

c. Clear the misunderstanding on the part of the listeners toward the Christians (or missionaries) before the Gospel is preached.

7. *More study and research needed*

a. The meaning and cultural implications of customs are to be studied in a particular culture in order to evaluate whether the customs are to be retained or not.

b. In-depth study of various cultures: study must be undertaken to help those working among Muslims, Hindus, followers of Confucius, etc.

c. Study of missionary anthropology for each region.

8. *Resources*

Information is available through the School of World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

9. *Steps to share the contents of the paper with others*

a. Study our own church: list those which are cultural, elements of a foreign culture and those which need modification.

b. List practices often questioned in our own society and evaluate them.

c. Share the insights of the paper with other church members.

d. Incorporate the study of cultural aspects in the training programs for evangelists.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Pablo M. Pérez

The presence of Protestantism in Latin America has been felt in forms which are stereotyped to a certain extent and which have in turn been taken by many to be its distinctive characteristics. In different circles and areas "the brothers" — as believers are known throughout the continent — are identified by their habits, norms of conduct, patterns of social organization, worship forms, as well as one or two works of charity — besides a number of peculiarities which are somewhat inexplicable. Furthermore, a good number of these same believers is in complete agreement with such a description and some even find a special satisfaction with it and do not give any further thought to what it implies.

But when one goes deeper into what is really represented by the Protestant prototype in Latin America, one will discover that in many respects such a "prototype" is nothing more than the somewhat strange amalgamation of customs and habits which were prevalent in other countries some decades ago, and the Latin American character. And it is strange not only because it is out-of-date in those places where it originated and is thus considered a relic of the past, but also because it was from the very beginning a result of imported ideas with but little discernment, and consequently has not taken root in its new habitat. If there are no roots, its fruit has been practically nonexistent; in order to produce it almost every effort has been concentrated in those stereotyped forms mentioned above and in a conformity to them. In other words, an external demonstration of some secondary characteristics has been sought primarily, and it has been made to appear that they in turn are the final goal of every believer.

It is pertinent, then, to raise the question: Should customs and activities as practiced in our Protestant churches in Latin America be discarded? This question at the same time raises some others which help us focus the problem in its true dimension. It is not a case of discarding or accepting, but of the need to place the Protestant church in our continent in a position where new horizons open before it. This will mean on the one hand that the church should be enabled to reach a higher level of discernment concerning its own position, and that she may do so in the light of biblical directives. She should also be able to take the appropriate steps to find her true identity and, consequently, offer a more viable spiritual alternative to the average Latin American. On the other hand, it will also demand a rigorous discipline which should keep her from going back to old practices while allowing her to launch confidently into new undertakings which up to now have been outside her reach. No doubt it will also produce more stable and reliable foundations for the second and third generation Protestants. These in themselves represent a most serious problem in connection with the strengthening of the Protestant witness and the continuity necessary to establish a more solid and visible community

of individuals and groups which evidence the control of the Holy Spirit.

Briefly, then, it is urgent now more than ever that the Protestant church in Latin America be confronted with the need to define its own personality and to follow its own path within the will of God. The task in itself is almost impossible and cannot even pretend to find the final word on the subject. But our predicament demands that we at least promote thinking along these lines in order to encourage an ever increasing nucleus of men and women who are concerned about reaching satisfactory conclusions within our own context. As such, the plan suggested by the title of this paper seems to be the most adequate to confront the problem, only following an inverted order. Just the same, it is necessary to point out that the term "evangelical," which will be used from here on, refers to the Protestant community as a whole, as has been used in Latin America for nearly half a century. While it includes the so-called conservatives which make up the majority of the Protestant community, it does not exclusively refer to them. Just the same, it does not include the cults and sects which are very much a part of a religious minority, but have never been an integral part of the Protestant community as such.

1. *Cultural dimensions*

Latin American culture, just like any other culture, consists of both positive and negative elements in the light of biblical revelation. That is, while some of them lend themselves to be God-approved means, others have been used and continue to be used very effectively by Satan for his own purposes. Now a good many Latin American evangelicals have held that there are really very few positive elements which could be approved by God and consequently used for his glory. They have adopted a mentality which holds that everything that surrounds us is "worldly" and that since it does not contribute anything to a truly "spiritual" development, it has to be eliminated radically.

