

Foreword

DURING THE THREE MORE recent decades theological reflection has become a global enterprise. It is not anymore simply the efficient transmission of an intellectual product developed in Germany, the British Isles, or the United States of America. During the twentieth century, and with God's blessing on the missionary activity of a myriad of individuals and organizations, new churches rose around the world, and as they grew up in size and maturity men and women started to reflect about their faith and delve into the biblical sources in order to respond to the questions that their context posed.

In Latin America we have come to define Theology as the reflection of the people of God on their Christian practice in light of God's Word. So theological *reflection* is not just the intellectual activity of specialists in University departments or Bible schools. It has become closely connected with what churches *are doing* in countries around the world in all six continents.

This book is a representative expression of this new reality and I feel honored by the request of its editors to write a foreword for it. As I read it I have come to appreciate the good compiling and editorial work of Sung Wook Chung and Dieumeme Noelliste. We have contributors from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, all of them part of what has come to be known as "the majority world." I have had the privilege of becoming acquainted with several of these writers in Evangelical student work, in the Lausanne movement, and in the theological conferences organized by the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (INFEMIT). In several cases we have experienced together the joy and the anguish of posing burning questions coming from our ministries and entering together in a communal exploration into the richness of God's Word and the wealth of the Evangelical tradition.

As the table of contents shows the chapters of this book have been arranged following a selection of themes from classical theology. However, as you read each chapter you will find new ways of dealing with classical issues, and new questions posed as each issue is approached. In some chapters it is clear that the reflection points finally to the application of the truth expounded in the daily life of churches. These authors are active in pastoral and teaching positions.

Several of the essays in this book call our attention to the liberating dimension of the gospel and to Jesus Christ as a Liberator. In order to better understand the direction of this reflection you have to take into account what Dieumeme Noelliste and Delano Palmer say about their own Caribbean context, which is also characteristic of other contexts in the majority world: "This thirst for emancipation in a freedom-denying context is one of the factors that explain the pull that many dwellers of the Caribbean Basin have felt toward Jesus and his message of liberation that the New Testament writers, particularly the authors of the Gospels have written about."

This liberating thrust of the person and the message of Jesus is more evident on the chapters about Christology that come from China, the English speaking Caribbean, and Latin America. The Christological questions are definitely posed from the perspective of evangelism and mission. Besides that, the chapter by David del Salto is representative of a younger generation of Latin American theologians that can now benefit from the pioneer work of the earlier generation of Evangelicals that related to the Lausanne movement and were the founders of INFEMIT.

Some of the essays from Asia and Africa reflect the fact that Christians in those regions have to come to terms with the pervasive influence of Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, or African religions. The early missionary approaches have to give way to a fresh understanding of other religions that pose difficult questions for Christians and churches in a post colonial atmosphere. A fresh reading of what Scripture teaches about religion is high in today's theological agenda. This task has become more difficult because of the change of approach towards religion in the academic world, moving from an expectation of a triumphant secularizing process to an acknowledgement that religion is back and will stay, even in modern societies. Lutheran sociologist Peter Berger points to that process and calls it "de-secularization," and theologian Harvey Cox has moved from his classic *The Secular City* to his more recent *Fire from Heaven*.

The bibliographies of this valuable collection of essays allow us to see that though the reflection is contextual it is not provincial in any way. By their academic formation and up-to-date acquaintance with theological activity in Europe and North America, these authors make good use of

definitions and insights of well-known Western theologians. In their work with the Bible they also make good use of tools developed in a long Western tradition, mainly Protestant, of biblical scholarship.

The readers of this volume will find it challenging and stretching, but never boring. As I was reading it one of my conclusions was that for the future of theology around the world it would be highly desirable that opportunities for a global theological dialogue will continue to be fostered by Evangelical bodies.

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