

ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION

F. Ross Kinsler

Central to the work of theological education is the ecumenical agenda of our day. That agenda has been summarized by the World Council of Churches under four broad headings:

- *The Expression and Communication of our Faith in the Triune God*
- *The Search for a Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society*
- *The Unity of the Church and its Relation to the Unity of Humankind*
- *Education and Renewal in Search of True Community*

Many would say not only that this agenda is central to the work of theological education but also that theological education plays a central role in the pursuit of this agenda.

Both assumptions could be tested by examining what actually happens at theological institutions. Such an examination would have to go beyond the avowed goals of these institutions and look at the curriculum and course content, the attitudes and involvements of professors and students, and relationships between all these and the real world and church. Certainly theological education offers unparalleled potential for ecumenical endeavor.

The following paragraphs will focus on theological education by extension as a channel for ecumenical work in the church. This model of alternative theological education is ~~not even~~^{just} 20 years old, but already there is considerable evidence that at least some extension programs are taking seriously the major concerns of the ecumenical movement. Because TEE reaches and builds on the leadership of the church at the parish and basic community level, its significance for the pursuit of the ecumenical agenda calls for special attention.

While on the one hand contemporary history seems to be controlled and manipulated by fewer people with ~~greater concentration of~~^{more and more} power, there is on the other hand growing evidence that God's Good News is being proclaimed, justice pursued, unity achieved, and human community renewed ~~primarily~~ by the common people in local situations. It should come as no surprise that the followers of Jesus, who served, witnessed, and died "outside the camp," are also fulfilling their ministry today "on the periphery." Those of us who are engaged in the ecumenical movement and in theological education are invited to discover in new and concrete ways the meaning of evangelism, justice, unity, and community by joining hands with God's people on the periphery and to make their faith and witness the central focus of the church.

I. THE EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION OF OUR FAITH IN THE TRIUNE GOD

The 1980 Melbourne Conference on World Mission and Evangelism was an exhilarating experience. The agenda was tough: Good News to the poor, the Kingdom of God and human struggles, the Church Witnesses to the Kingdom, and Christ-Crucified and risen -- challenges human power. The central theme was overpowering: "Your Kingdom Come." The world's agenda was dramatically present in the joyful witness of the delegations from Zimbabwe and Nicaragua and in the painful stories of participants from El Salvador, Chile, Namibia, South Africa, Korea, Taiwan, etc. It was the most widely representative gathering of this kind ever held: 600 people from 100 countries; substantial numbers of Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and conservative evangelicals; many from local urban and rural mission projects; some from independent, Pentecostal, and smaller churches.

For those who attended and for those who observed from a distance, Melbourne demonstrated the underlying, long expected shift of the tectonic plates of the world Christian movement. It became clear to all who had eyes to see that the balance of the world church, not only in numbers but even more in dynamic witness, had moved from Europe and North America to Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, from the so-called First and Second World churches to the churches of the so-called Third World. The shift was evident in the work and mood of the conference, and it was exemplified by the leadership, which included WCC General Secretary, Philip Potter (Caribbean), Director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Emilio Castro (Latin America), and Moderator of CWME, Soritua Nababan (Asia).

This seismic shift of the world Christian movement is evident in the secularization of faith and the decline of transforming witness in the North Atlantic and the massive growth of the churches in Africa, the re-evangelization of Latin America (by Catholics, Pentecostals, and Protestants), and the deepening contextualization of the churches' witness and service in all parts of the Third World. I would like to take Kenya as an example of evangelism and church growth, then look at some recent developments in theological education by extension there and elsewhere.

David Barratt, who recently published the World Christian Encyclopedia, has for many years studied the African Independent Churches and the churches of Kenya from his tiny office in Nairobi. He helped edit the Kenya Churches Handbook of 1973, which contains massive statistical data and many descriptive articles and essays. His observation on those churches: "During the twentieth century the Christian faith has been expanding in Kenya at a meteoric rate and is still expanding faster than in almost all other countries of the world."