But a simple examination, even if it is limited, of several aspects of our culture will indicate that there is a great deal of positive values within it that should be used properly. On the one hand we find that much of what is related to the family in our context has a biblical basis. Respect for parents, and effective and inter-dependent relationship among its members, the recognition and effort to keep alive the lasting bonds which unite it, as well as some other latent aspects, reveal a religious if not a strictly biblical background. The Word of God does not hesitate to affirm constantly that respect, love, mutual help are integral parts of the divine ideal for the family. All of this naturally is best expressed in a Christian home, and extension, in that spiritual family which finds its shelter within a church building.

However, I believe that we have also shown a lack of discernment when we encourage a tacit separation of the family unit when it reaches our churches. The children go to their respective classes, the young people do the same and seek to be with their friends during worship services. As a result the parents are reunited with their family

only at the time to go back home. This means that we do not even perceive that activities and relationships within the church itself tend to go against the positive elements which are a part of the family. Or that, in the best of cases, the church represents an extended family to which a nuclear family incorporates itself in order to function more effectively in society. In any case there is the urgent need to devise and develop those programs which will promote the maximum use of positive elements in our families, together with a proper attention given to age groups and those of common interests. These in turn should be local in origin and development so that local needs are met rather than dependent on suggestions or intervention from the outside.

Closely related to all of this we find respect for human dignity. It is not uncommon to speak of the distinctive characteristics of this concept such as family reputation as a part of our name, the recognition of courageous deeds performed by our national heroes, a due respect for the professional or technical ability of an individual, as well as the place of importance given to mothers and women in general with all that this entails. No doubt we can also discover here some biblical elements which value man in a special way and which allow him to function as an integral and essential part of the society in which he lives. At the same time he is expected to contribute in a unique way without being demanded to act as a specialist who may be detached from the warmth of human relations at different levels.

And undoubtedly this particular aspect has been used effectively in the task of evangelization. The intrinsic value of each individual has been appreciated and he has been given the opportunity to recover his dignity before God through the redeeming power of the Gospel. Nevertheless, in most cases he has been accepted only as he has proved his usefulness to the church and her programs, but not in the way he can show forth his new relationship to God in the secular world where he operates. It is possible that this is one of the results of a kind of evangelization which has been so individualistic and fragmentary as to pay special attention only to the "spiritual" aspects of Salvation while it overlooks other important elements of a believer's life.

In a similar way there has been an appeal to the ethical responsibility of the Christian just because he is a child of God. But generally speaking he has been led to believe that this responsibility can be satisfied by obeying certain norms of behavior; he has learned to think of these as distinctive characteristics of any "consecrated" evangelical. Nevertheless he does not even know that such norms were conceived and practiced in lands and circumstances very different from his own; that they are the result of a culture which has been molded by noble ideals and principles, but quite apart from Latin American reality. It is imperative, then, to face seriously our problems not on the basis of a Puritan context nor on a Victorian era, but within our particular historical heritage. This includes the repressive power of the Holy Office and the indelible marks of moral theology and its canon law — as well as Jesuit casuistry. A biblical ethic with such a background demands a solid basis which is closely dependent on the Holy Spirit rather than an external conformity built merely on "moral" reasonings that are obviously pharisaical.

Finally — as far as this paper is concerned — it is necessary for us to consider several positive aspects of a hierarchical structure inherent in our society, which has in itself vast and profound scope in our culture. It cannot be denied that this has contributed somewhat to social stability and to encourage the degree of respect which we naturally feel for our elders or for people in influential positions in society. It is true that to talk about hierarchical structures and their implications is out of ideological fashion, but we have to recognize that in our society an elite factor still plays a very important part. Whereas before the goal was to be a part of a select, aristocratic group, now it is to be able to have a prestigious position in government and to enlist in a "national liberation army." And without even trying to perpetuate everything this hierarchical structure implies, and not being blind to the evils it involves, it is necessary to examine its dynamics carefully since it still — whether we like it or not — rules most of our relationships.

