

Preparing and Supporting Latin Americans in Mission

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Introduction

Firstly, I would like to thank everybody for the opportunity of taking part in this group. It is a move of God's Spirit that has led to the internationalising of the mission movement and it is fitting that we should reflect upon this seriously both in the Latin American and European missionary movements.

I had better introduce myself because I am certain that the majority do not know me. My name is Paul Davies. I am married to Wilma. We are missionaries with Latin Link and have worked nine years in missionary training and missionary facilitation in Argentina. We started by teaching at a seminary in Buenos Aires. The SEIT was very small but was quite well known for its missionary training emphasis. After 3 years we were also invited to teach at the Biblical Institute of Buenos Aires and even later at the Baptist Seminary; always in mission related subjects. Wilma's speciality is anthropology and cultural issues and my speciality is biblical and theological subjects related to mission.

We also worked at national level in the mission movement. In 1999 I was elected to the board of *Misiones Mundiales*; the umbrella organisation for all those working in cross-cultural mission in Argentina. My role was mainly in the coordination of the forum for mission training but I also was involved in discussions on the development of mission structures and the cooperative work with Northern mission agencies. In this regard, I was on the ad-hoc committee that later developed into a full blown 'board' for the formation of LETRA; an Argentinean agency connected with Wycliffe. Wilma is now on that board and has written three manuals in Spanish to guide Latin American missionary trainers in the teaching of Anthropology. I am also a member of the board of the Baptist Mission Agency formed in 1997.

More recently we have been involved at international level. I taught in the Mission in the Third Millennium, organised by Samuel Cueva and the Seminario Raimundo Lulio, organised by Pablo Carillo (founder of PMI). In 2003 I was invited to be a member of the executive committee of COMIBAM International, with the responsibility to develop a network of missiological thought at continental level.

We did not neglect the local church, however, Wilma taught adult Sunday school and I was also a deacon in the church we attended in Buenos Aires. In addition I have been on the preaching commission of that church for six years. I also took part, as a theologian in the board of an agency working with drug users and those who are living with HIV/AIDS.

Wilma and I are both studying for doctorates. Wilma is studying the influence on Pentecostalism of the sub-strata of popular culture in the urban poor. She is doing this at the University of Birmingham. I am studying the missionary theology of Argentinean Methodist, José Míguez Bonino at the University of Utrecht, Holland.

Coming to this meeting, therefore, and considering these questions seems to be an extension of what I have been doing and thinking in Latin America for the past nine years.

I would consider my outlook in regard to the Latin American mission movement, therefore, as a sort of *outsider's inside view*. I am a member of the Latin American missionary movement and am committed to its development and growth and consequently have an inside view. I am not, however, a Latin and so remain essentially an outsider. In regard, however, to the European mission movement, I also have an *insider's outside view*! I am a European; a member of a European based mission agency and consequently, in regard to the Western missionary movement, I am an insider. On the other hand I am an outsider because I have tried to look at all these issues through Latin eyes for past nine years and have not experienced the reality of the Latin American missionary movement from a European perspective. I have an outside view. In addition, I am an

outsider because I join this whole process of reflection of this group in ignorance of what has gone on before. So please forgive anything I say that is obvious, or that has been discussed before.

What can Western agencies offer enthusiastic Latin American Christians seeking to share the love of Christ in the world? How can Western agencies communicate and engage with Latin Americans, to share skills and experience learned from the great heritage of cross-cultural mission in the last century? What longer term training and support mechanisms can be made available to Latins working cross-culturally when and if their enthusiasm is challenged and, in some cases defeated, in our own and other cultures apathetic or resistant to the gospel?

It is interesting to note the characterisations of both Latins and Europeans in the questions we have before us. Latin Americans are characterised as enthusiastic but likely to become discouraged (aren't we all!); and in need of help. Europeans are implicitly characterised as having less enthusiasm; more experience in mission and in a position to help. It's interesting that in Latin America those would also be common characterisations. Both, I think are true, but there is more to it. Latin Americans maybe are more lively than Europeans, but does this imply more spiritual life? Latin Americans maybe are more likely to get discouraged quicker than Europeans, but they are also much better at muddling through! Europeans are maybe quieter but that does not necessarily imply less spiritual life. The European missionary movement does have a great deal more experience than the Latin American movement but it seems to me to have forgotten much of what it should have learned and is repeating old mistakes.

