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Introduction: A Cuban *Encuentro*

In June of 1985 twelve theological educators from Protestant seminaries across the United States and about the same number from *Seminario Evangelico de Teologia* (SET) in Matanzas, Cuba, participated in a joint Colloquium on Theological Education for Global Solidarity held for two weeks at the Matanzas seminary. The purpose of the Colloquium was to explore perspectives on issues of theological education of common interest to educators from the U.S. and Cuba, especially focused on the theme, "Education for Solidarity: What Constitutes Liberating Intercultural Theological Education?"

The Colloquium (or *encuentro*, as we called it) developed out of conversations three years earlier in Cuba between Alice Hageman, who was spending a semester teaching at SET, and Jane Cary Peck, participating in the World Council of Churches pre-Assembly visitation to Cuban churches. We continued these conversations when we returned to our work in Boston and subsequently discussed our ideas and proposal with the administrators at SET.

From our own cross-cultural and ecumenical experiences through local churches, theological seminaries, World and National Council of Churches, SCMs, and faith-based Central American and Cuban solidarity groups and women's groups, we were convinced of the importance of a central focus on justice in the purpose and practice of theological education, in relation to local and international contexts and the ecumenical agenda.¹ Both of us had worked with and been strengthened by others in churches and seminaries who, out of their own experiences of working for justice and ecumenism, shared this conviction. We concluded that it

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¹ A similar conviction is manifested in the work for a number of years of the WCC's Program on Theological Education (such as the U.S.Canadian Consultation on Global Solidarity in Theological Education held in Toronto in July, 1981) and in publications such as The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy: Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1985).

would contribute to theological education and to the work of such persons to gather a group of theological educators and go to Cuba to talk with seminary faculty colleagues there about curricular issues of common interest, in an international, cross-cultural perspective.

Early in the planning stages, a proposal concerning the possibility of the publication of papers prepared for the *encuentro* was presented by John C. Diamond, Jr., Professor of Systematic Theology at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, who is also the editor of *The Journal of The Interdenominational Theological Center* (JITC). Since it was clearly evident that such papers would be of interest to a wide audience among theological educators and students, as well as to the churches, his proposal was subsequently adopted. Conferees from both Cuba and the United States take this opportunity to thank JITC editors and staff for this publication opportunity.

Why Cuba? For several reasons. First, because of the interest seminary faculty from each country would have in the developments in theological education in the other country. What is happening to theological education in Cuba, i.e., their way of looking at it in their very different socioeconomic context, is worth the attention of U.S. educators. Similarly, Cubans have an interest in developments on the cutting edge of theological education in the United States, such as feminist theology, but do not have easy access to these. There are differences in pedagogical method and intercultural atmosphere. While Cuban seminary faculty and students do more practical work by necessity than their U.S. counterparts, and thus bring this experience to the classroom, both method and context of theological education are more classical than in many liberal U.S. seminaries. Further, despite Cuba's geographical isolation as an island, exacerbated by the U.S. policy of isolation of Cuba, Cuban consciousness of the importance of international exchange is probably greater than that in the U.S. Cuban churches and seminaries are highly sensitive to and interrelated with other parts of the world, especially the rest of Latin America; there are always Cubans going out and visitors from other countries going in, a characteristic of seminaries as well as the general society. U.S. seminary education seems, on the other hand, aware of what is happening in the U.S. but less so in the rest of the world; our international students come primarily to learn from the U.S. and their potential contribution to our international, intercultural understanding is much less drawn upon. Thus, we thought that U.S. seminaries could learn from Cuban seminaries about theological education richly informed by constant cross-cultural ecumenical interchange, and could share with them some of the new theological developments from our context.

Further, many of the potential U.S. participants we invited teach and write in the area of liberation theology. For them, learning first-hand

about liberation theology in a socialist context could be enlightening and stimulating. In encountering the Cuban reality U.S. liberation theologians could (and can) observe a revolution which has as its stated goal the enhancement of the well-being of its whole population. Questions we would take to this experience could include: How much is the situation in Cuba determined by or influenced by the particular historical situation of Cuba and how much by its socialist revolution? How much menace and how much promise is there in the revolution? In relation to the implication behind the frequently-cited danger of "country X becoming another Cuba," is that such a dire eventuality? Is living in Cuba a "fate worse than death" (as implied by some U.S. commentators and government leaders), or does life in revolutionary Third-World Cuba offer signs of hope for persons in capitalist-dominated Third-World countries? We had much to learn about Cuba itself.

But Cuba is particularly important because, except for the two countries with which we share borders, it is our nearest neighbor; to be artificially cut off from this country and its people is an appalling fact. In ecumenical perspective, we must have amity toward our neighbors and consciousness and knowledge of their reality; we must overcome separation, particularly scandalous in this case so near. Thus, breaking down dividing walls of hostility was one of the motivations for the seminary faculty *encuentro* between Cubans and North Americans. Such an encounter between church-related people is of added significance because of the historic kinship relation between Cuban and U.S. Protestant churches.

