

Who Are We as Theological Educators? Do We Constitute Part of/Train for a Church of the Poor?

Religion is the heart of a world without heart; the spirit of a situation lacking of spirit. Karl Marx

Introduction

The theme proposed for our work on who we are as theological educators is a very difficult one. There is nothing more difficult than to answer in a sincere way the most terrible and profound question for a human being: "Who am I?" It was Don Quixote de la Mancha who openly affirmed, "I know who I am." However pitiful, Alonso Quijano felt satisfied suggesting that he did not know who he was.

Going into the theological arena, allow me to point out that John Calvin began his Institutes with the premise that the knowledge of the human phenomenon, i.e., to know who we are, and the knowledge of God constitute similar knowledge. As a matter of fact, they were only one knowledge, they were the same. The Confession of Faith of 1977 of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba ends with a statement that clarifies our ultimate concern: to achieve in Jesus Christ the divine answer to our greatest questions: "Tell us Thy name. Tell me who I am."

One of the aberrations of theological educators is in the chain of "informing" — making or asking for reports — about God without even thinking about the concomitant question: "Who is he or she as theological educator?" Therefore, the question before us cannot be a question of idle curiosity. To discover our identity is an essential aspect of our theological task. Any other educator — in order to understand who he or she is in relation to his or her task — could avoid any theological reference, at least in a direct way. (He or she doesn't need to refer directly who they are to who God is.) That is not our situation. To really discover who we are is intimately related to our search for God. Thence, the pertinence and relevance — but above all the difficulty — of the question proposed by this paper. As soon as we go into the matter we find ourselves in a very tragicomical situation: this that reflects the very charac-

ter of our identity as theological educators.

The Tragicomical Character of our Identity

Taking into consideration Marx's quotation at the beginning of this paper, it would be very easy to characterize us as tragicomical figures. This is in short what I want to say this morning about our identity as theological educators.

The best way to illustrate it and, at the same time, to explore and analyze it, as an introduction to the problem, is to look at biblical texts recorded in all three synoptic gospels. It is the dialogue that Jesus maintained with the apostles at Cesarea Phillipi. I have selected this passage as the best among many others, since it presents an event in which we notice the dialectical coincidence of the identity of Jesus and the identity of Peter. The dialogue puts before us Jesus as theological subject, and Peter as theological object in their dialectical relationship. As a matter of fact, we can here discover the etiology of our tragicomical identity.

To Jesus' question: "Who am I?", Peter answered "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Such an answer deserved a great deal of honorable titles for Peter, surely given not by Jesus himself but by the Church, especially those who were educated by Peter. The reaction of Jesus states not only a different but, in a way, a contradictory conceptualization of his own identity, beginning with the strict order not to repeat to anyone that he was the Messiah.

Then the tragicomical figure of Peter as theological educator came onto the scene. Full of venerable diplomas and honorable titles Peter began in a learned fashion to rebuke Jesus. Finally Jesus turned and said to Peter, the laureate theological educator of the apostles, "You think as men think, not as God thinks." Then Jesus began to claim from Peter and the other disciples to be merely his followers. The question does not require an onto-theological answer, but an ortho-praxis-theological answer. They — the disciples, including the theological educators — must leave self behind, that means to deny his or her own self. Let us say, following Paul, leaving greed behind. "Greed is idolatry." Idolatry is the essence of human sin: Greed is the original sin i.e., the heart of any fetishism. Not "*hubris*" but "*pleonedzia*" is the original sin.

Secondly, "He or she must take up his or her cross." It is necessary for him or her to assume an antimperialistic option, to be an antimperialistic militant, to make an option for the poor, i.e., for the oppressed, the exploited, against the dominant rich classes.

These two prerequisites put before us the two questions proposed for this paper. The first question was: "Do we constitute part of a Church of the poor?" To be poor is a very relative condition. In the midst of a society that has put an end to poverty in the large sense of the word, we

have to find a more dialectical understanding of poverty. As I study the question of poverty, I have come closer to the conclusion that to be poor means "to leave greed behind." It is dangerous to say this, because it is easy to spiritualize the problem, but I refuse any kind of spiritualization of "leaving greed behind." Jesus asked it of the rich young man. The problem was not spiritualized by Jesus, nor the young man.

