

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 20

Volume 20 • Number 4 • October 1996

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*

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Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

patriarchalism of Christian Scriptures, from benighted Jewish and Christian traditions. As a former full-time liberator, I know from experience how mesmerizing this enchantment can be.

When the liberated have virtually no immune system against heresy, no defence whatever against perfidious teaching, no criteria for testing out the legitimacy of counterfeit theological currency, it is time for feet-on-the-ground laity to enter the arena of bureaucratic church reform, and reinvent church governance, polity, and theological education. Laity are beginning to grasp that they have a decisive interest in the apostolicity of the ministries they are asked to trust.

It is now clear that a worldview is ebbing, perhaps not yet wholly extinct, but lacking all vitality, and awaiting only the lingering death process of these failed ideologies: autonomous individualism, narcissistic hedonism, reductive naturalism, and absolute moral relativism. Others may call that world something other than terminal modernity, but I have no better way of naming it. What is happening amid this historical situation is a joyous return to the sacred texts of Christian Scripture and the consensual exegetical guides of the formative period of its canonization and interpretation. Young fogeys, the mod-surviving paleo-orthodox, are those who, having entered in good faith into the disciplines of the modern university, and having become disillusioned with its illusions, are again studying the texts of the ancient Christian [p. 311](#) tradition which point to the word of God revealed in history as attested by prophetic and apostolic witnesses whose testimonies have become perennial authoritative scripture for this worldwide, multicultural, multigenerational remembering and celebrating community.

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Mañana: Discerning the Spirit in Latin America

Samuel Escobar

DISCERNING THE SPIRIT

The end of the century finds Latin American societies in the throes of yet another painful transition. Gone are the dreams of revolutions that were going to engender social utopias. The libertarian rhetoric of liberation theologies has become empty. Instead of lawyers and *literati*, pragmatic economists and engineers now lead these countries through the hard road of accommodation for survival within the strictures of global Market Economies in a unipolar world. Military dictatorships and four digit inflation are gone, and many state enterprises have been privatized, but there is more unemployment, the cities look more crowded and there are more children begging in the streets. In some countries the ideological terror of the guerrillas and the armed forces has been replaced

by a daily hyperdose of American TV violence via satellite, and the actual violence of drug traffickers and common criminals.

Against this background of social and political transformation there is an explosion of religious activity that has taken social scientists, Christian leaders and theologians by surprise. Part of the picture is determined by the long encounter between Iberian Catholicism and Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, a mutual challenge to renewal and relevance that developed during this century. When in almost every city you find old theatres converted into Evangelical worship places, and when Catholic priests from Spain or the United States imitate the open air preaching techniques or the healing services of Pentecostal pastors, you know that something new is taking place. Another part of the picture however is the coming of a wider religious pluralism—academic foundations sponsor the revival of pre-Hispanic witchcraft and both Catholics and Evangelicals have to compete with Afro-Brazilian Spiritists and New Age militants to get air time on TV. Thus theological categories developed by Liberation theologies and Evangelical missiologies are quickly becoming obsolete and outdated for those who are searching for pastoral discernment in order to understand what is going on. [p. 313](#)

I think theologians in Latin America today find themselves perplexed and full of questions like John the Baptist in prison: history was not happening the way he expected, but Jesus' answer to his question was a simple call to consider the facts: 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk ... and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me; ([Mt. 11:4-6](#)). Today, theologians are also invited to look at the facts of an emerging 'Third Church'¹—the emerging church of the poor, or oral theology, narrative preaching, dreams and visions, signs and wonders and transformative spiritual power which at given points does far more for the poor than the elaborate social agendas of traditional denominations. Perhaps in North and South the time has come for theologians to do at a global scale what Richard Mouw calls 'Consulting the faithful', i.e. intellectuals learning from popular religion.²

Latin American Evangelical theology developed in the '70s and '80s following a two pronged theological approach³—a *critical task*, including an ongoing debate with the two predominant interlocutors: Liberation theologies on the left and Church Growth missiology on the right; and a *constructive task* of developing a theology of mission that would express the dynamic reality and the missionary thrust of Evangelical churches in Latin America. The aim was to provide a solid biblical basis for new patterns of evangelism and discipleship. The frame for this theological reflection was the historical development of churches that enjoyed the heritage of a Bible-centred form of presence and mission, committed to spiritual and social transformation. This theology was developed by people who were all engaged in active evangelistic, teaching and pastoral tasks in Latin America or the Hispanic world of the USA. To the degree that Evangelical theology remained close to the life of these growing churches it took a unique missiological and holistic thrust, dealing with both poverty and justice as well as evangelization.