In connection with this I suggest that besides the multiplicity of inferences which this concept has and will continue to have as to systems of church government, it also has positive results as to its ethical and liturgical implications. All of us know that one of our pressing needs is for the believer to attain a certain degree of stability in his daily life, whether in his personal or in his family life. This is not a case of that type of stability which results from a submission to oppressive structures and systems, but the one which gives stability to character and aids in the control of violent reactions because it obeys a personal discipline based on biblical principles. These point to a system of priorities — or hierarchies — as to our relationship with God and with Christ on the part of men, women, and children. Not far behind we find those where we are exhorted to follow love and peace, both of which are derived from an adequate knowledge and the proper respect for a supreme and sovereign God. All of these and many more have ethical principles of vast reaching significance.

But at the same time a hierarchical structure affects our worship of God in a very direct way. Not only are we speaking here of recognizing a superiority which belongs to him only, but of the habits and principles which govern it. Many times we worship God with too much of a loose attitude as an honest reaction to that cold and ritualistic formalism of the religious tradition which we used to profess. Others worship with imported expressions and under regulations lacking in authenticity and relevance in our context, but yet full of "evangelical tradition." Still others, even though to a lesser degree, employ an elaborate ritualism or an imitation which smacks of servility, of what we can conceive of majesty and splendor. In all of these what really has taken place is that we have convinced ourselves that worship is an esoteric act of highly mystical dimensions and extra-terrestrial language — all of it strictly anthropocentric. Here a hierarchical structure has been inverted for even if we repeatedly declare that God is supreme and is worthy of all our respect, we are really offering him what seems best to us.

Both the contents and context of such passages as John 4:24, all

the doxological ones in the New Testament, as well as the unlimited wealth from the Psalms will throw light that will help us appreciate much better this hierarchical mentality we have. By the same token they will help us place it in its proper perspective and cause it to move in the right direction. It should be pleasing to God not only as it is related to worship but also in many other aspects of our daily Christian life.

And what can we say about service to the world? We do admire the spirit of generosity which still persists in one way or another in Latin America. We like to give in order to alleviate burdens of the needy and we are easily moved by tragedy. Moreover, it is not very difficult for us to make room in our home to provide shelter for a relative who wants to strive for a better lot or for one who is experiencing difficulties in his job — all of it in a spirit that is not opposed to biblical principles.

It is unfortunate, however, that when some of these practices are introduced to our churches the picture changes radically. According to our religious tradition, social work has been classified as charity supported by alms or pious gifts. In evangelical circles very little of this background has been changed in principle. But there is now increased reticence to act due to the fear of falling into a type of "social gospel" — a somewhat nebulous concept in the minds of believers, but which has repeatedly been discredited during several decades and is thus rejected without further discussion. And there seems to be no tendency for improvement when some are currently trying to assign it a measure of theological stature and speak with John XXIII, of "serving Christ in the poor" or giving them the power they have been denied. What this has accomplished is that the practice of social benevolence is limited for only those institutions which supposedly have the duty to perform it, while in the meantime neither individual nor collective responsibility has been promoted in certain groups.

It is my conviction that the Word of God allows freedom in this matter without having to specialize or to institutionalize such aid. Those means and avenues of service within the normal flow of human relations should be encouraged under the guidance of Bible study and its imperatives. Thus every form of positive social service will be multiplied in a continent overflowing with outcasts and deprived people. Whatever is being done in the name of the church should also be promoted, but it does not have to be limited to it only.

Now considering the negative aspects of our culture, it is necessary to recognize that many people are thoroughly convinced that we really do not find any positive elements in it. And even though they may not be totally right, note has to be taken of several features which undoubtedly are in need of correction so they may ultimately produce favorable results.

From the very beginning one can detect a marked tendency to imitate. It is observed that from our early history there have been determined efforts to reproduce both practices and models which seem worthy of such an endeavor. Furthermore, a great deal of attention is given to small details so that the impression can be created

that the original rather than its copy is being presented. Consequently, no effort seems too big for such a goal in order to get full acceptance.

And perhaps in no other aspect can this same effort be seen than in liturgy. It is not by accident that either German or Anglo-Saxon tunes are heard in our worship services or that North American-style choruses, in all their full splendor, are almost immediately adopted by our young people. The celebration of the Lord's Supper resembles a formal banquet in a European palace much more than a spiritual feast in the Near East. It is only recently that the use of guitars for instrumental accompaniment has been generally accepted, but many of us still prefer the organ. And let no one dare to question these practices because someone will promptly and vigorously declare, "We have always done it this way!"

