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“From Reformation to Transformation. The role of the humanities in Christian Higher Education and its relevance as a critical tool in an era of Global Transformation: A critical Latin American perspective”.

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Summary: Using the paradigm of the Reformation, which celebrates 500 years in 2017, precisely during a different kind of Global Transformation brought up by the discovery and colonization of the New World, this paper will attempt to explore, from a Latin American perspective, a critical view of the role of the humanities and CHE in our contemporary Global Transformation.

The commemoration of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 is an appropriate time to consider its significance for today. Indeed, the roots of what this conference has called *the era of global transformation* can be traced back to the period of the Reformation, when the discovery and colonialization of a New World resulted, in fact, in a process of global political, economic intellectual and social transformation that continues to develop until today. The Reformation was an important historical event that contributed to such developments, but I would like to propose that the Reformation brought up a different kind of global transformation that has not been sufficiently considered by contemporary thinkers, a transformation that I believe can challenge and help to redirect the process in which the world seems to be engulfed today.

It can be argued forcefully that the modern configuration of the world that began in the XVI Century produced important advancements in all kinds of knowledge that have made life easier today. But on the other hand, it is evident that these accomplishments have not reached the majority of the people who occupy the two thirds of the World. On the contrary, we have seen the growth of a disproportional social, political and economic inequality. The astonishing progress that we can witness, for example, in health care, education, and social and economical stability, has been very selective reaching only a small segment of the global population, while a marginalized majority has not only been left behind, but has also continued to be exploited for the benefit of the few.

This condition is openly condemned in the Bible as unjust and impious. The Bible also tell us that the primary reason that fosters this situation is at the core of human nature: selfishness and greed, hallmarks of what the Scriptures call sinfulness, that reveals itself in subtle ways as the self-interest justified by modern economics, and that has contaminated everything that humankind has produced, including Higher Education, which today is becoming no more than another commodity in the global market.

How has it happened that all the scientific, artistic and economic accomplishments, to name only the most visible, have failed to create a more just and compassionate society? I do not suggest that there is lack of justice and compassion from dedicated people who give their lives to the service of others, for we have many good examples. What I mean is that, given the degree of our abundant material and intellectual global resources, their unequal distribution is appalling. I think we all agree that something very important is missing.

I propose that what is lacking is a different kind of transformation, the transformation that the Reformation sought to bring back to the emerging modern world when it had been lost or watered down. Indeed, the Renaissance and the Reformation feed each other to produce an important historical, religious, social, political, economical, scientific, educational and spiritual change that leads to our present day. But we must affirm that it was the Reformation that demanded that these changes should be rooted in a personal transformation. Luther summarized the effect of such transformation in the following words: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” One of the most important contributions

of the Reformation to the world was the liberating process of the human spirit that made possible the development of scientific knowledge and artistic creativity by freeing them from the constraints of the absolute power of the Roman church, and the reformers saw such release as a means to serve each other, but particularly those who suffered most from the oppression of the secular and religious powers.

Unfortunately, this message was checked by the prevalent self-interest that invaded even the Christian communities and churches, which slowly but surely disengaged themselves from the affairs of the world, acting only in such matters that concerned their own religious (and very often economic) interests. Thus, proclamation for a radical transformation of the human spirit that would result in an engagement with the world to make it more just and compassionate was slowly but surely substituted by religion on one hand and the predominance of reason on the other. We can understand, given the prevalence of self-interest in the secular world, the criteria for almost anything, including exploitation of one by the other. But is difficult to justify the enclosure of the Christian churches and their withdrawal from demanding justice and compassion in all human actions.

As Christians today it is unquestionable that we need to recover the message of the Reformation, but above all we need to transform ourselves. Because only if we transform and reform ourselves will we be able to engage meaningfully with the world in this era of global transformation – to proclaim in word and deed the real biblical transformation.

