

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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obedience of faith*

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The National Council of Churches in India representing over 20 million Christians greets all people of our nation on the eve of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Independence with the following message.

We remember with gratitude and thanksgiving

- the life and sacrifice of the freedom fighters and martyrs of yesteryears.
- the great national leaders, religious leaders and Christian missionaries who gave their life and guided our nation.
- those unsung men and women who laboured and continue to labour for bringing Justice and Peace.
- the Jawans (soldiers) who sacrifice their lives in safeguarding the security of our country in eternal vigilance and the Kisans (farmers) who sustain the life of our nation.
- the salient provisions of our Constitution, the Democratic values on which the life of our nation is founded, and those who are involved in the governance of our country.

### **WE REPENT**

- the negligence of duties related to our communities and our nation.
- the mistakes of the past and seek God's forgiveness to fulfill the mission of Christ in the world which he loved and be a sign of hope for our motherland.

### **WE COMMIT OURSELVES**

- to the development of our nation through elimination of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment.
- to fight against corruption in the churches, society and governments.
- to support and express our solidarity to all the efforts of the government in upholding human rights, communal harmony, and the vision of a welfare State.
- to build up communities of Peace and Justice through propagating and practising the message of love and peace.
- to the practice of participatory democracy, secularism and freedom with responsibility.

### **WE DEDICATE OURSELVES**

- to fully participate in nation building so that our country will continue to develop as a land which will be the model of the Kingdom of God. To that end may God help us!

## **The Lordship of Christ and Political Ideologies**

# Valdir R Steuernagel

The author argues that the Church's confession of the Lordship of Christ in history and in the Church is not an ideological statement, but neither is it ideologically neutral. However, the public confession of Christ demands ideological mediation if it is going to be coherent and relevant in each and every historical context. The Lordship of Christ relativizes lordship to Caesar and all other gods and demands that affirmations of faith are consistent with life in community and justice and love in the world. The author discusses the failure of socialist ideology in Latin America and in Eastern Europe and warns against the alternative of oppressive capitalist ideologies. The Church's strength lies in its vulnerability.

Editor

But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard' ([Acts 4:19–20](#)).

## THE BREAKDOWN OF THE WALLS OF IDEOLOGY

In the seventies and eighties, especially in Latin America, 'ideology' became a kind of catchword in many theological circles. If there was a theological conversation it had to be brought in. In a superficial statement, the word became a tool to denounce western theology and western capitalism and to feed the utopia of a socialist society.

During the nineties, there were signs that people were becoming tired of this subject. But, more than this, there were major historical developments, especially in Eastern Europe but also in China and Nicaragua. It became impossible to continue to denounce the conservative ideologies from the North and to dream of revolution within a socialist framework. Almost all of the self-entitled 'socialist regimes' had broken down and no longer entered into the dreams of any utopia.

Hence, a remaining and very important question is, how to interpret the recent historical developments and how to relate them to the discussion about ideology? However, let me be very clear by saying that I do not share Francis Fukuyama's 'illusion' when he speaks about 'the end of history'.<sup>1</sup> Neither do I think that theologians or Christians in general can conclude that it is time to retire from the discussion about ideology and to concentrate completely on in-house issues. Nor would it be possible for me to join in chorus with those who triumphantly proclaim the victory of capitalism, proclaiming Adam Smith as a king and 'the free market myth' as the royal sceptre.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the danger of radicalization, perceived in the seventies and eighties, where everything at all times and in any place became ideological—an argument for every occasion—there was a richness to the discussion that should not be put aside.

Let us step back and ask two basic questions: (1) What were the basic motives that led so many theologians and church practitioners to incorporate the ideological dimension into their theological discourse and Christian practice? (2) What were the main contributions that this discussion brought to that discourse and practice?

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<sup>1</sup> See Strobe Talbott, 'Terminator 2: Gloom on the Right', in *Time*, January 27, 1992, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Miroslav Volf's paper, 'When the Unclean Spirit Leaves', describes 'the recent Eastern European revolution' as a 'revolution of return': 'The only option was to shift into reverse. So the revolution acquired the character of a restoration. Smith, the realist, was proven right; Marx, the adventurist, had failed. The socialist prodigal son returned in rags, as his older capitalist brother had predicted all along' (p. 3).

