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Matanzas *Encuentro*: A Retrospective Assessment

I have been requested in this concluding essay to write an evaluation of the Matanzas conference and of the presentations and events which occurred at it.

I. Some Overall Impressions and Observations

My strongest initial impression and abiding recollection is of the very friendly receptions and hospitality we theological educators and church leaders from the United States invariably received from our Cuban hosts. I had hoped that we would be warmly received but was unsure in view of the tension during the week or so before our departure. The Reagan administration precipitated this tension by inaugurating the propaganda broadcasts over what it insensitively called "Radio Marti." The delay in receiving our visas until the eve of our departure from Miami, occasioned apparently by the "Radio Marti" affair, heightened the anxiety somewhat.

My feelings of uncertainty and excited expectancy about what I would find on arrival were mixed with sadness as I beheld in the Miami airport many Cuban expatriates, many of them younger to middle-aged, tearfully embracing their elderly relatives, laden with much baggage, about to board the plane with us. The painful separation of families and friends resulting from the animosities between our two countries became much more concretely real for me then and stayed with me as I later came to hear people in Cuba itself speak about relatives in the U.S. from whom they felt cut off.

As we lumbered in a decrepit airplane across the mere ninety miles between the two countries, it felt more like a journey across the globe to a strange continent. All the time I could not help but feel also the sadness of the elderly Cubans on board with us, wondering when they might ever see their loved ones again.

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My anxious feelings were dispelled shortly after we arrived in Havana in the early morning by the cordial greeting we received from the administrative staff person representing the Seminario Evangelico de Teologia in Matanzas. During the drive to Matanzas he pointed out such evidences of gains in the post-revolutionary "new society" as numerous apartment buildings constructed largely by the workers whose families live in them, the large school for "Young Pioneers" from all over Cuba as well as for youth from other friendly countries, the oil wells near the coast which now help supply the nation's needs, and the impressive, deep harbor of Matanzas itself, with numerous ships from other nations.

The gracious hospitality extended to us on our arrival at the seminary campus by staff, faculty, and students continued to be our experience there. This was reinforced during the following week by our visits to and participation in worship with churches of varying Evangelical (Protestant) and other traditions in Matanzas, Havana, and outlying towns. The same was true on our trips to schools and other cultural centers arranged by the Department of Cuban People's Friendship.

I personally experienced only friendliness, mixed sometimes with lively curiosity as to my nationality, when I walked through and mixed with people on the streets or in the shops of Matanzas and Havana. Occasionally, some, finding out I was from the United States, would express dissatisfaction with their lives in Cuba and give me slips of paper with their names and addresses, indicating a sly interest in migrating. Such encounters, while still cordial, were rare. Other conference participants spoke frequently of experiencing, upon strolling around, much the same warm, even often festive, spirit among the everyday Cubans they met.

A second strong impression I gained, as did I believe other U.S. conference members, was that Cuba, while still struggling in many ways to realize structurally and institutionally the goals of a more just, humane, classless society, has made admirable gains since the revolutionary triumph in 1959. While much housing is still crowded and needs renovation or replacement, new, better accommodations are being constructed with, as already mentioned, voluntary worker participation. (This contrasts with the impersonal, often gutted, inner-city, highrise tenements in larger U.S. cities, subsidized by the federal government and usually constructed from standardized plans, without residents' input.)

One is struck also with the absence of hungry, homeless street people even in Havana. Substantial gains have been made during the post-revolutionary generation toward providing equal health care, education facilities and programs for all to whichever levels they aspire, as well as taking care of the other basic needs of most, if not all, the people.

A third observation which became clearer and was often reinforced by comments made during the conference is that, while the Cuban and U.S. participants were united in their commitment to liberation theology and

its implied dedication to struggle for social structures which foster just, humane conditions and dignity for all, regardless of gender, race, ethnic or origin otherwise, their cultural, economic, social, and political experiences had been quite different. Therefore, their perceptions and approaches to some issues tended to differ, e.g. as to what poverty means and who "the poor" are in different past and, even more, contrasting current situations in Cuba and the U.S.A.

