

# **THE 2nd WOCATI CONGRESS (Nairobi 1996)**



**PARTNERSHIP IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:  
CONVERSATION AND COMMUNION**

*CONGRESS 96 Keynote Address by Elsa Tamez*

When we think about partnership, we think of reciprocity, friendship, and mutual cooperation. When we speak of conversation, we have in mind dialogue, informality, and friendship; and when we experience communion, we feel celebrative. We experience openness with one another. We believe in friendship, love, commitment, solidarity.

Partnership, conversation, and communion occur within the dimension of grace in flexible spaces and times. Profit and advantage are not a part of it. It is only lived and felt. In that fellowship there is humanization and flavor.

When we think about theological education, what comes to mind is all that has to do with the fixed time and space of knowledge: the institution, academic excellence, norms, objectives, curriculum, accreditation, methods, content, financing—almost always elaborated hierarchically. We give little thought to human existence even when the object of our study is God.

Theological education, as we perceive it today, happens more in the context of institutionality than of grace. We think more about advantage and profit than about conversation and communion. The more academic life adheres to institutionality, the more distant it becomes from persons as living and creating subjects. Taken to the extreme, no space is left for the informality of conversation, or the fellowship of communion without a profitable return. There is no humanization. There is no flavor, only knowledge.

Even though the words «flavor» (in Spanish, «sabor») and «knowledge» («saber») come from the same Latin *raot, sapere*, it seems that the dimension of knowledge is very distant from the dimension of flavor.

What I have been asked to talk about, «partnership in theological education: conversation and communion,» shows that this division is recognized as a problem, and that in WOCATI we are trying to take up the issue with the intention of rethinking theological education from new angles. There are probably theological institutions which, for some time, have tried to close the gap between celebrative and academic reciprocity. My own experience has been part of a constant struggle between the institutional needs and the human needs of the community and of persons. Grace forms part of the human needs. Sometimes balancing the requirements of the institution with those of human beings is not easy. Much depends on the horizon by which the institution is guided.

So, to speak of partnership in theological education without taking into account the reality of the globalization of the neoliberal market on the one hand, and the diverse cultural, social, and ecclesial contexts on the other, can lead us to make universal statements without a grasp of the particulars; or, rather, valid only for the West. In fact, the division between partnership and theological education is a legacy of western academics which is considered universal. We all know that the majority of our theological seminaries and universities are west-

ern-style, and that it is not easy to conceive of new models of theological education outside of this arena.

How do we focus and unite partnership—conversation and communion—with academics in the global context and the specific contexts? In other words, how can grace become a fundamental and essential part of context-specific theological education (something important to be taken into consideration) and not appear as an *addendum!*

### ***1. Grace as the root of theological education***

One possible response is that grace be considered as the root of theological education, and that the educational institution, regulated by subjects, be the effective vehicle by which grace illuminates everything—persons, communities, nature, and the cosmos. In such a context, the human being takes on importance as a trans-individual subject interrelated with the world and with others. Communities and the current context take on importance, each distinct from the other. Mutual recognition, interchange, and dialogue do not permit the imposition of some over others.<sup>1</sup> Thus, to speak of partnership in theological education implies that the emphasis of all educational policies is placed on the subjects, interrelated among themselves and with their environment. Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for the human being and not vice versa. This means that the institution and its norms must be at the service of the subjects.

### ***2. The academy as a means to live and radiate grace***

One problem of many theological institutions of higher education is that academics become an end in itself. Most of the time, when this occurs, there is no space for conversation and communion. I will give you an example using biblical sciences. I have chosen four verses from the gospel of Matthew, almost at random, and only with the intention of showing the importance of the interrelation between knowledge and flavor in theological education.<sup>2</sup> I am reading from Matthew 5:13;

*You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.*

When we study this logion in class, we discover that there are two different traditions. This is deduced from the difference between the Synoptics. In Luke 14:34-35, salt that has «lost its taste is not fit for the soil or for the manure pile.» Though in Matthew the word «manure pile» does not appear, there is agreement with Luke. The word «soil» appears, the salt loses its taste, it becomes useless, it is thrown out. In the gospel of Mark, there is a greater difference. Though it begins like Luke, «salt is good,» it excludes several things and ends in a com-

pletely different way. «Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.» (Mark 9:50)

