

LATIN AMERICA MISSION: AN EXPLORATION OF EVANGELICAL GROWTH
IN A CATHOLIC CONTINENT

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis strives to explore Evangelical Protestant growth in Latin America during the twentieth century through the example of Latin America Mission, a nondenominational, evangelical mission organization founded in 1921. A discussion of the evolution of Christianity in Latin America from the conquest through the twentieth century lays the groundwork for the establishment of Latin America Mission. Subsequent chapters discuss the foundations and practices of the Mission, focusing on its innovative and holistic approach to missions as well as its commitment to social work. Finally, an exploration of the social, political, and religious climate of Latin America provides a further exploration of the continued growth of Latin America Mission into the twenty-first century.

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1. RELIGION IN THE NEW WORLD: THE EVOLUTION OF LATIN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

The religious landscape of Central and South America has always been dynamic and different from most of the rest of the world. This dynamism began with a complex, pre-Columbian cosmology which described a cyclical world in which many gods came and went, each possessing specific roles, but disappearing when they were no longer needed. As such, the introduction of Christianity into the New World was not an earth-shattering event that led to the extermination of native religion, but was rather perceived by the native peoples as a new phase in their religious cycle. Through processes of assimilation and syncretism, native religions combined with Catholicism to create a new religion, ostensibly Christian, but also encompassing many different, non-Christian influences and practices. This religious environment, the result of the physical and spiritual conquest of the New World, was the beginning of Latin America's Christian experience. However, this religious climate, established five hundred years ago, has been undergoing another major change in the last century. Previously Catholic populations are turning, in increasing numbers, to Evangelical Christian groups to meet their spiritual needs. This new religious force has experienced remarkable success in its mission to evangelize and convert the people of Central and South America, but understanding of the Evangelical story begins with the conquest of the New World. ¹

The discovery of the Americas in the late fifteenth century permanently changed both the New and the Old Worlds. Spain claimed the largest portion of the New World, desiring wealth and power. Spaniards eagerly explored and plundered these new lands, but alongside the force bent on physical conquest was an equally important group sent to facilitate the spiritual conquest of the New World. Missionaries spread throughout the colonies, evangelizing, converting, and civilizing the native population. These early missionaries, hailing from both the secular and regular branches of the Catholic Church, planted the seeds of Christianity in the New World and began Latin America's centuries-long relationship with Catholicism.

These European missionaries to the New World were driven by several motives. On the one hand, they were the tools of the Spanish monarchs, operating as "door-openers" for further conquest of the New World. They acted as a civilizing force on already colonized areas, but also became the conquerors on the frontiers of European settlement. Borderlands historian Herbert Bolton described their role as conquering and civilizing, paving the way for secular clergy to take over fully evangelized communities and parishes. This function was their first and most important priority, but it was far from the only goal of the early missionaries.²

Spain's imperial government relied on Catholic missionaries to fulfill political and economic functions in addition to their religious ones. Although the Spanish crown claimed as a priority the conversion of native souls, those missions which displayed the greatest economic ability were the ones which

received the most funding from the crown. As missions were founded and natives were moved in, missionaries were expected not only to convert and civilize these indigenous people, but also to mold them into a productive labor force. Therefore, missionaries taught the native peoples European agricultural practices and crafts. Bolton's interpretation of economic development playing a secondary, though important, role to soul-saving was reinterpreted by later historians. Some historians, such as Robert H. Jackson and Edward Castillo, even imply that Spanish economic concerns may have taken precedence over evangelization and conversion. Whatever their priority, it is clear that missionaries served as tools of colonization, far from being merely emissaries of God and the Catholic Church.³

Missions in the frontier areas also served as political institutions, often being built in strategic areas so they could serve as a fortress as well as a religious building. The missionaries were required to be political emissaries to the New World as part of the intertwined relationship between the colonial Church and the Spanish Crown. The Papacy had given the Crown almost complete control of the mission effort in the New World, and as such the missionaries were forced to work within the parameters laid down by the state. This relationship limited the missionaries as they rarely challenged the wishes and plans of the Spanish monarchy; however, it also endowed the New World missionaries with significant power. The missionaries were allowed to wield extensive political authority through the Inquisition, and this power shaped the influence of the missions on native peoples.⁴

Despite the obvious effects of the economic and political functions of missions, the religious motivations of missionaries remained integral to their role in the New World and constituted a driving force behind their continued work. While a generalized commitment to the saving of souls is acknowledged as a goal of missionaries worldwide, interpretations by Latin American historians of the religious motivations of colonial missions vary. Some of these historians use Renaissance Humanists, such as Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican missionary during the sixteenth century, and Vasco de Quiroga, the first bishop of Michoacán in Mexico, as examples of the prevalence of Humanism as a religious motivation. These priests saw the Indians as “noble savages” to be respected, not animal beings to be exploited. These priestly humanists were admirers of the way of life of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, and hoped to utilize the Indians’ humility and disinterest in materialism to create a utopia. However, even idealists like Quiroga were forced to recognize that this utopia would not appear in the New World for several reasons, among them the fact that the pristine nature of these native cultures had already been exposed to the negative effects of Spanish materialism and greed through the conquerors. However, for every humanist like las Casas there were also opposing theologians like Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. Instead of supporting peaceful colonization by priests, Sepúlveda argued in favor of violent conquest, citing the so-called backwardness of the natives and their previous sins as justification for the more refined Spaniards to take control by force. Therefore, humanism may

have played a role in the work of some individual missionaries, but it was not an all-encompassing motivation for missions in the New World.⁵

A second interpretation of the religious motivation for missionaries focuses on Millennialism as a driving force behind many mission movements, particularly among the mendicant clergy. This millennial thinking consisted of the belief during the sixteenth century that the discovery of the New World was in fact the beginning of the end of the world. The mystical view of the colonization process was especially prominent among the Franciscans, and sixteenth-century Franciscan missionaries, such as Gerónimo de Mendieta, are offered by historians as examples of the influence that millennial beliefs had on the Franciscans. Mendieta believed that Spain would provide the Messianic ruler who would unite the world under one Christian rule, founding the “New Israel” of apocalyptic Biblical literature, a vision similar to the humanist desire to establish a utopian society. Another example of Franciscan millennialism is Toribio de Benavente, better known by his given native name “Motolinia.” Motolinia believed that the world was nearing its end, and as such there was little time remaining to evangelize the native peoples of Latin America. This limited time was offered as a justification for the suffering inflicted on many in the New World, a common flaw of apocalyptic thinking. Motolinia was heavily influential in the beliefs of Mendieta. Thus both of these men, aided by their Franciscan brothers, were driven to convert as many natives as possible in the short time left to them. As such, the colonization and evangelization of the New World was simply the next logical step toward Christ’s second coming and the end of the world.⁶

These conversion efforts, while clearly widespread and zealous, were met with mixed results. Two cultures rarely, if ever, cooperate well together, much less assimilate and integrate without conflict. Latin American colonization was no different. European missionaries were on the front line of this cultural clash, leading the "spiritual conquest," but also running into tenacious native beliefs that refused to be assimilated. This religious conflict and the resulting compromises had a profound effect on the religious climate of Latin America, and although Catholicism ultimately won out, it was forever altered by its contact with native religion.⁷

Many scholars consider syncretism in Latin America to be a result of the search for a colonial identity, separate from both indigenous and European culture. This syncretism of Catholic and native faiths is a combination of one aspect of two cultures that eventually played an important role in the realization of a separate identity for people of the Spanish colonial world. A prime example of this identity-building syncretism is the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, an Indian vision of the Virgin Mary who allegedly made her appearance to an Indian near a religious shrine to the Aztec mother-goddess, Tonantzin, during the sixteenth century.⁸

The first account of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* was not written down until 1648, and so it is then that her popularity really began to grow. She became a symbol of the New World, and as such, those men and women of European descent who felt that the colonies were their true home flocked to worship her. She represented what they felt: she was an Old World figure in a new, Indian land, offering a sense of identity to a population that was trying to find its place in

the world. Jacques Lafaye sees Guadalupe as not merely a building block of *criollo* identity, but as the only thing tying together a nation lacking uniting factors.

Stafford Poole sums it up best, saying:

“In [1648] there suddenly appeared a cult legend, European in substance and form though with an Indian as protagonist... It was quickly embraced by *criollos*, who found in it a legitimation of their aspirations and identity... *Criollismo* was well developed by 1648 and needed only a catalyst, a symbol on which the people could base their self-esteem and a tool that could be used to emphasize their uniqueness.”⁹

Although unification and identity-building are clearly positive aspects of syncretism, there was a negative side to this phenomenon as well. After their initial conversion, many native populations continued their traditional religious practices, viewing Christianity as an addition, not a replacement. Their attempt to incorporate Christianity into an already rich religious life was not met with approval by the Catholic missionaries. Missionaries often took severe measures to punish this type of behavior. Inga Clendinnen recounts a detailed example of these extreme and negative reactions to native syncretism in her analysis of Fray Diego de Landa. Landa, a Franciscan missionary who worked quickly during the 1500s to evangelize great numbers, was later frustrated and appalled to find that the Maya people of the Yucatán had returned in large part to their previous religious beliefs. Their religion was rife with native practices, such as human sacrifice and cannibalism, which were equated with satanic religious rituals by horrified Spanish Catholics. Landa staged a mini-inquisition of his own against them, torturing and killing the offenders, and led a zealous campaign to destroy the physical artifacts of “evil” native religions, resulting in the demolition of many

idols, shrines, and other religious relics of the New World. Landa's cruel punishment of the native people of the Yucatán for their "betrayal" of Christianity together with the Catholic war against the tangible artifacts of native religion are prime examples of the European refusal to accept "new Christians," as historian Richard E. Greenleaf refers to them. However, this attempt at a forced march into Christianity did not produce the desired results, and even the most supportive and optimistic Spanish missionaries could not contain their disappointment. Thus the Spanish attempt to "erase the cultural differences" and avoid any native religious influence was not successful.¹⁰

The indigenous religions of the New World were far from the only threats to Catholic hegemony; the Church also considered Judaism and Protestantism enemies. The Spanish Inquisition, established in 1479 by Ferdinand and Isabella, was transplanted to the New World in 1570 in order to deal with these heretical religions. While the native peoples were officially exempt from the Inquisition, Jews and Protestants were not. In their zeal to cleanse the world of heresy and unify Catholicism, agents of the Inquisition imprisoned, tortured, and even killed many Jewish and Protestant individuals who had the misfortune to find themselves in Spanish or Portuguese America. The Inquisition's intolerance for other religions was instrumental in the establishment of Catholic supremacy in Latin America.¹¹

The Church wasted no time in further entrenching itself into Latin American society. In addition to the Inquisition, the Church established numerous other venues for social and political influence. Immediately after its

arrival in the New World, the Church divided the territory into ecclesiastical sees and drafted constitutions to govern these territories. While the Church clearly governed religious institutions, it also controlled other influential areas of society: education and public morality. By controlling education as well as moral issues, such as male-female relationships through the sacrament of marriage, the Church gained power over how the people of Latin America lived their lives by influencing the way people thought, beginning during their childhood. Furthermore, the sacramental cycle, beginning with baptism and ending with extreme unction, further ensured that adherents would remain involved with the Church for the entirety of their lives. While these spheres of influence allowed the Church to wield massive amounts of power over people in Latin America, events in Europe eventually undermined the authority of the Catholic Church.¹²

When the Spanish king Charles II died in 1700 without leaving an heir, Europe was thrown into turmoil over the War of Spanish Succession. The war left Spain devastated, with little money or influence. The Bourbon family took control of Spain in 1713 and immediately began rebuilding Spanish power, both in Europe and the Americas. In order to accomplish this, the Bourbons instated numerous administrative and political reforms in Spanish realms, which placed more and more power into the hands of the monarchy. One of the targets of these reforms was the Catholic Church, a bastion of influence and authority.¹³

One of the first attacks on Catholic hegemony came in 1753 when Ferdinand IV gained the right to nominate bishops for important ecclesiastical positions throughout areas within Spain's control. This gave the Spanish

monarchy control over the majority of the religious leadership within its territories. The Bourbons also began replacing American-born clergy in leadership positions with those born in Europe, in order to better maintain control of American religion. Following this, the *fueros*, or special privileges, of the clergy were revoked for a time. Then, the Bourbon king Charles III orchestrated the most dramatic anti-church reform yet: he expelled all members of the Jesuit Order in the New World in 1767. The Jesuits were perhaps the wealthiest and most influential Catholic presence in the New World, due in part to their control over much of the education in the Americas. Thus, by removing them Charles III was better able to control his colonial territories. The Jesuits blamed their expulsion on the Enlightenment, believing it to be an early attack by the *philosophes* against the Church. This Enlightenment aversion to all things traditional and conservative only exacerbated the growing limitation of Catholicism's authority in Spanish lands. No longer seen as the source of all truth and the defender of innocent victims, the Church was now gaining a reputation as a greedy institution that was causing more problems than it was able to fix.¹⁴

The Enlightenment led to a new understanding of the rights of citizens, which often placed the citizens at direct odds with their monarch. This tension was the fuel for revolutions in Europe and across the Western Hemisphere, and this revolutionary fervor did not go unnoticed in Latin America. Most of the Spanish colonies gained their independence during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and this ushered in an era in which liberalism, advocating enlightenment ideals, triumphed over conservatism. Conservatism was

generally opposed to free-thinking, and represented all things traditional, such as the monarchy and the Catholic Church. Most Latin American constitutions from this period still declared Catholicism to be the official religion, but the Church was limited by a loss of political support and an inability to change in order to remain relevant in an evolving society. The reality was that many Latin Americans had become disillusioned with Catholicism, and the Church would never again wield the same degree of power.¹⁵

This limitation of Catholic and conservative influence also manifested itself in a way that would leave a lasting impression on the religious climate of Latin America. To further undermine the Church, many governments began to encourage Protestant immigration into Latin America. As a result, immigrants from Anglican, Lutheran, and other Protestant denominations began filtering into Latin American countries early in the nineteenth century, particularly Brazil and Argentina. One of the first priorities of these Protestant settlers was the establishment of churches to accommodate their particular brand of Protestantism. While these immigrants were successful in bringing lasting Protestant congregations to Latin America, their principle concern was to serve the needs of their transplanted parishioners. They saw no need to evangelize among the largely Catholic populations of Latin America. As such, they were only marginally responsible for the early seeds of Protestantism's later growth throughout the continent. Evangelization and conversion of the people of Latin America was instead the responsibility of the growing number of Protestant missionaries during the nineteenth century.¹⁶

The earliest Protestant evangelization efforts were masked behind mundane efforts that were accepted and even encouraged by Latin American governments. One of the earliest examples of this is James Thomson, a Scottish Baptist missionary sent as a representative of the British Foreign School Society in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This society advocated an education system in which the students taught each other. There were several important benefits associated with this school system that had the new liberal governments of Latin America very interested. By teaching each other, the students were learning in an efficient and innovative way while also allowing large numbers of students to be supervised by only one teacher. This education program, advocated by governments in Chile, Argentina, and Peru, used the Bible as one of the major pieces of literature for the curriculum, resulting in the widespread dissemination of scripture throughout Latin America. However, these versions of Scripture were published without the notes on correct interpretation generally included with Catholic texts, but instead only included the text of the Scripture itself, leaving it open to personal interpretation in the Protestant tradition. In this way, men like Thomson introduced Protestant ideas to Latin America. While he officially remained a representative of the British Foreign School Society, Thomson wrote in 1821:

“It is my intention, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to spend my life ... in South America ... wherever I may most effectually promote the work of the Lord, in establishing schools, in circulating Scriptures, and in the use of such other means as circumstances may direct.”

