

# Inner and Outer Dimensions of Mission: A Historical Survey of the Role of Spirituality in Latin American Protestant Missiological Writings

Robert L. Gallagher

In an article entitled “Evangelization from the Inside: Reflections from a Prison Cell,” Mortimer Arias, former bishop of the Methodist Church in Bolivia, gives a personal example of a Bible study in a prison that resulted in Christian witness. As he led his fellow prisoners in singing, praying and Bible study in a Bolivian jail, he found himself in mission. He says of this time, “It is amazing how

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God can speak to and through people who are not conditioned by theological jargon or dogmatic hang-ups. It is here where the evangelizer is evangelized in the process of evangelizing.”<sup>1</sup>

Arias learned from his prison cell that the way to minister to someone is not from the outside, but with them from the inside. By this Arias does not only mean coming alongside the powerless for mission. He discovered a power in powerlessness at a personal spiritual level that made him reflect that “imprisonment was one of the most significant experiences in my life...I became truly liberated from the inside. My imprisonment also became a very meaningful evangelistic and pastoral experience.”<sup>2</sup> Arias challenges the church concerning mission from the inside out. He states, “How can this be done in the ongoing life of the church today and specifically in our evangelistic task? This, I believe, is the evangelistic question *par excellence*.”<sup>3</sup>

Ronald J. Sider, in his foreword to Orlando E. Costas’ *The Integrity of Mission*, calls for a biblically holistic approach to Christian mission. He views the contemporary church as divided over this issue. Some have concentrated on evangelism while others on social justice. Still others have “stressed the contemplative inward journey, [while] others have championed an activist outward journey.”<sup>4</sup> Sider suggests that there is “the possibility of significant convergence”<sup>5</sup> of the inward and outward journey.

This paper is an attempt to answer the question Arias poses and to reveal the possibility Sider suggests, by considering the

1. Mortimer Arias, “Evangelization from the Inside: Reflections from a Prison Cell,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5, no. 3 (July 1981): 100–101.

2. Arias, “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16, no. 1 (January 1992): 31.

3. Arias, “Evangelism from the Inside,” 101.

4. Ronald J. Sider, “Foreword,” in Orlando E. Costas, *Integrity of Mission: The Inner Life and Outreach of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), ix.

5. *Ibid.*

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writings of some of the most influential Latin American Protestant missiologists in the last sixty years. In doing so, it is hoped that insight will be gleaned regarding how God desires the relationship between spirituality and mission to function in the twenty-first century; in other words, how the church is to do mission from the inside out.

### Definitions and Assumptions

The first challenge to anyone writing on this subject is the formulation of clear and workable definitions. Such terms as “spirituality” and “mission” require lucid expression. First, the term “spirituality” has a wide variety of meanings throughout church history and among different denominational traditions. By and large, most people today identify the word with their “devotional life.” Spirituality or devotional life seems to mean vital activities that lead to the growth and maturity of the Christian life.

In this article, “Christian spirituality” refers to the way we nurture and express our experience with God as individuals and as members of the community of faith. “Spiritual growth” is a process of cooperation with the Holy Spirit in a transformation that conforms us to the image of Christ. “Spiritual disciplines” are activities that help deepen this relationship with God. Some of these spiritual practices might be personal and corporate such as worship and prayer; study, especially of Scripture; participation in the traditional church sacraments; and interaction with people, cultures, and nature.

Second, the following selective list of phrases shows the variety of understanding of Latin American missiologists concerning the term “mission”<sup>6</sup>:

1. “Our life in this world is life in mission. Life has a purpose only to the extent that it has a missionary dimension.”<sup>7</sup>
2. “Christian mission and Christian discipleship are two sides of the same coin. Both derive their meaning from Jesus, the crucified Messiah, who even as Lord remains crucified. The Christian mission is the mission of those who have identified themselves with the Crucified and are willing to follow him to the cross. Mission is suffering.”<sup>8</sup>
3. “At this point of my pilgrimage, I know that to live as a Christian is to be in mission. Life is mission!”<sup>9</sup>

This paper will adopt the following definitions of “mission” and “missiology” by Costas who says:

I define missiology as a holistic field of study: a critical and contextual reflection in the tumultuous crossroads of life. Missiology is concerned not just with the specificity of mission (the sharing of the gospel with the world and its concrete responses), but with its overall setting, its context and environment... [This] involves the entire life of the church... [Mission] is a comprehensive task, affecting both

6. In comparison, Emilio Castro states that “evangelism is the attempt to link the human situation to the story of Jesus Christ” (“Mission Today and Tomorrow: A Conversation with Emilio Castro,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5, no. 3 [July 1981]: 109).

