

North American Christians and the Latin American Church: Lessons from South of the Border

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Abstract

Throughout the history of relationships between North American and Latin American evangelicals, most of the influence has flowed from north to south. This article suggests that North American evangelicals can learn much from our Latin American sisters and brothers, especially in the areas of social justice and corporate solidarity. The combination of linguistic and theological insights should be of special interest to Christian foreign language teachers.

The Current Landscape

A Christian counselor, specializing in premarital counseling for bi-cultural couples, affirmed that “when two people from different cultures commit themselves to each other in marriage, they will definitely have more problems than ‘normal’ couples, but these problems are really opportunities for personal growth.” Although these words were originally intended for persons contemplating marriage, they apply equally well to North Americans who desire to minister to and learn from Latin American Christians.¹ It is important to understand and grow from these problems because an increasing number of North Americans in general, and Christian College students in particular, are having significant contacts with Latin Americans. In the first place, Latinos are one of the most rapidly growing segments of the general population in the United States, already comprising 14% of the total. Soon into the twenty-first century they will overtake the Afro-Americans as the largest ethnic minority in the country. Secondly, the North

American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the growing economic globalization are bringing North Americans and Latin Americans into greater contact. Thirdly, the Internet permits Latinos and North Americans to be traveling companions along the Communications Super Highway in ways that were totally unimaginable just a few years ago.

Christian students are also coming into contact with Latinos on an increasing scale. For example, at our college we are encouraging greater cultural diversity and we are striving to increase the Latino presence on campus. The growing population of Latinos in the area can be seen by the presence of some eight churches within a ten-mile radius of our campus where there are ministries in Spanish. Many students have part-time jobs where they rub shoulders with Latinos (e.g. many serve as waiters and waitresses in restaurants where the cooks and dishwashers are Latinos). Numerous ministries take our students into contact with Latin Americans. In addition, literally hundreds of our graduates have spent time in Latin America as missionaries, on business, or in education.

All too frequently these contacts have not led to personal growth or to the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Two main factors contribute to this sad reality: cultural relativism and religious imperialism. Cultural relativism dominates the landscape in our current secular North American society. It is commonly accepted that all perspectives are equally valid (or invalid). Therefore, that which is different from my culture² is quite acceptable for "those people", but it has no necessary bearing upon my life. Sometimes this ideology comes close to "absolute relativism", a contradiction in terms. In a book on cross-cultural orientation, author Pierre Casse affirms:

There is no absolute truth. It is indeed up to each individual to find out what his or her truth is.... What is true today will be obsolete and untrue tomorrow. What is all right for one individual is not necessarily so for another. What is effective for one situation is not automatically so for any situation. In short everything is relative.³

While most evangelicals do not officially adhere to cultural relativism, this ideology, together with a concomitant individualism that permeates North America, enables most of us in fact to evade the truth claims made upon us by other cultures. Truths discovered in Asia, Latin America,

and Africa seldom make their way into the hearts and lives of North American Christians.

At the other extreme of the spectrum is a religious imperialism and/or ethnocentrism that affirms that one particular version of Christianity (ours) is superior to all other forms of culture and religion in every aspect.⁴ Although this is not usually stated so bluntly, ethnocentrism is common to humanity, including Christians involved in cross-cultural activities. Over sixty years ago H. Richard Niebuhr aptly described the worldview of many North American missionaries:

Christianity, democracy, Americanism, the English language and culture, the growth of industry and science, American institutions—these are all confounded and confused. The contemplation of their own righteousness filled Americans with such lofty and enthusiastic sentiments that they readily identified it with the righteousness of God.... The Kingdom of the Lord...is in particular the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race, which is destined to bring light to the gentiles by means of lamps manufactured in America.⁵

During the last decade this religious imperialism has been reinforced by the growing “Americanization” of other cultures due to the end of the cold war and the rise of the global economy.

Some Christian college students epitomize these two extremes, frequently at the same time. For example, during their high school days many Christian students have had a weeklong “mission” trip to a country in Latin America. Prior to the trip they studied little about the culture or the church that exists in that country so that they might learn from them. It is even more disconcerting that when they were there they were happiest not when experiencing authentic expressions of national culture, but when they found a McDonalds or a Pizza Hut, when they presented a drama or pantomime originally designed for a North American youth culture audience, or when they sang “American” Christian songs that had been translated into Spanish or Portuguese.⁶

This paper attempts to avoid some of the pitfalls of these two extreme positions (cultural relativism and religious imperialism) and pave the way for an alternative path. It is motivated by a pastoral concern for our

students as they strive to obey the Word of God. It is common to hear that our students live within a “Bubble” and are consequently too protected from the harsh realities of the world. It is even more tragic that they are too insulated from truths that Christians in other parts of the world have discovered. Our students will be more holistic and well rounded disciples of our Lord if they incorporate into their lives lessons from the world-wide Body of Christ. If it is indeed correct that “all truth is God’s truth wherever it is found”,⁷ then it is imperative that we avail ourselves of the truth that the Two-Thirds world has discovered. Therefore, this paper (and my role on campus) should be seen as a bridge between these two worlds. In the midst of the postmodernist milieu that grips the Academy today it is frequently claimed that absolute truth is not available. Nevertheless, I propose that we can indeed know some truth in the midst of a multi-cultural world. It is precisely in our openness to learn from insights arising from the worldwide Church that our vision will be “sharpened” to better see God’s truth (Proverbs 27:17). Let us now travel south of the border and look at two main concepts, social justice and corporate solidarity, from the perspective of Latin American evangelicals. Lessons from these two motifs arise from and combine linguistic factors and theological reflection. These insights will hopefully strengthen our own obedient walk with the Lord.

Lessons from South of the Border

From a Biblical perspective, all human cultures have varying strengths and weaknesses.⁸ Churches within these cultures also display the flaws and virtues of all human endeavors. The examples mentioned below are cited because they demonstrate certain strengths of the Church in Latin America that might be helpful to the Church in North America. This does not mean that every local church in Latin America demonstrates these strengths nor that the Church in Latin America has nothing to learn from the churches in North America. Rather, it is precisely because “lessons” have almost universally flowed from North America down to Latin America, these “lessons” on social justice and corporate solidarity are offered as modest contributions to counterbalance the flow.

