

EVANGELICAL INTERFAITH

dialogue

Fuller Theological Seminary



LATIN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY: Encounters with the Indigenous

SPRING
2013

At a Glance

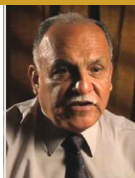


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Summary Statement

Christianity has interacted with indigenous religions in the Americas for over 500 years. Native peoples have been persecuted, evangelized and marginalized, but their religions have survived and have influenced Christian practice. Many forms of popular Catholicism (and some popular Pentecostals) reflect the influence of native religions. The growth of popular religious practice and the resurgence of native religions in Latin America invite evangelical Christians to re-think how to relate to native religions in light of their commitment to mission.

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EVANGELICAL INTERFAITH

Vision Statement

This journal seeks to create space for Evangelical scholars and practitioners to dialogue about the dynamics, challenges, practices, and theology surrounding interfaith work, while remaining faithful to the gospel of Jesus and his mission for his Church.

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On the Cover:

Luis González Palma, "Virginal."
See back cover for more on the artist.

LATIN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY:

Encounters with the Indigenous

On May 13, 2013 Pope Francis, the first South American pontiff, canonized Colombia's first saint, a nun, Laura of Saint Catherine of Siena, who journeyed with five other women into the forests in 1914 to be a teacher and spiritual guide to indigenous people. Francis praised the Colombian saint for "instilling hope" in indigenous people and for "respecting their culture and religion."



Missiologist Andrew F. Walls has long argued that the continuity in African religion, pre-Christian and Christian, is due in large measure to the usability of African worldviews and the application of the material of the Christian tradition to already existing maps of the universe. According to Walls, this has been the area in which African Christianity has been the most misunderstood—that the continuance of such maps somehow makes the resultant practice less Christian. While acknowledging that the components of the inherited categories undergo a process of radical reordering and transformation, Walls' point is that only a vibrant and genuine Christian faith will emerge if there is an encounter between the goals of the old religion and that of the new.

While speaking from an African setting, Walls' insight has important implications for Christian witness everywhere because of the patience, humility and interdependence required by the translation process. Nowhere is this more evident than in Latin America where the encounter between indigenous peoples and a foreign Iberian Christianity resulted in longstanding and (unintended) repercussions for the Christian faith in Latin America. From Crushing and Coercing to Conversing and Commending, Christians since 1492 have adopted various postures and approaches towards indigenous peoples.

In the lead article of this journal, Juan F. Martínez, a Latino theologian who has worked in Latin America and done research on the region, argues that the growth of popular religious practices, the resurgence of native religions as well as its influence in many popular forms of Catholicism and Pentecostalism, call evangelicals in Latin America to re-think how to do mission among the native peoples of the region. Because of its unique history and inter-religious relations, Martínez notes that encounters between evangelicals and the indigenous must begin and be framed by confession. As evangelicals move forward, the call to humble service in the name of Christ will need to be heeded so that the message is good news to people who have heard a mixed message for centuries.



ENCOUNTERS WITH THE INDIGENOUS: Conquest, Confession, and Mission

The encounter between Christianity and the religions of Latin America began with Columbus' travels. For over five hundred years, Christians—first Catholics, then Protestants, and even marginal Christian groups—have evangelized, persecuted, and marginalized native peoples. They have also sought to understand indigenous religions, and many Christians have defended native peoples against the onslaught of outside invaders. The religions of the Americas have survived and have even influenced Christian practice in the region. Many forms of popular Catholicism (and some forms of popular Pentecostalism) reflect the impact of native religions. And as native peoples have gained political and social power there has also been a resurgence of native religious practice.

The growth of popular religious practices and the resurgence of native religions in Latin America call evangelical Christians to re-think how to do mission among the native peoples of the region. The evangelism models of the past created a fundamentally uneven relationship that must be taken into account as evangelicals think about future mission. For this reason any conversation about interreligious interaction must begin with a review of that history, something crucial for understanding the current relations between evangelical Christianity and indigenous religions. This then provides the basis for thinking differently about mission among indigenous peoples.¹

The Religious Encounter: Spanish and Portuguese Catholicism

When the Portuguese and the Spaniards began their global exploration, the pope issued a number of papal bulls which gave those kings authority to explore and conquer any lands not under a Catholic king as long as evangelization was part of the process. And in 1508 the Spanish king also gained royal patronage that gave him authority to name the bishops of the Catholic Church in the lands conquered by Spain.

The process of evangelization immediately raised the question of whether the indigenous could become Christians. Some were from more “advanced” societies, but many were considered savages because of their social and cultural practices. An extensive theological debate ensued in Spain with the conclusion that the indigenous could become Catholics and thereby Spanish citizens. This conclusion would be affirmed in theory, throughout the colonial period, but often not in practice.



King Ferdinand II of Aragón and
Queen Isabella of Castille

As part of the evangelization process several religious orders entered the region. Because they answered directly to the pope, their role in Latin America was often in tension with the political authorities. Nonetheless, these missionary priests went to some of the most dangerous areas in the region, taking the faith with them. One of the models they used to evangelize and “civilize” the more nomadic peoples was to develop missions: places where the indigenous were organized into communities, evangelized, and taught skills so that they might fit in Spanish colonial society.

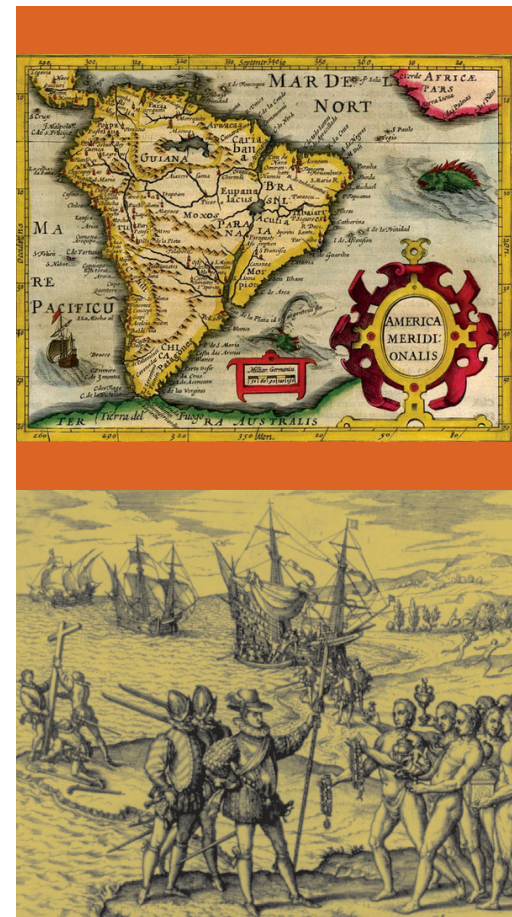
There were also other tools that combined the tasks of evangelization and conquest. On the one hand, the *Requerimiento* was a document to be read to all peoples encountered by Spaniards. It stated that the Spaniards were coming by authority of the pope and his delegated representative, the Spanish king, and that the people were to submit to their authority or be forcibly submitted. Spanish settlers were also allowed to develop *Encomiendas* on large tracts of land, which included the native inhabitants. They were allowed to “use” the labor of the people, but were required to teach them Christian faith.

This joining of evangelization and conquest became the model for relations between the peoples of the Americas and European Catholics. For Spaniards the expansion into the Americas was a continuation of the Crusades whereby they had freed the Iberian Peninsula from Muslims. They were now extending Christian faith into the Americas and expanding the rule of the Spanish king.

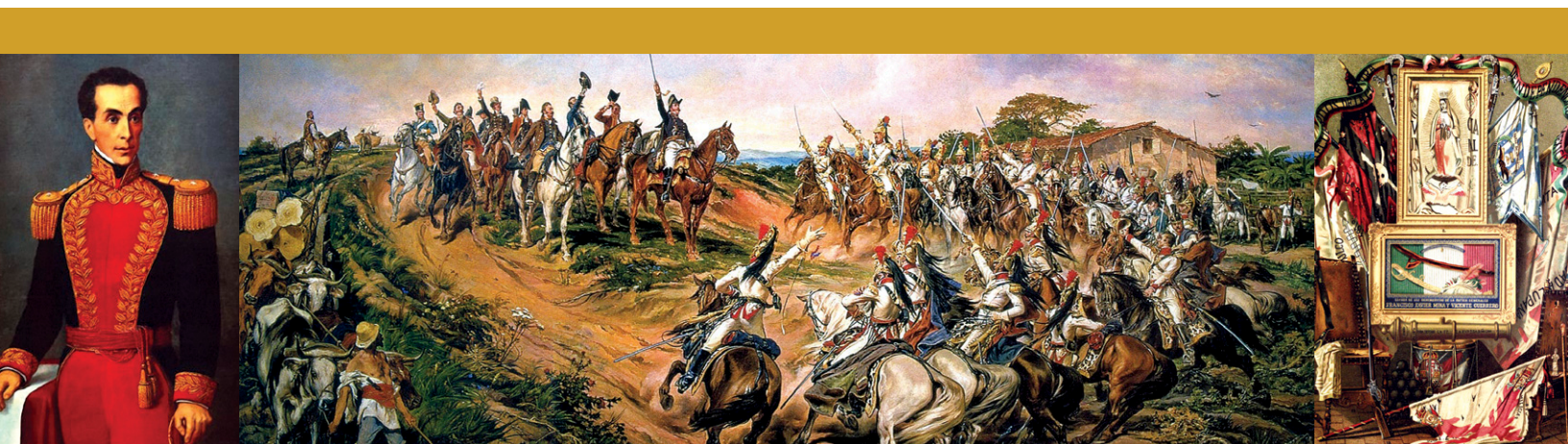
In many ways the movie *The Mission* represents the complexities of the Catholic evangelistic model in Latin America. On the one hand, the movie presents the commitment of the Jesuit missionaries and their willingness to educate and protect the native peoples. But political and economic interests were always immediately in the background. At the end of the day the economic and political interests always seemed to win, though some semblance of faith remained among the people.