And the approval that is usually sought for such an imitation is, on the one hand, that which is based on experience and the authority derived from it, which are foundations to which very few can object. Nevertheless, it is usually ignored that they represent circumstances and meanings which are different from those which originally prompted the external forms now being perpetuated; that just the same they evidence an attitude of dependence lacking in discernment. They ultimately produce intellectual and spiritual laziness.

Some others may argue that Paul exhorts us to imitate him since he was trying to introduce new habits to cultures with no biblical base whatsoever. It is well to note that the apostle stated that he was an imitator of Christ, and that he never had the desire to impose static patterns of behavior, worship, or church government on them. This means that, even if it can be accepted that there is nothing spiritual or biblical in our culture, there is no justification for the introduction of rituals and norms from another culture which has transmitted them, already modified, as meaningful as they might have been in the past. It would be well to remember that every symbol has its own individual background and that it must become a living reality to every generation which adopts it. In other words, there is rather a need to assimilate and adapt patterns than to imitate them in a servile manner; to know how to differentiate between the basic principles being represented and their external forms. And a great deal of disciplined effort and rigorous creativity is demanded for this task.

An imitative spirit also gives rise to a tendency to institutionalize and, consequently, sacralize activities and regulations. As has already been pointed out, the weight of experience and tradition is felt here in all its strength. Because of this, such items as time schedules, official posts, groups, and methods for evangelization are institutionalized rather speedily, just as the ones already mentioned. Once this is accomplished, there is the requirement for almost absolute submission in the precise observance of a multiplicity of details, slogans, program outlines, schedules of meetings, etc. In some groups known to this writer no one dares omit a "prayer circle" before opening a meeting, a "talk" with its corresponding "prayer after the talk," as well as "offering and announcements" and the unavoidable "benediction."

But one can also ask, is it not true that Latin Americans like

improvisation so that they can express creativity? How can you explain the imitative spirit with the tendency to institutionalize and consequently sacralize everything? On the one hand it can be answered that we like to create items of local art and handcraft which have but little bearing on basic forms and principles; they are rather peripheral. Similarly, that in many instances a practice is approved by the simple statement that it has already been tried elsewhere. Immediately there is an aura of authority over it which requires a minimum time for testing it and subsequently it becomes institutionalized within a community.

Obviously all of this lends itself to a glaring lack of adequate acclimatization which will permit such a practice to be assimilated with proper adaptations, if it is to take root. Unfortunately this becomes an obstacle to the outsider, the person we usually call "an unbeliever," since he cannot even begin to understand us. If he does understand us after some time, he will most likely feel encouraged to join our group or church and he will then use our terminology and speak of salvation, the worship service, the brethren, the offering. But he will go out to face a hostile world just as many members of our churches do, that is with no spiritual power but only with a barren vocabulary. The task would have been completed then: we would have converted him into a "believer" after our likeness, spiritually indolent and utterly dependent on formalism.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore the markedly negative aspects of the hierarchical structure mentioned before. Whereas it provides a certain degree of stability to society, it allows its head almost unlimited freedom and even extreme misuse of authority. It also fosters the idea of class distinctions — that respect of persons which the Scriptures speak about. All of these contribute to maintain conditions of hostility or a rather repugnant type of servility. Several samples of these are to be found in our churches and their structures of government. Ostensibly they may not tolerate the existence of hierarchical degrees with their corresponding titles, but in reality they are zealously guarded and any attempt to achieve a promotion is carefully brought under control. As a result several denominations are in the hands of veritable oligarchies which rule them with an iron fist. In the best of cases they do so with a true zeal and fervor, as guiding lights in defense of doctrine; in the worst, with violence and terrorist tactics which are contrary to a truly evangelical spirit. One can also notice the existence of small chieftains who operate outside of any control. However, they have a great deal of influence in the life and decisions of their parishioners.

Now, all of these elements have to be confronted in the light of reality and not merely idealistically. True, we live in a world where teachings concerning class equality forbid any talk about existing social distinctions, much less does it tolerate any idea which may tend to foster them. But this should not mean that society as such is beyond redemption nor that we should abstain from attempting the improvement of some of its structures, even if we have already labeled them as alienating. There are many examples in the Word of God where we can see a temporary spirit of toleration which eventually results

in a different situation to favor the outworking of God's plan, either within a short or a long term. From this vantage point, then, many basic problems can be dealt with as they apply to a variety of circumstances.

