

**The Latin American Forum, Global Connections  
London, UK, 28 September 2010**

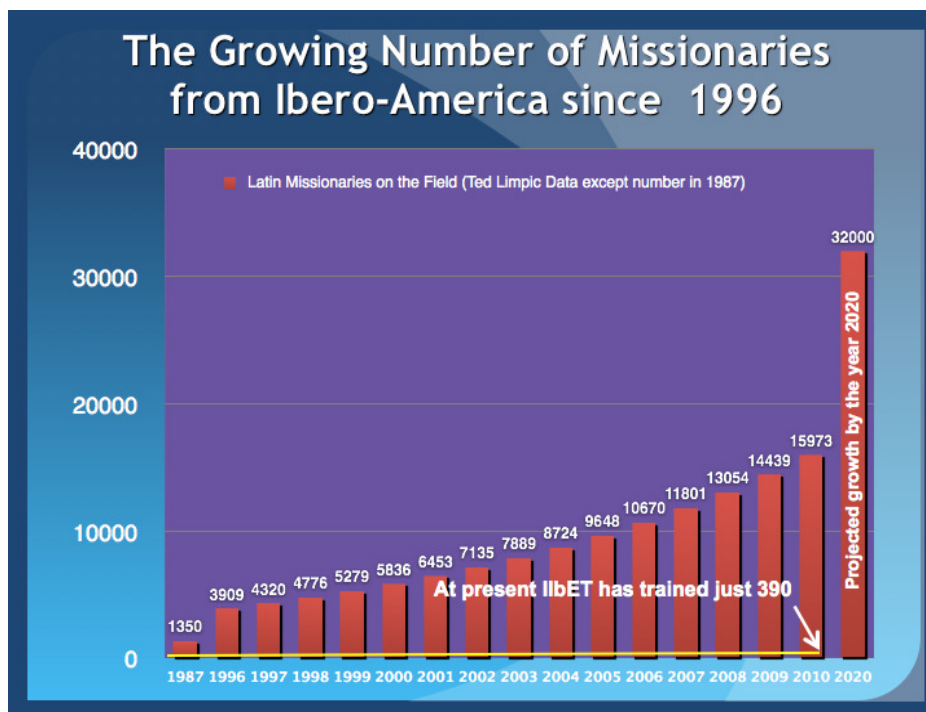
**The Missing Link - Equipping Latin Americans for Mission in Europe**

By Rodolfo J. Giron, D. Min.

" Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy. Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster." <sup>1</sup> Prof. Geert Hofstede, Emeritus Professor, Maastricht University.

**INTRODUCTION**

I want to begin by briefly analyzing the Latin American missionary movement to give a background to the topic. In the last 26 years the missionary movement from Ibero-America, especially through COMIBAM (The Cooperation in Missions from Ibero-America) has seen the increase of the missionary movement from and estimated number of 1600 missionaries in 1987 to 16,000 missionaries at the middle of 2010 (See table below).



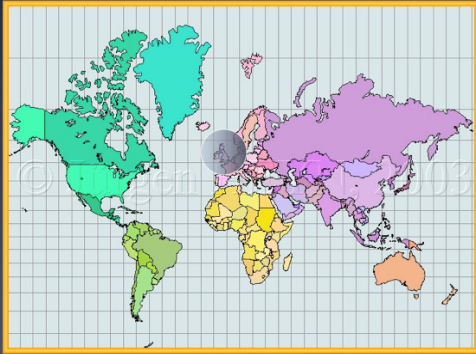
**Change of paradigm** is probably the concept that best explains the heart of our conversation. On the one hand, the Latin American church is in a process of changing its mentality – from one of dependency to one of interdependency - from a mentality of Third World countries to a mentality of Majority World countries. A great illustration of a change of mentality could be found in the cartographic examples below.

As we examine these maps we may perceive the distortions of the real sizes of continents and countries. The Mercator projection, a map that was designed in the 16th Century to navigate and continues to be of great value for that purpose, misrepresents the size and position of the Southern hemispheres. A change of mentality from the southern hemisphere countries calls for a bold look at themselves in a difference way.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>

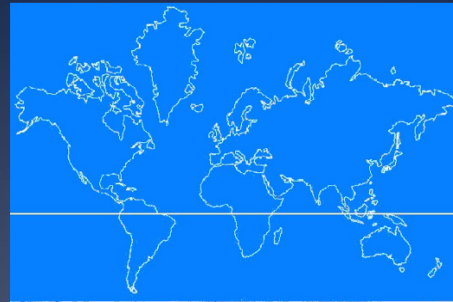
<sup>2</sup> All the maps were extracted from the Google images in the internet and were adapted by the author. The commentaries on each image are the sole responsibility of the author.

