

## U.S./CANADIAN CONSULTATION ON GLOBAL SOLIDARITY IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

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One hundred and fifty theological educators, students and church leaders met 12-15 July 1981 at Trinity College, Toronto, for a U.S./Canadian Consultation on "Global Solidarity in Theological Education." This event, the culmination of extensive preparation, was intended to be a catalyst for basic changes in theological education during the coming months and years. It represents both a recognition and a questioning of the role of U.S./Canadian theological institutions within their own contexts and in the context of the world church. It reflects an incontrovertible fact of our time, the globalization of human life.

### HISTORIC ROLE OF U.S./CANADIAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Although it is easy to assume that seminaries and university departments of theology or religion have long been the normative institutions of ministerial formation, this pattern of training is less than 200 years old and has only become the general practice in North America during the past 50 years. The development of these seminaries and departments coincides, however, with the expansion of the missionary movement in the 19th and 20th centuries, and these were the models which U.S. and Canadian missionaries carried and implanted around the globe. There were, in fact, seminary graduations from which 50% of the graduates entered overseas missionary service.

Since World War II there have been fundamental changes in the world church, reflecting the basic economic, ideological, and cultural shifts among the nations as well as the remarkable growth and autonomy of the churches in the so-called Third World. It is reported that already at the beginning of the 1980s there are more Christians in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific than there are in Europe and North America. The vitality of these Christians, expressed through evangelism and church planting, pastoral care and social service, the struggle for human rights and for more human social structures, is bringing new leadership to the ecumenical movement and new self-understanding to the churches and their institutions in North America.

During the 1960s and early '70s, internal social upheavals, particularly in the U.S., caused great stress among the churches and theological institutions. The Black revolution and the feminist movement, followed by the Hispanic and Native Peoples' awakenings, called into question the hegemony and legitimacy of established structures and patterns not only in terms of secular humanism but also under the mandate of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Similarly, the student revolt over U.S. involvement in Viet Nam made an enormous impact on colleges, universities, and seminaries. At moments of crisis some of the most prestigious institutions in that country faced the possibility of total collapse.

### THE SEARCH FOR GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

By the mid-'70s these crises had subsided, and there was a decided turn toward traditional parochial values, away from radical questioning and prophetic advocacy both at home and abroad. Theological schools saw a dramatic drop in social activism, new enthusiasm for the classical disciplines, and a growing emphasis on professional pastoral formation. The quest for global solidarity has developed in the context of this new conservatism, which has now come to full flower in the U.S. in the Reagan Administration.

In June 1976 a small group of deans and presidents attending the biennial meeting of the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada initiated a conversation around the topic, "the internationalization of theological education." At subsequent meetings they shared information about their respective programs of international exchange, discussed possibilities for cooperation, raised questions about the prevailing patterns of training for foreign students in North America, and examined the underlying philosophical and theological assumptions of these programs. One of their summary statements indicates that their overarching concern was to achieve a global perspective in theological education, i.e. "to educate a generation of pastors and scholars who will be sensitive to the fact that the context for ministry and scholarship in their futures is global."

Since that group first met, many significant efforts have been made to free North American theological education from its White, male, middle class limitations and to serve the needs of various population groups. Centers for Black studies and Black theological seminaries integrate theological education with the Black experience. Women's coalitions, women staff appointments, and the large enrollment of women students have introduced feminist perspectives and models for theology and ministry into the curriculum. The Native American Theological Association has created new options for the training of Native leaders, and it has also opened up several White seminaries to the enrichment of Native cultures and religion. Some seminaries are developing Hispanic studies options with bilingual professors. Numerous schools have short- or long-term links with theological institutions in other parts of the world. A few are attempting to permeate the entire curriculum and institutional life with the concern for global justice and pluralistic sensitivity. At least four denominations have carried out during the past year surveys and consultations in order to examine their seminaries' involvement in international and intercultural programs. The Pacific Basin Theological Network is an attempt to build bridges of understanding and cooperation among theological schools all around the Pacific Ocean, including the west coast of Canada and the U.S., and the Atlanta Theological Association has begun a process of consultation and exchange with theological schools of the Caribbean.

### PROGRAMME ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The Programme on Theological Education (PTE) was created by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in July 1977 with a mandate to work toward an ecumenical vision of theological education in all parts of the world. The three North American members of the PTE Commission and the staff immediately began to explore possible areas of PTE cooperation with North American partners, and the latter repeatedly pointed to "internationalization" as the place where PTE's ties and experience would be most helpful. Following the July 1978 meeting of the Commission, Tom Campbell, who was at that time Moderator, wrote to the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada (ATS) to indicate that PTE was willing to cooperate and to ask whether ATS might set up a special task force on internationalization. A further step was taken in March 1980 when the PTE convened two one-day meetings in New York City to discuss, first with theological educators and then with church officials concerned with ministry personnel and training, the international and intercultural dimensions of North American theological education.