This passage clearly shows Thomson's conviction that he was doing the Lord's work in Latin America, despite his mundane job description. Such was the approach of early Protestant evangelization; careful pseudo-mission work, largely supported by various Bible societies, such as the British and Foreign Bible Society and, later, the American Bible Society that tested the waters and primed the inhabitants for full-blown mission efforts.¹⁷

These nineteenth-century excursions by Bible Societies were swiftly followed by more permanent mission efforts by Protestants. The nineteenth century witnessed the establishment of missions by the majority of mainline denominations. The Anglican Church moved into Argentina in the 1820s and spread throughout the remainder of the continent over the next few decades. Anglican missions focused largely on native and African populations that were not Catholic, such as the Araucanians in Chile and the people of African descent in the Caribbean islands, as evangelization among professing Catholic Christians was against the Anglican Communion. The similarities between Anglicanism and Catholicism resulted in an Anglican acceptance of Roman Catholicism as effectively Christian.¹⁸

Other denominations did not impose such limitations on their evangelism, as the syncretistic tendencies of Latin American religion led many outsiders to view its practices as more heathen than Christian. Thus the Methodists and Lutherans were not far behind the Anglicans, establishing missions by the 1840s. Presbyterians spread throughout the continent by the 1860s, and the Methodists arrived in Mexico and Brazil during the 1870s. These denominations also

established hospitals and schools in their mission outposts, and zealously pursued the conversion of the entire Latin American population, regardless of prior beliefs or traditions. Their ties to Liberalism, which hinged largely on the fact that they challenged the hegemony of Catholicism, led them to be most successful among the urban working class, especially through their Protestant schools. These denominations made little inroads among the Catholic elite or the lower classes, however, and though many Protestant denominations thrived, the actual percentage of the population that had converted to Protestantism in Latin America remained very low at the turn of the twentieth century. By way of example, Mexico claimed 469 Protestant congregations in the decade leading up to the nineteenth century, but the total number of adherents still represented less than one percent of the total population of the country.¹⁹

While the mainline Protestant groups in Latin America were having disappointing results in their evangelism, a new religious movement was underway in North America. The turn of the twentieth century witnessed the foundation of many Evangelical Christian movements, a new addition to the Protestant milieu. "Evangelical" is a term that is notoriously difficult to define. It does not refer to any particular denomination, but a movement across denominations. Even Catholicism has not been entirely immune to its influence, although the majority of Evangelicals belong to Protestant denominations. Allister McGrath defined Evangelicalism by laying down six foundational tenets:

- "1. The supreme authority of scripture as a source of knowledge of God and a guide to Christian Living.

2. The Majesty of Jesus Christ, both as incarnate God and Lord and as the Savior of sinful humanity.
3. The lordship of the Holy Spirit.
4. The need for personal conversion.
5. The priority of evangelism for both individual Christians and the church as a whole.
6. The importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship, and growth.”

Timothy George described Evangelicals as a “worldwide family of Bible-believing Christians committed to sharing with everyone everywhere the transforming good news of new life in Jesus Christ, an utterly free gift that comes through faith alone in the crucified and risen savior.” Perhaps most telling, George Marsden, a historian of religion who has written extensively about Evangelicalism, defined an Evangelical simply as someone who admired Billy Graham. Despite the diversity of definitions, there is one aspect of Evangelicalism, implied by the word itself, that is generally accepted by all scholars of the topic: Evangelicalism maintains a strong commitment to missions and to the spread of its message around the world. As Douglas Sweeney states, “We are certainly not the only authentic Christians in the world ... But we are unique in our commitment to gospel witness around the world.” It is for this reason that Evangelicals are particularly important to the history of Protestantism in Latin America.²⁰

Pentecostalism emerged in the 1900s as the most influential sect of Evangelicalism in Latin America. Named after the Biblical Pentecost in which the disciples were given the ability to speak in tongues by the Holy Spirit, those who subscribe to Pentecostalism believe that speaking in tongues is a gift from God that denotes an individual who has been blessed by the Holy Spirit. This in-filling of the Holy Spirit would result in instantaneous missionaries who needed no

language training, and thus provide the means to reach every individual in the world quickly and effectively. Once all corners of the Earth had been reached by the gospel message, it was believed that Jesus would return, ushering in the Kingdom of God. This millennialist vision, first articulated by Charles Fox Parham in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901 and fully realized during William Seymour's Azusa Street Revival in 1906, seemed to many Evangelicals to be the future of Christianity.²¹

Pentecostalism quickly institutionalized, founding numerous denominations, the largest of which to date is the Assembly of God. This institutionalization did not slow down the growth of the movement, however, and Pentecostalism became the fastest-growing sect of the Evangelical movement, with numbers of Pentecostal converts in some Latin American countries skyrocketing. In Brazil, Pentecostals grew from several hundred in 1911 to nearly one hundred thousand believers in 1950. By the beginning of the current century, the Assemblies of God in Brazil claimed 14.4 million members. The numbers are similar in other Latin American nations, with thirteen percent of Mexicans and thirty-six percent of Chileans affiliated with Pentecostal churches by the twenty-first century.²²

In addition to evangelical movements associated with various Protestant denominations, such as Pentecostalism, many non-denominational mission groups were founded for the express purpose of evangelism among various groups. Groups such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, founded in 1877, and later Campus Crusade for Christ, founded in 1951, focused on ministries to

students and other young people. Today, both remain very active in mission and witness activities throughout Latin America. Additionally, non-denominational groups such as Central America Mission, founded in 1890, and Latin America Mission, founded in 1921, were created for the express purpose of reaching the peoples of Central and South America. All of these groups have been very successful, both in Latin America and around the world.²³

The success of these non-denominational Evangelical groups has been due, in large part, to the many departures from traditional Christian movements that are inherent to Evangelical practice. Evangelicals are far more flexible in how they approach their ministries, and that flexibility has paid off remarkably. The lack of any strong ties between these groups and specific denominations allows their members a freedom not possible within the confines of long established, restrictive doctrines. Many of these movements are also very interracial in their approach, which allows them to more easily relate to those they are proselytizing. Evangelical groups were also heavily reliant on the work and support of women in their missions, a condition that, historically, was not supported by either Catholic or mainline Protestant groups. Thus, the possibilities for evangelism grew even more. Finally, Evangelical missions are typically very concerned with the physical needs of the people they are working with, in addition to their spiritual wellbeing. Humanitarian efforts, such as medical care and social programs, including educational opportunities, are standard accompaniments to Evangelical missions, as is evident in the programs offered by Latin America Mission. Additionally, the behavioral codes espoused by most

Evangelical groups include the prohibition of alcohol, drugs, and illicit sex, which can drastically improve the lives of families. This dual approach to evangelism, later institutionalized in programs such as "Work and Witness," established by the Church of the Nazarene in 1974, made Evangelical groups particularly appealing to individuals struggling with poverty and marginalization.²⁴

The overall success of protestant groups since 1900 in Latin America has been remarkable. What used to be a society dominated by the Catholic Church is now showing significant growth in other religious sectors, with countries such as Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, and Brazil reporting more than ten percent of their population as Protestants, and others such as Guatemala and Belize reporting even larger percentages. These successes are once again changing the religious landscape of the continent.²⁵

Latin America Mission, one of the Evangelical missionary movements working in twentieth-century Latin America, owed its success to a variety of factors, both internal and external. The first of these factors concerns LAM's operating principles. LAM was heavily influenced by its Protestant roots, but was also willing to pursue an innovative and holistic approach to its missions. These foundations laid the groundwork for LAM's extensive social work, another factor of their success, which allowed missionaries to build personal relationships with Latin Americans that rendered them more accepting of LAM's spiritual message. These measures combined with a favorable social, political, and religious climate in Latin America to render LAM a success story in the Evangelical Mission

movement, an organization that has continued to minister in many Latin American nations into the twenty first century.

Latin America Mission is a somewhat unique organization in its structure and practices, as it disregards traditional mission affiliations by being nondenominational and symbiotic with other mission organizations. However, LAM also serves as a representative of Evangelical Protestant practices in Latin America and the relative success of their conversion efforts during the twentieth century. These two qualities make LAM an interesting facet of the religious environment in Latin America. While the body of literature concerning Protestant growth in Latin America is expanding, LAM is absent from this research with the exception of a few cursory sentences in several overview texts. As such, the information presented in the following pages is based almost entirely on internal memos and reports from LAM as well as other, more generalized Evangelical sources. These sources allow for a more detailed understanding of the Mission and how it perceived its own functions. However, there are also some notable limitations to these sources, as they preclude much discussion of local, Latin American and Catholic reactions to their efforts. Lack of Latin American and Catholic historiography aside, what follows is an exploration of Latin America Mission, largely from their own perspective.

Notes to Chapter One

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⁸ Liss, "The Friars, Christianity, and the Crown," 1975; Jacques LaFaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813*, trans. Benjamin Keen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 211-3.

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¹⁰ Richard E. Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969); Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Quotation taken from Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition*, 1969, 46. Luis N. Rivera, "National Providentialism and Messianism," in *A Violent Evangelism*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 42-62.

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- ¹⁴ González, *Christianity in Latin America*, 109-17; Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 26-7; Brading, *The First America*, 498-501.
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- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
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- ²¹ Sweeney, *American Evangelical Story*, 142-9.
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2. LATIN AMERICA MISSION: FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICES

The history of Latin America Mission begins at the turn of the twentieth century. Harry Strachan, a young Presbyterian living in Scotland, was preparing to enter the overseas mission field. He felt that God had called him to full-time evangelism, and he was single-minded in his drive to fulfill this calling. During his preparatory work in London, he was introduced to Susan Beamish, a young Irish woman who had also decided to pursue overseas missions after beginning to attend a Methodist church. Susan's calling was to Argentina, and although Harry first attempted to be a missionary to the Congo, ultimately he also ended up in Argentina. The couple married while serving with the Regions Beyond Missionary Society, a mission group founded in the nineteenth century by the Irish Protestant preacher Henry Grattan Guinness, in Tandil, a largely-European community of twelve thousand on the pampas of Argentina. Their responsibility was to preside over a small Protestant congregation of fourteen people, but Harry's ambitions would not allow him to settle for local work where he would only have access to a small number of people. As such, while Susan raised their fledgling family, Harry began to expand his evangelism beyond the small Argentine community where they lived.¹

As Harry's travels broadened, his passion for evangelism grew. He was wholly devoted to his mission work, often leaving his family for lengthy periods in order to preach and teach in increasingly distant regions of Latin America. While on a furlough trip to the United States, the Strachans came to the conclusion that

they could no longer serve with their mission society as Harry continued to feel called to itinerant evangelism rather than local work. With this decision made, the young family returned to Latin America, and after spending a year traveling through the continent, both Harry and Susan felt called to found a ministry in Costa Rica.²

Their decision to focus on Costa Rica was based largely on the need that the couple saw there. Central America Mission, an organization that had previously had a relatively strong presence in Costa Rica, had severely cut the number of missionaries that they supported in Costa Rica. While accounts vary on whether there were two missionaries or only one, all agree that the missionaries were female and preparing to leave the area. As such, the Strachans encountered an evangelistic void in Costa Rica, which they were more than happy to fill. With this in mind, Harry promptly moved his young family to a rented house on an unpaved street during the rainy season in the capitol city of San José. Less than a week after their arrival, Harry left the family in this tenuous situation to continue his ministry in Guatemala, relying on Susan to manage both the family and their mission work at the local level. Susan did not fail him, and immediately set about the work of founding the mission. Thus, in 1921, the Latin America Evangelization Campaign was established with the goal of evangelizing all of the Spanish-speaking nations of Latin America.³

Harry Strachan's call to evangelism was always central to his life and to his mission. He was a gifted and enthusiastic preacher, and maintained evangelistic campaigns and crusades throughout Central and South America for

the entirety of his life. His passionate pursuit of this itinerant lifestyle, while rendering him a near stranger to his own family, produced real results for the LAEC. He continually relied on these campaigns to influence the local populations, and, despite the fact that Latin America remained largely Roman Catholic during this period in time, their organization continued to grow. The LAEC extended their work into Colombia in 1937. Following this expansion, the organization was renamed "Latin America Mission" in 1938, a title that it retains to this day. Harry Strachan remained co-director with his wife Susan until his death in 1945. At this point, his son, R. Kenneth Strachan (Ken), took his place as co-director. When Susan died in 1950, Ken became General Director of LAM, and attempted to continue the traditions of parents. Ken, however, possessed a temperament that was much different than his father's, and the Mission evolved under his leadership.⁴

Ken Strachan's personality, strengths, and weaknesses become apparent through accounts of his youth. He spent a very happy childhood in Costa Rica, but when he turned fifteen, his father took him to the United States to attend school in Wheaton, Illinois. Education was very important to the Strachans, particularly Susan. While Ken often expressed his unhappiness at being forced to attend school, his mother never allowed him to seriously consider ending his education, no matter how badly he wanted to return to Costa Rica. Her hope was that Ken would follow in his father's footsteps, and when Ken expressed his intention to become a missionary, his mother responded "That would be a great joy to us, son... That would mean that you would be a missionary like your father.