I. Social Justice

It is well known that the Liberation Theologies that have arisen within Latin American Catholicism stress social justice. Likewise mainline

Protestant theologians involved in the earlier *ISAL* (*Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina*) movement also stressed justice as an essential component of the gospel.⁹ Nevertheless, the Church in North America will probably resonate more with the justice emphases articulated by leaders of the evangelical wing of the Latin American Church. In its early history, the evangelical church demonstrated a strong social justice component. This began to wane in the 1920's as Latin American evangelicals increasingly came under the influence of the fundamentalist wing of the North American church. At the same time secular governments increased in size and took over many social ministries (e.g. educational, medical, etc.) that evangelicals had previously occupied. Although for many decades (roughly from 1930-1970) Latin American evangelicals were generally oblivious to the justice dimensions of the gospel, over the last three decades many sectors have begun to recover a Biblically based justice. Part of this recovery was due to the remarkable number of poor Latin Americans who converted to evangelical churches. This recovery has been best articulated by members of the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* (FTL) who sought to respond to the challenges of widespread poverty and injustice. They wrestled with the same issues raised by Liberation Theology, but their responses gave more weight to the Biblical text.

Linguistic Factors Affecting Social Justice

There are linguistic factors that have been conducive to Latin Americans developing a justice theology rooted in Scripture. Some translation problems in our English versions of the Bible are clarified in Spanish. A pertinent example is the important Greek word "*dikaiosune*" which appears 92 times in the New Testament. It is usually translated as "righteousness" in the King James Bible, the RSV, the NASB and the NIV, although on a few occasions it is translated as "justice", "piety" or "what is right". Nevertheless, the Spanish versions of the Bible (the *Reina-Valera* revisions of 1909 and 1960 utilized in the evangelical churches, the recently published *Nueva Versión Internacional*, as well as the Catholic versions) quite consistently translate *dikaiosune* as "*justicia*". Although the term "righteousness" perhaps had a social justice connotation for previous generations when a postmillennialism dominated "Protestant America", that is not the case today. When current North American evangelicals read "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6),

the concepts of an inner purity, a proper attitude, or a legal, imputed righteousness usually come to mind.

On the one hand, countless sermons have been preached on these “Be-attitudes” which tend to emphasize the “attitude” more than the action itself. For example, the note on Matthew 5:6 in *The Full Life Study Bible: New International Version* attempts to clarify the meaning of “righteousness” by linking it with these close parallels.

The spiritual condition of Christians all throughout their lives will depend on their hunger and thirst for the presence of God, the Word of God, the communion of Christ, the fellowship of the Spirit, righteousness, kingdom power and the return of the Lord.¹⁰

The exaggerated individualism of this interpretation can be observed by the fact that not even one of these associated terms explicitly refers neither to **social** justice nor even to interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, some exegetes frequently understand this “righteousness” as referring to Christ’s work on the cross and applied to the believer. This is the general thrust of many Protestant scholars (Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Dispensationalists) who reread a Pauline substitutionary, “imputed justification” back into these passages. Typical of his generation, the 17th century divine Jeremiah Burroughs explicitly identified this righteousness as referring to Christ’s work: “It is the righteousness which is for justification...that perfect satisfaction to divine justice in whatsoever it requires, either in way of punishing for sin or obedience to the law, made by the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹¹ A popular commentator of the twentieth century, Arthur W. Pink, also found imputed righteousness in this passage.

God has, therefore, provided in Christ a *perfect righteousness* for each and all of His people. This righteousness, this satisfying of all the demands of God’s holy Law against us, was worked out by our Substitute and Surety. This righteousness is now *imputed* to (that is, legally credited to the account of) the believing sinner.¹²

By way of contrast, our Spanish-speaking sisters and brothers read this very same passage, but see *dikaiosune* translated as *justicia* and imme-

diately perceive social justice. Juan Mateos describes it in these terms:

Justice” is here, naturally, justice among humanity. Justice presupposes equality, presupposes dignity, means being treated as a person, presupposes liberty, autonomy, the right to decide for one’s self, in sum, all that constitutes a human being.¹³

Careful exegetes in the English-speaking world concur with this social justice connotation of *dikaiosune*, but frequently their work is not appreciated in our “Christianity Light” churches. R.V.G. Tasker comments on this verse by saying “...those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are those who, because they long to see God’s final triumph over evil and His kingdom fully established, long also to do what is right and just themselves. All such have the growing satisfaction of knowing that they are furthering and not thwarting God’s purposes.”¹⁴ John R. W. Stott admits three meanings of *dikaiosune* in the New Testament: legal (i.e. justification), moral (i.e. character), and social. He sees legal justification as extremely unlikely here and moral righteousness as only part of the picture.

For biblical righteousness is more than a private and personal affair; it includes social righteousness as well. And social righteousness, as we learn from the law and the prophets, is concerned with seeking man’s liberation from oppression, together with the promotion of civil rights, justice in the law courts, integrity in business dealings and honour in home and family affairs. Thus Christians are committed to hunger for righteousness in the whole human community as something pleasing to a righteous God.¹⁵

Based upon linguistic and hermeneutical reasons, the social justice connotation of *dikaiosune* in these Matthean passages seems convincing. The immediate context requires it. Although imputed righteousness or justification is the Pauline meaning in Romans, this epistle was written for a different audience, in a different culture, and some twenty-five years later than the original proclamation of the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, it is hermeneutically anachronistic to import a later connotation of a word into

an earlier setting in a different part of the world.¹⁶ The Sermon on the Mount is clearly concerned with our behavior and lifestyle (Matt. 5:19; 7:24). The larger Biblical context supports a social justice connotation as well. In the Septuagint “*dikaiosune*” is the common translation of the Hebrew “*sedeq*”. Hebrew parallelism in various Psalms demonstrates that *sedeq* is synonymous with “upholding the cause of the needy” (Psalm 140:12), “providing equality” (Psalm 99:4), and “being generous and lending freely” (Psalm 112:5). As we move along the hermeneutical spiral, the Spanish translation of *dikaiosune* as *justicia* should lead us to a healthy suspicion of the traditional “imputed righteousness” understanding of this term in Matthew’s rendition of the Sermon on the Mount. A study of the original Greek text tends to confirm our suspicion in this case. As we attempt to obey God and put into practice a “social justice” understanding of this passage, our experiences also tend to confirm our linguistic findings, especially as other passages such as Matthew 5:10 fall into place.¹⁷ Having laid this linguistic groundwork, it is time to listen to Latino theologians.