In the process of sharing the Catholic faith with native peoples, one of the key models used by the priests was that of connecting Catholic practice with previous indigenous religions. The most famous case of this type of enculturation is the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Guadalupe shrine and practices are closely linked to the Aztec goddess Tonantzin. The shrine was built at Tepeyac, where Tonantzin had been revered, and popular veneration of Guadalupe today is connected to the pre-Colombian worship of Tonantzin. To this date Guadalupe is the most venerated virgin apparition in the Americas and was declared the Patroness of the Americas by Pope John Paul II.

By the end of the colonial period, nearly all the indigenous peoples of Latin America formally confessed Catholic faith; they had been conquered and baptized into the faith. But it was not clear how they understood their new faith or how they connected their old religions with Catholicism. Evangelization and conquest had made (almost) everyone Catholic, but the old practices did not disappear. People continued their old religious practices either secretly or in Catholic guise. The status of indigenous religions became more complex after the independence of the countries of Latin America. Independence neither brought more rights to the indigenous, nor improved their situation. In places where they were part of missions, the missions were secularized and the indigenous peoples lost what they had, since the missions had officially been in the hands of the religious orders. And since many of the priests and the religious were Spaniards, they were kicked out of the newly independent countries. Thus, the countries of Latin America became independent the indigenous peoples were very much on the margin in the social and political leadership's vision for the future. At best they were cheap labor for the economies of the new republics. They were all Catholics and technically citizens of the new countries, but they held a very tenuous place in the new Latin America.



Top: America Meridionalis by Gerhard Mercator (1607). Bottom: Columbus landing on Hispaniola



From left to right: Simon Bolivar, political leader who led Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia to independence; battle for independence of Brazil (1822); memorabilia from Mexico's War of Independence (1810–1821)

Arrival of the Protestants: Literacy, Education, and Bible Translation

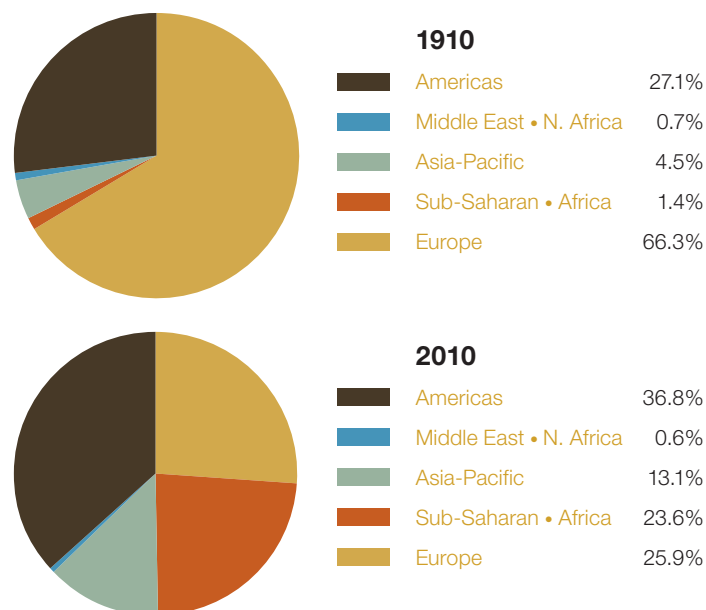
When Protestant missionaries arrived in Latin America in the nineteenth century, they often emphasized literacy and education. Their commitment to the poor and marginalized focused in this direction. These early missionaries were convinced that the people needed to be able to read the Bible so that they could understand the gospel. Their work among the indigenous usually included this focus, along with basic social services.

The most prominent way that Protestants interacted with native peoples during the twentieth century was through Bible translation. Wycliffe Bible Translators has served as the model for most translation projects. Translators connected with isolated communities and worked to learn the language and reduce it to writing. They all had some social science training and many were anthropologists. In the process of learning the language they learned about religion and culture. Their affirmation of the importance of the people's language often also created a new affirmation of the culture and the religion.

Once a language was understood and given written form, the translators began literacy programs. Bible portions were then translated and people were given copies, since the missionaries firmly believed that God would work through the Word and bring conversion. This process has produced Bibles or Bible portions in many languages and dialects, but it has also had other effects. Native peoples rediscovered their voice in the midst of societies that had neglected or abused them. Moreover, through the process of talking about their religious and cultural framing, many reaffirmed the value of their ancestral systems. Some of the informants in the translation process later became proponents of their ancestral religious systems.

Though Protestant Bible translators have done more to learn about indigenous languages than any Latin American government or university, their work has not been without controversy. The most direct critique has been the fact that the process is closely linked to evangelization. But many missionaries have also been accused of taking Western values into the communities. During the Cold

Regional Distributions of Christians



Figures for 1910 are from a Pew Forum analysis of data from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. Percentage may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Christianity, December 2011

War many Wycliffe missionaries were accused of being witting or unwitting agents of US expansionism in the region. Given the role of globalization today, the influence of outside values is much stronger than anything missionaries might do. But their presence in native communities raises the questions of the connection between evangelization and the respect for native peoples and their cultures.

Indigenous Religions among Christians in Latin America Today

In spite of over five hundred years of interaction, probably the most common perspective of indigenous religions through most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both Catholic and Protestant, has been that of quaint and backward practices of peoples who are being absorbed into Latin American societies. In some areas native peoples continue to be cheap labor and sometimes almost indentured servants. They continue to be pushed off their ancestral lands and forced to abandon their traditional practices. The European sense of superiority has meant that those in power in Latin America have usually seen little of value in indigenous practices.

Nonetheless, those countries with significant ruins built by the empires of the pre-colonial period, such as Peru, Guatemala,

and Mexico, have found that talking about ancient religions and societies is good for tourism. There has been a renewed interest in the religions of the pre-colonial period since most of the surviving structures had a clear religious purpose. But often this interest has only extended to those indigenous peoples who died hundreds of years ago. Many times the descendants of those who built those structures are marginalized from the benefits accrued by the expanding tourism.

The vast majority of indigenous peoples in Latin America today are officially Roman Catholic, though a growing percentage are becoming Protestants. But they are a part of a Catholicism that has formally, and informally, adopted and adapted indigenous practices. There are many places, such as the principal church in Totonicapán, Guatemala, where the connection is very direct. This church, built on the ruins of a pre-colonial temple, still has an indigenous altar at the base of the stairway up to the church. Many people make their offerings and sacrifices there before going into the church. Also, many of the practices of the religious fraternities that sustain that church are closely linked to old Mayan practices, though they may superficially look Catholic.

There are also people who continue the “old” practices more underground. In the past these practices have been called

10 Countries in the Americas with the Largest Number of Christians

COUNTRIES	ESTIMATED 2010 CHRISTIAN POPULATION	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT IS CHRISTIAN	PERCENTAGE OF WORLD CHRISTIAN POPULATION
United States	246,780,000	79.5%	11.3%
Brazil	175,770,000	90.2	8.0
Mexico	107,780,000	95.0	4.9
Colombia	42,810,000	92.5	2.0
Argentina	34,420,000	85.2	1.6
Peru	27,800,000	95.6	1.3
Venezuela	25,890,000	89.3	1.2
Canada	23,430,000	68.9	1.1
Chile	15,310,000	89.5	0.7
Guatemala	13,700,000	95.2	0.6
Subtotal for the 10 countries	713,690,000	86.1	32.7
Total for Rest of Region	90,380,000	8.7	4.1
Total for Region	804,070,000	86.0	36.8
World Total	2,184,060,000	31.7%	100.0%

Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers.
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Christianity, December 2011

Indigenous Population versus Total Population

COUNTRIES	INDIGENOUS POPULATION	TOTAL POPULATION	% OF INDIGENOUS POPULATION
1. Mexico	24,408,881	110,991,953	22.0%
2. Guatemala	5,975,473	13,446,471	44.4
3. Peru	4,243,431	29,285,927	14.5
4. Bolivia	3,686,929	5,949,496	62.0
5. Colombia	1,504,793	44,651,049	3.4
6. Argentina	1,236,640	40,117,096	3.1
7. Ecuador	1,028,444	14,692,061	7.0
8. Brazil	827,206	192,911,340	0.4
9. Chile	753,674	16,459,108	4.6
10. Nicaragua	567,861	5,699,472	10.0

Percentage of Population that is Indigenous

COUNTRIES	INDIGENOUS POPULATION	TOTAL POPULATION	% OF INDIGENOUS POPULATION
1. Bolivia	3,686,929	5,949,496	62.0%
2. Guatemala	5,975,473	13,446,471	44.4
3. Mexico	24,408,881	110,991,953	22.0
4. Peru	4,243,431	29,285,927	14.5
5. Panama	423,572	3,454,857	12.3
6. Nicaragua	567,861	5,699,472	10.0
7. Belize	30,727	309,672	9.9
8. Guyana	69,558	760,878	9.1
9. Ecuador	1,028,444	14,692,061	7.0
10. Honduras	471,505	7,510,662	6.3



William Cameron Townsend,
founder of Wycliffe Bible
Translators and Summer
Institute of Linguistics

witchcraft and the leaders have been persecuted. So these practices have tended to stay out of the public view. But because of the strong interaction with Catholicism it is not always clear how “pure” these practices are. They often follow patterns that look Catholic, even as Catholic practice often looks indigenous.

