

# 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 and Catholic 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.

Several months after the UCA killings, 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 poor nations whom Ellacuría called the crucified peoples of the world.<sup>1</sup>

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. We cannot hope to photocopy the UCA for the U.S. or elsewhere. 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. What is the context for higher education today? To what world must we respond?

### **Signs of the Times: The Bad News.**

As this new century begins, 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."<sup>2</sup> 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. To boot, governments and parties, left, right and center, have entered into a global legitimation crisis. Few believe today that traditional political institutions can eliminate the 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. 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.

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<sup>1</sup>John Paul II, *Ex corde ecclesiae*, nos. 32 and 34.

<sup>2</sup>UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 5.

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-initiatives 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 in 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 at the dawn of the new 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 *Theology of Liberation*, the level of new human relations, micro-politics or horizontal politics if you will, the level of cultural revolution and democratic values, all of which require *new human beings*.)

For our purposes, this is crucial. If the micro-initiatives of the poor South are not to be crushed by the macro-obstacles they face, that will depend, decisively, I think, on a critical mass of people in the rich North capable of assuming the cause of the poor as their own, and, indeed, as the cause of humanity, and responding effectively. Although important strides have been made in this direction, we are still a long way from the solidarity movement we need to do battle for life in the 21st century.

### **Education for Solidarity: Higher Standards of Excellence.**

Christian universities and, above all, Jesuit universities in the U.S., are in a position to play a signal role in the formation of a new generation of international solidarity -- not just people for others, but specifically people for the crucified majorities in the poor countries of the world.

{{Some might object that there are plenty of poor and suffering people in the U.S. and that charity begins at home. But let us not over-extend a good principle. We need to take suffering in the rich countries with utmost seriousness, certainly that of poor inner-city neighborhoods and neglected rural communities, but also the deep pain of the affluent suburbs and anguished professional. At the same time we need to take very seriously the way the suffering of the non-poor and their societies are intimately related to the suffering of the poor and their societies.

{{The real suffering of the affluent is directly related to the kind of society in which they live. It is in great part the reflection of the suffering of the poor and unimportant people from whom the non-poor distance themselves. In a similar way, the very grave social problems of the U.S. are also related to the way this society is constructed and the way it depends on the foreign policies which have distanced U.S. from the poor majorities of other nations and even contributed to their misery.

{{Citizens of the rich countries need to become reconciled with the poor majorities of the world in order to be healed of their own internal divisions. In addition, citizens of the colossal world power which the U.S. is today have a special responsibility toward the poor majorities of the world, to help remove these crucified peoples from their crosses, as Ellacuría put it. There is a political dimension to this responsibility. We all disagree with the U.S. teaching torture and the subversion of democracy at the School of the Americas and all the sordid policies which our government has carried out in poor countries. Many of us disagree with skewed economic policies imposed by the U.S. and its allies through the international lending agencies and the unfair trade practices imposed on the poor nations. But it is not as simple as that. For these policies are carried out *in our name and with our tax dollars*. We all have different

vocations, it is true, but here, silence and inaction amount to a complicity unworthy of our deepest Christian and human vocation.}}

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. policy in Latin America and foreign debt take place in the student cafeteria and the faculty lounge. A high percentage of students engage in service. Some go to the Dominican Republic or Mexico and come back "ruined for life." And yet, many feel that justice remains on the margin at the university, that, even in the debates, a great deal of disinformation frames what genuine information is discovered and shared. The agenda of forming those enlightened and committed "new human beings" gets stalled because of people's limited experience, the requirements of the job market, personal prejudice and institutional inertia. Is it wildly utopian to expect more? I don't think so.

Today not only the signs of the times but *the deepest needs of students and teachers* require that the Christian university reach beyond an excellent "liberal" education -- plus sacraments and pastoral attention. A truly humanistic, Christian education demands more. First, of course, we want to help students understand the world, *la realidad mundial*, and not just "the literature" of their major fields (as important as that obviously is). We want them to understand the world's suffering and the causes of that suffering, as well as possible solutions. But, in addition, we want them to be *morally* prepared to change the world when they leave the university.

This requires more than bare intellectual training. It also requires moral conversion and conscientization. The Christian university needs to take moral conversion seriously, especially since intellectual formation itself suffers without it. Intellectual training also suffers unless it includes conscientization, by which I mean intellectual conversion, the development of moral sensitivity to and awareness of suffering and its causes. The holistic outlook on formation has a long history in the Ignatian educational tradition.