Latin American Evangelical Theology on Social Justice

An evangelical theology of social justice needs to respond to the socio-economic challenges of Latin America where our Christian brothers and sisters live out their lives in the midst of poverty. They are surrounded by economic inequalities where 50% of the population is below the poverty level according to UN standards. Most Latin American evangelicals can be classified among the “working poor”. This is quite similar to the lifestyle that Jesus chose while here on earth. It is no wonder that passages of Scripture that are extremely important to Latin Americans (and to Jesus) are conveniently overlooked by those of us who live in middle or upper class lifestyles in the richest country the world has ever known.

A watershed event in the development of this theology was Samuel Escobar’s exposition “*Responsabilidad social de la iglesia*” at the First Latin American Congress of Evangelization in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1969. Escobar argued that while the evangelical lack of involvement in resolving the ills of society was understandable, it was no longer acceptable.¹⁸ Escobar, René Padilla, and other Latinos developed their positions within the context of the incipient *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* as well as within the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). They made significant contributions at important conventions (e.g. the Urbana

Missionary Convention in 1970 and the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974) that led to a growing international consensus among evangelicals for a more “holistic” gospel that emphasized both evangelism and social justice as essential components of our Christian mission.¹⁹

In the 1970’s evangelical social ministries, including numerous efforts spawned by graduates and students of the IFES, began to appear. These were designed, by and large, to minister to the poor, to those excluded by economic development, and to those who had been victims of violence or natural disasters. Frequently, the *FTL* and IFES were criticized by the more radical liberationists for only offering “palliatives” or “Band-Aids” when a wholesale restructuring of society was necessary. Nevertheless, given the fact that evangelicals were a relatively small minority in Latin America, they continued along this path and gave birth to literally hundreds of such ministries. Due to their growth and success in the 1980’s they began to emerge from an isolationist “Christ Against Culture” mentality and started aspiring to see a **transformation** of society. Evangelicals could “give thanks to God for what the Church was doing to respond to the urgent needs”²⁰ of their people, but also recognized the need to evaluate their methods and to provide an even greater Christian response under Scripture’s guidelines. With that goal in mind the *FTL* convened a continental conference in 1987, held at Huampani, Peru, with the theme “*Hacia una transformación integral*” (“Toward a Holistic Transformation”). Although Christian ministries had alleviated much human suffering, Latin America had become poorer. The conference desired to see important changes take place at the larger societal level, which would lead to greater justice and well-being.²¹ In his biblical expositions René Padilla developed a scriptural concept of justice (Ps. 146:6-9; Jer. 22:3; Prov. 31:8-9).

But, what is justice? In the Bible, and especially in the Old Testament, it is not merely a justice of **distribution** (i.e. giving the same to everyone without considering their particular necessities); nor is it a justice of **retribution** (i.e. giving to everyone according to their merits); it is rather a justice of **restitution**, a justice that includes the two former, but goes much further in that it seeks to **restore or return** that which has been taken away from “the oppressed”, “the hungry”, the “exiled”, “the orphans”, “the widows”, from all the victims of the abuse

of power and the injustice of a society stained by sin.²²

The unequal distribution of wealth was sharply criticized at the conference. What could Christians do in a continent where 93% of the fertile land was held by only 7% of the population? Christians could not encourage “development” if that “development” led to greater poverty. Christians needed to forge a theory and a theology of “transformation”. Drawing upon insights of evangelical leaders from around the world,²³ the conference proposed ten key principles of such “transformation”:

- 1) It would seek to sustain life and to meet the basic needs of humanity
- 2) It would seek equality in the distribution of goods and resources necessary for life
- 3) It would seek a justice of not merely distribution and retribution, but also restitution
- 4) It would seek human dignity for individuals and social groups
- 5) It would seek freedom, not the “free” domination by the strongest, but the freedom to love and serve others
- 6) It would seek the participation and reciprocity in society by all of its members
- 7) It would seek a transformation that is sensitive to the local culture
- 8) It would seek to preserve and take care of the natural environment
- 9) It would facilitate the spiritual transformation of individuals and society
- 10) It would promote hope, a uniquely Christian contribution²⁴

Simultaneously, evangelicals began to involve themselves more in the political process in an attempt to bring about structural change. Over the last two decades this participation has left a mixed legacy of both positive and negative lessons. One of the earliest evangelicals to participate in national politics was Pedro Arana, who had ministered as a Regional Director for Latin America with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Stu-

dents (IFES) and as a Presbyterian pastor in Lima, Peru.²⁵ In 1978 Peru was beginning the transition from military rule to a civilian government. A special congress was elected by the people to write a new Constitution. Arana was elected and served on the commissions charged with writing the portions regarding health and education. Arana made it clear that although he was motivated to run and to serve based upon his faith, he did not officially speak for his local church, denomination, nor the Peruvian evangelicals in general. At the end of his term friends and foes alike congratulated him for his self-giving service on behalf of the Peruvian people.

More recent forays by evangelicals into politics (such as in Guatemala, Brazil, Chile, and Peru) have produced more caution about the possibility of social justice trickling down to the masses from evangelicals in the halls of power. *The Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* has now published various books and sponsored several consultations dealing with evangelicals and politics.²⁶ A growing consensus is emerging that evangelical Christians need to be involved in electoral politics, yet the nature of that involvement is still being debated. More than twenty confessional political parties currently exist in Latin America. Other leaders claim that Protestants, by nature, cannot constitute a “voting block”, even though their growing numbers are causing many non-Christian politicians to woo them. Still others, based upon the relative successful ventures of NGO’s and other more “grass-roots” social justice ventures, urge that evangelical believers concentrate their efforts at the local level. Although the jury is still out regarding the ways Latin American evangelicals should participate in the political process, there is a growing consensus that Christians should be ‘justice seekers’ in our world.