In 1900 there were 5,000 Christians among Kenya's 2,900,000 people. By 1972 there were 8 million Kenyan Christians, 66% of the total population, which had grown to 12 million. Current statistics indicate that by the year 2000 there will be 28 million Christians, 83.4% of the total population (34 million). The Christian community is currently growing twice as fast as the general population. Barratt notes that this extraordinary growth is not the result of foreign missions or of a foreign transplant but of indigenous Kenyan Christianity. It cannot be the work of church hierarchies or professional clergy, for it far outstrips their resources and their control. Like the tiny mustard seed, it is "a sign of the arrival of the Kingdom of God in genuinely indigenous form" among the common people.

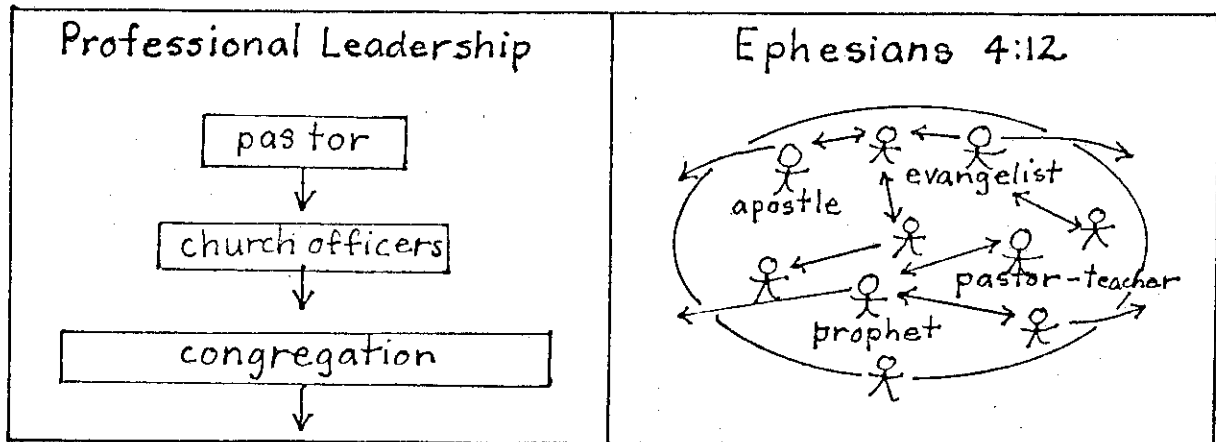
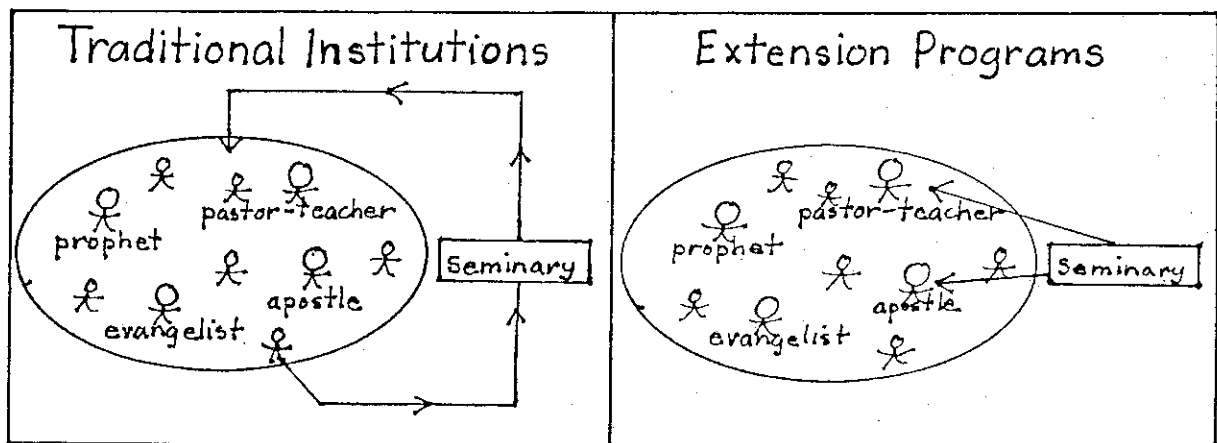
Some would object that the Christians of Kenya do not adequately express the understanding of mission articulated at Melbourne. And it could well be that most of the Kenyan congregations -- Catholic, Protestant, Independent, and Orthodox -- would have great difficulty understanding the Melbourne documents. But these people *are* the church of the poor, engaged in the most basic human struggles, witnessing by their life and by their fervent worship to God's presence and power.