The Catholic models of evangelization in the region often raise the question of syncretism. To what extent do the Catholic religious practices of the region reflect a missiologically crucial enculturation and to what extent has

Catholic faith and practice been changed by the encounter with the indigenous religious practices of the people? Of course, after five centuries of interaction, interpretation, and reinterpretation, it is unlikely that one could easily separate one from the other. Of course, another important issue has to do with the significance of attempting this analysis? What would be gained and how would it help the situation?

A changing Latin America has also created new types of spaces for indigenous religions. In places with large indigenous populations, the people have gained political power and some have used that platform to promote their religious practices. The two countries that most stand out are Bolivia and Guatemala. President Evo Morales of Bolivia has openly encouraged the practice of the local religions and publically practices them himself. In Guatemala indigenous

religious groups legally organize as such, and at least one ex-president, Alvaro Colom, formally became a Mayan priest before he became president of the country.

The growth of Protestantism, particularly Pentecostalism, among the indigenous has created new issues and complexities. Pentecostals take the spiritual claims of the indigenous religions very seriously and interpret many of the practices as satanic. They confront indigenous religions through the lens of spiritual warfare. This has created more conversions toward Pentecostalism. But at times it has also created some questionable interpretations, such as when a large neo-Pentecostal church in Guatemala City blamed Guatemala’s problems on indigenous religions, but never once spoke against the blatant economic and political violence of the powerful against the indigenous.

Another type of tension is seen in some communities in Mexico where Protestants have been forced to leave their homes because they refuse to pay for the traditional Catholic/indigenous feast days, particularly because the money is used to buy liquor. The local *caciques* (indigenous community leaders) have so much power that they can use popular religious practices against the Protestants with impunity. By refusing to participate in the local celebrations, indigenous Protestants are undermining one of the linchpins of the *caciques’* power in the community.

Christian Witness in the Twenty-first Century

A truly Christian witness among the indigenous of Latin America must begin and be framed by confession. Though there have been several types of “formal” confessions, the reality is that most Christians in Latin America continue to treat indigenous



From left to right: Machu Picchu, Peru; Mayan Temple of the Sun in Palenque, Mexico; Lamanai Mayan temple ruins in Belize

peoples disparagingly and not take their religions seriously. The confessions have to go beyond the issue of religious freedom. Land expropriation, forced learning of the national languages, indentured servitude, and other similar actions continue to be part of the treatment of native peoples in the Americas. Any Christian confession has to include recognition of how much Latin American Christians have benefited from this unjust treatment of the indigenous. In particular, Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals have to be leery of any situation where the oppressed are blamed for the spiritual problems in a country while the oppressors go unchallenged.

This is part of the larger problem of evangelization in the modern era—the link between Christendom power and mission. Anywhere the gospel went out alongside a colonializing project, the gospel was adversely affected and the message received was mixed with the political and economic agendas of the colonial power. This issue cannot be avoided anywhere that Europeans—and their direct descendants—have expanded over the last five centuries.

The Cape Town Commitment (2010)² stated that evangelicals would defend the rights of those who suffer religious persecution and would speak for religious freedom. That commitment will continually be tested in Latin America where indigenous rights, and religious freedom, are often linked to left-wing political agendas and to the tensions between the indigenous and *ladino* populations. Because in this situation Christians have been the oppressors and the beneficiaries of the status quo, it will be particularly complicated to speak on behalf of religious freedom, but it will be particularly important.

As we think about the proclamation and call of the gospel among the indigenous today, we do well to remember the commitment of the Iguassu Affirmation (1999):

Religious pluralism challenges us to hold firmly to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Savior even as we work for increased tolerance and understanding among religious communities. . . . We also commit ourselves to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in faithfulness and loving humility.³

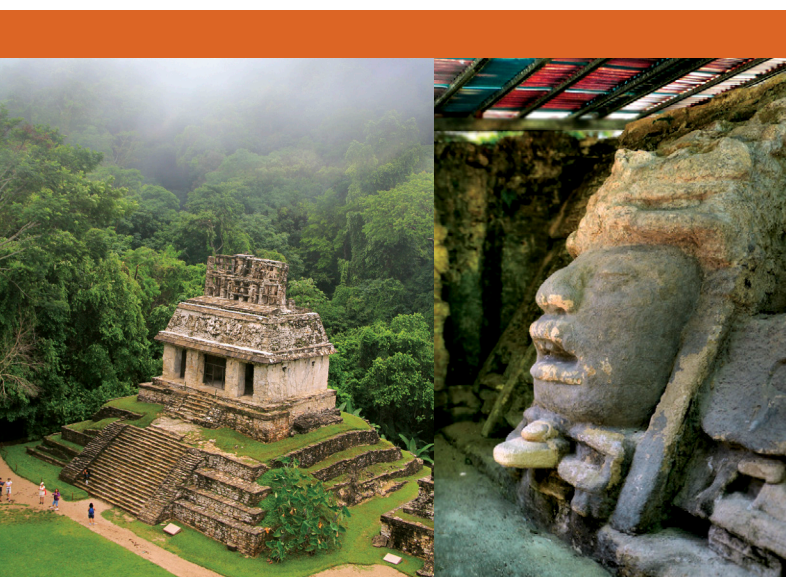


Latin American Pentecostal worship

Taking that seriously in this context will require a lot of humility in the midst of faithfulness. If evangelicals are to live up to this commitment, they will need to focus on models of mission and evangelization that affirm indigenous peoples and cultures so that humility can be at the center of the service in the name of Christ.

Literacy programs continue to provide opportunities to give witness to the willingness to empower indigenous peoples. A project that encourages people to value their language, talk about their faith and culture, and to affirm that God has been with them and their histories continues to be an excellent way for evangelicals to connect the gospel with indigenous peoples. Of course, helping people think about their culture and their faith means that they might reaffirm the value of their traditional faith.

Part of this process implies affirming God's creation and God's continuing presence among all peoples. Working from the perspective that all cultures reflect both God's work and the fallenness of humanity means that evangelicals need to identify and take seriously the gifts and assets of the indigenous cultures within which they work. Part of this process will include encouraging the continuance of practices that affirm God's work and creation, including connecting these practices to the way indigenous Christians live out their faith. For example, the strong ecological affirmations within many indigenous practices need to be clearly connected to the Christian confession that God is creator of all and that we are stewards of that creation.



As we share the good news of the gospel we also need to build bridges with indigenous faith and practice. We need to look for Christological bridges, places where people see God at work and where we can connect the good news of the incarnation to the life and practices of the people. Many of the indigenous peoples tell stories of God's work and presence that are not unlike stories of the Old Testament. Evangelicals need to listen and be attentive to the ways that God is already working and connecting.

But evangelicals also need to take a proactive role in supporting and protecting peoples who are being pushed off their traditional lands and away from their traditional ways of life. Globalization has created new types of pressures, and the various people

groups will need to make decisions about how they frame their futures and/or interact with the larger society and their globalized world. But Christians, and evangelicals in particular, need to be at the forefront of creating spaces for indigenous peoples to define their own futures, be it on their traditional lands or as they seek to adjust to life in urban Latin America.

Because of the unique history and interactions, interreligious relations will look different in this environment than in other parts of the world. Clearly indigenous and Catholic practices are closely intertwined after centuries of encounter. What might have begun as syncretism has now become part of the faith understanding of many. It is not always clear which has influenced which and how. So the issue is not so much about trying to clarify the past as it is about inviting people to hear the gospel in this context and looking for links, for places where God is at work and where the gospel can be heard as good news in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As evangelicals we confess that it is the Holy Spirit who works through the word of God to transform lives. In the past many evangelicals fell into the trap of assuming that working alongside those in power would make the evangelistic task easier. The evangelistic efforts among the indigenous in Latin America provide glaring examples of the error of that assumption. As evangelicals go forward, the call to humble service in the name of Christ will need to be heeded so that the message is good news to people who for centuries have heard a mixed message. **EIFD**

Juan Martínez is associate provost for diversity and international programs and associate professor of Hispanic studies and pastoral leadership. Since coming to Fuller in 2001, Dr. Martínez has also served as director of the Center for the Study of Hispanic Church and Community. Among other topics, his current research focuses on the history of Latino Protestantism, Latino Protestant identity, ministry in Latino Protestant churches, Latino and Latin American Anabaptists, and transnational mission among US Latinos.

Martínez joined Fuller from the Latin American Anabaptist Seminary in Guatemala City, Guatemala, where he served as rector for nine years. A Mennonite Brethren pastor, Martínez also has experience in church planting and teaching in both religious and secular venues. He served as director of Hispanic Ministries for the Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church and of Instituto Bíblico del Pacífico, a Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute.

ENDNOTES

¹ This reflection will focus on Latin American indigenous religions with roots in the pre-colonial period. Though African religions are often part of popular religious practice in the region, they will not be directly addressed here. It is also important to note that I write this reflection from an evangelical perspective and as an outsider. I am Latino, worked in Latin America for almost nine years, and maintain links to the region. But my social location is not in the region. So I write this with much humility.

² Available on the Lausanne Movement website, at <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html>.

³ Available on a page of the ReoCities archives, at http://reocities.com/CollegePark/pool/5040/English_version_Iguassu_Affirmation.html.



Top: Evo Morales, President of Bolivia since 2006. Bottom: President Morales has openly encouraged the practice of the local religions and publically practices them himself.