II. Corporate Solidarity

An area closely intertwined with social justice is that of corporate solidarity. Latin Americans are famous for their emphasis on family, friends, and fiestas. Latinos are heavily shaped by their families and by other social groupings. This corporate solidarity frequently expresses itself as generosity. The common Spanish phrase “*Mi casa es tu casa*” (my home is your home) accurately captures the truth that others have some legitimate claim upon “my” possessions.

This corporate solidarity stands in stark contrast with the rugged individualism of North Americans. Sociologist Stephen Hart affirms “ours

is probably the most individualistic nation the world has ever known. Our individualism is not only a set of value preferences sacralizing individual freedom, but also a cognitive framework blinding us to the supra-individual aspect of human life.²⁷ If this affirmation is even partially correct, the implications for evangelical Christianity are serious. As the Body of Christ in the world, we are to express God's message with balance and power. Nevertheless, if we are blind to the "supra-individual aspect" of human life, we are unintentionally distorting that message. First, let us clarify the concept of individualism and then examine it under the scrutiny of Scripture. Dennis Hollinger provides a helpful description of individualism.

Individualism is a view of reality in which the individual is the most basic entity and the defining principle of all existence. It is an atomistic conception of reality in which a collective has no existence apart from its constituent parts.... The social whole is a composite of separate individuals.²⁸

In practice, this individualistic concept of reality works itself out in the political, economic, and social spheres of life. "As a social philosophy individualism stresses personal morality over social ethics, individual transformation as the key to social change, laissez-faire economics, and a politics extolling the freedom of the individual and a limited state."²⁹ We Christians affirm the authority of Scripture for all areas of life. Since so much depends upon this "lens" of individualism, it is wise to examine whether it squares with Biblical revelation.

Linguistic Factors Affecting Corporate Solidarity

In their reading of the Bible many Latinos interpret collectively what North Americans see individually. This is due, in part, to linguistic differences between Spanish and English. Spanish, like the Biblical languages Greek and Hebrew, distinguishes between the second person singular (*tú/usted/vos*) and plural (*ustedes/vosotros*) whereas modern English (you) does not.³⁰

The implications of this distinction can have profound consequences. For example, best-selling evangelical author Neil Anderson writes about our identity in Christ in his very popular book *Living Free in Christ*.³¹ Each of his thirty-six chapters has titles that begin with "I", such as "I Am

Accepted”, “I Am God’s Child”, and “I Have Been Justified”. Each chapter starts with a Biblical passage, which provides the basis for the theme of the chapter. Nevertheless, Anderson changes the original meaning of the Biblical text by reading a highly individualistic interpretation into passages where the original message was clearly plural.³² Although the meaning in modern English versions is ambiguous in sentences such as “you are the salt of the earth”, “you are the light of the world”, “you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”, and “you are God’s temple”, the Spanish versions, faithfully reflecting the original second person plural in Greek, “*umein*”, demonstrate the collective nature of these affirmations.³³

Ten years of ministry in Honduras and a careful study of the New Testament have led author Mark Baker to a similar conclusion. He correctly translates 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 as follows:

You yourselves [plural] are our letter [singular], written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you [plural] are a letter [singular] of Christ.

Baker then narrates his eye-opening moment of understanding:

In that instant I saw the passage differently than I had ever seen it before. Previously when I had heard these verses, I had thought of myself as being a letter of Christ and the church member sitting next to me as another letter. That is not, however, what the text says. Paul did not see the church in Corinth as a collection of letters of Christ; the community gathered together was one letter.³⁴

This is crucial for our understanding of Christian discipleship. Most Latin Americans emphasize that their identity derives from their integration within a larger group, such as their [extended] family or church. Interpersonal and social responsibilities and commitments come fairly naturally. In contrast, many Anglo-Americans see their essential identity as individuals, and then seem to have greater difficulty adding on those interpersonal and social responsibilities.

We can now again turn our attention to the voices of our Latin American sisters and brothers as they speak about the corporate nature of human identity.

Latin American Evangelical Theology on Corporate Solidarity

In recent decades evangelical theologians in Latin America have repeatedly critiqued the individualistic hermeneutical lens utilized by North American Christians. The critique is not merely a fraternal suggestion from one church to another. Given the North American dominance upon the evangelical world through missionaries, Christian literature and music, a distorted understanding of the Gospel by North Americans negatively affects the universal church in areas of evangelism, church life, discipleship, and ministry. Therefore, many Latin American Christians feel that it is their responsibility to point out this weakness in order to improve faithfulness by Christians throughout the entire world.

Early in the life of the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* the members resolved to come together to study anew the essentials of the gospel. In their first Consultation (1970) they reaffirmed the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, but they also recognized the hermeneutical difficulties that culture presents as Christians come to the Scriptures from differing cultural perspectives.³⁵ Samuel Escobar clearly raised the issue with his paper “*Una teología evangélica para Iberoamérica: El contenido bíblico y el ropaje anglosajón en la teología latinoamericana*” in which he pointed out social, historical, and theological factors in Anglo Christianity that gave shape to Evangelicalism in Latin America.³⁶ He urged the participants to pursue and develop a serious Latin American theology. The *Fraternidad* took up his challenge and decided to tackle the vital area of the gospel message itself and its presentation in their Second Consultation on “*El reino de Dios y América Latina*” held December 11-18, 1972 in Lima, Peru.³⁷ They noted that our Lord’s favorite topic was the “Kingdom or Reign of God”. Nevertheless, Evangelicals in both North America and Latin America had emphasized “individual salvation” and had relegated the Kingdom of God to a secondary position. Following that Second Consultation, many evangelical authors in Latin America have urged that the Kingdom of God motif be recovered as the main hermeneutical principle for understanding the Gospels and Jesus Himself. René Padilla stated the rationale for this recovery: “The individualism of ‘culture Christianity’ ...sees the Lord with only one eye, as an individualistic Jesus who is concerned with the salvation of individuals.”³⁸ Perhaps the Bolivian Methodist bishop Mortimer Arias best explained the importance of recovering the fullness of

the Kingdom message.³⁹ He described how the Church in different eras and in differing locations has allowed the Kingdom of God motif to be eclipsed as the Church reduced it to merely one of its components. His critique has a broad twenty-century sweep and is not limited to North American individualism. Nevertheless, he attempts to retain that which is good about the North American experiences in evangelism, while rejecting the individualistic excesses.