For instance, U.S. conferees would be inclined to interpret poverty as material deprivation and accompanying lack of dignity or self-esteem; whereas at least some of their Cuban counterparts, perceiving that in their country since the Revolution most material or structural poverty has been overcome, and "the poor" are now "in power" (Adolfo Ham), defined poverty as being "free of greed" or not to "live in misery as victims of oppressors" (Sergio Arce).¹

Another example of different perspectives commented upon had to do with power. One or more of the Cuban participants felt the need in their post-revolutionary context to address the issue of power historically, in terms of how this had been expressed in the churches prior to the revolution and since then. They suggested that their U.S. colleagues, on the other hand, need to look at this issue more in terms of how power in their churches and otherwise in U.S. society is "manipulated by the [capitalist] political-economic system" (Israel Batista).²

Such differences, while undoubtedly important and probably more or less acknowledged by most of the presenters, were not surprising due to the fact that the U.S. is predominantly capitalistic and increasingly becoming a military-industrial society. These contrasting perceptions and assumptions did not, however, produce conflict between the two national groups at Matanzas.

A more significant difference, which I detected by observing and speaking with other U.S. male conferees and with some of the Cuban male participants, had to do with the great assertiveness, sometimes reaching the point of stridency, in the manner with which some of the U.S. female participants presented their arguments for a "critically conscious" vs. a "liberal" or less structurally oriented feminist analysis. While all three U.S. males agreed with the urgency for such an analysis, they probably disagreed as to whether the thorough, urgent societal analysis called for is essentially or exclusively a "feminist" one.³ Further-

¹ Exchange between Adolfo Ham and Sergio Arce, June 6, 1985.

² Israel Batista in discussion following the presentation of Carlos Camps. Probably most, if not all, U.S. conferees were willing to accept this suggestion.

³ See José Comblin, *The Church and the National Security State* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979); Gustavo Gutierrez and Richard Shaull, *Liberation and Change* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977); José Miguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Eth-*

more, they were troubled by the tone with which it sometimes was presented.

The Cuban males appeared to be mostly quite critical of machismo patterns which prevailed in their country prior to the revolution and supported laws and programs designed to achieve sexual equality in all social institutions. However, some responded coolly to the manner of a few U.S. women presenters.

The last vivid impression from the conference and my total stay in Cuba which I shall mention has to do with the striking, fascinating pluralism of the populations, the cultures, and the religions there. Prior to the revolutionary triumph in 1959, those of European, Roman Catholic backgrounds with fair complexion were usually accorded more respect and had higher status than mestizos (persons of mixed ethnic origins) and particularly those of black, African origins. Since 1959 and continuing today, the government, we were told, has encouraged all ethnic or racial groups to celebrate and foster their distinctive traditions or customs.⁴

A fascinating example of this is the public appreciation given to the Afro-Cuban heritage. Some of the faculty and the students at the Seminario Evangelico in Matanzas have made special efforts to relate to this heritage, due to their deep appreciation for its lasting influence and valuable contribution to Cuba's cultural and religious life. They have become especially well-versed in *Santeria*, the cult of the saints.

Santeria has its roots in the religious practices which the Yoruba people from West Africa brought with them when they were forced to come to work in sugar cane production. As a way of coping in the oppressive environment and meeting the official hostility of the Roman Catholic Church to their worship, which was "structured upon seeking the guidance of spirits in meeting the ordinary problems of life," they secretly carried on this practice while publicly participating in Roman Catholic rituals and adopting the names and venerational acts associated with many of the Roman Catholic saints.⁵

I shall long remember the fiesta at the end of our encuentro in Matanzas which featured a lively, beautiful song and dance performance by an Afro-Cuban group. Also memorable was a visit several of us from the

ics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). These are but several more recent expressions of thorough structural analyses of Latin American and U.S. societies which are sympathetic with "critically conscious" feminist agendas but are broader in their outlook.