## THE MERCATOR PROJECTION



The Mercator projection is widely used to teach and study geography in schools, but it implies also that those in the South are unimportant

## SOME DISTORTIONS



The equator is 30% under the middle of the map

Although convenient to navigate, it distorts the size of the North (bigger) over the South (smaller)



Greenland is exaggeratedly greater than China and South America

Two gross misrepresentations: Greenland is larger than China and South America. Actually China is 4.54 bigger and South America is 8.24 bigger than Greenland

## La proyección de Mercator y sus distorsiones



Rusia, exageradamente mas grande que el continente africano

The African continent is misrepresented so it is smaller than one country, Russia, which while it is the largest country in the world is 1.77 smaller than Africa

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## A NEW WORLDVIEW

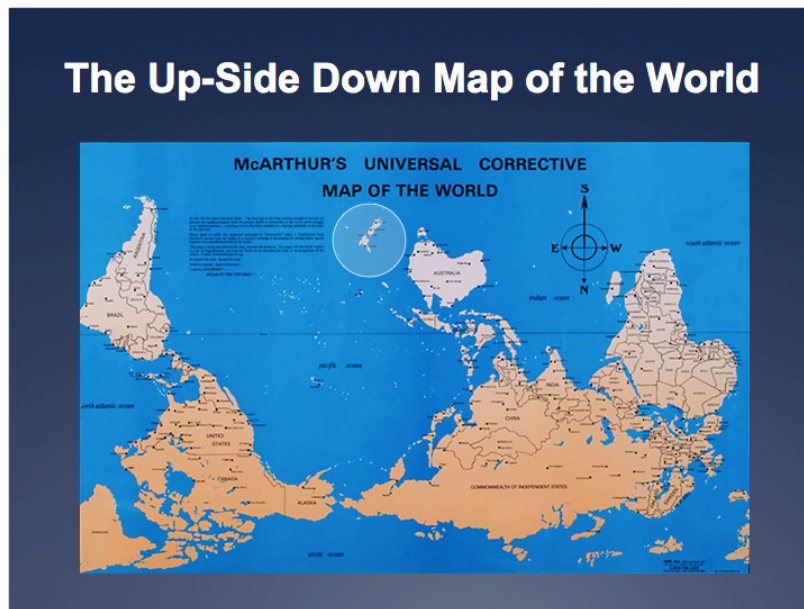
### Peter's Projection Map of the World



Areas Represented in a Size that is Closer to the Reality

A change of mentality calls for a different world view like the one represented by Peter's projection, a German cartographer who proposed in the 70's the so called Peter's projection Map of the World. He argues that we cannot afford to see the world in a distorted manner. His equal areas map brings a completely different perception of the world that gives justice to the Southern hemisphere.

However as I searched for a map that really represented a different view of the world, a New Zealander friend, missiologist and missionary, gave me a copy of another wonderful map – McArthur's up-side down map below. It really caught my attention because it boldly changes a given paradigm in the way we see the world. It challenges the conventional assumption that the North is UP and the South is DOWN. In fact, in Mercator's projection the centre of the world is England and of course the centre of time is there. But in McArthur's Corrective Map of the World, he asks for no apologies because he argues the assumed fact that North is up and South is down is just conventional. Originally he argued, "Orient" was UP and there it came the word "orientation." Generally in America people say "I'm going down to Mexico". In Europe we may say "I'm m going down to Africa".. That is conventional and no one will question these statements. But what if I say "I'm going down to London," if I'm travelling from Johannesburg, then eyebrows will be lifted because that is unconventional.



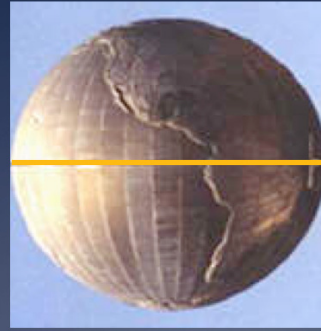
Well that is exactly what is happening in many churches in the Global South. They challenge conventional assumptions and they are saying that even though they are not rich, though not necessarily poor, they are defining themselves as missionary church. They have resources, yes, human resources, they have success. Their churches are growing like no one else in the North. That is a change of mentality. The Universal Corrective Map of the World says it all.

The best way to understand this new worldview is to take a look at a monument located at the centre of the world in what is called "La Mitad del Mundo" (the half of the world site) close to Quito, Ecuador. As you arrive there, you find this monument as shown in the left picture below.