In the same way we can refer to the evangelistic revivals in North America, in the XVIII and XIX centuries, that lowered religion from the head to the heart, from reason to emotion, and emphasized the need for a personal, traumatic and transforming personal experience. All of this is an indispensable part of our faith, and it was necessary for recovering an essential dimension of the Kingdom: the personal relationship with God. After all, one does not enter the Kingdom as a flock, but personally, through the way of repentance, faith, and personal decision. But we have moved beyond the personal to the individualistic, and these concepts are not the same. This is because a person is a social being, a being in society, a being in relationship, never merely an individual or a social atom. To spiritualize the message of the Kingdom and to reduce it to an individual experience is to radically distort the Biblical message.⁴⁰

The preaching of this Gospel of the Kingdom stands out in stark contrast to the typical presentations of the gospel in the United States. One of the better-known “packages” of the gospel in North America is the *Four Spiritual Laws* booklet published by Campus Crusade for Christ. The invitation throughout is individualized and the community component (e.g. ‘go to a Bible preaching church’) is added on at the end. It is interesting to note that in the late 1970’s the Catholic Church in Mexico adopted and transformed the booklet into the *Six Spiritual Laws* making it somewhat less individualistic. The Fifth Law stated that when a person received Christ as Savior, he or she was born again into the family of God, that is, the Church, with certain privileges and responsibilities.⁴¹

The Evangelism Explosion presentation of the Gospel made popu-

lar by the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida is even more individualistic. The lead-in question is “If you were to die tonight, what would you say to God so that He would let you enter heaven?” The otherworldly context created by this question greatly reduces the scope of Biblical salvation. The early Christians affirmed that Jesus is Lord in the here and now. All authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth so that nations could be disciplined and, here on earth, obey all that He had taught (Matthew 28:16-20). To place the emphasis of the gospel solely on the afterlife and not to call people into the Lordship of Jesus in this life are characteristics more in keeping with Greek Platonic thought than with Biblical revelation. Biblical presentations of the gospel need to give adequate attention to repentance, that is, a turning back to God with actions consonant with that repentance.⁴²

If our preaching of the gospel has been distorted by an excessive individualism, then our entire Christian worldview is out of sync. This distortion is noted quite vividly in the area of possessions and money.⁴³ If we begin with individualistic presuppositions then it is only logical to conclude that “*mi casa es mi casa*” and “my money is my money”.⁴⁴ If I choose to share with others, then I am considered generous. But if we begin with the assumption that God is the owner of all the earth, then I am only His steward. Possessions under my “stewardship” are to be utilized according to His criteria of justice. Therefore, when there is human need and given the fact that we all belong to the human race, corporate solidarity would demand that we meet that need with whatever resources are at hand. This sharing of resources was known as *koinonia* or “communion” in the New Testament church. Given the fact that all Christians belong to God’s worldwide family, *koinonia* should take place within and among churches, overcoming linguistic, cultural, and political boundaries. One of the most extensive passages in Pauline literature (II Corinthians 8-9), and therefore an issue of vital importance, dealt with the “Collection”, a special offering raised by the Gentile churches to aid the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem so that they might have “equality” (II Corinthians 8:15).⁴⁵

A current application of the *koinonia* principle is the forgiveness of debts associated with the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). Protestant Christians began the call to nations and banks in the First World to celebrate the new millennium as a year of Jubilee by forgiving the debts of the poor in the Two-Thirds world. The Roman Catholic Church has not only seconded the call but has developed it further than the Protestants. The forgiveness of

debts springs from the recognition that economic injustice is rampant upon the earth and the poor are crushed underneath. It recovers and adapts God's Levitical legislation to give people an economic fresh start or clean slate every fifty years. The *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* has repeatedly urged Christians in the First World to join in this call.⁴⁶

This is seen as a significant expression of Biblical justice according to Padilla's call for restitution and restoration. Much of the debt owed by Latin American countries was acquired during the 1970's and 1980's by authoritarian and military dictatorships in their countries, which were frequently propped up by the United States. Most loans made to Latin America in that period enabled the dictators and the ruling elite to become richer whereas the majority of the population became poorer. The poor did not have the opportunity to participate in selecting their rulers, in receiving the benefits of those loans, nor in negotiating the harsh budgetary cuts imposed on their governments, especially in the areas of health and education. Why should the poor be punished even further, by having a large percentage of their Gross National Product sent back to the First World as high interest on these loans? Doesn't the Lord's Prayer itself encourage us to forgive the debts of others as we have been forgiven? Caution must be exercised in the way this debt is forgiven so that corrupt governments, national elites, or multinational corporations do not benefit at the expense of the poor. The forgiveness of past debts should be tied to education and health initiatives that would truly benefit the poor. The importance that Latino evangelicals have given to the Jubilee can be seen in the fact that the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* made the Jubilee the centerpiece of their "*Fe y economía*" Consultation at the *CLADE IV (Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización)* conference held in Ecuador in September 2000.