¹ The expression was coined by missiologist Walbert Bülman to describe the new global church, contrasting it with the dominant Eastern Church of the first thousand years of our era and the dominant Western Church of the millennium now coming to an end.

² Richard Mouw, *Consulting the Faithful* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

³ See my chapter 'The Search for a Missiological Christology in Latin America' in William A. Dymess, Ed., *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), pp. 199–227.

In this phase the thrust of theological reflection was Christological, whose point of entrance was missiology. For both Liberation and Evangelical theologies, the basic question was 'What is the mission of the church in Latin America today?' The existence of the church was a 'given', and all questions about God, human beings, history and Jesus Christ were posed from the ground of this initial reality about which there is no doubt. In their theological reflection, however, Evangelicals saw the existence of their churches as a result of the proclamation of God's Word from Scripture. ^{p. 314} Catholics who have been here longer insisted upon the precedence of the church through whom the Word of Scripture has been given.

At this point, however, five years before the beginning of a new century, the question has taken a new turn. The question is still missiological but the setting has changed. The frame of liberation discourse was the fact that officially the Roman Catholic Church had made an 'option for the poor', avowedly placing herself besides the masses and away from the dominant elites. That was a challenge not only for Catholics but also for Protestants of every kind. But what has become evident in the '90s is that the poor masses in Latin America are opting for the popular Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which have been growing at a significant pace and becoming more visible actors in society.⁴

Posing it in its simplest form, the theological question becomes a search for discernment: 'Are these new facts the work of the Holy Spirit?' The question can be expressed in a threefold manner. First, is the emergence of these new forms of popular Protestantism a sign of God's Spirit moving within the social realities of our times? Is this the new wine of the Spirit reviving his church from below? This would be the pneumatological question. Second, are the new structures of mission, new forms of worship and new ways of communication typical of this popular Protestantism, the new wineskins that the Spirit will use in the century to come? This would be the ecclesiological question. Third, is this religious revival going to bring transformation so that the evil forces that are disintegrating post-modern societies will be controlled and human life preserved? This is the eschatological question.

THE PNEUMATOLOGICAL QUESTION

While discussions about issues such as sanctification, the need for a second experience, glossolalia, the place of healing and miracles, were central to the daily ministry of those who were the main actors in the Pentecostal movement and its precursors, it is only in the second half of this twentieth century that theologians have started to deal seriously with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and Christian mission

One important line of reflection came from missiologists. In fact all through this century, the theology of mission has been pursuing the pneumatological. But it was the amazing growth of the Pentecostal movement, that was missionary from its inception that eventually forced the question into the corridors and debates of the academic world, and

⁴ In this essay I will be referring to 'Evangelical' and 'Pentecostal' churches that have been growing especially among the poor urban masses, and I will use the terms interchangeably. A better way of describing them is 'popular Protestantism'. In some cases I will refer specifically to Pentecostals.

the Pentecostal movement in itself p. 315 became a vast field for research and experimentation.⁵

Evangelical theology in Latin America has not yet explored in a systematic way the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in relation to the existence and mission of the Protestant churches there. I ask myself, why it is that as Evangelical theologians in Latin America we did not place the Holy Spirit higher in our agenda? Could it be that Evangelical dialogue at a global scale imposed a 'modern' agenda on us, in which the role of the Holy Spirit is mainly to help us to arrive at correct propositional truth? The only references to the Holy Spirit in the 'Declaration of Cochabamba', the foundational document of the LATF in 1970, are references to the role of the Spirit in illuminating the Word in order to help us interpret Scripture. That is very 'Evangelical' indeed. However, we have not even one sentence about the Spirit empowering his church for mission and mobilizing all church members for a true priesthood of all believers.⁶ In other words, there is no reflection about that living dimension of our own reality. While the Holy Spirit was driving the rank and file of popular Protestant churches to mission so that they grew in a spectacular way, Evangelical theologians were unaware of the importance of reflection on their own practice as a way of doing theology.