⁴ Cf. conversation with José Felipe Carneado, Director of the Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, in Havana, June 25, 1985. Also see Joseph B. Treaster, "Castro, Churches Improve Relations," *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, June 9, 1985, sec. A, p. 21, repr. *New York Times*, June 8, 1985, sec. A, p. 1.

⁵ See Joseph M. Murphy, "Afro-American Religion and Oracles: *Santeria* in Cuba," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, VIII (Fall 1980): 83-88.

U.S. made, with the gracious escort of Odén Marichal, Rector of the Seminario Evangelico de Teologia, to the Museo Municipal Guanabacoa, on the periphery of Havana, which had a rich display of artifacts associated with *Santeria* and other Afro-Cuban cultural-religious practices. This again was confirming evidence of the municipal and national governments' support for the sustaining of these traditions.

II. *Some Main Issues Discussed at the Encuentro*

The Matanzas meeting was prepublicized as a "Colloquium on Theological Education for Global Solidarity." In actuality it was not as much "global" in orientation (that was probably too ambitious a scope, anyway) as a gathering of Cuban and U.S. Christians concerned foremost about the problems resulting from the isolation of their two countries from each other and the conditions of church life and theological education within each nation. Implications for other parts of the world were usually touched upon only in general terms.

Another factor giving the conference a special focus was that the two co-leaders of the U.S. group were women, Alice Hageman and Jane Cary Peck, who have strong feminist concerns. They attracted to the trip seven other women who also heartily share those concerns and have developed with them a strong professional and sisterly network. The co-leaders also made a special effort to invite Cuban women who are committed to achieving more just and equal roles for females in the churches and all other sectors of their society. This meant that whatever the announced topic of presentation the feminist agenda almost always received special consideration.

Rather than trying to list all the topics of the papers presented at the conference and summarizing the main points within each of these, I would prefer to identify two of the central themes which appear to me to have been interwoven in most of them. I shall comment briefly on the following and attempt to offer some evaluations of the adequacy of the treatment of each of these in the conference sessions:

A. The Relation of Theological Education to Its Contexts in the U.S. and Cuba

B. The Urgency for Liberation Theology Perspectives to Shape the Institutional Structures and Curricula of Seminaries

A. *The Relation of Theological Education to Its Contexts in the U.S. and Cuba*

The U.S. participants were united in expressing their feeling that as theological educators they are "marginalized and alienated from the dominant values and priorities of our society and government because of

their commitment to liberation and justice.”⁶ These values and priorities from which they feel alienated are, they perceive, rooted in long-established institutional structures that are predominantly hierarchical, paternalistic, classist, racist, and sexist. These discriminatory and exploitative structures, after having been challenged and modified to some degree since the Depression and the advent of the Roosevelt New Deal, have been revived and reentrenched under the Reagan administration.

Reagan has encouraged a consolidation of right-wing groups who have sought to pre-empt the political and social center and claim this for themselves. “Traditional family values” have become a rallying cry for ultra-right political programs. Those who oppose these simplistic ideological appeals are regularly accused of being Communist. These ultra-right groups often try to threaten the “mainline liberal” denominations and seminaries (Beverly Harrison).⁷

Due to these threats and other adverse pressures in the U.S. capitalist society, these denominations and seminaries have been declining numerically and in financial support. They have often tried to rectify this weakening situation by resorting uncritically to corporate business managerial methods. The seminaries have modified their curricula to try to satisfy the “market” demands of the denominations and the wider society. This has led to greater emphasis upon courses in personal counseling, “spirituality,” and “getting back to the basics” of systematic theology and biblical studies, viewed either from a “neutral, historical-critical” or conservative “evangelical” approach.⁸