Having said all this I must confess to feeling a great ignorance about how to approach this. We have seen many agencies from the north try and work humbly and correctly in Latin America. They have, however, made very big mistakes. Even as Europeans and North Americans we have enthusiastically rushed into 'helping' the Latin Americans and have either not scratched where the itch was, or have had the right vision but have imposed the method. A more cautious is needed. I think this is the great thing about this meeting.

I have got to say that even COMIBAM International with its board of regional representatives from every missionary movement often confesses incomplete data and information. The information of the needs of the Latin American mission movement always comes to the executive committee with a whole bunch of caveats!

Rather than come to the issue with suggestions I think we need a methodology to think about this issue. This implies that we do not carry out this methodology once and then apply and carry it out in all contexts but it rather a process than a product. Latin American theology has developed a theological methodology that has deeply influenced European missiology, and to a lesser extent North American missiology. I would like to apply this to the questions raised here. Please forgive me if we get a bit abstract but it does have practical outworking at then end.

1. Obedient participation in God's mission

We always must begin with active, obedient participation in God's mission. This is not an option and we cannot hope to even begin the process of analysing how we should be involved unless we make this first step of obedient participation. It is certain that we as Europeans must realise that the cross-cultural mission movement's primary agent is the Latin American church and more specifically the Latin American local churches. We are part of that movement as members of the universal church but only as we are involved working with the church in Latin America. This goes as much for agencies as for individuals. The danger for agencies is that they become 'para-church' in the negative since that we have experienced in Latin America. The organisation arrives with lots of money and ideas and milks the local church of people and resources. Organisations must serve the local church not its own goals. It is easier with individuals but still there is the danger. You are a member of the local church not simply in order to use it as a platform to fulfil your mission but to serve that local congregation.

2. Analysis

This is the key. We must know more about the missionary movements we are attempting serve as well as our own. We need to analyse the state of the Latin American movement in order to know how best to engage. This analysis must include an examination of the traditions, which this movement draws from. Like I said, even

COMIBAM International struggles to analyse this context. The Latin American missionary movement is made up of a great deal of different church backgrounds. The churches involved range from Presbyterians to Neo-Pentecostals! Latin American Christian cross-cultural workers also work in vastly differing contexts. Some work in international agencies, some work directly under their local church, some have a receiving agency, and others are with denominations. How we are involved with each of these people is very different. Some of these missionaries are very restricted in how they can cooperate; others have a great deal of freedom.

The already existing activities of the Latin American mission movement need to be investigated. COMIBAM International has three main areas of work: forum for local church; forum of missionary training; and forum of missionary sending structures. This of course means that a whole bunch is already being done in this area. If we are ignorant of these local attempts, our duplication will almost certainly crush the local ones. We have more money, more power, more kudos, more history, etc. I have seen this happen all too often!

Also we need to know where Latin Americans are working and what they are doing. Where are the gaps in the training? What is not being done? How, therefore, can we be of help? Is something about to be started?

The other end of the analysis is to know the European or Western missionary movement better. Our attitude is one area to look at. Taking my outsider's inside perspective, I would say that possibly unconscious colonialist attitudes still are present within the European movement. These are very subtle and normally unconscious. Having said this we also need to see how the Latin churches have taken on these modes of thought. José Míguez Bonino asks: 'have the imperialist characteristics that marked the ethos and language of missions that trained us remained imprinted on our native evangelization'.¹ His answer would be a most definite yes.

What is the shape of the member organisations in our movement. Western Agencies also come in many shapes and sizes. The theological tendency, denominational background, age and size of the agency will define how an agency can engage in partnership with Latin Americans in mission. What is the relationship between the movement and the local churches, here in Europe and there in Latin America?

Also practically, what is being done already? By whom is this being done? In what areas is it being worked out? With who is this being done? Many more questions could and should be asked.