III. Implications for the Christian College Communities⁴⁷

It is common for professors to be asked the question, "What do you teach?" We usually reply with something like "I teach Biology" or "I teach Spanish" or "I teach Bible". A better answer would be "I teach students to become more mature disciples of Jesus Christ, and Biology (or Spanish or even the Bible) is one of the tools God has provided". By no means is this meant to denigrate the importance of the subject matters that we teach!⁴⁸ We spend years of study in our disciplines in order to use these instruments in the discipleship of our students. Nevertheless, we must never

lose sight of the fact that our subject matters are not ends in themselves, but rather tools of our trade, much like medicine is to a doctor. The classical text on the inspiration of Scripture (II Timothy 3:16-17) clearly shows that even the Bible is to be considered as an instrument to teach, rebuke, correct, and train the man or woman (*anthrōwpos*) of God in justice, equipping them for every good work. Good teaching, as understood in the Bible, is always shaped by the needs and backgrounds of the students.⁴⁹ Students should always be **active** participants in the learning process. Jesus recognized the holistic nature of humanity and therefore sought to integrate the volition, emotions, and reflection of his students in the pedagogical process.⁵⁰ Because humans are the bearers of God's image, it stands to reason that Jesus would repeatedly utilize interpersonal relations to teach about our walk with God.⁵¹ The frequent use of a **confrontational pedagogy** by Jesus⁵² suggests that we should seek plentiful opportunities for our students to likewise be confronted in many areas (cognitive, volitional, relational, etc.) of their lives.

What does this imply for me, in my role as a **bridge** between the academy in North America and the Latin American church? I should encourage my students to intentionally learn from the Latin American world and grapple with issues that Latin American Christians see as important, like social justice. This takes many forms. Reading the Bible in Spanish will uncomfortably call into question and hopefully bring greater clarity to previously held misconceptions of God and our role in this universe. Learning Spanish well enough to digest some good writings of Latin American Christians will permit students to grasp more facets of God's truth. Developing deep, long-lasting friendships with Latin Americans will enable students to glimpse life from a different perspective. Cognitive disagreements with people that we truly care about can be emotionally draining. Nevertheless, this existential pain is frequently an important part of the maturation process. Although these friendships can occur on our campuses, the greatest growth has come about from friendships begun in Latin America itself, such as our overseas programs. Being exposed to the best Latin American literature in various disciplines will go far in reducing the prejudices that we all have. The testing of the students' ability to recall Spanish or information about Latin America is neither the whole nor the final stage in the educational process. They are merely steps along the way and should lead to further movement up the hermeneutical spiral. Christian educator Parker Palmer has articulated a view of teaching that resonates with my

beliefs: to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced.⁵³

Finally, I need to be a humble co-learner with my students as we together walk along the way of the hermeneutical spiral. Paulo Freire stressed over and over again that teachers and students alike were “*aprendiendos*”, that is, perpetual co-learners in the way of life. Palmer states it well when he says that in an education seen as a spiritual journey “...intellect and spirit would be one, teachers and learners and subjects would be in vital community with one another, and a world in need of healing would be well served”.⁵⁴

Concluding Postscript

When people from different cultures commit themselves to each other as members of the Body of Christ, they will definitely have more problems and challenges than same-culture people who choose an easier path without these cultural difficulties. From the divine point of view, these problems are really opportunities for growth and maturity. We who are Christian foreign language teachers affirm that we exist for Christ and His Kingdom that consists of people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. May we live up to our high calling until our Lord returns.

NOTES

¹ It is admitted that the terms “North America” and “Latin America” can have multiple, imprecise, and somewhat overlapping meanings. Geographically and politically speaking, “North America” includes Canada, the United States and Mexico, although it is commonly applied only to the United States. “Latin America” frequently refers to all of the countries in the Americas and the Caribbean where Spanish or Portuguese (and to a lesser extent French) are the main languages spoken. Nevertheless, the terms “Latin Americans” or “Latinos” equally apply to descendants of these countries even when they live in the United States or Canada.

² Although “culture” is a term not easily susceptible of precise definition, a working definition is in order. *The Willowbank Report—Gospel and Culture* (Wheaton: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978), p. 7, summarized the diverse meanings as follows: “Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.), and of institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospi-

tals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.), which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.” The Lausanne Movement in its best moments has provided opportunities where representatives from the worldwide Church have come together and shared “lessons” the Lord has revealed to them. It is interesting to note that this Consultation realized in Willowbank, Bermuda in 1978 was coordinated by Pedro Savage, a Latin American born and raised British missionary, who was at that time General Secretary of the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana*. Three other Latinos (Robinson Cavalcanti, Orlando Costas, and René Padilla) also participated in the Consultation.

³ Pierre Casse, *Training for the Cross-Cultural Mind*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research, 1981), p. xiii.

⁴ Here I am not questioning the essential Christian truths that are universal and supracultural, such as the uniqueness of the person and work of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). What is being examined is the assumption that our version of Christianity is superior to all others in every detail.

⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Willett, Clark, 1937), p. 242.

⁶ Perhaps we who are foreign language teachers unconsciously foment this mentality. In our classrooms it is tempting to use Christian songs that have been translated into the target language, precisely because our students are already familiar with the melody and the content. Nevertheless, if we limit ourselves to these types of songs, we give the false impression that the cultural chasm has been bridged when, in fact, we have not even exposed ourselves to the target culture.

⁷ Arthur Holmes popularized this phrase for evangelicals in the twentieth century, but he himself attributes it to some of the early church fathers. See Arthur Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983).

⁸ The famous Lausanne Covenant (paragraph 10) phrased this concept in the following way: “Because man is God’s creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he is fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic.”

⁹ Presbyterian missionary M. Richard Shaull is considered the “grandfather” of Liberation Theology in Latin America. An early groundbreaking book in the liberationist movement was his *Encounter with Revolution* (New York: Association Press, 1955). For a good critique of the ISAL movement from an evangelical perspective see C. René Padilla, “Iglesia y sociedad en América Latina” in C. René Padilla, comp., *Fe cristiana y Latinoamérica hoy* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Certeza, 1974).

¹⁰ Donald C. Stamps, ed. *The Full Life Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 1410-1411, n. Matt. 5:6. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp.

73-94, essentially takes the same position. He rejects the idea that righteousness means “justification” or social justice. He argues for a predominantly vertical relationship with God where “the desire for righteousness is a desire to be right with God”.

¹¹ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Burroughs on the Beatitudes: The Saints’ Happiness* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992 {1660}), p. 96.

¹² Arthur W. Pink, *The Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), p. 33.

¹³ Juan Mateos, *El Sermón del Monte* (Mexico City: Centro de Reflexión Teológica, 1990), 35. Mateos has had an important impact upon Spanish-speaking Christianity because he was the main translator of the New Testament and co-editor of the *Nueva Biblia Española* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1975).