A frequent experience in El Salvador can throw the wider educational challenge into relief.

### **Encounter with the Victims.**

Waves of foreign delegations have come to El Salvador during recent years. The pilgrims deplane a little anxious, vaguely dreading what awaits them. They fear, half-consciously, that the people might lunge for their wallets, or that when they, the visitors, arrive at their first poor community, they will suffer a massive Irish-Catholic -- or Jewish or Methodist -- guilt-attack; or at least that they will have to sell their VCR when they get back home.

As happens with most of our fears, it doesn't turn out that way. On the one hand, the visitors spend much of their time in El Salvador wondering why these people are smiling. The people are glad they came and receive them with open arms. On the other hand, if the pilgrims listen to the stories of bombings and flight from the army, death squads, hunger and premature

death, the victims will break their hearts. And *that*, after all, is the main reason the pilgrims have come. It is an experience of extraordinary richness, if the visitors can take it in.

The encounter stops them short and focuses their attention. "My God!" they cry, "half their children die from preventable disease. The powerful steal from them at will. There is no justice. And what has *my* government done here in my name?" The visitors are shocked. Not that the poor are all saints. They just do not deserve what they have had to suffer. The injustice clashes strikingly with their humanity.

This humanity, pressing upon the visitors, can shake them to their roots. The more they allow the poor to crash through their defenses, the more unsettled they feel. They begin to see their own reflection in the eyes of their hosts, and they say to themselves, "Hey, these people are just like us!" They sense a gentle invitation to lay down the burden of their own superiority (of which they are mostly unaware) and identify with these humble people, despite the differences between them. They begin to feel smaller and more "ordinary." The visitors feel themselves losing their grip; or better, they feel the world losing its grip on them. What world? The world made up of important people like them and unimportant poor people like their hosts. "Things fall apart," as the poet says; the visitors' world is coming unhinged as the poor welcome them without demanding that they clean up their act with their hosts and billions like them. The northerners' disorientation is like the sweet shame and holy confusion of falling in love. In fact, that is what is happening, a kind of falling in love. The earth trembles. Their horizon is opening up. They're entering unfamiliar ground, a richer, more real world.

In this interchange, the anonymous masses of the world's poor emerge from their cardboard-cutout reality and take on the three-dimensional status of full-fledged human beings.

This kind of encounter can blow our world apart. It discloses that the world is far worse off than we dared to imagine. But right there, the victims reveal that there is also something going on in the world that is far more wonderful than we dared to imagine. Sin indeed abounds, but grace abounds even more (Rom 5,20). When the victims share their last tortilla with a visiting stranger, they pull back the veil on their hope, a hope they themselves seldom fully understand. It seems we need to allow their suffering to break our world apart in order for them to share with us the secret of God's transforming work in the world. Only then can we participate in that smile of theirs which seems to have so little basis in the facts.

### **My Middle-class Tribe.**

After reflecting on experiences like this for some time, it gradually dawned on me that I belong to a peculiar tribe. The middle-class cultures of the North are newcomers to world history and have only existed for about 200 years. We're not all bad people; we're just a tiny minority under the common illusion that we are the center of gravity of the universe. The poor can free us of this strange idea.

The middle-class cultures have made extraordinary advances in civilization. True; historically, many came at great cost to the despoiled nations and races. Nonetheless, these are historic achievements. I'm not so much referring to the ambiguous technological progress. I

mean the spiritual, cultural and political breakthroughs: the unheard-of opportunities, political liberties, democracy, the critical consciousness of the Enlightenment, and so on. The problem for the non-poor is that the new freedoms and economic security have distanced us from the kind of daily life-and-death struggle that has always been the daily fare of the poor. Perhaps 90% of all the people 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 what is really important in life, namely life itself and love. To make matters worse, our superior technology and the media induce us to think of our culture and perspective on life is the norm, basically on track.