And even if some points may not be a direct result of our cultural legacy, we cannot ignore that there are conditions which directly affect the very existence of the evangelical community in Latin America in its own context. One of these is the high rate of illiteracy which still persists despite the efforts of several governments to the contrary. Some experts declare that the problem is even worse due to the fact that while the number of people who learn to read and write increases, there is still a great deal of "functional illiteracy." This takes on an alarming dimension among evangelicals when we recognize the fact that even though we are known as the people of the book, there still prevails what we could call a "biblical functional illiteracy" intimately related to our environment as a very real problem in our churches. In order to solve it we would need a drastic revision of methods and teaching materials so as to find the most effective means to teach the Word of God and its implications for our time. This must be done not only in the light of methods being used by contemporary secular education, but even of other means which have not traditionally been accepted as educational. I am speaking both of mass communication media and of publications with attractive formats, low in intellectual content but immensely popular in every level of the social scale. Many a positive lesson can be learned from Walt Disney stories in comic-book form, as well as from the corresponding local heroes as they relate to tactics and the acknowledgment of mass dynamic factors.

In short, if the evangelical community is to express its true cultural identity all the elements that make up Latin American culture have to be taken into consideration, be they seemingly or notoriously positive or negative. We have to repeat that this is neither a pleasant nor an easy task, but that it is extremely urgent in order to offset a trend toward an indigenous syncretism or, worse than that, to import another syncretism which is original to other places and times. This task demands also the active participation, representative of a cross-section of the Latin American community. This group, with a definite commitment of both spiritual and intellectual discipline, can study conditions and suggest directives to follow. These will then be adapted to any local situation so that they may be real models for adaptation without becoming normative examples for every specific situation. And all of this within the broad but disciplined framework of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Word of which he is the author.

2. *Biblical dimensions*

One of the distinguishing characteristics of biblical revelation is that it uncovers for us a God dynamically and constantly active in his relationship to humanity and his own. He is a being who knows fully the place culture has in the life of man. Thus he does not oppose it automatically, nor does he manipulate it with petty desires, much less does he make it the only expression of his will for all humanity

for all times. Thus we can understand that culture can become a means of divine action but that it never becomes an end in itself.

As far as the limits of this paper are concerned it will be necessary once more to restrict our treatment to just a few outstanding points of biblical revelation which have a bearing on Iberian-America at the present time. It is pertinent to state that the present author holds to a position which accepts unreservedly the Bible as the inspired Word of God to the full extent of the term and according to Peter's expression that the biblical authors did not invent their message but that they, "Spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:21).

a. *Introductory remarks* — We have almost forgotten the counter-cultural spirit of early Christianity. In other words, that while it acknowledged that peoples and tribes had a particular life-style expressed in their cultures, it also had a corrective attitude towards them. It brought with itself divine judgment against their negative points as well as radical modification of the positive aspects. The apostles and their followers did not hesitate to condemn idolatry and every type of immorality as well as philosophical doctrines which kept their minds ensnared.

No doubt this was one of the aspects which contributed to the success of the preaching of the Gospel in the early church. It was not simply a "prophetic" task (as it is conceived nowadays), but the simple condemnation of sin and a call to repentance leading to forgiveness and the transforming power which could drive its possessor to a new life. "Repent," said the Lord in his first public message; "Let men repent," reiterated Paul before the Athenians. It was in this way and in many others that those who listened to the Gospel message for the first time were confronted with the fact that there were some negative elements in their culture from which they should turn away. At the same time they were exhorted to take a new stance which would let them establish trends pleasing to God, even if this meant that such a trend would run contrary to the existing order. It can thus be noticed that the door would then be opened for divine intervention in any given culture, obviously governed by biblical directives toward the goal which the Lord himself set.