Ironically, in recent times Catholic theologians may have come to our rescue. In a book about the Holy Spirit, Belgian priest José Comblin who has worked for several years in Brazil describes the renewal experiences that have been taking place in the Catholic Base Communities and in the Pentecostal churches. He refers not only to what we call charismatic gifts, but to the sense of freedom that simple men and women experience when they can speak the words of Scripture, praise God aloud in a meeting, face adversity and enemies with a new sense of dignity. He writes, 'People feel themselves taken hold of by new strength that makes them do things they had never thought of doing. Individuals and communities that had been downhearted, lacking in dynamism, resigned to the endless struggle for survival, discover themselves to be protagonists of a history far greater than themselves. Most members of a community would not know how to say that they are experiencing the Spirit; they do not know what names to give to what they experience. But those who do know the names can confirm the reality of the phenomenon.'⁷

It is understandable that a Catholic theologian may attribute the emergence of Base Communities to the work of the Holy Spirit. But for him to include the emergence of popular Protestant churches as part p. 316 of the work of the Holy Spirit today is a significant step. The question however is whether Evangelical theologians are as open as Comblin to see the Holy Spirit at work in this emergence of popular forms of Christianity in Latin America.

The explicit teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of [John 14–16](#) gives us a Christological key to discern the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. If the truth about Jesus Christ comes to be understood by people so that they come to the Father through him, and if the character of Jesus Christ is reflected in their lives, there we can discern the presence of the Spirit. Here we are at the core of the Christian identity and we have a good foundation, a common ground which is a cornerstone. This is especially important in our century,

⁵ Murray Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, Eds, *Called and Empowered, Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991).

⁶ More attention should be paid at this point to the missiological reflection of Kenneth Strachan and the 'Evangelism in Depth' movement. See his book *The Inescapable Calling* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968).

⁷ José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis); p. 20.

when the Christian church has become global and contextual in an astonishing variety of forms.

Some corrections to our perspectives come when we start to develop this principle. Coming from his Pentecostal background, Argentinian Norberto Saracco has pointed out the need to use the categories of the kingdom of God, in order to understand the missionary model of Jesus Christ. The Gospels make it very clear that Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, engaged in a ministry that from the start faced opposition. The source of conflict was the fact that Jesus' ministry touched all aspects of life. The material and spiritual needs of people were not seen as mutually exclusive. The evil spirits that oppressed people resisted Jesus, but resistance came also from those persons or social groups which had political or religious power and were oppressing the people. Today's mission in Latin America confronts also the powers of darkness in the form of spiritual as well as economic and social oppression, and needs the same empowering that made possible the mission of Jesus.

The task of the theologian is to recover a biblical dimension of the gospel as the gospel of the kingdom and to learn to see how the Holy Spirit today transforms persons in all the dimensions of their humanity.

Recovering faith in post-modern societies

In Latin American societies, the pre-modern, the modern and the post-modern coexist within the confines of the same city. The theological task of understanding, expressing and communicating the Christian faith within this kind of environment is a continuing call to renewal, creativity and boldness. Theology must be driven by a missiological thrust and a disposition to take seriously the frontiers that the church is constantly crossing.

Evangelical theology has been an effort to keep the missiological thrust and the faithfulness to revealed truth. Our emphasis has not been on a continuity expressed by an earthly hierarchical institution but on a continuity made possible by God's Word revealed to human beings. However, in the contemporary situation I think we need to pay heed to Emil Brunner who wrote, 'It is not merely a question of the continuity of the word—the maintenance of the original doctrine—but [p. 317](#) also of the continuity of a life; that is life flowing from the Holy Ghost. The fellowship of Jesus lives under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; that is the secret of its life, of its communion and of its power.'⁸

While theologians seem to be at home in handling words from the Word and in formulating precise orthodox propositions about the content of the faith, they do not know exactly how to handle the reality of the Holy Spirit at work in the church and in the world. The times call for a new openness to the Spirit.

A new openness to the Holy Spirit

Latin American Evangelicals have considered themselves the inheritors of Luther, Calvin or the Anabaptists. But the dynamism of missionary Protestantism came from the renewal movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And now we realize that we have not been listening to these our fathers in the faith. The readiness of men like Wesley or Zinzendorf to abandon old church structures, and their creativity in developing new structures for mission was made possible because they were open to the movements of the Spirit. An attitude of openness to the Spirit is what Brazilian missiologist Valdir Steuernaegel calls for in his book about *Mission obedience and historical practice: the search*

⁸ Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953); p. 47.

for models.⁹ He observes, 'Mission understood in pneumatological language is one act with two steps. It is first to perceive the blow of the Spirit and the direction from which it comes. And then it is to run in the same direction towards which the Spirit is blowing.'¹⁰

The discernment of the wind from the Spirit requires an open attitude and sensitivity to acknowledge that behind facts that appear as something new and unusual, the strength and vigour of the Spirit may be at work. The act of obedience demands creativity in order to shape new structures that will be adequate instruments for missionary action in a particular historical moment.