The encounter with the poor can free us from these illusions. When we come out on the other side, we realize that the marginalized are really at the center of things. It is we, in Chicago and Paris, who are on the fringe. Clearly we need these victims -- the poor, abused women and children, racial and sexual minorities, prisoners -- more than they need us. They draw us out of ourselves and usher us into the heart of reality. Like practically everybody, we live habitually on the periphery of life=s deep drama -- more so, on average, in affluent societies. The reality of the periphery is thin, one-dimensional, "lite," compared to the multilayered richness of the center where life struggles against death. The poor reveal to us both the horror of evil in the world and the possibility for a more humane way of living together. They bring us up against the world and ourselves all at once. When the world=s pain crashes in upon us in the person of the victim, the encounter dredges up from within us the parts of ourselves that we had banished into unconscious exile. The outcast outside us calls forth the outcast within.

We don't have to go to El Salvador for this. But, for all our courses and diplomas, can we really consider ourselves educated people unless we allow the poor to break open our world like this?

As I see it, experiences like this reveal three lessons for humanistic education today: First, authentic education requires cognitional hygiene, especially for my middle-class tribe. It must challenge students to open their horizons and overcome prejudices rooted in social conditioning. Second, books alone are not enough for this. It requires engaging students at the level of experience and practice in such a way as to challenge their intellectual and moral commitments. In most cases this will provoke wholesome crisis. Third, this raises new questions and helps students to re-configure their world-view, re-locating important issues at the center and de-centering less-important ones.

Does this wider educational agenda threaten academic excellence? No. It implies standards of excellence that are *much higher* than those of the Ivy League competition. By tackling the prejudice and limited horizons that undermine intellectual authenticity, it aims at greater academic rigor. Does it mean less book-learning? No. It seeks to raise the issues that send people to the library and the classroom searching intently for answers. Our best-intentioned professors frequently find themselves proposing the justice answers to students who lack the questions.

I will say a word about each of the above three points: prejudice, liberating education and new world-views.

### **Resistance, Prejudice, Searching for Truth.**

What are the conditions for coming to know the truth about reality in a pluralistic setting like a university? What can help us move the debates forward? To answer that we need to confront the 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 toward God. So, 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 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 we interpret and evaluate data, and the questions that arise in our experience. This framework is less the product of reason than of interaction with our earliest family environment and the value-bearing institutions of the society in which we were 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 desires and inclinations shaped by social interaction, and embedded, in the end, in my identity. To question these 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 substratum of our conscious and rational life (Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, pragmatism, the sociology of knowledge, Gadamer, and so on).

Christian theology has always recognized a moral component to the problem of intellectual bias. Scripture therefore scoffs at the foolish wisdom of this world, of those who say they see but who are actually blind. But theology rarely draws out the implications for education: If we really take sin seriously -- original, habitual, actual and now structural sin -- then we should take seriously the need to overcome original distortion, habitual distortion, actual distortion and institutionalized collective distortion.



Ignatius had a clear sense of the problem, and, although he lacked modern scientific tools, I think he was more radical and realistic than most. According to him, unless our commitments and affective inclinations are in order, we are out of touch with reality. We need to free the chains on our imagination and intelligence and overcome institutional barriers which prevent the most important questions from getting raised. This cognitive liberation depends in turn on untangling the habits of our heart and ordering our commitments. In that case, the search for truth is more than a matter of evidence, logical rigor and even greater self-consciousness.

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. Reality is reasonable, but we are naive if we suppose that reason alone can take us to it. Fortunately, we can count on more than reason to guide us to the truth.

### **Liberating Education.<sup>3</sup>**

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."<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup>At Medellin 31 years ago, the Latin American bishops called for such a liberating education. See the Medellin document entitled "Education."

<sup>4</sup>As St. Ignatius says in the *Spiritual Exercises*, "it is not much knowing that fills and satisfies the soul, but feeling [*sentir*] and savoring things internally" [2]. Cf [63, 104, 233, etc.]. This verb, *sentir*, means both feeling and understanding. Numbers in brackets refer to the standard numbering of paragraphs.

the truth to sink in, we have to adjust to reality both morally and practically.<sup>5</sup> 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 brilliant intellectuals, 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 resistance to self-transcendence. Consolation is accompanied by new images and concepts which expand one's limited horizon and undermine intellectual bias. Desolation discloses my resistance to this kind of liberation. We need to learn to interpret such feelings and states.<sup>6</sup> In order to assimilate reality, the visitors to El Salvador had to "sit with" the experience, *working through the feelings and the thoughts it evoked*. As the new reality entered them (and vice versa), it not only stirred their thoughts but also their feelings -- and eventually their hands and feet. Reality draws us out of ourselves. Our response then generates new experience which in turn further affects our understanding of the world.