7. Emilio Castro, “Liberation, Development, and Evangelism: Must We Choose in Mission?” *Occasional Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (July 1978): 87.

8. C. René Padilla, “Biblical Studies,” *Missiology* 10, no. 3 (July 1982): 338.

9. Arias, “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” 32.

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the inner life and outreach of the church, with evangelistic, educational, administrative, ethical, diaconal, and liturgical dimensions.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, the paper assumes that there is an interdependence between mission and spirituality. The renewal of mission fervor depends on the renewal of spirituality in the churches. There is a relationship between an inner renewal of faith and mission; renewal of mission will occur through renewal in spirituality. A changing spirituality relates to a changing missiology. Without renewal in spirituality, there will be little or no renewal of mission. Another assumption is that mission is the fruit of a relationship with God that deals with the deepest issues of “being” within a person. Consequently, an individual’s worldview does affect those concepts. Further, the writings of the selected missiologists are reflective of the particular author and the Christian community from which he or she comes.

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### Tensions between the Inner and Outer Dimensions of Mission

The tension between the inner and outer dimensions of the Christian life appears to be a constant struggle for Latin American missiologists. Emilio Castro observes the beginning of the needed “spiritual revolution” occurring in worshipful churches concerned for the human problems of life.<sup>11</sup> According to the former General

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10. Costas, *The Integrity of Mission*, xiii.

11. Castro, “Evangelism in Latin America,” *International Review of Missions* 53 (October 1964), 452.

Secretary of the World Council of Churches, the participation by Christians in the fight for social justice cannot be divorced from the responsibility to call people to Jesus Christ and to form Christian communities of prayer and Bible study.<sup>12</sup> A proper balance of these elements will result in a growth toward Christian maturity and an involvement in national issues of justice.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, Castro cannot accept the “fatal dichotomy” that sees the life of the church as an “individual spiritual support” network instead of a community aware of God’s purpose in their neighborhood, nation, and world. He writes, “The dichotomy between

material/spiritual and service/mission is a denial of our basic conviction that God’s mission encompasses the whole of man. Our missionary structures and emphases should not endanger this basic unity.”<sup>14</sup>

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material/spiritual and service/mission is a denial of our basic conviction that God’s mission encompasses the whole of man. Our missionary structures and emphases should not endanger this basic unity.”<sup>14</sup>

In addition, Orlando Costas challenges the church that if the whole world is to hear the whole gospel then there must be an encounter with the structures that cause injustice and oppression. He observes that Protestant Christianity in the 1950s focused mainly on spirituality and evangelization, followed by a concentration on social action in the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> In the following two paragraphs, Costas captures the reality of the Christian tension between spirituality and mission.

To take head-on oppressive structures like consumerism, technology, militarism, multinational capitalism, international communism, racism, and sexism, we need a spirituality of mis-

12. See William Cook, “Spirituality in the Struggles for Social Justice: A Brief Latin American Anthology,” *Missiology* 12, no. 2 (April 1984): 223–32.

13. Castro, “An Agenda for Today,” *Occasional Bulletin* 25, no. 4 (May–June 1975): 7.

14. Castro, “Mission Today,” *Missiology* 2, no. 3 (July 1974): 366.

15. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982), 162.

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sional engagement: a devotional attitude, a personal ethic, a continuous liturgical experience that flows out of and expresses itself in apostolic obedience. Prayer, Bible study, personal ethics, and worship will not mean withdrawal from the world but an immersion in its sufferings and struggles. Likewise, participation in the struggles of history will not mean an abandonment of piety and contemplation, but an experience of God from the depths of human suffering.

