SOME CAVEATS FOR
THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION

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As missionaries of this century went out from Western lands to propagate the faith, they were faced with the immediate problem of how to train workers to minister to the many congregations that were being planted. The missionaries' time was soon exhausted as they tried in vain to minister to a circuit of congregations, typically being able to visit each one only once or twice a year.

The Traditional Model

The need, therefore, to train a national clergy was obvious. It was only natural that early missionaries believed the goal of educating a national clergy could best be accomplished through the establishment of institutions like those they had attended. This usually meant a residential seminary program, lasting several years, with an academically well-trained faculty and students whose educational level was comparable to that of divinity students in the west. The model of development which was in vogue during the period from the end of World War II until 1960 also accommodated this approach. Those who were interested in the growth and prosperity of their people would follow the example of the more prosperous nations in the west, it was thought, including the example of the western model of education (Mattson, p. 1).

Unfortunately, the residential model of seminary educa-
tion for church leadership has not lived up to its expectations. Several problems inherent in the model along with varying cultural dynamics raised questions as to its viability for the future. The costs, usually underwritten by a foreign mission board, have been exorbitant (Mattson, p. 2). It has been pointed out that in the case of the Lutheran Church of the Philippines, for example, the annual budget of the of the Lutheran Theological Seminary was in the range of $220,000. Of that amount, perhaps $60,000 went toward faculty costs, the rest ($160,000!) being utilized in maintenance and support (Newton, class notes). In spite of such a heavy financial commitment, however, the seminary was graduating an average of only 1.5 candidates per year (Fuli-ga, p. 109).

Emilio Castro adds other factors which need to be taken into consideration: 1) The residential model encourages "professionalism," understood as a "competitive desire to climb the promotional ladder," something which should not be a part of the Christian community. 2) The residential/professional model is very difficult to sustain among a people who are already living in poverty, therefore the economic viability is called into question. 3) Extraction from the cultural milieu of the student makes it difficult for him to return to his former lifestyle. Barriers are raised that make it almost impossible for him to relate to
his own people (Castro, p. x).

The residential seminaries were producing pastors who were well-trained academically, but whose expectations had been raised so that only through subsidy from the west could it be anticipated that they would continue the work of pastoring congregations. There were questions of spiritual maturity among seminary graduates, who often times did quite well academically, but were sorely deficient in life experience. In addition, the creation of seminaries after the Western model was seen as a further example of colonialism by many third-world Christians. Declining enrollment, limited viability, and the failure to produce enough well-trained pastors for the rapidly growing churches all pointed to the need for a new approach to ministerial training.

Theological Education by Extension

The beginning, in 1963, of the Theological Education by Extension movement among Presbyterians in Guatemala grew out of this urgent need. A new way of training pastors that would be financially viable, eliminate the problems of extraction, and be contextually appropriate was necessary. It was decided that theological education would be taken to the people—by extension.

Three elements were essential to the program: 1) Self-study materials to enable the student to learn at home; 2) Practical work in the student's own congregation; and
3) Regular encounters or seminars to promote fellowship and inspiration to both students and teacher (Kinsler, p. 34-35). Although it has been adapted to a variety of situations around the world, those three elements make up the genius of Theological Education by Extension. Today it is seen by its promoters as a panacea for the leadership needs of growing churches, but on the other hand, by its detractors as a serious threat to the future of Christian education.

Strengths and Presuppositions of Theological Education by Extension

Theological Education by Extension endeavors to address many of the failures of the residential seminary. In the first place, it seeks to teach ministry in context. The students are not removed from their home for the period of study. They have opportunity to relate and apply what they are learning from the course-work to their daily life situation and the lives of those around them. The importance of this aspect cannot be overestimated. As was mentioned earlier, elitism was a real factor in the residential model. Patterns for leadership development were copied from the presuppositions of the seminary. When theological education takes place in context, leadership characteristics and patterns from that culture can be taken into consideration, and natural leaders can participate. Roland Allen made this
very same point many years ago. Commenting on what had already occurred according to what later would be known as "the missionary model," he said:

The grave men of the church, the natural leaders of the village life, and the natural leaders of the church are silenced. The church is not led and administered by the people to whom all would naturally turn, but either by a foreigner, or by a young man who has come with a foreign education (Allen, p. 106).