A view from Latin America

As a Latin American student in the 1960s, then as a Christian at the university and finally as a professor of literature at a Mexican Jesuit university, I have come to deeply appreciate the indirect influence of the Reformation on the catholic religious orders that played a significant role during the conquest and colonization of the American continent, in maintaining a sense of justice and compassion towards the marginalized, particularly the indigenous people. In my student years, I witnessed the rise of Liberation Theology and other movements alike, like the struggles for the human rights of the minorities in the US lead by Martin Luther King. It was the name of Martin Luther King that lead me to read Martin Luther and about the Reformation, and to come to the conclusion, just as Martin

Luther King and the Latin American liberation theologians did, that the logical consequence of experiencing freedom of the mind and the heart brought by the presence of Christ in one's life is, as Luther said, to serve others. This is the central mark of the Kingdom of God according to Jesus and the whole biblical tradition: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice..." (Mathew 6:33)

This emphasis on the imperative of justice and compassion on behalf of the dispossessed is also the center of the Reformation and is the true transformation that is lacking in this increasingly unjust and discompassionate world. Ironically, it has been expressed more forcefully in Latin America by Catholic Christians than by the inheritors of the Reformation, who arrived late in the XIX Century with an educational program and liberal politics, but that by the middle of the XX Century had fallen short of being a cradle for social and political, not to mention theological, creativity. Thus it is not surprising that, with a few exceptions, the birth of Evangelical Christian Higher Education in the second part of the XX Century, joined forces with the conservative wing of the Catholic universities in condemning movements like Liberation Theology, or other social movements, without proposing a positive alternative.

The ideology of a global economy has permeated the middle class and their educational institutions, including the ones with a Christian orientation, and is even forcing State institutions, which used to be a significant political force, to consider the educational market under the competition of an array of private institutions. Thus, Higher Education at all levels is becoming in Latin America, just as I believe it is in the rest of the world, a commodity dominated by a global market, during which process its role has been altered to primarily serve the economic forces over the social needs of a given country. Of course, an obvious consequence of this phenomenon is the increasing divide between poverty and wealth, social justice and political conservatism, and the emergence of a form of Higher Education, both secular and religious, that mainly serves the interest of the conservative economical order and a middle class that aspires to the good life of the upper classes, without concern for the ones who are left behind. This, then, is the reality of Higher Education in Latin America, including, save a few exceptions, the Evangelical Christian Institutions that are being rapidly formed in the Latin American continent. Unfortunately, the Latin American institutions of Christian Higher Education seem to be more interested in

protecting their doctrinal orientation and in acquiring national and international accreditation to become competitive in the global market, than in defining their role in said market.

Yet, in the mist of this contradiction, and while Liberation Theology awakened the social consciousness of Latin American Christians, a group of independent evangelical theologians and educators lead by the Latin American Theological Fraternity assumed the task of rescuing the biblical principles of the Reformation and began to put them into practice in what is known today as Holistic Mission or “Misión Integral”, which has grown to be a serious alternative to conservative Evangelical and Catholic theology, politics and social practices. The movement lead by the Theological Fraternity not only proposed to reform and transform Latin American evangelical churches but, aware of the lack of real transformation in Christian Higher Education, set out to develop programs and organize conferences that would challenge it with practical, social and culturally appropriated alternatives drawn from a different way of using the Bible and doing theology. This seems imperative in order to become truly meaningful in the global processes of the world. Although a formal approach to the dilemma is being proposed, there is a conviction that Christian Higher Education needs to be reformed and transformed into what, from a biblical and historical perspective, it is meant to be: to bring forward transformational alternatives to the creation and use of knowledge and arts, with an strong emphasis on justice and compassion for the most vulnerable people of the world.

This alternative, both in Education and Social action is, I believe, what is missing in this era of global transformation.

Inspiration from the Reformation.

As I have said, I sympathized in my formative years with Liberation theology. But my Lutheran background also helped me to recognize the presence of the Reformation in its main propositions. In fact, I believe that it was the reading of some of the more significant protestant theologians and biblical scholars, allowed and encouraged after Vatican II, together with the Bible, that inspired the actions and the writings of both catholic and evangelical movements.