## Searching for Motives—Why Talk About Ideology?

In a very simple way it could be said that, in Latin America, the discussion about ideology was related to the conclusion, reached by sectors of the Roman Catholic Church, that they could no longer maintain their traditional alliances with the conservative forces in power, while increasing numbers of the population were becoming not only poor but miserable and many young people and organized workers' associations were embracing revolutionary options of socio-political and economic changes.

The economic and political alternatives officially at hand in the continent were not working but instead produced deep scars of injustice. In spite of the 'Alliance for Progress' slogan, the development model was being recognized as a social failure and the military dictatorships, which were spread all over the continent, had their dirty hands full of blood.

By analyzing this situation, the traditional way of understanding the Christian faith and of doing theology was put under suspicion. A new way of reading the Bible and relating to the struggles of everyday life was asked for, as well as a new way of doing theology. The traditional mediation of philosophy, in the process of doing theology, was recognized as being inadequate. It did not help to uncover and change reality and to establish the necessary bridge between faith and life. Social Sciences, and their tool of analysis, would be much more helpful to the church in understanding its task in the context of the specific reality of poverty, injustice and oppression in Latin America.

Furthermore, by using those tools of interpretation, it was concluded that much of local poverty and many of the patterns of injustice in the Third World had transnational roots. Those roots had not only to be denounced but also eradicated. It is within this context that the Dependency theory was brought into the theological discourse. In David Bosch's words:

*Since the 1950s, however, the mood had been changing in Third World countries themselves, particularly in Latin America. Socio-politically, development was replaced by revolution; ecclesiastically and theologically by liberation theology ... Soon 'liberation' was cropping up everywhere in the ecclesiastical landscape. The opposites we were dealing with were not development and underdevelopment, but domination and dependence, rich and poor, Capitalism and Socialism, oppression and oppressed.<sup>3</sup>*

## Looking for Contributions—Was the Discussion About 'Ideology' Helpful?

To bring the discussion about ideology into the theological field was helpful and not only presented the theologians with new challenges but also enriched the understanding of Christian faith and practice. Let us look into some aspects of such contributions:

a. We are all part of what Guillermo Cook calls 'the ideological game'.<sup>4</sup> While the Christian faith, as an affirmation of the 'Lordship of Christ', is not an ideological statement, the public witness of that faith, in word and deed, does have an ideological flavour. 'To be sure,' says Costas, 'the confession of the lordship of Christ is not an ideological affirmation ... it is acceptance of God's free gift of forgiveness, obedience to Christ's will through the help of the Holy Spirit, and hope in the future revelation of God's kingdom.' However, Costas continues, 'just as it is impossible to talk about our God experiences without

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<sup>3</sup> David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission* (Orbis Books: New York, 1991), p. 434.

<sup>4</sup> Guillermo Cook, 'Ideología y Comunicación Cristiana: Imágenes Bíblicas', p. 14.

religious language, so there cannot be a public confession of Christ without an ideological mediation.’<sup>5</sup>

This ideological mediation occurs not only because the Christian faith is embraced and witnessed about by people and communities with their roots in history, carrying their historical baggage, but also because the Christian commitment to ethical imperatives such as justice, peace and love, demand an ideological mediation in order to be coherent and to become concrete in each and every historical context.<sup>6</sup>

b. To become aware of the impossibility of absolute ideological neutrality is necessary and important. All of us are, consciously or unconsciously, exposed to ideological influence. If we recognize this fact we should, as Cook says, ‘critically revise our own ideological presuppositions’, practising, on a personal and collective level, what has been called the ‘sospecha ideologica’.<sup>7</sup>

c. By applying the criteria of the ‘sospecha ideologica’ to the life and historical activity of the Church, many Christians in the Third World have become aware of the ideological background and influence which has been determining the public witness of the Christian faith; Latin America being an example, as expressed and articulated by the modern missionary movement. Costas says:

*For one thing, third world Christians have become much too aware of the ideological ties between the modern missionary movement and the colonization and exploitation of their countries. For another, they have uncovered the historic economic and ideological ties between Western missionary expansion and the economic interests and military aggression of the United States and its European allies. This has led to a growing suspicion not only of the hidden motives behind a lot of present-day foreign missionary activity and development projects, but especially of the ideological presuppositions in Western theological thought.*<sup>8</sup>

## FROM IDEOLOGICAL ABSOLUTISM TO VULNERABILITY

There are different ways of defining ideology. Referring to political ideologies, Orlando Costas says that ‘a political ideology involves a vision of the future, a coherent interpretation of reality, and a programmatic line of action conducive to the organization of society’.<sup>9</sup> By involving a vision of the future and proceeding towards an interpretation of reality every and each ideological proposition has the virus of relativism and myopia which is inherent to any human production. In other words, the criteria of ‘sospecha ideologica’ must be applied to any and every ideology.

