

**PENTECOSTALS AND ECO-THEOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA:
A BRIEF REPORT ON A CONFERENCE HELD AT THE
SEMINARIO MINISTERIAL SUDAMERICANO (SEMISUD), QUITO ECUADOR**

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

On September 10-12, 2019, the Pentecostal seminary, known as *SEMISUD* (for its initials in Spanish), together with the Evangelical service agency, Misión Alianza Noruega-Ecuador, organized and conducted a conference on the topic of ecotheology, under the novel title in Spanish, “Ecoexistencia: De la preservación a la coexistencia”, in English, “Ecoexistence: From Preservation to Coexistence”.

This was a public event of an academic nature which attracted approximately 500 participants. Its stated purpose was “to promote theological and ecclesial action in the Latin American context around the central theme of commitment to the care, preservation and social relation with nature at a time when there are growing risks of the destruction of our ‘great home’, the Earth”.

A wide spectrum of related topics were explored through the use of various methods such as panel discussions, Bible studies, lectures, liturgy, media presentations, case studies, and a keynote addresses given by Brazilian author and theologian, Leonardo Boff, perhaps the leading contemporary Christian voice on the chosen subject. Wide cooperation was also given by representatives of other churches and

service agencies who participated in the conference program.

Specific topics in the conference program included “Contributions from the Worldview of the Original Andean Peoples”, “Re-reading the Biblical Text with an Ecological Conscience”, “Ecology, Church, Public Advocacy and Political Action”, “The Ethic of Love and Health from an Ecological Perspective in Contemporary Preaching”, “Pentecostalism, Spirituality and Creation”, and “Toward a Spirituality of Creation Care”.

BACKGROUND OF THE CONFERENCE

The topic of creation care has increasingly become an issue of interest among Latin American Pentecostals albeit with the younger generations and the more educated pastors. A similar observation could be made about Pentecostal awareness and involvement in environmental missions in other parts of the world¹. Still however, among much of the rank and file of Pentecostal churches and believers in Latin America, there is little interest, and at times, opposition toward the subject due, in part, to the fundamentalist/dispensationalist theological legacy brought from North America by missionaries and the general lack of information and formation from an Evangelical Pentecostal perspective. The topic is, however, gaining visibility among Pentecostals due to the various governmental and agency emphases on the urgency of taking action in light of dramatic climate change and the COP21 events calling states to take action in that regard.²

This particular conference was a part of an ongoing annual ministerial enrichment event (PRIDEMI—Intensive Program for Ministerial Development) began many years ago and was meant to make a small contribution to raising awareness on the subject as the stated objective indicates.

While I was serving on the faculty of the seminary we had discussed on various occasions the need to address the subject of eco-theology or creation care and had made some tentative plans for a conference one year only to have the event topic changed due to unforeseen circumstances. This year the conference topic was approved and the planning for the event went forward with wide participation of various Evangelical/Protestant entities in Ecuador.

In my own work as a missionary teacher I had been giving more and more attention to the subject and developed a course on “Ecotheology and Creation Care” which was taught at the seminary in Ecuador and in other seminaries in Honduras, Peru and Argentina.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

In summary, the conference itself was a great success by all accounts. Not only was a Pentecostal seminary (related to the U.S.-based Church of God—Cleveland, Tennessee) able to organize a major conference on Ecotheology attracting a wide audience of both speakers and participants. It also dealt with all the related issues from a critical and reflective perspective and did not avoid prophetically engaging the difficult

structural issues of global Neoliberal economics and current transnational problems such as the burning of the Amazon forest.

All of this was accomplished from the perspective of wholistic mission, including issues of spirituality, discipleship, worship, social and political action and more. We believe that a great step forward was taken although we understand that much work remains to be done.

¹ See my chapter, "Spirit of Creation, Spirit of Pentecost: Reflections on Eco-theology and Mission in Latin American Pentecostalism", in A.J. Swoboda, ed., BLOOD CRIES OUT: PENTECOSTALS, ECOLOGY AND THE GROANS OF CREATION, Wipf and Stock, 2014.

2 See Swoboda, A.J., *TONGUES AND TREES: TOWARD A PENTECOSTAL ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY*, DEO Publishing, 2013. This seems to be the first systematic attempt by a Pentecostal scholar to address the issues of eco-theology and creation care.