Higher Standards for Higher Education: The Christian University and Solidarity

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Ten years ago, in November of 1989, a commando unit of the Salvadoran armed forces entered the campus of the Central American University (UCA) and killed two women colleagues and six Jesuit priests. The tenth anniversary of the UCA massacre offers us a rich opportunity to continue our reflection on what a university must be for the 21st century, especially a Christian, Catholic and Jesuit university.

The murdered university president, Ignacio Ellacuría, and those who shaped the UCA wanted a university at the service of their country. They argued that this meant the "liberation of the poor majorities". The UCA was to pursue its goal of service to the poor, and to the nation, *universitariamente*, that is, by doing the work proper to a university, not that of a church, a political party or some other kind of organization. A university seeks the truth. The objective of human liberation threw into sharp relief that the UCA was to pursue the truth about *la realidad nacional*, the national reality. The three instruments, or means, proper to the university in the pursuit of this goal were to be the familiar two of teaching and research and the less familiar one of *proyección social*. This last, *social projection*, includes all those means by which the university *projects* the truth it discovers directly into the social world outside the campus in order to help shape social consciousness.

University personnel carried out *proyección social* through public speaking and appearances in the media, publications, the work of Segundo Montes's Human Rights Institute, Martín-Baró's Institute for Public Opinion and the Pastoral Center.

Projecting that truth into society generated conflict. It meant unmasking the official lies. Under conditions of mass injustice, violent repression and then civil war, Ellacuría and others argued that *proyección social* was the most important instrument by which the UCA was to realize its mission of service. That was what led to the killings of November 1989.

We cannot hope to photocopy the UCA in the U.S. Yet, we need to ask how we can shape our universities to respond more faithfully, and *universitariamente,* to an unjust world, in a manner analogous to what the martyrs of the UCA did.

Several months after their deaths, John Paul II published his exhortation on Catholic higher education, *Ex corde ecclesiae.* It has stirred the old controversy over whether Catholic identity threatens free inquiry. But the document also challenges all in Catholic higher education to undertake teaching, research and *proyección social* very much in the spirit of the UCA martyrs. Of the Catholic university, it says that its

> research activities will . . . include study of *serious contemporary problems*, such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of the natural environment, the search for peace and political stability, a more equitable distribution of world resources and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at the national and international level. University research will have to be directed toward in-depth study of the roots and causes of the grave problems of our time . . .

The document states that "The Christian spirit of service to others in *promoting social justice* is especially important for each Catholic university and should be shared by professors and fomented among students." The university should help promote the development of the impoverished whom Ellacuría called the crucified peoples of the world.

What I propose to explore here is the difficult issue of educating for justice, especially international justice, in these confusing times in which we find ourselves.

Signs of the Times: The Bad News.

At the turn of the millennium, we find it very hard to say where the world is headed--whether economically, politically, socially, culturally or intellectually. But one thing is certain.

We are finishing up this century in bad shape. The U.N.'s 1999 *Human Development Report* informs us that "The income gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest was 74 to 1 in 1997, up from 60 to 1 in 1990 and 30 to 1 in 1960." Inequality is increasing everywhere, including the U.S. and Europe. Globally, more than twice as many women are poor as men, and the division of rich and poor is perhaps the single greatest cause of environmental destruction. With the growing resource gap, U.N. documents speak of spreading crime and violence and, in general, social disintegration. I witnessed that disintegration in spades during the 80s in the South Bronx: the crumbling of communities, families and egos. Since then we have been witnessing a kind of globalization of the South Bronx and that threefold crumbling. Governments and parties, left, right and center, are suffering a global legitimation crisis. We don't believe they can eliminate poverty, save the environment, stop the violence or advance the cause of human rights.

Hopeful Signs: Grassroots Movements in Civil Society.

What is the good news? Who is advancing the cause of humanity? When I ask people these questions, they answer: Amnesty International, the United Nations, environmental groups, women's groups, community groups. They mention non-governmental organizations, NGOs. It was a coalition of more than 1,300 NGOs who spearheaded the spectacular success of the Land

Mine Treaty and won the Nobel Peace Prize three years ago. These groups of ordinary citizens carried off one of the most successful humanitarian campaigns in history. Signs of the times.

In Central America most of the ferment, and the locus of hope, is in civil society. Like other poor regions, Central America is witness to the steady growth of *la sociedad civil*: groups of neighbors, indigenous and black people, environmental groups, unions, small and medium-sized businesses, cooperatives, communal banks and consumers who are pushing for change from the bottom up and across the base of society. Within what have been traditional authoritarian societies, these movements increasingly stress democratic participation, transparency and accountability in their own internal organization.