François Chatelet even says that ideology is a cultural production which expresses the viewpoint of a social class or caste. According to this definition, as Cook concludes, ideologies do not have the primordial function of communicating the truth. Ideologies interpret and sustain specific perceptions of reality.<sup>10</sup> As such, they are very important but their importance is relative.

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<sup>5</sup> Orlando Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate. Mission Beyond Christendom* (Orbis Books: New York, 1982), p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> See Costas, p. 121, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> See Cook, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Costas, p. 122, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Costas, p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> Cook, p. 15.

Only a few days ago, the anchorman of a Brazilian nationwide television network said that Fidel Castro is reinstituting in Cuba the practice of the death penalty—the *pared-ao*—which characterized the revolution in its early years. A desperate political act to keep together an old revolution. Furthermore, in this month of February, a group of Brazilian artists, politicians, writers and intellectuals spent a week in Cuba on a solidarity trip. They wanted to make their support of the Cuban revolution very clear—quite a difficult task. The shadow of the *pared-ao* made this act of solidarity very difficult. And there was more. As an act of solidarity each one of the voyagers had to take along thirty-five kilos of medicine. A public mirror of the state of despair of an aging revolution.

Does this short concentration on Cuba mean that the long-standing North American boycott of the small Caribbean island should be supported? Not at all. I'm against the boycott. What I'm trying to say is that the vulnerability of the old revolution can no longer be hidden ... and this is very hard to recognize. The old Christian principle of human relativity and sinfulness is again on the agenda. There is a human tendency to elaborate and implement plans and projects and then be unable to recognize mistakes, exercise the practice of a healthy self-criticism and be open to changes. Ideological options and historical projects do get old and tired and carry with them the virus of death.

The reference to Cuba is just one example of a worldwide ideological crisis. More than an ideological crisis, we face a crisis of hope. The dreams of our youth do not go beyond their effort to get some money, buy a new shirt and go dancing on Saturday night, after having a sandwich at a new local shopping centre. The intelligentsia of our societies are lost and while some of them decide to make money others still travel to Cuba with thirty-five kilograms of medicine.

While this ideological crisis indicates that the emerging generations are frustrated with the proposals of their parents, it also demonstrates a crisis of the modern state. In this sense it must almost be questioned if what we are facing is not both a crisis of utopia and a financial crisis where the state is unable to finance not only the dreams of changes but also the most elementary necessities of human life such as health and housing, transportation and work.

Where are we heading to? Is there such a thing as a post-ideological society? While this question is too complex to be answered, the emergence of a new, global and enchanting ideological articulation cannot be detected on the horizon. What can be detected is a kind of culture of survival, determined by increasing levels of poverty, on the one hand, and a struggle for room to be free and to be yourself, on the other hand.

The culture of survival could also be identified as the revolution of the empty stomachs, which expresses itself in an anarchical adventure of crossing the frontiers between rich and poor; between those who have, and those who do not have and do not even have the perspective to have. Yesterday, thousands of poor Brazilians migrated from the Northeast to São Paulo searching for a better life. Today, the quality and perspectives of life in São Paulo might not be, to those people, much better than in their former homeland. Furthermore, many Brazilians are looking for some other place in order to 'make some money'. One of the key challenges of the nineties will be named MIGRATIONS. Voluntary, desperate, uncontrollable waves of migrants will invade Europe and North America in search of work and in order to survive. The mobilization of those waves of migrants does not respond to any ideological proposal. Their utopia goes as far as their stomachs and the network of their families.

Motivated, among others, by economic problems the struggle for room to be free and to be yourself can be seen in a frightening dimension in the increasing numbers of nations which are emerging in Eastern Europe. The re-emergence of ethnic, racial and religious identities and the upheaval of minority groups will put its mark especially on the future

of Europe and will become even more explosive as it faces the waves of migrants invading that old continent.

Looking at the blank screen created by the absence of collective and motivating dreams, I also perceive, in the context of my country and culture, decline in values, on the one hand, and a desire to participate, mainly on a micro level, on the other hand. The decline in values can best be seen on the national political scene where corruption, involvement with drugs traffic, family breakdown and sexual involvements are part of everyday life ... without constraint. The desire to participate, on the other hand, occurs mostly at the grassroots level, establishing a political culture that stresses micro organization and participation on decision-making processes.

