

(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

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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

and the loving Christian community?

Some biblical guidelines to evaluate our culture and cultural identity in Latin America

1. The Scriptures must be supreme. Christ is our Lord. The Lausanne Covenant affirms, "The message of the Bible is addressed to all mankind . . ." The Holy Spirit ". . . illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes . . ." Therefore all culture must be evaluated in the light of, and be subjected to, Scripture. Every culture has its positive and negative aspects. No culture is perfect, regardless of ethnocentrism. This applies equally to the culture in which one works, as well as the one from which he perhaps has come.

2. All men are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, Gal. 3:28, Acts 17:26). Therefore we must recognize cultural diversity as reflecting some of God's image. At the same time we acknowledge that sin has disfigured man and his culture, and God must judge.

3. The form and freedom which the New Testament allows are vast both in the proclamation of the Gospel, as well as within the life of the community of believers. We must not allow cultural traditions, which are found within and outside of the local church, to stifle the life of Christ (Mark 7:8-13).

4. Cultural pressures must not permit a change of emphasis in the purity and demands of the New Testament Gospel and discipleship. The social needs of Latin America call for a Christian response, but the priorities must be sustained. Again the Lausanne Covenant expresses the balance and tension, "Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty." The emotional quality of the Latin American appears to cause him to be especially receptive to the Gospel, but this should cause us to be careful in articulating the demands of biblical discipleship.

5. Jesus is the perfect example of one who crossed many cultural barriers. The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Paul's teaching in Philippians chapter 2 underscores this. Our responsibility in evaluating culture — whether our own or another's — is to do it in love, with an honest desire to learn, identifying with the culture without violating our own personal identity, free to make our critiques in careful love, avoiding the confusion of cultural relatives with biblical absolutes.

Implication in the theology of evangelization

Our theology must not change. The essence of our proclamation is cross-cultural, and has its origins in the Person of God and in the work of the Son. While the diversity of cultural realities must not neutralize the evangelization of the world, we underline the fact that this task must be carried out with an awareness of the culture in which the evangelization is being carried out.

The essential results of evangelization will not change obedience to

Christ, incorporation into a local community of believers, and significant outreach to the world. What will change should be local manifestations of both strategy and methodology of evangelization. There will also be biblical freedom in the forms and structures of the new church. The Latin American culture is rich in interpersonal relationships which are both emotionally moving and personally satisfying. These must be studied, cleansed if necessary, and utilized in the church.

Current, and sometimes carelessly imported, methods of evangelization and forms in the local Latin American church must be re-examined. They will change; some may be discarded, but all must be examined in light of the New Testament principles as they apply to Latin America.

Further study and research

We suggest a few examples of imperative research.

1. Careful definitions of "culture" and "biblical absolutes" must be developed as they apply to Latin America. Obviously these are done in a time and space dimension which will change depending on the individual and his place in history. But we need help here.

2. We request study of worship patterns that Scripture encourages, so that these can be developed and incorporated in the matrix of the Latin American cultures — whether Indian or ladino, poor barrio or rising middle classes.

3. We request study into the nature of the Latin American family life and dynamic, and its implication in evangelization and Christian nurture. The roles and hierarchy of the family must be analyzed. The concept of manhood, leadership, must be evaluated. What is present in the Latin family which is biblical — support.

4. We recommend the distribution of Dr. Pérez' paper, and other similar articles, in Christian magazines such as *Decision*, *Rensamiento Cristiano*, *Certeza*. This should be just a start in the right direction of positive self-analysis in Latin America.

5. We suggest that centers for theological education in Latin America include studies in the Christian approach of cultural anthropology.

Some immediate needs

1. We must evaluate our attitudes to our own culture, as well as to the culture we may have adopted. How can we learn, change, love?

2. We must discuss the topic of cultural identity and its biblical guidelines with our brethren in Latin America, regardless of their origin.

3. We request that the non-Latin American sending and supporting agencies evaluate their criteria for new missionaries to Latin America. (It is not a matter of not sending them, but of sending the right ones.) We ask them to evaluate their operating methodologies, problem solving processes, and organization leadership structures.

4. We encourage the desperately needed change — gradual and loving — in evangelical churches and leaders in Latin America that will bring life and renewal in proclamation, worship, education, and service in the light of the Latin American cultures and biblical principles.

5. We ask all Christians — Latin American and non-Latin American — to consider carefully what it means to be a Latin American

believer in countries that suffer centuries of injustice and damage to human dignity, or countries which are undergoing significant social and structural changes. Scripture must ultimately judge all social systems.

EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS: THE TENSION BETWEEN BIBLE AND CULTURE

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1. *Problem and task*

a. *The situation* — At the present time Europe consists of thirty-three countries. The national frontiers on this continent have shifted rather frequently, and are not identical with linguistic, cultural, and national borders. Today there are even more languages than nations. There are, however, cultural areas with their own distinct characteristics.

Since the early days, Christianity has had an enormous impact on Europe — east, west, north and south. It has influenced through revival periods, through influential institutions, through varying forms of theologies, through spiritual and ecclesiastical life, through constantly changing creative knowledge and actions, as well as the preservation of already existing elements. This century has contributed a number of radical changes within European churches as no century before. Some of these widely varying factors, responsible for this development are as follows: technology, leisure time, political situations and ideologies, opulence, and persecutions.

Even though the mutual cultural influence of nations and churches in Europe was and still is strong, the problem we face can be tackled from various aspects such as the political, cultural, and religious development. We have to confine ourselves to one of the possibilities available.

b. *Problem and task* — In the midst of the rapid changes in our day, many Christians ask themselves how our generation will cope with the problems and yet remain faithful to Jesus Christ and his biblical commands, while at the same time avoiding unnecessary cultural isolation and thus missionary fruitlessness.

It is possible that the characteristic of our European situation with its long history of culture and Christianity, is that our consciousness of problems has become our major preoccupation. This results in a limited capacity to produce solutions. The problems of Europe and the world, of the church and humanity, encumber our minds. In some cases we are able to analyze them and avail ourselves of the latest theological, sociological, etc., helps. The solutions suggested, however, often are of theoretical ideas that were born around conference tables but lack the power and inspiration to become workable projects for the masses.

A number of participants of the Congress have asked beforehand that the tension between true Christianity from the biblical point of view and those cultures surrounding us should be discussed. This question is both comprehensive and old, and I am certain that every one of us will contribute some solutions. Before going on I would like to define the term "culture" to form the basis for a better understanding for