These movements hold great promise; and yet, they remain weak. In countries like El Salvador, the micro-iniciatives run up against macro-obstacles. If you directly challenge companies who are polluting the Acelhuate River in San Salvador, they could find you floating face down in the Acelhuate tomorrow morning. This means that environmental activists need to link up with Greenpeace. The human rights office at the UCA is working hard to end impunity of prominent public figures involved organized crime and even murder. The director of the human rights office is no fool. He makes good friends with human rights groups in Washington and San José, Costa Rica. Groups of women, indigenous peoples and unions connect with others locally and internationally. Poor local communities link up with sister parishes and sister communities in Europe and North America. Without international allies, the fledgling groups of the *sociedad civil* have no chance against those who control the market and the means of violence.

That seems to be the pattern as we move into the next century. On the one hand, our major institutions have entered into crisis and social disintegration is spreading; and, on the other hand, non-governmental groups and movements are sprouting up to combat social crumbling and are sowing the seeds of a new social order. While fire rages among the tall pines, new shoots are springing up on the forest floor. But, again, the local micro-initiatives in poor and violent countries face macro-obstacles and need international allies to survive.

The Century of International Solidarity?

This situation leads me to suggest that we will have to make this new century the Century of International Solidarity. The powerful of the world are extending their power through globalized markets and communications. The response from those who hope to advance the cause of humanity can only be to globalize solidarity, that is, to globalize the practice of love. It is not clear at this point just how to organize more humane societies in this new century or how to get from here to there. But one thing is certain. There will be no new societies unless we have new human beings capable of identifying with the cause of the world's majorities. In the Ignatian spirit of *tantum/quantum* rather than the consumer spirit, we will need to take advantage of the new technology--internet, e-mail and discount air fares--and make them channels of love and service instead of their opposites. But above all, we need to concern ourselves with the formation of *new human beings.*

(Parenthetically, the situation I described, suggests to me a general agenda for the next phase of liberation theology which I expect to thrive well into the next century. It suggests the need to

reflect theologically on that least-noticed "second meaning-level" of liberation which Gustavo Gutiérrez described in his

These days more people recognize the importance of promoting justice in the university. Kosovo, East Timor and the misery of Africa are topics for study in the classroom. Debates over affirmative action, the virtues and vices of the market, U.S. poli

who ever lived have struggled every day to keep the household alive against the daily threat of hunger, disease, accidents and violence. By distancing the non-poor from the daily threat of death, the benefits of modernity have induced in us a kind of chronic low-grade confusion about

way common-sense discourse, personal and institutional prejudice and social conditioning stand between us and reality, and we need to ask how these obstacles can be overcome.

I have found Ignatius Loyola a helpful guide here. Ignatius understood people to be on a journey either toward greater union with God and greater humanity, or away from these. His passion was to help them advance on their journey. He would locate the intellectual formation of members of the university community within the wider framework of their personal journeys and their journey together.

Along our journey, our intellect and the way it functions is bound up with basic myths and assumptions, symbols and myths with which we are committed. Our thinking is like the branches of a bush, below which a network of roots extends deep into the soil. If I can mix metaphors here, these assumptions and attitudes establish the horizon of our experience, the framework in which I interpret and evaluate data, and the questions that arise in my experience. This framework is less the product of reason than of interaction with my earliest family environment and the value-bearing institutions of the society in which I was raised. So, I live in my world. Everything at its center moves me. Everything on its periphery leaves me cold.

My horizon helps me understand reality but it also partly distorts reality, thanks to bias, blind spots and sheer lack of experience, all of which I share to some extent with other members of my class, race, sex and nation. So, searching for the truth involves unmasking the falsehoods and half-truths, public and private, that stand between us and reality.

As we follow the roots of our conscious thinking deeper still, we discover that the basic assumptions, symbols and myths are themselves rooted in past and present commitments, in my desires and inclinations and, in the end, in my identity. These have all be shaped and formed in social interaction, so that my basic assumptions are embedded in the habits of my heart and my identity itself. To question those assumptions is to question *me* and to shake the foundations of my world. A whole army of thinkers has helped us uncover the genesis and structure of this non-rational sub-stratum of our conscious and rational life (Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, pragmatism, the sociology of knowledge, Gadamer, and so on).

the most important questions from getting raised. This cognitive liberation depends in turn on untangling our disordered inclinations and ordering our commitments.

