

## *Beatriz Melano*

### *First Female Protestant Doctor of Theology in Latin America*

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**B**eatriz Elena Melano Laguardia was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina on October 20, 1931. Her father was Giuseppe Melano, who worked in the area of publicity for a tobacco company; her mother, Maria Luisa Laguardia, was from Uruguay and was one of the first women dentists in Buenos Aires. Susana Campertoni mentions that, as a young girl, Melano helped her mother in tasks at the Baptist Church (Campertoni 2012, 142). As a member of the Methodist Church, while she was studying at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, she met Richard Couch, a Presbyterian minister, and they were married in 1957 (Melano 1961, 10). They had two daughters and a son: Ana Gabriela (deceased), Johanna Ruth, and Marcos Jose. In February 1959, they were sent by the United Presbyterian Church, US, to teach at the Union Seminary in Buenos Aires (Melano 1961, 10).

Melano participated in the Student Christian Movement and had Margaret Flory (1914–2009), an internationally known mentor for students in religion, as her friend and supporter during her university studies. In 1959, during the Carnahan Lectures, she met the French Reformed theologian Suzanne de Dietrich (1891–1981), whom she admired for her theological clarity. There were two important people in her academic life: Yvonne van Berchem (1893–1970) and her husband,

Emanuel Galland, a minister in the Reformed Church, who jointly created the Emmanuel Center in Colonia Valdense, Uruguay. Likewise, in Bolivia and Montevideo, Uruguay, she was invited by Aymara women to offer lectures along with courses in education and theology. In 1963, she participated in the Encounter of North American Presbyterian and Latin American Reformed Women, which took place in Mexico. In the 1960s, she gathered Catholic and Protestant women to work together on consciousness-raising to achieve the recognition of women in all spheres of life (Campertoni 2012, 141-6).



Image 1: Beatriz Melano (used by permission).

Melano received her teaching degree from the National Normal School in Lomas Zamora, Uruguay, in 1950 and received a degree in modern languages from Tift College in Georgia in 1955. She also received degrees in Christian education and theology from Princeton Theological Seminary (1957) and, in 1970, graduated with a degree in modern literature from the University of Buenos Aires, Department of Philosophy and Literature with the thesis: “The Problematic of Salvation in O’Neill” with Jorge Luis Borges as her adviser (Melano 1970). While at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, she took advanced courses in psychology and religion (1964) and later carried out her clinical pastoral practice at Presbyterian Hospital while at

Union Seminary in New York (1964), where she also studied Christianity and Drama (1964). She completed her doctoral studies in religious studies under Paul Ricoeur in Strasbourg, France (1975). She wrote her thesis on “Hermeneutical Method: The Theory of Interpretation According to Paul Ricoeur” with Roger Mehl (1902–97) as her adviser (Melano n.d.). She was a professor at the Higher Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires and, while there, founded and directed the Department of Christian Education. Finally, she was a member of the IV Commission of the World Council of Churches.

Melano belonged to a generation of Christian scholars and activists in Buenos Aires and beyond such as Julia Esquivel (1930–2019), Raúl Macín (1930–2006), Hiber Conteris (1933– ), Rubem Alves (1933–2014), Julio de Santa Ana (1934– ), and Justo L. González (1937– ). Others within the cultural sphere were people such as María Elena Walsh (1930–2011), Elizabeth Azcona Cranwell (1933–2004), and Alejandra Pizarnik (1936–72). Melano published two books: *La mujer y la Iglesia* (Women and the Church, 1973) and *Hermenéutica metódica: teoría de la interpretación según Paul Ricoeur* (Hermeneutical Method: The Theory of Interpretation According to Paul Ricoeur, 1983), plus several chapters in anthologies. She translated James D. Smart’s book *The Teaching Ministry of the Church* into Spanish (*El ministerio docente de la iglesia*, 1963) and collaborated with Ricoeur on an anthology, *Del existencialismo a la filosofía del lenguaje* (From Existentialism to a Philosophy of Language, 1983).

As of 1959, she began to write about theology, biblical interpretation, Christian education, pastoral psychology, evangelization, ecumenism, the mission of the Church, systematic theology, liberation theology, and ethics. She gave conferences on liberation theology, feminist theology, Black theology, Christian education, religious studies, and hermeneutics. She was a member of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights of Argentina whose president was Methodist minister José Míguez Bonino (Asamblea Permanente 1995).