Global Evangelical Statements on Interfaith Dialogue

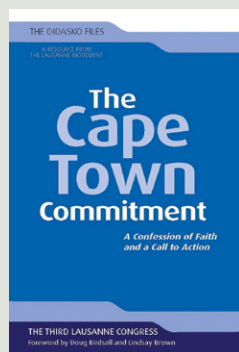


The World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, two prominent international evangelical networks, each held missions conferences (in 1999 and 2010, respectively) that produced statements that have since been instrumental in shaping the worldwide evangelical missionary movement. Both documents contain sections outlining ways in which

attendees of the gatherings expressed their convictions regarding what constitutes Christian treatment of people of other faiths.

Iguassu Affirmation

In 1999, the World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission's conference drew 160 mission practitioners, missiologists and church leaders from 53 countries around the world to Foz de Iguazu, Brazil, to reflect on the challenges, trends, and opportunities present in world missions at the dawn of the twenty-first century.¹ Attendees of the gathering produced the Iguassu Affirmation, a document that outlined the group's key commitments for the future. Among these commitments was a pledge by members of the conference to be "agents of reconciliation", people who oppose interreligious violence and hostility as a matter of Christian principle. According to the Affirmation, such an undertaking must neither include downplaying religious differences nor exclude proclaiming Christ; seeking harmony and retaining a conviction about Christ's uniqueness are not mutually exclusive enterprises, but rather, two necessarily simultaneous tasks.

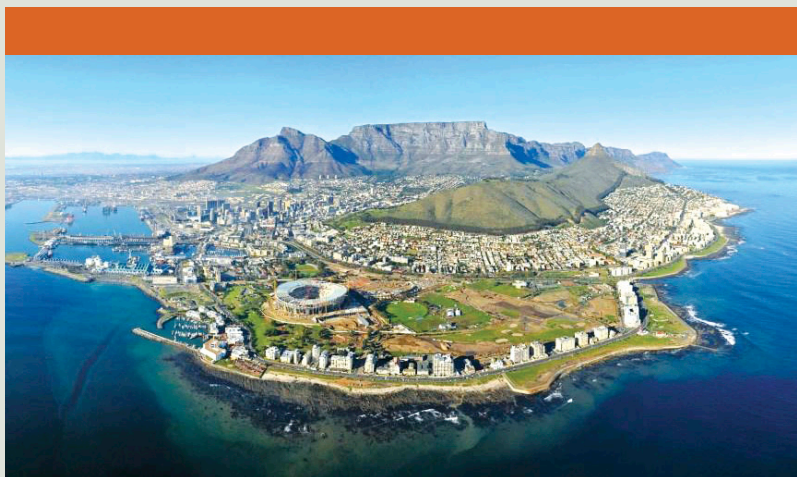


Cape Town Commitment

In 2010, 4,200 evangelical leaders representing 198 countries converged in Cape Town, South Africa, for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization.² The principal achievement of the conference was the Cape Town Commitment, a document outlining the Lausanne Movement's goals for the following

decade. The Cape Town Commitment echoes the Iguassu Affirmation in its dedication to seek the best for all people, regardless of their religious affiliations, in a manner that does not compromise the authors' own Christian convictions. Religious freedom is a human rights issue, according to the

Commitment; Christians have a responsibility to act as advocates on behalf of persecuted religious minorities, thereby fulfilling the biblical injunction to be good citizens and to seek the welfare of their nations. Disciples of Christ are called to acknowledge the *imago Dei* in their non-Christian neighbors and treat them accordingly, seeking to foster friendships with and display goodwill toward people of other faiths. This goodwill necessarily includes refusing to promote falsehoods about other faiths and rejecting violence and revenge as viable responses even to religiously motivated violence propagated against oneself.



View of Cape Town and Table Mountain

The Cape Town Commitment affirms that interfaith dialogue (defined as "combin[ing] confidence in the uniqueness of Christ and in the truth of the gospel with respectful listening to others") has a place in Christian mission. Just as Paul engaged in theological discussion with Jews and Gentiles, so also are Christians called to similarly engage their neighbors remembering that Christian witness should be "marked by gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience."

ENDNOTES

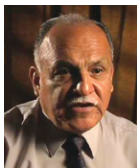
¹ http://reocities.com/CollegePark/pool/5040/English_version_Iguassu_Affirmation.html.

² <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html>.

SAMUEL ESCOBAR

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MEMORY, METHODS, AND MISSION FROM BELOW



I value this effort of Juan F. Martínez to put on the table a missiological issue to which most evangelicals in Latin America have not paid enough attention, even in countries with a high percentage of indigenous populations such as Bolivia, Peru,

Ecuador, and Brazil. Recovering the memory of what took place during the Spanish and Portuguese “crusades” in the Americas is an important initial point in the agenda. My former colleague Stewart MacIntosh, a Scottish missionary who worked in Peru for thirty years, came out of his practice in order to undertake doctoral studies, and he “discovered” the efforts of several Spanish priests to translate catechisms and hymns into the Quechua language. He was especially attracted by the work of Jesuit José de Acosta, who wrote *De procuranda indorum salute* (*About the Search for the Salvation of the Indians*), a six-hundred-page book published in Salamanca in 1588.¹ This is actually a missionary handbook on how to evangelize the Indians, and Acosta deals with the questions and the practices of his own day, evaluating them from a critical and biblical perspective. We evangelicals must be humble and informed enough to acknowledge that even in the year 2013, we do not have a study equivalent to Acosta’s, since we continue to be ignorant of the questions he raised as well as about indigenous religious realities.

One significant issue of debate among missionaries and conquerors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was whether the natives were actually human beings. An important theologian from Salamanca doubted whether the natives could indeed be in fact human, but his position was debated by the Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas, a great defender of the Indians, who had missionary experience in Central America. Las Casas was highly critical of the use of violence as a means of coercion to convert the pagans, which was used by some missionaries during that era. In fact, some theologians suggested that the gospel was so profound and transcendent that the primitive mind of the Indians could not understand it. Therefore, they had to be civilized first and then evangelized, thus the saying “primero vencer, después convencer,” that is, “first to defeat and then to convince.” Violence and coercion could be used for the first step but not for the second. The Catholic Church could not keep her missionary enthusiasm beyond the mid-seventeenth century, and the kind of popular Catholicism practiced by the native peoples was perceived to have no

“For many indigenous peoples, becoming evangelicals meant a change for the good in family life, economic practices, education, and health.”

redemptive elements and as a result was mostly used to keep the Indians under political control. The permanent shortage of priests during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made things worse.

There is enough research now about Protestant missionary work to allow us to make some general statements about the encounters in that time period. Evangelicals insisted on individual conversion to Christ, and as a result, a change of lifestyle. For many indigenous peoples, becoming evangelicals meant a change for the good in family life, economic practices, education, and health. In many cases it was a liberating experience. In some instances as Bible translation and indigenous leadership developed, there were also cases of group conversion and church growth, and questions about gospel and culture became increasingly pressing. While evangelicals tended to have a very rational and cerebral church life, indigenous churches were more attracted by prayer, miracles, and spiritual deliverance, which explains why different forms of Pentecostalism grew at an explosive rate among indigenous peoples. When missionaries were able to be self-critical of their methods and emphases, they learned to walk alongside these new churches and minister within them with relatively low degrees of conflict.

Lastly, I especially value the final part of Martínez’s paper where he both refers to the Iguassu and Cape Town documents that emerged from these missiological forums, and offers us some proposals for the future. My own missiological formation came out of debate and dialogue with Roman Catholicism and Marxism. Now that I live in Spain within an atmosphere of the decline of Christendom, I have

Bartolomé de las Casas

Bartolomé de las Casas, described as the “founder” of human rights, was a controversial figure serving on the frontlines of the encounter between Spain and the New World during the sixteenth century. Las Casas was born in Sevilla, Spain, in 1484. Early in his teenage years his father and uncle, along with many other Spaniards, joined Columbus on his second journey to the Americas in search of newfound wealth. At the age of 14 Las Casas began studies in preparation for the priesthood. In 1502, at the age of 18, he received minor orders and embarked on his first trip to the Caribbean island of Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) with 2,500 men and women to establish a permanent settlement. On April 15, 1502, he arrived in Santo Domingo, where, in addition to overseeing his father’s land and laborers, he was given his own land and 100 indigenous laborers by the Spanish governor.

In 1507 he was ordained as a priest in Rome, Italy. In a visit with Pope Julius II he informed the pontiff of the opportunity to convert the “natives” in the New World. He returned to Hispaniola as an Indian doctrinero, the official catechist to the Indian population.

In September 1510, the first Dominicans arrived in Hispaniola. After witnessing the deplorable treatment of the indigenous peoples on Hispaniola and the encomienda system—enslavement of the indigenous people by the Spanish for labor and mining for gold—Friar Antón Montesino, a Dominican priest, preached a famous speech on December 21, 1511, denouncing the encomienda system as a mortal sin.

In 1514 Las Casas witnessed the tragic massacre of indigenous American leaders at the hands of the Spanish. He abhorred the killings and atrocities committed against the indigenous people, and on Pentecost of 1415, he renounced his ownership of indigenous laborers and the encomienda system. Like many of the Dominican friars, he began to preach against the injustices of the encomienda system and Spain’s tyranny. Regent and Cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros, who consequently promoted the crusades in North Africa, gave Las Casas the title “Protector of the Indians.” Las Casas became an advocate for the humane treatment of the indigenous people in the Americas. He, along with other Dominican friars, dedicated their lives to reforming Spain’s encomienda system. Las Casas, launching a campaign for indigenous rights, labored to convince the Spanish king that Spain’s mission to spread Christianity in the Americas should not deprive the indigenous population of their freedom, sovereignty, and property rights.