Theological education by extension, on the other hand, is an attempt to utilize those natural leaders of the community, the "grave men," for ministry among their own, to their own. Instead of education taking place in the sterile, safe, seminary compound, it takes place in the world of the people, where the questions of the people can be addressed. This, in turn, provides for more spiritually mature leaders who have had experience in the everyday troubles of life and how to relate the Gospel to those experiences.

Theological education by extension also has economic advantages. The relative cost is much lower than a residential program. Since the students are not living on campus, it is not necessary to maintain extensive building complexes, and one teacher can reach more students. Students are free to continue their normal work schedule and thus earn a living. This model pre-supposes that upon completion of a program and the granting of more responsibility as a church leader, quite often the candidate will continue to support
himself, at least in part, through his work in the secular arena, thus helping to eliminate the problem of how the pastors will be paid upon completion of the program. They will be paid from their secular occupations.

Another presupposition of theological education by extension, is that the ministry belongs to all the people. Theological education by extension is a way to break down the structures of the aforementioned elitism extant in the missionary model (Kinsler, p. 43). All members of the body of Christ have responsibility for the work and life of the church. It is not geared toward helping the elite maintain their position of influence and authority, but opens the door of theological knowledge to all. Due to the non-formal nature of extension education there is built in flexibility to accommodate the varying educational levels and educational needs of the participants.

Lester Hirst describes a typical program of theological education by extension and how it meets the needs of the church. He lists the objectives as: 1) Training is programmed for every level of local church leadership; 2) Training takes into consideration the aspects considered to be important for leadership development. They are knowledge, skills, and character; 3) Courses are taught not only by outsiders, but local leaders are incorporated as teachers; 4) Flexibility is allowed, and indeed, encouraged; 5) The
training program is linked integrally to the local church (Hirst, p. 420-424).

In recent years numerous articles have been written proclaiming the above mentioned advantages (and many more) of theological education by extension. There are some who are unwilling to accept it as a credible model, but the fact is that it is here to stay. Churches, missions, and mission boards see the pressing need for an alternative to the traditional model, and extension education came to the forefront as a reasonable option. This is seen in the enthusiasm for theological education by extension on the part of the Board for Mission Services of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, for example, which recently created and filled a new staff position--the consultant for theological education by extension.

Areas of Concern for Theological Education by Extension

Some caveats are in order, however, for whenever sweeping change takes place it should not be done hastily or carelessly, but rather in a thoughtful and informed manner. This is especially true when so much is at stake. Christ has given the church the responsibility for maintaining and handing down the gospel in all its truth (Deuteronomy 6:6-8, Matthew 28:20, II Timothy 1:13-14, Titus 1:9). Theological education has as its purpose the perpetuation and dissemination of the gospel so that it might be preserved to coming
generations and extended to those who have not heard the good news. In this respect the Lutheran Church has much to offer, for excellence and dedication to theological education have always been of great importance in our tradition (Newton, "Neocolonialism...," p. 3). Yet a reflection on some of the more basic issues involved is necessary in order to evaluate any program of theological education. This is true of any model of theological education. However, for the purpose of this paper certain questions regarding theological education by extension will be raised.

Evaluation

It has been suggested that one way of evaluating a program of theological education is by using the split-rail fence analogy of Ted Ward. In this analogy one rail of the fence represents the cognitive input that is a part of any educational process, the other rail signifies the practical experience that is thought to be necessary for leadership training, and the fence posts symbolize the times of dynamic reflection, where theory and practice can be synthesized through group meetings and discussions. The factor that is missing in this analogy is character formation or spiritual development. Luther's meditatio and tentatio are accounted for, but the important third element, oratio, is missing. Therefore the analogy of the train track, with the rails taking the place of the fence rails, and the ties in place
of the fence posts has been proposed. Under it all is the bed-rock of "spiritual formation." Luther called this oratio. It is a manifestation of "the continual consciousness of dependency upon God" (Newton, class handout, p. 22).

Presupposing the two-track analogy as a valid way of looking at theological education, then, some questions concerning the theological education by extension movement come to the forefront with regards to how it lives up to its claims.