(The last part of that sentence is best, son, for there are few missionaries like your father.)” Clearly, the Strachans had high expectations for their son.⁵

These hopes placed a great burden on Ken as a youth, because he was completely convinced of his own inadequacies. This low opinion of his own abilities was only amplified by comparison with his father. While Harry was an effective and engaging speaker, Ken was criticized for his speaking style. Even his father condemned him for not putting enough “background and pep” into his speaking. Despite these failings, however, Ken continued to prepare for mission work. He enrolled in the Evangelical Theological College, a seminary in Dallas, Texas, at his parents’ behest. At this seminary, he took classes in Evangelical theology, preaching, and Bible study. It was while he was attending this college that Ken began to realize his talents. He taught Sunday School to a group of twelve-year olds, and when he was successful in teaching them, he named it “an awfully big thrill” in a letter to his mother. Additionally, he organized a boys club focused on swimming that met at the Dallas YMCA. He was much more comfortable working with people on a personal level than preaching from a platform. These strengths and weaknesses would later influence the direction that he steered LAM during his term as General Director. ⁶

Latin America Mission, from its inception under the Strachans, was a continuously evolving organization, changing to meet the needs of the people it served. The shape and size of the organization was in constant flux as it adopted struggling missions and released others that had reached a degree of maturity and self-sufficiency. These fluctuations were not always simple for

LAM's workers. One missionary, Mary Gay, stated that her only criticism of LAM was "the fact that changes were so frequent, that very few people seemed to have a permanent assignment, that no one could ever feel sure of staying in one place or one job." However, while the change was not always smooth or easy, LAM's flexibility and willingness to operate outside of the traditional methods of evangelism contributed in no small measure to the success of the mission through the ensuing decades. As a report from 1970 on the purpose of LAM stated,

"We try to enlarge the missionary vision of the Church and encourage it to mobilize all its resources to reach out beyond its frontier... We believe our mission has been a pioneer in some significant ways... because its leadership has been open to new ideas ... and courageous enough to implement ideas and strategies that go beyond what may have characterized the majority of independent faith missionary groups."

This desire to "reach out beyond its frontier" led to two major restructurings of the mission, the first of which occurred in 1959 with the establishment of "Evangelism-in-Depth" during R. Kenneth Strachan's term as General Director.⁷

Evangelism-in-Depth was a direct result of Ken's different leadership style. This program retained his father's focus on Evangelism as the most important goal of the mission, but changed the way LAM approached this goal. While Ken did lead a few Evangelical campaigns in Latin America in the tradition of his father, he was never comfortable in that position. Because of Ken's insecurity with his ability to direct large Evangelical Crusades, he moved LAM away from this reliance on individual evangelists leading soul-saving campaigns. Instead, Evangelism-in-Depth focused on training the laity to "become the true right arm

of the pastor.” LAM also instituted religious education programs that made each new convert an instrument of the Mission, furthering the spread of their message. New adherents were organized into prayer cells, taught how to share their faith, and encouraged to go door-to-door distributing literature. This new method, which was focused locally and made efficient use of all resources at hand, made it possible to reach vast numbers of people much more quickly and effectively, and was the major legacy that R. Kenneth Strachan bequeathed to the Mission. This legacy was clear through the growth of the organization, but also through the solidification of the acceptance and positive reputation of LAM in Evangelical circles. This status is evident in the fact that, by 1966, despite being a relatively small mission with 144 missionaries in the field, LAM was one of only eight mission societies that could claim membership in both the Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, organizations based in North America that promoted and facilitated mission work.⁸

The second major restructuring began in the late 1960s under the directorship of Horace L. Fenton, Jr. This restructuring was not a change in evangelistic methods as the previous one had been, but rather a change in leadership and administrative methods. The work of LAM had long been overseen by directors who were not native to Latin America. This had been necessary in the early years of the Mission when the membership remained small as there were few individuals with proper training to take leadership positions. Additionally, a degree of ethnocentrism and a sense of spiritual

superiority played a role in maintaining foreign leadership. Susan Strachan informed her son that she did not believe that Latin Americans were trustworthy enough to employ as missionaries, an opinion her son clearly did not share as was evident through his Evangelism-in-Depth campaign. However, even in 1970, Fenton, the General Director, questioned whether or not the necessary "Latin leadership" was available. Despite these uncertainties, Fenton and the rest of LAM leadership saw a need to shift much of the control of the Mission to local leaders.⁹

The shift officially took place in 1971, with LAM turning over the Mission to local leadership with the support and input of a LAM committee based in the United States. The headquarters of the States-side committee was located in Florida, but all members remained very active in the leadership of the Mission. However, by giving over the regional control of LAM into the hands of the local populace, the organization became even more successful as people who were intimately familiar with the regional customs and beliefs were now free to choose paths for LAM that would be well understood, appreciated, and accepted by their friends, family, and neighbors. As W. Dayton Roberts, who became the first general secretary of the restructured mission, stated in 1971, by restructuring in this fashion "each national entity, together with the international ministries, can carry on the best of the LAM tradition, but without being hampered by the present LAM structure." Thus, the LAM of today would be unrecognizable to Harry and Susan Strachan in its scope and administration, but the core beliefs and goals of the mission have remained true to their original vision.¹⁰

These core beliefs and goals deserve further discussion and consideration as they suffuse the entirety of the mission's history and accomplishments. One of the primary goals of Latin America Mission is to be inclusive. As such, the Mission defines itself as nondenominational, although it does limit that definition by also claiming to be Evangelical. Because they have never affiliated themselves with any specific denomination, the Mission created their own doctrinal statement which must be adhered to by all members of their mission. This doctrinal statement includes eight points, all of which are relatively standard and familiar to Evangelical groups.¹¹

First, the Mission includes a straightforward statement of belief in one God, expressed through the Trinity. They accept that Jesus Christ, both fully God and fully human, was born, lived, died, and was resurrected, and they believe that he will come again. They hold that that all of humanity has sinned and suffers for it, but that Jesus Christ offers atonement for sin. This atonement, reached through repentance and faith, allows those who believe to receive eternal life, while also allowing that unbelievers will be eternally separated from God. Finally, LAM acknowledges as part of their belief the important role of the Holy Spirit, who "dwells in those who believe, equipping and empowering them for lives of holiness and fruitful service." These doctrinal statements form the basis of the Mission's Christian belief. All who work for LAM, regardless of their personal denomination or faith convictions, must annually affirm their unqualified agreement with the Mission's statement of faith. The acceptance of this statement is the only theological requirement of LAM.¹²

In addition to this doctrinal statement, the Mission does address a few other issues that could potentially be the source of disagreements, most importantly the question of Spiritual Gifts. The Spiritual Gifts, found in chapter twelve of the Biblical book of First Corinthians, are a source of division among Evangelical branches. Indeed, some belief systems exist as separate branches of Evangelical Christianity due to their stance on Spiritual gifts. The most well-known of these branches, Pentecostalism, was the source of some contention in years past in Latin America Mission; many were uncertain if the Pentecostal penchant for speaking in tongues would interfere with the Mission's goals. However, the official statement of LAM in 2010 is that "LAM rejoices in and affirms the expression of all of the gifts, while recognizing that extreme positions have resulted in divisiveness." In short, the Mission is willing to accept gifts of the Holy Spirit as long as said gift does not create difficulties or take on "a more important role than Scripture does."¹³

With these core beliefs in place, the next foundational layer of LAM is its mission. Harry and Susan Strachan's original focus on the evangelization of Central and Latin America, beginning with Costa Rica, has been continually reaffirmed throughout the history of the mission. R. Kenneth Strachan, the second generation General Director of LAM, was driven by this concept when he launched the "Evangelism-in-Depth" campaign in 1958, not long after taking the reins of command from his late father and mother. The focus on evangelism is also clear from the organization's numerous statements that were issued throughout the years. In 1970, LAM reiterated its purpose, stating that

evangelism was “in a place of centrality and priority” and speaking to the commitment of their missionaries to “the primacy of evangelism.” Currently, LAM lists two foundations for all its work, the first of which is promoting evangelism. Thus, this commitment and focus has not changed throughout the decades of the Mission’s existence.¹⁴

This core mission of evangelism in Latin America, however, hinges on one major assumption: that Roman Catholicism is not a true form of Christianity. It appears that the Strachans did not even consider the Roman Catholic Churches in Central America when they chose Costa Rica as their base of operations. Their only concern was that the only Evangelical missionaries working in the area were preparing to leave. Indeed, their son, R. Kenneth Strachan, acknowledged in an internal memo that no official LAM statement concerning Roman Catholicism was ever created. What this implies is that to the Strachans there was no conceivable reason to be concerned about infringing on already Christian territories because Catholicism simply was not Christian.¹⁵

The Strachans’ opinion was shared by much of the Evangelical Protestant population throughout the world during this period, evident from numerous publications from the middle of the twentieth century. The front page of a quarterly magazine published by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship in 1947 proclaimed “Latin America—Nearest Neighbor Yet Still Unreached: Newly awakened interest in these adjacent countries raises the question—Will the Ambassadors of Christ rise to a long-overdue Christian Good-Neighbor Policy?” The article went on to state that the Roman Catholic church “has had every

opportunity to show what she can do to uplift the people—without competitor, backed by the State, unlimited opportunity!,” and then accused the Catholic Church of abusing its power, favoring the wealthy classes and seeking political power. In short, in the opinion of Evangelicals, if Catholicism was once a Christian denomination, it could no longer be identified as such.¹⁶

These sentiments are further supported by other documents and publications, carefully saved and discussed by the members of LAM. Sensationalist claims like “Franco and Peron[sic] wear boots of Hitler and Mussolini in the Vatican campaign to seize dictatorial power in Latin America” appear next to accusations that the Catholic Church staged Bible burnings, as evidence that the Catholic Church desired to hold all religious authority. These allegations reveal a deep distrust of Catholicism in Evangelical Protestant circles, explicitly where Latin America is concerned, and helped to inform the decisions of the Mission directors.¹⁷

This general distrust gave way to burgeoning interest in ecumenism and cooperation in the 1960s. This trend toward ecumenism was largely driven by the advent of Vatican II, the ecumenical council announced by Pope John XXIII in 1959. Among the many outcomes of this council were some changes that were of particular interest to Protestant and Evangelical groups. First, Vatican II acknowledged that, while Catholicism was the one true church, many spiritual truths could also be found outside the confines of Catholicism. This admission provided enough leeway for some Protestant groups to gain a new open-mindedness about Catholicism. Additionally, Vatican II declared the importance

of scripture and Bible study to the lives of Catholics, both clergy and laity. This was another area where Protestant individuals could now find common ground with Catholicism.¹⁸

Because of these changes, among others, Vatican II resulted in a widespread reevaluation of the Protestant relationship with Catholicism. Protestant denominations around the world began to acknowledge Catholicism as a branch of Christianity. These changes did not go unnoticed by LAM; instead, it was the topic of much discussion and concern. An internal memo from 1961 posed the question, if Roman Catholicism is, indeed, Christian, then "what are we doing as Protestant Missionaries in Latin America?" Another memo from two years later revealed that this issue was still under discussion, but in this instance the author, David M. Howard, came to the conclusion that Roman Catholicism still could not be considered Christian. This, then, began a whole new series of questions about how LAM should choose to relate to those ecumenically-minded groups, such as the Methodists in Peru, that were willing to work jointly with Catholics.¹⁹

Despite numerous conferences held concerning ecumenism, the leaders of LAM remained reluctant to acknowledge Catholicism as Christian and unsure of how to approach ecumenism in general. In an internal memo from LAM Director H.L. Fenton dated March 28, 1967, the director stated

"While as a mission...we want to be aware of and responsive to the evidence of change in the Roman Catholic Church...and the evidence of true faith seen in numbers of them, nevertheless we do not care to take any position that could be interpreted as a

recognition of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America as a sister Church in Christ.”