In 1522, Las Casas entered the Dominican order in Hispaniola. He traveled between Hispaniola and Spain continuing his campaign to expose the abuses suffered by the indigenous population under the encomienda system and to reform Spanish laws. His campaign

influenced the New Laws of 1542, which prohibited the enslavement of indigenous people, called for the establishment of institutional mechanisms to protect indigenous people from labor abuses, and called for an end of the encomienda system. Las Casas faced many controversies, including charges of high treason against Spain from detractors. However, his campaign had already left its mark on the New Laws of 1542 and helped to bring about the decline of the encomienda system.

Scholars propose that Bartolomé de las Casas had two conversion experiences: first he renounced his ownership of indigenous laborers and the encomienda system, and second he joined the Dominican order. Las Casas later wrote that the blinders fell from his eyes and he saw that everything the Spaniards had done in the Indies from the beginning—all the brutal exploitation and decimation of innocent Indians, with no heed for their welfare or their conversion—was not only completely wrong, but also a mortal sin. In his last words, he

professed that he had kept faith, during fifty years of untiring labor, with the charge that God had laid upon him to plead for the restoration to the Indians of their original lands, liberty, and freedom. Las Casas’ ideas continue to influence us today. In November 2008, Oxford University founded the Las Casas Centre for Human Rights. The Institute aims to examine difficult questions in the spirit of dialogue, mutual respect, and friendship that is central to the Dominican intellectual tradition, enquiry, and disputation.



Bartolomé de Las Casas, sitting at a desk looking out of a window with Indian friend (Constantino Brumidi, 1876).

Retired Mennonite mission worker, following forty years of service in the Argentine Chaco among the Qom indigenous people.

BEING A GUEST:

Accompaniment of Indigenous Communities as an Alternative Missionary Practice



Juan Martínez calls for a paradigm shift in thinking about evangelistic efforts among the indigenous of Latin America. As such it is both a fresh and welcome word. Today's diverse and multicultural society demands an attempt to end hegemonic attitudes as reflected during the rule of both Constantinian and modern colonial powers. Interfaith dialogue with the indigenous peoples of Latin America continues to suffer from a host of unequal relationships—an imbalance of power between dominant players over the weaker ones. Evangelistic efforts must be carried out, as Martínez suggests, with an attitude of listening attentively to God's presence and action among indigenous peoples from pre-conquest times to the present. An admirable contemporary example from North America of a new paradigm might be the Indigenous Relations department of the Mennonite Church Canada, which speaks boldly of *settler* societies and *host* populations.¹ This terminology helps provide a corrective to the dialogue that is customarily weighted toward those in power.

My wife, Byrdalene, and I were privileged to work for nearly forty years as Mennonite mission workers in the Argentine Chaco among the Qom, an indigenous people made up of three linguistically related groups. Known in the literature as Toba, Mocovi, and Pilaga, the groups are now increasingly recognized by their own designations: Toba Qom, Moqoit, and Pitlaxa. For our purposes here I will use the generalized designation, Qom. The history of their evangelization presents a refreshing exception to the common experience of many Latin American indigenous populations. The Qom peoples persistently resisted and rejected imposed Roman Catholicism as part of the larger project of Conquest. When they did accept the gospel, it was in Pentecostal clothes, compatible with their previous ancestral spirituality. They received Jesus as they understood him in terms of their own metaphors. Jesus was experienced primarily through the power of physical healing and a newly found sense of human dignity. The gospel affirmed the Qom as persons fully accepted and loved by the Creator *in their identity as indigenous persons*. So strong was this appeal of Jesus that in

less than two decades (the 1940s and 1950s) a majority of the tribal remnant—those remaining following the Conquest—began to consider themselves as belonging to the Way of Jesus.

Mennonite missionaries working in the region at the time did not readily accept this reality because some of the cultural expressions of Qom believers seemed quite “unchristian.” Learning to step back and walk alongside Qom church leaders in a supportive role was a significant shift in mission practice, one that cost the Mennonites dearly. In fact, the missionaries referred to the change in missionary paradigm as a new “conversion.” They turned over all church authority to the Qom and began to reference themselves as “fraternal workers” rather than missionaries. This move empowered indigenous leaders to take full control not only of the church but of the very definition of the gospel itself. Following the lead of veteran missionaries Albert and Lois Buckwalter, the Mennonite team of mission workers developed the concept of “missionary as guest.”

In 2009, an Argentine evangelical press published the book *Misión sin Conquista*,² which articulates the vision the Mennonite team has practiced. The book's full title (*Mission Without Conquest: Accompaniment of Indigenous Communities as an Alternative Missionary Practice*) refers to the Mennonite missionary experiment in the Argentine Chaco as an “alternative missionary practice.” Building a denominational church among the Qom was discarded in favor of empowering a thoroughly native church managed by Qom spiritual leaders. Thus the people themselves carried out the significant role of defining Christianity in their own culture.

Translation of the Bible into the Qom languages became another key component of the accompaniment model. Recognition of the cultural value of local languages turned out to be a crucial contributing factor in the empowerment of indigenous leadership. Mission personnel brought technical and linguistic skills to the translation endeavor and functioned as bridges between Qom translators and the Argentine Bible Society. The arduous task of training indigenous translators involves theological formation that should lead to both a culturally relevant theology as well as a

reaffirmation of the positive values of traditional faith. Martínez correctly identifies the need for the theological affirmation of Creation and of God's continual presence among all peoples. A further step for evangelical interfaith dialogue should be to listen more attentively to indigenous worldviews about the place of the human in Creation. An evangelical theology that has tended to emphasize an anthropocentric creation, with the human solely in charge of the rest of creation as "stewards," will need to eventually give way to indigenous understandings in which all created beings are our relatives. From the indigenous perspective, humans are understood to be such an intrinsic part of Creation that we must actually be subservient to her (and not the other way around).

Our experience among the Qom taught us that when people who are perceived or treated as a culturally inferior group are given the space and encouragement to see the gospel through their own eyes, they are fully capable of adapting the message in a culturally relevant configuration. When foreign impositions are removed, or at least minimized, native spiritual leaders are empowered to embody the gospel in ways that speak to their own people at the deepest level. Catholic religious workers throughout Latin America often refer to this process as "enculturation of the gospel." By this they mean a degree of incarnation of the gospel that goes beyond what we evangelicals often refer to as contextualization. Nobel peace prize winner Rigoberta Menchú describes it as being like a flower is to its mother plant: something the plant itself produces. That is, the recipients of the gospel internalize the message to such a degree that it grows and flowers as a part of the plant itself, not as a strange element grafted in, or a foreign message contextualized in order to find acceptance.

In fact, we began to see that believers in Jesus who are part of an ethnic people radically different from the Jewish peoplehood ought to be encouraged to understand and express the gospel in metaphors from their own culture. This may lead to unorthodox theological constructs or different interpretations of essential doctrines such as the atonement, the Trinity, or the meaning of the Lord's Supper. For example, Qom theologians

seem to understand Jesus' work in the forgiveness of sins more in terms of purification than as vicarious blood sacrifice.

Lastly, perhaps we need a reevaluation of practices considered to be syncretistic. After all, good news from outside can be adequately understood only when viewed through the eyes of one's own cultural framework. This will inevitably produce synthetic formulations



People in traditional Ecuadorean dresses dance as part of a parade through the streets celebrating a traditional festival in Quito, Ecuador.

that to outsiders can easily seem like unjustified syncretism. We should encourage such unorthodox configurations of the gospel wherever the practical results are observable and identifiable as a way of following Jesus in daily life. In this sense, orthopraxis will trump orthodoxy. **EIFD**

Willis G. and Byrdalene (Wyse) Horst reside in Goshen, Indiana, where they retired in 2010 following 38 years of service for the Mennonite Mission Network and its predecessor agency. Located in the Chaco region of northern Argentina among the Qom indigenous peoples, Willis accompanied Qom church leaders through Bible studies and intercultural theological dialogue and served as coordinator of the Mennonite missionary team. They have four children and seven grandchildren.

ENDNOTES

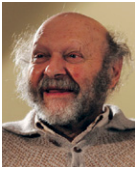
- ¹ See "Indigenous Relations (Canada)," on the Mennonite Church Canada website (last modified October 23, 2012): <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/witness/world/countries/nm/index.htm>.
- ² Willis Horst, Ute Müller Eckhardt, and Frank Paul, *Misión sin conquista: Acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2009).



Two young women in traditional dress at Carnival in Oruro, Bolivia.

Jesuit priest, prolific author and cofounder of CIPCA (Center for the Investigation and Promotion of Peasants, Bolivia).

THE “ENCOUNTER” BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND NATIVES IN THE COLONIES



Dr. Martínez is correct in what he says but it can be clarified in two respects. First, a historical distinction can be made between the initial phases of the Conquest in which there were indeed the famous *Requerimientos* and *encomiendas*, etc.,

and yet there were also influential minority sectors, among whom stand out certain Dominicans such as Bartolomé de las Casas. The latter figure continued to question the legitimacy of the Conquest even when the colonial reality had to be accepted amidst a whole range of alleged syncretism. Likewise, a change of emphasis needs to be noted: On the one hand, until the end of the sixteenth century there was a dogmatic insistence on “eradicating the doctrinal idolatries” even if perhaps many practices continued in secret. On the other hand, from the sixteenth century onward in geographic areas considered “territorially baptized,” there was greater tolerance for such things as superstitions, popular beliefs, witchcraft, and so forth. The irony is that many of these alleged practices were quite common in Europe.