The second question was: "Do we train for a church of the poor?" To train for a church of the poor means to assume in contemporary times education that seriously requires from us as educators a socio-political-economic option against the dominant system, and to engage ourselves in the struggle for the liberation of the majority of the people and nations who are poor, i.e., the victims of the greedy.

I have referred to this passage because it illustrates the tragicomical character of theological education. Stuffing oneself with the best titles and the biggest number of diplomas we usually don't go farther than to reaffirm Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. We do not hear his prohibition of talking about it and his claim of being the Son of Man.

The way to do this is before us: to leave greed behind, to take up an anticapitalistic militance.

Let us move quickly a little farther because this paper is taking more the shape of a sermon than a lecture, even though as Barth says, a good theological lecture is a better sermon.

Our Tragicomical Figure in an Intellectual Perspective

The path of discovering who we are as theological educators requires a first step, i.e., to define what our goals are.

To educate is to shape. In order to shape (to form) someone, we are required to inform him or her. In our particular case as theological educators we have to inform *the people of the church* about the dialectical movement implicit in the identity of Jesus for those who teach him as Messiah — the Son of God and his self-identification as Son of Man, i.e., the movement that goes through the dialectical path from Jesus the Lord, according to most of the theological educators, and Jesus the Servant of his little brothers and sisters, according to his own understanding of himself.

This dialectical movement points to the central event of God's Revelation, His Incarnation. To actually give such information would mean a transformation, a re-formation, or conversion of the Church. But it requires at the same time the existence of transformed or converted theological educators.

Let us try to move into some details in relation to the required type of theological information as primary aspect of theological formation. The

primary question would be the question of communication.

To inform is to communicate. There is no possibility of education without communication. On this level of the educative event the tragicomical figure of the theological educator easily emerges.

After two thousand years of solemn teaching of the gospel, the philosophies of our time growing out of the inner parts of our Western culture have declared themselves atheists. This cultural phenomenon can be analyzed from various different points of view, but the secularist nature of these philosophies points with an accusing finger more to our religious tragicomical character as educators than at their own evil. The "secularism" of the present world after two thousand years of theological education is a consequence of the theological sacralization of the gospel and of all its means of communication.

In this sense we, theological educators, are not innocent. The first thing that the theological educator today must learn is that through these atheist philosophies God is speaking to us, God is preaching the gospel and judging us. Among these philosophies, because of their preponderance in today's world, Linguistic Positivism and Marxism-Leninism stand out. The first has forced us — as theological educators — to clarify the language of our theological discourse. The second, Marxism, forces us to clarify the language of "our action." Linguistic Positivism is a philosophical product of Capitalism and shows its character. Capitalist societies are societies in which human beings live, work and die for him or herself; where "Love is just a moral commandment." Human beings are really incapacitated, without trying intentionally and systematically to know "God who is love," since capitalism produces in its bosom beings who mainly have eyes to see their own needs, minds to suffer to a pathological point their own particular yearnings and personal problems, and hearts to love only themselves to the sacrifice of the others. In that sense, work — the essence of human spirituality — results in being "the price of bread," and the purpose of human life is reduced in a dehumanizing way to an individualistic struggle, to the pursuit of what he or she considers to be his or her particular happiness, his or her private well-being. Marxist philosophy is the philosophy which characterizes the revolutionary social world it is making, where human beings are challenged to live, work, and die for others, where "Love is converted into law, i.e., in objective reality", in concrete acts of love as Ché Guevara would say, "efficient love" as Father Camilo Torres writes. It capacitates human beings admittedly without trying to intentionally, but in fact in a systematic way, to come to know "God, who is Love," since it tries to produce human beings who have eyes to see the needs of others, to think in heroic proportions about the sufferings and the yearnings and problems of others and to feel compassion and love for others to the sacrifice of themselves. One works not to pay "the price of bread" but rather "work be-

comes the personal participation of each one in the happiness of all," in the common well being.

As a person in the contemporary cultural world, a real theological educator has to choose between these two "atheisms." It is not strange that, because of the gospel we put ourselves decisively in favor of the second, Marxist atheism. If there exists any contradiction between Marxist atheism and Christian faith, it will be in the purely theoretical field, and it is well to observe that the gospel in which we say we believe and the theological affirmations which we are called to communicate are not a "theory of God," nor an exposition of ideas about humanity and/or nature, but rather the liberating event which opens the way for the action of the Spirit of God who exists in the loving realization of "interpersonal/social/political/economic relations." "No one has ever seen God. . .if we love one another, God abides in us. . .God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (I John 4:12 a, 16 b). Those who make justice are from God.