This statement confirmed the general unwillingness of LAM to accept Catholicism as a spiritual equal, while indicating a newfound readiness to accept that Catholicism was making attempts to reform. This sentiment was confirmed in a memo sent several months later in which Fenton acknowledged the possibility that Catholicism could be “a part of the body of Christ with many grievous errors and heresies” which forced careful vigilance in interactions with the Roman Catholic Church. Despite this later evidence of a slight, but grudging, acceptance of Catholicism, it is clear that LAM continued to consider it a lesser, and dangerous, belief system, which is evinced by the Mission’s continued presence in Latin America.²⁰

While LAM has remained focused on evangelism despite ecumenical questions and an ever-changing organization, evangelism is not the only facet of LAM’s mission and goals. Another important strategy of the Mission has been innovation. This creativity and striving towards growth has been evident in the Mission’s constant evolution toward different evangelism paradigms. LAM experimented with different methods, approaching them almost scientifically to determine which methods returned the best results. Evangelism-in-Depth, along with its later updates, was a prime example of this.²¹

When R. Kenneth Strachan came up with this pioneering ministry, he ran test missions first in Nicaragua and then in Costa Rica and Guatemala before implementing it throughout the LAM territories. The committee for “Operation

Outreach,” the exploratory campaign for Evangelism-in-Depth, carefully recorded statistics in order to compare the three nations so that they could determine the relative success of their programs. The population of each country was listed alongside the number of Evangelical churches in each nation in order to develop a basic understanding of the environment into which each team was going. The Mission was also interested to know the number of prayer cells that existed in each country, as they considered prayer to be as important to the campaign as the rest of the advance planning that was occurring. They then recorded how many individuals attended the retreats and conferences that LAM sponsored, along with the number who attended the classes that they provided. These statistics, among others, were analyzed and discussed in order to better understand the positive and negative aspects of their methods.²²

From these results, the Mission made decisions about their next evangelization goals. For example, despite the fact that the population of Guatemala was higher than that of Nicaragua and Costa Rica combined and attendance at evangelism events in Guatemala was proportionally higher than attendance in the other nations, the actual professions of faith in Guatemala were only marginally higher than that of other nations. This relatively low ratio of faith professions to event attendance implied either an ineffective ministry or an already highly evangelized population. When the high number of Guatemalan Evangelical churches (1,027 as compared to a combined 311 between Costa Rica and Nicaragua) was factored in, the logical conclusion was that Guatemala had already been effectively reached, and LAM had to consider whether or not

missions to Guatemala were an effective use of Mission resources. The result of this almost scientific way of thinking about missionization was a completely new approach to evangelism that utilized all available resources in order to reach more people in a way that was effective and meaningful to them, and it is a strategy that has been adopted by mission groups of many different affiliations and has continued to be employed into the twenty-first century in Latin America, the United States and Canada, Europe, Africa, Australia, and Asia.²³

Innovation, however, is not solely evident in the methods of evangelism utilized by the LAM hierarchy. The Mission has relied on financial gifts, both at the local level and at an international level, in order to operate. This system did not result in vast monetary resources. Thus, the directors, missionaries, and fieldworkers often had to be creative in their planning in order to maintain the organization and make the best use of limited funds. This particular brand of innovation was evident in LAM ministries, such as their Costa Rican orphanage. This orphanage was located on a working farm that provided for many of the food needs of the children and workers, as well as a constructive and educational environment. Later, as more crops and animals were added to the farm, the orphanage even became a source of income for the Mission. LAM's willingness to not be constrained by conventional thought helped them to make the most efficient use of their resources, allowing their ministries to "exhibit a high degree of creativity and innovation," which was both a goal and a need for the Mission.²⁴

In addition to innovation and creativity, the Mission has committed to being inclusive, holistic, and partnership-oriented. LAM uses these words, "inclusive"

and “holistic,” to explain their approach to the people on whom they focus their ministry efforts. The Mission has been inclusive in the fact that they evangelize among all people using all methods available to them, and they have strived to be holistic, meaning that they have been “focused on ministry to the whole person in his/her whole life.” Thus, Latin America Mission made a conscious effort to meet the needs of the individual outside of the spiritual realm through schools, medical facilities, and other programs, and, additionally, actively sought people from all levels of society. Written into a Systematic Evangelistic Program guide from the 1970s was the expectation that there would be “special efforts to reach definite sectors of the population, such as: women, university students, children, professionals, businessmen, laborers, prisoners, hospital patients, etc.,” making it clear that it is their ideal that all groups of people can be reached by their message.²⁵

Further, LAM has owed much of its success to its willingness and ability to share responsibilities with other local evangelical groups and foreign missions groups. For example, while Latin America Mission helped support the school system in Colombia by providing funds and a few staff members, the majority of the youth programs associated with the schools were sponsored by the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean. However, as a LAM report on Colombia stated, “If Mission personnel and funds were to be pulled out tomorrow...the mission school in Cartagena and Bible institute in Sincelejo would probably find it impossible to continue functioning.” In this instance, as in many

others, without cooperation from other Evangelical groups, some of the LAM ministries would not have been able to continue.²⁶

The inclusiveness of LAM, however, does not extend to tolerance of other religious persuasions, as is evident in their approach toward Catholicism. While this is not explicitly discussed in strategy and mission statements, this separation falls under the LAM goal of upholding the Bible as the ultimate authority. The various directors of LAM agreed that Catholicism did not hold Scripture to be the final authority on the Christian life, and thus Catholicism fell outside of the Evangelical perception of acceptable religious beliefs.²⁷

While LAM has strived to be innovative, holistic, inclusive, and partner-oriented in its evangelism, none of these things would be possible without the people that have staffed the Mission. These individuals come from many different backgrounds and from all over the world. The workers are overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, Evangelical Protestants, but that is often the extent of their shared backgrounds. While this diversity has sometimes resulted in disagreements over policies and doctrinal issues, it also has contributed a great deal to the Mission's creativity and energy, and thus is an aspect of LAM that remains important to this day.

Originally, LAM accepted nearly anyone willing to serve provided that they accepted the doctrinal beliefs of the Mission. These missionaries were assigned somewhat randomly, and most had multiple jobs due to the fact that the fledgling Mission simply did not have enough employees to be able to separate evangelists from teachers and office workers. In order to increase the number of

LAM's missionaries and resources, missionaries on furlough toured the United States preaching to college students and church congregations, hoping to gain prayer support, monetary support, and actual missionary volunteers. These tours proved to be tremendously successful in efforts to recruit new missionaries, and, by the 1950s, LAM was becoming overwhelmed by candidates. As this phenomenon continued, LAM found that they were not only able to continue expanding, but they were also able to be more discerning in their choices for missionaries, who could then be assigned to more specific roles in the Mission.²⁸

In light of these new options for specialization, LAM, in the spirit of innovatively making use of what is available to them, generally placed workers, whether volunteers or paid missionaries, in positions that made the best use of their skills. Mission volunteers who previously taught elementary school were assigned similar tasks by LAM, and those with administrative experience were used in positions on the bureaucratic side of the Mission. By the turn of the twenty-first century, LAM was filling positions that ranged from standard mission work like education and church planting to areas such as micro-finance and economic development.²⁹

Many LAM missionaries and fieldworkers have traditionally possessed degrees in mission-related work from Evangelical colleges and universities, but it is not a requirement for service. LAM now provides a brief orientation to familiarize new workers with their history, mission, and goals, and does make language schools, typically located at LAM headquarters, available to their workers, but that is the extent of the training that they offer. The abilities, skills,

and gifts of the men and women who volunteer are completely due to their own education and life experience prior to entering the mission field. These skills were often very important to the LAM workers, especially in earlier decades when they were entering countries that were not necessarily amenable to Protestant proselytization. A 1949 letter between missionaries recounts the story of a missionary nurse returning to the United States from Colombia on leave. When she attempted to return to Colombia to continue her mission work, she was given the following options by Colombian authorities: stay out of missions and work only as a professional nurse or stay out of Colombia. As such, without her professional skills in the medical field, this woman would not have been allowed to return to Colombia.³⁰

Additionally, LAM has actively encouraged both women and young people to be a part of their ministries throughout the history of the movement. Susan Strachan was indispensable in the foundation of the Mission, and women have continued to play a vital role in LAM's progress. According to Marian Gold Chapman, a LAM missionary, women were even encouraged to take on leadership positions, and were generally well respected. The Mission also actively seeks the help and ideas of young people throughout the territories it reaches in order to better relate its youth ministries to its target audience, and, beginning with the term of R. Kenneth Strachan, the mission focused heavily on bringing local individuals into the Mission in leadership roles to help LAM relate more effectively to the people of Central and Latin America. Thus, the Mission is

populated by people from many different social, educational, and ethnic backgrounds who work together to keep the mission vital.³¹

LAM's beliefs, combined with their mission and workers, allowed the mission to expand from its headquarters in San José, Costa Rica into Colombia in 1937, and these two nations became the focus of most of LAM's energy and resources. However, the Mission continued to grow, moving into Panama in 1954 and then Mexico in 1964. Originally, LAM avoided non-Spanish speaking countries when placing missionaries and resources, but in later decades LAM did include Brazil on its list of evangelized territories. In addition to the already mentioned nations, as of 2010, the Mission has ministries in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, Venezuela and the United States. The Mission, in partnership with other evangelical groups, has recently looked to expand into Chile, El Salvador, Haiti, and Nicaragua.³²

The original drive for setting up a base of operations in Costa Rica has been previously discussed, and the expansion can be easily explained by the fact that, beginning with the Strachans, LAM has also focused on effectively evangelizing as many people as possible. However, it is perhaps more instructive to look at some of the nations that LAM does not list as ministry locations. Some, such as Guatemala, were already heavily missionized by other Evangelical groups. This is clear from the frantic rate of growth in Guatemalan Protestantism, with adherents multiplying by a factor of seven between 1960 and 1985. With such an astounding rate of conversion, there was no need for LAM to expend resources in Guatemala.³³

While simple lack of lack of need was enough to largely prevent LAM expansion in Guatemala, there are different reasons for the neglect of other nations, such as Nicaragua. In 1958, Nicaragua became the testing ground for Evangelism-in-Depth with R. Kenneth Strachan's pioneering, two-year evangelism campaign. Nicaragua had fewer evangelical churches and fewer prayer cells, or groups that would commit to praying for the campaign, than the later test nations possessed, and fewer individuals participated in the campaign, but the Mission still received a positive response from their efforts. However, despite this test run in Nicaragua, LAM did not pursue further ministry options in that country. One of the major reasons for this was the fact that opportunities for LAM were somewhat limited in Nicaragua in the decades after the Mission got its Evangelism-in-Depth program up and running. Beginning in 1961, Nicaragua was thrown into chaos due to civil war. The *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, or Sandinistas, had risen to challenge the corrupt and abusive Somoza dynasty. The struggle was long and bloody, but in 1979 the Sandinistas were victorious. Their prize, however, was a country in shambles. So, this new government promptly set to meeting the needs of its people by providing secular literacy programs and expanded healthcare, effectively disabling two of LAM's favorite tools for gaining access to a territory. Thus, largely due to political reasons, LAM remained absent from the Nicaraguan religious landscape.³⁴

Despite a few exceptions, Latin America Mission has been largely successful in its mission to evangelize Latin America. Although the Mission of today has changed a great deal from its origins, the core goals and values

remain the same. LAM's commitment to reach as many people as possible with whatever resources are available combined with its willingness to innovate and pioneer new methods has served it well. These goals and beliefs are the foundation of LAM's social programs, and continue to support the growth and accomplishments of the Mission. These social programs, including schools, seminaries, orphanages, and medical facilities, comprise the majority of LAM's outreach to the people of Latin America and set them apart from other mission groups. As such, they form the core of the organization's evangelism, and are an integral part of understanding the success of LAM.

Notes to Chapter Two

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3. MINISTERING TO BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT

The success of Latin America Mission, while heavily dependent on their innovative and unstructured mission style, was also due to the fact that LAM understood the importance of meeting people's physical needs as well as their spiritual and emotional needs. LAM established itself in an environment where many individuals were struggling to meet the basic requirements of life. In difficult social climates, such as that, proselytizing is not particularly effective. People who are worrying about fundamental concerns, such as illness, are not in a position to be too concerned with their lives beyond their earthly existence. With this in mind, LAM made a concerted effort to first work toward providing for these people's basic necessities, which then allowed people to take an interest in LAM's spiritual message by alleviating their worry while simultaneously building a trust relationship.

LAM worked to meet these needs through their numerous social programs, which represented many different concerns of the Latin American populace. Perhaps the most all-encompassing of these ministries was the establishment of the *Hogar Bíblico* (Bible Home) in Costa Rica in 1932. The Bible Home was an orphanage and daycare (added around 1970), located on a two hundred acre farm owned by the Mission outside of San José de la Montaña, a small town near San José. This farm was one of the first purchases Susan Strachan made upon the establishment of LAM, and was an ideal location to create a home for children who were in need of caretakers, even if only for short periods while parents were at work. In addition to a safe and stable home life,

the orphanage provided spiritual teachings by the missionaries who staffed the Bible Home as well as educational opportunities through the Enrique Strachan School, opened at the Home in 1937. With the contributions of the working farm on which it was located in the form of eggs, vegetables, milk, and extra income, the orphanage became a self-sufficient community that was able to meet the needs of orphaned or abused children in a holistic way. This was a very effective ministry to children, as well as any family that they may have had, as was evident through an anecdote related in a letter from the Bible Home. The mother of one of the children who was enrolled in day programs at the Bible Home asked the directors to please write out a prayer that she could say at the table before meals, as her three-year old son refused to eat at home because they did not give thanks for the meal before eating. In this way, LAM's impression on a very young child led to opportunities to teach his mother about their spiritual beliefs.¹

The Mission also offered other programs aimed toward providing stability and spirituality for children and young adults. These programs are exemplified by *Escuadrón de Servicio Cristiano*, an organization for boys and young men that was similar to the Christian Service Brigade in the United States. Established in 1947, *Escuadrón* operated under the belief that "the best way to win a boy is through his buddy." This boys' club organized the members into groups numbering between six and eight, which met under the leadership of an older guide. These groups would do activities together, such as playing games and studying for their classes, but they also prayed and read the Bible. It was the role of the leader to try to encourage the boys toward Evangelical Christianity,

and many guides were successful in this goal. For example, in Costa Rica in 1956 a young man named Moisés Gonzales agreed to lead an *Escuadrón* group that was made up of a “very needy” group that “would try the patience of an experienced leader.” Despite these less than ideal circumstances, Gonzales was able to report four conversions among his group within his first two months of service. Stories such as this convinced LAM of the importance of youth programs, and the Mission considered these programs integral to their attempts to reach Latin American youth.²

These two social programs barely scratch the surface of LAM's ministries, and while they were considered significant, they were not the most important aspects of the Mission's social efforts. LAM focused the majority of the resources allocated for social work on two endeavors: educational pursuits and medical facilities. These were areas in which the original founders, Harry and Susan Strachan, perceived the greatest needs in the areas in which they were working, and they were the projects that provided LAM with its most effective results. Both schools and hospitals or clinics provided opportunities to use a service to the body or mind to create the foundation for a relationship based on trust, which could then be parlayed into an opportunity to share the Evangelical faith. The first social project that LAM undertook concerned education, a move which was the foundation for a widespread network of educational facilities all over Central and South America.