Mission without spirituality cannot survive any more than combustion without oxygen. The nature of the world in which we live and the gospel that we have been committed to communicate therein demand, however, that it be a spirituality of engagement and not of withdrawal. Such a spirituality can only be cultivated in obedience and discipleship, and not in the isolated comfort of one's inner self. By the same token, it can only be verified in the liberating struggles against the principalities and powers that hold so many millions in bondage.<sup>16</sup>

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### Wholeness and Integrity in Mission

Wholeness and integrity in mission are key concepts in Costas' mission theology. For him it is not whether we are preaching the

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16. Ibid., 171–72. Costas repeated these two paragraphs in a *Missiology* article with the following additional sentence appearing after the first sentence of the second paragraph. “Hence in preparing women and men for mission, seminaries must build into their curriculum a contagious spirituality” (“The Whole World for the Whole Gospel,” *Missiology* 8, no. 4 [October 1980]: 403–404).

gospel or making disciples or engaging in social action that indicates if mission is occurring but whether there is an integration of all three taking place “in a comprehensive, dynamic, and consistent witness.”<sup>17</sup> The traditional separation between these three categories of mission will be broken down when the churches develop “multiple strategies to meet the challenge of each situation in faithfulness to the comprehensiveness of God’s mission.”<sup>18</sup>

In this ongoing debate concerning the integrity of mission, the Ecuadorian evangelical C. René Padilla urges the Western church to give priority to inward rather than outward growth. When this is done, it will be able to contribute to the solutions of underdevelopment without being “aggressively benevolent.”<sup>19</sup> Like Costas, Padilla is concerned with the wholeness of mission. There is a need to find practical ways to bring together such actions as evangelism and social responsibility; the individual and the communal; and spirituality and mission. “Integrity is not optional,” says Padilla. “It has to do with faithfulness to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the whole of life.”<sup>20</sup>

At Lausanne 1974, Samuel Escobar warned, “spirituality without involvement in social, economic, and political concerns is mere religiosity.”<sup>21</sup> Certainly, in the ministry of Jesus there was no such dichotomy between word and action as he healed the sick, delivered people from demons, fed the hungry, and shared the good news.<sup>22</sup> As the Argentine Methodist theologian José Míguez Bonino argues:

17. Costas, *The Integrity of Mission*, 75.

18. Costas, “Churches in Evangelistic Partnership,” in *The New Face of Evangelism*, ed., C. René Padilla (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), 156.

19. Padilla, “The Fullness of Mission,” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3, no. 1 (January 1979): 10.

20. Padilla, “Mission in the 1990s,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 4 (October 1989): 152.

21. Quoted in Roger C. Bassham, *Mission Theology: 1948–1975* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 237.

22. Padilla, “Bible Studies,” *Missiology* 10, no. 3 (July 1982): 320.



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There is a tendency to think that evangelism can remain unaffected, can carry on business as usual, without forgetting social action, but without being fundamentally changed. This it seems to me, is to be a deadly misunderstanding. The real problem is that the alliance of missions and Western capitalistic expansion has distorted the Gospel beyond recognition, and that evangelism, prayer, worship, and personal devotions have been held captive to an individualistic, otherworldly, success-crazy, legalistic destruction of the Gospel. Evangelism, prayer, worship, and private devotions do not have to be abandoned. They have to be converted to Christ.<sup>23</sup>

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### Spiritual Disciplines and Mission

When we turn to the area of the spiritual disciplines and mission, the Latin American missiologists offer valuable perceptions. Commenting on Kenneth Strachan’s “Evangelism in Depth” program, Castro encourages church leaders that as they pray and study the Bible together, they will discover the “responsible witness” that God would have them make.<sup>24</sup> He suggests that for mission, the Bible is of prime importance—not a passive involvement but a dynamic movement with the Spirit. “Biblical renewal means missionary commitment.”<sup>25</sup> Although he recognizes that there have been times in the church’s history, such as the European

23. José Míguez Bonino, “The Present Crisis in Mission,” in *Mission Trends No. 1: Crucial Issues in Mission Today*, eds., Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 41.