Bernard Lonergan can help us to understand this better. He argues that the search for truth involves the whole person in a process of ongoing conversion -- intellectual, moral and religious conversion. Knowing reality embraces four interconnected activities: experience, understanding, judgment and response. That translates into four imperatives: First, be attentive to reality. Second, be intelligent, that is, think and understand. Third, be reasonable, that is, distinguish between the genuine insights that correspond to reality and those bright ideas that do not. Finally, be responsible. This last step includes evaluating the situation morally, discerning,

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<sup>5</sup>"Knowledge" in the Bible is a matter of experience by the whole person in a way similar to what we are speaking, about here. By contrast, Western thought distinguishes sharply between sense and feeling on the one hand and conceptual knowledge on the other. The philosophy of Xavier Zubiri is an important exception. For him human beings are animals of "sensible [or feeling] intelligence, @ *inteligencia sentiente*. In this view, there is no such thing as pure reason or intelligence separated from the senses and the feelings. Xavier Zubiri, *Inteligencia sentiente. Inteligencia y realidad* (Madrid: Alianza, 1980).

Western philosophy generally characterizes experience and knowledge as an *encounter* between the knower and the known, the subject and the object, or it seeks to overcome that scheme. Largely thanks to Marx, the mutual shaping of subject and object colors a great deal of contemporary philosophy. This is an advance. Still, besides encounter and mutual shaping, I think we need the idea of the *inter-penetration* of knower and known to adequately characterize both knowledge and experience.

<sup>6</sup>Cf Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, [3 13-336].

deciding and acting.<sup>7</sup> For Lonergan, the search for truth is nothing less than a matter of self-transcendence leading to greater personal authenticity. Lonergan's cognitive theory takes distorting prejudice seriously and also proposes a way to overcome it.

The present perspective leads me to modify this scheme in two ways. First, we need to connect the two ends of Lonergan's chain. Now we see action and experience linked in a first complex step. Thinking must be shaken up and stimulated by practice (in the end, I will argue, by commitment, by love). Practice generates questions for reflection. Tying the two ends of the chain gives us a "heuristic circle," or rather a spiral, which progressively deepens our understanding of reality. It is a spiral which should of itself lead us to the encounter with the victim. However, personal and institutional prejudice can stave off that encounter. We therefore need to incorporate the reality of the victim explicitly into the heuristic circle.

That is the second change we need to make: We need to ask ourselves: Be attentive to what experience? *What* reality and *who*'s experience are we talking about? As Ellacuría put it, we need to experience the impact of the reality of the victims. That brings us to the heart of reality. The encounter with the poor which we described earlier suggests to me the priority of being attentive to the victims and learning from their experience.

(In a provocative essay, Gil Bailie tries to diagnose the crumbling of Western philosophy which we witness today in the thought of deconstructionists like Jacques Derridá. Appealing to René Girard's analysis of culture, Bailie understands Western philosophy as an attempt to explain reality abstractly while at the same time ignoring the violence which lies at the base of all human societies. By trying to explain reality and at the same time ignore the victim, Western philosophy, for all its progress, has chased its tail for 25 centuries and has entered into a radical crisis, along with most of our social institutions, now that we are no longer able to hide this foundational violence.<sup>8</sup>)

### **Re-configuring Our World.**

The encounter with the poor teaches us a third lesson about education: More than other experiences, this one raises the deep questions we most need to ask, stimulates reflection on them and leads people to re-configure their world-view. The practical option for the poor, attention to suffering reality, understanding reality and sound judgment about reality shakes our worldview at its foundations. It helps re-shape the basic anthropological, cosmological and cognitive assumptions that form the horizon for our interpretation. It leads us to what Lonergan calls a "higher viewpoint."

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<sup>7</sup>Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990; orig., 1972), pp. 53, 55.

<sup>8</sup>Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroads, 1995), chapter 13.

The modified Lonergan schema supposes that we face a *root* prejudice that we all need to overcome. This "original prejudice" is the division of the world into important people and unimportant people. When we read the world, when we watch the nightly news and when we read the gospel, the same thing comes to light. Every existing culture divides the world into important people and unimportant people. Sometimes it=s important races and unimportant races; sometimes it=s men vs. women, or rich and poor; or workers and owners; or the elders and the youth. The root distortion is that some are more human than others.

