

Evangelical Declaration of Cochabamba

At the Founding Meeting of the Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana, December, 1970¹

We have met here to reflect together on the revelation of God, that free and sovereign God who “spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1–2). We believe that special revelation is the first and indispensable condition for knowing God and understanding the significance of human life and history. While God has made himself partially known through nature and through the law written in the hearts of men and women, he has revealed himself in the clearest and most definitive way through Jesus Christ, to whom the Bible testifies. It is primarily upon this fact that we base our theological reflection and attempt to understand our mission as the people of God in Latin America.

1. This is an adaptation of the “Evangelical Declaration of Cochabamba” first published in English in *Latin America Pulse* 6, no. 1 (1970): 4. Originally in Spanish: “Declaración Evangélica de Cochabamba,” in *El debate contemporáneo sobre la Biblia*, ed. Peter Savage (Barcelona: Ediciones Evangélicas Europeas, 1972), 225–28.

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We recognize our debt to the missionaries who brought us the gospel. At the same time we believe that a theological reflection relevant to our own people must take into account the dramatic reality of the Latin American scene and must make an effort to identify and remove the foreign trappings in which the message has been wrapped.

God reveals himself through a historical process which began with the creation described in Genesis and will end with the consummation of all things described in Revelation. He reveals himself in special historic events which have been interpreted through the voice of God communicating through the apostles and prophets. The Bible derives its authority from its relationship to God's revelation which finds its highest fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Bible is the Scripture, the words of which, inspired by God, communicate the Word of God and infallibly fulfill the purpose for which they were given: "that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tm 3:16-17). It is a book written by humans, and as such it bears an indelible human imprint, but at the same time it is a divine book, written under the control of the Holy Spirit. To deny the fact of inspiration is, in the final analysis, equivalent to denying the special revelation of God.

The Bible cannot be separated from the history of salvation since, being a part of this history, it came into being through the action of the Holy Spirit. The only absolute authority is that which is found in God himself. A definition of the meaning and scope of biblical authority is possible only when the Bible is placed in the total context of God's revelation in history and of his saving purposes. The Bible is also inseparable from Jesus Christ and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. God exercises his authority through the written word and through the Spirit. And this authority is normative for all that which is related to Christian faith and practice.

The acknowledgment of biblical authority may be considered one of the most widespread characteristics of the evangelical

movement in Latin America. This is to be expected within a movement of which the great majority is theologically conservative.

Nevertheless, we must admit that the way most evangelicals in Latin America use the Bible does not always coincide with the high view of the Scriptures they profess. The Bible is highly respected, but the voice of the Lord who speaks through it is not always obeyed, and this disobedience is rationalized in many ways. We need a hermeneutic which does justice to the biblical text in every case. Preaching is often void of biblical substance. The evangelical pulpit is in a state of crisis. We find among ourselves a depressing ignorance of the Bible and of the application of its message to today's needs. The biblical message is indisputably pertinent to Latin Americans, but its proclamation does not play the part it should among us.

We are living in a difficult moment for the evangelical church of our continent. This demands a new evaluation of our situation. The need of the hour is to turn to the Word of God in submission to the Holy Spirit. It involves returning to the Bible and to the Lord who reigns through it, as well as calling into question our "evangelical traditions" in light of written revelation. It means placing every activity of the church under the judgment of the Word of the living God. It is to obey the clear demands of the Word of God in announcing the message of Jesus Christ to all, calling all people to be his disciples, and, within the complex social, political, and economic scene in Latin America, to become a community which expresses the spirit of justice, kindness, and service which is implied in the gospel.

We rejoice at the movement for the distribution and study of the Bible in Roman Catholic circles. We realize that this movement is like an alarm bell which rings to awaken us from the slumber into which many of us evangelicals have fallen with a closed Bible in our hands. It shows us that a new biblical movement is needed in the evangelical church in Latin America.

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Today's ideologies, which increasingly challenge us, can also be a prod in God's hands to make us listen to his voice. Now is the time to search the Scriptures to rediscover the true Christian hope, that dynamic which makes us "rejoice in hope."

It is time to recognize how much biblical teaching we have left aside because of our own human traditions and because of those human visions of a new world which feed the utopias of our time. Thus, we who know the Truth, we who have the only true Hope, we who have been the object of the supreme Love, will be able to present to our Latin America the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ with a brilliance which will outshine all false gospels.

We give thanks to God for his objective revelation given "once for all" which we have in the Bible. We give thanks to God for his Spirit who illumines and applies the written Word.

Cochabamba, December 18, 1970