

Arturo Piedra

Introduction

These written lines¹ attempt to take the pulse of Protestantism and to describe the new challenges both within (in its own religious world) and around (in the secular world) Protestantism in Latin America. I hope to provoke churches, pastors, and the laity to rethink their Christian commitment in light of Latin America's new religious and social realities. I also aim to inspire a Christian commitment that is relevant for our times.

This effort revolves around three axes. First comes the recognition that there are sufficient reasons to believe that our understanding of the Christian mission needs to mature, taking into account the changes the Latin American region has experienced in the last decade. We need to try to answer the central question, where are the church and the believers now? What aspects of our mission need to change, and which should stay the same? The next axis is the acknowledgment that we need to develop a strategy for understanding how regional changes are directly affecting both church vision and church life. Some corresponding questions include the following: How are churches in the first decade of the

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twenty-first century different from churches in the 1970s and 1980s? What are some of the greatest challenges facing churches today? Finally, the third basis of my argument lies in realizing that the success of organizations like CLAI and the FTL depends upon the type of relationship we have with churches. It is indispensable to have a serious evaluation of the basic characteristics of our connections with congregations. The following questions will help us: What past actions of our ministries brought us closer to and which distanced us from churches? What actions do we need to take today to strengthen communication with churches in this decade?

These three points pivot around the conviction that one of the most important missiological goals is to fall in love again with the work of the church and to be oriented by the needs and questions churches have in moments of great religious confusion. There is no doubt that every link with the external world of the church (the social, political, and economic reality) will grow much richer by valuing ecclesial reality.

CLAI: *Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias*, the Latin American Council of Churches. Founded in 1982, this ecumenical organization promotes unity among Latin American Christians. For more information, visit www.clai.org.ec/

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