Even in the Pauline missionary practice we find the same discernible pattern. Paul's Christology is the development of pastoral, doctrinal and ethical teaching that stems from the fact of Christ. Paul elaborates his Christology as he responds to the needs and the questions of churches which were born from the Spirit and had the signs of new life, but had not yet articulated their belief in a meaningful way. What we have in the world today are churches in which people may repeat every week the minutiae of a Christological creed but they do not have the new life in Christ that the Spirit begets. On the other hand we have growing churches where there are the signs of the power of the Spirit at work but where a basic theological p. 318 task is necessary, along the lines of what Paul did in his ministry. The approach must be the one that Gordon Fee sets for himself in his massive study about the Holy Spirit in Paul: 'Not only has the coming of Christ changed everything for Paul, so too has the coming of the Spirit. In dealing with the Spirit, we are dealing with none other than the *personal presence of God* himself.'¹¹

As we look back to historical models and as we also look around us to what is taking place in churches around the world, we realize the need to keep in mind the uniqueness of our time and the larger picture of the history of the church.

With that kind of perspective Andrew Walls keeps reminding us that the expressions of Christianity of the southern hemisphere (Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and to some degree Latin America) are becoming the dominant forms of the faith, a fact that will have significant consequences, as missiologist Lesslie Newbigin has observed. Pointing to some deadlocks in the ecumenical conversation of the '50s between Catholics and Protestants he wondered if 'the way forward may be found in a new understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. But of course that illumination which is needed will never come as a result of purely academic theological study. May it not be that the great Churches of the Catholic and the Protestant traditions will have to be humble enough to receive it in fellowship with their brethren in the various groups of the Pentecostal type with whom at present they have scarcely any fellowship at all?'¹²

This is the kind of dialogue that has been taking place recently in the doing of theology in Latin America, but it still has a long way to go.

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL QUESTION

In his missiological reflection, the late Orlando Costas summarized well the variety of theological concerns that Evangelical theologizing faced and developed after Lausanne

⁹ Valdir R. Stuernage, *Obediencia missionária e prática histórica. Em busca de modelos* (Sao Paulo: ABU Editora, 1993).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 92.

¹¹ Gordon D Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: the Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994); pp. 6 and 9.

¹² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of Faith* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), p. 122.

1974. He tried to articulate a vision of what he called 'the integrity of mission' through an approach that was both critical and constructive. In his posthumous book *Liberating News* he posed the need for a contextual evangelistic practice, stating, 'we have been arguing not so much for a new type of evangelization as for a new way of understanding and practising contextual evangelization. This implies a socio-historical approach to the biblical roots of evangelization, a communal theological ground and an ecclesial vision informed by the theological and social base of the church.'¹³

The missiological thrust of some recent lines of New Testament p. 319 scholarship is demonstrating the relevance of the agenda described here by Costas, and the deepening of our understanding of the early church as a result of what he calls a socio-historical approach to our biblical roots.¹⁴ Anthropological and socio-logical research about the Mediterranean basin in the first century has illuminated the context of the New Testament so that we perceive better the nature, means and effects of mission in its apostolic stage, the worldviews of the main actors in that drama, the way in which the fact of Christ impacted human history at that point.¹⁵ In a similar way, the social sciences have helped to provide a better understanding of the present sociohistorical context in Latin America.

Ecclesiology and social analysis

One way in which the social sciences contribute to the work of the theologian is by providing a better understanding of the church as a social group and of the functioning of the structures of the church. The data gathered by social scientists about the way in which churches function as communities becomes an eye-opener for the theologian.

In the case of Latin America the growth of the popular Protestant churches has made them the object of a sometimes hostile scrutiny from social scientists. Earlier work from sociologists about popular Protestant churches showed some characteristics that are very important from the ecclesiological perspective, especially how the participation of the people was facilitated and through this there developed a liberating experience which enabled simple men and women to practise the priesthood of all believers.

