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Lectureship challenges Christians to become global citizens involved in global mission

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) - "The evangelization of the world, including the West, is inseparable from the rediscovery of the gospel as 'good news to the poor.'" This core message in the Theological Lectureship at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary came from C. René Padilla, Ph.D., who sees the U.S. and its economic and political policies from a perspective in the Two-thirds World.

Padilla lives in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and works with organizations that help Christians meet the physical, social and spiritual needs of poor communities. He is the son of a tailor-evangelist and after coming to faith in Christ at the age of 15, became an evangelist in jail ministry and street preaching.

In his series of three lectures at AMBS, February 14 and 15, he outlined first the impact that the West, and particularly the United States, has in controlling resources and power throughout the world. This domination is imperial globalization, he explained at the beginning of his presentations titled, *Imperial Globalization and Christian Mission*.

Padilla pointed out numerous effects of this domination through the last 500 years, including the growing disparity between rich and poor; between the countries, companies and individuals who are becoming wealthier and the 1.3 billion people who live on less than one dollar per day. "Characterized by greed, ethnocentrism and religious justification, imperial globalization has become the greatest threat to life on the planet Earth and, as such, the greatest challenge to the Christian mission around the world," Padilla said.

Padilla is president of the Micah Network, a worldwide group of organizations aimed at mobilizing Christians against poverty. From that experience and perspective, his lectures challenged the seminary community of mostly Western Christians to counter the influence of wealth and greed in our culture and government.

“The task of securing justice for the poor through political action may well be the primary responsibility for Christians in the wealthy countries,” he said. “This presupposes a real effort to become aware of international issues and especially of the way in which U.S. foreign policies affect the poor countries.” This awareness requires a conscious effort to gather information and perspectives in alternative ways, he urged, not relying on the mass media which supports and serves the current culture of dominance.

Padilla outlined three responses he suggests for the church: global citizenship, global community and global mission. Christians must see themselves as members of the body of Christ, people whose identity is not dependent on race or nationality, social or economic position, status or gender. We must “implement a partnership in mission entirely coherent with global Christianity rooted in the good news of the Kingdom of God,” he said.

“Today’s challenge for all Christians everywhere, in the East and in the West, in the North and in the South, is to rediscover the transforming power of the Kingdom of God’s justice in the midst of the kingdoms of this world,” he said.

Following each lecture, several members of the seminary community were invited to respond. Saulo Padilla, a student originally from Central America now living in Goshen, Ind., pointed out things he saw on a recent study trip to Guatemala. “We are not allowed to come to this country and work here,” he said, referring to immigration restrictions. But U.S. businesses—Burger King, McDonald’s, Dunkin’ Donuts, Wal-Mart—“invade these streets and local businesses fade.”

He made a modest proposal to Christians in the Elkhart area: “I propose that we embrace those who are being drawn to our communities, those who are searching for a better future and their daily bread, those who are called illegal immigrants.”

Fred Lesakale, a student from Kenya, responded by pointing out that in his home area it is violence, and not only poverty, that has had a significant impact on people's lives. "Violence has robbed people of their dignity and their very sense of being human," he said, pointing out that a whole generation of children has grown up without the experience of family life and enculturation. However, Lesakale, said, "There are always things I can do as an individual that will make a difference." He added, "We can do a lot if what we do is founded on the Word of God."

C. René Padilla, who holds a Ph.D. in New Testament from the University of Manchester, has written extensively on mission, evangelism and social ethics. His books include *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Eerdmans), and *New Face of Evangelism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant* (InterVarsity). He has been general secretary for Latin America of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students and of the Latin American Theological Fraternity.

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