Second, the encounter has social, geographic, and ecological aspects. The more populous and therefore more desirable indigenous groups for labor in the mines and in commercial agriculture were those in Middle America (*Mesoamérica*) and the Andes. Historically, the baptisms and syncretism among those groups came much earlier and were more intense. Missionary activity was quite limited among the dispersed and isolated, especially in the lower marginal lands. In fact, some areas only had missionaries (such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Augustinians, and others) without other Spanish or Portuguese present. In these areas, the evangelization was more transparent, combined with attempts to “civilize” the natives in their social and economic organization but without the pressure of weapons and landlords. Those who wanted to become Christians did so, while others did not, including many minority groups (with whom no contact had been made), especially in the Amazon region. The expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 from the whole continent facilitated the arrival of new landowners, which added an additional coercive dynamic in the encounter.

The Late Arrival of the Protestants

The great importance given to education, literacy, and languages is definitely linked to the foreigners’ desire that natives have direct access to the Bible in a way they could fully understand. In the Andean region where I currently live, this was the especially the case among the Adventist and Methodist churches.

In addition to the Wycliffe Bible Translators, the Summer Institute of Linguistics—who perhaps concentrate too much on linguistics due to their theological framework—assumes an automatic relationship between the hearing or reading of Scripture and conversion. This seems to be a pattern in the twentieth century. However, I would argue that these groups have not gone far enough in seeking to understand the cultural and social worldviews of indigenous peoples and neither have they studied their social organizations. In the twentieth century, this pattern is also true of New Tribes Mission, especially in areas where they have concentrated evangelistic efforts in areas considered “unreached.”

Current Views

I resonate with many of Dr. Martínez’s comments. If we are to go deeper into the issues raised in this article we must necessarily distinguish between the diverse underlying theologies among Catholics and especially among the many Protestant groups. Dr. Martínez does this with Pentecostals, which is pertinent since this group is the one growing the most in Latin America, even among Catholics (e.g., Guatemala). Our mutual friend (Jesuit) Tom Rausch also does this. Not everyone demonizes indigenous beliefs, at least not in Bolivia.

Concerning syncretism, many view syncretism as categorically negative, while others such as myself think that we need to analyze each specific case because this may be the way we gain a better respect for the religion of the indigenous peoples. Evangelism then must be shaped by the attitudes and character based on the missionary’s love of neighbor and his/her diversity of cultures. In my view, in part due to historical factors, we must give priority to orthopraxis more than orthodoxy. Within orthopraxis we can choose to vary the regularity (and perhaps felt necessity?) with which we


The Virgin of Guadalupe



state (or not) the centrality of the person of Jesus. We must take into account how Jesus has come to each group and how that might differ from ways shaped by the imperial and oppressive attitudes of many Western evangelizers. The final judgment scene of Matthew 25 has always made me humbly meditate on my own blind spots. Jesus says, “When did we see you hungry and give you food to eat?” He answers, “I assure you that all you did for one of my brothers even the least of these you did for me.”

Moving Forward

As the dialogue moves forward, more importance should be given to the need for increased ecumenical exchange between Catholics and evangelicals particularly in the midst of indigenous groups. Frequently, because of the lack of intra-Christian exchange, our internal divisions contribute to deepening the divisions that already exist among the indigenous groups for a number of reasons (e.g., access to land, water, or other resources; internal power struggles, etc.). With regard to this last issue we have many examples of the link between the desire for political power and how religious identity is used (e.g., Ríos Mott in Guatemala, FEINE in Ecuador, the “New Israelites” in Fujimori’s Peru).

On the other hand, if we as Catholics and evangelicals unite and seek a way to solve our “common” social or political disputes, our theological differences will not matter as much. Ultimately, we can achieve greater unity through our mutual action. This has occurred, for example, in the international cooperation of the NGOs against poverty and the empowering of the indigenous population. In the time of dictatorships, the ISAL movement (Church and Society in Latin America) played an important ecumenical role together with Catholic groups, Methodists, Lutherans, and others to restore democracy. 

Xavier Albó was born in Cataluña, Spain (1934), migrated to Bolivia in 1952 as a Jesuit priest, and is a citizen of that country. He is the author of many books and articles, especially ones related to the indigenous population and intercultural matters in Bolivia and Latin America. Among the Jesuits he was the coordinator of the Jesuit Network of Latin American Solidarity and Pastoral Care of the Indigenous Population (1995–2002) and a member of the advising team of the International Interreligious Dialogue (2010–2012).

Long before Spaniards began settling in Latin America in the sixteenth century, Aztec religion offered a highly developed conception of a female deity called Tonantzin, the supreme Earth Mother. Tonantzin was the source of both life and death, a terrifying goddess who eventually consumed everything she created.¹ Worship of Tonantzin became a dangerous enterprise with the 1519 arrival of Spanish conquistadors to Latin America. The Spaniards were set on eradicating native expressions of spirituality, and they attempted by force to establish Catholicism as

the territory’s religion. In their Catholicism Mary played a prominent role, and the Spanish left a trail of Marian images and statues in villages they passed through, all the way from the Atlantic coast to Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico City), the area’s capital and the center of Aztec worship.²

From the perspective of the Aztecs, Mary was originally associated with the death and destruction wrought by the Spaniards, and more specifically with the destruction of Aztec temples and statues of gods—statues that were often replaced with statues of Mary.³ For native peoples (and through the encouragement of Catholic priests eager to make converts), the Virgin Mary took on meaning previously ascribed to the Aztec goddess Tonantzin.

This association was strengthened by an event that took place in 1951 at a former site of Tonantzin worship. There, an Aztec peasant and convert to Catholicism named Juan Diego experienced a vision of Mary in which she called herself “La Virgen de Guadalupe” and expressed a desire for a church to be built at the site. She instructed Juan Diego to gather out-of-season roses and present them to the bishop as proof of her appearance. When Juan Diego opened his cloak, the roses fell out, and in their place miraculously appeared a painting of the Virgin on the inside of Juan’s cloak.

For the native people, this story took on multiple layers of significance. Mary—whose skin in the painting was native-toned—had appeared to one of them, on their land, and had inspired a peasant to confront the occupying powers with a demand for a uniquely native church. The Virgin of Guadalupe offered hope to the native peoples experiencing oppression at the hands of conquering foreigners, and the connection between the Virgin of Guadalupe and the goddess Tonantzin meant that a conduit had been created through which people so inclined were able to worship Tonantzin by a different name.⁴

The Virgin of Guadalupe became and still remains a symbol of Mexican independence, though her influence extends far beyond Mexico’s borders. Today, over ten million people per year visit the church that was built at the Virgin’s behest, making it the second-most visited Catholic church in the world (the first being St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican).⁵ Appearances of the Virgin Mary are part and parcel of the Latin American Catholic experience, but in terms of popular appeal, no others have come close to rivaling the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

ENDNOTES

¹ Patricia Harrington, “Mother of Death, Mother of Rebirth: The Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56 (1988): 26.

² *Ibid.*, 29.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Alberto Pereyra, “The Virgin of Guadalupe, History, Myth, and Spirituality,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24 (1997): 348–54.

⁵ “Our Lady of Guadalupe,” on the Catholic News Agency website, December 12, 2013, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/saint.php?n=82>.

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BUILDING CHRISTOLOGICAL BRIDGES TO INDIGENOUS FAITH AND PRACTICE



Juan Martínez has written a concise and thoughtful review of some of the major historical and cultural factors impacting evangelistic outreach among the indigenous peoples of Latin America. He well chronicles the challenges and complexities involved

in such efforts—the emergence of nativistic religious movements, ongoing questions of syncretism, Christian attitudes of superiority and, not least of all, the often painful and harsh reality of missions history in this region. These issues have created impediments that the serious cross-cultural evangelist cannot, with any modicum of integrity or hope for success, minimize or ignore. Even the most sensitive Christian worker who zealously affirms the intrinsic value of indigenous peoples and their cultures must contend with the missiological maelstrom created by these vexing realities. They are the Scylla and Charybdis that cannot be avoided, and the evangelist must navigate through them with great care if there are to be meaningful opportunities for sharing the good news of the gospel in this context.

I am in full agreement with Martínez's assertion that an attitude of humility must carry the day in doing mission among the native peoples of this region. Because of the long history of discrimination and persecution that the indigenous peoples of Latin America have endured, many North American and European missionaries—and their message—are still looked upon with suspicion by rural Amerindian populations. In my own research and ministry among the Cañari Quichua people of highland Ecuador, I have been struck by the fact that there are those in positions of leadership who are arguing loudly for a *desevangelización* (de-evangelization) of their culture. In the view of some, Christianity—in both its Catholic and Protestant forms—has been no small factor in the collapse of indigenous culture, identity, and power. Making the Christian message compelling in such an environment will require far more than understanding and compassion on the part of the evangelist. It will necessitate a renewed commitment to an incarnational model patterned after the example of Christ, a disavowing of status and power, and a self-emptying that opens not just the eyes but the very

life of the missionary to the enormously real pain and struggle of indigenous life.

Concurrent with and integral to this appeal for an unfeigned missionary humility, I would also like to respond specifically to



Photo by Allen McWhite

Martínez's call to build "Christological bridges" with indigenous faith and practice. However, I want to approach this idea from a somewhat different perspective by focusing on the ubiquitous image of Christ that is so deeply ingrained in the popular religiosity of indigenous peoples. Jesus is by no means a stranger in this environment. His effigies, in a variety of manifestations, are found everywhere. The traditional Latin American Christological images

(those brought by the Spaniards to the Americas and the ones most commonly observed in this context) tend to focus almost entirely on the two extremities of Jesus' earthly life, that is, his nativity and his crucifixion. These images of Christ as divine child and expiatory victim elevate the "other-worldly" dimensions of his life, diminishing his humanity and tending to remove him from a meaningful role in the contemporary struggles of indigenous peoples. Certainly, the influence of Liberation Theology has given Jesus a social and political platform in some significant sectors of Latin America. Nevertheless, for the majority of native peoples, Jesus is viewed primarily as a divine Savior who opens the doorway to heaven and eternal life; he has little to offer in providing release or relief from the challenges and struggles of an earthly, temporal existence. Those remedies must be sought out elsewhere—either from the Virgin or one of the Catholic saints, from the local shaman or *curandero* (healer), or through a socio-political process that often yields little, in spite of more than five hundred years of indigenous resistance.