Because of these differences, one arrives at the conclusion that Matthew and Luke follow document Q. According to scholars, the similarity between Luke and Mark comes from an influence of an intermediate Marcan redactor in the last Lucan translation. Now, if Matthew begins with the phrase «You are the salt of the earth...» it is because it has been added by an intermediate Matthean redactor to include the logia about the light in 14a and 16. Matthew omits the primitive formulation of the logion in Q the word «manure pile,» and adds, as well, the final punishment: the salt is thrown out and is trampled by human beings. What the scholars cannot explain with precision is whether those two modifications of Matthew are from an intermediate Matthean redactor or from the last Matthean translation.

Now, I will read Matthew 5:14-16, which is along the same lines: «You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand; and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.»

In these three verses we find three different logia. The first one that talks about the light begins in verse 14a and continues in verse 16. Justin uses an analogous text, also IP.2.12. Since this logion is not in Luke, it is difficult to affirm whether it comes from document Q or from another collection of logia of an intermediate Matthean redactor. Verse 14b constitutes the logion about the city, which alludes to Jerusalem in messianic times in Isaiah 2:2-4. It is probably taken from the Septuagint version, most likely from the tradition of Thomas 32.

Verse 15 deals with the logion about the lamp. It comes from document Q. According to studies, it was included by the last Matthean redactor, previously taken from an intermediate Matthean redactor, but located in a different place. Here I end the literary analysis of the four texts.

Some of you will ask what all this technical analysis of biblical texts is doing in a conference about partnership in theological education. What I want to point out is the following. If, in academics, we are centered on and limit ourselves to the deconstruction of the text and the explanation of its form and history of redaction, the work can be arid and incomplete, although some might experience intellectual pleasure. In a closed academic curriculum, it is difficult to find space for the exchange of knowledge, conversation, and communion. The space is only for those who know, directed towards those who don't know. The flavor of knowledge appears when there is partnership, and when the flavor is more than just intellectual pleasure. Theological education that has grace as its root, radiates grace when academics become a means rather than an end. We need to go far-

ther than the scientific discussions. It is necessary to reproduce and multiply the possible meanings in order to impact the concrete life of the community and of persons in their historical moment.

This statement does not devalue academics. A tendency towards academic excellence is important. The most revitalized meanings of the texts emerge when the text is analyzed profoundly. Many of the things that are not observed on first glance are clarified when an analysis such as the above is done. For example, a curious person could ask why document Q writes that the salt is no good either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is easy to understand salt as an element that seasons and gives flavor to food. But what does it have to do with the soil? One possible answer is that document Q alludes to an old agricultural practice known in Egypt and Palestine in which salt was thrown onto waste so that it would better fertilize the earth. The fertile earth will produce fruits, which are the good works of those who are «salt.» The last Matthean redactor does not have this meaning in mind; perhaps because, at that time, the practice was no longer well known, or because he wanted to assign a culinary meaning to the salt that gives flavor to everything, as with the light, illuminating a whole room.

When we speak of theological education in the seminaries, we must go further than the academic level; since there exists before us a horizon for which we have opted by vocation: to serve the churches, the people of God, and finally to serve the Kingdom of God, in the midst of a society that tends to be more and more inhuman. Institutions of theological education, in order not to become hardened, must keep the surprise and indetermination of the Holy Spirit ever-present. In practice, this means giving space to conversation and communion within the academy. When we talk about a «good» textual study, we are referring to a «serious» study. Does that mean that a joyful and delightful study is superficial? Perhaps, instead of talking about academic seriousness, we should talk about the joy of academics and rescue it from that state of «tediousness.»

Let's return to the logion of Matthew. These four logia speak of wisdom, teaching, and the good works that the disciples must do in order to radiate, penetrate, give flavor and knowledge to all and everyone. If we stay within the literary analysis (however profound it may be), paradoxically, it will manifest the opposite of the meaning of the texts analyzed, which is sharing, celebrating, and putting into practice that which is learned.

In the first logion, Jesus says to his disciples that they are the salt of the earth. The salt was an image used for that which gives flavor, purifies, or preserves. The disciples are called to be «salt.» This is manifested by their works, their fertile message, their wisdom. With those things they give flavor to the soil, they help to mold life. Here in Matthew the soil is the world and its inhabitants.