In 1994, Janet W. May, a professor at the Latin American Biblical Seminary in Costa Rica, edited the fourteenth volume of the theological journal *Vida y Pensamiento* (Life and Thought). In the introduction to the volume, she mentions that this edition was dedicated to the First Encounter-Workshop of Female Professors of Theology, which paid homage to Melano. She states:

In this number we are including some papers from the First Encounter-Workshop of Female Professors of Theology. In this encounter, a small representative group of women met, who teach at theological institutions throughout Latin America. We wanted to get to know one another, share about our tasks, ideas and challenges. We also wanted to honor Beatriz Melano whose entry into theological education established a landmark and

a challenge to all women and male theologians, many years ago, and was a stimulus that has produced fruit: the incorporation of other Latin American women into the field of education. (May 1994, 3)

In another posthumous homage, Melano was considered to truly be “an amazon of the universe of Protestant theology in the second half of the 20th century” (García Bachmann 2009, 49). Her voice has been rescued and analyzed by new generations of female and male theologians (Azcuy 2012, 67). She approached the new forms of theology from the hermeneutical proposals of liberation theology and the theological offerings of authors such as José Míguez Bonino, Pablo Richard, Mortimer Arias, Emilio Castro, Rubem Alves, Hugo Assmann, Julio de Santa Ana, and José Severino Croatto, many of whom were professors at ISEDET. For her hermeneutics, she condensed the works of the French Reformed philosopher Paul Ricoeur. She read Eric Erikson, Miguel de Unamuno, Antonio Machado, and Sigmund Freud widely.

She recognized the value of other female authors whom she admired, such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the first woman to defend her right to study, and “her right to think and write theology,” as Melano (1985, 51) states. Her affirmation of Sor Juana as the “first theologian in America” became an important reference point. Lucy Stone and Mary Wollstonecraft in the 19th century also raised their voices in the struggle for human rights and the defense of women’s rights (Melano 1973, 78–9). She also took on the ideas of anthropologist Margaret Mead (Melano 1973, 27). Melano was also influenced by Rosemary Radford Ruether’s critique of Plato’s soul-body dualism (Melano 1973, 59). She claimed Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s re-interpretation of patriarchal Christian traditions, since “patriarchalism meant that women were gradually eliminated from leadership and subordinated to traditional feminine roles” (Melano 1979, 127). For Melano, the Bible transcends patriarchy, and, with Letty Russell, she learned “that without a change in language, the process of changing structures is slow.” That is why Melano affirms that it is “necessary to change the language of the oppressor for a new language and new images” (Melano 1979, 119).

Rubem Alves—the initiator of liberation theology in the Protestant sphere—and Melano were invited to attend the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians in 1976 (Tanzania). He was invited to speak about the “Presence of the Church,” and she was given the theme of “Outline for a Theological Approximation and a Perspective of the Church.” However, Alves could not attend, so Melano took on both themes and presented a single essay entitled: “Liberation Theology and the Mission of the Church in Latin America” (Melano 1985, 21). Other relevant articles written by her were “Feminist Hermeneutics. The Role of Women and its

Implications” (Melano 1994, 15-33) and “Liberation: A Biblical Perspective (I Samuel 1:2-2:11)” (Melano 1997, 227-36).

From her standpoint as a professor, she influenced Dr. Mary Hunt, who said that she learned a lot from Melano about the relationship between women and religion in Latin America. Hunt was a visiting professor at ISEDET between 1980 and 1981 (Mary Hunt, pers. comm., September 18, 2017). Likewise, she was an influence on the theological thought of students such as Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952-2009) (Hunt 2010, 19). There is a letter, dated August 18, 1995, in which Althaus-Reid sends a résumé of her thesis, along with a tape, to Melano. Marcela Bosch (1955)<sup>2</sup> and Mercedes García Bachmann (1963) are two other students, from different faith traditions, whose work shows evidence of Melano’s influence on their theological offerings (García Bachmann 2009, 493-8). Althaus-Reid recognized that Melano coined the term “pertinent theology,” which was a precursor of liberation theology (Althaus-Reid 2005, 41). Professor Pablo R. Andiñach says that she retired from ISEDET in 1998, and he considered her a pioneer of feminism, influenced by Doröthee Solle (1929-2003) and the educator Sara Eccleston (1840-1916) (Pablo R. Andiñach, pers. comm., April 7, 2016).