As has already been established by the Strachans' insistence that their own son, Ken, obtain a good quality education at American schools, education

was deeply important to the founders of Latin America Mission. However, this focus on education was also clear through the activities of LAM, beginning in the second year of the Mission's existence. In the area where the Strachans had settled, the only school that they considered appropriate for the three Strachan children to attend was a Methodist school for boys. This school was considered suitable because the Strachans generally approved of Methodist doctrine; at the very least, to Harry and Susan, a Methodist school was far preferable to sending their children to any Catholic school. Their daughter Grace, however, was without similar options for an education. This personal concern for the well-being of her daughter only enhanced Susan's distress over the lack of educational opportunities for the Costa Rican youth. This consideration for the young people's welfare became the initial drive for the establishment of a school as part of the Mission. The obvious need for school systems in Costa Rica only compounded the Strachans' earlier conviction of the "urgent need of trained nationals," a requirement that was impossible to fulfill without adequate educational facilities.³

With these factors in mind, the founders of LAM set about establishing educational opportunities throughout Central America. The first step toward this goal was the institution of short-term Bible training conferences that were held in conjunction with Harry Strachan's evangelistic campaigns. These campaigns began in 1921 and continued until the outbreak of World War II. These classes met in the mornings for the duration of the campaign and offered rudimentary classes in Bible study and ministry. While these short-term classes were an

important first step toward furthering education and a helpful addition to Harry's other campaigns, they were insufficient for LAM's greater goal of training up a new generation of local evangelical leaders.⁴

Less than two years after the evangelistic campaigns were initiated, LAM took its second step toward accomplishing its educational goals. The fledgling Mission had few resources, but Susan had complete faith that the support for a school would appear as needed. As she wrote to a friend, "I cannot doubt that this thing is of God, and so I know that He will send us enough money to keep the girls when He sends them to us." Thus, in March of 1923, Susan established the "Women's Bible Training School." The first group of students was composed of eight young women, six from Costa Rica and two from El Salvador, all eager to gain an education. They met in the Strachan home in San José for that entire year until the construction of the first LAM building in 1924.⁵

While Susan was busy overseeing the first year of the Women's Bible Training School, Harry was in Managua, Nicaragua directing an evangelistic campaign. In the short-term training programs that the Mission sponsored during the evangelistic campaigns, Harry identified a group of eight young men who possessed the potential to be ministers and evangelists in the future. Harry felt that it was imperative that they receive further instruction with a strong, evangelical foundation. As such, he decided to convert the Women's Bible Training School into a co-educational facility. The training school was renamed *Institute Bíblico de Costa Rica*, and it grew steadily over the next few years, in both number and diversity. By 1930, the Institute had a student body of forty

individuals who represented eleven countries and eight different denominations or missions.⁶

The educational standards of the Institute increased as the school grew, facilitated by the addition of seminary-trained faculty members. In 1941, the school underwent another name change to *Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano*, a title that reflected the rising scholastic standards. The term “seminary” was not meant to imply equality with North American theological institutions, but was merely reflective of the relatively high level of theological education available by Latin American standards. The comparatively high academic standards were stressed to an even greater degree in 1954 when the Seminario began requiring that applicants have some secondary education, although for many years it was not uncommon for the school to disregard this requirement.⁷

The Seminario focused on Bible and ministerial courses, with only a cursory nod to general education through its grammar and literature classes. The majority of the curriculum was taken up with church history, Christian doctrine, methods of teaching and preaching, and Bible study. The Seminario also offered music theory and singing courses designed to facilitate ministry, as many of these students would not have the luxury of having a separate ministry team in charge of music when they left the school to serve a congregation or mission field. In addition to these classes, which were developed for the male students, the Seminario held classes in home economics and nursing for the female students who attended in preparation for further training in nursing at the Clínica Bíblica. The result was a vocational school designed to manufacture

evangelists, preachers, and missionary nurses, which handily fulfilled the original goal of the Strachans: to train a generation of local leaders who could further the Evangelical movement in Latin America.⁸

While the physical school was an integral part of meeting LAM's goals of long-term evangelization in Latin America, the Seminario provided another valuable service that greatly extended its influence: correspondence courses. In 1929, LAM promised that "a correspondence Bible course will be added as soon as possible to meet the need of scattered believers who are far from help in the study of the Word." The courses were inaugurated shortly thereafter, and the first twelve students graduated from the course in 1934. This opportunity was very well received throughout Latin America, and by its second year the course enrolled students from every Latin American country. The classes taught through correspondence ranged from basic introductory Bible and doctrinal courses to intermediate preparatory work for an advanced seminary education. The correspondence courses remained an integral part of the Seminario until 1966, when the newly created LAM Educational Division assumed control.⁹

Along with the rest of LAM, the Seminario "nationalized" (came under the control of Latin Americans rather than foreign missionaries) in the 1970s, and direct oversight and control of the school changed hands from foreign missionaries to local administrators. This change resulted in the same benefits for the Seminario that the rest of LAM experienced, and the school continued to produce educated graduates ready to lead the next generation of Latin American Evangelicals. However, after the school nationalized, some of the instructors

and administrators became increasingly swayed by Liberation Theology, a movement within the Catholic Church which relied heavily on Marxism, two influences that Evangelical groups were decidedly uncomfortable with. As ideas stemming from Liberation Theology made their way into lectures and policies, the Evangelical groups that associated with the school became increasingly nervous about these “inappropriate” influences. As such, increasing numbers of Evangelical mission societies and denominations withdrew their financial support of the Seminario, unwilling to be associated with anything even remotely tied to Liberation Theology. Finally, in 1979, LAM joined the other Evangelical groups in withdrawing public support of the school, but the Mission did continue to send some missionaries to work at the Seminario.¹⁰

While the Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano was the result of LAM’s earliest educational pursuits, it was far from the only educational program that the Mission established and supported. Following LAM’s expansion into Colombia, the Mission there was not immediately focused on providing educational opportunities. However, within a few years it became clear through field reports that there was a real need for educational opportunities in Colombia. As the LAM headquarters in Colombia reported in 1941, “There is no greater need amongst the believers than that of schools for their children.” A 1943 statement by a LAM missionary confirms this need: “For children of believers it is certainly the mission’s duty to provide at least elementary schooling.” Additionally, Susan Strachan herself saw the importance of school systems in Colombia, stating “In view of government restrictions prohibiting the entrance of

Protestant missionaries in Colombia, we need to build up the nationals through an intensification of the educational program.” Thus, in addition to simple need for education, LAM perceived this as an opportunity to evangelize people they would otherwise be unable to reach. Therefore, conscious of the extent of the need for education in Colombia, the Mission began planning an education program.¹¹

Their first step was to establish a girls' school in Cartagena in 1948 to provide Evangelical educational opportunities for young women in Colombia. Following the foundation of this school, LAM debated whether or not to establish a boys' school as well. While they recognized the educational need, they were also concerned about the financial commitment necessary to found another school. However, in 1955 LAM decided to provide an Evangelical educational environment for boys despite the Mission's monetary concerns. Both schools remained relatively small, aiming to maintain student populations of around one hundred fifty students, and focused their curriculum on classes such as Church History and Bible study while still offering classes in grammar, mathematics, and other general education classes. With the foundation of the boys' school, all of the Protestant Evangelical children living near Cartagena were given the opportunity to receive an education in an environment that did not challenge their Evangelical beliefs.¹²

These Colombian schools faced the same hardships that all Mission ministries shared, most importantly insufficient funding. While LAM's records and reports from this period reflect financial hardships, they are not explicit as to the

cause of these difficulties. It appears, however, that LAM was experiencing problems due to increasing commitments to ministries and projects that exceeded the Mission's budget. There was a pervasive attitude among the LAM hierarchy that, because they were doing God's work, God would provide the necessary resources to continue that work. As such, they often struck out in faith, trusting that the necessary funds would appear when the time was right. While this attitude speaks to their Evangelical beliefs, in reality it was not always practical. During the 1950s, LAM was undertaking numerous new projects in addition to the schools in Colombia, including a new round of evangelical campaigns throughout the continent, preparations for Evangelism-in-Depth, the recent foundation of *Editorial Caribe* (LAM's publishing house) in 1949 and subsequent establishment of bookstores, the foundation of the Caribbean Bible Center in Colombia and the Colegio Monterrey in San José, extension of mission activity into Panama, and a new ministry in New York City for the Hispanic population. These new programs and projects, in addition to many others, all required additional funding over the Mission's previous budget, and it seems that LAM's efforts to raise money were insufficient to keep up with the demand from these new undertakings.¹³

Therefore, due to these financial issues, the schools were forced to wait for improvements, supplies, and even housing until the necessary resources were available. LAM's projection for the costs associated with constructing the girls' school alone was more than ninety thousand dollars, an amount that was not easy for a nonprofit organization to raise. In 1964, nearly two decades after

its foundation, the girls' school was still waiting for funds to finish building a wall around the school in order to provide increased security to both the teachers and students. This security was especially important as the girls' school had become a target of robberies in 1961. Even lower on LAM's priority list was the boys' school, which was still meeting in rented buildings during the 1960s. Construction on the first building for the boys' school, a dormitory, did not begin until 1967, and it was finally completed and ready for use in 1968.¹⁴

These financial difficulties were only compounded by the other difficulties LAM, and its schools, were facing in Colombia. Evangelicals faced a much larger degree of animosity in Colombia than they had in Costa Rica, experiencing attacks that ranged from construction halts to church burnings and physical attacks on ministers. Additionally, more than one hundred sixty schools established by various Evangelical groups had been shut down by the Colombian government in the 1940s and 1950s. This "persecution," as Evangelicals perceived it, stemmed from the social and political climate of Colombia.¹⁵

During the twentieth century, Colombia was controlled by Liberal factions from 1930 to the mid-1940s. This period proved to be very advantageous for Evangelical Protestant mission groups, as Liberalism in Latin America typically attempted to reduce the power and influence of the Catholic Church, and consequently promoted Protestant groups as a religious alternative. Therefore, this period saw considerable growth in the Protestant presence in Colombia, including the extension of LAM's ministries into this nation. However, the Conservative party gained control of the Colombian government in 1946 due to

Liberal infighting and a series of strategic moves by Conservative leader Laureano Gómez, a “consummate politician.” Columbia’s return to conservatism created difficulties for the Evangelicals, as the authoritarian Gómez government (beginning in 1950) promoted Catholicism and did not tolerate opposition. This new government support only increased the antagonism between Catholic and Evangelical groups, and led to numerous conflicts between them.¹⁶

While Evangelicals were not without blame in the situation as they encouraged anti-Catholic sentiment, the Catholic Church took this antagonism to new extremes. Under Gómez’s protection, the Church expanded its control over Colombia’s education system, accounting in part for the numerous closures of Evangelical schools. Additionally, priests encouraged violent behaviors among their parishioners, as was evident in March of 1952 when three priests led a mob of children to a Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Ibagué and encouraged them to throw stones at the building, resulting in severe damage to the building. This was all accomplished while local civil authorities looked the other way. Furthermore, as Protestants were typically associated with Liberals, many were victimized directly by the government as the Conservatives attempted to consolidate their power in Colombia.¹⁷

In this hostile environment, the existing LAM schools in Colombia had a difficult relationship with the Colombian government. New LAM missionaries assigned to the Colombian school were often denied access to the country by the government, making it difficult for the school to augment its teaching staff.

Furthermore, the schools had been fighting for government accreditation for decades. The Colombian Ministry of Education refused to officially accept LAM's school, in large part because the Mission was unable to hire the necessary number and caliber of teachers required, but also because of inadequate facilities. Both of these deficiencies were largely due to insufficient monetary resources. Thus began a vicious cycle for the schools, with the lack of accreditation and facilities making it impossible to enroll a greater number of students, which made it impossible for the school to bring in more income. However, the LAM hierarchy had never lost the "strong conviction that the Lord must surely raise up from somewhere the provision" for the schools, and their tenacity paid off in the end. The girls' school was finally accredited in 1964 when they were able to make provisions for better campus facilities. Two years later, the boys' school received conditional recognition of its fourth year program, a provision that had to be renewed each year but permitted the students in the boys' school to receive credit for their fourth year studies, which in turn allowed them to continue their education elsewhere.¹⁸

While this seemed to be a major coup for LAM, circumstances, both internal and external, continued to conspire against the Colombian schools. As previously stated, the Mission was facing a financial crisis. All of LAM's programs and ministries were being confronted with budget cutbacks in the late 1960s, including the schools. As such, the Mission was seeking to reduce its commitments. The boys' school in Colombia appeared to be a good option to minimize for various reasons. First, the social and political climate of Colombia

had changed in the years following the original establishment of the schools due to the end of the authoritarian Conservative period in the mid-1950s. What had once been a hotbed of “persecution” against Evangelicals that made it nearly impossible for Evangelical students to obtain an education had recently changed into a society that was growing more open to religious toleration. Second, Colombia’s Ministry of Education had recently imposed higher standards for secondary education that LAM was unable to meet. The Mission was finding that it was extremely difficult to find Evangelicals who were also adequately trained from an academic perspective. Unwilling to sacrifice either their religious convictions or the quality of education, LAM was rapidly running out of options to maintain the school system. Additionally, it was increasingly difficult for the school to maintain a student body that was open to the teachings of Christianity. For these reasons, LAM decided that the boys’ school would be closed for the 1969 school year.¹⁹

