

# Forty-Five Years of the FTL and its Biblical Theology: A Bit of Theology along the Way...and Mary

Valdir Steuernagel

To look back on the forty-five years of the Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana (FTL, Latin American Theological Fellowship) is a wonderful privilege for me, especially because the ABU/FTL<sup>1</sup> combination was deeply formative in my life. The foundation and pillars that have given strength and direction to my life and ministry were established in that world. As the years go by and I recall and retell stories of my walk with God, I am surprised by the

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1. Some of the founders of the FTL were at the same time leaders in the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) in various Latin American countries. Valdir Steuernagel was a leader in the Aliança Bíblica Universitária do Brasil (ABU), which is the IFES student ministry in Brazil.

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countless times I reference this dynamic duo of the ABU and the FTL. I can only conclude that both were a fascinating bedrock for my development.

In examining biblical theology, I believe we are gazing at the very core of this formative process, both for me personally and for the FTL. From the start, I have stated and also lived out by experience that our theology must be grounded in, inspired by, and submitted to the Holy Scriptures which we affirm to be our point of both departure and arrival. Nevertheless, I am not talking about the Book *ipsis literis* but rather about how this Book must be opened. The way that we do so is of vital importance for understanding and living it. In addition, the person who opens this Book, which in reality is *Book-Word-Presence*, is essential for the process of hearing the Word that emerges from it. Last, but not least, I have learned that the place where you are as this Book is opened and listened to is also essential for perceiving that the voice which speaks is a declaration of love, an invitation to live life holistically, to the full. The

Book is a plan for a communal life of service and an invitation to profound transformation. In other words, the Book simply is. It is an invitation to worship.

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My message up to this point, I confess, has not been very “academic” or “theological.” To tell the truth, with every passing year I become more of a mere storyteller: life stories that dialogue with the Book-Word and stories from the Book that bring on the “Aha!” moments. In this way, I gradually discover the path of grace, the path of my neighbor, and the path of hope. What has helped me in my journey is having learned from Frederick Buechner, in his book *The Sacred Journey*, that all theology is, in fact, *autobiography*. He explains it in this way, “What

a theologian is doing essentially is examining as honestly as he can the rough-and-tumble of his own experience with all its ups and downs, its mysteries and loose ends, and expressing in logical,