### The Half of the World Monument in Ecuador



### The Globe as We Normally Think About It



Looking closer at it, you will see a globe on top of the monument. Generally we will think of the world as the picture on the right above, that is to say, north is UP, and south is DOWN. But when I visited the site a few years ago, I was shocked, happy and with a sense of revelation as I discovered that the globe is positioned at the top of the monument and in the same position that the planet earth is in relation to the sun. It was 12:00 noon when I got there. The Sun was shining bright above me, and above the monument. And what a revelation! Above was the sun, at the right it was the north side of the world, at the left was the south side of the globe and I discovered that UP is where the sun is. North is at the right, and south is at the left, and our planet earth is rotating over its centre 24 hours a day, I also realized that "NO ONE IS UP, AND NO ONE IS DOWN." Everything is conventional, we are where we want to be at, either on top or down. It is a matter of mentality.

### The World as is in Reality Positioned en Relation to the Sun



Of course, it takes boldness to be at the top, when traditionally you have been down. By the same token, it is difficult to be down when you have always been up. In reality, we do not need to be UP or DOWN, in Christ we are equal, all of us are UNDER the lordship of the Lord and we all are children of God.

This necessary change of mentality if not just one way. It is not just the south who needs a change of mindset, it is also the West that needs a change of mentality. The churches, agencies, and missionary entities have to be willing to change their mentality. Coming original from a majority position, now they are in a numerical minority in relation to the number of Christians in the South. Coming from a past of an imperial spiritual power, to become now a post-Christian secular West that is struggling to keep is glorious spiritual past. Such conflicting realities demand a great deal of humility and disposition at both ends of the spectrum in order to be productive and have mutual acceptance. To close the gap between them, both need to have the correct attitude of mutual acceptance, and true partnership.

Another important element to achieve true and productive partnerships is the attitude that each side of the spectrum has. On one hand, the Latin-Americans need to have a sense of gratitude for the work the Western missionaries did and are doing. Their work has established churches all over Latin America. The Western churches, on the other hand, need, in the words of John Stott, "to listen to and learn from our sisters and brothers in other parts of the world."<sup>3</sup> Overcoming cultural barriers and prejudices is vital to achieve such a change of attitude.

Equipping the Latin Americans for mission in Europe calls for a willingness to work together in a true partnership that will allow the synergy of the two realities to impact the Kingdom of God in Europe. An excellent biblical model of cooperation is found in 1st. Chronicles 19:10-13.

As we develop the four questions this forum is intending to deal with, the following thoughts are valuable. They come from the reflection of two veteran Latin American missionaries in Europe. First, Samuel Cueva, a Peruvian pastor and theologian serving in London for many years. Second, from Francisco Gross, a Guatemalan missionary for many years in Spain, where he leads the work of the Latin Americans for his missionary agency. Their views are recorded here because they clearly illustrate what they feel is necessary to breach the gap between the two realities of the missionary communities. Hopefully these reflections will help us to answer the questions at hand.

## FOUR QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

### 1. **How do we help Latinos who come into the European context unprepared, to prepare more effectively? How do we identify key training needs for Latinos?**

There are many areas in which Latinos will find themselves unprepared, even though having received formal/informal training:

- a. Cultural awareness. That includes awareness of their own home culture which many times is taken for granted, and awareness of their host culture. Basic training in anthropology will help the workers to understand their own culture and to cope with the host culture. If those courses are given in a real setting, they will have a much better effect.
- b. Social differences (especially between practicalities among true socialism -which is NOT communism - and private government politics)
- c. Receiving cultural awareness & knowledge (language, customs, worldview, past history, climate, food, etc.)
- d. Level and grade of personal, family and social commitment, towards a specific activity or organization or government (church for example)
- e. Identity awareness (strong individualism and humanism against group identity)
- f. Cultural (local) "normal" & accepted ways of true evangelism & community.
- g. Type and kind of Christian belief (European - more conscious, convinced and demonstrated vs. a Latin American - more "sensuous" and community belief). Individualism and analytic vs. Community and interpersonal relationships.

The following educational modules are vital in a training program for Latin missionaries: Contemporary Church history in Europe, culture and society, intercultural missiology, globalization and post- modernity. Evangelism with multicultural context. Missions and Secularism.

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (IVP Academic:2003), p. 8

**2. Exploring any differences between what types and formats of resources and training Latinos feel they need and current training provision. What are their needs and what are the stumbling blocks?**

Financial, legal advice, pastoral care, and mission structures that would support the work are in great demand. A lack of strong relationship with European leadership as well as a lack of strong European leadership that would draw near to the Latin-American mission force to work in reciprocal relationships. It is still not easy to overcome cultural barriers.

Since Latinos come from a more community social environment (church & family), training and learning will be received easily through such meanings. Since the Christian communities are not big in most of Europe (especially in central and southern countries), Latinos may feel that formal training may not be perceived as effective or relevant (this may be a big challenge that needs to be also culturally addressed).