The second logion (14a and 16) speaks of the disciples as the light of the world

that should illuminate everything and everyone. This logion is joined to the previous one by the works that must shine through the disciples, to the extent that the community celebrates, glorifying God.

The third logion repeats the obvious meaning that what is beautiful must show itself: «a city built on a hill cannot be hidden.» The fourth logion insists on the same meaning with the figure of the lamp. The lamp must be placed in an appropriate place so that it illuminates everything.

The four logia point to the same thing: participating, sharing, putting knowledge into practice, all for the celebration that comes from the glorification of God.

The opposite message is also present. The salt is of no use if it does not give flavor; the light is of no use if it is under a bushel basket and does not give light, not just for the disciples themselves, but for the communities served. Applied to theological education, the logia teach that institutions that are centered solely on knowledge in and of itself, that are indifferent to persons and communities, to specific contexts, that do not give importance to reciprocity, sharing, and celebration, that do not attempt to discover new pedagogical methods that incorporate partnership as an integral part of the teaching, are flat (tasteless) and, as such, are of no use for anything. They are a lamp placed under a bushel. They are a city built in a cave that no one knows. They do not produce good works, and, therefore, they do not assure celebration in the glorification of God.

### ***3. Partnership in the face of the globalization of the neoliberal market***

The invitation to consider partnership in theological education is not a simple proposal of a new modality in educational policies. It is a counter-current proposal in the contemporary reality of the globalization of the free market. It is said that the implementation of free market competition is generating an exacerbated individualism, lack of solidarity, consumerism, and fear. The experience of partnership does not fit with the current lifestyle that is imposed by force on the global society. Partnership, conversation, and communion are dimensions that belong to a different order than that proposed with free competition. The theological institution that sets its educational policies from the angle of partnership does not promote utilitarianism or meritocracy. Competitiveness among its members has no place. It does not fall into the consumerism of course contents, rather the reciprocity of mutual enrichment. Fear gains no foothold in an attitude of conversation; and individualism remains outside because communion and dialogue prevail.

The reality of unequal economic globalization that engenders anti-partnership attitudes is a challenge to institutions of theological education that wish to offer more human life alternatives, in accord with the spirit of the gospel.



#### **4. *Toward new models of theological education***

In reality, the classical structure of many theological institutions, their curriculum, and educational model do not facilitate partnership relations. The curricula are generally closed, centralized, impersonal, atomized, and abstract. If a vision of partnership is not achieved in the residence model, much less will it be achieved by extension when the students, on their own, only relate to the didactic materials they receive.

A structural renovation is needed, not just for partnership, but because the current reality of dominant and one-dimensional globalization demands it. For the last five years, the Latin American Biblical Seminary, founded in 1923, has been implementing a decentralized model, combining residential studies with extension courses. The students come to San Jose, Costa Rica, for short periods and return to their countries to continue their studies by extension. The model allows the students to study communally in groups, whether in the classrooms or in study circles, and at the same time, not disconnect from their cultures and churches. The curriculum, besides being adapted to the decentralized model, is integral, contextualized, and is written in accordance with the particular interests of the students. The professors do not just give classes in San Jose. They travel to the other countries to give intensive courses where there are groups of students. The trips allow the professors to know the places from which the students come, their culture, and their churches. The covenants signed by the various educational centers that share the same curriculum and the same perspective facilitate the relationship of partnership in theological education.

A current example that illustrates the vision of partnership in education is the current campaign called «One Million Women Building Our Dream,» launched by the Seminario Biblico Latinamericano on March 8, 1995. The Campaign is gathering the names of one million women from all over the world, given by men and women, accompanied by a dollar per name, to construct the new home of the Biblical Seminary— which is in the process of becoming a university. The campaign is in many parts of the world. We already have names from 113 countries. The symbol is very significant. The new facility will be constructed «from below» (by grassroots efforts), and it will remind everyone that theology, Bible study, and ministry are done «from below.» The names of the women from all centuries will become an historic memorial so that women will never be forgotten in theological education. The campaign has become the dream of many people, women and men, weaving a new network of grassroots solidarity, in a society which, because of its neoliberal economic policies, generates insolidarity. WOCATI is invited to join this campaign in solidarity.