While this closure seemed like the best answer to a difficult situation, there were serious repercussions from shutting down the boys’ school. Students would need to find a new educational program, and the current staff would have to locate work elsewhere. Furthermore, LAM had recently invested a large sum in the construction of buildings for the boys’ school which could not be wasted. With these issues in mind, it was suggested that the girls’ school, which was to remain open, should be made into a co-educational program for Colombian students that would continue to make use of the campus buildings while allowing LAM to consolidate the other resources necessary for running the schools. This

proposal was accepted by the LAM hierarchy, and the newly merged school opened in 1970 under the name "Colegio Latinoamericano." The Colegio Latinoamericano continued to function as an institution of secondary education, maintaining the original educational goals of Latin America Mission in Colombia.²⁰

Although the Seminario Bíblico and the Colegio Latinoamericano are representative of LAM's educational operations, they are by no means a complete picture of their educational programs. The Mission established and supported numerous other primary and secondary schools as well as other seminaries, such as the Colegio Monterrey in Costa Rica or the Evangelical Seminary of Caracas in Venezuela. LAM's educational activities also branched into publishing, first under the title *Editorial Caribe*, and renamed to Latin America Mission Publications in 1960. These publishing houses were responsible for gospel tracts and Bible study guides as well as the occasional textbook to be used in LAM's schools. All of these projects functioned as a network to realize LAM's goals for Latin America.²¹

While education was the focus of LAM's first social programs, it was only a few years after the establishment of the first school in Costa Rica that the Mission turned its attention to the medical needs of the local people. There were many reasons cited for the foundation of a medical practice, and LAM was very careful to develop a theoretical position on medical missions as part of this endeavor. Their belief was that for the duration of each person's earthly life, the body and soul were inseparable. To the Mission, speaking "of loving men's souls

[was] an empty pretense if love does not include the whole man,” because the “human body has intrinsic worth.” In the minds of the missionaries, this worth was demonstrated by numerous Biblical passages devoted to health, hygiene, and care of the body. The most famous of these verses, found in First Corinthians, states “do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,” an admonishment that the missionaries of LAM took to heart. LAM’s missionaries were also devout believers in spiritual healing. In their opinion, faith in God could produce “every form of healing and benevolent work.” As such, they maintained the importance of Bible Study and prayer among their staff. The result of this theoretical foundation was that they created a way to tangibly meet the physical needs of people in manner that would advance their spiritual agenda for the area.²²

However, despite these spiritual foundations for their medical work, LAM was careful to balance the religiosity with a realistic understanding of medical needs and goals. Medical work was emphatically not to be used as “mere camouflage, hiding or disguising religious propaganda.” Their medical facilities were intended to be modern and effective in their own right in order to efficiently serve the local populations. Furthermore, it was important to LAM directors that no one be turned away based on religious beliefs. However, while the religious aspect was not to be overt or forced, it was expected that the spiritual beliefs of the workers and directors would so suffuse the facility that patients could not help but notice. As one hospital report stated, a patient inquired of the nursing staff why all of the workers “had such shining faces.” The nursing staff used this

question as an opportunity to share their faith with this woman and to give her a copy of the New Testament, explaining how their Christian beliefs made them joyful. Additionally, their medical facilities always provided Bibles and scriptural brochures as reading material in the waiting areas, prompting questions and interest from those who waited their turn to meet with a medical professional. Nearly every monthly report filed for the Clínica Bíblica, LAM's medical headquarters, contained at least one story about individuals who were evangelized at the hospital through these various means. The reason for this strategy of combining evangelism with medical services was perhaps best described by the mantra LAM adopted for the Clínica Bíblica: "More people pass through the hospitals of the world than through its churches." LAM did its best to capitalize on this, and every year saw additional converts to Evangelical Christianity through the work of the clinic.²³

While these theoretical justifications for medical missions were an important aspect of the foundation of the Clínica Bíblica in 1929, the actual impetus behind the establishment of this facility was the great need that the Strachans perceived in Costa Rica. This hospital was one of Susan Strachan's pet projects. While Harry spent most of his time traveling around Central and South America leading evangelical campaigns, Susan remained at the Costa Rican headquarters. As such, she was subjected daily to the hardships of the people living in the region. Susan was particularly troubled by the plight of Costa Rican children, especially those of the poorer classes of society. Extremely high infant mortality rates claimed three hundred fifty of every thousand births, and

that number increased to fifty percent mortality by the age of five. This was due in large part to the poor availability of medical resources. Thus, she was driven to establish a medical facility to serve the Costa Rican people.²⁴

Susan's concern for the physical well-being of the people of Costa Rica stemmed from more than just infant mortality rates. In San José, there was no government provision for "adequate" medical care, meaning, from Susan's perspective, Western medical facilities. Furthermore, the few facilities that were available to the people of San José, such as the San Juan de Dios hospital, were staffed by untrained nuns rather than qualified medical professionals. This appalling situation was a cause of concern not only for LAM, but also for a number of local newspapers. These newspapers mounted a public campaign with the aim of gaining adequate medical facilities for the city, a campaign that was not lost on Susan.²⁵

In addition to LAM's concern for the inadequate medical facilities available to the local people, they were also concerned by the fact that local Evangelicals were completely without options for medical care. The available facilities, consisting of public hospitals staffed by nuns, were, by LAM accounts, quite unwilling to help Evangelical patients. Evangelicals were "ill-treated" and sometimes denied care at the local hospitals. This was of particular concern to LAM because, in addition to difficulties for their religious brethren, this meant that LAM's missionaries themselves would be unable to receive adequate medical treatment if it became necessary. As such, it was clear to the Mission that a hospital where those in need of medical attention could "be cared for and be free

from the vengeance of fanatical nuns” was a very real need, both for the missionaries and for the local people.²⁶

So, armed with convincing arguments based on both theological precedent and current Costa Rican conditions, LAM began the foundational work for establishing a medical facility. Their first concern was locating trained professionals from an Evangelical background to staff the fledgling medical mission. They ran advertisements and notices in *Latin American Evangelist*, the Mission’s bi-monthly publication, seeking trained nurses to staff the facility and to train other young women to be nurses. These women would then be sent “into the desperately needy homes of the sick poor to carry healing for soul and body.” The original plan also included a consultation department where patients could come for treatment, offered as a free, or nearly-free, service. Additionally, they hoped to include a few paying rooms which would serve two purposes: first, and most obviously, the income gained from these rooms would help to defray the costs incurred by the rest of the medical mission; secondly, and most important in the minds of the LAM hierarchy, these rooms would provide a classroom experience for the young girls training to be nurses, allowing them the opportunity to observe actual medical professionals in action while also giving them a location to practice their newly learned skills. Shortly after these original plans were broached, LAM added to its goals the presence of an infant and children’s wing in addition to the in-patient department, which became known as “La Clínica Infantil del Instituto Bíblico.”²⁷

Construction on the physical building that would house the proposed clinic began in the last half of the 1920s. Work on the building was never steady, as each small step in the construction process was dependent on incoming funds. To add to the difficulty of less than adequate funds for such a major project, the clinic attracted a great deal of hostile attention from some local groups. The Catholic Church, as well as those heavily influenced by the Church, implemented a “well-planned and forceful program of propaganda...against the Bible Clinic.” While this behavior certainly made LAM's project all the more difficult to complete, this hostility was not without cause. With the construction of the clinic came the announcement that no Catholic priest would be allowed into the building in the capacity of a priest under any condition. Thus, although LAM meant for their clinic to be a place where all could be cared for regardless of religious affiliation, this limitation represented an attack on Catholicism nonetheless, a symptom of LAM's anti-Catholic mindset.²⁸

Despite these setbacks, the Clínica Bíblica was officially inaugurated on July 14, 1929. Harry Strachan oversaw the ceremony, and declared that the clinic was built out of “pure Christianity and love toward the poor and outcast” so that they could “find solace for their ills physical and moral.” Several days after the ceremony, the Clínica Bíblica was visited by the Costa Rican President, Cleto González Viquez, along with several members of his cabinet. While this was an important recognition of LAM's work in Costa Rica, it also served to further fuel the resentment simmering between the Catholic majority and the Evangelical minority. However, although the Catholic Church was unhappy with the

inauguration of an Evangelical medical facility, it was not until 1963 that the Hospital Católico was opened in San José as a Catholic alternative to the Clínica Bíblica.²⁹

The Clínica Bíblica handled its first year well, with records showing 1400 patients being treated at the free consultation clinic, and 1460 children being treated in La Clínica Infantil. After the first year, in which only nurses were available to treat patients, LAM welcomed its first missionary doctor, Dr. Marie Cameron. With Dr. Cameron's expertise, the clinic continued to reach many of the lower classes in San José, but also began to attract some of the wealthy members of Costa Rican society by 1931. Dr. Cameron and the rest of the nursing staff cultivated these relationships by implementing home visitations which provided these wealthier people with convenient, quality healthcare. These additional clients had several important effects on the Clínica Bíblica. First, through these early connections with the wealthier, more influential classes, LAM was able to cultivate friendly relationships with government officials, something which made the clinic's existence less tenuous. Second, these new patrons were fully capable of paying for their medical care, which was very helpful in allowing LAM to continue offering services to the poor at severely reduced rates, or even for free. Even more important, this increased income resulted in financial self-sufficiency for the clinic by 1932. Through the next decade, the clinic continued to expand at a remarkable rate, with records showing 10,300 outpatients for 1938, and 20,000 for 1941. LAM capitalized on this success, adding over the next few decades additional staff (the Mission

employed between seventy and ninety employees during the 1960s) and departments for maternity, surgery, pharmacy, and later x-ray.³⁰

As previously mentioned, the Clínica Bíblica was also responsible for training young women to become nurses. This aspect of the clinic was very important to LAM, as it gave women an opportunity to become educated, to earn a living and supply LAM with much-needed medical staff. The classes were relatively small in the nursing program, with class sizes generally remaining under ten. This was due in large part to the lack of staff that could also be employed as instructors for these young women. Standards of education varied throughout the years of the school's existence. While in 1949 Dr. Marie Cameron expressed her hope that one of her nurses might learn to run a portable x-ray machine by spending a few hours in the x-ray department of San Juan de Dios hospital, implying that a few hours was considered an adequate amount of training, later correspondence from 1957 indicates that the clinic had imposed much higher standards on their nurses than was previously required. Upon receiving an invitation to coordinate with a Nicaraguan nursing program at a Baptist hospital, LAM refused to support the Nicaraguan program because they felt that the standards, which were much higher than their own a decade earlier, were at this time much lower than what was deemed adequate. Despite these fluctuations, one aspect of the nursing curriculum remained the same: the nurses-in-training were always required to take Bible and evangelism classes to help them share their faith with their patients. Although the nursing program was successful in educating young women, it was shut down by the Costa Rican

government in 1959 for vague reasons concerning licensure, but the Clínica Bíblica continued to train young women unofficially, who could then continue then continue their education elsewhere, having been thoroughly prepared at the clinic.³¹

In addition to its internal success, the Clínica Bíblica also served as the headquarters for other medical services. LAM partnered with Good Will Caravans, a department of the Evangelical Alliance of Costa Rica's Rural Work Committee, to send mobile medical facilities to rural areas that had no access to government facilities. These caravans paired nurses trained at the Clínica Bíblica with dentists or other medical professionals to perform checkups, administer shots and other medications, and complete simple procedures in rural communities. The Clínica Bíblica also played an important role in LAM's expansion into Colombia in 1937. The advance team that LAM sent into Colombia was composed of two missionary nurses and several young Latin American women who had been trained at the clinic. These are just a few examples of the breadth of the Clínica Bíblica's influence in Latin America.³²

Despite the clinic's success, however, by the 1950s monthly reports on the situation of Clínica Bíblica reveal problems with inadequate staff and funds. While the hospital had been previously self-supporting, a variety of factors over the past decades were beginning to cause financial difficulties for the mission. This was the period during which all of LAM's ministries were experiencing problems due to the previously discussed financial deficiencies. Additionally, technological advances and growing costs for medical equipment were a major

factor in the financial situation of the clinic. Plans to add x-ray equipment to the clinic in the mid-1960s was projected to bring in revenue, but it also required a substantial investment. The purchase of x-ray equipment, as well as other upgrades, put a financial strain on the clinic that they were not equipped to deal with. In many cases, even minor purchases such as accounting machines required a long process of requests and approvals in order to justify using any of the Mission's limited funds. Upgrades were also necessary for the building itself; regular wear and tear required maintenance, and a growing organization required a larger building to serve as a base. Plans to add additional wings to the building to house new departments, as well as increasing the number of private rooms, all represented funds that the clinic was finding increasingly difficult to supply. In addition to these financial issues, the directors, typically chosen from among the more senior foreign missionaries, were often inexperienced in administration of medical facilities. This resulted in overspending in several different areas, most notably for housekeeping and other staffing. Directors were often not conscientious enough in their hiring, resulting in employees who were not efficient in their work. However, these directors were also loathe to fire these incompetent individuals, citing their other positive qualities, and instead hired more staff to pick up the slack. The result was unnecessary expenditures in wages being paid to individuals who did not handle their workload.³³

These financial and administrative difficulties were compounded by chronic shortages of trained workers. While the clinic reported no shortage of young Christian girls to draft into their training programs for nursing, this training

was a slow process, and the insufficient teaching staff only served to further delay their education. Additionally, specialists such as obstetricians were difficult to recruit and keep at the clinic, largely due to less than competitive wages. LAM's focus on hiring Evangelical Christians to fill these positions further limited the available pool of workers, as did their increasing inability to pay wages comparable to other facilities. As such, the quality of the medical practice suffered to a degree, although by all accounts the nursing care available at the Clínica Bíblica remained the best in Costa Rica.³⁴

These difficulties combined to push the Clínica Bíblica to a crisis point. In 1968, the Board of Directors of the clinic recommended to the LAM general directors that the Clínica Bíblica be closed for several reasons. First, the healthcare situation in Costa Rica had improved to such a degree that LAM could feasibly argue that the clinic was no longer needed. Most importantly, however, the closure was proposed due to the clinic's inability to maintain their expanded ministry within budgetary constraints and quality expectations. When LAM's general directors accepted this recommendation, there was an immediate outcry against the closing of the clinic from the public, many of the doctors who were affiliated with the clinic, and even from some government officials. At this point, an outside group of doctors and other healthcare professionals, along with other interested parties, proposed privatizing the clinic under a new board of directors. This solution seemed to be the best for everyone involved, as it allowed the clinic to stay open without further draining LAM resources. Thus, after much discussion and negotiation, this new, independent board, named *Servicios*

Medicos, took control of the clinic while agreeing to carry on the Clínica Bíblica's tradition of evangelism through healthcare. Today, the Hospital Clínica Bíblica remains one of San José's top medical facilities, and it retains "the Christian principles on which it was founded" as part of its vision.³⁵

By 1960, LAM had established all of its major ministries. The Clínica Bíblica, numerous school systems, and other programs were all fully functional contributors to the Mission's success by this point. Accordingly, LAM, and the entire Evangelical movement, was seeing results. Based on denominational totals around 1960, Costa Rica was home to about sixteen thousand Evangelicals, Bolivia had approximately forty thousand, and Colombia and Venezuela could each claim more than sixty thousand Evangelicals. Of these total Evangelical populations, LAM counted around ten thousand participants in their programs in Bolivia, nearly twenty thousand in Venezuela, and more than twenty-five thousand in Colombia. Though these numbers comprised relatively small portions of the populations of these countries, they represented significant gains, both for LAM and for Evangelicalism. Protestantism of any variety was basically nonexistent in Latin America prior to the twentieth century, yet less than forty years after Harry and Susan Strachan founded the Latin America Evangelization Campaign in the 1920s, their organization was reaching tens of thousands of people and was responsible for large portions of the total Latin American Evangelical population. LAM's social services played a very important role in the Mission's success, as their personal ministries to individuals resulted in numerous converts who then shared their new faith with friends and neighbors.