The second major question of this paper is, How to address the uniqueness of Christ within the context of this hour without talking only to yourself, or within the walls of 'closed' church buildings?

## **JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF HISTORY**

That Jesus Christ is Lord is one of the oldest confessions of the Christian faith. And from its beginning it was a confrontationally exclusive, universal but contextual affirmation. In answer to the demand for silence from the established religious system in Jerusalem, Peter declared his absolute dependency on God and the impossibility of keeping silent. His calling to tell the story of Jesus was so intense and radical and his experience with Jesus so life-changing that there was no other way than to keep telling the story further and further. Over against the petulant confession that Caesar is Lord, the Christian family declared, from its early hour and for the whole Roman Empire to hear, that Jesus Christ was Lord ... Lord of the whole Empire, Lord of history, Lord of the universe.

The affirmation that Jesus Christ is Lord of history is a life-changing, a contextual and a universal statement. If those different but integrated dimensions of the confession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ do not keep together, the confession runs the risk of becoming either parochial or abstract. There are examples of both to be told. It may be an inhouse confession of the Lordship of Jesus that is unable or unwilling to relate such confession to the surrounding reality, or it may be an abstract construction of the uniqueness of Jesus that is unable to dialogue with the real challenges of life, either at a personal or a global level.

To affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord is always an invitation to life, a denunciation of death and a relativization of the powers and systems of the day. By inviting people to surrender their lives to Jesus and to belong to a worshipping, witnessing and serving community, the Christian faith is promoting life: 'When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there dressed and in his right mind ...' ([Mk. 5:15](#)). And, as the passage continues, this experience of life has a contagious nature: 'As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." ' ([Mk. 5:18-19](#)).

To affirm the Lordship of Jesus implies a denunciation of forces of death, be it the demons who possessed and violated the humanity, dignity and identity of the Gerasene man; be it all and every 'Caesar's system' that believes itself to be absolute, behaves as if exclusive, oppresses those who do not agree with it and exploits those who are unable or unwilling to react against it. Not least, it relativizes powers and systems that are unable and unwilling to perceive that they are only powers and systems of the day, waiting to be replaced tomorrow. But we have not yet addressed the question of how to relate the

uniqueness of Christ to the challenges of this hour or, how to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord today. I would start by suggesting what we should not do.

### **Lessons from 500 years of Christian History in Latin America**

In this hour of ideological crisis and the absence of any utopia we should avoid, at any price, singing a naive chorus of victory, by arrogantly and simply saying that we knew it all along and were only waiting for the whole ideological apparatus and revolutionary proposals of the last decades to fall down.

Why should we avoid singing such a chorus? First, because this would only show our ideological bias. Second, because we should remember that we live under a glass roof. Third, because the ideological crisis is ours too.

*First.* One of the side effects of the breakdown of the Berlin Wall is the danger of romantically raising up a monument of victory to the capitalist ideology, celebrating the belief that some day the whole world will submit to the law of privatization and the free-market economy. From the perspective of the Third World it could be said that such a monument does already exist, except that it has been erected in the world's backyard and it does not look nice at all. We, in Latin America, have been exposed to the capitalist ideology for a long time and it has not worked well. Hence, when Miraslov Volf says that 'Eastern European countries are more and more facing problems similar to those that plague the countries of the Two-Thirds World',<sup>11</sup> many of us from the Third World have to say that we are already moving on to the Fourth World. There are no illusions, and we know that while capitalism has been able to provide an opulent table to many in the First World and to a few in the Third World, there is an increasing number of empty tables in our villages and communities, while unjust structures and exploitative working relations continue to provide delicacies, mostly to those tables that are already opulent.

As Walter Altmann has shown, one of the consequences of the easing of the tension in the East-West relations is that the North-South conflict will emerge much more strongly as the world's open wound. Since the economies of the North are becoming more self-sufficient and no longer need the South in the same proportion, the weakness and abandonment of the South will be seen as never before. As Altmann says:

*The masses of the Third World, transformed into Fourth World, are becoming superfluous. We have to count more and more with the 'lumpen' reality: poor masses thrown to the margin without any perspective of a dignifying life, deprived from everything that is essential and even from the ability of taking initiatives and from hoping.*<sup>13</sup>

And, not last, there is the danger of celebrating the defeat of the materialistic socialist dream, while proclaiming, in the name of a free Christian world, the victory of the capitalist ideology.<sup>14</sup> We should view the capitalist world (which is also essentially and programmatically materialistic), with the same suspicion with which many of us viewed the state-socialist experiment. By so doing we would become less bound by ideology and render a better service to the Kingdom of God.