U.S. seminaries were described as prevailingly accommodating uncritically with the reactionary patterns of their cultural context, as controlled by the white male establishment (represented in mostly white, male, Anglo administrators and faculty, who regard themselves as “the gatekeepers” of the churches), and also as having too few students or too little contact otherwise with those who are marginal in the U.S. or most of the world. This elitist situation will continue in the seminaries until they begin to develop a critical social consciousness and adopt institutional models other than those of the current nation-state and the capitalist, hierarchical corporation. This will require choosing to undergo a *metanoia*, being willing to listen empathetically to and experience as the marginalized do (Jane Cary Peck).⁹

Still there are other resources available to U.S. theological schools, if they choose to undergo this deep reorientation. First, compared with sim-

⁶ See “Cuban Encuentro: Conference Statement,” written by United States participants in this volume.

⁷ See the paper by Beverly Wildung Harrison in this volume.

⁸ See papers in this volume by Harrison and Jane Cary Peck.

⁹ Peck, *Ibid.*

ilar institutions in other nations more economically impoverished, U.S. seminaries, especially the better financed ones, provide their administrators, faculties, and students with opportunities for travel abroad, for cultural exchanges, and enlarging facilities for communication.

Second, there is the pluralism of U.S. society. This is reflected in those seminaries, which, because of their more open admissions policies and financial aid programs, have attracted minority members and experienced a much greater influx of women students. This is slowly beginning to have an impact in varying degrees in different institutions, in more critical emphasis upon experiences of racism and feminism in what is taught and how it is taught.

Third, the increasing movements in the U.S. against ultra-conservative economic and political support for the Reagan administration's interventionist activities in Central America and its "constructive engagement" collaboration with South Africa's white minority apartheid system, as well as greater unemployment, resistance to deindustrialization, and the women's rights movements, have resulted in a U.S. public climate slightly more sensitive to injustices at home as well as abroad (B. Harrison).¹⁰

This climate may also prove more favorable to those in U.S. seminaries who are working toward a more critical consciousness in theological education.

The above characterizations of the relation of U.S. seminaries to their national context are based mainly upon the presentations by Beverly Harrison and Jane Cary Peck. I think that most, if not all, the other U.S. conferees would largely have agreed with them. I myself did and continue to do so. I wish to add, though, that we who attended the Matanzas Encuentro were entirely from more ecumenically and relatively more progressive institutions. Therefore I suspect that more administrators, faculty, and students in other schools probably perceive the U.S. economic-political ethos more favorably and the relation of theological education to it quite differently. Even within the schools where we teach, we are probably a small minority in our liberation theology perspective, as we sometimes acknowledged at Matanzas. This means we must continue to be quite realistic, without becoming pessimistic, about the leverage we have in our own institutions to make that perspective effective in bringing about broader curricular and structural changes. At the same time, we need to continue to strategize realistically and courageously against the massive, extremely well financed and organized ultra-right movements in our country striving steadily to repeal even the most basic legal safeguards and social programs designed to protect the most

¹⁰ Harrison, *Ibid.*

vulnerable.

Our Cuban colleagues presented a more favorable, though at points a qualified, portrayal of the relation of theological education and the churches to their wider, post-revolutionary society. All belong to Evangelical (Protestant) denominations which historically have been religious minority institutions within Cuban society. They emphasized, though, the dramatic, and at the time for many, traumatic changes which occurred after 1959 for all the churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, e.g. dramatic declines in official membership and attendance at public services as well the exodus of many clergy.

Several of them (Marichal, Camps, Batista, Ham, Arce) stressed the value of Marxist socio-economic analysis for the churches and theological seminaries in understanding why Roman Catholicism particularly lost its status as the Cuban "official religion" and the larger "middle class" Evangelical denominations also came under suspicion as reactionary after the new revolutionary government came to power. The challenge facing all the churches now is to be more conscious of church-culture relationships, to try to develop a better informed, more critical consciousness about the great extent to which they have allowed their more privileged class status to alienate them from other social sectors as well as the government's programs for a more humane society.¹¹