It is good to analyse all these issues but, how should we, as Christians work this out in practice. At this point, I believe a theological reflection should be carried out in order to give us a practical and Christian framework rather than a purely pragmatic one. This is where, I am afraid we get a bit abstract!

3. Reflection

After such an analysis of the context, we return to the question: what should we do? We need a theological reflection on working together: what is commonly called, partnership. It seems to me, however, that without a biblical and theological reflection on partnership and some of the implications of money and power, we will not be able to begin to answer the questions before us. The problem I find is that most of what I have read on partnership (both in English and Spanish) is from a Western and business perspective. The tendency has been to use business models of partnership and then to quote biblical verses to substantiate the model. This is maybe seen as a contextualised way but my opinion is that it falls too far into syncretism.

Firstly, we must ask: do we have a theological framework for partnership worked out in Latin America? The question is not do we have a theological framework *for* partnership worked out for Latin America but *in* Latin America?²

Unfortunately, we are often all too ignorant of the history of partnership that has already gone on in Latin America. There have been several attempts made in the past; we will briefly mention two. Firstly, The Whitby meetings of the International Missionary Council (1947) were titled: "Partnership in Mission". It was suggested

¹ Faces of Latin American Protestantism, (1995), p. 135.

² It is also important to differentiate between how we are partners IN Latin America with Latins and how we are partners in Europe with Latins. We are all more self-sufficient within our own contexts. We need to meet Latin Americans when they have power and we do not!

that each continent should have their own missionary conference in the continent with most of the speakers being from the continent and accompanied by missionaries who had full voice as with the locals but not control or veto. One outcome of those meetings was the first Latin American Evangelical Conference (CELA I), held in Buenos Aires (1949). According to José Míguez Bonino, this was the start of the maturity of the Latin Church. It led to Latin American leaders taking up the reins of responsibility for mission, both in Latin America and elsewhere.

Secondly there was a meeting in Oaxtepec, Mexico in 1971, which posed the question: North American Missionaries in Latin America: what for? The conference was organised by UNELAM, a product of the CELA II, held in Lima (1961). It was rather a blunt question and for many, rather hurtful. But it is a good question. Orlando Costas reported that this meeting tried to give a frame of reference for this issue. Various issues were raised. I will mention four. Firstly, missionaries working in Latin America must be aware of the context. Secondly, mission organisations must be aware of the fundamental role of the local church not the para-church organisation. Thirdly, missionaries must be flexible in the realisation of their call. Finally, that mission being an international enterprise must have an international structure. Costas finishes his report with these words:

By placing the missionary within a charismatic (a gift of love from one church to another), dialogic (the result of a fruitful dialogue between two churches) and a universal (an expression of the worldwide task of the one church) perspective, the Consultation transcended individualistic and nationalistic barriers as well as the rich/poor-church dichotomy that has often made the world missionary enterprise the private possession of the affluent churches.³

The sending and receiving of missionaries, therefore, was conceived as a universal, giving dialogue.

From the Latin American reflection upon partnership we turn to the European/North American argument. This begins with a polemic. There is a widespread contradiction that is propounded in Anglo Saxon mission circles that there is no word in Spanish for partnership but, it is said, it is a biblical term and concept. It is true that there is no verb that describes what is written about in Christian and missionary books on partnership. There is a logical problem with this. If its in the Bible, and the Bible is in Spanish, then what do the translations use for the concept. Philippians 1.4 is normally the verse quoted. Paul speaks of the partnership in the gospel. What is the biblical word here? The word is *koinonia*—fellowship.

The question we should be asking therefore is what does *koinonia* mean seen in these terms? *Koinonia* comes from the word common; to have something in common. For the New Testament, the basic *koinonia* is communion with God. Communion with the Father (*I Corinthians 1.9; I John 3*); Communion with the Christ (*I Corinthians 10.16*); Communion in the Spirit (*Philippians 2.1*). It has application in unity, using the example of the sacrifice of Christ; Communion in the gospel (*Philippians 1.5*). In this humanity is included, through Christ in the life of the Godhead. What is the life of the Godhead like, therefore?

