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EVALUATIONS OF BANGKOK

Much has already been written about the world conference on mission and evangelism "Salvation Today", held in Bangkok from December 29th, 1972 till January 13th, 1973. Out of these many voices we have selected some from Africa, Asia and Latin America, either evaluating in character (1) or trying to apply Bangkok to the situation at home (2).

1. Evaluations of Bangkok

In THIS MONTH 1973, No. 3, p. 13, Bishop Manuel Gaxiola, president of the Iglesia Apostolica de la Fe de Mexico, a very rapidly growing indigenous church of Mexico, is commenting on three items:

a) Latin Americans have been amazed by the sharp criticism the white brethren were taking from those who came in a different hue:

"They take every opportunity to tell us they are tired of Western teachings and customs that were imposed upon them and to remind us how much they have suffered the consequences of misguided missionary methods used in the past by whites, whose intentions, values and methods are now resented and rejected by those who, in spite of all past mistakes, are now Christians. Although we do not condone the mistakes and even abuses committed by missionaries in the name of Jesus, we think it is about time some one stood up, be he white, black or yellow, to say something nice about our Western Brethren".

b) "Latin Americans are justly proud to see one of their own, Emilio Castro, take the top job at the CWME. Emilio outlined some of his concerns, which are global rather than parochial, and the Latin Americans understand this". Speaking of activities "at home" Gaxiola said:

"In their regional meeting, the Latin Americans promised Emilio their full backing, earnest prayers and sympathetic understanding. They also decided Latin Americans need to create a body that will speak for them in continental terms, with more unity, coordination and "clout". The EACC (= ACC) seems to be their model, and perhaps their envy".

c) Gaxiola knows a delegate who, returning to Latin America, would rather speak about the "good points" only, fearing a negative reaction
from his colleagues there if he tells them all that is transpiring and being discussed at Bangkok. The "bad points" have to do with an interpretation of salvation, conversion, dialogue, involvement, which runs counter to the ideas and interpretations of some in the ecumenical community in Latin America and the majority of people in the non-conciliar churches:

"CWME seems to be trying to accommodate new social, political and religious trends in the world, but by ignoring and in some cases opposing the feelings of many, both inside and outside the WCC, it faces the danger of alienating a very influential and numerous element of the Christian world".

Gaxiola elaborates this view in an article "Salvation Today: A critical report" (in: The Evangelical Response to Bangkok), of which we like to quote the Conclusion extensively:

"In conclusion and in all charity we can only say in our personal response to the Salvation Today Conference that we fully agree with Paul's estimate of the proclamation of Christ:

Some, indeed, proclaim Christ in a jealous and quarrelsome spirit; others proclaim him in true goodwill, and these are moved by love for me; they know that it is to defend the Gospel that I am where I am. But the others, moved by personal rivalry, present Christ from mixed motives, meaning to stir up fresh trouble for me as I lie in prison. What does it matter? One way or another, in pretence or sincerity, Christ is set forth, and for that I rejoice. (Philippians 1: 15-18, New English Bible).

However, we cannot help the feeling of dismay at the theological direction the CWME seems inevitably following. Knowing some of the participants personally, fully aware of their earnestness and sincerity as well as their kindness, it would be regrettable to find that their course is not guided by the Word of God, for we cannot help but remember also that anything that is not built on the solid rock of God's Word will collapse" (pp. 76-77).

The Bangkok Conference has also been a deep concern for Chandu Ray of the "Coordinating Office for Asian Evangelism", Singapore. In Newsletter Vol. 5, 1973, No. 1, p. 1, he gives the following comment:

"At Bangkok when the World Conference on "Salvation Today" met for ten days, one felt the existing confusion was due, at least in part, because men were speaking from their own backgrounds rather than from a world view. The shoutings and