One of the earliest sociological analyses of Pentecostals in Brazil and Chile was the work of Emilio Willems.¹⁶ He stressed the participative nature of Pentecostal liturgy and congregational life, for which literacy or education were not necessary but only a disposition to be touched by the power of the Holy Spirit. His analysis pointed to the significance of the *tomada do Espirito* or 'seizure by the Spirit' that 'puts a seal of divine approval on the individual who can now be elected or appointed to any office'.¹⁷ The seizure as a form of legitimation had to be validated also by energetic and successful proselytism. p. 320

¹³ Orlando Costas, *Liberating News* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); p. 148.

¹⁴ Here I am thinking of the work pioneered by E.A. Judge in his book *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the New Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1960); and also of the work of A.J. Malherbe, Wayne Meeks and Gerd Theissen.

¹⁵ An extensive bibliography on this point is Jean Duhaime, 'Early Christianity and the Social Sciences: A Bibliography' *Social Compass* 39 (2), (1992); pp. 275–290. In relation to the missiological use of this material see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991); Chapter 1.

¹⁶ E. Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967; 'Protestantism and Cultural Change in Brazil and Chile' in W.V. D'Antonio and F.B. Pike, Eds., *Religion, Revolution and Reform* (New York: Prager, 1964); pp. 93–108.

¹⁷ Willems, *Followers ...*; p. 106–107.

It became evident that this experience had an integrative effect, allowing thousands of persons from the lower social classes to become part of an organized group in which they could enter in community, contribute what they had to offer and receive affirmation, comfort and a sense of belonging. The seizure experience had also an egalitarian effect, because participation in the community did not require the symbols of status like money, social rank, education or even verbal articulateness. What started at the level of liturgical participation could also be extended to the level of decision-making processes in the community.,

The work of Karl Wilhelm Westmeier¹⁸ a missionary and theologian in Colombia and Puerto Rico is an example of how sociological data such as this provides the basis for missiological understanding and criteria.

Ecclesiology and political ethics

The numerical growth of Pentecostals fostered upward mobility and created conditions that brought the political question to the foreground of sociological observation and theological reflection. Willems' analysis demonstrated the sociological potential of conversion to Pentecostalism that included an emphasis on some marks of character as indication of 'the change of Life'. As Westmeier develops the point, this important component of the Pentecostal message was considered an evidence of the redeeming power of Christ. As in the case of evangelical protestants, Pentecostals presented the convert with specific prohibitions against the use of alcohol and tobacco. But what was especially significant in the Pentecostal practice was that the prohibitions were accompanied by the strong emphasis on an emotional experience of conversion, a seizure from God's power, that in some cases was the key point of breaking away from the old habits like alcoholism, prevalent among the popular classes of the urban world.

In the Pentecostal experience the ascetic lifestyle included in conversion was also accompanied by a celebrative form of worship and communal life that was a great aid to endurance among the converted. This change of lifestyle had also economic and social consequences in the improvement of housing conditions and eating habits. Savings were generated and sometimes matched with a newly discovered ability for entrepreneurship that brought upward mobility, 'The economic significance of Protestant asceticism lies in the fact that it frees part of one's income for the acquisition of things that symbolize a higher level of living.'¹⁹

Prompted into political action by numerical growth and upward mobility, Evangelicals had to pay attention to the theological task of [p. 321](#) reflecting about politics. During the '70s such evangelical reflection was set within the theological frame of the kingdom of God.²⁰ Later on, a consultation in 1983 tackled the issue of political power,²¹ and Latin American Evangelicals involved in the political arena of their countries brought a new

¹⁸ Karl Wilhelm Westmeier, *Reconciling Heaven and Earth. The Transcendental Enthusiasm and Growth of an Urban Protestant Community, Bogotá, Colombia* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986).

¹⁹ Willems, 'Protestantism and cultural change ...', p. 251.

²⁰ A starting point was C. René Padilla, Ed., *El Reino de Dios y América Latina* (El Paso: CBP, 1975).

²¹ See Pablo Deiros, Ed., *Los evangélicos y el poder político* (Grand Rapids-Buenos Aires: Eerdmans-Nueva Creación, 1986).

agenda to theological reflection.²² In the consultation to celebrate 20 years of the LATF two theological themes about which there was intentional reflection were 'justice' and 'power'. In the series of consultations that preceded this celebration other questions studied were 'poverty' and 'terrorism'. These are not theoretical questions for Latin American Evangelicals. Those writing papers were many times reflecting about their own experiences as politicians, lawyers working in human rights issues, pastors in areas where insurgency and counter-insurgency wars were decimating the population, or denominational leaders who had to provide orientation during presidential elections in which the vote of Evangelicals was decisive.²³