Various Latin American theologians have attempted to recover the idea of the Trinity as ‘the communion of the persons’. They talk of the interpenetration of the persons of the Trinity. The Son and Spirit are in the Father; the Father and Spirit are in the Son and the Son and the Father are in the spirit. John’s concept is most prevalent here but so is Paul’s (Romans 8:10; 1 Corinthians 2:11; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 13:14). In fact, ‘God in Himself is a permanent conversation, a communion of love, an identity of purpose and unity of action: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’⁴ This is the nature of ultimate reality. ‘The life of God is communion; identity is not affirmed by closing in on oneself but by opening up to the other; unity is not singularity but rather full communication. It is in that image we are created, it is in participation in that constant divine ‘conversation’ that we find the meaning of our existence, life abundant; it is on this model we should structure our human relations.’⁵ Most of all of course these human relations should be worked out in the church and in mission.

³ Orlando E. Costas, Report of the Oaxtepec, Mexico Consultation (1970) in *Theology of the Crossroads in Contemporary Latin America: Missiology in Mainline Protestantism: 1969-1974*, p.161.

⁴ *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*, (1995), p. 115.

⁵ *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*, (1995), p. 116.

This is worked out in the New Testament in terms of *koinonia* between Christians. *Koinonia* is, therefore, to share in a common enterprise; e.g. Christian work (*II Corinthians 8.23*), secular work (*Luke 5.10*: the companions of Simon); to Share a common experience (e.g. persecution in *Hebrews 10:33* and *Revelation 1:9*; suffering in *II Corinthians 1:7*; praise in *I Corinthians 10:18*; to Share privileges in common (*Roman 11:17*; *I Corinthian 9:23*); to Share realities in common (*Philippians 1:7*; *I Peter 5:1*; and *II Peter 1:4*, although in the first verse "the grace" in question can be of the apostolate that both Paul and the church share, about which Paul writes in *Romans 1:5* and *Ephesians 3:2,8*; to Share through giving as in *II Corinthians 9.13* where Paul speaks of the "generosity of its contribution." The phrase "its contribution" translates the Greek phrase your *koinonia*; *Romans 15. 26* shows how this *koinonia* takes concrete forms in the generosity like in *II Corinthians 8.4*. *Acts 2.42* certainly it aims in this direction.

There are some conclusions that we can draw out here. First, that *koinonia* has to do with interpersonal relations. It has more to do with people than institutions. Secondly, we have communion with God and with others through the gospel. This is not optional! On the other hand there is *koinonia* that we could call situational. Situational *koinonia* can be permanent or temporary. Thirdly, situational *koinonia* is based on the *koinonia* in the gospel. The clearest biblical example of the relation between the *koinonia* formed in Christ and its function is the theological meaning that Paul puts on the collection of the gentile churches for the Jewish churches (*II Corinthians 9.13*). The reason why there is this situational *koinonia* is the ontological *koinonia*. It is not that our oneness with each other is an application of our oneness with God in Christ but rather it is an expression of that oneness. The situational *koinonia* and is an essential and concrete expression from the ontological *koinonia*. If there is not situational *koinonia* in the church we have good reason to doubt of its ontological *koinonia*—that is to say, we cannot declare our oneness in Christ without something being done about it! Working alone in an area, in an area, without reference to others that are doing the same thing is not primarily a problem of efficacy, nor efficiency but is a theological problem. The fact is we have Christ in common whether we have a task in common or not. That means, therefore, that our commonness in the task must be seen in the light of our commonness in the gospel. This makes us equals in mission.

All this is rather idealistic and can be used in order to hide real and concrete ways in which we can oppress and use one another. We must therefore be conscious that our *koinonia* or partnership takes place in the context of the fall. We are fallen, the world is fallen and therefore, and most importantly to understand here, is that our relationships are fallen: the world and the flesh (the devil is almost unemployed here) affect our relationships. By the world we mean the values of this world. This is the danger of uncritically using business concepts in partnership. I say uncritically because there are no divine methods of human sociality. The flesh we know all too well! The flesh is subtle and our own fallen ways are often unconscious.