The Bible does not present us with a "theory about God," a "theory about nature," nor a "theory about human beings" on one hand; on the other, all God's experience or the events that the Bible tells us about have a secularized character. Secularism is a good preventive or antidote for idolatry. Idolatry creates "credulous" people. We as theological educators are called to create and nurture believers. Our main problem as theological educators is how to teach about God — who does not admit any image of himself — without creating idols.

The tragicomical figure of the theological educator comes out on this matter with sufficient evidence and force to make ourselves our own and primary mockers. In our Cuban situation the tragicomedy of our figure loses a little of its "vie tragique," i.e., its tragic character. Its "vie comique" increases. The common people laugh at us.

The idol that we create in our theological education agrees with both the value of our Marxist-"Marxian"-socio-cultural reality and the biblical revelation. We educate in the midst of a people who are constructing socialism according to a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary program. This program is identifying historical projects which are being carried out as the historical development of humanity in a post-capitalist stage. The question of Christian faith is to overcome the tendency of both imperialist/capitalist and socialist/communist trends to think that a post capitalist stage means a post-Christian stage. In my thought and action, I have always refuted the idea that "marriage until death" characterizes Christian faith and capitalist ideology.

The Marxist-Leninist project has the advantage over many other previous historical-political-social-economic projects in the objective fact that it has the baggage of the scientific certainty of the project in itself. Therefore, the project has a capacity of critical analysis in regard to its

realizations which are achieved and its aspirations which go astray or fail, and in regard to the most adequate orientation for future realizations on the basis of accomplishments and failures.

In the socialist society which is being constructed we are confronted by the real exaltation of the values of the human spirit which other models of previous societies have exalted as ideals but without a generalized objective realization — values such as love, altruistic spirit, human brother/sisterhood, life in community, equal actual opportunities for all, justice in function of human development, democracy. In the society which is being built by reason of the elements which carry out its most effective realization, all human values become more objective. In the new socialist society, the human being appears exactly as he/she is, as a worker, as creator. Work appears as a human "necessity." On the other hand, the final doing away with classes as a social economic phenomenon appears, along with the aspiration of peace, as a goal not only desired but also sought after. We have before us a society in formation.

The capitalist society, the practical negation of all human spiritual values, that has been left behind is irreversible past. These are the historical facts that make the figure of the theological educator in Cuba more comic than tragic.

Our Tragicomical Figure in a Socio-political Perspective

Our previous remarks point to an aspect of our condition/situation as theological educators closely related to the socio-political issues. But in the line of liberation or liberation theologies, it is necessary to stress the historical and concrete essence of the gospel, i.e., the Kingdom of God.

I think that all of us must consider our task on this basis reference, that the ferment of the Kingdom of God "solidifies" human history. The development of history takes us closer and closer to the day of final redemption. In the historic attainment of a world where "being" not "having" is the source of human values, and where things are made human instead of human beings made "things," the Christian faith sees the action of God in History.

God has assumed as his own, human history.

The theological educator must see in the process of history, the action of the Eternal God who, through the Holy Spirit, is realizing the Lordship of Christ along the continuous historical development. God is imposing his eternal purpose of sustaining a creature "in his image and likeness" who is "first among many brothers." He substantiates history, with one "who disperses those who are conceited in their ideology, overthrows the powerful from their thrones, and raises up the humble, fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty," with his birth as a poor man, his youth as a worker, his maturity as a servant, his death as a subversive,

his resurrection as an eternal companion.

He is the one who guides history, the one who supports its valid accomplishments, the one who fits its redeeming aspirations, the one who enriches its genuine realizations, the one who guarantees the permanence of its true spiritual values.

The Kingdom does not stop being in the future, it becomes the present. The eschatological hope is an integral part of the "Kingdom that is among us" and of the Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus in Palestine in the First Century.

