

Dear Friends,

I returned to Costa Rica this last Monday night after ten ministry-packed days in Havana, Cuba, where I was joined by my colleague, Dr. Enrique Fernandez, and the president of Latin America Mission, Steve Johnson, to present a seminar on “The Hidden Curriculum in Theological Education,” a theme that the Cuban leaders invited us to teach on. My co-leaders of the seminar did a splendid job of presenting the various aspects of this issue and of outlining a number of solid solutions. In addition to the talks that each of us presented, there were break-out sessions in which the participants wrestled with the implications of our talks and how they should apply what they were learning to their ministry of teaching in Cuba.

The theme of the seminar stimulated a great deal of discussion. None of us who were leading the seminar have lived in Cuba and, therefore, we are not deeply conversant with the culture and the unique challenges that it presents for the Evangelical Church. We needed to listen well, ask discerning questions, and give judicious advice when asked to do so. For all of us on the team, these times of interactions sharpened our focus and enriched our presentations. I appreciate the inquisitiveness and honesty of the participants, their willingness to critique their efforts in theological education and seek change. It was a real delight.

What, you may ask, is “The Hidden Curriculum?” In general terms, it is all the ways that the culture of an institution

unconsciously works against its stated aims and values. For example, a theological institution will usually have as a stated value to train men and women who love and serve the church of Christ. But, if members of the faculty and administrative staff are not involved in any significant manner in the life of a local church, the example they set subverts what is taught in class—a kind of “do as I say, but not as I do” scenario. More specifically, the hidden curriculum is a strong by-product of the Enlightenment’s emphasis on mastery of objective facts and the need for the learner to be neutral and dispassionate when mastering a field of knowledge. The goal is to master objective facts that can then be manipulated for one’s

own advantage. This modern ideal “neglects the inner reality of teacher and students for the sake of reality ‘out there’” and this means that “the heart of the knowing self is never held up for inspection.”¹

From this all too brief description one can see how inadequate this

form of instruction is for theological education. For, in studying the Scriptures in which God has revealed himself as creator and redeemer, we are not studying objective facts that call us to be neutral and dispassionate, but rather we are called to a relationship of heartfelt engagement with the living God. Neither are we mastering facts that we then manipulate for our advantage—that would surely be idolatry, to say nothing of blasphemy.



¹ Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known*, Harper, 1993, p. 35.



The problem, the hiddenness of what I have described, is found in the fact that all theological education is based on models of modern education, which calls for some reevaluation of what we are doing, and the fact that our students have had years of training in an educational system that creates unconscious expectations that can, and often do, subvert the aims and values of our theological institutions. What then is the solution? Well... that will have to wait another time and format, for I see that I'm running out of space, and perhaps, you dear reader, are running low on patience, as well.

Those who participated in the seminar are not only professors; they are pastors and key-leaders of their denomination, *La Iglesia Evangélica, Los Pinos Nuevos*. The seminary has 40 full-time students, but a few years back the decision was made to decentralize the school and create extension centers throughout the island, while maintaining the traditional program at the Seminary in Santa Clara. Now the school has over 500 students studying part-time. When I asked Dr. Norberto Quesada, the president of the organization, how many of these students are planting house churches—*casa cultos*, he replied, "They all are. That's why," he went on to say, "that we need to train these leaders who are teaching pastors and church planters, and who will bring about the changes in the seminary that are needed." I couldn't agree more.

What's next for me? I have been invited back to Cuba in November to teach in an extension center on the east side of the island. Also, I will be in communication with Dr. Norberto Quesada and my team members to evaluate this last seminar and to make plans for a follow-up seminar in the first quarter of 2013.

I want to express my heart-felt thanks to all of you who have support us and help make it possible to pursue that Lord's calling in Costa Rica and Cuba. Barbi and I are indeed very grateful and we pray that the Lord will multiply his blessings to you.

Your Friends and Co-Laborers in Christ,

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