

Internationalization or “Anglonization” of Missions

by Federico A. Bertuzzi

Wal-Mart came to my city

I was born and still live in the city of Santa Fe, Argentina. A city of some four hundred thousand inhabitants, Santa Fe is surrounded by water, with a river and lagoons to the north, south and east. This is the original location of the city that Don Juan de Garay founded over 400 years ago, which is on the banks of the great Paraná river that descends, majestically, from Brazil and Paraguay, passing through the extensive humid pampa of my country. Some time ago, an enormous area that was generally covered with brown river water began to be filled up. Night and day, a huge dredger extracted thousands of cubic meters of sand from the river bed and deposited it in between large steel tubes on the site.

Slowly but surely, the flooded area was raised to over three meters above its original height. The water dried up, the sand was compacted, and the builders started construction on, what was for us at that time, an enormous complex. It was a huge commercial center, with parking lots, shops, cinemas, etc. In record time (less than a year) and backed by a multimillion dollar investment, the terrain was won back from the river and a sleepy town in the interior of Argentina had its own branch of the North American department store giant: Wal-Mart.

The businessmen of my town were terrified. This multinational, with the backing of politicians (you never know whose side they are on!), had moved in right under their noses, and came to compete with them, offering subsidized prices with which they could never compete. In the middle of a very difficult recession, the local businesses didn't have much chance of surviving and would be forced to close. The people would lose already scarce sources of employment. Dark clouds were filling the skyline of a city that had never been seen as very prosperous.

The Sudden Emergence of North Atlantic Missions

This illustration serves to open the theme we have before us: the internationalization or “anglonization” of mission. In the very moment that we are experiencing a time of real awakening (a truly indigenous awakening) for

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World Mission in the churches of Latin America, a significant number of missionary initiatives from the North are arriving on our shores. Dozens of mission organizations and North Atlantic initiatives have been established among us, all with the aim of “collaborating” with Latin Americans in world evangelization, particularly in the 10/40 window. This is a relatively new phenomenon, perhaps less than five years old.

As Latin American evangelicals, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude towards our dear blond brethren who for more than a century brought us the gospel and blessed us with their presence. They helped us with the translation of the Bible so that our indigenous peoples can have the Bible in their own language. They helped establish congregations and built thousands of Church buildings and chapels, numerous theological and educational institutions, radio and television studios, orphanages, children’s and old people’s homes, printing works, hospitals, dispensaries, etc., in numbers to large to count. To God be the glory for all this effort, and for the many who left their mortal remains in our beloved soil!

This paper is not about the long history of missionaries from the North Atlantic to Latin America, for whom we are so thankful. We are writing about something that is totally new. Once, European and Americans saw us Latin Americans as needy and, for that reason, brought us the gospel; now they see us “useful” and want to take us all over the world. They are making us into participants in what they have been doing for over a century!

Over four years ago, a mission leader commented that the Assemblies of God, which has over 450 North American missionaries in Latin America, had assigned only two missionaries to supporting the growth of the missionary movement in his denomination. Recently, at a conclave of Southern Baptist leaders “for the acceleration of World Evangelization”, we talked with one of the principle World directors from Richmond, who informed us that of the 1,000 North

American missionaries that work in our continent, there was not even one that was officially designated to work on the development of missions outreach from the Baptist Churches!

Why did they not teach us about mission before? When they were sent from their countries (USA, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Australia or New Zealand) many were preaching about missions, and when they returned on home-leave, they spent time preaching about missions. But why, until now, have they not spoken to *us* about missions. Did they think we were not ready? Or that we weren’t able? Or that missions was not part of the “whole counsel of God”? (Acts 20.27).

Two further elements were missing from their preaching: they didn’t teach us stewardship or civic involvement. The first failure they remedied thirty years ago. That is why we now actively practice tithing and make regular offerings. With respect to the other, they did not teach us to participate actively in society (not to mention participation in politics!), even though in their homes in the North it is common to find civil servants and politicians of note who declare themselves Evangelicals and “Born Again”.

Fortunately, it seems that things are changing and the hour has come (despite arriving one hundred years late!): The South is now ready to take on the world!