The U.S. governmental ban on travel by U.S. citizens to Cuba² makes it extremely difficult for a sustained encounter with our Cuban neighbors. Thus, it is important for those few U.S. citizens who fit in the categories eligible to travel to Cuba to take advantage of the opportunity, on behalf of the rest of our citizenry. These were some of the motivations for proposing the *encuentro*.

It was a U.S. initiative, largely for our benefit, with the Cubans being willing to extend the invitation and participate with us for the contribu-

² U.S. Treasury Department regulations effective May 15, 1982, require that persons subject to U.S. jurisdiction be licensed to engage in any financial transactions related to travel to Cuba. The only transactions authorized are those relating to official travel by U.S. or foreign governmental officials; travel by media personnel and professional researchers; and, on a case-by-case basis, travel for humanitarian reasons or for purposes of participation in public exhibitions or performances. Without a Treasury license, U.S. citizens traveling within Cuba may not buy goods (for example an air ticket). Violation of these regulations is punishable by a fine of up to \$50,000, and/or imprisonment for up to ten years. This means that, unless someone fits within one of the limited categories, or is the invited guest of a Cuban organization, unlicensed travel to Cuba by everyone else is effectively prohibited, since it carries the risk of a substantial fine and/or a lengthy prison sentence.

tion they perceived such an exchange could make to theological education in both countries. One of the Cuban faculty members commented some time after the Colloquium that only in retrospect did the Cubans realize just how significant the exchange had been in the life of the seminary and church. Though there is a history of countless international, ecumenical gatherings for theological discourse in the Matanzas seminary and many visitations by individual theologians, these have not focused on theological *education*. This Colloquium was probably the first of its kind at SET, with its focus . . . on the respective lives of theological institutions in two different countries, in a meetings of peers. Thus new ground was to be broken, setting up collegial relationships which could potentially be ongoing, rather than the usual single-event programs and church bureaucratic trips.

The SET administrators and faculty thus agreed to be both hosts and colleagues. We jointly shaped the planning program based on initial drafts prepared by the U.S. leaders. Participants invited on the Cuban side were the Matanzas faculty and administration, some local pastors, a few students, former administrators of the seminary, and leaders of the Cuban Ecumenical Council. A nucleus was expected to participate throughout the Colloquium, while others would come in as their schedules permitted; presentations would be made by those in the core group.

The recruitment and selection of the U.S. participants began more than a year before the Colloquium. We identified about 50 people who might be interested in this kind of gathering, based upon their theological and work interests. We sought representation of women and men, whites and persons of color, and geographical spread. An initial letter was sent to those on our list, announcing the possibility of the Colloquium; then these spread the word to others. The criteria for selection were representation, qualification under the U.S. Treasury Travel Ban (seminary faculty), international experience and justice work to use as points of reference for reflection on Cuba, interest in Cuban churches. Applicants were asked to write a statement on why they wanted to participate in the Colloquium and the possibility of a multiplier effect—how they would use the experience when they returned to their own seminaries and churches. Almost everyone who expressed interest was known to us. All were positively predisposed toward liberation theology and Cuba. A number had had significant overseas experience with opportunity to assess another culture. Only one had never previously been out of the U.S. None except the two leaders had been to Cuba before, so participants were eager to take part in the Colloquium in this particular context. The statement of one participant is fairly representative of the in interest and purposes of most of the U.S. participants:

I am attempting to develop a liberating style and content of theological education, and would benefit greatly from a conference that addresses the questions that must be

addressed if such education is thoroughly intercultural. In most of my courses I utilize the work of Latin American theologians, and my understanding of that work, as well as my ability to share it with my students, would be enhanced by conversation with Cuban theologians and by study of Cuban churches. To further my work on the contribution churches make to the political process, I am especially interested in examining the political function of the churches in Cuba, and comparing this to the various political effects of the churches in the U.S. I am also involved in enhancing the full participation of women in churches and theological education, and would like to learn from Cuban theological faculty about the status of women in Cuban churches and Cuban society.

We, the U.S. participants, were not a typical group of theological educators coming together for this *encuentro*: not only did we all share a basic commitment to and experience with liberation theological approaches, but also the majority of the group were women and feminists. Both factors impacted the U.S. participants and our approach, and the latter factor significantly impacted the Cubans as well.

The participants in the Colloquium were: From the U.S., although not all made presentations:

Herman C. Waetjen, Professor of New Testament, San Francisco Theological Seminary

Sharon D. Welch, Assistant Professor of Theology and Applied Theology, Harvard Divinity School.

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, Associate Professor of Theology and Culture, Chicago Theological Seminary.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, Professor of Historical Theology, Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary.