But at the same time, I have been challenged to look into Luther's writings with new eyes, particularly as they pertain to Higher Education. I believed, like him, that Grace transforms not only the heart but also the mind, and frees both to find creative ways to serve others with compassion and justice, despite the fact that we are still under the dominance of our self-interest, from which we are being released by Grace in Christ.

Luther's concern with education was central in his aim to reform not only the church, but also the whole society, which I think should be the same concern of Christians today. And this is why I believe his ideas are very relevant for us. I would like to show you this this by referring to two of his more significant writings: "To The Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools", of 1524, and the "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School", of 1530. In these, Luther emphasizes four points that I would like to develop and show their pertinence for the Reformation and Transformation of the Christian Church and the world today.

Even though Luther was thinking about Christian Education in his own context, that is, chiefly the formation of ministers, his belief in the priesthood of all believers makes him extend his propositions to other activities in the world, without diminishing their importance. They are ministries as worthy as those of the preachers. Thus, we could argue that Luther's principles are relevant not only for Christian Education in general, including Higher Education, but for Higher Education in all senses.

1. The foundation.

What should be the foundation of education in general? Just as today, in Luther's times the meaning of human life became measured in terms of the satisfaction of material needs. Similarly, today we could argue that education is linked to the acquisition of tools to survive and succeed in an increasingly materialistic world. Addressing both the past and the present, Luther dismissed this as the Christian purpose of education. Truly, when education is solely motivated by economic interests or social status, then it ceases to be education and becomes just a commodity, a useful instrument for purely materialistic ends, even though the educational discourse appeals to more lofty goals. Thus Luther criticizes the students who entered the university only to acquire a better social position, even though they did not learn anything:

Indeed, what did men learn in those institutions but how to become asses, blockheads and dunces! For twenty and forty years one sat over one's books without acquiring either Latin or German. I say nothing of the shameful and vicious life, by which the excellent youths were miserably corrupted. (79)

In other words, focusing only on the acquisition of material goods and social recognition is to waste the gift of education, as if it were thrown to beasts. As we can see, Luther understands as fundamental those disciplines we today call the humanities, siding then with the renaissance humanists.

But Luther is also aware that the Reformation of the church and, for that matter, the whole European culture, depends to a large degree on an educational reform that would radically change the medieval way of teaching, freeing the spirit and the mind from the chains of scholasticism. At the same time, Luther insists that the Christian community cannot dispense from educating men and women so that they can carry on the reformation of the church and society; therefore he proposes to follow an educational method rooted in Scripture, but also in a creative way of thinking, which would please not only students but even the parents:

They would rather say: "If it is true, as the Gospel teaches, that this estate is dangerous to our children, why then, dear sirs, show us another way to educate them that will be pleasing to God and profitable to them; we certainly want to provide not only for the bellies of our dear children, but also for their souls." That, at least, is what true, Christian and faithful parents would say (77).

Thus, Luther's foundation is simply the evangelical assertion that "man does not live of bread alone". In other words, education presupposes that man is not just a "brute", but also a human being with qualities that requires a formative process for healthy development. Education, then, should not be directed chiefly towards the satisfaction of material needs, for these only breed sophisticated forms of self-interest, selfishness and greed, that is, of its brute self. On the contrary, education promotes the transformation of such nature into a new one, which will make

man compassionate, and share what he acquires and what he has with the dispossessed, thus bringing justice to the world.

2. The motivation.

For Luther, the motivation of education cannot be simply utilitarian, but should be concerned with the formation of a different kind of people: a just and compassionate people. Thus Luther calls to the biblical tradition, pointing out that education primarily has a spiritual purpose, so that the spiritual decadence of European Christendom is due mostly to the decadence of Christian education and its unchristian goals: pride, social position, etc. All this to satisfy materialistic desires.