¹⁴ R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 62.

¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)* (Leicester and Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), p. 45.

¹⁶ Since the Gospel of Matthew was probably written after Paul’s Epistles to the Romans, the logic of my argument presupposes the evangelical belief that Matthew presents us with a faithful Greek rendition of the original Aramaic.

¹⁷ I readily admit that there is a subjective element in this hermeneutical process, especially in the interpretation of our own experiences. Subjectivity is a natural component of the human condition, and as such, is an essential part of the “hermeneutical spiral”. Nevertheless, there are enough “objective” hermeneutical safeguards built into the spiral to guide our attempts at obedience.

¹⁸ This Congress continued in the path of the Berlin Evangelism Congress (1966) and had the backing of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The papers and studies presented at the Congress can be found in Samuel Escobar, ed. *Acción en Cristo para un continente en crisis* (San José, Costa Rica and Miami: Editorial Caribe, 1970).

¹⁹ Escobar was able to share his perspective at the 1970 Urbana Missionary Convention; see “Social Concern and World Evangelism” in John R. W. Stott and others, *Christ the Liberator: Urbana 70* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1971), pp. 103-112. He then served as General Secretary for the Canadian InterVarsity Christian Fellowship for three years.

²⁰ Washington Padilla, *Hacia una transformación integral* (Buenos Aires: Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana, 1989), p. 1. This book provides a popular summary of the Huampani conference’s studies and proposals.

²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 21-37.

²² *Ibid.* p.10.

²³ It is worth noting that one of the most frequently cited documents at the conference was the “Wheaton ’83 Statement” signed by the participants of a conference held on Wheaton’s campus in June, 1983 with the topic “The Church in Response to Human Need”. The “Kingdom of God” motif played an important role at the Wheaton conference and in Latin American evangelical theology. See Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, eds. *The Church in Response to Human Need* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 257-58 for an oft-cited article: “We have come to see that the goal of transformation is best described by the biblical vision of the Kingdom of God. This new way of being human in submission to the Lord of all has many facets. In particular, it means striving to bring peace among individuals, races, and nations by overcoming prejudices, fears, and preconceived ideas about others. It means sharing basic resources like food, water, the means of healing, and knowledge. It also means working for a greater participation of people in the decisions, which affect their lives, making possible an equal receiving from others and giving of themselves. Finally, it means growing up into Christ in all things as a body of people dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit and upon each other.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-37.

²⁵ The “lessons” learned by Arana in his venture into politics are told in Pedro Arana, *Testimonio político* 2nd ed., (Mexico City: El Faro and Amextra, 1987).

²⁶ Pablo Alberto Deiros, ed., *Los evangélicos y el poder político en América Latina* (Grand Rapids and Buenos Aires: Nueva Creación, 1986) and C. René Padilla, comp. *De la marginación al compromiso: Los evangélicos y la política en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana, 1991). A special continental consultation on evangelicals and politics took place in 1998 in addition to seminars on the topic at the CLADE III (1992) and CLADE IV (2000) congresses as well as at numerous national and local conferences.

²⁷ Stephen Hart, “Privatization in American Religion and Society,” *Sociological Analysis* 47 (winter 1987): 325.

²⁸ Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 16-17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁰ The archaic English of the King James Bible does accurately reflect the singular/plural distinctions of the original Biblical texts by the use, respectively, of “you” and “ye” (although the “ye” form is used only as a subject pronoun, not as an object pronoun). The southern regional form “y’all” also captures the distinction.

³¹ Neil T. Anderson. *Living Free in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993).

³² In more than thirty of the thirty-six passages that Anderson uses, he changes to the singular what was plural in the Greek text.

³³ To his credit, Anderson, *Living Free*, p. 223, does recognize the collective nature

of the passage “you are God’s temple”. He admits that “when 1 Corinthians 3:16,17 refers to God’s temple, the emphasis is not upon the individual but on the Church”. Nevertheless, the overall impression created by Anderson’s chapter titles is that our relationship with God is predominantly personal and not corporate in any significant way.

³⁴ Mark D. Baker. *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace & Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 60. My only quarrel with his point might be his phrase “the community gathered together was one letter”. I would argue that the community of believers when it is “gathered together” in worship **and** when it is “scattered” in service continues to be that one letter of Christ. Baker finds the same principle at work in Romans 12:1 where Paul urges the Christians to offer their bodies [plural] as one living sacrifice [singular], holy and acceptable to God. He concludes “looking at these verses has demonstrated that the Bible has less individualism and more emphasis on community than an individualistic lens allows North Americans to see”.

³⁵ Pedro Savage, and others. *El debate contemporáneo sobre la biblia* (Barcelona: Ediciones Evangélicas Europeas, 1972). This volume contains the six main papers presented at the First Consultation, which took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 1970.

³⁶ Samuel Escobar. “Una teología evangélica para Iberoamérica: El contenido bíblico y el ropaje anglosajón en la teología latinoamericana” in *Debate contemporáneo*, pp. 17-36.

³⁷ C. René Padilla, ed. *El reino de Dios y América Latina* (El Paso: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1975) gathers together the five main papers presented at this consultation, the critical responses, and the group discussions.

³⁸ C. René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 22.

³⁹ Mortimer Arias. *Venga tu reino: La memoria subversiva de Jesús* (Mexico City: Casa Unida de Publicaciones, 1980).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48 (translation mine).

⁴¹ The addition of this Fifth Law is a good example of the hermeneutical spiral functioning well. Although this law perhaps originated from the Catholic dogma “outside of the Church there is no salvation”, the way it is expressed in the booklet strengthens the presentation of the gospel. The Sixth Law was, from Biblical criteria, a negative modification as it stated that, upon conversion to Christ, persons enter into a special relationship with the Virgin Mary. Further modifications of Campus Crusade’s materials by the Catholic Church have a spotty record. Some changes brought the materials closer in line with Scripture while others did not. See the various writings of Father Alfonso Navarro Castellanos such as *Evangelización: Primer anuncio* (Mexico City: Publicaciones EvEs, 1976).