The question is rather, how can theological education relate effectively to the dynamic Christian movement in Kenya. The theological colleges, seminaries, and Bible schools play a strategic role in the training of pastors, priests, and bishops. But they are bursting at the seams, and the ratio of clergy to members is diminishing. Most of the preaching, teaching, and pastoral care is carried out by men and women who will never enter a theological institution.

One by one the dioceses of the Church of the Province of Kenya (Anglican), which is the largest Protestant denomination, have initiated TEE programs in order to provide theological and pastoral training for congregational leaders. In

May 1981 the Provincial Board of Theological Education urged all the dioceses to start TEE programs. The African Inland Church, of which the President of Kenya is a member and preacher, operates a TEE network throughout the country and projects a total enrollment of several thousand. In 1980 the Organization of African Independent Churches initiated a pilot scheme in Kenya, and already 1,484 people have applied for courses. There are perhaps 20 extension programs in Kenya, some at the university level and others at very elementary levels, representing a wide theological and ecclesiastical spectrum. Each in its own way provides tools for the understanding and communication of the Gospel in the local context.

The experience of TEE in Kenya and elsewhere has been illuminating and liberating. Not only are many more people given access to training; the churches' more qualified, gifted, and proven natural leadership is able to take its rightful place in ministry. Theological reflection and pastoral training become more relevant and dynamic because the students bring to the process a wealth of experience, meaningful questions to be dealt with, and daily involvements that test what is studied. Ministry and theological reflection become far more participatory, and the universal tendency to elitism is constantly challenged. TEE not only builds on but contributes to the growth and witness of the whole church. Even if the material resources were available, it is evident that Western-style professional and academic training would not be appropriate for most of Kenya's indigenous church leadership.



At this point it may be useful to turn to the USA, where decline rather than growth is predominant in the mainline churches, and to ask what is happening in theological education by extension. The Southern Baptist denomination, which is the largest in that country with over 11 million members, initiated its Seminary Extension Department in 1951; courses are offered for preachers who have risen from the ranks, for interested laypeople, as continuing education of clergy, and most recently as a substitute for basic seminary education; over 11,000 people are currently enrolled. San Francisco Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) began exploring the possibilities of off-campus theological education in the early 1960's by developing continuing education degree programs (Sc.T.D. and D.Min.) for clergy that focus on and are undertaken within the practice of ministry; later an extension Master of Arts in Values was added for laypeople serious about their Christian vocation in society; that seminary now has about 150 students on campus and 800 off campus all across the country and overseas; a network of extension centers is being established throughout the western states to undergird these programs and to offer various additional options for clergy and laity. About 80 US theological institutions now have D.Min. programs; many serve large numbers of clergy and laity through decentralized non-degree programs; a few are beginning to offer the basic M.Div. (formerly called B.D.) degree by extension.

Those involved in TEE in the US are experiencing results similar to those in Kenya, though the context is radically different. When theological education is made accessible to mature, experienced clergy and laity, it becomes more relevant, dynamic, and participatory. Such developments can be largely self-supporting, which means that they can expand throughout their constituencies. As the base for theological reflection and ministry is broadened, the whole church grows and extends its witness.

II. THE SEARCH FOR A JUST, PARTICIPATORY, AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

JPSS gathers many aspects of the ecumenical agenda and holds them in tension around the concepts of justice, participation, and sustainability. Because the church is deeply rooted in the North Atlantic countries and in the regions of the Third World, it must be deeply involved in both the local and international dimensions of these concerns. Because the church's mission is defined by the Kingdom, God's sovereign and redemptive Rule over history and creation, these concerns are not marginal but central to the Gospel and to the work of theological education.

It would not be possible to enter here into the wider debates surrounding JPSS. Rather, we shall select one sector of human need, health and health care, and use it as a paradigm. There are obvious parallels in other sectors.