Two decisive events took place in June 1980. First, the PTE Commission decided to hold its next full meeting in North America in July 1981 and at that time to convene a U.S./Canadian Consultation on "Global Solidarity in Theological Education." A few days later the ATS Biennial Meeting adopted a motion to set

up a special committee "to be charged with the task of exploring possible rationales, programs, and resources for the internationalization of theological education in North America."

## SPONSORS AND STEERING GROUP

With this convergence of elements necessary for a fruitful consultation, preparations began in August 1980, facilitated by the coincidence that PTE was at that time opening an office in New York. The first step was to identify and invite North American partners to join in the planning process. The response was positive and the cooperation enthusiastic. The final, carefully worded statement by partner organizations indicated that the consultation would be "sponsored by the Program on Theological Education, World Council of Churches in consultation with:"

*Association of Theological Schools, U.S. and Canada*  
*Seminary Education Group, Professional Church Leadership, NCCCUSA*  
*Coordinating Committee on Theological Education in Canada*  
*The Fund for Theological Education*  
*Native American Theological Association*  
*North American Academy of Ecumenists*

The Steering Group for the consultation included representatives from these bodies with additional persons to provide the necessary balance and expertise for the task at hand.

## GOALS AND FOCUS OF THE CONSULTATION

From the beginning it was clear that the consultation should find its integrative rationale in the biblical call to justice. It was also evident that attention should be directed to two dimensions of global justice: the local-national context, where women, minorities, and others continue to face tremendous disadvantages; and the international context, where the vast majority of the peoples of the world suffer under escalating poverty and oppression. The general purpose of the entire consultation process was to seek ways to place the pursuit of justice at the heart of theological education in the U.S. and Canada.

Early in the planning process this general purpose was articulated in terms of the following goals:

- *To gather and disseminate information about existing programs of theological education for ministry that have a multicultural and an international perspective.*
- *To analyze, conceptualize and demonstrate appropriate educational methods for leadership formation for global solidarity.*
- *To prepare guidelines, strategies and structures for theological curricula that will deal seriously with both the local context and global realities.*
- *To provide encouragement and help for theological schools that wish to carry out ministerial formation with a global perspective in order to build a truly ecumenical vision in the churches.*
- *To heighten the process of conscientization in terms of Gospel imperatives, world realities, and radical discipleship in the face of cultural parochialism, political conservatism, the privatization of religion, and theological malaise.*

## DESIGN OF THE CONSULTATION

Recognizing the multiplicity of programs and the complexity of issues within the theme of global solidarity, the Steering Group struggled with various dimensions of the consultation design.

In order to facilitate wide participation of faculty, students, administration, trustees, and diverse constituencies, individual schools were invited to make a self-assessment, and regional groups of institutions were encouraged to hold preparatory meetings. Regional preparatory meetings were held at Toronto, Atlanta, Boston, Stony Point (NY), and San Francisco; follow-up meetings have been proposed at Toronto, Atlanta, Boston, Stony Point, Chicago, and San Antonio.

The preparatory meetings provided important input for the consultation and assured follow-up of recommendations coming out of the consultation. The consultation was not an isolated event but part of an ongoing process.

The intention of the consultation was to allow the participants to enter the debate at many different points and also to give them an opportunity to deal with three essential areas: Issues, Pedagogy, and Programs. Each person was invited to select three workgroups, one in each area, plus a strategy session to bring together the findings of one area.

The consultation provided an opportunity to gather the many, sometimes competing, causes and issues of global justice and integrate them within the common task of theological education. The Toronto workgroups and strategy groups were asked to identify the contributions of these causes and issues toward the formation of ministry with a global perspective.

The Steering Group agreed that global justice must be dealt with not only by special groups and peripheral programs of theological schools, but especially by the core curriculum and the institution as a whole. This problem was taken up by the special speakers, workgroups, and strategy sessions.

The members of the PTE Commission, staff, and guests, most of them from other regions of the world, were expected to provide additional perspectives and sharpen the debate. In addition, invitations were extended to Third World theologians in North America, most of them graduate students.

A special study on El Salvador was placed on the agenda to demonstrate the urgency of the quest for global solidarity and to test the integrative learning possibilities of a particular crisis.

## DOCUMENTATION

No complete catalogue of international and intercultural programs was attempted, but pertinent documents were selected and distributed at three points as preparation for the consultation. A selection of these resource documents, including "Assessment Questions on Global Solidarity for Theological Institutions" and reports of various models, will be included in the final report of the Toronto Consultation, which will present the major addresses, reports of strategy sessions, recommendations from workgroups, and the list of participants. The Consultation was not designed to produce a definitive statement on "Global Solidarity in Theological Education." It was decided, rather, to ask the two moderators, who had played an important role in the entire planning process, to prepare the summary report which follows.