One great exception to the almost exclusively soteriological function of Jesus in Latin America can be seen in the patronal Christ images


of individual towns, villages, communities, and families.¹ While these icons are not nearly as prominent as the more traditional Christological images or as numerous as the myriad images of the Virgin and the Catholic saints, they do represent one locale of faith where Jesus appears to be firmly and intimately linked to the real-life issues and struggles of Amerindian peoples. For the Cañari Quichua of Ecuador, these patronal images of Christ are believed to perform miracles of healing, prevent drought and floods, ensure the productivity of agricultural lands and livestock, bring success in relationships and business ventures, provide protection in travel and immigration, and intervene in circumstances that demand justice or vindication.

While one may choose to argue that the indigenous beliefs and practices associated with these cult images and local Christologies are superstitious or even idolatrous, the fact remains that the New Testament accounts of Jesus' earthly life (particularly as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels) often focus on the provisional and protectional aspects of his ministry. The evangelist who sees value in this dimension of the gospel message may find a relevant point of departure for building an authentic and holistic understanding of



Jesus' person, work, and message among native Latin American peoples. Such a focus on Synoptic Christologies, which tend to reflect a Christology "from below," seems to provide indigenous

peoples with a more natural avenue for discovering their own unique points of identification with Jesus, an important first step in developing a truly contextual Christology. Of course, connecting the provisional and protectional ministries of the historical Jesus with the authentic discipleship demanded by the Christ of faith will remain the great challenge, but this is part and parcel of a genuine enculturation of the gospel. The ultimate goal of all missionary efforts must be that Amerindian peoples will find Jesus—and the gospel—to be relevant in their own lives, to their own needs, and within their own culture.

Jesus Christ and the gospel will only become "good news" to the indigenous peoples of Latin America when they begin to provide answers to the questions that native peoples are asking, when they begin to speak to the uncertainties and fears that are most common in their culture, and when they begin to address the deepest longings and aspirations of their hearts. Endeavoring to build these kinds of "Christological bridges" could require the emergence of some new and different paradigms for Christ that may bear little resemblance to the classical Euro-American understanding. And yet, this is part of the process of dealing with a question that was first asked by Jesus himself: "Who do men say that I am?" The answer from Latin America may help us all see Jesus in new ways, opening our eyes and our hearts to understand more clearly "the fullness of him [Christ] who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:23). 

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ These patronal Christs are sometimes local manifestations of universal Christian advocations. In other instances they are completely unique manifestations. In either case, these local Christs are believed to intervene directly in the lives of their devotees and possess great tutelary and/or thaumaturgic powers; hence, they are the objects of intense reverence and devotion. Pilgrimages, processions, community festivals, and high masses are held in their honor. These are the images of Christ to which the faithful draw near in their endless endeavors to overcome the challenges and the crises of life. They evoke great veneration, sacrifice, and expressions of thanksgiving.



Above: A group of Cañari Quichua woman in the highlands of Ecuador (photo by Allen McWhite)

IRMA ESPINOZA O.

Missiologist and educator who has worked with different ethnic groups of the Amazon for more than 30 years.

EVANGELISM'S NEGLECT OF THE INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW



So-called evangelization, whether Catholic or evangelical, has focused on the conversion of the soul and has rejected any coming together of the indigenous worldview and “ours.” As a result, the indigenous worldview has been reduced to the practice of witchcraft and Shamanism. Many Catholics and evangelicals have not taken the time to view the native as a complete individual with the same needs to live, create, better himself/herself, and excel as any other human being. The indigenous continue to be used by other Christians to carry out self-serving “goals” without taking into account the native’s goals, a perspective that discounts them as “fellow human beings or neighbors,” let alone someone who must be considered as equally human as oneself. Because discipleship has not taken local cultures seriously, the gospel—which John MacKay speaks of very well in his book *The Other Spanish Christ*—Christ has been presented as the Child or as the Crucified yet not given the importance of Savior, Lord, or Redeemer.¹ The latter demonstrates why translation and literacy go hand in hand. Translation emphasizes finding and improving the technical aspect, while the literacy campaign functions as an invitation to come together and learn more deeply about the particularities of culture, to treat the other as a person.

Western-style evangelization is in a hurry to complete short-, medium-, and long-term goals. In so doing, Westerners fulfill “their obligation” by presenting projects to the indigenous population only so that “their own work” is not interrupted. Time is not taken

to train those involved in all that a project entails, such as the areas of administration, the idea of collective ownership, what to do when the project fails, and the value and use of money. The reason is that you have to pay the person who learns a profession, even though the missionaries know one can serve professionally without charging. All of this is to say that the introduction of new ideas and tools had the potential to contribute to indigenous life, but that potential was wasted because no time was spent on the process of helping local people understand those tools. Of course, the conclusion reached by Westerners was that the natives were guilty and solely culpable for not making the most of the tools introduced to them. Unfortunately, these attitudes have not changed much. Western denominations and the Western missionary outlook continue to embody the colonial attitudes of individualism, superiority, and territorialism rather than mutually sharing knowledge, skills, and resources as equals. EIFD

Irma Espinoza is a missiologist (M.A.) and educator who has worked with different ethnic groups of the Amazon for more than 30 years. Currently, she is the director of the “Amazon Focus” mission. She has worked alongside the “Red Transamazonica” (Transamazonian Network), which is composed of networks in seven Amazonian countries. Espinoza has also worked as the coordinator of the “Consorcio Alteo” (Alteo Partnership) for Latin America, which is composed of churches, missions and entities in the U.S. that minister to the different ethnic groups of the Amazon.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See John Alexander Mackay, *The Other Spanish Christ: A Study in the Spiritual History of Spain and South America* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

SAMUEL ESCOBAR Response (continued from page 12)

to come to terms with the issue of religious pluralism, especially as it pertains to Islam. There are no easy answers, and I must learn a lot. Like the Spanish who went to the Americas in the sixteenth century, I find myself tempted to refer to Muslims as “a little less human than us Christians.” This attitude is partly fostered by the media stereotypes with which I am constantly bombarded. I have a lot of homework to do in relation to Islam. I am helped by conversation with some Latin Americans who are now carrying

on mission in Muslim countries and see things in a different way. These brothers and sisters carry on “mission from below,” and that helps a lot! EIFD

Samuel Escobar is from Peru. He and his wife, Lilly, were missionaries among university students in Latin America from 1959 to 1985. Then until 2005 he taught missiology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania (United States). Presently he lives in Valencia, Spain, and he teaches at the Facultad Protestante de Teología in Madrid.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For a translation into English, see José de Acosta and Stewart G. McIntosh, *De procuranda indorum salute* (Tayport, Scotland: Mac Research, 1996).



MISIÓN SIN CONQUISTA:

Acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa

by Willis Horst, Ute Müller Eckhardt, and Frank Paul

Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2009

Misión Sin Conquista (*Mission Without Conquest*) is a record of a deep reflection prompted by the experience of a Mennonite missionary team living and walking with the Toba-Qom people in the region of Chaco, Argentina. In the form of a journal and collection of testimonies, the book offers a perspective “from within” the process of contextualization of the gospel that led to a new paradigm for cross-cultural Christian mission and, ultimately, for the Toba-Qom community, the formation of a genuine indigenous church.

As the title suggests, the authors aim to demonstrate that missionary vocation emanating from the gospel is one that rejects any kind of proselytizing, patronizing, colonizing, or conquering practices. Making use of more than forty years of service and participant observations, coauthor Willis Horst affirms that “any action that diminishes another is not worthy of being called Gospel” (p. 15). This conviction has led the Mennonite team to develop an alternative form of mission based on the idea of walking alongside those who are also seeking *the life*, prioritizing the integrity of the indigenous people.

One of the key terms on which the authors build their argument is the principle of “religious self-determination,” which points to the ideal of respect towards the cultural bases that define the identity of a group of people. The first foundation for this principle is based on an anthropological perspective that recognizes a people’s historical background as a legitimate and successful life-long goal. Here, each member has full capacity for participating in a dialectical selection of those aspects to be maintained or incorporated from both the culture of origin and the surrounding or external culture.

A second aspect for the foundation of “religious self-determination” depends on the missionaries’ theological understandings that enable them to recognize God’s blueprints in each individual and each culture. By employing different images or metaphors such as “utopia,” “shalom,” “earth without evil,” “memory restoration,” or even “new heavens and earth,” the indigenous people demonstrate that they are already developing different life-long desire, hopes, and goals. The gospel, therefore, operates as an input that straightens, contributes, and continues the pursuit of *the life* of a people, now being defined through the person of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the book’s narrative, the authors grow in their understanding of the kind of spirituality that the Toba-Qom have developed through the centuries. They recognize virtues such as wholeness of life (absence of dualistic conceptions), communal identity, an integration of faith and action, and mutuality in the created order of relationships. These are the elements that make the Toba-Qom theology one of extraordinary relevance and richness especially for the Western worldview.