*Second.* What about our 'glass roof'?

It is somehow easy to proclaim the ideological captivity of others and to condemn the ideological options of those who are far away. In 1992, in Latin America, we are searching

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<sup>11</sup> Costas refers to this absolutist tendency as follows: 'Ideologies, however, can be potentially explosive for Christians, since they tend toward absolutism when they demand complete loyalty from their adherents to a coherent (and inflexible) system of political thought and action. Insofar as Christians are motivated by vision of God's eschatological kingdom, they will always find themselves uneasy with any ideology, even with those that come close to their ethical concerns' (p. 122).



for a language that better expresses the meaning of the 500 years of Christian presence in the Continent. And as we move from 'celebration' to 'invasion' and vice versa we are impelled to conclude that the gospel has been captive to and impoverished by different ideological expressions, responding to the political apparatus and economic needs of those who, in power, had their tables well set. While we rejoice in the fact that God has been with us and speaking to us, throughout all this time, we also have to recognize that much harm has been done to the gospel and many lives have been cut down—literally and figuratively speaking—in the name of that faith that should bring life ... abundant life.

However, from an evangelical perspective, it might be tempting to denounce the negative effects of the presence and ministry of the Roman Catholic Church in the Continent for so long, without recognizing that we built on the basis established by them. And, in many cases, we are not aware—or do not want to be aware—of our own ideological captivity. After all, the historical presence of evangelicalism in Latin America also responds to ideological presuppositions which are foreign to the gospel. Furthermore, there is the temptation to say naively that we will do everything right and that Latin America will be changing its social picture as it becomes evangelical. The hour has come to say 'NO' to this temptation. While the Church is growing, and evangelicals are entering their first major experience of national politics in this continent, there are many signs that we are not only being blind but also captive to dreams of change that resist a solid biblical hermeneutic, that do not have a good economic and socio-political basis, and to which history has already said 'NO'. The challenge to exercise the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in the political arena, vis-à-vis the discussion of political ideologies, is very much needed in Latin America today, even if the desire to face such a challenge is evaporating.

*Third.* Are Evangelicals facing an ideological crisis too?

It is usually very difficult for us, as evangelicals, to recognize that we are in crisis. We work with the assumption that we have answers while others have questions. Alongside this way of perceiving the crisis of others and our own sense of security there is even a tendency to hold a party around the empty table of utopias, a characteristic of the end of this century and of today's younger generations. I would suggest that there is no longer room for this kind of apologetic posture that always waits for the worse scenario to emerge in order to proclaim the rescuing message of Jesus Christ.

While we cannot and do not want to give up the privilege of experiencing hope in Christ Jesus as well as of sharing this hope with others, we should be humble in order to experience the agony of emptiness and hopelessness that characterize this hour. If our Christian witness is not marked by a humble attitude of openness which is willing to suffer the pain of the world we will not be able to understand the lack of commitment of our youth, the despair of mothers concerning their children, the abandonment of the elderly, the increasing levels of drugs consumption, the proliferation of AIDS, the acceptance of corrupt practice as a normal procedure and the complete breakdown of the morality which gave some sense of coherence to former generations.

We should recognize that the crisis of utopia of our days is our crisis too. We are not only a part of this historical moment but are much more contaminated by the virus of hopelessness than we think. I myself have been experiencing the pastoral challenge to share about hope in Christ in a context where the axe of unemployment is over almost everyone's head from Sunday to Sunday, and where the younger generation seems to be suffering from an unshakable commitment to a hedonist lifestyle that produces a scaring sense of immunity in the midst of a world in flames. Yes, the ideological crisis is our crisis too.

## **JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF THE CHURCH**

As Christians we experience the hopelessness of this hour by identifying with the weeping of Jesus over Jerusalem, by committing ourselves to the witnessing community of Christ, and by rooting our faith in the promise that 'we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness' ([2 Pet. 3:13](#)).

Are we able to weep over 'Jerusalem'? In the last decades the contextual theology that has been erupting from the Third World has said that INCARNATION is a key missiological concept in the search of understanding the missionary task of the Church today.

