

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 15

---

Volume 15 • Number 4 • October 1991

---

## Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from  
publications worldwide for an international  
readership for the purpose of discerning the  
obedience of faith*

GENERAL EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by  
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

reports of indigenous women being raped and sexually harassed because the military has covertly approved such methods of dealing with rebellious peoples. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh reports of human rights violations, torture and rape are increasing everyday. There is an increasing number of refugees as a result of militarization.

The debt crisis has affected most of the Asian countries and the indigenous women feel very much the effects of this. Cuts in social services deprive indigenous women of their rights to health care. To earn foreign dollars for debt repayment, tourism has been developed with women as the main attraction. The commodification of indigenous women in Asia has worsened in the past few years. Thailand and Manila have earned the label of sex centres of the world.

Resistance and opposition to all these efforts to subjugate and dehumanize the indigenous peoples have been waged and there are still many which are ongoing. At present, the Naga and Mizo peoples of Nagaland are putting up a fight against the Indian government. The West Papuans are still struggling against the Indonesian government and military. The Cordillera peoples in the Northern Philippines and the Bangsa Moro in the Southern region are very much part of the national liberation movement being waged against neocolonialism. The Karens in Burma are also resisting the Burmese government which has consistently discriminated against them. The indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh are also actively engaged in a resistance movement against the Bangladeshi government. The Tibetan peoples in China continue to assert their rights to self-determination. Indigenous women are actively involved in these resistance movements in varying degrees. They are very much victims of human rights violations brought about by militarization. Documentation of incidents of rape, sexual abuses and arbitrary detentions among the women is increasing.

The situation of Asian indigenous women has definitely worsened these past few years and there is an urgent need to look more deeply into how they are affected by such issues and what they are doing about it. There needs to be more support to the efforts of indigenous women in Asia to organize themselves. Many of our sisters are still in the early stages of organizing themselves as Women. It is because of this situation that the indigenous women in Asia would like very much to be a part of a broader network which can provide a venue wherein they can air all these issues and get further support for their struggles. p. 338

## **Women in Conflict: Latin American Version**

**Beatriz Zapata**

*Reprinted with permission from Transformation April/June 1989*

In 1992 Spain will have a great celebration. She will celebrate 500 years since the conquest of the West Indies, which opened the door to the Latin American Continent.

When the Spanish *conquistadores* arrived in our Latin countries, they admired the land and took for themselves much of the natural riches. However, they decided that of all the

discoveries they had found, the best was their beautiful, dark women. There is no doubt that the Latin woman has been profoundly influenced by this conquest. In many of the Latin countries, such as Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia and some parts of Mexico, which have a high percentage of ethnic groups, the Latin woman's behaviour is greatly influenced by these groups.

Vasconcelos, the great Latin American author, writes that the union of the Indian and Spanish races formed what he calls 'The Cosmic Race'. This union has helped all of Latin America to develop a singular character. In contrast with North America—The United States of America—we Latins have very little racial discrimination. We worry more about odour than about colour!

When the great *conquistadores* arrived in Latin lands, they felt an obligation to make their conquest a religious one, as well as political and geographical. They introduced the Indians to the influence of a Roman Catholic Christianity. Without a doubt, this influence also has modelled the Latin feminine mind at all levels, influencing her emotional, physical, mental and spiritual development.

All of these factors—the Indian background, the Spanish conquest, and the influence of the Roman Catholic church—have had an important part in the forming of the Latin woman. According to United Nations statistics, there are 220 million women in Latin America. 47% of the women of this continent belong to the work force. 110 million women are of child-bearing age.

## CONFLICTING ROLES OF WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA

The expectations that a woman has for her personal life, and for her role as wife and mother, have definitely come into conflict with each other. Part of this conflict comes from the lack of definition of her role as a woman. What the men expect from her is not what she knows she can give to her Latin world. The Latin woman believes in herself and has been waiting, for centuries, for the opportunity to show the world her great potential.

Since the early 50s, the Latin American woman has clearly been awakening to her potential—physically, intellectually and spiritually. Suddenly, she has realized that her neighbours, the women of North America, have gained much ground in every area of their lives as they fought for their rights. The Latin woman decided to follow their example. The first thing she did was to show the Latin world that she had an intellect worthy of notice. Also, she started to take part in the political aspect of her country and demanded that men respect and honour her.

Many of these changes were due to the influence of a positive and truthful Gospel. While the Roman Catholic church prohibited the use of contraceptives, in its ecclesiastical laws, evangelical voices were raised protecting the rights of the couple, and therefore of the woman. This helped to make her feel her worth as a mother and believe she should have the privilege of choosing her partner and children. When the political parties and the multinational companies began to accept women in their ranks, the Latin woman knew how to respond with honour to that challenge.

The Latin woman has definitely come a long way towards her acceptance and a true liberation from the oppression that she has suffered for centuries. In all the Latin countries, we are watching the awakening of a new woman—full of talent, ability, education, and above all, hope.

The evangelical Church has not been left behind in this revolution. Without fear, the Christian evangelical man, in many cases, has finally appropriated the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving honour to the woman in the church and in Christian organizations.