Letty M. Russell, Professor of the Practice of Theology, Yale Divinity School

Jane Cary Peck, Associate Professor of Religion and Society, Andover Newton Theological School

Carter Heyward, Professor of Theology, Episcopal Divinity School

Beverly W. Harrison, Professor of Christian Ethics, Union Theological Seminary

Alice Hageman Attorney and formerly Co-pastor, Church of the Covenant, Boston

John C. Diamond, Jr., Professor of Systematic Theology, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta

Robert H. Bryant, Professor of Constructive Theology, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

Karen L. Bloomquist, Assistant Professor of Church and Society, Lutheran School of Theology

From Cuba, those participants who made presentations were:

Sergio Arce, formerly Rector of SET and Professor of Theology; International Vice President of Christian Peace Conference; Presbyterian Reformed Pastor

Israel Bastista, Professor of Old Testament, SET; Director of Provincial Library of Matanzas; Methodist pastor

Carlos Camps, Professor of Theology, SET; Stated Clerk of Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba

René Castellanos, Professor Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, SET; retired Presbyterian Reformed pastor

Adolfo Ham, Professor of Ethics, SET; Presbyterian Reformed pastor; President, Cuban Ecumenical Council

Lois Kroehler, Director of Music, SET, National Director of Music, Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba

Pablo Odén Marichal, Rector and Professor, SET; Episcopal priest

Denial Montoya, former Dean and Professor, SET; Presbyterian Reformed pastor

Miriam Ortega, former Professor of Christian Education, SET; Presbyterian Reformed pastor; Associate Director, Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland

Dora Valentin, former administrator and Professor, SET; former Director, Women's Department, Cuban Ecumenical Council; Treasurer, Christian Peace Conference of Latin American and the Caribbean

During the major part of the colloquium, we lived at the seminary in its beautiful setting atop a hill overlooking the Matanzas Harbor. Together with the Cuban participants, we ate at the seminary cafeteria. During the weekend at the close of the Colloquium, we stayed in the Methodist Center in the center of Havana.

After the Colloquium, several of the *encuentro* participants spent two days in Havana, during which they visited local congregations; met informally with Dr. José Felipe Carneado, Director of the Department of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party; visited a museum of Afro-Cuban religion; and attended the closing worship service of a diocesan consultation on the life and mission of the church in Cuba, which brought together clergy and lay delegates from the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Havana, along with ecumenical guests from Protestant and Jewish communities in the Havana area.

The Colloquium itself consisted of six dual presentations made by a Cuban and a U.S. participant, each followed by discussion among the wider group of participants; small group meetings; visits to and speaking or preaching in churches in Havana and the Matanzas area; a presentation by the Matanzas Women's Federation in their offices; a tour of the Matanzas secondary school of performing arts; an afternoon at world-renowned Varadero Beach; walking exploration of the city of Matanzas; a cultural presentation of music and dance by a Matanzas Afro-Cuban folk group; and a presentation by SET professor René Castellanos on Afro-Cuban religion, *Santería*.

The presentations, which covered a period of five days, addressed the

following topics:

Issues of major concern in theological education in Cuba, the Caribbean, and the U.S.

Presenters: Odén Marichal and Beverly W. Harrison,

Who are we as theological educators? Do we constitute part of and train persons for a church of the poor?

Presenters: Sergio Arce, Rosemary R. Ruether

How do we educate and for what?

Presenters: Miriam Ortego, Letty M. Russell, and Carlos Camps.

Is theological education captive of, critic of, enhancer of the respective cultures in which it is rooted?

Presenters: Adolfo Ham, Jane Cary Peck, and Susan Thistlethwaite.

How do we use the Bible to educate, manipulate, liberate-sustain?

Presenters: Israel Batista and Herman C. Waetjen.

Are women full participants in theological education, in the church, in the society?

Presenters: Dora Valentin, Marta Fuego, and Carter Heyward.

At the conclusion of the Colloquium, the U.S. participants prepared a collective statement of information and reflection on our experience in Cuba. The statement was circulated in our seminaries and among denominational and ecumenical Latin American and Caribbean education offices and is included in this volume. A retrospective assessment of the *encuentro*, written by one of the participants from the United States, Professor Robert Bryant, is also included herein, as is an abridgement of a statement prepared for the Third Congress, Central Committee, the Communist Party of Cuba, titled: *Cuban Women: Twenty-Five Years of the Revolution*. This statement is published with the permission of Marta Fuego, National Director, Cuban Federation of Women.

At the close of the *encuentro*, it was discovered by the editors that a colloquium participant, Rosemary R. Ruether, an artist as well as a theologian, had done line drawings (actually, watercolors) of the seminary buildings at Matanzas. One of these drawings is presented with her permission in this volume, a first in the world of publishing.