In 1979 E. Richard Brown published a fascinating article, "Exporting Medical Education: Professionalism, Modernization and Imperialism," in the British journal, *Social Science and Medicine*. His thesis is that the US pattern of medical modernization and professionalism, exemplified first by Peking Union Medical College (beginning in 1914), was intentionally exported to "underdeveloped" countries in order "to shape the recipient country's cultural, political, and economic development to meet the needs of Western nations." Records of the Rockefeller philanthropies show that they were aware that China had about 400,000 traditional medical practitioners; that they chose to ignore and discredit this tremendous resource for public health and rather to introduce "scientific" medicine through the Peking medical school following the highest American standards; that the medical elite produced in this way (166 physicians in the first 22 years) would best serve the interests of America's expanding economic empire -- through the formation of and service to a professional, managerial class with industrial world views. Furthermore, they realized that

"of all forms of foreign intervention, medicine was irresistible to peoples the world over." In 1917 Rockefeller Foundation President George Vincent wrote that dispensaries and physicians were peacefully penetrating many places extremely dangerous for soldiers, demonstrating that "for purposes of placating primitive and suspicious people *medicine has some advantages over machine guns.*" This model was emulated and adapted around the world for 50 years by the Rockefeller Foundation, foreign aid programs, missionaries, and international health organizations.

There is ample evidence that this approach to health care, whether it was in any specific instance intentionally motivated by Western imperialism or not, has had disastrous results for the peoples of the Third World -- as noted even in more recent studies by the Rockefeller Foundation. Brown notes that, while medical schools and hospitals consume an enormous portion of the funds available, high-technology curative medicine has little or no impact on the major causes of disease and death, i.e. malnutrition, infectious disease, poor sanitation, and contaminated water.

During the 1960's and 70's the Christian Medical Commission of the WCC and the World Health Organization of the UN took steps to reverse this process and set as their top priority the development of health care systems that would be just and sustainable among the majority populations of the world, who are poor and largely excluded from current approved medical services. They affirmed that there is no greater injustice than that which allows a few to monopolize the world's health care resources for their own needs, while the vast majority suffer needlessly and watch their children die from illnesses that could be prevented.

The new approach, which is called primary health care or community-based health care, begins with the assumption that local communities, no matter how poor or "primitive," must determine their own needs and take responsibility for their own health care. Local health promoters, selected by their communities and given access to appropriate training, can provide the basic leadership for health education and health care. Most of the health problems in poor regions cannot be solved by medical treatment; they require land reform, agricultural improvements, change in diet and customs, etc. Health is not simply the eradication of disease but the establishment of psychological, social, and spiritual wholeness. This approach does not deny the value of professional doctors, hospitals, and drugs, but it does suggest that the medical health care pyramid should be overturned. The primary agents for health are the village health promoters and their local committees; the others, including doctors and nurses, should be seen as auxiliary. Elementary as it may seem, this approach may be able to achieve, in the words of WHO, "health for all by the year 2000."

The parallels to primary health care in other sectors of human development are easy to find. The similarity of this approach to theological education by extension ^{is} ~~are~~ striking. Some of those involved in TEE have begun to see not only a parallel but a convergence, i.e. an avenue for the pursuit of primary, holistic health care and primary, holistic ministry through the same networks and congregations.