## *Historical Setting*

In the 1960s, Protestants and Catholics, from each of their theological stances, were challenged to become involved in the social movements of the different Latin American countries. Melano affirms that, in that period of history, particularly in Argentina, they were living under the weight of the “Perón tyranny” (Melano 1961, 10). In many countries in the region, military dictatorships used macro-structural violence emanating from public institutions. Military and paramilitary groups used violence to repress anyone who thought or acted contrary to the dictatorial system supported by the United States (Gaudichaud 2005, 16-17). Many forced disappearances, tortures, jailings and extra-judicial executions, among other extreme situations, took place.

These terrible experiences were perhaps what motivated the young student, Melano, to meet with her fellow students to reflect on the actions that, from their Protestant Christian vision, they could carry out in favor of the lives of people who had suffered violence. The historic moment that developing countries in Latin America were experiencing demanded that the churches leave aside their passivity. Melano’s writings reflect the uneasy feeling that the non-Catholic Christian churches had about the task of generating concrete actions in favor of life as a way of showing solidarity with the oppressed and the Gospel. Melano participated in the Center for the Study of Social Law (CELS) in Buenos Aires, along with an

ecumenical group of pastors, professors, and other people, including Rabbi Marshall Meyer (1930–1993). This group met regularly to support human rights work in the early 1980s (Mary Hunt, pers. comm., September 18, 2017).

The mission of Protestantism in Argentina in the 1960s was to act in such a way as to avoid the political, social, economic, and ecclesial damage derived from the thrust of US imperialism. One of the latter's strategies to obtain the submission of the countries in the Southern Hemisphere was to implement state terror through dissuading any social movements or civil, labor, or student organizations; there is evidence in the so-called "Horror Archives" (Gaudichaud 2005, 21–25).

As early as 1916, some Protestant churches organized activities to respond to the political, social, economic, and religious situation in Latin America. The circumstances led to the creation of various conferences that occurred on three different occasions. The I Latin American Evangelical Conference (I CELA) entitled "Evangelical Christianity in Latin America" (I Conferencia Evangélica 1949) took place July 18–30, 1949 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Seventeen countries participated. The main themes were "The Latin American Reality and the Presence of the Protestant Churches" and "The Message and Mission of Protestant Christianity for Latin America." Only four women came to this meeting. This conference tepidly denounced economic policy. One of the matters dealt with was "the female element."

The II CELA took place July 20–August 6, 1961, in Lima, Peru, with the theme of "Christ, the Hope for Latin America." The theme was based on the historical observation of social injustice, economic imperialism, and the complex issues of its native populations (II Conferencia Evangélica 1961). Its themes were "Our Message" and "Our Unfinished Task." Two hundred people participated, among them 33 women, from most of the Latin American countries. Melano and her husband were present at this conference. Melano reflected on the fact that "the Church in Latin America must faithfully discover its responsibility in the rapid and revolutionary social change ... [R]ather than remaining at an elite distance from the world's ferment, it could discover, over the course of time, the existence of a prophetic community for God's task in the world" (Melano 1961, 21). Melano's participation in the Christian Student Movement (Mary Hunt, pers. comm., September 20, 2017) and her relationships with members of other Christian traditions permitted her to have a wider vision of the Church's mission in Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

The III CELA took place from July 13–19, 1969, in Buenos Aires. The theme was "Debtors to the World" (III Conferencia Evangélica 1969). This conference touched on this relevant theme, among others, because it recognized that Protestant churches had a debt toward all social groups and now included Latin American women. In the paper presented by Olga B. de Ramírez, "Our Debt as Protestants to

Latin American Women,” it was recognized that traditional religious conditions favored the submission of women. Popular religiosity placed them in a situation of dependency and marginality. These situations are contrary to God’s will (III CELA 1969, 11-36). Furthermore, they warned the churches that they should be a prophetic voice and physical presence to confront the inhumane actions that were part of institutional violence on the American continent.

