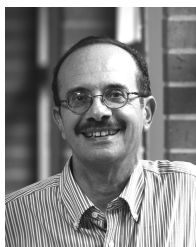


A Tribute to René Padilla and Samuel Escobar

Ramez Atallah

As we celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Latin American Theological Fellowship I want to honor in a special way two of the original founders.

As a young evangelical at the First International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Lausanne, Switzerland in July 1974, I was struck in preparation for the congress by reading the perceptive, provocative, and insightful presentations of both René Padilla and Samuel Escobar. Like many participants at Lausanne, I responded with my comments and questions. René and Samuel eloquently and persuasively answered the responses their papers had elicited. Unfortunately, the evangelical establishment at the time was not prepared to accept the challenges they presented, and many dismissed them as “radicals!” Some considered their call for justice and what would later be called “holistic/integral mission” as a “dethroning” of the centrality of the gospel message. It was perhaps understandable



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that so many would react negatively since both René and Samuel struck at the heart of much of the strategy embodied in the beliefs and practices of many evangelical churches and organizations.

In his presentation, René said:

Furthermore, if the strategy for world evangelization is tied up to technology, then obviously the ones who have the final word on the strategy that the Church is to follow in the future are those who have the technical know-how as well as those who have the resources to make the necessary investigations. The church in the Third World has nothing to say on the matter. Isn't this again a way to identify the Gospel with worldly power, a way to perpetuate the dominion/dependence pattern that has often characterized missionary work for the last hundred years? What becomes of the universal character and the unity of the Church of Christ? But perhaps these things do not matter, after all—the real problem is to produce the greatest number of Christians at the least possible cost in the shortest possible time!¹

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For his part, Samuel went on to say:

Of course, all this insistence on hunger, suffering, violence, pollution, unbalanced trade and development and the growing gap between rich and poor nations could be easily dismissed as part of the great plot against Christianity, as part of a Communist or Humanist plan to subvert the good Christian West. Some think that

¹ C. René Padilla, “Evangelism and the World,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J.D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 139.