The above-mentioned Cuban conferees also cited positive effects of the revolution for the ongoing life of the Cuban churches and theological education. Some of these are: (1) greater appreciation for the dignity of all kinds of socially responsible work and for those involved in it; (2) laws and programs implementing the government's emphasis on equal opportunities for women and the equal partnership roles of both men and women in marriage, rearing children, in household obligations, as well in the whole of Cuban society; (3) the government's encouragement of popular cultures, i.e., the heritages of all indigenous populations but especially those of groups who historically have been marginalized (e.g., the Afro-Cubans).¹²

The Cuban participants differed somewhat, however, in the ways they formulated their views of how the churches and theological education should relate to contemporary, post-revolutionary culture. One view expressed (A. Ham) was that the Protestant churches in the past and in varying degrees today, under the continuing influence of their European and North American roots and their classist perspective, have been "sub-cultures" or even "counter-cultures" in relation to the dominant Roman

¹¹ See paper by Odén Marichal, this volume; and those by Carlos Camps, Adolfo Ham, Israel Batista.

¹² See citations in note 11 above. There seemed to be nearly unanimous agreement on these points by all the Cuban conferees, as evidenced in their repeated references to them.

Catholic, Spanish traditions, which they perceived as decadent. Now the churches and theological education, while not simply accommodating uncritically with current Cuban cultures, should celebrate the increasingly vital expressions of the indigenous groups in music, dance, and otherwise. In this regard, Ham commended the example of José Martí who consciously defended indigenous cultures and described European culture as an alien graft on Cuban life.¹³

Another view (Arce, Marichal) was that the relationship of the churches and theological education should be interpreted more dialectically, namely that most of the time the Evangelical churches were not counter-cultural, i.e., adverse to the "popular" Cuban cultures but a positive influence upon them. Some educated Cuban Protestant ministers and Roman Catholic poets affirmed these cultures even in pre-revolutionary times.¹⁴

The presentations and comments of our Cuban colleagues about the relation of theological education to their own cultural contexts, both past and present, had for me many rich, fascinatingly insightful nuances, which I have been able only to touch upon here but hope will be more evident elsewhere in this journal. Two points stand out clearly, however: one is that the present post-revolutionary situation in Cuba provides on the whole a positive opportunity for the churches and theological educators to redefine their Christian identity while co-operating where they honestly can with their Cuban compatriots, not of Christian but Marxist or other persuasion, in building a new, more humane kind of society. The other salient point is that all the Cuban participants seemed to affirm that the Cuban churches to which they belong and their own theological curriculum at Matanzas can learn much from Marxist class analysis and dialectical interpretation of Cuban history, as long as the churches and seminary curriculum remain biblically rooted and critically aware that Marxist analysis has its limitations. Israel Batista, for instance, spoke of these limitations as tendencies toward being sometimes "too anthropological and mechanistic."¹⁵

B. *The Urgency for Liberation Theological Perspectives to Shape the Institutional Structures and Curricula of the Churches and Seminaries*

All the U.S. and Cuban presentations at Matanzas expressed directly or indirectly their commitment to liberation theology and their convic-

¹³ See paper by Adolfo Ham, this volume.

¹⁴ Comments of Sergio Arce and Odén Marichal, in discussions, June 19, 1985. For further clarification of his dialectical perspective regarding the relations of the churches and theological education in Cuban society past and present, see Arce's paper, this volume.

¹⁵ Comments of Israel Batista, discussion, June 19, 1985.

tion that it should influence decisively how they do theological education and the total ethos of the churches and the institutions where they serve. I shall examine two questions here: first, how did the Cuban and U.S. participants define or characterize liberation theology and did they differ noticeably or significantly in their formulations, and second, how did they visualize enabling this theology to become so formative in the churches and seminaries.