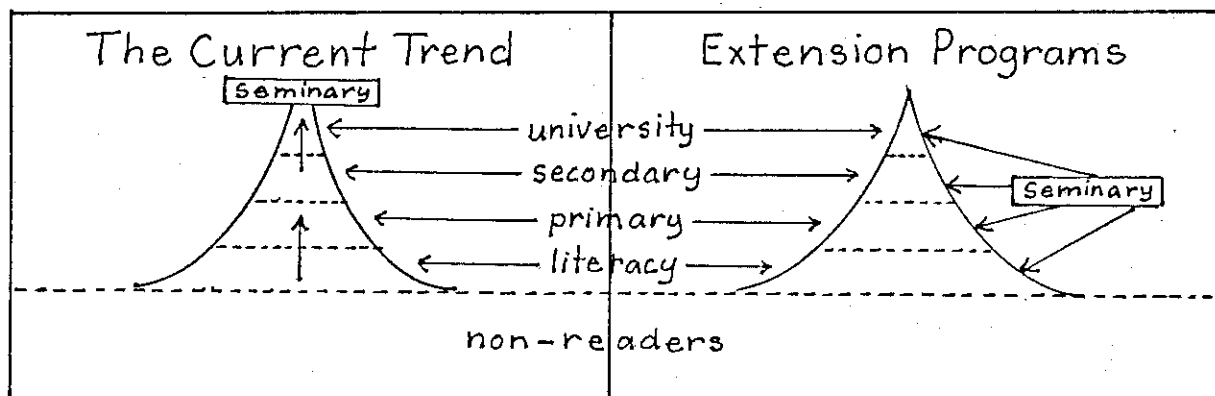
Many TEE programs have been initiated simply because existing theological institutions cannot provide enough trained ministers, but some are now convinced that TEE is necessary to maintain a ministry that is just, participatory and sustainable in all societies. The danger is that the pattern of ministry and theological education exported from the North Atlantic is highly professional and expensive. Even in rich countries, where cost is not a major factor, the appropriateness of the professional model can be questioned, for ministry is fundamentally the calling of the whole church.

The United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines in cooperation with Union Seminary (Manila) launched an extension program in 1974 with two objectives:

First, to provide theological education for the many church workers who are already serving in the field, and for the ever-increasing recruits to the ministry.

Second, to design appropriate theological education for church workers for leadership in the ministry of liberation, justice, and development.

Studies revealed that the majority of the existing pastors had not studied at the Seminary, that the need for pastors was growing faster than the number of graduates, and that most congregations could not afford to pay professional salaries for their pastors. Moreover, it was evident that the churches' ministry of liberation and justice could not be entrusted to a privileged elite but must be directed by local leaders in the congregations. 700 of these leaders now carry on independent studies and meet regularly in local groups to discuss the Christian tradition, the Christian vocation, and the contemporary Philippine society, which is characterized by exploitation and oppression.



Similar needs are evident among minority constituencies in First World countries. Cook Christian Training School in Arizona now provides resources for TEE programs among Native American peoples all across the US, and New York Theological Seminary offers all its programs in the evenings and on the weekends in order to serve the leadership of the Black, Hispanic, and Oriental churches of that metropolitan area. Central to their programs are the concerns for justice, participation and sustainability.

Equally important is the need to carry these concerns to Christians at all levels of the social structures. Because they occupy the front line of the church's witness and service in the world, the School of Theology of the University of the South affirms that laypeople must develop essential theological tools. Approximately 5,000 are now enrolled in small groups all across the country and overseas studying a rigorous, four-year curriculum intended to enable them to discern, own and implement the processes by which God's Kingdom is being manifested in their lives and in their world.

III. THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND ITS RELATION TO THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

Reports of the Lima meeting of the Faith and Order Commission (January 1982) indicate that the delegates signalled the consensus achieved on baptism,