This naturally demands that discipline of an adequate interpretation of God's Word both as a strict and as a relevant discipline. That is, that it should be a task which serves the scriptural record rather than an ideology or a theological fad with all the limitations inherent to it. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that it originated in a dynamic and living Being, it is necessary to remember that such a Word speaks directly and addresses itself to concrete situations which can assimilate its principles in order to adapt them to our idiosyncrasy. As such, the task of hermeneutics represents a challenge which cannot afford to ignore the genius and characteristics of the culture to which it seeks to transmit the message, nor the seriousness of this same message and its divine origin. This means that every system of interpretation must be examined in the light of the place it has had in history. When it is finally adopted, if it is, it can only be used as a starting point. Every conclusion must be reached methodically and not arbitrarily;

under the strict and conscious control of the Holy Spirit and not slavishly following archaic patterns or high-sounding novelties.

b. *Some basic concepts* — Our present era makes us forget the primary importance of concepts that are basic to cultural activity, as stated in the Word of God. On the one hand the same God who has revealed himself in the Scriptures is a personal God who, while he is merciful and kind, is also hard and jealous of his own name and his own glory. His intervention may be multifarious, but always within the limits that he himself has made known in his Word. His glory stands out unequivocally as the starting point, the moving force, and the primary goal of his every act as well as those of his creatures in the universe. Within that same glory we can find his desire to have man participate with him in all the eternal blessings in his heavenly mansions. For this purpose he has provided the means through which man can attain this: salvation through faith in the substitutionary work of his Son Jesus Christ on the Cross. At the same time he desires that everyone who becomes identified with him through faith may live in obedience to his will and enjoy an abundant life which pleases him and affords personal satisfaction to man. Consequently he has given the Holy Spirit to live in every believer so that he may enable and impel him to obey his will and thus prepare for life in heaven. And that same will is found clearly expressed in the Bible, the only rule of faith and practice for every aspect of a believer's life.

The Lord has also planned for the establishment of a visible body of believers who encourage one another to love and good works. They exhibit both corporately and individually God's power, love, and concern for that part of humanity which is still not committed to his control. This body, the Church, does not live for itself nor for the world primarily, but for the Lord and the goals he has established. It is a community of witness, aggressive proclamation of the praises of him who called it "from darkness to his marvelous light," and a consuming passion for those who are still far from God and his Christ. The Church, then, has a mission which is highly spiritual and unquestionably humanizing in the fullest sense of both terms as part of one and the same reality. It thus is anxiously expecting its Lord who will return to establish his kingdom in all its fullness, as a complete expression of what is now already at work among us.

c. *Contemporary manifestations* — Conditions at present in Latin America have contributed already to the discussion of several topics in the realm of biblical theology. It is unfortunate that such a discussion has been limited up to now to socio-political approaches with a marked socialist and Marxist flavor, heavily spiced with European theological terminology even if the development has been in Latin America by Latin Americans. In reality, then, the very same mistake which has haunted Latin American thinking and practice has been made again: Both patterns and categories of thought of an old nature and a foreign origin have been followed.

However, it is imperative that we acknowledge that those topics merit an in-depth treatment with a thoroughly biblical framework and contents. There is an urgent need to develop a biblical anthro-

pology that takes into consideration the predicament of every Latin American, not only the poor and the outcasts; one that will also include insights and contributions of those sciences which have carefully analyzed man within the recent past; that will place man in his proper perspective within divine priorities and plans. Just as important are the interpersonal relations in a society which, like ours, is bankrupt but still has redeemable elements in it.

Closely related to all of this we find the concept concerning the Kingdom of God and its application to the Latin American situation. It is no longer considered idle talk to consider socio-political expressions that must be analyzed in the light of the Word of God to determine their relationship with the divine purpose, both temporal and eternal. If socialism with its messianic hopes is one form of that Kingdom, there should be no shadow of a doubt that it must be accepted. Just the same, it cannot be forgotten that the Kingdom of God and of his Christ is not to be submitted to systems or ideologies of human origin, humanizing as their postulates may sound. In the light of the failure of capitalism it cannot afford to embrace the best option to be found in a market place which is still in the experimental stage. If it does so, it is bound to make the same mistake and thus to lose its corrective power definitely.