There is still much ground to cover on this issue but it is only fair to admit that great and definite steps have been taken to remedy the oppressive situation in which the woman has lived.

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has transforming power.

## **PRESSURE POINTS FOR MARRIED AND SINGLE WOMAN**

What are the incidental issues that the woman faces as she struggles to fulfil her role? Is her role changing in respect to marriage, family and work? **P. 340**

Most of the women are accustomed to work almost from infancy: carrying water pots on their heads, walking for miles to the market, working in the fields, side by side with their husbands, cooking, cleaning and now in modern times, managing and directing great companies. The Latin woman expects to cooperate as much as possible with the home budget. Unfortunately, on many occasions, this is due to the absence of her husband or his lack of responsibility in meeting the family expenses. The high incidence of alcoholism has become a curse in the home, as well as the idea that the man is master and lord and can have a wife plus other women, without even giving a thought to see if the needs of his family are satisfied.

In the face of these problems, the woman with courage stands up and supports the family. Most of our Latin homes are matriarchal. The children and even the husband have come to depend emotionally, materially and even financially on the work and strength of the mother and wife.

On the other hand, we must mention the increasing number of single women. One of the greatest needs in the evangelical church in Latin America is to develop a programme that can help to meet the needs of the increasing number of single women. There are very few evangelical churches and very few countries that have this kind of programme. Many people still think that the woman's main purpose in life is marriage. Since that is their way of thinking, that is the way they protect it. With this view they have only created a serious conflict in the expectations that a woman has of life. Since in our Latin culture we do not approve of nursing homes for the elderly, the single woman has to face her future responsibility to her parents and their need for support. If the family has other children, and they are married, everyone takes for granted that the single woman is the one who is responsible for her parents.

When we talk about the working woman, we must remember that the Latin woman does not necessarily work outside the home. She is so courageous that she thinks of creative ways of doing something in her home, to help the family's budget. The small industry is very common in the Latin home. In the front room she may set up a small store, knit, cook or make ceramics. Among the ethnic groups, she sits on the floor, spending hours weaving the beautiful tapestries which her husband will later sell in the market place.

Often the great expectation of the single woman who works outside the home is that when she marries, her husband will help her with responsibilities in the home, and together they will carry the load. Nothing may be further from the truth. When she marries, she may **p. 341** find an altogether different situation. There are very few Latin men who help bathe the children, care for them, cook, or clean the house. To the Latin man, to do that is to do work beneath himself. If the evangelical church could include in its discipleship programmes good, solid, Bible-centred and realistic pre-marital counselling, it would help to minimize the problems caused by this tradition.

The political violence in Latin countries has made a victim of the Latin woman. The future is not very promising. A woman expects to be happy, but she soon faces the absence

and even death of her husband. Since she has several children, she must leave them to go to work. All too frequently, because of her lack of schooling she is unable to find a good job and must rely on prostitution. In other cases, the need pressures her to become a beggar, to live in subhuman conditions, or to steal. Her priority is always the same: her children's welfare.

In Latin America, social standing is very important and social differences are well established. There is a strong emergent middle class. A woman who belongs to this emergent social class wants to prove to the world that she can outshine men in her job outside the home. Her personal frustrations in her marriage, or in staying single, press her into great effort in her work, often causing disintegration of her home. In some parts of the Latin world there is still a possibility of finding domestic help for the home. The mother finds it easy to leave the children under the care of the maids, and they become the ones who are educating the next generation.

## **THE IMPACT OF THE GOSPEL ON LATIN WOMEN**

Among Christian evangelical women, it has been very encouraging to see the changing power of the Gospel. When they come to know Christ and his Word, they have become convinced that the Lord wants them to fulfil their ministry in the home. Many have made adjustments in their home budgets in order to dedicate themselves to homemaking. Of course, in most of these cases, the husband and father also knows Christ and is ready to obey his Word.

One of the great influences that the evangelical church could have on Latin governments is to demand that existing laws protecting women be enforced. Serious social injustices often give more protection to the man than to the woman. Not infrequently the man who has a mistress protects and supports her better than he does his own wife, the mother of his children.

The Latin woman is beginning to hope for better things in the future. She has always lived with hope. In many social circles women are [p. 342](#) already talking about retirement, a concept that was never mentioned before. Also, we are beginning to see women appointed to important public offices, serving in the community, and making their influence felt in many places. There are fewer situations of racial and salary discrimination now.

It is very encouraging to see the increasing number of evangelical women who wish to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and with his power, to be examples to the next generation. We do not fear the future; we want only to be treated with honour and dignity. There are many roles in which God is using Latin women. We need to encourage our pastors and leaders to include in their biblical teaching a solid instruction concerning man's role as a Christian husband and father. He should be taught his responsibility as head of the home. He needs to understand that he should minister to his wife and faithfully fulfil the priesthood God has entrusted to him.

Conflicting expectations? Maybe. Changing rules? Yes. But above all this, there is a sure and firm hope that God is using Latin women to accomplish great things, both personally and spiritually.

---

**Mrs Beatriz Zapata was Executive Secretary for the Commission on Women's Concerns of the World Evangelical Fellowship. She lives in Guatemala. [p. 343](#)**