With the victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the instauration of a Marxist regime in Grenada, both in 1979, the inter-American relationship was in dire straits. Washington feared another Cuba in its backyard and its subsequent actions—support to the Contras and the invasion of Grenada in 1982—only deepened the chasm with Latin America. Nicaragua and Grenada became tokens of the enormous abyss of perceptions between North and Latin America. Latin Americans saw in the fall of Somoza the end of several decades of oppression and systematic looting of the country by a small oligarchy, and consequently this victory brought hope for better times and empowering of the people of Latin America. For Washington, Latin America and the Caribbean were on the brink of becoming part of the “evil empire,” and therefore it felt the urge to stop the “red danger” of communism. President Reagan projected a victorious mood for his country while Latin America was suffering the pain of having “at least 80 per cent of its population under one kind of dictatorship or another—either of the left or of the right,

---

1 See, for example, Gianni Minà, Un Continente Desaparecido: L’America Latina Vissuta e Raccontata da Samuel Ruiz, Gabriel García Márquez, Eduardo Galeano, Rigoberta Menchú, Jorge Amado, Frei Betto, Pombo e Urbano, i Compagni del Che in Bolivia, Saggi; (Milano: Sperling and Kupfer, 1995); Jesús Cambre Mariño, América Central Durante la Época Reagan (Barcelona: Institut Catòlic d’Estudis Socials, 1989).

but mostly of the right—with all the varied implications that have to do with human rights, repression and fear.”

In 1979 evangelicals in Latin America were facing urgent and unavoidable questions that demanded answers rooted in the Bible and that had practical applications. How does one explain the Gospel to a generation of orphans of war? Does the Bible speak to the suffering of a continent in captivity? Does it have anything to say to the military juntas, dictators, and other repressive regimes? Is the gospel only about a mansion in heaven, or does it have something to do with earthly life for a Latin America in tears? When the time came for the FTL to convene the Segundo Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización—CLADE II—it had as backdrop at least three things. First, there had been at least 200,000 political deaths and 100,000 disappearances on the continent during the 1970s. Second, there was an increasing number of people living under poverty. And third, there was a growing migration of people to the cities with the consequent social complications and new social realities. The region was quite different from what it had been ten years before. Social and political conditions had worsened, and there was little hope of reversing the trend. Samuel Escobar observed:

We are in a continent where there is more poverty, more unemployment, more youth with less perspective for the future, less political stability, bigger and more open manifestations of violence and violations of human rights, an unstoppable massive urbanization and a tremendous religious confusion. However, it is clear that the facets of this crisis are different in each country or region.

On the religious scene, CLADE II was preceded by two important gatherings, one Roman Catholic and the other organized by ecumenical Protestantism. The latter held an assembly of churches in Oaxtepec, Mexico, September 19 to 26, 1978. The Consejo Latinoamericano de

---