Ministerial Training: Skills or Habitus

In the first place, what is the driving factor in the program of theological education? Edward Farley has suggested that there is more than one way in which ministerial training can be looked at. On the one hand, it can be viewed as a teaching of the necessary skills in order to carry out the functions of the ministry according to the expectations of the church. This he calls the "professional paradigm" (Farley, p. 11). On the other hand, theological education can be seen as the teaching of "theologia," or "divinity," terms which Farley uses as synonyms for what theologians used to call habitus: the sapiential knowledge of God, of the things of God, and how they relate to our world (Farley, pp. 35-36). How one views the goal of education will directly affect the educational process.

In the western world, the approach to theological
education that seeks to teach the skills and technic necessary for ministry has prevailed. Our approach has been to move from the concept of minister as interpreter and shepherd, to minister as manager (Farley, p. 11). While no one can doubt that certain skills are necessary for the successful completion of the tasks of ministry, the question is: Should the teaching of those skills be the focal point of theological training? Farley suggests that theological education should seek to prepare the student at a deeper level. Skills are not enough. All the skills could never be taught. What must be taught is theologia, the habit of being a theological thinker who can reason beyond the simple answers to the deeper issues behind any given situation. At the same time it requires an ability to apply the spiritual truths to concrete situations.

A program of theological education by extension should never be allowed to degenerate into a course of study aimed merely at the teaching of skills. Much more goes into the preparation of a church leader. The "necessary skills" approach in fact does violence to the two-track analogy, for it ignores the spiritual formation aspects. The church leader may be able to jump through the right hoops, but when the size, shape and color of the hoops change (tentatio) he will be unable to deal with them in an intelligent manner.

Education or Indoctrination

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Related to this issue is question of the way in which the extension courses are designed. It is assumed that participants will have certain readings to study, along with some kind of a work-book that will help him to pick out the important points in the readings so he can interact with the material. This too can degenerate into what has been called "list memorization." While the validity of possessing a body of facts is not called into question, theological education cannot be accomplished merely by passing on that body of information. Jesus never worked with that presupposition, nor should modern-day educators. Theology is an aptitude for judging a situation according to spiritual truth, and making decisions and acting in accordance with a Christ-centered world-view. As Newton pointed out, "Only in its objective and secondary sense is theology equated with doctrine" (Newton, class handout, p. 9). If the goal of the theological education by extension program is simply to pass on certain facts, so that the participants can pass a written test or repeat memorized phrases and cliches, real theology will never be taught.

Early in the theological education by extension movement, list memorization was largely used. Programmed materials were developed so that as the student interacted with the materials he had to do little critical thinking on his own. He merely filled in the blank with the answer that was
given in the previous paragraph. As the dangers of this methodology were discovered, new and better approaches were instituted (Brainerd, p. 219). Yet it is still possible that workbooks can lead the student to come up with formulations and answers that are in accordance with the biases of the one who prepared them. If this is the case, the student is not learning how to think on his own. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

Educator Paulo Freire writes from a deep concern that in any educational endeavor the rights and integrity of the student be respected. This is especially crucial in the area of adult education. Freire rejects the banking model of education. The goal of education should never be only the passing on of certain facts. It has to do with helping someone discover the meaning of a truth and how it can be helpful to him in his situation. In order for that to happen, the student must be enabled to think critically, plan and act for himself. He calls this process, to which education must move, "conscientization." It is the raising of critical consciousness.

In the realm of theological education, if the goal is to teach theologia, one can see how Freire's insights are helpful. The program of theological education should be structured so that the student is able to come up with his own answers to fit his own situation. This by no means
negates the necessity for true doctrine, but it allows the student to apply the true doctrine to his life and come up with his practical responses. If the ability to self-theologize (understood in the proper sense, as to apply the gospel to one's own situation) is not inculcated, the student will never fully integrate the gospel of Jesus Christ with all its implications into his life. Freire says of those who have not learned to think critically:

Incapable of autonomous projects, they seek to transplant from other cultures solutions to their problems. But since these borrowed solutions are neither generated by a critical analysis of the context itself, nor adequately adapted to the context, they prove inoperative and unfruitful (Freire, p. 13).

