

# Bible Study in Latin America: An Exploration

Juan José Barreda Toscano

Another gray cloud approaches,  
And I know you're so afraid of it  
That it finally happens.

Gustavo Cerati<sup>1</sup>

“She was a prostitute!” the woman sitting at the back answered emphatically. I had asked the group what they thought of the protagonist in the story of John 4.

Some twenty centuries later, the Samaritan woman whose name we do not even know is still being mistreated. In this instance, the mistreatment is the result of a biblical exegesis that does not listen

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1. Gustavo Cerati, “Al fin sucede,” on *Ahí vamos*, compact disc, Sony BMG Music Entertainment (Argentina), 2006.

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to her but rather denigrates her, giving her a personal history that is not actually accurate. The interpretation is heavy with prejudice against women who are used as prostitutes and against those who have gone through a divorce. This Samaritan woman, condemned and dispossessed, humiliated and abused, remains an object of discrimination and mistreatment over two thousand years later.

“Do you understand what you are reading?”

“How can I...unless someone explains it to me?”

The story of the Ethiopian official and Philip (Acts 8:26–40) talks about our need for someone to explain the Scriptures to us. As a social production, the Scriptures are human books attributed to divine inspiration (cf. 2 Tm 3:16) and must be studied socially. In and of itself, the social dimension of the Scriptures does not tell us how to go about interpreting them socially. It is not enough

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to know that we need each other in order to interpret. We must define the dynamics of the process of studying and learning, the power relationships we construct, and the effects we hope these interpretations have on our society. We must even question the theological reading we make of the event of reading Scripture communally. How can we read the Bible from a Latin American context fraught with social injustice, colonization, and the search for abundant life? What can the so-called biblical sciences contribute to the solution or hope-filled quest for solutions in our contexts?

## 1. The Canon and Current Social Problems

The Scriptures are a collection of sacred texts of diverse origins that were composed by a multiplicity of authors and editors whose questions and faith choices are reflected therein. The theological