

Mission Without Conquest

Prologue – by C. René Padilla

The title of this work synthetically expresses not only its content but also a new way to approach the missionary task of the church. A way that is more harmonious with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A way that makes of Jesus Christ's mission – the Word made flesh that dwelt among us – the paradigm for the Christian mission until the end of the age.

It must be clarified that the novelty of this missionary approach does not mean that its essential characteristics have been totally absent from the ways to do mission in the past. The novelty consists in that the authors of this book have rediscovered a way to do mission that is in sharp contrast with another way that was so common that the Christian mission became closely associated with the political and economic power of the empires beginning with Constantine.

In fact, the history of modern foreign missions, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, is a history of light and darkness: light derived from the spirit of dedication and sacrifice of many missionaries, perhaps the majority of them; darkness resulting from the spirit of conquest imbedded in Western culture.

In his classical work *The Other Spanish Christ: A Study in the Spiritual History of Spain and South America*, John A. Mackay shows that the Iberian conquest beginning in 1492 was in reality a religious epic inspired by the mystic motive of Roman Catholic King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel. With a real sense of mission, Spain approached the conquest of the New World for the purpose of converting it into a Roman Catholic continent. The cross and the sword worked in partnership and, in the name of evangelization, the sword took care of opening the way to the cross. For Mackay, this was the original mark of Spanish Christianity.

We must recognize, however, that the close association between mission and empire is also part of the history of Protestant missions. As David J. Bosch has affirmed in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*: “Surveying the great variety of ways in which Western cultural norms were, implicitly or explicitly, imposed upon converts in other parts of the world, it is of some significance to note that both liberals and conservatives shared [and unfortunately many still share] the assumption that [Western] Christianity was [and still is] the only basis for a healthy civilization; this was a form of consensus so fundamental that it operated mainly on an unconscious, prepositional level.”

What is new in what Willis Horst, Ute Mueller-Eckhardt and Frank Paul offer in this book is nothing more than the rediscovery of *mission without conquest*, that is, a missionary alternative radically different from the mission shaped by the spirit of conquest described by Mackay and Bosch. It is an alternative forged in the heat of a long period of living with indigenous communities and of deep reflection on the meaning of contextualization of the Gospel in a culture totally different from that of the missionaries.

From a biblical perspective, every disciple of Jesus Christ is called to participate in the mission of God in the world. One of the values of *Mission Without Conquest* is that it offers an excellent illustration of how to carry out this task. Of course, it is especially related to transcultural missionary work among indigenous communities that represent the most neglected sector of the population in Latin America in general and in Argentina in particular. At the same time, however, it shows what it means to practice the principles that must characterize every effort to communicate the Gospel.

If this work inspires the readers to humbly share the good news of Jesus Christ in their own situation without a spirit of conquest, both the authors and the editors will be extremely pleased.

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