The Model of International Missions

As we were saying, this paper is not about North Atlantic missionary organizations and the classical missionary work they carried out in Latin America. In this paper we are considering the ministry of those North Atlantic missionaries who are working in Latin America, all the while focusing their vision on sending Latin Americans to other areas of the world. How should we relate to them? In general the author is grateful for their participation and involvement with us in the Great

Commission. Nonetheless, it is necessary to analyze the models that are being used, since, as good stewards, we desire to optimize their potential as well as our own, for the benefit of the unreached. We also desire to avoid repeating mistakes. History has shown how easily mistakes repeat themselves *ad nauseam*.

It seems to us that there are models that contribute healthily to the strengthening of our young Latin missionary movement, and there are others that seem to be weakening or fragmenting it.

In a rather simplified way, there seem to be three different models that, with their variations, typify this recent upsurge in North Atlantic missionary efforts in Latin America.

1. The first is the “anglophile” model, in which the Northern Organization opens a “branch” in the South that becomes a faithful reflection of all she is and does in the country of origin. This overseas local office has the same brand, “trade mark”, statutes, operative principles, direction, etc. The upper leaders are all from the North Atlantic and they recruit Latins according to the same practices and procedures that they use in the North. The responsibility for the financial and logistic support of the missionaries that are sent under this model belongs fundamentally to the “Gringo” agency. The people in the missionary’s church of origin say: “The foreigners took our people away to work with them!”
2. The second model is the “participatory” model, in which the Northern Organization sets up shop among us, in a more or less close relationship with the locals. Work agreements are signed and the local church participates some in the process of sending its missionaries, but everybody is very clear that the foreign organization has the final say in the sending process. The people in the missionary’s church of origin say: “It’s great that we can count on the support of the foreigners!”

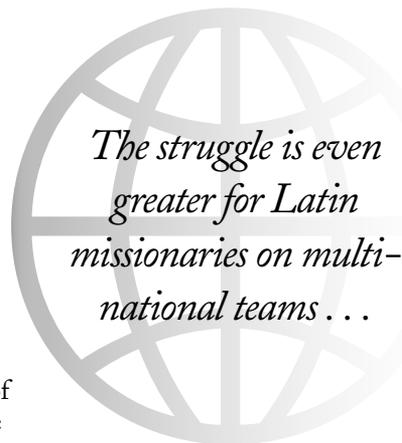
3. The third model is that of “service”, in which the Northern Organization comes to us with a real attitude of service, willing to work under the authority of Latin pastors and leaders, and offer “disinterestedly” its service and resources, without imposing conditions and methods. Sometimes, their name appears publicly, and the people in the missionary’s church of origin, noting that the foreigners are not taking advantage of us, say: “These people, even though they don’t speak good Spanish, they are one of us!”

Some “Holy” Temptations

There are many weary mission mobilizers in Latin America who have battled in a difficult area of ministry—that of mission—one in which the arid soil does not always respond readily to the process of sowing and reaping. They have battled to see changes in a church that is enmeshed, distracted by other emphases, and apathetic to the missionary vision. Not surprisingly, they are attracted to whatever offer of help and cooperation might facilitate their missionary objectives. And it is precisely here, that it would be good to stop and consider that “not all that glitters is gold.” Some offers of assistance might, at first, seem to be attractive. They could, in the long run, end up being a stumbling block. It is not necessary, at this point in the process, to speak about those things that continue to trouble the work of God, such as Gringo paternalism, or even Latino opportunism, with which we have tried to “fleece” the gringos more than once. For the dignity of the Holy Gospel: “neither one nor the other!”

In the best spirit of current inter-ecclesial and inter-missiological cooperation, when we see barriers once seemed insurmountable coming down, we are led to envision a day when, together as never before, we can bring together and maximize the human, economic and logistical resources that the Lord has given us and complete the task of world evangelization!

The whole theme of missionary cooperation is one of the aims of COMIBAM Internacional (the very name means Ibero-American Missionary Cooperation). From the middle of the eighties, it has been “plodding away” with the unity of the church and missions (John 17.21), and I don’t believe it is an exaggeration to say that no other issue has united the church in Latin America as much as missions has. Coming from a wide variety of theological and liturgical traditions, brothers and sisters are united, participating in innumerable missionary congresses,



consultations and conferences, carried out over the length and breadth of our vast continent. The issue of Missions unites.