Applying this emphasis to the discussion about the uniqueness of Christ it must be said that there is not much room for a kind of theoretical discourse which, using philosophical categories, wants to 'prove' how unique Christ is over against other philosophical statements, political proposals or religious alternatives. While the Christian faith has a discursive dimension—proclamation, dialogue—attached to it, it must be able to relate to people within the context of their everyday life experience. The Christian faith becomes contextually unique when the Church follows the steps of the Lord. To put it in another way: there is little room for systematic discourses about the uniqueness of Christ when and if the Lordship of Jesus does not become a touchable reality within the context of the living Christian community ... down there at the village. There is no place for victorious discourses about the superiority of the Christian faith if the streets of 'Galilee' are empty of acts of love in the name of Jesus. The universality of the statement about the uniqueness of Christ is best seen and becomes authoritative when the Lordship of Jesus becomes reality at the contextual level of individual and contextual life.

We are not talking of a local context only. We need the ability to relate to reality and to interpret historical developments and challenges. In this sense we as Christians not only experience the pain of this hour but also engage in dialogue which we perceive as being in favour of life. Hence, while old and new political ideologies are put under the scrutiny of a Christian analysis they should also come under Christian influence while in the process of articulation and/or implementation.

*A Unique Community.* While the Christian faith is essentially a communal faith, the community of faith is essentially missiological. Hence, the commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the assertion concerning the uniqueness of Jesus is, by its very nature, missiological. The way in which the Lordship of Jesus becomes reality in the everyday life of the Church and the means through which the Church relates to and engages in favour of life, with other living forces in society, sets the tone about the acceptance and experience of Christ as being unique.

In the Latin American context this points to the fact that both Church and poverty are growing and ideological discourses and options are out of fashion. But how do Church, poverty and ideologies relate to each other? According to the gospel, the Church cannot ignore the poor and the levels of poverty will not diminish without a political action that responds somehow to an ideological option. Without ideologizing the Christian faith, the Church in Latin America today has the responsibility of participating in the different national dialogues which search for an economic and socio-political option for today. This is a consequence both of the demand of the gospel and of the growth of the Church. There is no way for the Church to say that saving souls is its business without betraying the gospel and the poor. And there is no room for strategies on world evangelization toward the year 2000 without asking the question about the contextuality of those same strategies.

*An Expectant Community.* In times of crisis there is always the tendency to embrace a kind of escapist eschatology. While the hope of the ultimate return of Christ and the installation of the kingdom of God is a very important source of endurance and witness in our days, any eschatology that diverts the Christian community from its healthy and

necessary involvement in present history is harmful to the Christian community as well as to the human communities that need to know the Lord.

While waiting for the kingdom of God to erupt in plenitude the Christian community is committed to signalize this kingdom by preaching the gospel, healing the sick and reproving the evil spirits. By doing so, the church will not and cannot abandon present history to the devil. Furthermore, it cannot avoid taking ecological co-responsibility for the earth, being consistent to the proclamation of faith that claims that 'the earth is the Lord's' ([Psalm 24:1](#)). A healthy eschatology waits eagerly for the Lord to come; but while waiting it plants a tree. This we should have learned from Martin Luther.

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# **The State from an Evangelical Perspective**

Pietro Bolognesi

In this important article the author strives for an authentic evangelical conscience on our Christian commitment to nation building in the context of a nation where the Roman Catholic church and culture pervades all of life—political, economic, social and religious. He gives a broad survey of the main schools on the origin and functioning of the state; the unfolding of the perspective of biblical revelation on church and state; a survey of perspectives through history from the first centuries to the present; and a number of theological reflections on the nature and function of the state for the promotion of a good society. This extended article is worthy of careful study. Editor

## **INTRODUCTION**

The state<sup>1</sup> tends all the time to absorb more and more space in man's social life. It is not only one of the many dimensions of human life; it is also that which, at the present time, appears perhaps to be the most intrusive. Despite the pluralism it claims for itself, the state puts considerable pressure on the individual, society and the church. The term itself sounds somewhat abstract, but sooner or later everyone becomes aware of its weighty concreteness.

Believers are involved in the progress of the kingdom of God in the family, in the church, in education, and in all spheres of life, including that of the state. It is right, therefore, for them to ask themselves what their responsibilities are regarding the state. It is important for them to consider what the state should be according to God's plan. What is the nature of the state? Is it possible to outline a theology of the state? In everyone's

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'state' is used in the present article without a capital letter, except in those cases in which a quotation is used. This emphasizes the intention of attributing to it a perfectly ordinary role, in contrast with the widespread tendencies of state-worship.