The story of a man named Toño, told in pieces through monthly LAM reports, was testament to this fact.³⁶

Toño was a chauffeur for one of the doctors working at the Clínica Bíblica, and was converted by the efforts of the clinic staff. As a result of his conversion, he gave up drinking and smoking, but more importantly, he began handing out New Testaments to coworkers, family and neighbors. He also took gospel tracts to distribute among farm workers in the area. About one year after his conversion, his efforts had made a serious impression on at least thirteen people, and he remained thoroughly faithful to his new spiritual beliefs. Instances like this were not uncommon through LAM's social ministries, and were significant contributors to the success of the Mission.³⁷

Latin America Mission made use of medical facilities and schools in addition to other social programs in order to effectively influence the people of Latin America. By building innocuous relationships through service, the missionaries were afforded the opportunity to share their faith and the beliefs of LAM with an audience that was predisposed to be accepting of their message. The Mission also took advantage of the fact that their status as educators or medical professionals allowed them access to areas that were off limits to Evangelical missionaries. These social programs proved to be very effective tools for furthering LAM's goals in Latin America, but LAM's success cannot be attributed solely to the Mission's creativity. LAM owes much of its success to its theological roots as well as the external circumstances of Central and South

America, and an evaluation of these contributing factors is necessary for a complete understanding of Latin America Mission's longevity and success.

Notes to Chapter Three

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4. LATIN AMERICA MISSION: AN EVALUATION

The previous discussion of the foundations and services of Latin America Mission makes clear the fact that the Mission was not merely an evangelistic body. While proselytizing was a central concern of their organization, LAM also focused heavily on meeting the physical and emotional needs of the people that they encountered. By making their physical, earthly life more comfortable they made it possible for many people to consider their faith and make personal religious commitments. From an Evangelical perspective, LAM was very successful because of this approach, but their success was also due to the social, political, and religious context of the Mission. Without an understanding of these factors, particularly the religious climate of Latin America, a complete understanding of LAM's success is impossible.

A concise overview of the religious environment in an area as vast and diverse as Latin America is nearly impossible. It requires generalization and simplification of the major issues, limitations which are only amplified by this document's dependence on Evangelical sources. As such, it must be noted that the subsequent discussion of Catholic and Evangelical religious conventions does not reflect the full spectrum of practice and belief, but merely a basic overview which is often focused on Evangelical perspective.

The religious climate of Latin America during the twentieth century consisted of three main components: mainline Protestant groups, Evangelical Protestantism, and Catholicism. As was mentioned in the first chapter, mainline

Protestant groups, such as Lutherans and Presbyterians, initially established to meet the spiritual needs of Protestant settlers from Europe and America, had been making inroads into Latin America throughout the nineteenth century. While these churches did engage in some evangelistic activities, their focus was primarily on administering their Protestant flock. This brief explanation is sufficient to explain the role of mainline Protestantism for the purposes of this discussion, and so the focus must shift to Evangelical Protestantism.¹

As was discussed briefly in the introduction, the idea of Evangelicalism is extremely difficult to define. Its diversity is such that definitive characterizations are an impossibility. It is a movement that is not specific to any one denomination, but instead is represented by Evangelical branches in every major Christian denomination, from Assembly of God to Catholicism, as well as in nondenominational groups. However, despite its admittedly small presence in Catholicism, Evangelicalism is generally understood to be a Protestant phenomenon that came into its own during the twentieth century. As such, there are many aspects of Evangelicalism that stem directly from Protestantism, thus removing itself from standard Catholic practice.²

The two characteristics most commonly shared by all Evangelical groups are their commitment to missions and their unwavering belief in the inerrancy of scripture. This commitment to missions and soul winning is an obvious factor in the success of their missions, as it has been widely deemed the most important function of the church by Evangelicals. The importance placed on this function, however, derives from that second shared characteristic: belief in the inerrancy of

scripture. Evangelical groups believe that the Bible represents the perfect word of God, passed down through the generations without inaccuracies in meaning. As such, the precepts, examples of moral living, and advice found in the Bible, particularly the New Testament, represent the ultimate in spiritual authority and must not be ignored; the scriptures serve as a handbook for daily life as well as spirituality.³

This belief in the inerrancy and supremacy of the Bible explains why Evangelical Christians are so focused on mission work: it is a Biblical mandate. The final passage of the New Testament book of Matthew is known as “The Great Commission,” and it consists of a command to go into the world and win converts to the faith. This passage is widely cited as the reason why Christians should focus on Evangelism, as it is understood by Evangelicals that this command concerning the role of the community of believers comes directly from Jesus Christ, the son of God. Thus, the Evangelical Church continues this mission to this day, making every effort to “go and make disciples.”⁴

Catholicism’s views on scripture are considerably different. While many Catholics now affirm the Protestant belief that all truth necessary for salvation is located within the Bible, they disagree with the Evangelical belief that the Bible is the sole and supreme spiritual authority. In Catholicism, it is held that the scripture cannot be effectively interpreted without the assistance of apostolic teaching. The ultimate Catholic interpretation comes from the Pope, whose doctrinal pronouncements are considered infallible as God’s spokesman on

Earth. As such, Catholic interpretation and action are very different from that of Evangelical Protestant groups.⁵

Perception and interpretation of scripture are not the only ways in which Catholic and Evangelical groups utilize different approaches to their belief system. These disparities are best understood by first discussing the worship styles of these different groups. It is clear that both Catholic Christians and Evangelicals have a strong communal element in their expressions of faith; indeed, by its very nature a church is a community of believers. However, these groups developed and maintained these faith communities for very different reasons. While many members of traditional Catholic congregations belong to the church community largely due to spiritual requirements and their perception of Catholicism as part of their cultural identity, most Evangelical Christians choose to be active members of their faith community out of a desire for spiritual fellowship rather than any necessity. While these are, admittedly, generalizations that are not true for every individual, they do represent the majority of Christian groups.⁶

Catholicism has always been a very communal faith. Its members have relied heavily on the Church hierarchy which served as a sort of middleman between the average lay person and an almighty God. This reliance stemmed in part from the elaborate system of rituals and sacraments developed in the Church which served to transmit the grace of God to the people while also providing them with tangible evidence of their faith. These rituals created an environment in which spiritual actions were communal rather than personal, often

lacking in individual connections to the faith or to God as the adherents were unable to complete the rituals and sacraments that were integral to their faith without an intermediary. Therefore, rather than participation in the Catholic community being voluntary, it has instead been based on the spiritual necessity of having regular access to the sacraments, as those who do not take part in these communal rituals are considered to be cut off from God's grace.⁷

Additionally, in the modern age the Catholic community has evolved into a cultural phenomenon for many of its members. While this certainly does not apply to all individuals who consider themselves Catholic, it is becoming increasingly common in the Western world for the label "Catholic" to imply a cultural identity rather than a personal, religious conviction. As Evangelical sources state, these Catholics are generally "baptized, married, and buried in the Catholic church—but have little or no concern about spiritual matters." The implication of this Evangelical statement is that, while Catholics have little understanding of the Church or concern for its moral teachings, they maintain a deep, emotional connection to the Church as an important part of their heritage and their cultural identity. As such, for many in Latin America, and other parts of the West, Catholicism remains an important communal affiliation, but is increasingly less important as a personal religious choice. The result of this change, according to Evangelicals, is that in many cases the Catholic community does not exist based on strong, personal, religious convictions, but is instead a societal title with little meaning or outward evidence for many people.⁸

Conversely, Evangelical Protestantism relies on individual spiritual commitments rather than public, communal affirmations to determine the state of an individual's soul. This emphasis on individual, personal relationships with an omnipotent God generates a different outlook on the role of faith and religion. Each person remains accountable for his or her actions and inactions, with no mediator between the individual and God. This then drives each person to actively work toward the growth of God's kingdom on Earth, fulfilling the mandate of the "Great Commission." As such, each person feels an intense commitment to the faith community of which he or she is a part, as it is the inner-most circle of God's Earthly kingdom. Thus, the Evangelical community is based on spiritual desire; there is no regular, spiritual requirement to be a member of the community, but there is a strong personal connection nonetheless.⁹

These different concepts of worship and community have resulted in different approaches to converts and growth. Catholicism built a community dependent on the hierarchy, while the Evangelical Christian faith community was built to a much greater extent from the bottom up. These different foundations resulted in each of these branches of Christianity focusing on different characteristics, which in turn contributed to the success of Evangelicals in Latin America.

First among these Evangelical characteristics is their focus on the individual. Because Evangelicals believe that individuals must develop deep, personal connections to God, they focus their energies on a much more individual, rather than communal, level. Thus, Evangelical missionaries tend to

prefer developing personal relationships with individuals that they are trying to convert. This leads to an interest in their personal needs, both physical and spiritual. When these needs are not being met, it opens an opportunity for the missionary to step in and create a friendly, positive bond with this individual. As this bond develops, it opens the door for missionaries to present their spiritual message to an already friendly audience, as happened in the case of a Sr. Medina. Medina was a Honduran engineer who had come to the Clínica Bíblica in 1947 for a surgery, and was very angry when he was asked his religious affiliation. After the nursing staff explained that it was a routine question that would not affect his care, he was appeased. During his stay, he began to develop friendships with members of the staff, and he later attended a graduation service for the nurses in LAM's nearby church. After a time, he returned to the clinic to purchase a Bible, at which point the staff was able to talk to him about their faith, a belief system that Medina was now open to accepting. In this way many converts were won in Latin America.¹⁰

This concern with individual needs, both physical and spiritual, effectively introduced new converts into the Evangelical faith community. This community reinforced Evangelical religious beliefs as well as their moral teachings. Moral teachings, however, were considered a secondary concern; Evangelicalism does not consider good works and morality to be a pathway to heaven, but rather believes morality to be a manifestation of an individual's newfound commitment to the Evangelical faith. However, this morality was yet another important benefit to the Latin American people whom the missionaries were attempting to reach.

For example, the machismo culture of many Latin American nations and communities, as perceived by Evangelicals, dictated that men drink alcohol to excess, gamble, and womanize, among other things. These behaviors often caused serious hardships for their families. When money that was already scarce was funneled into alcohol and other unnecessary entertainments rather than into the well-being of the family, the wife and children suffered, often having to do without necessities. Additionally, these habits can manifest abusive tendencies, a very tangible example of the harmful effects of selfishness and substance abuse. Evangelical groups typically eschewed alcohol, tobacco, and all other drugs. They distanced themselves from dancing, card-playing, and other “pleasures of the flesh” that they considered to be temptations to good, upstanding Christians. Therefore, as these men began to convert to Evangelicalism, the change in their habits resulted in a great deal of additional time and funds to channel into their family life, improving their standard of living. This represented a very appealing option to many Latin Americans, producing further growth and development of the Evangelical faith community.¹¹

As the Evangelical community grew and developed, it became necessary to care for the body of believers. This, too, derives from the Evangelical belief in the inerrancy of scripture. This compelling need to take care of the faith community is based on the New Testament accounts of the early Church. One of the scriptural passages that is representative of this attitude is found in the Book of Acts, 2:44-47. These verses support a community in which all things are held in common, with all members sharing and giving to others based on need.

This passage of scripture becomes even more appealing as a missions tenet when it continues on to state “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved,” implying that this community could be used as an evangelical tool rather than merely a benefit of Evangelicalism.¹²

Therefore, because the Bible declares that the community of believers should care for its own, it is only natural that these groups would adopt that attitude. This attitude was abundantly clear in the practices of LAM. By providing orphanages and medical facilities to the very poor people they were encountering in Latin America, LAM effectively built a community that cared for itself, creating a fertile environment for even more evangelism. This communal effort went a step further with the establishment of schools and seminaries to provide for the intellectual and educational needs of their community.

