

DORA VALENTIN\*

## Are Women Full Participants in Theological Education / Church / Society?

With great pleasure and satisfaction I have accepted the invitation to participate in this Colloquium on Theological Education held in Matanzas Evangelical Seminary, with which I have been related for more than 30 years as a professor, and for the last 10 years as an administrator until recently. At the same time I do it with concern, because the topic I am supposed to present is so challenging and important to me—"Are Women Full Participants in Theological Education/ Church/ Society?"—that I have promised myself I will dedicate the rest of my life to make it positively possible.

Today as far as the specific topic I will develop, which is Women in Theological Education and Church, I cannot say much. We have not accomplished much in Cuba in these two aspects, in spite of living in a Revolution for more than 25 years, even when much has been accomplished in our society in relation to women. My "companeras" will tell you about this later on.

However, before entering into my specific topic, I do believe it is necessary to remind you of some of the characteristics of Women's Struggle in Latin America. We must situate ourselves within the historical development of the continent which has to do specifically with the condition, situation, and struggles of the Latin American woman. This history is summed up, in the last four centuries, in a constant and persevering struggle for the liberation of the entire continent. In the process of that social-political-economic struggle, one discovers that the Latin American woman has been the most oppressed being, the most dispossessed of her right as a human being, the most ignored and the most ignorant; but at the same time one discovers that she has taken an active, committed part, on occasion a decisive part, in the development of that struggle. It has become clearer that there exists on this Continent a woman op-

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pressed by a male who also suffers the oppression of a whole system of exploitation and cruelty.

Liberation of women in Latin America implies liberation of society. There can be no free women in a society of oppressed beings. So, in a way our struggle is different from that of women from developed countries. After the political, economical, and social liberation is achieved, then the fight against the specific condition of exploitation and oppression will start, as it happened in Cuba. My "companeras" will talk to you about it later in this panel.

Now to our specific point. The woman's condition is further subjected to a specific oppression, the product of a long history that combines religious influences, traditional cultures, values, established stereotypes, and sexism. I will refer only to the first one: that is: the religious influence. It was Simone de Beauvoir and August Babel, ideological mentors of the feminist women's groups in Germany, who said that Christianity contributed essentially to the subjugation of women. Our churches' defensive position in relation to women's right tends to confirm rather than revise that judgement.

When I say the church, of course I am referring to that traditional institutional church of ours which is still today living (in every aspect) in the past, in which women are the very devoted religious ones, only going from "home to church, and from church to home". So, what can we say about opportunities in the theological aspect? Not much we can mention, except for a few graduated from the Theological Seminary but without any significant creative theological contributions yet.