The name of God revealed to Moses as Yahweh means precisely that God is future becoming present, being the same God of the Patriarch, God is the future of oppressed people, the future of the poor. That is the only valid meaning of "God as futurity," the only way in which God could be Father of Jesus dead and resurrected. God's futurity does not deny his contemporaneous existence as God of the oppressed, the poor. He is God who reveals himself as Emmanuel, "God with us," in the midst of the crisis of our weakness, as poor.

At the same time and over all, God reveals himself in the "evangelical" name in Joshua, "Yahweh is actually liberation." This future of God does not deny, therefore, the importance of his present and the meaning of his past. "The Kingdom which is to come" is the same which is "among us" and the same which was inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth.

The theological educator would know that the Kingdom solidifies human history. This implies a Christian interpretation of faith. It is not the same as any other dialectical interpretation of history. The dialectic of the scientific interpretation of history does not invalidate the interpretation of faith, nor vice versa: nor does any scientific interpretation of Nature invalidate the Christian interpretation or vice-versa. To pretend something else is to make faith a mystical irrationality or to make science a kind of diabolical aberration, which would deny both the value of science and of faith.

The "X-ray picture" of a man/woman does not invalidate his/her photograph, nor vice-versa.

That's why the tragicomical character of a Cuban theological educator is much more evident than any other one, even though the *vie comique* is less seen than the tragic one. The prominence of the tragic aspect is the result of the existence of a Church tied to obsolete capitalist ethical, social, cultural patterns in the midst of this new society. The Church lives in capitalist molds, bourgeois ideological structures, structures of abstractionist intellectual categories, pseudo-communitarian ethical-social structures, individualistic psychological structures, from which the conservative — even reactionary and counter-revolutionary structures are derived.

Contemporary Protestant Christianity, and perhaps Catholic Christianity, are struggling at a decisive crossroads which presents fundamentally three trends. I do not want to simplify the situation but it is necessary to be schematic. The first we will call the road of "baroque" Christianity, decorated with thousands of theological, ethical and aesthetic superfluties which hide our poverty. The baroque Christianity is placed consciously or unconsciously at the service of the reaction of retrograde and obsolete forces of history.

This Christianity resents various manifestations apparently dissimilar; in depth, there is a baroque common denominator. It is presented sometimes, for example, with a series of dialectic "theologumenias" in Niebuhr and his disciples; or idealistic "theologumenias" in the North American theologians of the "Death of God." On other occasions, for example, with a series of proselytizing techniques in the "evangelistic" baroquism of a Graham and in the "thorough" evangelists so popular in the North American ideological penetration in Latin America, or with a series of pseudo-spiritual rites in the style of the neo-pentecostals and the non-pietists, or most of the time, with a series of social political taboos, in the style of neo-pseudo-apolitical "Christians."

In all these cases they hide a late and bleary-eyed McCarthyism, with its cohort of "investigators," "informers," and "collaborators." All these diverse "baroquisms" have a common factor: faith has been made superstition; hope, pessimism; love, cheap sentimentalism tinged with romanticism or empty sonority of honeyed words and/or hypocritical parsimony of candied acts without historic effectivity.

The second road to take is that of plain and simple Christianity that in the words of the gospel "converts the hearts of the parents to the children," to follow Jesus, that places self at the service of liberating forces of history as the gospel of "Yahweh-is-liberation," recognizing Christ in his liberating work simply wherever there are "arms showing strength, destroying the ideology of the strong, putting down the mighty from their thrones, lifting those of low degree, filling the hungry with goods, and sending the rich away empty."

This type of Christianity adopts various manifestations but fundamentally depends on a rediscovery of the biblical God. It strives desperately for faith, that is obedience to the liberating will of God in the human historical process. It works toward belief in the God of the Bible, that is to get enrolled in the fight against all obsolete power structures that oppress the human being. The biblical God is not a God wrapped up in himself, hieratic, static, but rather acting in Nature, History, and human conscience. The biblical God is a God "who fights against darkness." He has an enemy, an anti-God to overcome. In the process of history He is a God who also manifests Himself as an "anti." Only the foolish or opportunistic are pro-everything. God is anti-imperialist because He is pro-

oppressed, pro-poor, pro-exploited, pro-victims of unjust structures of power. Faith obedience to God who became incarnate, a God committed to history, is commitment to humanity in the search for its fullness and "shalom," against the victimizers full of greed and hate.