The approach to the issues of justice and power was basically Christological in the work of Padilla, which developed from the eschatological dimension of his Christology. This was operative in his critical evaluation of culture, and the understanding of the forces hostile to the kingdom of God that presently enslave human beings and tend to undermine the church's identity and distort her mission. There is an Antichrist at work in the world, that has to be named and unmasked at the same time as Jesus Christ is proclaimed as Lord.²⁴

The Christological key is also very important when we look inside the structures of the churches. If the final outcome of their ministry is lives shaped by the example of Jesus Christ and by growth in demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit we have in them valuable missiological lessons. In order to refine our Christological evaluation socio-historical analysis provides help in understanding what is really taking place in the life inside these popular churches, and in their projection outside to the societies of which they are a part.

In the countries where the growth of popular Protestantism has been more visible sociological analysis has been able to follow up the evolution of these churches. We have now valuable studies covering several decades in Chile and Brazil. In recent years Evangelical theologians have developed a more sophisticated socio-theological research in p. 322 an effort to probe into the social life of the churches and their structures, relating facts to beliefs.²⁵

Paul Freston from Brazil is the scholar who has conducted the most exhaustive and systematic scrutiny of Brazilian Pentecostalism and its expressions in relation to politics.²⁶ Summarizing data from a variety of sources he concludes that 'the new evangelical political participants in Brazil do not have a project; they only feel, and perhaps justifiably, that the future belongs to them.'²⁷ This is in open contrast with the beginning of this century in which Protestantism presented itself as the carrier of modernization.

²² An account and evaluation of this process in my articles in the special issue of *Boletín Teológico*, Nos.42/43, 1991. More recent events are presented in C. René Padilla, 'Latin American Evangelicals Enter the Public Square' *Transformation* Vol. 9, No.3, (1992).

²³ See samples of testimonies and reflection in an already mentioned issue of *Transformation* Vol. 9, No.3, (Jul-Set 1992).

²⁴ See especially *Mission Between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

²⁵ For Chile, see Humberto Lagos Schuffeneger, *Crisis de la esperanza* (Santiago de Chile: Presor-Lar, 1988); see also Westmeier above.

²⁶ His doctoral dissertation *Protestantes e politica no Brasil: da Constituinte ao Impeachment* (Universidade de Campinas, 1993); soon to be published by Editora Sumaré, Sao Paulo) was the basis for his book *Evangélicos na politica brasileira; História ambigua e desafio ético* Curitiba: (Encontro Editora, 1994).

²⁷ 'In Search of an Evangelical Political Project for Brazil: a Pentecostal "Showvention" ' *Transformation* Vol. 9, No.3; p. 30.

However, an analysis of the activities of current Pentecostal politicians suggests that they seem to be lending to the worst kind of political conservatism 'the phenomenal contribution of (their) cultural and rhetorical resources, and enviable human and organizational base resources'.²⁸ Moreover, they have fallen into corrupt political practices that non-Evangelicals have been eager to criticize.

What Freston describes as the lack of a project to guide the political action of Pentecostals is rooted in an extremely individualistic understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. Hence, he stresses the need of Evangelicals in Brazil to work seriously in ethical issues that are challenging them at this point.

He uses the three temptations that the devil presents to Jesus as a key to understand the temptations faced now by the large Pentecostal churches in Brazil. They are permanent temptations for the church in every age. The temptation to possess the kingdoms of the world and their splendour is the temptation of triumphalism, the search for visibility. The temptation to transform stones into bread is the temptation posed by Prosperity Theology, a hedonistic gospel. And the temptation to throw himself from the top of the temple is the temptation of the so-called 'Spiritual Warfare' to impress the world by a demonstration of power. These temptations militate against the urgent ethical renewal that the popular churches in Brazil need.²⁹ They must be faced in the name of Jesus and with the power of the Spirit.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL QUESTION

One of the most important aspects of the Christian situation in Latin America is the change in the perception of history now that the **P.323** marxist utopia has come to an end, which had a powerful influence during this second half of our century. In fact one of the distinctive notes of Liberation Theologies was their use of marxist categories for social analysis, historical criticism and the formulation of a political project.³⁰ Not enough has been said about how much of the liberation discourse was based on the assumption or hope that world history was moving towards socialism. The party line for catholic and ecumenical theologians was expressed succinctly by a Lutheran theologian from Argentina: 'At this point of historical circumstances the fundamental contradiction which confronts us involves North American imperialism and its local accomplices.'³¹ The solution to the problem was defined not so much in terms of a viable proposal for a different kind of society, but through the negative way of dialectics, 'The path toward the liberation of Latin America will not lead through the capitalistic system, but will be anti-capitalistic and anti-imperialistic.'³²

In those days when Russia, China, Cuba and later on Nicaragua were depicted as good models of alternative societies, the political programme of 'liberation' was usually

²⁸ *Ibid.*; p. 29;

²⁹ Freston, *Evangélicos na Política* ... p. 138-140.