Ultimately, LAM took an even greater step toward a true community of the sort espoused by the Bible during the restructuring of the hierarchy in the 1960s and 1970s. It was during this period that LAM truly acknowledged that their faith community consisted of equals rather than foreign teachers who led local converts. They accepted that the local people were no longer spiritual children in need of guidance, but were instead up to the challenge of managing themselves the mission in Latin America. The restructuring of LAM to put local leaders in charge of LAM activities throughout Latin America was an important step in fully realizing their goals in the region. It fostered an environment of respect and understanding that has allowed LAM to continue to grow into new areas and new ministries.¹³

Evangelical focus on individual relationships and needs as well as community-building and well-being has been important to the success of LAM throughout Central and South America. However, there are a few other distinctly Protestant characteristics that LAM has relied on throughout its mission work. First among these characteristics is the deep-seated conviction that education is an important aspect of the Christian faith. This belief has its roots in the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s. Martin Luther, the Catholic priest whose then-radical ideas set off the Reformation, had ideas about the practices and expressions of the Christian faith that went against traditional Catholic teaching.¹⁴

While the members of the Catholic Church continued to rely on the Church hierarchy for understanding, it remained unnecessary for them to read and interpret scripture for themselves. Luther became convinced that this separation from personal religious understanding was spiritually unhealthy for Christians. He instead believed that each individual person was saved by faith and grace, and that in order for these people to have a true faith they must first understand the premises of their faith. Understanding, however, was impossible when the vast majority of the population was unable to comprehend Mass or read the Bible, both of which were presented in Latin.¹⁵

It was not, however, only the use of Latin that was the problem. General literacy itself was quite low during this period. Literacy rates in Europe during the 1500s are difficult to determine. The definition of literacy during that time period was, in itself, rather fluid. The simple act of being able to sign one's name was sometimes offered as proof of literacy despite the fact that knowing a signature

does not signal the ability to capably read and write. The best guesses of historians, however, are all very low. Estimates for Germany around 1500 are for three to four percent literacy, which rose to as high as thirty percent in towns. English literacy rates for the same period were around ten percent for men, but a much lower one percent for women. Even much later, in 1587, the number of young boys who were attending school in the cultural center of Venice was a mere twenty six percent. These numbers, despite the fact that they are merely estimates, nevertheless make clear that very few Europeans were capable of reading during the sixteenth century.¹⁶

Luther felt that it was vitally important to remedy the fact that only an elite few were able to read and understand the scriptures, so one of his earliest projects after the start of the Reformation was the translation of the Bible from Latin into the vernacular German. While this did increase the number of people who were able to understand the scriptures, it was of no help to those Europeans who were completely uneducated. Luther's convictions did, however, lay the groundwork for the Protestant insistence on education, as only those who can understand the scriptures can come to a true faith on their own without relying on the interpretation and mediation of Church hierarchy.¹⁷

This Lutheran idea rapidly spread and remains one of the central tenets of Protestant denominations. The importance of education is very clear in the actions and programs of LAM, as some of their first projects were establishing educational facilities, and they continue to support secondary schools and seminaries into the twenty-first century. The educational facilities were meant to

teach those who would otherwise not have a chance at an education, such as the girls school established in Costa Rica. Women were a marginalized group during the first half of the twentieth century in Latin America, and their educational opportunities were minimal, particularly in poorer areas. The seminaries, however, had a slightly different focus.¹⁸

The seminaries affiliated with LAM were established with the intention of training a new generation of leaders to further the Evangelical church. This concept ties together the importance of education with the importance of community building in the minds of Evangelical Christians. Without advanced educational opportunities, it would be nearly impossible for new members to gain the knowledge necessary to attain positions of authority in the church. This emphasis on higher education seems contradictory to the typical Protestant approach to education. First, Protestants generally believe that each person has the right to interpret the Bible for themselves, regardless of their educational background, rendering higher education unnecessary. Furthermore, many Evangelical groups actually frowned on advanced education as it caused many individuals to doubt things that could not be proven, such as the Virgin Birth or any of the miracles of Christ. However, in the case of LAM, this was an unnecessary concern. As previously discussed, LAM's seminaries focused largely on courses to facilitate preaching, such as church history, church doctrine, and methods of teaching. General education courses and secular interests were generally absent from the seminary curriculums. So, LAM continued to promote educational opportunities, as did the other Evangelical

groups associated with the seminaries, in order to provide students with the necessary knowledge to lead future churches. Concomitantly, without new generations of leaders, the Church would stagnate and deteriorate. Thus education serves a second, very necessary purpose: the perpetuation of the Evangelical Church.¹⁹

The Evangelical Protestant characteristics of a belief in Biblical inerrancy, a focus on individual needs and relationships, and the importance of education were all very important contributors to the success of LAM in Central and South America. Their methods allowed them to expand into large territories, utilize different methods, and continue their success for nearly a century. However, their success cannot be accounted for solely based on the virtues of Evangelical Protestantism. Their success was also dependent on the existing political, social, and religious climate of Latin America.

The political side of the religious conflict in Latin America has already been touched on, albeit briefly, in the introduction. Specific instances in which politics influenced the actions or inactions of LAM are not mentioned in the accessible records of the Mission. However, it is worth reiterating the fact that Protestantism was generally appealing to Latin American governments attempting to throw off conservative, and thereby Catholic, influences. Nineteenth-century Liberals, heavily influenced by Enlightenment ideas, generally believed that in order to create a democracy and educate the people, clerical influence over the masses had to be eliminated. Thus, they believed that it was in the best interest of their nations to limit the power of the Catholic

Church. As a result, by the middle of the 1900s nearly every Latin American nation had made legal provisions to abandon or suppress official ties with the Catholic Church, including the prohibition on property ownership by the Church written into the Mexican Constitution of 1917, the ban of monastic communities in Honduras, and the Ecuadoran refusal to allow any clergy member to serve in the legislature.²⁰

Additionally, as a general rule, Protestant denominations were usually disinclined to meddle in secular politics, as they believed that secular rulers had their place, and they were in control for a reason. An almighty God would be capable of preventing anything against his will; therefore, he must have allowed rulers to ascend for a purpose. This attitude of separation and acceptance can also be traced to the New Testament, in which Jesus is quoted as saying "give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." This divine acknowledgement of the role of secular leaders has been generally accepted and practiced into the modern age, resulting in fewer church-state entanglements in Evangelical Protestant circles.²¹

Aside from political preferences in Latin America, the economic situation during the twentieth century resulted in poor social conditions. Following World War I, most Latin American nations became increasingly dependent on foreign investment. Thus, their economies were focused on developing the products desired by their investors, such as bananas and coffee. While there were large markets for these foodstuffs, most of the revenue generated by these products was channeled back to the foreign investors rather than into the countries

themselves. This monocultural economic model proved to be especially destructive when the Great Depression settled over the world during the 1930s. As foreign markets plummeted, Latin American nations lost their major source of revenue. This economic crisis translated into serious problems for the people of Latin America. Decreased demand for exports throughout the world resulted in problems of unemployment and insufficient salaries leading to social chaos, such as workers' strikes.²²

The Latin American economy experienced an upswing due to increased exports during the Second World War and the establishment of two economic strategies to foster domestic production of goods: import-substituting industrialization (I-SI) and import-substituting agriculture (I-SA). While these systems were originally successful in helping Latin America industrialize, by the 1960s they had reached the limits of their usefulness. These measures resulted in reduced exports, as all of the manufactured products were channeled toward the domestic market, which meant diminished income from trade. Unfortunately, the domestic market was limited in Latin America, further reducing profits. Additionally, the prices for those products that Latin America did export, such as coffee, had been steadily declining over the past years, which also diminished income. Thus, the Latin American economy remained shaky throughout the initial period of LAM's growth, and the majority of people in Latin America remained very poor, with little or no opportunity to improve their lives.²³

These economic and social woes of the first half of the twentieth century were simply compounded by the struggles of the Catholic Church. Traditionally a

source of charity and welfare, the Church had previously met the needs of the poor. However, the Church had been losing its influence and ability to help in the previous decades, and therefore maintained a degree of separation from the suffering of its people.

Contributing to the struggles of the Catholic Church was the chronic lack of priests available to minister to the people of Latin America. During the colonial period there was no major shortage of priests; for example, in Mexico the ratio was one priest to every six hundred to eight hundred people throughout the colonial period. However, following the independence struggles in Latin America, the ratios began to fall off until the average ratio in Latin America in the 1960s was one priest to nearly five thousand people. This is hardly an effective ratio for maintaining a thriving faith community or providing social services, but the numbers continued to get worse, with the ratios in some regions falling as low as ten thousand baptized Catholics to each individual priest.²⁴

With such low numbers of priests to minister to such large portions of the Latin American population, the Catholic community was breaking down. From its inception, the Catholic Church had been responsible for social programs and charity as well as education, often being the only source for these societal necessities. Now, services that had historically been the responsibility of the Church were neglected due to the simple fact that it did not have enough people to staff these ministries.

This lack of resources prompted the Church to look elsewhere for help. In the 1960s, as many as forty percent of Latin American priests were foreigners,

making them less likely to understand the local Church and build a real connection to the Latin American people. Additionally, many of the Latin American priests were sent overseas to obtain advanced degrees before returning to minister, of which the majority studied theology or canon law rather than attempting to understand the Church and its place in the world. This created further disconnects between the already insufficient clergy and their congregations.²⁵

The Church was also forced to look elsewhere for monetary support. When much of this support came from North Atlantic countries, the Church in Latin America again became a colonial entity, relying on outsiders as its costs outstripped the ability of local congregations to support. An unfortunate side effect of this has been that educational programs, one of the investments that would be most likely to pay off in the future, were neglected as Catholic Churches struggled to find funds. The Church considered the surviving educational system ineffective and insufficient for its needs. The teachers in the Catholic school systems were accused of living in ivory towers, away from the reality of the world. The schools were not educating young people and grooming them to be the future generation of Catholic leaders, but were instead merely providing a basic education. In the words of one priest during the 1960s,

“We must put leadership into our schools, into our churches. But how do we bring this about? How does Jesus become a living reality? How do we inspire those thousands of boys and girls from so many loyal Catholic families? I’m only a missionary, not an educator, but I think this is our crucial problem.”

This statement is evidence of the decline in the educational system that had been occurring over the previous decades. These issues came to be of even greater concern to the Church in the 1960s and 1970s with the advent of Liberation Theology.²⁶

Liberation Theology, a product of the Latin American Church hierarchy, put forth a “preferential option” for the poor. This theology was founded on the belief that “the Bible speaks of the mercy and the judgement of God: God’s compassion for the poor and oppressed, God’s wrath and judgement for a world in which the larger part of God’s children are condemned to hunger, deprivation, marginalization, and death,” in the words of one Argentine clergyman. It was meant to promote social justice through the moral authority of the Church, focusing on a need for social work and help for those stricken with poverty. While this concern for the poor was clearly lacking in Catholic practice and needed to be addressed, this new focus was not without issues of its own. Many priests, in their zeal to be of help to the needy people of their parishes, began to neglect religious teaching and spiritual needs in favor of social work. This left some Catholics searching for religious meaning, which they found in other religious groups, such as LAM. As Pope John Paul II said in 1992, it can happen that “the faithful do not find in their pastoral ministers the strong sense of God” and so they “go to the sects seeking a religious sense of life.” This has clearly been another issue facing the Church at the end of the twentieth century as it has continued to struggle with increasing numbers of Protestant converts.²⁷

Latin America's five hundred year experience with Christianity has only recently included Protestantism in any significant way. This evolution of Latin American religion triggered a "Protestant explosion" in the last half of the twentieth century, much to the chagrin of the Catholic establishment. This growth has been remarkable, with significant portions of Latin American populations claiming various forms of Protestantism as their personal religion. At the turn of the twenty-first century, Bolivia and Nicaragua reported that ten percent of their populations were Protestant, Costa Rica and Honduras declared at least fifteen percent, and Guatemala claimed that twenty-five percent of its population was Protestant. This significant Protestant growth in Latin America has been the result of many dedicated mission groups like Latin America Mission.²⁸

While the history of Latin America Mission was not without trials and tribulations, it has been predominately a story of vision, perseverance and ultimate success from an Evangelical perspective. LAM has succeeded in meeting the aspirations of its founders, and almost a century later still espouses the same basic morals, beliefs, and goals. This success has been reliant on many different factors, beginning with the foundation of the Mission. Harry and Susan Strachan were remarkably driven, devoted people whose perseverance and tenacity were responsible for the original development of the Latin America Evangelization Campaign. Without their ambition to evangelize all of Latin America, the Mission would not have been successful. Equally important, however, was LAM's willingness to leave behind traditional methods of mission

work and instead generate innovative solutions and programs that were more effective among the local people they were attempting to reach.

A significant part of LAM's methods was focused on social work. They established and supported a very successful medical facility and numerous schools as well as other programs aimed at the youth of Latin America. These social programs provided service to the bodies, minds, and spirits of the local people, opening the doors for evangelism among them. Even when LAM's extensive programs began to strain its budgetary limits, the Mission was able to resolve these issues by partnering with other groups so that these important ministries could remain open, contributing to the proselytization of Latin America.

While these characteristics of LAM were vital to their continued success, there were external factors that also played a significant role. LAM's Protestant heritage bequeathed several important practices to LAM. In particular, Protestantism advocates concern for the individual, both physically and spiritually, a desire to build and maintain the faith community, and a belief that education is a necessity for developing a true faith relationship with God. However, these factors were far from the only ones contributing to LAM's longevity. Political expediency and economic difficulty were additional conditions that created opportunities for Evangelical groups to move into Latin America. However, perhaps most important, Catholicism's struggles throughout the twentieth century to maintain its dominant position with ever-dwindling resources resulted in a religious vacuum in Latin America that Evangelical groups were more than happy to fill. While Catholicism is by no account only possessed of

negative traits, and Evangelicalism is far from perfect, in the case of LAM the positive traits of Evangelicalism and Catholicism's negative side combined with fortunate timing to make the Mission a success.

These various factors, related to the foundations and practices of LAM as well as the external religious, social, political, and economic climate of Latin America all combined to render the Mission an Evangelical success. For nearly a century LAM has pursued its goal of the evangelism of Central and South America, and the organization, and its influence, has continued to grow. LAM's innovative methods, flexibility, and theological roots all serve as examples of Protestant Evangelical practice, and thus provide an explanation for Protestantism's recent success in the Catholic continent.

Notes to Chapter Four

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