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### **5. *The Institution oriented by the logic of grace***

I would like to end with a brief commentary on the tension between the institution and its norms, and what we have called the logic of grace.<sup>3</sup>

Leaders often complain of not being able to do anything because the institution does not allow it, or because it runs counter to tradition; and this occurs even when it is clear that what is desired is good, or even better than what the institution offers. We are talking here of the logic of the institution, which is the logic of law, contrary to the logic of faith or of grace about which Paul talks in Galatians and Romans. The logic of law enslaves and does not allow the conscience of the subjects to intervene to reorient it in favor of persons and the community. Conscience, heart, and profound reflection are not what orients its actions. Instead, its actions are oriented by what the law and tradition dictate, independent of opinions about them. It is thus that dehumanization occurs frequently in the operation of the institutions, both for those affected by the application of the law and for those who apply it. It is clear that it is not possible to function as a theological school without the institution and without norms. We need them. Nevertheless, there is a great difference if this institutional necessity is assumed from the perspective of grace. Those of us who are in the leadership of the theological institutions should claim the gift of freedom and not allow ourselves to be enslaved by the norms that we ourselves have created. When the leaders of institutions are oriented by the perspective of grace, they have in mind the gift of the new creation in all areas: the educational model, the curriculum, the norms. Humanization and the desire not to exclude also permeate the execution of the regulations. In this way, the institution puts itself at the service of persons and of the community, and not the reverse.

So it is that any institution of theological education that wants to be oriented from the angle of grace will have to consciously assume the tension between the logic of the institution with its norms and traditions, and the desire to advance an alternative education on behalf of the life of the persons and communities which it serves. Its educational model will have to be capable of assuming a high level of flexibility and exceptions to the norms, as well as the constant search for new possibilities and a readiness for constant changes. With this attitude, it is possible to speak of «partnership in theological education: conversation and communion,» without feelings of guilt for departing from tradition and recognized norms.

The rationality of grace is much more challenging and demanding than the rationality of institutionality. But even if it causes enormous headaches, doing what in good conscience must be done on behalf of those we serve gives one great satisfaction.

**NOTES**

1. Popular education has much to offer to higher theological education. Its emphasis centers not on institutionality but rather on the «original dimension of human existence.»
2. The literary analysis is taken exclusively from *Sinopsis de los Cuatro Evangelios*. Benoit, Boismard, Malillos, 1977.
3. I wrote part of this reflection in «The Logic of Grace in Theological Education (Galatians 3:23-29),» John S. Pobee (ed.), *Theology, Ministry and Renewal of God ? People*. Sixteen Bible Studies, Geneva, WCC, 1995.

**CONGRESS 96 RESPONSES  
TO THE WORKING PAPERS**

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## ***1. THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH***

The tension between the so-called «academic» and «practical» aspects of theological scholarship and research was a key issue for all groups discussing the paper.

A «mark of excellence» for theological education today, it was noted, is how theology relates to the life of the people. The shift to a more community-oriented approach was recognized as urgent and necessary. The responsibility of doing «crisis» or «issue-oriented» theology was seen from the point of view, of some areas, to be crucial. A relevant problem-centered theology could look at such issues as child labour, land mines, ocean and air pollution, for example, as issues that are affecting the whole inhabited earth and of concern to all people. Participants in the theological reflection, as well as items on the theology agenda would cover a much wider range than is generally the case.

Forming hermeneutical communities was identified as a proper way of theologizing. Educating Christian leaders without educating Christian communities was seen as an incomplete and distorted approach. Furthermore, the tendency in some places, to remove theology from the lived experience of the people resulted in many theological graduates and «scholars» returning to their homes and countries as «misfits.»

Positive «breakthroughs» were seen in some areas where newly formed lay people, educated for theological reflection from the grassroots contexts, are now engaging with the pastors, teachers, and «theologians.» This theological conversation is calling forth a fresh and authentic response to real life issues.

Also of encouraging interest was the reminder that in certain places the three-way «conversation and communion» between the local church community, the institution, and the students, reflected the quality of the theological education. This dialogue determined the nature of the scholarship and research. When the conversation occurred before and after the period of formal training, «theology for life» was more assured.

