

Emilio Antonio Núñez Castañeda



Salvadoran by birth (May 31, 1923) and Guatemalan by choice, Emilio Antonio Núñez Castañeda has been a major contributor to Latin American evangelical theology for over half a century. If anyone would have asked this poor peasant boy what he wanted to be when he grew up he would have answered unequivocally that his desire was to become a Catholic priest. However, after his father lost his job, the situation at home became one of extreme poverty. “Hunger was knocking at our door, and we had to combat it in any way possible.”¹ Therefore, eleven-year-old Emilio had to help his family financially as an apprentice to a tailor. At the tailor’s shop, Emilio discovered the Bible and started reading it in secret. He did not own his own Bible until he was seventeen, when a young teacher invited him to her church and gave him one. By that time Emilio had left the Catholic church and was wandering aimlessly in life.

¹ All autobiographical references are taken from Emilio Antonio Núñez C., “Testigo de un nuevo amanecer,” in *Hacia una teología evangélica latinoamericana: Ensayos en honor de Pedro Savage*, ed. C. René Padilla (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Caribe, 1984), 101-111.

Through reading the Bible and listening to the sermons of Thomas Dixon, pastor of the First Baptist Church in his town of San Miguel, Emilio found for the first time the message of salvation by grace through faith alone. Soon after, on a sleepless night at home, Emilio was born again. A year and a half later in November of 1942 he married the teacher who had given him the Bible, Sara Monterrosa Echevoyén. Over time, the Lord gave them four children: three girls and one boy. In 1943 Emilio graduated with training as an elementary school teacher. However, following his desire to receive training for full-time Christian ministry, he moved his family in 1944 to Guatemala City to start his theological education at the *Instituto Bíblico Centroamericano*.

Besides his studies at the *Instituto*, Emilio was a pioneer in radio ministry, founding in 1950 the Radio Cultural TGN, one of the first evangelical radio stations in the region. As an educator he founded in 1952 the *Colegio Evangélico Francisco G. Penzotti*, becoming its first president. His endeavors with the radio and the school demonstrate his understanding of the gospel as affecting all areas of life, not just the religious sector. In 1957, Emilio went to Dallas, Texas, to further his education. He graduated simultaneously from Southern Methodist University with a B.S. in History and Philosophy and from Dallas Theological Seminary with a Masters in Theology in 1964. He also graduated with a Th.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1969, after which he returned to serve as president of the *Seminario Teológico Centroamericano* (SETECA) in Guatemala City.

At the university I reaffirmed my Latin American identity by studying everything I could about our countries. I did not stay at the margin of my own people during the nine years of studies in North America. I fulfilled my ministry at a Hispanic Baptist church