In 1967, two years before the III CELA, the Rev. Emilio Castro, as coordinator of *Unidad Evangélica Latinoamericana* (UNELAM), called for a consultation. He was motivated by the preoccupation with women’s low participation in the Latin American ecumenical movement and the demand that Protestant and Catholic churches respond creatively to rapid social changes. This consultation, entitled “The Role of Women in the Church and in Society” was unique. It was the first time that women gathered from almost all Latin American countries. Melano was invited, and she presented a lecture titled “Man and Woman in God’s Mission.” For her, the Christian task is to become human, “become flesh of the other and this is pointing out something more than a genital relationship” (Melano 1968, 77). Melano explains that to “become flesh” has to do with a greater critical consciousness, greater knowledge and greater responsibility with oneself and with the cosmos. As to this, she states:

[W]e live in a time of abundance and of great hunger, of demographic explosion and the power to control births. The danger lies in that man, capable of annihilating germs and ending death causing diseases, lets millions living in infrahuman conditions, in ignorance and exploited, die from starvation. Modern man can produce synthetic food, housing, clothing, can transmit knowledge and news in massive ways, predict and compute facts. This is the epoch of discovering the individual and collective subconscious with all its defense mechanisms and possibilities to recreate; the epoch of the patience of God and the impatience of man; the epoch of great awakenings and of tremendous blindness. (Melano 1968, 79)

The challenge to all human beings, Christian or not, was tremendous, because they lived in an epoch that biblically hearkened to the desert and the Exodus. Melano reflected on how women and men had the mission of discovering themselves as people immersed in a culture. With this discovery, they should be able to free themselves from prejudices and customs that impeded them from becoming persons. She thus proposed that the task should be carried out jointly, by both men and women, through a profound dialogue. Both could carry out the responsibilities as co-inheritors of a new humanity that inhabits the earth that sustains them as part of the entire cosmos created by God.

## *Some Theological Proposals*

### *The Foundations for Melano's Biblical Interpretation*

Rosino Gibellini has gathered some theological proposals from the “Theology in the Americas” conference that took place in Detroit in 1975, in which Melano participated, and stated:

[I]n Latin America, we underline the importance of the starting point, of the praxis and use of social sciences to analyze our historical-political situation. In this sense, I am totally in agreement with my male colleagues, but with a quantitative difference: I underline the need of pointing out the importance of the different cultural forms which express oppression, as well as the ideology which divides us not only as a class, but also as a race and sex. Racism and sexism are oppressive ideologies that need to be dealt with in a specific way in the sphere of liberation theology. (Gibellini 1998, 629)

Since 1975, Melano carried out theological analysis in the two categories of race and sex. She states: “Today all of these groups begin to create theology. We have a very interesting new one in Native American theology, and in North American and South African Black theology, as well as feminist theology in Europe and in the United States, incipient in Latin America” (Melano 1979, 134). As to sex, she says, “... as if humanity had been created for sex and not sex for humanity” (Melano 1973, 69). That is why racism and sexism, from a theological perspective, must be the starting point for all historical-political and theological analysis. The analysis of the category of sex is important because it influences how people are socially construed. This has repercussions in the ministries, which have been relegated to women within churches in ways that reflect prevailing prejudices over biblical truth.

In this sense, she affirms that “our interpretation must try to be conscious of the limitations imposed by the structures of the society in which we live, that is, the thought and life patterns that condition our very thoughts, our very imagination and our actions” (Melano 1979, 116). From that standpoint, she began her theological task by analyzing biblical language. She exposed the damage that dualism has created through the use of words because these words in themselves exclude not only women but all groups that are not within the dominant hegemony. Thus, the life experience of women and other groups contains different faith perspectives from which they interpret biblical language, and they become the theological subject and place of a new hermeneutic, a new theology, and a new liberating paradigm.



Reflection, action, and the social sciences were, for her, the basis of a new proposal for biblical interpretation. Her theology attempted to go beyond the traditional interpretation shared by Protestant missionaries who arrived in the latter half of the 19th century with conservative beliefs and religious practices. In fact, the ideology of the missionaries could not be cataloged as “theological thought” as such, but rather as forms of Protestant thought whose sources were the evangelization manuals with a fundamentalist or traditional emphasis (Alves 1973, 88-96).

### *The Prejudices Between Men and Women are the Expression of Sin*

In 1967, in her lecture, “Man and Woman in God’s Mission” (Melano 1968, 75-91), Melano explained that men and women constituted God’s humanity even in Genesis. Both men and women were mandated to work in unity to become one flesh, not only in the genital sense but in discovering one with the other. For her, Marxists were the first to recognize woman as the “first slave, the first laborer, the first proletariat” (Melano 1968, 78) and that the situation went against the divine plan. As she speaks of Marxism, it becomes clear that the theological methodology she uses is not traditional. This is due to her affirmation that biblical interpretation must incorporate tools from the social sciences. With these tools, it is evident that God’s Word is insisting that women and men should not create barriers that separate. Instead, they should be united in Christ and live under the aegis of the divine will. Their bonds are vital for the perpetuation of creation in accord with God’s mission. Because of this, she states, “woman cannot nor must act separately from man as a self-sufficient entity prescinding from the other part of humanity, since in the very act of creation, God created one humanity: male and female ... God gave the entire creation to the entirety of humanity ... and mandated it to work in unity also” (Melano 1968, 75-7).