Many groups acknowledged the needs, and sometimes the demands and expectations, to conform to Western standards and approaches. This worked against doing contextual theology and hampered the growth of good theological scholarship and research in the Christian community.

Awareness of the importance of shared leadership raised implications for theological education. Sensitivity to this and other cultural matters meant modifications of curricula and methodologies. Recognition of shared leadership issues pointed to opportunities for new directions in doing theology.

Sharing of views and experiences related to modern technology emerged as another major area of importance. Use of teleconferences, working with the In-

ternet, and accessing tutors through e-mail, for example, were recognized as important new ways of improving the quality of information and communication.

But while positive aspects were noted, e.g., possibilities for strengthened communal dimensions in theology, concern was also expressed in relation to the potential of modern technology for widening the gap even further between the «haves» and the «have nots.»

The issue of globalization was discussed, with the group recognizing the potential for control and domination as well as opportunity for enrichment. Sharing vision and resources in a universal church with a global context being both ecumenical and cross-cultural was seen by many participants as a way of strengthening rather than weakening the whole Christian family.

The «starting point» for theology and the search for the «common points of reference» were other key areas of importance in the response. The group affirmed the paper's statement about the shift from doctrine to experience, recognizing *the* experience for the Christian family being the incarnation of the Son of God.

Incarnational theology—recognition of and response to the Word of God in the world—was understood as utterly basic and paramount for the theological enterprise. The Word, the person and message of Jesus, was seen as «starting point» and, along with this, an understanding that the common point of reference we search for is already present in our suffering humanity and in our world. The group highlighted the fact that our theological scholarship and research needs to shape its educational framework from this place of need, brokenness, struggle, and hope.

There were two issues (picked up during and after the plenary session) which were named as particularly important. The paper states that doing theology through nonrational ways is «admissible and desirable.» This is not enough. We would want to say that the intuitive artistic and emotive aspects are *absolutely critical* to the learning process and to any fully human response to theological scholarship and research. Along with theory and praxis, these ways give room for imagination and silence, for creativity, and especially they make space for the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, theology may even need more radical and profound changes than this. A completely new «logique» and way of doing theology may need to be addressed or may in fact emerge.

Finally the relationship between theological scholarship and ministerial formation was seen to be an issue of particular concern, not to be regarded as an additional item or a useful «extra» but as absolutely integral to the whole task and responsibility of theological scholarship and research. The ongoing spiritual formation of both students and staff was recognized as a priority. Without the commitment to personal and communal Christian transformation, the theological educator and «educated» are without roots and unable to give life to the

Christian family and to the world.

## ***2. WOMEN IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION***

The 1992 WOCAT1 CONGRESS mandated the Executive Committee to address itself to the issue of injustices arising out of the constraints, prohibitions, failures, and denials of persons—particularly women—who seek the services of theological education or who feel called to be theological educators. The paper on Women in Theological Education was the response to that mandate. The process of writing the paper was itself an expression of partnership, the result of collaborative consultation, debate, and conversation among four women from around the world. It is an example of a different way of doing theology.

The main issue we found was under representation; this takes place in several ways:

- a. The actual exclusion of women from theological education, which has largely been the prerogative of men.
- b. Even where the churches formally accept women in theological education, there are many factors that continue to inhibit the participation of women.
- c. The problem of tokenism where women are admitted in theological institutions, but their presence is not felt, their voice is not listened to, their work is not affirmed or acknowledged.
- d. Through methods of doing theology which continue to be male-centered.
- e. When the language of theology does not speak to, or of, women's experiences, but reinforces negative images of women.
- f. When unorthodox and often disturbing theology produced by women, grounded in women's experiences, is dismissed as sub-standard and not acceptable.
- g. When the diversity and complexity of women's experiences results in diversity in women's theological voices, women are stereotyped as lacking focus and incapable of communicating, even among themselves.

We want to affirm that theological education is not done in a vacuum; it always takes place in concrete social, political, and historical contexts. Global is-

sues of social justice (or its lack), especially impact women and may prevent the effective participation of women in all settings of education. For women, therefore, the issue of social justice lies at the core of all theology.