24. Castro, “Evangelism in Latin America,” 455.

25. Castro, “The Bible in the Mission of the Church,” *International Review of Mission* 70, no. 279 (July 1981): 115.

Reformation, when a biblical renewal has not been immediately accompanied by a missionary concern, the fact remains that “while the Bible is *always* a missionary book, the style and the priorities of our response to that missionary book are closely related to our awareness of the world in which we live.”<sup>26</sup>

Whenever people study the Bible from the vantage point of their pressing problems, says Castro, there is a revelation given to the Christian community of the missionary nature of the Scriptures both locally and globally. Thus, the reading of the Bible is going to be an invitation to the church for missionary obedience and at the same time to be a subversive agent confronting the injustices of all human authorities. “The Bible is an instrument in the mission of the church precisely because of the cutting edge of the Word of God.”<sup>27</sup>

Escobar acknowledges the important role the Bible played in Protestant mission in Latin America. “In many places the Bible was a forerunner of the missionary.”<sup>28</sup> He elaborates, “when Protestantism started to spread through Latin America, the Bible was central in its missionary action, and was practically an unknown book in the continent.”<sup>29</sup> He even suggests that the biblical renewal in the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America may have been influenced by the “explosive missiological value of the Bible in evangelical work.”<sup>30</sup>

Speaking about the early church in Syrian Antioch, Costas likewise makes the link between the spiritual disciplines and mission.<sup>31</sup> It was a praying, fasting, and worshiping church that

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26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 118.

28. Samuel Escobar, “Beyond Liberation Theology: Evangelical Missiology in Latin America,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 3 (July 1982): 112.

29. Escobar, “Missions and Renewal in Latin-American Catholicism,” *Missiology* 15, no. 2 (April 1987): 41.

30. Ibid. Cf. Escobar, “The Legacy of John Alexander Mackay,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16, no. 3 (July 1992): 118.

31. Costas speaks of mission as a public celebration through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist that are a witness for the church in “outward identity and historical continuity” (“The Whole World for the Whole Gospel,” 399).

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received missional guidance from the Holy Spirit while they were praying. He then warns that we should not lose sight of the fact that the Spirit is the source of all mission, and we need to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church. "They [the ministers of the church] get so immersed in the daily routine of ministry that they seem to have no time for God; they lose touch with the energizing source of mission."<sup>32</sup>

Along the same lines, Padilla, in teaching from Matthew 9:35–38, underscores that Christ told the disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into the harvest field—"missionaries appointed for the sake of the multitudes, missionaries willing to take upon themselves the suffering of the poor, and the oppressed."<sup>33</sup> He points to the fact that "there is no participation in Christ's mission to the multitude without a personal encounter with God as the sovereign Lord."<sup>34</sup> In other words, "there is no sharing in the spiritual benefits of his work without communion with him."<sup>35</sup>

Theology, piety, and enthusiasm in the Student Volunteer Movement are seen by Escobar as key elements of the evangelical character. "Certain spiritual disciplines of which prayer was the most evident" expressed piety.<sup>36</sup> The source of the vitality of the Movement was prayer.

You have observed that the missionary zeal is like a plant that blossoms in the ground of evangelical theology, piety, and enthusiasm... Theology is not a product, which is

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32. Costas, "The Mission of Ministry," *Missiology* 14, no. 4 (October 1986): 466.

33. Padilla, "Bible Studies," 325.

34. *Ibid.*, 321.

35. *Ibid.*, 329.

36. Escobar, "Recruitment of Students for Mission," *Missiology* 15, no. 4 (October 1987): 543.

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already made, so that missiology is the technique of putting it in little packages adequate for marketing. Theology is being forged at the points where mission is taking place... And the same is true for piety, for prayer, and the spiritual disciplines.<sup>37</sup>

In reporting on Urbana '90, Escobar shared a concern about mission spirituality. He recounted the spiritual dynamism of the Student Volunteer Movement in finding appropriate ways of cultivating evangelical mission spirituality through personal and small group prayer and Bible study, and he compared the past with the present. He referred with nostalgia to the contemplative pace of early conferences.<sup>38</sup>

## Worship and Mission

Regarding the spiritual act of worship, Castro states, "A community worships God not for its own edification only, but as the priestly people of God praying for the good of all humankind."<sup>39</sup> The Uruguayan missiologist was concerned with worship since he saw it as "the interceding act of the local community that brings before God all human concerns."<sup>40</sup> Costas includes socio-economic liberation as a central facet of the church's mission but at the same time emphasizes worship.<sup>41</sup> "Liturgy without

37. Ibid.

38. Escobar, "The Significance of Urbana '90," *Missiology* 19, no. 3 (July 1991): 338.

39. Castro, "Liberation, Development, and Evangelism: Must We Choose in Mission?" *Occasional Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (July 1978): 87.