Unless education addresses the way our thinking is grounded in our commitments and shored up by the structure of our affectivity, then, for all our rationality, the way we are searching for the truth must be challenged *on strictly academic grounds*. We will have to doubt whether the classroom, cafeteria and faculty lounge debates will advance very far. Persistent, reasonable discourse rarely leads us beyond fundamental philosophical and theological positions to question the commitments behind the ideas.

Most of the modern "masters of suspicion" and sociologists of knowledge who posed the problem of subconscious bias so trenchantly prescribed more reason and more conscious awareness as the solution. Here, too, I think Ignatius is more realistic and radical. He not only recognized that affectivity and commitment are key to the problem; unlike most others he also saw them as key to the solution.

Liberating Education.

The second lesson of the encounter with the victims was this: Genuine education, especially for "our tribe", must engage students *personally* at the level of experience and practice, challenging their commitments and value-priorities. Authentic formation leads to *wisdom* which, we know, involves a kind of knowing that engages the whole person. The encounter of the pilgrims with the poor Central Americans produced in the visitors an experiential knowledge, involving intellect, will and the "affections". This kind of knowledge transforms the person. This, I think, is the.*prime analogue of knowing.*

Mathematics and natural science require dispassionate observation, free from affective interference. They depend on something approaching pure reason. This kind of knowledge, while indispensable, is insufficient for understanding life. We cannot grasp life’s meaning by analyzing it from a distance (even though we can know *aspects* of life in this way through psychology, sociology, etc.), much less by surgically separating the facts from the values. Understanding the irreducibly moral drama of life requires moral sympathy and practical commitment. It requires entering into the drama and allowing it to enter us. This is what happens when we come to know another person in friendship or as we fall in love. It is what happens when we enter a foreign country or a new neighborhood or place of work. For the truth to sink in, we have to adjust to reality both morally and practically. This kind of experiential knowledge does not depend in the first place in IQ. Many people who are less gifted intellectually and who lack formal education are wiser than many academics, even though the former may find it difficult to express their wisdom. Paul discovered that in their search for wisdom, the Greeks missed the most important truths of all. He preached only Christ crucified--the wisdom and power of God.

Certain kinds of experiences occasion in people who are properly disposed feelings and moods that spring from their very center, feelings and states that Ignatius calls "consolation" and "desolation". These typically reveal the direction which leads the individual toward greater self-transcendence and into greater light, or, on the other hand, they indicate the person’s resistence to self-transcendence. Consolation is accompanied by new images and concepts which expand

one’s limited horizon undermine intellectual bias. Desolation discloses my resistance to this kind of liberation. We need to learn to interpret such feelings and states. In order to assimilate reality, the visitors to El Salvador had to "sit with" the experience,

> It is often said that the university should be impartial. We do not agree. The university should strive to be free and objective, but objectivity and freedom may demand taking sides. We are freely on the side of the popular majority because they are unjustly oppressed and because the truth of the situation lies within them both negatively and positively. Our university as a university has an acknowledged preferential option for the poor, and it learns from them in their reality . . . . We take this stand with them in order to be able to find the truth of what is happening and the truth that all of us must be seeking and building together.
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> There are good theoretical reasons to think that such an effort is well grounded epistemologically, but in addition, we think there is no alternative in Latin America, in the Third World, and elsewhere, for universities and intellectuals who claim to be of Christian inspiration. Our university is of Christian inspiration when it places itself in this preferential option for the poor, who in quantitative terms are the greatest humanistic challenge facing humankind.

We can say the same with each one's search for truth. Augustine stressed faith-commitment as a condition for understanding: *crede ut intellegas!* We must also say today, especially for our middle-class "tribe", *dilige ut intellegas!*, love that you might understand.

END

APPENDIX: SEARCHING FOR TRUTH IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

The Three Poles of Experience (or Reality).

In order to flesh out the implications of the modified Lonergan cognitive scheme, I propose to expand it into an 9-step "path," a "way" to the truth. But first, it will help to attempt to draw a map of reality.

Every experience has a subjective side to it (what goes on inside me) and an objective side (what goes on outside me). When we reflect more carefully, we see, in addition, that our experience includes all those cultural products--symbols and concepts--by which we interpret the world. This cultural word by which we make sense of the world belongs primarily to the world "out there".