We need to recognize women's achievements *and* determine next steps for theological education

### ***3. ACADEMIC DECREES AND CREDENTIALS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION***

It is widely accepted by the participants that credentials in theological education is a problematic area and solutions to problems may not be easy to find. Nevertheless, the participants were of the view that WOCATI affords the best forum to discuss openly and freely problems related to standards in credentials. That exchange of information may lead to greater understanding, and the discovery of ways for sharing vexing academic problems.

Participants were generally reluctant to adopt the proposed eight types of academic credentials that were suggested as part of global theological standards in credentials. The proposal, while helpful in some respects, is seen to be weighed too much in favor of the North American system of theological education. Yet the problems related to finding equivalency among several types of degrees and diplomas, as they are awarded in different parts of the world, is indeed a pressing



**MESSAGE FROM THE 1996 2nd WOCATI CONGRESS**

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## THE CONTEXT

We came to Nairobi, 50 delegates and guests from 17 associations and other related organizations.

We began by listening to our hosts speak of Africa. The continent where the human family was born and which cherishes a wisdom of wholeness. The elders joined to the unborn and people to the land and the animals. We heard about the struggle to maintain this vision in theological education:

- when the poor are sold for a pair of sandals.
- when violence and great faith are found together.
- when educators face painful tensions and must choose between their personal needs and the urgent call to attend a new birth.
- when clear vision is needed to look into the future.
- when the cord that binds the present to the past must be broken.
- when celebrations can be made, even in the midst of suffering, because the people are faithful and God will multiply them and make them very strong.
- when as yet unformed and vulnerable beginnings must be cherished and sustained because they may bring deliverance.

We heard from Latin America of the grace of God that tastes like salt. Like the blood of a birth, like the tears of travail, like the “sea smell” of a new born baby. A theological education that radiates grace. That is:

- born in the night and not in the fixed time and space of knowledge.
- has a soft form that fits the breast and that can be carried upon the back.
- that resembles its father and its mother having a human face, not the face of a machine.
- that comes from the people and will free the people.

We heard from these particular contexts and recognised that they revealed to each of us the contours of our own. In every place a painful labour is in process. Gentle hands are needed to steer the birth, and clear vision is needed to protect the helpless grace which God is multiplying amongst us.

## THE CHALLENGES

### *Theological Scholarship and Research*

We discussed the document prepared on this subject which drew our attention to the need for excellence in scholarship, the honouring of local knowledge, the need for socially engaged reflection upon the issues of contemporary concern, and a coherent global perspective.

In our response we faced painful issues. We recognised that in most contexts a gap exists between the life of theological institutions and the living faith of the people. WOCATI believes that in our future work we:

- must acknowledge the place of power and privilege in which theological education has operated and in which excellence has been defined.
- must recognise the life that God has granted to local and contextual theologies which show great beauty and profound wisdom.
- must intentionally direct our energies to include lay people and women in the life of theological institutions.
- must bear in mind the necessary link between theological education, spiritual formation, and the life of the churches.

The Congress acknowledges that difficult questions concerning the distribution of resources and the «ownership» of tradition are unresolved. These are of vital importance when promoting good scholarship and research. WOCATI must urgently consider:

- the possibilities for a far more effective sharing of resources through the use of new technology.
- the corresponding danger that new technology may widen the gap between those who are joined in networks of communication and those who are excluded.
- the dangers inherent in a post-modern «globalised» culture that indigenous theological traditions may be abused and plundered by Western academic theology.
- the tension between the need to develop self-sufficiency, South-South exchanges, and contextual scholarship and the just requirement to share resources (e.g., scholarship, publications and subject specialists) between the North and South.

When theological scholarship and research are viewed in the light of the richness of our spiritual heritage we affirm:

- the vital significance of artistic and creative expressions of theology.
- the importance of conversation between local perspectives in order to achieve a communication which becomes manifest in concrete action on issues of social justice.
- the presence of God's Word in the language of human suffering.

### ***Women in Theological Education***

We studied the paper on theological education which was produced by women in conversation from four corners of the world. It drew our attention to the lack of participation by women in theological education and the obstacles they encounter when they begin to claim their place within the theological education.

