

# Latin American Evangelical Christology

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A clear consequence of living in a globalized world is that now more than ever we are open to considering and consuming products from other parts of the world. That is true in every aspect of life, including theology. Although the conscious development of local theologies as expressions of particular contexts started in the second half of the last century in many parts of the world, only now is interaction among so-called global theologies taking place. That development began as it became evident that every theology is contextual.

A shift in perspective, concentrating on the role that circumstances play in shaping one's response to the gospel, first became evident in regions where Christianity was relatively new. It started coming to the world's attention in the 1950s in parts of Africa and Asia. There was a growing sense that the theologies being inherited

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from the older churches of the North Atlantic community did not fit well into these quite different cultural circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

The urge to think in that direction in the centers of traditional theological production comes, however, mainly due to the changing geography of Christianity in the world. As Kevin J. Vanhoozer states, “The single most significant methodological development that stems from the changing demographics of Christianity is the new appreciation for context.”<sup>2</sup>

He then affirms, “Context is simply shorthand for seeing theology as ineluctably tied to and rooted in particular social, cultural, and geographical networks. It is context that gives theologies their specific *texture*.”<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the reasons for that new awareness, what is important to notice is that it represents a significant step toward maturity for the church of Jesus Christ in the world.

When considering the Latin American contribution to the evangelical faith, especially during the last three decades of the twentieth century, two thinkers deserve particular consideration, C. René Padilla and Orlando E. Costas, due to the significance of their work for the evangelical family around the world. Although neither has produced a Christology per se, both thinkers have used Christological motives to advance their main theological work, that is, their theologies of mission and evangelization.

Padilla and Costas represent a generation of Latin American evangelicals that dared to think for themselves, in a context where

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 1. See also Charles H. Kraft, “The Development of Contextualization Theory in Euroamerican Missiology,” in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library).

<sup>2</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule Them All? Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity,” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 93.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*