The two modifications we make in Lonergan's schema together imply that commitment to the victim is indispensable for understanding reality. The modern "masters of suspicions" and sociologists of knowledge have helped us understand how bias and interest distort our thinking. They offer partial solutions. Practical solidarity with the victims, love, is the key to overcoming the original prejudice, the key to intellectual conversion.

It is from the foot of the cross that we begin to see straight; it is from there that we can put things in proper perspective. From there, we can certainly do philosophy. But when we avoid the unsettling reality of the crucified victims of history, our wisdom turns to foolishness.

Well, what do we see from the foot of the cross? We see that the center of the drama which we are living is the great struggle between good and evil -- the drama of suffering and oppression, on the one hand, and liberation for communion on the other. The victim is at the heart of the cognitive model, and the model confirms that the victim is at the heart of reality.

### **The Mission of the Christian University.**

Ellacuría said that the central object of study should be *la realidad*. If the heart of reality is oppression-liberation in its many dimensions, the central question for all of us is, What does this mean for us? That in turn suggests that understanding this drama and what it means for us should be at the center of the university=s agenda.

American universities are not the UCA; the U.S. is not Central America; the new decade will not be the 1970s or the 80s. Can we put injustice and liberation at the center of this university=s agenda without violating the spirit of free inquiry, without falling into the worst caricatures of political correctness? It may be difficult, but I think it is still necessary. I do not mean that this should be the exclusive focus of study. There are still differential equations, organic chemistry and biology to learn. But failing to put injustice and liberation at the center means relegating them to the periphery. In that case, we would be conducting a partial search for truth, partial in its omission of large chunks of what we all need to learn, and partial in the sense that the university=s search for truth would be driven by interests other than authentic formation and the pure desire to know.

Institutionally, this kind of a commitment gives new dynamism to teaching and research - and stimulates *proyección social*.

## ***Proyección social.***

As I mentioned in the beginning, in Latin America, and at the UCA in particular, we add to teaching and research a third instrument by which the university serves society, namely, *proyección social*, roughly translated as social outreach. "*Proyección social*" means *projecting* the information, the critique, concrete proposals for solutions, in short, the educational work proper to a university, out into the society. *Ex corde ecclesiae* calls for the Catholic university to "demonstrate the courage to express uncomfortable truths, truths that may clash with public opinion but that are also necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society" (no. 32). The Jesuits at the UCA were killed for just this. They publically attacked abuse and unmasked the official lies during the civil war. They understood this to be, at least in that context, the principle service that the university was providing to society.

Social projection is going on in universities in the U.S. What form should it take in this different context? How can the university do battle for truth *outside* the university? Is it appropriate for the university to take a public stand when injustice is promoted on the basis of half-truths and even lies? Should the university president call for an end to the death penalty, or to legalized abortion in the state? Should the university challenge the military budget? Would many people even notice? The board of directors would probably notice, and the faculty senate. Would they take the president to task for engaging the university in this way? Wisdom is needed here, but also daring. Martin Luther King chided the decent standers-by: I know where you stand on prudence; I don't know where you stand on courage. When does silence become complicity? Consult, I=d say; then speak out. Let people publically dissent. At the UCA *proyección social* provoked controversy inside the university and bombs from outside. But we are a better university today for all of it.

## **Conclusion.**

When the university gives priority to suffering and the conditions for liberation and takes a stand with the poor, then it is committing itself to greater academic excellence, not less. It is committed to coming closer to the truth. Not everyone will see it that way. Some will object that all this compromises the university and its work. If we are honest, we recognize that every university=s agenda is already compromised by a variety of interests other than the pure search for truth. Rather, colleges and universities need something like the kind of cognitive hygiene outlined here.

The commitment to excellence will probably invite the equivalent of *persecution*, at least in the loss of prestige and even funding. But it will probably also stir up new sources of funding, awaken a stronger sense of identity and even foster a kind of evangelical "prestige." Persecution also provides the opportunity to bear witness to a fuller set of criteria for educational excellence and to what it means to be a Christian university today.

Ignacio Ellacuría defended the university's option for the poor in these terms.

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.

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 challenges facing humankind.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>