On the contrary, when the motivation is the search for human integration, education contributes to the enrichment of the human spirit, without dismissing the material needs but leading them in the right direction to have a healthy material life. In other words, the satisfaction of material needs becomes appropriate according to the real goal of human life, which finds its meaning by promoting social justice through the exercise of compassion and justice that, in turn, is the proper expression of the Kingdom of God in the world. Speaking of the need for law scholars that would pursue the application of justice he said:

Thus the jurists and scholars in this worldly government are the persons who preserve this law, and maintain the worldly government; and just as a pious theologian and sincere preacher is called, in the realm of Christ, an angel of God, a savior, prophet, priest, servant, and teacher (as has been said above), so a pious jurist and true scholar can be called, in the worldly realm of the emperor, a prophet, priest, angel, and savior. (Sermon, 121)

Because of the priesthood of all believers, Christian education is motivated by the desire to form free servants in the world, who will lovingly offer their lives and their gifts to others by means of their chosen professions, since the Gospel does not make distinctions or hierarchies among people or ministries. Thus, transforming Christian education is set to transform the world through the transformation of its own students.

3. The Method

It is clear that Luther intended to carry the Reformation into the realm of education because he was convinced that the educational institutions were as corrupted as the Church that he intended to reform. Thus, his strong criticism of the state of universities and convents implies that he also sought a radical reform of the educational system.

It is true that, rather than have the universities and monasteries continue as before, with no other place for youth to study and live, I should wish no boy ever to study nor to be able to speak; for it is my earnest intention, prayer and desire, that those ass-stables and devil's-schools should either sink into the abyss or be converted into Christian schools (79).

Luther then identified himself with the humanistic ideal of a renewed form of education, shared with other Christian humanists of his times inspired by the Augustinian tradition. They focused on knowledge of what today we call the humanities: languages, particularly the biblical and classical ones, history and the literary arts. They also incorporated new approaches to the study of society that began to develop then from law and a keen interest on regulating the social and political life when canonical law ceased to be the only norm. However, although Luther shares the view of the renaissance humanists of the degradation of society as a result of a poor educational system, he opposed their attitude of making education a matter for the elites. On the contrary, Luther would demand that the educational reform should be at all levels and for all people, and not only for the nobility. In fact, he challenges the city council to assume responsibility for the education of the common people. It is at this point where Luther differs the most from catholic humanists, who eventually gave rise to the Jesuit order whose aim was to educate the ruling elites, even at the places around the world where they established missions, with the well intentioned but misguided idea that in such a way the church would continue to rule the social and political life of people. At least, this was the case in Latin America where, as we know, this backfired resulting in the expulsion of the order by the same elites they educated.

We could say that Luther had hopes that the church would become a real people's church, and that educating the people would assure the continuation of the Reformation. That is why Luther urges the German authorities to provide for the education of boys and girls in the

languages and arts. It also shows that for him, the Reformation was not only a matter of the heavenly kingdom but also of the kingdom of this world.

If then there were no soul, as I have said, and if there were no need at all of schools and languages for the sake of the Scriptures and of God, this one consideration should suffice to establish everywhere the very best schools for both boys and girls, namely, that in order outwardly to maintain its temporal estate, the world must have good and skilled men and women, so that the former may rule well over land and people and the latter may keep house and train children and servants aright (90)

Luther also insists on a good foundation, so he demands the creation of libraries and books accessible to all, just as he himself made the Bible accessible to the common people.