In our discussion we recognised that:

- women have given their energy, commitment, and financial support to the work of the church, including theological education, but have not been honored for their contribution or received their fair share in the distribution of educational resources.
- women's traditions have been forgotten, women's names have been unrecorded.
- women's concerns have not been the subject of theological reflection and have been omitted from the curriculum.

In order to counter women's exclusion from theological education an *intentional* process of change must be initiated. This will require attention to:

- the access of women to theological education *whether or not* they seek ordination as a result.
- the intentional distribution of resources to women for further study and research and the intentional recruitment of women faculty members.
- the intentional revision of the curriculum with the interests, concerns, and insights of women in mind.

WOCATI affirms that women have nourished and sustained the life of the Christian church throughout the centuries. It celebrates its faith that in future their names will not be lost and declares its commitment to discern appropriate ways to ensure their full partnership in theological education.

### ***Academic Degrees and Credentials***

We considered the prepared paper which set out the origins of academic credentials in the West and differentiated among eight levels of intellectual and professional competence.

The CONGRESS felt that it was not possible to address the use of academic credentials without naming issues of access and power. It was reluctant to adopt as normative the eight categories which had originated within the Western academic system. However it recognised that, whether WOCATI adopts these classifications or not, they will continue to be widely used to govern access to theological education. For this reason WOCATI must continue to engage in conversations concerning academic credentials in theological education:

- that information be shared widely as to the value attached to academic awards within their specific contexts.
- that the various debates concerning accreditation which are currently taking place along confessional lines be brought into dialogue with one another.
- that creative ways of facilitating access to theological education and assessing non-traditional theological work be actively pursued.

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## THE RESPONSE

In response to the challenges it has considered, WOCATI affirms that its mission is rooted the worship of God and its commitment to God's people. We embrace the challenge:

- to return to our own contexts with a fresh commitment to articulate local knowledge and to share fully in the life and inheritance of our peoples.
- to recognise the importance of the image of God in every human face; intentionally supporting the theological work of women and the scholarship of Africa, Latin America, and Asia.
- to discern and share what is of value in the development of traditions of accreditation.
- to look to the future, whose face we do not yet know, and discover ways in which new technology might be shared in the service of our institutions.
- to examine ways in which financial resources might be best employed to achieve the visions we have now made our own.

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**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
ADDRESSES THE FUTURE OF WOCATI**



The Executive Committee of WOCATI met in Pittsburgh, PA (USA) January 5-8, 1997. The Committee considered five questions facing WOCATI:

1. What are the distinctive goals of WOCATI and how can they be met in the next four to five years? We agreed that WOCATI should pursue six major goals in the future: (a) stimulate scholarly work on the nature and future of theological education, (b) support women in theological education, (c) engage religious educators from other religious traditions about theological or religious education, (d) develop clearer understandings of degrees and credentials used in different parts of the world, and (e) encourage the formation of regional associations in parts of the world where they do not exist and work to support existing associations.

2. How will the financial resources to sustain WOCATI be obtained to enable the conference to continue its work? We need a combination of global support and local funding. Local funding is needed for travel grants to assist delegates when they attend a WOCATI CONGRESS. The Executive Committee will be contacting members and other agencies to explore options.

How can we get more members—from groups that are presently uninformed about the existence of WOCATI, from global organizations already concerned about theological education, from affiliate agencies that relate to theological education? We are developing a new pattern of communication to spread information about WOCATI more effectively.

What pattern of meetings should be used to promote the work of WOCATI in the next five years? We propose a consultation on «Change in Theological Education» for May 1999. We suggest that the next CONGRESS be postponed until 2001 to avoid conflicts with other meetings and to enable WOCATI to find the necessary funding.

What means should WOCATI use to communicate with members and share useful information about theological education? We will no longer publish *WOCATI NEWS*. It will be replaced by a diversity of communication tools that are currently being explored: a periodic fax news sheet, a series of printed occasional papers, and a World Wide Web page.

Details about these decisions and plans will be shared with member associations and interested schools in the months ahead—following a new WOCATI communications plan.