Diversity in ways which have been positive in Latin America may develop training in a complicated resource with a grand quantity of options, depending on denominationalism, origin, language (Spanish, Portuguese, English).

Latin America has been strongly and positively influenced by North American culture and when coming to Europe, Latinos may think it is the same (in way of thinking, teaching, church doing, etc.) and they get frustrated when realizing the difference between North American and European ideologies.

For more secular information about cultural interactions, the Geert Hofstede material is quite accurate and interesting – see [www.geert-hofstede.com](http://www.geert-hofstede.com)

**3. How best is it to resource and fund training for people from Latin America especially those who have a focus on Europe?**

Create a funding resource for specialized training and promote mission consultations with the presence of key leaders. Work to build up a network of local congregations and mission structures that would received them to work with both, their projects or new initiatives, and to support Latin American missionaries in practical aspects such as accommodation, visas or language study.

Some possibilities and suggestions:

- a. Include Latinos who have been on the field already and who are willing to share their experience and knowledge.
- b. Include locals (Europeans) who can share their knowledge and experience (particularly in local church history and development).
- c. Engage both cultures in mutual building (training, acceptance, social accepted position).
- d. As a resource (human and financial), their sending churches (or communities, denominations or countries) should have a good part in the training process (in Europe). This will give them (missionaries) security, affirmation and identity while receiving European training and knowledge.
- e. Partnering with already existing Latin American churches in Europe.

**4. Provision, variety and availability of cross-cultural training in Latin America.**

In dealing with this issue, I have classified the educational options a missionary candidate will have in Latin America. There are at least six categories of theological and missionary training in Latin America.

- a. Local church training programs. Much time is devoted to discipleship and study of the church's doctrines and type of government. They give the basic training and especially, the discipleship needed for the missionary to be effective on the field.
- b. Denominational Bible Institutes or seminaries. More and more Bible Institutes and Theological Seminaries are flourishing giving the missionary candidates the chance to be trained theologically. These schools generally have, with few exceptions, one or two courses with a missiological content. They accomplish a very important role in the biblical and theological training of their candidates.
- c. Interdenominational schools. There is a great number of seminaries and schools with a high quality of training. Few of them have missiological specialties and concentrations. Most will have just some courses dealing with missiology, history of missions and studies of anthropology.
- d. Missionary training centres. Since 1990, COMIBAM and the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance began a programme that has produced a great number of small, deficiently funded, missionary training centres. They have really helped in giving the content needed that most schools and seminaries are not giving. We are different sizes and at local, denominational and interdenominational level. They are led by mobilisers, some of them with formal missiological training, or by foreign missionaries that have the call to train the Latin Americans for mission. These centres are supplying the much needed pre-field training for the missionary candidates, but they lack academic consistency.
- e. Universities and well developed and funded theological schools. A few number of schools in the continent are specializing in the area of Missiology. The majority of them are in Brazil and serve mostly Portuguese speaking candidates, although a growing number of students come from Latin America and are trained there, giving them a soft cross-cultural experience when they move from a Spanish speaking context to a Portuguese speaking context. Some universities are working in partnership with theological seminaries of the USA to offer PhD's in the area of missiology. The program called PRODOLA, a joint effort between Fuller Theological Seminary and UNELA of Costa Rica is a good example of that. An excellent contribution of England to the need of professional formation for missiologist is the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies where several Latin scholars especially from the Latin American Theological Fraternity have collaborated to prepare several missiologists in Latin America.
- f. In the past 5 years a number of online programmes are beginning to grow. Some options are offered by the department of missiological training of COMIBAM. There is also a programme called PROMETA, a leading program in Online education, but it is not yet specialized in the area of missiology.

### **IIBET - THE IBERO-AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES**

Based in Málaga, Spain, it is probably one of the few programmes in the European context that in a consistent and systematic way, is offering training for Ibero-American workers that are on the field or heading to it. It came to life in 1999 as the joint effort of 20 agencies with workers in the Muslim world. It has trained more than 450 workers with about 40 courses. Its vision is to train Ibero-American workers with a holistic formation to be effective in their witness and discipling among multicultural contexts. Its programs have now developed to cover other mega spheres, namely Hindu, Buddhist, Tribal and Post-modern European. IIBET serves workers from all theological persuasions.

In practical terms, IIBET offers courses in several locations: the main one is in Spain, but also in the Middle East, Far East and South Asia. IIBET has launched the VISION 2020 Project which aims to transform itself from and Institute to become UNIBET, the Ibero-American University of Cross Cultural Studies. For more information, see [www.iibet.org](http://www.iibet.org)