She emphasizes that men, as well as women, are unfaithful because they have not been able to discover a way to confront and overcome the struggle that has separated them for centuries with respect to sex and the social construct which has resulted from this. She warns that they must go together to get water from the well of life that God has given them.

When she talks about the political or historical implications, she emphasizes that dialogue is needed. It is necessary because our dialogue partners can only be humanized when we come to know how they think. Thus, together, they can contribute toward the creation of new roles, whose conformation and

construction will be the foundations of a new way of relating and the creation of a new humanity.

She insists that to free oneself of prejudices and enter into dialogue is a calling from God. “In the case of man, the generally subconscious prejudice in the presence of woman, in terms of collaboration or co-participation in the sphere of thought and action ... means he cannot easily get rid of his ancestral subconscious and conscious baggage, which has dominated humanity during the twenty centuries in which woman was considered and used as an object ... servant, instrument” (Melano 1968, 87).

Melano says that this separation of the sexes is an expression of sin within the church. The church continues to be held back by prejudices that, in other spheres, have been overcome. That is why she challenges the churches to revise their dogmas and not separate what God has united. She invites women, themselves, to not have prejudices against other women. She asks people to reflect on a ministry that is not just masculine but instead integrated and open to women and men. Together, men and women can reflect theologically on the significance of obedience and faithfulness to God, for the creation of a humanity dearly loved by God, its creator (Melano 1968, 86).

### *Christ Overcomes the Barriers that Separate Humanity*

In her book *La mujer y la Iglesia* (“Woman and the Church”), published in 1973, she describes her participation in the Second Iberian Ecumenical Encounter of Women in Madrid in 1971. Protestant and Catholic women, traditional and liberal, came to this meeting from all over the Iberian Peninsula. The focus of her lectures was based on three aspects:

- some biblical and theological bases to achieve a perspective on the place and mission of women in the Church;
- the barriers that have impeded women’s full participation in said mission;
- the challenge that the Gospel and the world face today, demanding a deeper comprehension of the role of women in the Church and its commitment to the furthering of God’s purposes in our time (Melano 1973, 9).

Her interest in publishing her lectures in Latin America consisted in the fact that she hoped they would resonate for women all over the continent, as occurred with the Spanish and Portuguese women. The purpose was to create a consciousness of the necessity to restate the role of women in the contemporary Church (Melano 1973, 10). One of her theses is that the resurrection of Christ helps us discover that he destroys the walls that divide and separate human beings from God and one

another; walls mostly construed from prejudices, tradition, or custom, and which fundamentally are an expression of sin (Melano 1973, 13).

Melano affirms that, theologically, Jesus annulled all divisions. She recognizes that it was difficult for Jews to comprehend and accept that God also accepts gentiles (Acts 11:17). She suggests that the same difficulty exists in the majority of men and many women, who cannot accept that God created them equally, and that the priesthood is for all who believe. Sadly, overcoming prejudice against women has not yet been achieved (Melano 1973, 18).

In like manner, she invites Christians to review the myths, cultural prejudices, and customs that obscure the message of the Gospel. She also exhorts Christians, who as daughters and sons of God should reflect on what Paul said to the Romans: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). She challenges men and women to reflect on "What does it mean to be a new-man-in-relation-to-women from a theological perspective?" (Melano 1973, 29). The divide is seen as natural in some men as in some women. Hence, she asks the questions: "Can a human being be free or achieve complete freedom while their fellow human being remains a slave?" and "Can a woman and a man be free without taking the other into account?" (Melano 1973, 30). By not entering into a dialogue about this, one is negating God's purpose and the unity of all humankind. At the same time, God's redemption is not allowed. God desires the unity of humankind in its diversity for the fullness of life and the reign of life.

Furthermore, she reminds us that "a fundamental tenet of the Early Church was equality in Christ" (Gal. 3:28), whose main point is that male and female, free and slave are considered persons. Rank, class, and race are overcome. Through the Lord, all people are equal. She reminds us to the biblical story to remind us that "women in the Early Church held four positions: prophetic, liturgical, teaching and charity" (Melano 1973, 37).