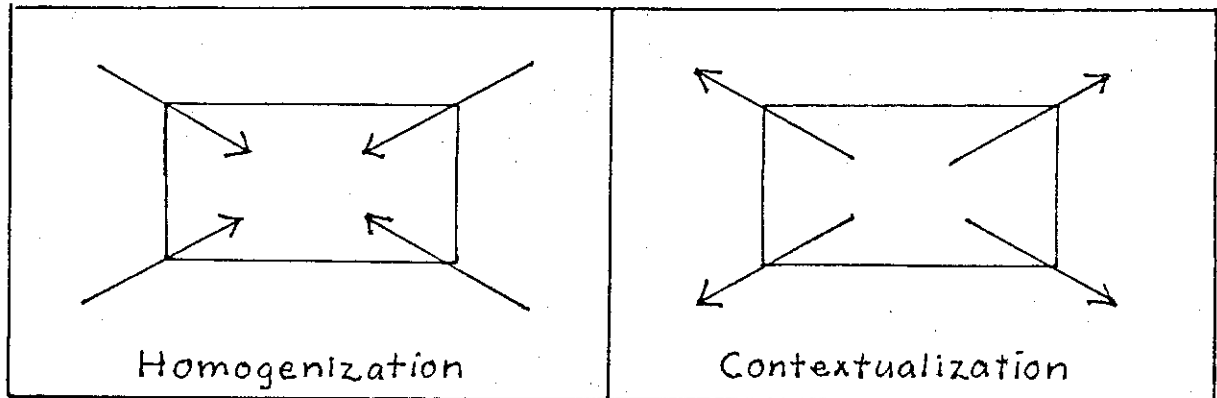
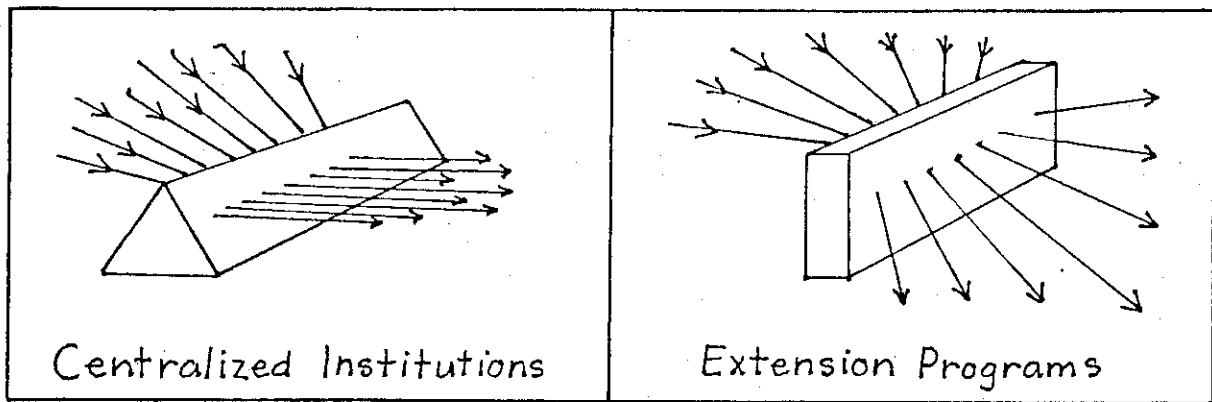
eucharist, and ministry with a unanimous ovation. Also completed at that meeting was the Community of Women and Men in the Church Study. The results of these two programs, which are of great potential significance for the unity of the church and the unity of humankind, will be high on the agenda of the Vancouver Assembly (1983) and of the churches that make up the WCC.

Since the first world Conference on Faith and Order (Lausanne 1927) numerous meetings and studies have contributed to a growing understanding of the differences that divide and the faith that unites the major Christian traditions. Since the Louvain meeting (1971) the WCC has increasingly related the search for unity in the church with the search for unity in the wider human community. We have had to recognize that the great divisions and conflicts in the human community are also found in the church. The church must therefore deal with sexism, racism, classism, and with cultural, national, and ideological differences both for its own health and for the sake of the world under the mandate of the Gospel. Our calling in Christ, in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, is to be a sign and a paradigm of the unity of humankind.

The challenge to theological education is to take up the new ecumenical achievements and to make them a reality in the life of the churches at the local level. All too often the studies, statements, and recommendations made by ecumenical bodies and church hierarchies remain unknown or inoperative in the life of the members. Even documents studied in the theological curriculum are filed and forgotten long before the students reach positions of ministry where they could do anything about them.

Theological education by extension is in some places -- South Africa, Guyana, Tanzania -- organized as a joint venture of Roman Catholics and Protestants; in many other places several Protestant denominations are working together. Moreover the decentralized pattern reaches across race, ethnic, class, sex, age, and occupational barriers much more prominently than do residential schools. This means that course content dealing with disunity in the church or in the human community is immediately placed in the hands of local leaders who are able to deal effectively with it. In fact there are many instances where local congregations, basic communities, and other groups are far ahead of the denominational and ecumenical statements.