This gives us, if you will, three interrelated poles of experience--the two outer poles of (A) concrete reality itself and (B) the word, or *logos*, about reality and (C) the inner pole of my interior life. All three poles of reality overlap, but only partially. Each grows out of the others and is organically linked to the others; but each is clearly distinguishable. Each of the three poles of experience is a source of truth about reality. The truth comes from the world, from the word and from within me. (It may help to consider a trinitarian correspondence: There is the truth that

comes from the Creator of the world, the truth of the Son w

as we have said. That knowledge shakes us out of our prejudices and opens us up to a wider horizon, draws us out of ourselves. It attunes us like a musical instrument to values and helps us put things in proper order. It makes us susceptible to the interior consolations, desolations and "counsels" of which Ignatius speaks, and permits us to reflect with greater clarity and perception.

As Pascal said, the heart has reasons the mind knows not. The converted heart (not mere impulse) inclines toward what is true and good, and consolation inclines the heart not only toward what is true and good and morally right. See the Ignatian Rules for the Discernment of Spirits and the Methods for Election (SpEx [313-336 and 176]). A person who searches for the truth finds that following the consolation, and also discovering the patterns of consolation and desolation, can aid enormously in understanding the world.

This is a crucial moment in the process of conscientization.

4. *Conscientization.* Searching for the truth requires conscientization concerning objective social reality. Conscientization is a matter of unmasking systematic distortion. It is a matter of waking up from sleep. Christians profess belief in original sin, structural sin and personal sin. (This doesn't require much religious faith; it simply requires perception.) And yet we frequently fail to

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understand how the world works, in order to change it. Ideology has a pejorative connotation today, partly because of dogmatic abuse, but also because of anti-intellectual prejudice and pragmatism. We all need to develop coherent understanding of how the world actually works--a social theory which explains the facts and which is permanently open to revision in the light of new data.

The search for truth takes place in a social environment. Individuals need to draw on a tradition-bearing community of critical support in their ongoing formation. The remaining three criteria are concerned with this communal dimension of the conditions for discernment.

7. *Community.* No one has infinite knowledge or infinite moral sensitivity; we all approach reality from a partial perspective. We need help overcoming our blindness and prejudice. But even apart from that, reality is so rich and complex, so filled with mirages and blind alleys, that getting at the truth requires insight from many different perspectives. Personal intellectual and moral autonomy is a paramount value, but that has nothing to do with self-sufficiency.

We therefore need to belong to a local moral community that can both inform us and call us to account in the daily challenge to discover the truth and put it into practice. Not any kind of community will do for this. The task requires a community that draws on a deep tradition of practical wisdom. Of course, the church is supposed to be just this kind of community. But so is the university, in its own proper way, a tr

The point to stress in liberal, individualistic societies is that, unless we identify with a tradition-bearing community, we flounder about formed by traditions of which we are unaware, shaped as much by market forces and mass media as by anything else.

9. *Authority.* Nothing is easier to abuse than authority, but that ought not blind us to its legitimate use. Ironically, authorities (like community and tradition) are essential to authentic personal autonomy, as we said earlier. When I want to have my teeth or my car fixed, I go to "authorities". The same is true in the intellectual and the moral life. Conscience does not kneel before the authorities, however; conscience kneels before the truth.

These nine principles seem to me essential for getting at the truth, that is, for a decent education. Something would be lacking to a serious search for the truth if any one of these elements were seriously lacking.

Three Poles of Experience, Revisited.

The logic of these criteria appears more clearly when we locate them on the map of experience that we charted earlier. As we said, the three poles are internally complex and overlap amongruth.

options. But it recognizes that, because of our prejudices and the limits of our brains, reasoning alone is insufficient for arriving at what is most reasonable. Much more is required, including ongoing conversion, practical commitment, attention to affective movements, utopian imagination, a wisdom-bearing community and dialogue. It seems to me that it would be theoretically and morally *irresponsible* to ignore any one of the above points on the path.

I propose this path, not only for its internal coherence but especially because of my own experience. As a university student in 1969, I entered into a four-year period of crisis and confusion about basic truths and values. As I floundered around, I discovered that closeness to the life-and-death struggles of the poor in Lower Manhattan helped to focus and center my scattered thoughts and feelings. As I attended to the interior movements, frequently occasioned by external events, I noticed that some led to peace and light and others to greater confusion. I noticed, finally, that taking tentative stands and making practical commitments brought further light--or sometimes greater confusion, but in any case, they advanced my search.

The first seven markers on the path present fewer difficulties to contemporary sensibilities than the last two--tradition and authority. These meet stiff resistance within an individualistic, pluralistic society. The limitations and dangers of communities and their authority are obvious but we cannot do without either community or authority in our search for truth. While their abuses are inexcusable, they are inevitable in real, as opposed to ideal (non-existing), groups of imperfect human beings. If you want a tradition-bearing community, this is part of the price.