Another important aspect will be that of proposing a doctrine of the Church in its Latin American expression even before determining its identity. While any true ecclesiology cannot be conceived apart from the biblical principles as the Body of Christ under the absolute control of the Holy Spirit, it is just as valid that it cannot exist in a purely abstract form. But it is precisely at this juncture that little attention has been paid to the theoretical basis in favor of a speedy naturalization and acclimatization in our continent. Furthermore, its evangelistic task has been emphasized while the organization of supporting groups to encourage the development of a truly Christian character in the new believers has been neglected. For this reason it is still hard to determine the true identity of the Latin American evangelical church. And it will continue to be so unless there is a definite effort in every level within itself so that concrete proposals are made to achieve this purpose.

Finally, it is just as important to study every detail that is involved in the doctrine and sanctification. The Word of God does not limit its reach to external patterns of behavior at certain ethical levels, but it extends to what these in turn reflect concerning the relationship of the individual to God. Again, social ethics operates under guidelines of a divine origin rather than because of the pressures of collective needs. Thus the Latin American evangelical church can no longer be at the mercy of pious requirements with a shallow depth and a high pharisaical content, neither is it to have new mystiques with humanistic overtones which ignore divine priorities for the sake of the community. Neither barren legalism nor passionate ideologies are to be allowed as substitutes of biblical concepts to rule the believers' behavior.

What, then, can be done specifically? For the time being it would be good to operate at least under the following general principles:

(i) With a creative attitude which does not depend upon external influences exclusively, but rather in absolute submission to biblical principles.

(ii) With a system of priorities in the light of God's will and according to both his temporal and eternal plan for man and the believer, with awareness at the same time of the totality of Latin American reality.

(iii) With an increasing consciousness of the corrective role of the Gospel in its relationships with society, the structures which make it up, and the prevailing ideologies.

(iv) With all seriousness and earnestness which will not incorporate novelties automatically nor do away with existing principles, as long as nothing which might offend the Lord is discovered.

(v) With a high degree of spiritual discernment which results from the unconditional commitment to the Lord of the Church and to the control of the Holy Spirit in individual as well as in collective matters.

(vi) With special care in order to avoid any unnecessary institutionalization of forms and expressions of a passing nature concerning liturgy, systems of church government, and social concern.

With all of these and many others which can undoubtedly be suggested during the Congress a new trend can be started, one which sooner or later will contribute positively to determine the true identity of the Latin American church in the light of biblical theology.

HOW TO EVALUATE CULTURAL PRACTICES BY BIBLICAL STANDARDS IN MAINTAINING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN LATIN AMERICA REPORT

Chairman: Benjamin Moraes

Secretary: William Taylor

The relationship between culture and the theology of evangelization is a dynamic, living one. It is one which implicates all elements involved in the process of evangelization and the establishment of the local Christian community. If it is a cross-cultural communication, the Good News bearer — if he comes from a foreign culture — must be sensitive to understand both his own culture and the one he works in! The recipient is not expected to share the burden of understanding both. He deserves a pure Gospel. That Gospel essence must not be confused or changed, although it is often jarred out of focus due to verbal and non-verbal communication which comes as part of the Gospel wrappings.

The subject of Latin American cultural identity is a touchy one to some. The Latin American people have suffered from social, political, economic, and ecclesiastical exploitation and control from without. The impact of this search for cultural identity has been felt within the evangelical church also. Most believers from Latin America will readily express appreciation and gratitude for the foreign believers and missionaries who brought the Gospel. At the same time, many of these Latin brethren express their own personal experience of subjugation to inferior status, snubs, and apparently deliberate mistreatment. The fact is that many non-Latin American missionaries are totally unaware of what they have done in the past.

It takes a careful, cool and loving interpersonal relationship to deal with these problems. Over-riding our discussion of Dr. Pérez' paper — in which both Latin American and non-Latin American actively participated — was a sense of common dependence upon the Spirit.

Some pointed questions

Here are some of the interrogatives which stimulated discussion, some without answers. First, what does the Latin American culture have that is positive, and what is negative? Second, are there positive aspects of this culture which we have ignored or even violated as Christians in Latin America? Third, have we biblically judged the negative aspects of the culture? Fourth, what examples illustrate these first three questions? Fifth, what does it mean to be a *Latin American* believer in Jesus Christ? Does it differ from a believer in other cultures? Sixth, since missionaries have committed mistakes, should they all move out and allow the autonomous Latin American church to take over? Seventh, what is our responsibility as foreign missionaries and Latin American believers to the society at large? How do we express a biblical balance between evangelism and social concern, between biblical authority