Our Cuban colleagues mentioned that the Cuban churches, both Evangelical and Roman Catholic, were slow to acknowledge any significance the base Christian community movement and liberation theology would have for them. They began to be more positively attentive to these when church leaders from elsewhere in Latin America who have been actively involved in base Christian communities and have been spokespersons for the kind of critical reflection-action theology taking shape in them began visiting Cuba, giving a first-hand account. There were also return visits by some Cuban church leaders, both men and women, to other Latin American countries to attend ecumenical meetings where they gained more personal experience with the base Christian communities' way of interpreting the Bible in relation to daily realities of oppression. Dora Valentin, former administrator of the Seminario Evangelico de Teologia-Matanzas, and Miriam Ortega, a former faculty person there, now at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey (Switzerland), have been active in such meetings, as have various male faculty at SET.

In Cuba, we were told, that there is still much resistance, especially from many Baptist and various sect groups, to a critical reflection-action approach to understanding the Bible, due to their continuing deep-seated, dualistic, otherworldly piety and literalism. Such pietistic and literalistic patterns also are still quite prevalent in the Presbyterian-Reformed, Methodist, and other denominations which helped organize and support the SET.

Slowly, though, despite such continuing resistance, those who participated in the Student Christian Movement and other ecumenical groups began to read the Bible differently. They were influenced by the S.C.M.'s booklet *The Bible for People Today* and *The Gospel in Solentiname*. Also the lectures and writings of the Chilean theologian Pablo Richard and the French theologian George Casalis were influential in their reorientation.¹⁶

The increasing challenge also from Marxists and members of the Cuban Communist Party to the churches to abandon their dualistic, otherworldly theologies and become active in the struggle for human justice and dignity had its impact also. Likewise, some Christians realized that

¹⁶ Presentations by Miriam Ortega, June 19, 1985; Odén Marichal, June 17, 1985; Dora Valentin, June 18, 1985; Carlos Camps, June 18, 1985; and Israel Batista, June 21, 1985.

the Marxist utopian vision of the classless society within history had some similarity to the biblical teaching that God's kingdom is being manifested in history and through the incarnation in Jesus.¹⁷

Also encouraging Christians to move toward a more liberation-theology perspective has been Fidel Castro's own more positive attitude toward the churches due to the growing number of Christian martyrs in El Salvador and Nicaragua and their having been active in base Christian communities. His more favorable view has been reinforced by Cuban Christians who have supported post-revolutionary programs. They in turn have been heartened to be more actively involved in such programs aimed at more equality and justice for all and by the era of improved relations between the government and the churches since the late '70s.¹⁸

Inasmuch as I can discern, none of the Cuban conferees presented a single clear, succinct definition of liberation theology. There did seem, however, to be general agreement that, as they are familiar with it in Latin America, it is rooted in base Christian communities; it arises mostly among the impoverished or those who are socially and economically marginal; it involves a critical reflection-praxis pattern, that is, a hermeneutical circle in which base Christian community members learn critically to analyze their situation as they read biblical passages in relation to their daily experiences of poverty and injustice; as such a critical consciousness develops, people begin to understand the social structures in which they are immersed in a way similar to, though not necessarily identical with, some Marxist class analysis; and finally that all of this process of "conscientization" (Paulo Freire) enables them to grow in their own self-esteem, sense of identity, in solidarity with each other, and thus to become empowered to start to change their situation for the better.¹⁹

Proceeding from these characterizations of liberation theology which are widely espoused by its proponents in Latin America and elsewhere, our Cuban colleagues did not indicate very specifically its implications for curricular changes and institutional restructuring of the churches or of the theological seminary at Matanzas.

Regarding the institutional restructuring of the churches they were agreed that this would entail all the churches moving toward ordination of women and providing recognition of them in all leadership roles equal to that given to men (Ortega, Valentin); it would mean a "conversion" of the Cuban Protestant churches from either a "baroque Christianity" which denies the poor's experiences of reality and tries to retain anachro-

¹⁷ Presentations by Marichal, June 17, 1985; Ham, June 19, 1985; Arce, June 10, 1985.

¹⁸ Presentations by Batista, Ham, and Livio Diaz on relations of the churches and government in Cuba, the evening of June 19, 1985.