She points out that it is necessary to review the apostle Paul's suggestions, because "his theology goes beyond that of his tradition, it penetrates deeper than the customs of his society... he underlines once and again, the unity and equality of both in Christ" (Gal. 3:27-8; Ef. 2:11-22) (Melano 1973, 40-1). She points out that Paul did not diminish the roles that women had. On the contrary, he insisted that they must not "... become slaves of human masters" (I Cor. 7:23) and "each one, male or female, [should] respond to the Lord faithfully, according to the gifts and the vocation to which he was called" (Melano 1973, 43).

Specifically, she speaks about women and myth "as a traditional story referring to events that occurred in the beginnings of time; a story through which the human being tries to understand itself within its own world" (Melano 1973, 50). These myths have to do with a woman's sexuality and body, considering her tainted,

impure, untouchable, dangerous, tempting, and inferior. Melano says, “these myths play a role in the subconscious of the human race. This is proven by the irrational reactions of men and women when they question certain male and female roles within the Church and society” (Melano 1973, 56-7). She speaks of at least seven consequences of these myths in women’s lives and the limitations that are generated that impede them from developing their full potential, with women’s activities reduced to those of certain primitive societies—children, the kitchen, the church—as their only possible destiny:

- The practice among Christians of a so-called double standard, with a more benign judgment on “Don Juan”-type men, whereas women are severely judged.
- The concept of the intellectual inferiority of women, and legal and juridical discrimination.
- Economic inequality in the labor force, besides the “invisible work” carried out in the home and without any remuneration.
- The persistence of the buying and selling of women as a “sexual object.”
- Single women are belittled, branded pejoratively as “spinsters,” stigmatized as not fully realized, incomplete and less valuable beings.
- The activities assigned to women within the parishes and other ecclesiastical institutions are of a secondary nature. Women continue to serve men, therefore, they perform fixed roles that presuppose that God’s daughters have no other interests or capacities. Co-participation is almost null. Only the male has been assigned fixed and immovable values, such as intellectual capacity and the roles of theologian or priest, among others (Melano 1973, 65-9).

Therefore, the most important ecclesiological implication for her was the priesthood of all believers (Melano 1973, 80), because “each member of the church is a priest. Each person has the responsibility to interpret, teach, and preach the Word, giving glory only to God following the basic principles of the Reformation.” For her, this “expresses the risk of the Protestant Reformation” (Melano 1999, 154). To be consequent with the Reformed principles of *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia* (by scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone) is truly a challenge to all Christian churches worldwide to reconsider their existence and task in the 21st Century.

## *The New Reformation of the Church*

In “Potential Contributions of Reformed Theology for Ecumenical Discussion and Practice,” Melano points out that theology is inseparable from history. *Sola fide*,

*sola gratia, sola scriptura* continue to be challenging mainly for the churches which came out of the Reformation. For her, the danger of the Reformation is that the Protestant churches will not understand their human responsibility and follow the call, because they must respond to what God demands, since “we are living in a time when coveting power and love of power predominate. The glorification of the human being generates institutionalized violence” (Melano 1999, 154).

The basic principles of the Reformation were devised by the reformers in the 16th century as a response to the historic context of their time.

To the Reformers ... the hermeneutical key of *sola Scriptura* was Jesus Christ himself, in his liberating and redeeming work for the earth and all humankind. This ... prevents us from falling prey to biblicism and social absenteeism[, which are how] the church loses its authority ... as it reproduces the reality of a torn humanity in its own interior. ... And the question ... is of asking ourselves whether or not we are their [the reformers'] true heirs. (Melano 1999, 154-5)

To reflect on this, she proposes the following elements:

1. The renewal of biblical hermeneutics: This renewal assists us in going back to our source (*sola scriptura*) because it is a matter of being freed from false interpretations which became dogmas in the past and whose weight is still present among us. Therefore, a hermeneutical renewal is necessary to be faithful to the principles of the Reformed theologians. Likewise, the problem of biblical interpretation divides our contemporary theology due to confessional barriers. We must consider that the Christian message is not so much a collection of dogmas and doctrines. Yahweh is a historical God.
2. A renovated Church: For Melano, a Reformation of solidarity with all those people who live in subhuman situations is necessary. This is because, in the midst of so much confusion, the Holy Spirit creates a community of worship, proclamation, and solidary service. When the proclaimed word is not paired with a visible solidarity with those who have been relegated by society, it runs the risk of becoming empty words without meaning. Service is an intrinsic part of the reason for the existence of the Church. For Melano, the reformed church, always reforming, must act through three aspects:
  1. *A Prophetic Community*: She asks herself, what is the response of the church in the face of a humanity that lives in subhuman conditions; in the face of the dispossessed, exploited, prisoners, oppressed, powerless, voiceless? In this sense, Christians do not have a message, but are the message.