In this missiological environment there are new winds of international cooperation blowing, strategic alliances and a coming together by North and South. (It would be worth further analysis, to discern whether behind this newness there is not the influence, however unconscious it may be, of the globalizing business world, in which the multinationals and world-wide banking institutions establish networks and work together with aim of insuring their capital and making fat profits.)

Surprises of living together

When it comes to North–South cooperative efforts in mission, it is sometimes assumed, rather naively, that apart from the language issue (which means that the Latino inevitably must end up learning the “universal” language: English!),

everything else will run like clockwork. Some mission agencies make their Latin workers learn English so that they can communicate with the fellow members of their team on the mission field. In addition, they must also learn the local language, which is the real tool that they must use if they are to be true to God’s call. The local language is fundamental for cross-cultural ministry. To be forced to learn *two* new languages when one is no longer a child can be an excessive burden for the worker who comes from a monolingual culture such as the Hispanic cultures of Latin America. One thing is to learn to communicate in a foreign language so as not to die of hunger, another is to share the gospel, and yet more is needed if one is to deal with subjects that are more abstract, subjective, and intimate. One must develop sufficient vocabulary in each of these areas. The struggle is even greater for Latin missionaries on multi-national teams when they are deeply frustrated by not being able to communicate with their missionary team-mates at a level of feelings that he or she might have done had they been able to do so in their own mother tongue.

Moreover, every international missionary team living together must take into account non-verbal aspects of communication (such as patterns of behavior, habits, cultural values, ways doing things, ways of making decisions, etc.) that can cause friction.

What is the best model?

A complaint that has been heard in the continent is: “They brought us the gospel but they also brought their party spirit!” Now, when missions is uniting us, missionaries return to Latin America, and instead of “helping us”, their competing mission agencies, once again, divide us. Is that so bad? In a Latin America made up of thousands of churches and hundreds of evangelical institutions, and to which Gringos want to come and collaborate with us to reach unreached people groups, what is the most acceptable way for them to carry forward their intentions? Would it

be wise to establish themselves as indigenous missions, start their own offices, do good marketing with multicolored brochures, and begin aggressive recruitment campaigns? When all is said and done, there is freedom and everyone will have to answer to the Lord for the talents given to them. But where a national church is already taking its first steps in missions, wouldn't it be better to relate to her first and offer your services to her?

The power difference between the North and South is "abysmal". I have heard of some terrible cases of incipient Latin missionary organizations, that can just barely support their missionaries overseas (without mentioning their mission sending offices), that had to go through the difficult and destabilizing experiences caused by certain big initiatives from the North that had been established in their own backyard. The northerners said that

they had come to cooperate (and we don't doubt their motives) but they brought with them more problems than blessings. How can a small mission from the Third World compete with their vast experience, institutional prestige, financial stability, international connections, latest technology, and contagious enthusiasm? Would it not be easier to abandon our efforts and unite with these experts? Is it worth continuing reaching for an ideal, if "others" with much less sacrifice can achieve far more?

All these issues deserve to be considered in a frank and mature way, without prejudice. The New Testament model shows us that those Christians participated together in world missions, crossing frontiers of hundreds and thousands of kilometers that separated them. Macedonia and Achaia (two nations in the Roman Empire) went out to help the poor brethren of Judea (another nation), and Paul,

the missionary, asked for help from the capital (Rome) for sponsorship in order to reach the utmost parts of the Mediterranean (Spain), his new unreached field (Romans 15.25-31). Young churches helped an old church. Christians, who didn't know one another, were knit together in fraternal links of love and solidarity. Poor helped poor; they did mission; they came from different races; they made plans, and got off to a good start. And all this without, even remotely, the means of communication, transport, insurance, bank transfers, etc., that we have available in our century!

Conclusion

In 2 Corinthians 8.13-15, it says:

¹³Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, ¹⁵as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.

The church is the body of Christ, and each member is a part of the whole. We need one another and we are indebted one to another. The same conditions are imposed on all of us in a way that goes beyond ideology or our level of economic privilege or scarcity. If inequalities exist, these should be put right. We must work so that the inequalities that do exist are eliminated. There are large quantities of human and financial resources in the North and in the South that have not joined hands with each other.

The internationalization of mission is biblical, and it should be our ambition to effectively unite the marvelous resources that the Holy Spirit has distributed generously in the Body of Christ, in order to carry out the Great Commission that our Lord has given us: "Make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28.19). **IJFM**

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