The authors also point out that sustaining and working from this anthropological and theological framework elicits a new understanding of the way of being the church that emphasizes a kind of religious pluralism in which “each people, culture or congregation has the possibility of understanding and interpreting the message of the Gospel from within their own culture” (p. 28). In this way, the churches are freely empowered to create new and locally appropriate spiritualities, theologies, and ecclesiologies that, in the eyes of a foreigner, may seem awkward or unorthodox.

The success of the Mennonite mission in Chaco, Argentina, can be attributed to a sincere acknowledgement that the missionaries themselves were representatives of a Western society responsible for terrible damages, abuse, and suffering committed against indigenous peoples. As a result, their missionary approach was conducted under a spirit of fraternity, patience, and vulnerability—one that adopts a posture that recognizes the white missionary is not the agent who brings God to the people, but instead one whom is brought by God as a guest. As a guest, the missionary shares meals, worships, and sleeps among indigenous brothers and sisters who for centuries have carried God’s image, and now do so in the light of one who is called “the way, the truth, and the life.”

Sebastian Lopez is originally from Temuco, Chile. He moved to Pasadena California in 2010 to start his studies at Fuller Theological seminary in the Masters of Divinity Program. Together with his wife they serve in a pastoral ministry at a Hispanic church in south Los Angeles. He also likes to blog and spend time having conversations with Hispanic leaders through his website www.lentesnuevos.net.

WALKING WITH THE K'EKCHI IN GUATEMALA



Setting

The K'ekchi of northeastern Guatemala and southern Belize number about one million and are one of the more than 21 indigenous groups of Mayan descent in Central America. Living in the hilly highlands and tropical jungles, they are mainly subsistence farmers with a long

history of oppression at the hands of the Spanish *conquistadores* and the modern-day landlords. As the third largest indigenous group in Guatemala, the K'ekchi have been able to maintain a stronger cultural and language identity than many of the smaller and more urbanized groups.

Missionary Presence and K'ekchi Spirituality

Eastern Mennonite Missions workers arrived in the K'ekchi area in 1968 and began the slow process of learning the language and culture.¹ Overcoming the suspicion of foreigners and gaining acceptance into the community did not happen quickly. As they developed relationships with their neighbors and learned to know the needs of the area, they initiated projects in agricultural development, health, and education. Much time was spent accompanying their friends in the traditional corn planting celebrations and other community events. It was not until 1972 that the first believers were baptized, marking the beginning of a church-planting movement that has now grown to 125 congregations.

It did not take long to learn that the K'ekchi are very much aware of the spirit world. Their primal worldview is one in which the primary spirits are embodied in the mountains and hills that surround their traditional habitat. Long, frequent, and fervent prayers were a part of their daily life long before the missionaries came. They can be heard praying aloud when they awake in the morning and before sleeping at night. The 500 years of interface with Catholicism has left them with an expression of syncretism that makes it common to hear references to Jesus, Holy Mary, and the local mountain god all in the same prayer. They pray for permission to engage in whatever activity they are about to begin so as not to offend the spirits that care about that activity. They pray for protection from the unpredictable and often malevolent spirits that linger in their environment.

Missionaries have learned much and have been deeply humbled by the K'ekchi's keen awareness of the spiritual and by their religious fervor. I remember the day a young man said to me, the missionary, "Brother, don't you think we should pray before we begin this activity?" Or the time a pastor said to my wife, who is a nurse, "Sister, when we visit the sick, please do not start asking questions about the medical condition of the person until after we have prayed." Who indeed are the true spiritual leaders here?

The Gospel Message and the K'ekchi Worldview

View of Creation



Mateo Pop Coc and his wife Dominga stand in front of the new K'ekchi Mennonite Church the village helped to construct in Chirubequim (photo by Larry Lehman, courtesy EMM).

"I lift up my eyes to the hills." Yes, the K'ekchi do that every day. It is to the hills that they pray. It is in the caves in the hills that the most sacred spots are found and the most important prayers are prayed. It is on the hills that corn, the source of life, is planted. It is indeed to the hills where they look for their help. But Psalm 121 goes on: "Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the *Maker* of the heaven and the earth." The K'ekchi believers claim this Psalm

as one that was written for them. The fact that they can now know the Creator of their precious hills has taken them beyond the fear of the unpredictable with which they used to live. The Creator of the hills is good and "will keep them from harm and will watch over them." This fact leads them to worship and be thankful in a way that they never experienced before.

The respect for nature and creation that comes from the primal worldview has some positive aspects, but in my view it is based on fear as much as on true respect. From my perspective, the Biblical view of creation, for example, provides a much more viable basis for respect for creation. The current reality in Central America, as in many places in the world, is that neither primal nor biblical worldviews (if we can call it that) have provided the necessary resources for a consciousness of caring for the environment.



From left to right: A group of wedding guests inside Nueva Esperanza Mission; Phyllis sharing and studying with a friend (photos by the Groffs, courtesy of EMM).

As everywhere, the church among the K'ekchi needs to continually emphasize that we have a good God who has created a good world and has commissioned us to care for it.

Fertility and Survival

Corn planting is the most sacred and celebrated time of the year. Along with feasting and drinking, animal sacrifices and complex ceremonies are performed to appease the god of the hills. So how do believers plant corn? At the beginning of corn-planting season, believers participate in a great feast as they have always done. Now, however, instead of the ceremonies and drinking, they have a joyous time of prayer and worship. They ask the Creator God to bless the seeds, to bring the needed rain, and to keep the wild animals from eating their crops.

Illness and Medicine

In the traditional worldview illnesses are caused by spiritual forces. Either someone did something wrong or they did not do something they should have done. A sickness can be placed on someone by others who wish to do them harm. Even after years of being Christian believers, many K'ekchi retain a view of sickness that is unfamiliar to those with a more secular/scientific view. Christian medical personnel and pastors among the K'ekchi have learned that it is most helpful to try to discover why the person believes he or she is sick. This inquiry is important because if one treats a person with modern medicine for an illness he or she believes has a spiritual source, the person most likely will not cooperate with the treatment and not be cured.

It is not uncommon for a person to confess a belief that the sickness came from a fear, a broken relationship, an angry outburst, or another problem in his or her life. This provides an excellent opportunity to counsel and pray with the person about these issues. In a case like this, the K'ekchi may be closer to biblical view of the whole person than those of us who default to treating every symptom with medicine.

One effective approach used by many local pastors, especially when a person believes he or she is under a curse, has been to neither acknowledge nor deny the reality of the person's belief regarding the source of the sickness. Instead they affirm that God is more powerful than whatever it is that has made them sick. It is God's power that

heals sicknesses, and just as the traditional healers use herbs and incantations, God may "borrow" the doctor and his medicine to help heal the sick. The pastor then prays with the person on a regular basis while at the same time helping them and encouraging them to seek medical attention. They pray expecting that the God who loves them will hear them. Jesus said, after all, "Ask and you will receive." Testimonies of healings and other miracles are very common.

In conclusion, our work among the K'ekchi has included many errors and misguided efforts, but as we have tried to humbly walk among them, the Holy Spirit has raised up a vibrant body of believers who are interpreting the gospel in their own context. We have been here through years of war, oppression, and conflict. By necessity, we have not been active in the political issues that have been affecting the K'ekchi people. But by our presence and activities, we have attempted to empower them to be leaders and to be involved in the issues that affect their lives. During our time, many local communities that were once controlled by oppressive landlords are now under indigenous leadership and ownership. Many pastors and leaders of the church who have had training in conflict resolution are often on the forefront in efforts to resolve local conflicts in their communities.

The story of God working among the K'ekchi, which began in ages past, will continue. It is humbling to have been here for a season to walk with them in that journey. My prayer is that they will continue to discover what it means to live out the life of Jesus in their context and to be faithful to his call.

We have been blessed to spend the last 20 years in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, learning the language and culture of the K'ekchi people group. We work with the K'ekchi Mennonite Church, which was started more than 40 years ago by missionaries sent by Eastern Mennonite Missions in Salunga, Pennsylvania. The church currently consists of 126 congregations and approximately 10,000 members. The church serves its community through the Bezaleel Education Center, which is a high school with 170 boarding students and a health program that provides basic health care to several hundred rural villages. Our role is to walk with the leaders that God is raising up among his people here. That means mentoring some, teaching some, praying with some as we carry them in our hearts and learn with them what it means to walk with Jesus in this part of the world.



Originally from Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, the Groffs have been blessed to spend the last 20 years in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, learning the language and culture of the K'ekchi people group. They work with the K'ekchi Mennonite Church, which was started more than 40 years ago by missionaries sent by Eastern Mennonite Missions. The church currently consists of 126 congregations and approximately 10,000 members. Galen and Phyllis have three children and four grandsons.

ENDNOTES

¹ See the Eastern Mennonite Missions' website: <http://emm.org/>.

Seeing Differently Luis González Palma



LENI (2008)

20 X 20 inches

Hand Painted Silver Gelatin Print

The glance has power. The *indigenous glance* has the power to provoke all kinds of questions.

Art has the inherent ability and power to question how we look at the other, of interrogating the history that has produced these glances and, therefore, the ways in which we interact with the world. In my artistic process I have tried to create images that invite the observer to examine through what I call "emotional contemplation."

I focus on creating certain metaphors by means of frontal portraits of fixed direct stares that expose the dignity of the models and, simultaneously, make evident the fragility of their being; these are portraits in which both loneliness and emotional firmness are displayed. In the series of Guatemalan portraits within which *Leni* is displayed, the strength of the *glance* lies in the power it has to reverse my own. For the observer, the self-discovery is accompanied by a silent mirroring which is meant to indicate that we all share a common destiny.

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