This type of Christianity is "evangelical" in the sense that means "good news to the poor," embraces a hope that is rationally based on reality, and human being is understood as co-creator with God. As a consequence human work is considered as a means of accomplishment and realization of "their" humanity. Work as punishment is a valid concept within salvation history. To be a worker by punishment as part of the divine course is a category within sinful and alienated humanity which Jesus Christ as principal has overcome with his incarnation and expiation, with his humiliation. This evangelical Christianity believes in the practice of solidary love which is summed up in the phrase of Jesus: Love one another as I have loved you. Love stops being romanticized or idealized sentiment to become a concrete action, efficient service, to which hope offers its rationality and faith, its motivation. The "practice of love" without taking into account its efficiency, its motivation, and its rationality is a bestial sentiment. Only animals love without practical, rational and motivational discrimination.

Love is the finished expression of the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit is the creator of "Koinonia." Jesus affirms: "No one has greater love than this, that one gives his/her life for his/her friends". Jesus clarified that "you are my friends if you do what I command you." and on another occasion "I have called you my friends because all the things [causes] I have received from my Father I have made known to you."

There is a third type of Christianity which I have called the "third-party" Christianity. We find here those who want to hide their reactionary position behind a veil of progressiveness and revolutionarism, supposing a "third way" of renewal which has no historic reality, no historic means of realization. The congenital unreality of this type of Christianity invalidates completely this "third-position" which ignores the sociological scientific truths, the historical accomplishments of socialist revolutions, and the social-economical-political realities of the present world. This is the essence of biblical phariseeism, a contemporary phariseeism that has received Christian baptism. I think that in many ways that is the situation that characterizes liberalism today. These Christians get to be more revolutionary than Lenin, el Ché, or Fidel, and before long they are giving lessons to the latter on what revolution really is.

The Christian Church in Cuba, generally speaking, belongs, not for sure, to the "evangelical" trend. This fact makes our work in that sense, more tragic than comic.

As a last remark I want to describe how I understand our tragicomical

character as theological educators in relation to the fact that theology does not exist in order to make explicit the religious phenomenon of the Church but rather to transform the Church to the high calling of the times in which it lives.

This aspect relates our tragicomical figure as educators with the Church itself. The Church as institution in Cuba, its hierarchies, wants to domesticate the theological educator so he or she offers ideological elements falsely dressed as something holy. What it credits as divine is turning its back on the great social transformations which have been occurring in our country during these years and turning its back on the people who today are making their own history.

Perhaps the most generalized level of this attempted manipulation is that level in which an attempt is made to bring out with a theist pretext of Christian doctrine a pseudo-Christian explanation of Nature and the Human Being. In this sense I only point out *a very evident fact that for all theological educators who are on the way to knowing who they are*, theism is only a philosophical doctrine. The Biblical God of Jesus is a jealous God who, on the one hand, does not allow us to create an image and commands us to have no other God.

Our task in Cuba today is at a definite crossroad. It is necessary to form, i.e., to-inform and re-form, a de-formed Church. This is not a novel fact. Theology is an undertaking ever incited, because as we pointed out before, theology is not for the purpose of making explicit the religious phenomenon of the church, but rather to transform the church. In this we affirm that not everyone who claims to be a theological educator has really been one. A faithful theological educator of the church in times of crisis will always be a stumbling block in the measure in which he or she tries to fulfill his or her calling as such. The institutional church always declares as heretic all theological educators who want to inform and reform the church. Not all the heretics of the church institution have been genuine theologians, but all genuine theological educators have been considered heretics or quasi-heretics in the church. The work of theological formation resides in the elements it can offer the church in order to inform and reform it so that it can be formed by the renewal of its mind. It is the only way in which we as theological educators can put away the tragicomedy of our identity.

As my last words, let me paraphrase of the saying of Karl Marx quoted at the beginning: "Theological education used to be the heart of a church without heart, the spirit of a church situation lacking spirit." That constitutes his or her tragic figure. The only way to change our figure today is to struggle in the conversion/transformation/reformation of the church to make a significant contribution to theological education, in order to help the Holy Spirit to create a church at least with heart, and with spirit.

The only way to do it is to struggle for the conversion/transformation/reformation of the church in order that the Church can re-achieve its heart, and its situation can be transformed into a real and truly spiritual situation.

Let us engage all of us in the struggle for a Church full of Spirit.