³⁰ For a self-critical account from a liberationist perspective see Arthur F. McGovern, SJ, 'Dependency Theory, Marxist Analysis and Liberation Theology', in Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro, Eds., *Expanding the View, Gustavo Gutiérrez and the Future of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

³¹ Mario Yutzis, 'The Revolutionary Process and Latin American Christianity', *Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 22, No.1, (1970); p. 19.

³² *Ibid.*

described in terms of the search for some kind of 'socialist' project.³³ However everything, from Sunday School material to curriculum in theological schools, from liturgical practices to missionary methods came to be evaluated from this anticapitalist pro-socialist perspective.³⁴ The history of the church was therefore reinterpreted from the perspective of that general movement of history and a certain 'political correctness' criterium was developed in order to evaluate churches and religious movements.

Such an approach to the churches of the poor by sociologists and theologians did not allow them to perceive the historical significance of the multiplication of these churches around the world, and its social impact. This is better perceived now that observers and scholars have had to come to terms with the fact that in spite of all good theory and good intentions many actions in favour of the poor were tainted by a paternalistic approach. Social and political conscientization took the form of a struggle *for* the poor, p. 324 trying to create a more just society *for* them rather than *with* them. Historical churches connected to world communities and denominational families had access to funds, foreign press and even diplomatic ties that were used in an effort to help the victims of poverty or state terrorism. Sacrificial inculturation among the poor was many times the source of these efforts, but they failed in mobilizing the poor themselves. By contrast, the popular Protestant churches are popular movements in themselves. Their pastors and leaders do not have to identify with the poor, *they are the poor*. They do not have a social agenda but an intense spiritual agenda and it is through that agenda that they have been able to have a social impact.

The dynamic of this movement of the poor was better perceived by missiologists and that perception has been refined more recently. Costas provided a theological key when he focused on the significance of mission as coming from the 'periphery', from the marginalized people. He considers carefully the Galilean base of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Mark and concludes that the deliberate choice of Galilee is a key 'not only to understanding Mark but also to recovering and interpreting Jesus' evangelistic legacy'.³⁵ In Costas' use the term 'periphery' means not only the region of Galilee that was on the fringes of the Palestinian Jewish world, but also the kind of people who were the first disciples, not only from the respectable classes of Israel but especially from the outsiders and the marginals. Thus Mark's emphasis provides a clue of universal value when we look at evangelization and the Christian mission.

'If evangelization starts on the periphery of society, if it works from the bottom up, the good news of God's kingdom is vividly demonstrated and credibly announced as a message of liberating love, justice and peace. When the Gospel makes "somebody" out of "nobodies" in society, when it restores the self-worth of the marginalized, when it enables the oppressed to have a reason for hope, when it empowers the poor to struggle and suffer for justice and peace, then it is truly good news of a new order of life. When evangelization begins at the centres of power, working from the top down, its content usually ends up

³³ There was a more sophisticated development beyond the simplistic categories of the '70s. José Miguez Bonino offers a discussion of this socialist historical project using key ideas from Gustavo Gutiérrez as well as his own. See *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

³⁴ I have analyzed the influence of the marxist utopia on historical and theological discourse in my book *La fe evangélica y las teologías de la liberación* (El Paso: CBP, 1987), and in *Liberation Themes in Reformational Perspective*.

³⁵ Costas, *Liberating News*; p. 49.

being an easy and cheap accommodation of the vested interests of the mighty and wealthy.’³⁶

We may well place the growth of popular Protestantism in Latin America within the larger frame of the shift of Christianity to the south, ‘the south’ meaning in this case not only Asia, Africa and Latin America, but also the enclaves of poverty and marginalization in the rich nations of Europe and North America, all places in which churches are growing. That ‘periphery’ is going to be the base for mission in the coming century and we have not yet explored all the theological significance of this possibility. At the end of the imperial age of mission in p. 325 which the gospel was presented from above by Spanish conquistadores or followed too closely the European colonial pattern, the Third Church is carrying on mission from below—Gipsies in Spain, Filipino maids in the Muslim countries, illegal immigrants in the United States, African university students in Europe. Here also the truth about the Holy Spirit offers us fertile territory for theological exploration.

