.: Regal, 1982).

not the numerical growth but the new type of ministry that the pastor and his church are carrying out.

Without a doubt many of our churches in Latin America have to be freed from their chains in order to serve other social segments. We must add that the challenge goes beyond the merely spiritual. It also includes the millions who cry out for social justice. The church cannot become deaf to that cry. We are told that we should see not only the effects of our social problems but also their causes, and then do something about them, in order to be consistent with our Christian faith.

This great challenge is unavoidable, and it has resulted in an awakening of social consciousness among evangelicals at the level of world consultations and congresses. The proof of that statement is seen in documents such as the Wheaton Declaration (1966), the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Declaration on Evangelism and Social Responsibility (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982), and the Documents of Group III, Wheaton Conference (1983). It appears that the process of reflection and conscientization on the social responsibility of the p. 119 evangelical church is irreversible. It has been a good step to begin with biblical and theological reflection on so controversial an issue. What many of us Latin American evangelicals hope is that those who are the most serene and stable in the biblical faith will participate, so that the evangelical church may fully assume its social responsibility without straying from the path marked out by the written revelation of God. May our *action* be motivated and directed, always and everywhere, by that *revelation*.

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Christian Witness Amidst Asian Poverty

Herman Moldez

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(It is said that just as the theology of mission occupied world christendom for the last three quarters of the century, the theme of poverty would occupy Christians world over for the next quarter at least. Doing theology in the Two-thirds World in general and Asia in particular, is impossible without a basic consideration of poverty as a theological category. For only by speaking to contemporary issues relevantly can theology be called theology. Though somewhat older in comparison with other articles (this was written before the revolution in Philippines) yet it is published here because it still speaks to the burning issues in the Philippines. Meant primarily for the youth, the article may lack theological as well as sociological precision but coming from the pen of a Two-thirds World evangelical, it needs to be read. Some of the examples given would also find a counterpart in other situations of poverty. This of course is one view. For other views, readers are directed to either Ron Sider's or Brian Griffiths writings.)

Ed.