¹⁹ Presentations of Ortega, Marichal, Camps, Ham, and Arce.

nistic, superstitious, or sentimental interpretations of history or a "liberalism" which pretends to be progressive while holding on to privileged, prerevolutionary values and status (Arce).²⁰

In terms of seminary curricular implications, Carlos Camps mentioned his dissatisfaction with thematic approaches to teaching theological courses and the urgency of implementing an approach which would be more historical-contextual and pastorally oriented. Adolfo Ham spoke of the need in Cuba generally for a "prophetic ethics," which would engage in more social-political analysis and would train people to be "friendly critics" of the government. He saw the importance of seminary courses which would entail such analysis and appreciative interpretation of popular cultures.²¹

Israel Batista was more specific in his description of a liberation-praxis approach to the Bible which should be employed in Cuba and in seminaries at Matanzas or elsewhere. He acknowledged that the liberation-praxis approach has been attempted at Matanzas but has often failed. It is essential, asserted Batista, always to connect the biblical kerygma with the concrete historical situation which is always changing. In Cuba an important ingredient in that situation is the distinctive kind of Marxism which has developed, taking into account the societal structures and infrastructures. Another is the emerging emphasis upon the feminist critical consciousness and sexually inclusive language, both of which also help foster an awareness of structures.²²

The U.S. presenters at the Encuentro also did not provide clear, succinct definitions of liberation theology as they were using the terminology. Like the Cuban participants, they were more inclined to assume shared understandings and experiences of this way of doing theology, particularly referring to Paulo Freire, the Latin American base Christian communities involvement in struggling for justice, and the feminist efforts in the U.S. to analyze critically and change societal structures (including those of churches and universities or seminaries) which exploit both women and men.

Main attention in the U.S. papers was given to the practical institutional effects where active commitments to liberation theology or to a critical feminist consciousness is missing or deficient. For instance, Beverly Harrison and Jane Cary Peck, as already mentioned, focused on problems arising from the lack of such a critical consciousness in most of the U.S. cultural context but especially in the churches and theological education. Susan Thistlethwaite dealt with feminism as a "critique of culture in light of misogyny," and applied this critique to specific issues

²⁰ See previous references to those cited.

²¹ See the papers by Camps and Ham.

²² See paper by Batista.

of how sexually exclusive or inclusive languages shape our experiences of reality and implications of the feminist critique for reshaping theological education.

Carter Heyward, after presenting her analysis of why women are not full participants in U.S. society, churches, and theological education, proceeded to describe the feminist movement as a "political" one "on behalf of shared resources, common good, justice for all people." Then she explained why many U.S. feminist theologians, while seriously critical of the patriarchalism in Christian traditions, still regard Christianity as providing "the faith perspective for feminism as a political movement and ideology" needed today.²³

Herman Waetjen questioned whether the Bible, as interpreted by most modern western historical-critical method, would serve the cause of liberation and justice. This method, he contended, has been controlled by "elite white males" who have been insensitive to the exploited industrial workers who have produced the economic surplus which has supported them. Christian socialists, liberation theologians, feminist hermeneuticists, and some social scientists have "exposed the bankruptcy of Western biblical scholarship, its ideological captivity and the unethical character of its neutrality."

Waetjen noted that, among the Hebrew prophets, Trito-Isaiah, by using feminine names for Israel, began to proclaim the vision of a new moral order which would be characterized by gender and race equality. The decisive paradigm shift occurs, however, in the New Testament gospels which present Jesus as preaching and teaching that "the new moral order of God's rule has been inaugurated, and its goal is to draw all women and men into a horizontal relation with the Creator."²⁴

While Waetjen in his presentation did not spell out specifically the theological-curricular and institutional implications of the "paradigm shift" he identifies in the Bible, these implications could be far-reaching and are worthy of careful consideration.

Rosemary Ruether and Letty Russell, while devoting considerable attention to describing the elitist, male, European, white-dominated institutional structures of U.S. theological education, went further to try to delineate what theological curricula and seminaries would be like should they really seek equal participation of women and other marginal groups.