The extension program of the Presbyterian Seminary of Guatemala is sponsored only by that denomination, but it has contributed to ecumenical advance in several directions. Pentecostalism was considered by most to be a threat in terms of charismatic excess, doctrinal soundness, proselytism, and divisiveness, but the presence of several outstanding Pentecostals and of prominent Presbyterian leaders among the students led to serious reflection and action in the denomination. Similarly when the church faced a major crisis concerning its attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church, protagonists of the conflicting positions were among the students, whose studies dealt with that very issue. The denomination does not ordain women as elders or pastors, but the effective participation of many women in the program and graduation of several has repeatedly raised questions about the role and perspectives of women in the church. The Mayan Indian peoples of Guatemala, who make up 60% of the general population and perhaps 50% of the church's membership, have in the past been treated as second-class citizens in the society and in the church, but the inclusion of a course on anthropology, the participation of Indian leaders as students, and special adaptation of the program have enabled many Indian churches and two new Indian presbyteries to organize.



The Ecumenical Theology Workshop of Geneva is an important experiment directed jointly by Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians for laypeople who enroll for two years of theological instruction and experiment with a new kind of community. Each course is jointly taught by theologians of both traditions, so dialogue is constantly assured and their disunity is constantly confronted. The participants bring their disaffection with traditional religion and the problems of the secular world, which assures that their theological work deals with the real problems of their world. Drawn together out of a secular diaspora these Christians are creating a new ecumenical community, a dwelling place where they can experience small-scale unity as they work for the wider unity of the Kingdom.

IV. EDUCATION AND RENEWAL IN SEARCH OF TRUE COMMUNITY

Since the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC (1975) and before, we have had to take seriously the radical critique of our education systems, particularly as they are developing in the Third World. Ivan Illich's little book, *En América Latina ¿Para Qué Sirve la Escuela?*, is a devastating attack on the structure and ideology of public schooling, which poses as "a panacea for social integration" and actually undergirds and facilitates the formation of fascist elites. The schooling mentality enjoys unqualified support from the masses because it creates the myth of open, upward mobility for all. Schools grade and consequently degrade the population according to the school levels attained, inculcating willing submission to the steep socio-economic pyramid. In Bolivia, for example, half of the total budget for education is spent on that 1% of the population which passes through university, and only 2% of the rural people have reached fifth grade. "This discrimination was legalized in 1967 by declaring primary education obligatory for all, a law which made de facto criminals of

the majority and immoral exploiters of the others by decree." The pursuit of diplomas and privileges does not prepare students to question and change the terrible injustices in which they live -- as the rhetoric of student demonstrations would suggest -- but rather to alienate them from their own people and culture.

Paulo Freire gives a simple analysis of the psychodynamics of traditional education in Latin America -- and elsewhere. It is a process of domestication. The teacher, the source of all knowledge, deposits that knowledge into the submissive, empty minds of the students, who store it up for future use. The latter thus abandon their natural curiosity, initiative, knowledge, and culture to become willing servants of the dominant culture, social class, and exploitative economic system.

Obviously these educational structures and methods must be altered radically in order to pursue real education and renewal for true community. Discriminatory grading should be replaced by providing open access to learning centers. People of all schooling "levels" should begin by recovering their genuine cultural identity, their personal dignity and potential, their right to write their own history, their duty to transform their world.

