

My Theological Pilgrimage¹

C. René Padilla

I was born and reared in Quito, the capital city of Ecuador, on October 12, 1932. I was born and reared in a poor—not extremely, but still quite poor—home in Quito, Ecuador. My father was a tailor who had learned his trade when he was thirteen years old. I remember him working long hours, sometimes deep into the night and mostly at home, with a great sense of responsibility to provide for the needs of the family. But I also remember him reading (mainly Christian) books, the Bible, or the newspaper, sometimes in silence, sometimes loud enough for my mother and anyone else within reach to hear what he read while she prepared a meal. He had only studied up to third grade of primary school, but he was an avid reader. Undoubtedly, his reading

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habit was one of the legacies that all his children, including me, received from him.

My mother also did some tailoring, but she was mainly dedicated to taking care of our family of three girls and four boys. She had only finished primary school, but she excelled as a steward of the limited material resources she had at her disposal. I remember her as a very intelligent and generous woman, always looking for ways to help people who had less means than we had. And how can I forget the times when she would pawn a valuable jewel she had, in order to feed her family?

When I was two-and-a-half years old we moved to Colombia. Those were the times of the Great Depression, and I suspect that my father found that his trade offered him better possibilities to support the family there than in his own country. Little did I know that this move would be for me in the end a sort of preparation for living as a stranger in a foreign land most of my life!

At that time Colombia had a concordat with the Vatican. There was no separation between church and state, and the country, as was the case with several Latin American countries, was officially under the aegis of the Roman Catholic Church.² Accordingly, there was no religious freedom;³ and school children were obliged to attend mass and to participate in Roman Catholic activities. My

² For a classical description of the Roman Catholicism that the Spanish conquerors brought to Latin America, see John A. Mackay, *The Other Spanish Christ: A Study of the Spiritual History of Spain and South America* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

³ The 1991 National Constitution of the Republic of Colombia instituted religious freedom and abolished the role of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the protector of the nation. It ruled that any person could establish a religious cult. Since then, the Protestant (mostly Pentecostal) movement has expanded in an amazing way.