

# Who Sets the Table for Whom?

## Latin American Congresses on Evangelization (CLADE) 1969-2012: A Revision with Eyes Toward a New Celebration

Ruth Padilla DeBorst

What happens in our homes just before mealtime? At least in the houses of those of us privileged enough to have several daily meals, and in which the family gathers to share them, someone must set the table. In our home, whoever sets the table wields certain power: she or he gets to determine who sits where and if we use placemats or a tablecloth. But, obviously, certain previous decisions put constraints on the table-setter. There will be no forks if the menu consists solely of soup; there is no need for dressing if there is no salad! Whoever prepares the meal has significant power: in families with a comfort-

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able economic position, he or she determines what will be eaten and what not.

The Gospel writers paint many scenes of Jesus at table, breaking and sharing bread with diverse people. His critics berate him: "He's a glutton and a drunkard! And to make matters worse, he eats and drinks with publicans and sinners!" Jesus is undaunted. He does not hide his agenda, alternative as it is to the ruling values. He faces head-on the discriminatory practices that determine table seating according to the prestige and personal wealth of the guest. And when a man, confidently ensconced within the religious system, raises a prideful cup, saying, "Blessed is he who partakes in the banquet of the kingdom!" Jesus responds with the parable of the banquet in which the favored guests are the poor, the lame, the blind, the "nobodies" from out of town, the rejects of the established society and the economic system (Luke 4).

Why am I talking about tables, guests, and meals when the title of this article names the CLADE conferences? I intend to guide us through a reflection on the four CLADE conferences of the past and the upcoming one using the metaphor of the table. We will consider who determined the menu, who set the table, who was invited to the meal, and who was nourished by these "banquets." I trust that the exercise of posing questions to our past will offer a critical foundation so that we may, together, prepare the table for CLADE V, to be held in July of 2012.

It is worth noting that this paper does not pretend to offer a detailed account of each congress such as would satisfy the rigorous expectations of a professional historian. The bibliography at the end may serve whoever wants to delve deeper. This piece simply attempts to open our appetite for such research.