4. The grant objective

An education based on the recognized value of people and their endless possibilities, is the basis of a larger objective: the transformation of society and its culture. This was the view of the renaissance humanists, but for Luther it was not just a civilizing program. In his letter to the City Council, to whom, as I have mentioned, Luther charges with the responsibility to organize and finance what today we may call public education, he points out that there are also very practical reasons:

If it is necessary, dear sirs, to expend annually such great sums for firearms, roads, bridges, dams and countless similar items, in order that a city may enjoy temporal peace and prosperity, why should not at least as much be devoted to the poor, needy youth, so that we might engage one or two competent men to teach school? (78-79)

Investing in education is to have the foresight of creating a better society and culture. To be only concerned with economic growth for the city, without supporting the formation of honest and knowledgeable people, is a recipe for moral and cultural disaster, not to mention the practical

costs. Again, Luther refers to the evangelical mandate that man does not live by bread alone: “Now the welfare of a city consists not alone in gathering great treasures and providing solid walls, beautiful buildings, and a goodly supply of guns and armor”. (82)

To leave the governance and administration of the city to people without a solid moral, spiritual and intellectual formation is dangerous, for it would inevitably result in rampant corruption. Luther thus suggests that the safety of the city does not consist in material goods, but in the quality of the people that manage such goods, a quality that depends a great deal of the quality of education they have received:

But a city’s best and highest welfare, safety and strength consist in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable and well-bred citizens; such men can readily gather treasures and all goods, protect them and put them to a good use (82).

For Luther the just and compassionate administration of the goods of the community does not depend as much on having the right legislation, as on the formation of people to be just and with a clear understanding that they are not just administrators of the goods of the city or its inhabitants, but that these were given by God for the equal distribution among people. Justice and compassion would also make them more sensible to the neediest of people. Luther saw education as God’s gift to humanity to promote real social change. Speaking about the German situation, which in his time would be considered a third world nation, he said:

Let us for once make use of our reason, so that God may behold our gratitude for His benefits, and other lands see that we, too, are human beings, able to learn useful things from them or teach them to them, in order that through us, too, the world may be made better. (93)

Luther sees education as a global enterprise, but not in the way it is seen today. He appreciates what Europe has to offer to Germany, but is also quick to mention that Germany has many things to offer the world. In fact, he seems to be aware that cultural, economic, social, religious

and any other kind of global exchange must work both ways and both partners must recognize, respect and appreciate the value and dignity of the other.

It seems clear that for Luther there was not room for inequality or injustice, not only among the members of a Christian community, but among all peoples regardless of their religion, gender, race or nationality. Indeed, he calls the German people and its rulers to assume the divine mandate to carry on the Reformation to all the nations around the globe, not only by proclaiming the Gospel, but sharing the transformational view of education, an education that has as its main goal the formation of a more just society that will effectually reflect the kingdom of God.

Latin America, just as other parts of the so-called third world, has resembled what Luther said about his own country at the birth of the modern world. The dominant global economic and military powers of the world have drawn their contours to fit their own interests, and in the process have made evident the injustice of their proposals in the form of regional violence, uncontrollable emigration, and increasing economical and racial disparity. Indeed, this is a kind of global transformation, but not for the better, at least not for countries or continents like mine. In this regard, CHE could contribute to make a difference.

I would like to close by summarizing some of the principles that we may draw from Luther's teaching on education. We must begin by affirming that what was really important for him was his own experience and understanding of God's Grace as the liberating power that transformed him, despite his shortcomings, at different stages of his life, but particularly in his years as student and scholar at the university.

Thus, it is unavoidable to see Grace in his concept of education, and this is true today for Christian Higher Education: to rely on the Grace of God as the source of the transformation of the students and not what the institution has to offer.

Education should be always a way to exercise the freedom that Grace grants to everybody. Therefore, the spiritual, intellectual and social freedom that comes from Grace must be cultivated to be offered, in the words of the apostle Paul, as a living sacrifice to serve others and to bring the justice of God's Kingdom to the world.

Finally, we have been called to creatively offer viable, sustainable and appropriate alternatives in the sciences and the arts, and all other disciplines of Higher Education; alternatives to those who have dominated global enterprise and produced an increase of injustice

and violence in the world. This means that the role of CHE is not just to reproduce the trends of the educational global market, but also to bear witness with practical alternatives, showing that there is a kind of transformation radically different to the one being hailed as global transformation.

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