Although this *koinonia* (with God and with our fellow human beings) something that is transcendent of sin and this world (it is truly divine) it is, however, something that must be worked out in this world of sin. We must, therefore, be constantly conscientized to our sinful ways of relating to others. Two areas of sin stand out in this specific area: our attitudes towards power and money.

Power. Western Agencies wield a great deal of power. This is sometimes recognised (by the agency), sometimes ignored and sometimes hidden! We must be aware that when we, as European or North American agencies cooperate with Latin Agencies and even more acutely with Latin Americans themselves, whether we know it or not we are incredibly powerful. *The Elephant who isn't careful when waltzing with the mouse will soon have to find a new dancing partner!*

Money: Bob Dylan said: 'Money doesn't talk it swears'. The issue of money is often thought about as worldly and so is avoided. Jonathan Bonk's book about money and partnership is an excellent, if not slightly depressing analysis. The Bible talks a great deal about money. C. Rene Padilla was writing sections for the NIV study Bible in Spanish and he was stunned by how often he felt the importance of mentioning money but it was rarely mentioned in the Study Bible in English. We must reflect openly and 'Christianly' upon money.

4. Practical

The question now becomes: in this context, which we have analysed, in the light of our studies on the theological aspects of partnership, how does that work out in practice. I would like to suggest some ways forward.

Due to the fact that our partnership is based in the character of God and the gospel, this gives us both responsibility and freedom. We have responsibility in the sense that our partnership must be seen in the framework of the gospel but freedom in the way that this is conceived and the level of partnership. This leaves partnership within certain limits but free to work out the ways of working together.

I have found this from Ralph Winter helpful.

<u>Level of desired relationship</u>	<u>Type of relationship</u>	<u>Description</u>
Non-desirable relationship	Self-criticism	Unasked for supervision
Desired relationship	Advise	Advise when requested
	Fellowship	Mutual help and encouragement
	Contact	Periodic communication
Non-desirable relationship	Breakdown	Complete breakdown

This bases our partnership in the context of relationships. There is no special magic or rocket science it is simply acting as a Christian in a situation of partnership. As individuals we would not dream of treating our brothers and sisters with disrespect but we often act in the most abominable ways as organisations.

Attempting to make this more concrete in terms of partnership between agencies, I think Scott Moreau's model of four levels of partnership is helpful. He speaks of communication, cooperation, collaboration and constitution. *Communication* is where the ministries actively share information by personal contact and so to avoid duplication and misunderstanding. *Cooperation* is where the ministries agree to help one another to achieve their own individual goals. *Collaboration* is where the ministries work together to achieve common goals, which they could not have achieved separately. *Constitution* is where the ministries eventually merge to form a new organisation.

The first three are really what we are talking about in our discussions.

Communication: We must share information in honest and open communication: successes and failures, concerns about the relationships, and hopes for the future, motivations. This must be done in a way that looks at the relationship from the perspective of the other not from our own personal or corporate goals.

Cooperation: This is always dangerous because there is a human tendency to use the other for our own benefit. If we are cooperating in order to achieve our own goals, is the other in agreement with our goal? Open and honest communication is even more important here. Above all our motivations must be laid open to comment from the other. The "benefit" to the other in achieving our goals must be clear.

Collaboration: The achievement of common goals is defiantly a longer process as these goals must be discussed adjusted and agreed upon. How this common goal fits in with the particular goal of the partner must also be laid open to comment from the other. This takes us back once again to communication.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, I agree with many of the suggestions that Fred [Nuckley – Horizontes] has made but feel that wider investigation needs to take place before we would go forward. It seems to me that a forum could be established with Latin Americans to investigate the best way in which we can work together. There needs to be an investigation carried out by both the Latin American mission movement and also the European Mission Movement into its own structure and relationships. These investigations need to then be shared with the other

movement for their perspective. In the light of this analysis, there needs to be a joint theological dialogue on our relationships. How do we, theologically conceive of the relationship between our missionary movements. Thirdly, in a second moment of analysis we need carry out a join investigation into how this will work out in concrete expressions of active koinonia. Fourthly, these active expressions of koinonia need to be jointly analysed to see how adjustments can be made in order to move forward. The practical and reflection must continue.

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