

## **Collaboration between TE Institutions and Church-based Theological Education - Opportunities and Challenges**

### **On taking Context and Community seriously**

#### **Introduction**

There are two questions that need to be answered when we propose context-based theological education supported by colleges and seminaries, from a Latin American perspective. The first is how is that theological education, particularly an Anglican Theology, can be truly committed to the economic, political, social and cultural and religious context in this part of the globe? In other words, how is context-based theological education actually possible?

Even after five decades or more of Liberation Theology, and many other emergent theologies in Latin-America and the Caribbean (interconnected with similar theological constructions all over the world), the church in general - and the churches of the Anglican Communion in particular - put many barriers in the way, coming out of old colonial, clericalist, patriarchal and racist assumptions. In fact, often these churches are in alliance with the dominant powers and the profit system of capitalism. So, instead, a new emergent and contextual theological formation is needed to serve the excluded, marginalised, oppressed peoples, living in our common home.

The second question that needs to be answered is how good academic support and resourcing from seminaries and colleges is to be provided. There is an epistemological question about what is “academic” within the structures of seminaries and colleges. If we want a contextualised theological formation, the “*locus*” of that academic epistemological construction must be the lives of those people and all creation, in life or death, hope or frustration, inclusion or exclusion,

dignity or invisibility, integrity or destruction. Resources cannot be thought of and imagined as being part of the old structures of certain elites and their 'knowledge', but must be understood as open spaces, starting points and places of engagement with a great diversity of perceptions, languages, spiritualities, histories, interpretations, practices, etc.

In this paper I want to point out some steps taken in this direction, in the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil, and developed throughout meetings sponsored by CETALC-TEC (Commission for Theological Education for Latin America and Caribbean of the Episcopal Church). But I also want to point out the barriers we still have for the achievement of a new contextual theological education based on the Anglican experience in the context of Latin America.

### **Teaching and learning in context**

One of the most famous books of the Brazilian teacher and theologian Paulo Freire is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This describes an oppressive construction of knowledge as “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor”, where “the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat”. Freire calls this the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which all that students do is “the receiving, filing, and storing of the deposits” (FREIRE 2005, p.72).

Instead, in CETALC’s consultations, it was agreed that theological education must enable learners and teachers to “know how to know” (*saber conocer*), “know how to be” (*saber ser*), “know how to do” (*saber hacer*), and “know how to live with” (*saber convivir*). It is not for the ‘teacher’ to give the content and truth and the ‘learner’ to incorporate that truth in her/his knowledge and practice, but for the teacher to learn with the learner, within the mediation of lives and relationships, on any subject. And the learners teach through the epistemological framework of their own contexts and practices.

The traditional content of theology and pastoral knowledge should not be a stranger to this process. Its historical baggage must be critically evaluated in the light of contexts, relationships, dialogue, deconstruction and construction of

human beings living the Christian Faith in a committed and transformational way. The permanent rediscovering of the sense of Scripture, Tradition and Reason must play its part. In practical terms, we need less time to “pass on”, and more time to “share with”, in our teaching and learning processes. But it will not be easy, because our theological students may have had their previous formation, and even their catechetical formation in the “banking” type of education. For that reason, we must invest in preparatory theological formation for teachers, so that they learn how to learn *from* students, and students need to learn how to do critical evaluation of their contexts. The *Indaba* methodology, used at the Lambeth Conference in 2008, can be of help in this process.

### Practical ways forward

In the first two decades of the XXI century, and even before, we achieved a new vision of praxis at every level, the vision of a worldwide “net”. But in theological education, in spite of many efforts, formation is still perceived to be located within the constrained space of our institutions and traditions (not necessarily in the bad sense), without a praxis of collective cooperation recognising diversity. We do not see the “others”, especially the “less developed” or the “peripheral” as necessary source of knowledge. This is especially the case in the most traditional centres of theological formation. But in the less traditional centres of formation such people are an obligatory source for the self-construction of theological knowledge, with new starting points and many diverse issues emerging for new actors and subjects of faith, life and transformation.

The pandemic has taught us about “distancing”. For that reason, it is a suitable context for a significant advance. We have sources that make this praxis possible more than ever before. If we go deeply into this kind of “net-inclusive-contextual-decolonial-theology”<sup>1</sup> (NOGUEIRA BAPTISTA, 2016, p.502), we will

---

<sup>1</sup> "From the perspective of decolonial thinking, there are in the Liberation Theologies both positions that continue to advocate economic determination and conceptions that affirm cultural determination, closer to postcolonial conceptions, especially the feminist, black, queer liberation theologies. And also those who seek to articulate these determinations as ecological, religious pluralism, and others more. This diversity is very positive and produces growth and self-criticism, broadening the methods and epistemologies, but also their theoretical productions and “praxis” horizons. From the theoretical and practical point of view, the Liberation theologies continue to be the voice of the colonised, producing their theology together and alongside them, mobilising themselves to confront the coloniality of power, being, knowledge and nature. The various pastoralists and the basic ecclesial communities show this".

find many things for all of us to learn. This new approach is not a “project” but a “proposal” and a continuous discovery of ways, purposes, relationships, sources, and ministries. And the time to begin is now, because our humanity and our life in our common home demand it.

In this outlook we must see our institutional and material infrastructure as a space for construction of a “theological community”, more than for “theological deposit”, as a “theological space of deconstruction and reconstruction” rather than as a source of “imperative theological truth”. This new praxis must have a method where the community is taken as a place (*locus*) where the theology emerges through relationships of communion (*Koinonia*).

Finally, for this reason it is necessary to understand the new digital technologies not as a replacement of what has happened up to now but rather – and here we must be creative – as offering new possibilities to amplify the communitarian capacity of living the Christian faith with vital commitment to the life of the world (John 10:10).

### **Bibliographical resources**

FREIRE, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*; translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: The Continuum International Publishing, 2005.

NOGUEIRA BAPTISTA, Paulo Agostinho. *Pensamento decolonial, teologias pós-coloniais e teologia da libertação*. in *Perspectivas Teológicas*, Belo Horizonte: FAJE, Vol.48, nº 3, Set-Dez 2016. Disponível em: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311850685\\_PENSAMENTO\\_DECOLONIAL\\_TEOLOGIAS\\_POS-COLONIAIS\\_E\\_TEOLOGIA\\_DA\\_LIBERTACAO](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311850685_PENSAMENTO_DECOLONIAL_TEOLOGIAS_POS-COLONIAIS_E_TEOLOGIA_DA_LIBERTACAO).

Acesso: 12 Jan. 2021.