The spirituality of Mañana

The way in which eschatology relates to a renewed biblical understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit from the perspective of the emerging churches of the poor has been forcefully presented by Justo L. González in his beautiful book *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*. In his chapter about ‘Life in the Spirit’ he addresses the deeply felt malaise that affects many mainline Protestant denominations in North America, and discards the easy prescriptions that look for structural matters and constitutional revisions as a solution. For him ‘The problem really has to do with the meaning of the Gospel and how we apply it, not only in our individual lives but also in the communal and structural life of the church’, and consequently ‘the solution to our present malaise will not be found until we deal with issues of spirituality and come to a spirituality that is both deeply grounded in Scripture and radically relevant to today’s world.’³⁷

In order to guide us through the understanding of biblical spirituality González insists on a note that permeates his book as he deals with Creation and Christology. He reminds us of the way in which Christian thinking became influenced by Hellenistic religiosity and adopted its contrast between matter and spirit. That distinction, however, is not central to the biblical understanding of reality and should not be at the centre of our understanding of spirituality.

‘The basis for Christian spirituality is not “the spiritual” in the sense of the non-material. The basis for Christian spirituality is the Spirit—the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore in biblical parlance one is “spiritual” not because one is primarily concerned with “spiritual” things in contrast to the “material” but because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. A “spiritual person” is not one who flexes and develops his or her spirit, as an athlete flexes and develops muscles, but one in whom the Spirit of the Lord dwells.’³⁸

As we look at the totality of Scripture, from creation to consummation, all that God has done, is doing, and will do, is done through the Spirit. There is here a discontinuity because the spirit of the world sees only ‘that which naturally follows from the present order, while the Spirit of God allows us to see “what has been bestowed to us” ([1 Cor. 2:12](#)), the coming Reign, the new order, our inheritance, the promise.’³⁹ p. 326

³⁶ *ibid.* p. 62.

³⁷ *ibid.* p. 157.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 158.

³⁹ *ibid.*; p. 160.

What González finds in the Book of Acts is that ‘part of the function of the Spirit is to allow the believing community to live already, at least partially, in the “not yet” of the Reign’.⁴⁰ ‘On this basis, being “spiritual” means living out of the future we have been promised, precisely because that promise has been sealed and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. What this means is that Christian spirituality that is based not on our own “spiritual” or “soulish” powers but on the presence of the Holy Spirit—is eschatological in nature. It is future-oriented. It is life lived out on an expectation, out of a hope and a goal. And that goal is the coming Reign of God. To have the Spirit is to have a foot up on the stirrup of the eschatological future and to live now as those who expect a new reality, the coming of the Reign of God.’⁴¹

What González proposes is a stance and a theology that can well be described by the Spanish word *Mañana*. This word does not only mean ‘tomorrow’, but it is the radical questioning of today; it is a time unlike today, ‘it is a time of a new reality, not the outcome of today’s disorderly order but the outcome of other factors that bring about a breach with an unbearable today’. Gambling or drugs are the ways in which some poor people try to get into that *mañana*.

‘Then there are those who capture the *mañana* vision of Scripture. The world will not always be as it is. It will not even be an outgrowth of what is. God who created the world in the first place is about to do a new thing—a thing as great and as surprising as that first act of creation. God is already doing this new thing, and we can join in it by the power of the Spirit. *Mañana* is here! True, *mañana* is not yet today, but today can be lived out of the glory and the promise of *mañana*, thanks to the power of the Spirit.’⁴²

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Faith Transforming Context: in Search of a Theology for a Viable Caribbean

Dieumene Noëlliste

INTRODUCTION

Christian faith is a ferment of transformation. What it seeks to achieve first and foremost is the transformation of reality in accordance with God’s ideal for life. Its aim is the removal of what is and its replacement by what ought to be ([2. Cor.5:17](#); [Rev. 21:3–5](#)).

Now the shift from the real to the ideal does not occur by fiat or instantly; rather it involves a process whose completion is eschatological. But the gradualness of faith’s

⁴⁰ *ibid.*; p. 162.

⁴¹ *ibid.*; p. 163.

⁴² *ibid.*; p. 164.