Ruether claims that "the poor black or indigenous female, particularly the youngest and the oldest," is the one most exploited in all hierarchical, male-controlled cultural systems. Therefore, poor black or indigenous women should be given priority in any redemptive vision for theological education. While confessing that she herself finds it difficult to

²³ See papers by Harrison and Peck.

²⁴ See paper by Herman Waetjen, this volume.

transcend the predominant classist, racist, sexist structures in the churches and the seminaries, she does imagine an "alternative system." It would begin with communities, rooted among the poor, having as their main purpose liberating the poor and all society from the prevailing oppressive structures. The community's reflection would seek to relate the Bible and theology to actual praxis of liberating the community.²⁵

Letty Russell cited the Women's Theological Center in Boston as a case study in "doing liberation/feminist theologies together with others." (She and Carter Heyward serve on the Center's Board.)²⁶

Ruether's and Russell's examples for implementing a liberation-theology, feminist perspective institutionally helped give specificity to the conference, even though they described these examples only briefly. More examples of such institutional implementation and reconstructing from a liberation orientation are needed to suggest ways to strategize for more humane societal changes.

III. Conclusion

I have attempted by looking back on the Matanzas Encuentro, first, to offer some of my overall impressions and observations of the conference and, second, to identify two main issues which the conferees dealt with as well as some of my evaluative assessments of how these issues were discussed.

Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to Alice Hageman and Jane Cary Peck, the main U.S. organizers, and to Odén Marichal, Rector of the Seminario Evangelico de Teologia at Matanzas, and to all our other Cuban friends who deserve much credit for helping the conference to be the stimulating, heart-warming experience in dialogue and facilitating better relations between our two national groups which it was. I am glad that a second encuentro is tentatively being planned to be held in the U.S. at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta in 1987.

Based on our experience at the Matanzas *encuentro*, I wish to offer several suggestions for the planners of the future conference: one would be to strive for more diverse and balanced representation in the participants and presenters. Assuming that the conference again would focus on theological education as it relates to the churches and wider Cuban and U.S. societies as it did at Matanzas, greater balance in gender, racial or ethnic participation should be sought. This would be more likely to prevent any one group or set of interests from dominating the sessions, as the U.S. mainly feminist group tended to do at Matanzas. It is essen-

²⁵ See paper by Rosemary R. Ruether, this volume.

²⁶ For further description and evaluation of the Boston Women's Theological Center, see the paper by Letty M. Russell, this volume.

tial that more just structural expressions of power not only be discussed but also demonstrated in how the conference is organized and conducted, both formally and informally.

Second, along the same lines, it will be especially important, if the conference is to be held in the U.S., to do everything realistically possible to assure that there are an equal number of representative Cubans as well as U.S. participants to lessen the danger of U.S. interests controlling the agenda or in other ways exercising a "cultural imperialism." To achieve this will, of course, depends upon a determined commitment of the U.S. members of the planning committee to help secure the visas and financial support which Cuban participants may need.

Third, persons and facilities to guarantee simultaneous translation in both Spanish and English at all the plenary and other conference sessions should be carefully prearranged. Again, this has to do with the power or "cultural imperialism" issue.

Fourth, at the next conference participants should not only talk about more justice for marginal or oppressed groups but should be able to meet and listen to persons from such groups (both women and men who are economically and socially disadvantaged, especially the unemployed, displaced, or under-employed workers; the aged; the physically and mentally "handicapped"), so there can be opportunities to learn firsthandly how they "tell their stories" and analyze their situations in the broader power structures. This would result in a different format for the next conference, namely, one in which there would be less time given to presentations of papers by academicians and more opportunities for face-to-face meetings with a greater range of marginal persons, optimally even in their own locales.

I look forward to the next *encuentro*. The one at Matanzas helped set a favorable precedent for its successor. The friendships deepened or initiated there will, I believe, be fruitful in numerous other ways as well.