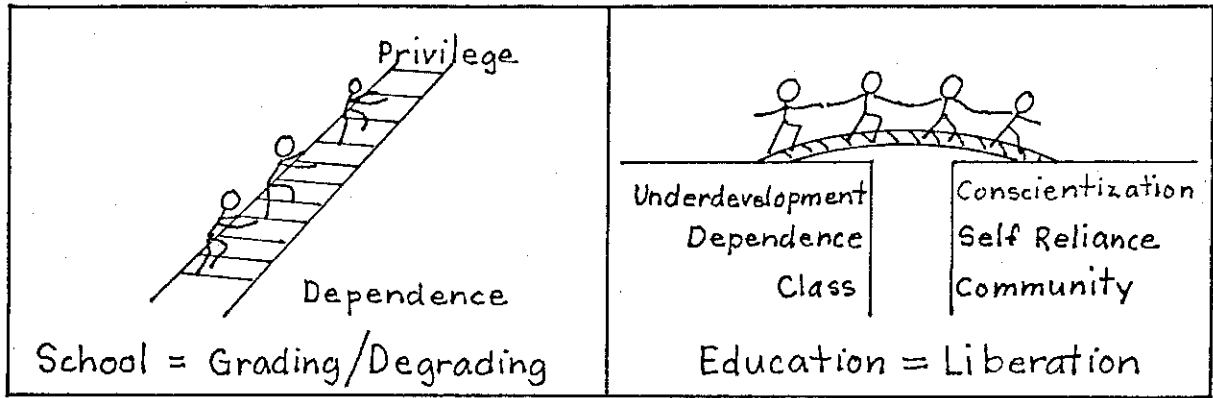
It is easy to see how theological education has been caught in the schooling mentality, emulating the socio-educational structures and psychodynamics, seeking to move itself and its students up the illusory ladder of schooling that produces privilege and dependency in the church. It is also easy to see how theological education by extension offers radical, new possibilities by providing access to theological learning to people of all geographical locations, social classes, ethnic and racial groups, sexes, age and schooling levels. And by taking theological education to local congregations and communities, it is now possible not only to relate more effectively to widely divergent contexts but also to build partnerships in the learning process because it takes place in those contexts where the "students" are the leaders.

Adeolu Adegbola, a leading African theologian, ecumenist, and theological educator, began in the 70's a similar radical critique of schooling in Africa and a search for educational means for authentic, holistic response of the church to Africa's enormous development needs. Having served for many years first as Principal of Immanuel Theological College and then as Director of the Institute for Church and Society of the Christian Council of Nigeria, he founded the Center for Applied Religion and Education in 1979. Extension methods are now being prepared and tested among four kinds of people: village men and women, who are considered to be the primary agents of meaningful and lasting change in rural areas; polytechnic and university students, who are being challenged to find and introduce appropriate science and technology; working pastors and catechists, who need theological, interdisciplinary, and practical retraining for a new understanding of the church's mission. Utilizing a wide range of methods and resources as a university without walls, this "renewal course for African pastors and other Christians" will operate at several "levels" and offer specializations for pastoral, educational, rural, urban, and public ministries.

The Latin American Biblical Seminary, one of the largest and most respected Protestant institutions in that region, has launched an international extension program at the university "level" as a priority response to their context. Having taken a prophetic stand on the issues of poverty, development, and exploitation, the faculty have prepared an open curriculum that includes a wide range of modules for guided study, certain basic requirements in terms of background studies and basic tools for doing theology, and maximum freedom as to entry point and area of concentration. Each student is required to design and

carry out action/reflection projects based on analysis of particular needs in their own churches and communities. The work is finalized through reflection papers that integrate theological, ideological, and strategic insights gained by the experience.

It is now becoming clear that theological education by extension can function credibly on any academic level and that it can avoid or mitigate the enormous dangers of elitism and dependence. It can be an effective tool of education for liberation and authentic development.



One of the most important alternative theological education programs is the International Institute of Theology at a Distance, which was inaugurated in 1973 in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Madrid and now has 6,700 students all over the world but especially in Spain and Latin America. Its purposes are to provide continuing education for priests and to provide more basic theological and practical training for religious and laity on these assumptions: "that theological formation is a fundamental Christian right rather than a privilege for a few, that the participation of laypeople requires preparation appropriate for their various ministries and pastoral responsibilities, that modern technical resources offer the possibility of reducing the cost of higher education and extending it to a large number of people with a high level of achievement, and that new pastoral needs arise daily in urban and rural dioceses requiring continual formation of all who are responsible at all levels and in all sectors of the ministry."

There are, of course, many examples of TEE programs that are narrow, manipulative, or just infantile. Such programs should challenge us not to reject the whole concept but rather to look for better ways to respond to the tremendous interest among people in many places throughout the world. The examples cited in this paper, when set over against the narrow confines of traditional institutions, make us realize that far more can be done through theological education for the renewal and equipping of the whole church in search of true community.