⁴² It is of interest to note the message of salvation proclaimed by John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-20). Although it was a message leading to the “forgiveness of sins”, it most certainly contained a strong call to repentance. When people asked what they should do to repent towards God, John contextualized each answer and specified a demanding social justice component (Share your tunics and food...Don’t take bribes...Don’t extort money...Don’t accuse others falsely). Far from being just a pre-Christian message, thirty years later the Apostle Paul proclaimed that all people everywhere, both Jews and Gentiles should repent and express their return to God with “works of repentance” (Acts 26:20). It is likely that our Protestant theology of salvation (that salvation is not based upon our good works) has colored our translations of this passage. Elsewhere in the New Testament *erga* is translated as “works” but in most translations of this passage it is altered to “deeds”.

⁴³ Another passage where the Spanish versions are closer to the original Greek is found in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy 6:10. It identifies the attraction of money as the source of evil, and, consequently, injustice in our world. In the classical King James Version we find “the love of money is **the** root of **all** evil”. More recent translations in English debilitate the force of Paul’s affirmation. The NASB renders the love of money as “**a** root of **all** sorts of evil” and in the NIV we read that the love of money is “**a** root of **all** kinds of evil”. In the versions that are most commonly used in the Latin American evangelical churches (the 1909 and 1960 revisions of the *Reina Valera*) we encounter the love of money identified as “**root of all the evils**” (“*raíz de todos los males*”). Although there is no article before the Greek word “*riza*” in the original text (nor in the Spanish versions), and therefore the evidence favoring the definite article over the indefinite is not absolutely conclusive, the structure is identical to the John 1:1 passage where we evangelicals rightly protest any attempt to change “the Word was God” to “the Word was **a** god”. The phrase “*pantwn tw n kakwn*” is best translated literally as “all evil” or “all the evils”. Since this is obviously a hyperbole, similar to “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24), the newer translations attempt to catch the sense with “all kinds of evil”. Given the fact that the economic component has been diminished in North American theology, I believe that it is better to leave the phrase in its shocking literalness and let the reader deal with its hyperbolic nature. Although to some the changes may seem to be minor, the practical consequences are quite important. See Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 113-14.

⁴⁴ Latin American evangelicals are quite amazed how many North American Christians have conveniently omitted any “theology of money” that goes beyond the giving of the tithe, as if the “invisible hand” of the market were the hand of God. Living on the underside of the economic disequilibrium, money and possessions are regular staples of Christian reflection in the Two-Thirds world. They rightly

point out that money and possessions were the second most favored theme (next to the Kingdom of God) in the Gospels. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 107, affirms that the absence of theological reflection on economics is a radical departure from the Reformed faith. “Neither for Luther nor for Calvin would it have appeared as anything other than incomprehensible blasphemy to suggest that human behavior in the sphere of economics was outside the jurisdiction of theology. On the contrary, buying and selling, hiring labor and working for a master, amassing wealth and enclosing land—these are precisely the human activities in greatest need of the reminder that every man stands under the law of God and will be accountable to God for his treatment of his neighbor.”

⁴⁵ For a fuller treatment of this topic, see Lindy Scott, *Economic Koinonia within the Body of Christ* (Mexico City: Editorial Kyrios, 1980).

⁴⁶ This has been clearly articulated at the various Oxford Conferences on Christian Faith and Economics, especially at the January 1990 conference where the Latin American delegation made a strong and forceful argument for the forgiveness of debts. See Herbert Schlossberg, Vinay Samuel, and Ronald J. Sider, eds. *Christianity and Economics in the Post-Cold War Era: The Oxford Declaration and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁴⁷ I am indebted to the Brazilian pedagogy expert, Paulo Freire, for some of the following pedagogical insights. Through his life and writings, he has been, by far, the most widely read and influential educator in all of Latin America. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, (New York: Seabury Press, 1970 [1968]). Samuel Escobar, *Paulo Freire: Una pedagogía latinoamericana* (Mexico City: Editorial Kyrios, 1993) provides us with an excellent critique and appreciation of Freire’s methodology from an evangelical perspective.

⁴⁸ Far from minimizing the importance of Spanish, those students who are convinced of the need for a contextualized ministry to Spanish speakers aim for excellence as they strive to obtain a near native speaker mastery of the language.

⁴⁹ This is clearly seen in the diversity of teaching styles and methods (parables, arguments from the Old Testament, etc.) utilized by Jesus. He altered his pedagogy according to the needs of his listeners (Matthew 13:11-13). His use of questions (Luke 2:46; Mark 11:30; cf. Genesis 3:9) exemplified his “student-centered” methodology. This same flexibility can also be seen in Paul’s teaching ministry where he provided “milk” or “solid food” depending upon the maturity of his audience (I Corinthians 3:1-4). The Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John demonstrated this same sensitivity to their readers because they carefully translated certain Aramaic expressions to make them more understandable to their audience (e.g. Matthew’s “Kingdom of Heaven” becomes “Kingdom of God” in the other Gospels due to the predominantly Gentile composition of their likely audience).

⁵⁰ Jesus did not teach a segmented course on the sovereignty of God. Rather, his teaching on God's sovereignty was incorporated into the daily course of life. Luke 5:1-11 is illustrative. After a long night of fishing with no results, Peter and his partners were washing their nets. Jesus told Peter to cast his nets (Jesus appealed to Peter's volition). Peter's reluctant obedience brought in a huge catch. Peter became very afraid (Peter's emotions played an integral part in his learning process) and then cognizant of his own sin and God's power (mental reflection and moral response are essential components of holistic, Christian education).

⁵¹ Matthew 25:31-46 is a classic example of the "*Imago Dei*" ethic emphasized by our Lord. He identifies with all human beings to the extent that both virtuous and sinful actions directed towards them are, in fact, directed towards him.

⁵² Jesus challenged the rich young ruler with a decision about "his" possessions (Matthew 19:16-24). He frequently confronted the Pharisees and the teachers of the law about their misunderstanding of the Scriptures (Matthew 22:41-46).

⁵³ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), pp. 69-105.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

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