A holistic approach to theological education is what this calls for. It is an approach that recognizes the power of the gospel in the lives of individuals, as they are allowed to conduct the dialogue between the Word and the world without having to pass it first through the filter of our cultural presuppositions. Newton put it this way:

To be faithful to its purpose, ministerial training must assist a student in learning to draw his own spiritual map of reality around God's message of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Sound training calls every aspect of life into dialogue with God's Word and integrates it in a holistic scheme consonant with His eternal and universal will (Newton, p. 11.)

Although instructional materials that facilitate this dialogue should be prepared, the dynamic reflection aspect of theological education by extension should also be con-
ducted so as to be its main arena.

**Proclamation and Dialogue**

A topic of debate among theological educators has been the tension that exists between proclamation and dialogue. This is not unrelated to Freire's and Newton's concern. Francis Cardinal Arinze recognizes that we must speak on two levels. He calls these levels the "two dimensions of theological reflection" (Arinze, p. 11). For him, the first and primary dimension of theological reflection is that universal truth which God has revealed to us in the Sacred Scriptures. The secondary dimension has to do with the life and cultural situations in which we find ourselves. In other words, there is universal truth that is not open to debate (proclamation), and there are ways in which that truth applies to a given culture or situation, which is debatable (dialogue). Although some would doubt the validity of this distinction (Zikmund, p. 41), this tension does exist and it must be recognized by the theological educator. There are universal truths. Jesus spoke of universal Truth (John 1:14,17; 3:21; 4:23; 14:6, et. al.). But individual people and individual cultures see the application of that truth in different ways. That is why dialogue, along with proclamation, must be built into theological education. To think that we have all the answers to the theological issues facing another individual in another culture is paternalis-
tic, but even worse, wrong.

**Center - Periphery**

Another area of concern with regard to theological education by extension, is the center and periphery phenomena in education spoken of by Philip G. Altbach (p. 602). Does theological education by extension allow participants in a two-thirds world environment to contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of theology? In fact, many extension programs are initiated, directed, funded, and carried out by western missionaries. What is taught in the program is often dictated by the priorities and cultural assumptions of the western church. By many this is seen as another form of neo-colonialism. It is still to be seen if the extension movement will produce theologians who will contribute on an international level to Christian understanding.

In this same vein, the issue of academic quality and accreditation needs to be addressed. It has often been charged that theological education by extension does not function at a level so as to make it academically credible. Often the participants have not met the entrance standards common to western theological seminaries, and so adjustments have had to be made in expectations and evaluation. A case in point is the Hispanic Institute of River Forest, Illinois, a theological education by extension institution of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Almost from the start
the instructors knew they would have to lower the academic standards of the courses and redefine their objectives and goals to accommodate the participants who were not prepared for such intensive study. New efforts are being undertaken, however, and attempts at standardization and accreditation agencies have been set up in some parts of the world (Ferris, p. 59).

Conclusion

Some of these concerns may seem to be of secondary importance. After all, Christ does not require a degree or certificate in order to serve Him. A well planned and executed program of theological education does not necessarily produce a true theologian. At the same time, it must be recognized that we live in a context that is becoming increasingly globalized. The term "global village" has been used to describe our world. If we are going to prepare pastors and theologians to lead congregations now and in the future, we must be sensitive to what is going to be considered credible in the world.

Yet, the primary concern of theological education is the formation of leaders--pastors and teachers--who are capable of, not just knowing theology, but of being theologians, theologians who possess a *habitus* that manifests itself in his relationship to himself, to others, and to God. In the end analysis, only the Holy Spirit can make a
real theologian. As Luther said:

No man can make a theologian, no emperor or pope; only the Holy Spirit. . . . What, then are we to do? I know of no other way than humbly to pray God to give us doctors of theology. Pope, emperor, and universities may make doctors of arts, of medicine, of laws, and of the Sentences; but be assured that no one will make a doctor of Holy Scripture save only the Holy Ghost from heaven (Luther, p. 1354-5).

While only the Holy Spirit can make a theologian, theological education can be carried out is such a way so as to facilitate that process. Theological education by extension as a model incorporates many necessary ingredients--combining theory and practice, with dynamic reflection. There are concerns, however, which must be taken into consideration, as with any educational model. Theological education by extension is not and cannot be the panacea that it is sometimes claimed to be, primarily because no man is the perfect teacher except Jesus Christ. It is, however, here to stay. How it well it is used and how well it serves the church depends in large part on how much thought is put into its implementation.

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