2. *An Ecumenical Community — A Frontier for Unity and Reconciliation*: The divisions and subdivisions that happen in Christian churches are a scandal, which are added to that of the cross. The labels that are used to identify us separate all the church from the rest of non-Christian human beings.
3. *A Community of Incarnate Non-violence: A Frontier for Peace*. In light of the macro-structural violence that mutilates minimal basic rights, the messianic community cannot remain in a neutral stance, in cowardice, or in the acceptance of this type of situation (Melano 1999, 162–4).

From the standpoint of her interest in creating a new hermeneutic, she formulated a methodology with a liberation orientation. She suggested a plan in which men and women must cast off the prejudices and customs that alienate them from their humanity. She proposed that dialogue, as a basic tool, could allow them to fulfill their responsibility in the world and allow them to participate in the construction of a new humanity.

From her hermeneutical proposal, she saw the need to articulate a new language for interpreting the biblical text. Biblical interpretation should lead to the truth as something to be done, not only believed, from philosophical, theological, and historical stances. Her proposal to analyze biblical language for interpretation is still timely because the very force of the written word in the biblical text expresses significant and favorable elements for the overcoming of legalistic and patriarchal interpretations. She states: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ has theological roots in the Hebrew prophets, rather than in priestly, legalistic Judaism. Nevertheless, the churches sometimes do not know whether they are heirs of the Hebrew prophets or legalistic Judaism” (Melano 1979, 120). Likewise, she highlights the need to recuperate a feminine semantic for all theological formulation. For example, in the Psalms, a feminist interpretation makes evident the ways in which biblical language transcends patriarchy from the first story in Genesis (1:27)—a text which tells how God created a humanity in God’s image, not a patriarchal humanity (Melano 1979, 125).

Unfortunately, her theological-philosophical reflections were largely ignored because there was no response from Latin American Protestant communities at that time. However, as Mary Hunt says, “If she was ignored in a certain measure in Latin America, she was taken seriously in the United States and Europe as a feminist theologian” (Mary Hunt, pers. comm., September 18, 2017). Melano decided to make her residence in her home in Montevideo for a time, until she died on May 29, 2004 (Campertoni 2012, 146).

Melano is an example or paradigm for every Christian person who seeks a solid and pertinent theological education that takes into account the ample demands of

one's historic moment. From her perspective as a theologian, exegete, and feminist, Christ's church in Latin America and throughout the world must define its ministries, since it must become incarnate in a historic reality as a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. It must maintain its capacity for wonder in the midst of so many signs of death and act consequently. Melano was convinced that faith in praxis must make the churches return to scripture to guide their prophetic, ecumenical, and incarnational action.

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## Notes

1. This chapter is an abbreviated version of Martha González Pérez's article, "Beatriz Melano, primera doctora en Teología de ámbito protestante latinoamericano," in *Revista Iberoamericana de Teología* 27 (July–December 2018): 43–80, [revistas.iberomexico.mx/ribet/uploads/volumenes/28/pdf/RIBET\\_27\\_WEB.pdf](https://revistas.iberomexico.mx/ribet/uploads/volumenes/28/pdf/RIBET_27_WEB.pdf). Translated by Cherie R. White.
2. As to the question of Melano's influence on her theological training and other areas of her life, Marcela Bosch expressed: "It helped me to see a woman who was attacked by her colleagues, suffering sexism at ISEDET. Like no one else, she was able to explain hermeneutics to me. As so many other intelligent, brilliant and pioneering women, she was stigmatized as being crazy. She taught me that to forge roads anywhere, we must struggle. And that only women who are 'daddy's girl,' that is to say, who are reconciled with patriarchy or flirt with it, are the ones who triumph quickly and maintain their positions because they do not deal with the root causes of their power. She taught me this without saying one word, nor complaining. But I have eyes to see and deconstruct" (Bosch, pers. communication, August 13, 2017).
3. The CSM was part of the World Federation of Christian Student Movements (WFCSM).