40. Castro, "Mission Today," *Missiology* 2, no. 3 (July 1974): 361.

41. Cf. Escobar, "The Totalitarian Climate," in *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, eds., Carl F. H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1967), 290.

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mission is like a river without a spring. Mission without worship is like a river without a sea. Both are necessary.”<sup>42</sup> By his contact with Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics, Costas was challenged to consider the relationship between liturgy and evangelism and between worship and witness. He concludes that the church can become a worshipping community that proclaims the gospel through their worshipping lives.<sup>43</sup>

In his chapter “Mission as Celebration” in *The Integrity of Mission*, Costas expands his views on the relationship between worship and mission. Using the Book of Revelation as his backdrop, he asks what the message of the heavenly celebration was. One of the messages he presents was that “worship is intrinsically related to God’s action in history, and the conversion of the nations to God.”<sup>44</sup> Human worship comes from mission as a result of the experience of redemption. Likewise, mission should be seen as an act of worship due to the gift of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. He suggests:

There is no dichotomy between worship and mission. Worship is the gathering of the people sent into the world to celebrate what God has done in Christ and is doing through their participation in the Spirit’s witnessing action. Mission is the culmination and anticipation of worship. In worship and mission, the redeemed community gives evidence to the fact that it is a praying, and a witnessing people.<sup>45</sup>

Costas goes on to say that the church separates worship and mission. Instead of being two parts of one whole, the impression is that the two do not belong together. However, they do belong

42. Costas, *The Integrity of Mission*, 91.

43. *Ibid.*, 60.

44. *Ibid.*, 90–91.

45. *Ibid.*, 91.

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together. He argues that one cannot function without the other. "The test of a vigorous worship experience will be a dynamic participation in mission. The test of a faithful missional involvement will be a profound worship experience."<sup>46</sup>

## Implications for Contemporary Mission

This survey found much common ground between the selected missiologists. To be theologically relevant in a changing world, all agreed that the church must continue to study the Bible, pray, and worship. Study leads to spiritual awakening and, in turn, brings about social transformation. Intercessory prayer is essential in the spiritual battle for the souls of humankind. As the people of God pray, the Holy Spirit revitalizes the church to reach out to our needy world. The worship of God, through the sacraments and the Eucharist, serves Christ by serving the weak and the lowly. In the Eucharist, Christ is adored, and out of that overflowing joy and understanding of who God is, flows true mission.

From this position of communion with Jesus comes the right motivation to disperse into the nations for Spirit-filled witness. God's cosmic purpose involves all nations, cultures, and peoples worshipping him through Christ. So, how can this be done in the ongoing life of the church today and specifically in our evangelistic task? How can the church do mission from the inside out?

Ultimately, it is important for any student of mission to learn to wait on God. The purpose of the spiritual disciplines is to help us to know God in a deeper fashion. In that process of knowing,

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46. Ibid.

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we grow in love for God. This love, inevitably, leads us to greater self-awareness and societal engagement. By finding God in solitude and silence, by practicing the discipline of prayer, we connect to our source of strength. Only the power of the Trinity can coax believers out of our selfish tendencies and into an active life of mission. Through his might, we are able to move along new paths and connect with the non-Christian world. By serving with God's love—the love he implants within us—mission comes from the inside out.

But is it that simple? Can mission be done in a people-centered fashion—focused on relationships instead of the number of converts? The answer: only through Christ. In this survey, we found that a number of missiologists attested to the importance of the Eucharist in mobilizing Christians to social action. When we focus our gaze on Christ—his prophetic birth, his radical life, his atoning death and liberating resurrection, we find that only he can truly show us the way we should go. When our heart, mind, and actions are transformed into his likeness then we will be empowered to offer that same power of transformation to a world in dire need of his power. Arias found that the key to mission from the inside out was discovering a power within powerlessness. Recording the words of Jesus, the apostle Paul put it this way: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

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