**WOCATI AND THE FUTURE AND VIABILITY  
OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

*By Petros Vassiliadis*

There is no doubt that the classical approach to *theology* is being questioned from various quarters at the end of this turbulent and divisions-creating second millennium. If some do not openly admit that it is in a certain crisis, very few would deny that it has at least run its course. Ever since the beginning of medieval scholasticism, and even after the Enlightenment, theology was defined as a discipline which used the methods of the Aristotelian logic. Rational knowledge was, and in some case is still, considered as the only legitimate form of knowledge. *Theological education*, thus, gradually shifted away from its eucharistic/liturgical framework, i.e. away from its ecclesial, community, local context.<sup>1</sup>

The rational understanding of God and humanity had in fact led to a *knowledge-centered* and *mission-oriented* theological education. Most Theological Institutions around the globe have been structured in such a way as to educate Church 'leaders', not the entire people of God; to equip priests, pastors or missionaries with the necessary means to preserve and propagate certain Christian truths or ethical norms, and in some cases even to defend old-fashioned institutions, not to build up local eucharistic communities. They lost, in other words, the *community-centered* and *liturgically/eschatologically-oriented* dimension of theological education. Gradually, therefore, we all unconsciously lost sight of the most significant parameter that really makes theology viable: The very often forgotten truth that *theology* is the real conscience of the living Church; that theology is first and foremost the voice of the - sometimes voiceless - Christian community and one of its most fundamental tasks; even further: that theology is neither a discipline for young people at the end of adolescence, nor a prerogative of the professionals, be it clergy or academics, but the task of the entire Christian community. Consequently, little - if any - attention has been given to the fact that theological education is a worldwide enterprise fundamental to the mission of the Church, not in its institutional character, but in its eschatological awareness of being a glimpse and a foretaste of the *Kingdom of God*, the prophetic manifestation of this ultimate reality that should always determine our approach to history.

## I

This vision of the Kingdom was unquestionably reinforced in modern times through the ecumenical movement, which for a moment created an unprecedented enthusiasm among the deeply divided Christianity that the centuries-long divisions of the Church might find some sort of an agreed solution. Unfortunately the momentum which reached a climax in the 60s, especially through the historic event of Vatican II, did not have an equally optimistic follow-up. Ironically, the ecu-

menical optimism and enthusiasm towards the goal of the visible unity of the Church was interrupted at the very point an important achievement in the field of theological hermeneutics was reached with the affirmation at a world level, and wide application from the 70s onwards, of the *contextual* character of theology. This great achievement has created an unabridged psychological gap between the traditional Churches and the new and most vibrant younger Christian communities. The main reason for this unexpected, and at the same time unfortunate, development in the ecumenical movement was the complete negation of any stable point of reference, of all authentic criteria in the search for unity and the ultimate truth in the post-Uppsala period culminating at Canberra.<sup>2</sup>

It is very significant that the discussions in the Oslo consultation were conducted in the *context of contextuality and catholicity*, and the "ecumenical vision" was well rooted in the original planning in such a way as to direct our attention towards "how ministry and formation processes can further the unity of the Church (John 17:21) for the sake of the unity and renewal of humankind and indeed all creation".

There is no question that it is impossible to make a case for the *unity of the Church* while being indifferent to the *unity of humankind*. Today it is a common view in ecumenical circles that we can now definitely speak of «differing, but legitimate, interpretations of one and the same gospel»(Bristol). It has become an axiom that «*every text has a context*», a context that is not merely something external to the text (theological position, theological tradition etc.) that simply modifies it, but something that constitutes an integral part of it. None can any longer deny that all traditions are inseparably linked to a specific historical, social-cultural, political, and even economic and psychological context. And this means that the traditional data can no longer be used as a rationale for an abstract universal theology that carries absolute and unlimited authority. Finally, through contextuality, in contrast to classical approach to theology, we are no longer concerned whether and to what extent today's theological positions are in agreement with the *tradition*, but if these positions have any dynamic reference and relation at all to the given contemporary conditions.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, little - if any at all - attention has been given to work toward reconciling the two currents of modern ecumenism in order to soften the existing antithesis between contextuality and catholicity. My modest contribution will focus only on this extremely important dimension of the ecumenical vision, encouraged by the mandate of the organizers to work towards a synthesis of the legitimacy of all contemporary local/contextual theologies, and the necessity - in fact an imperative, and not simply an option - of a core of the apostolic fai-

th. It is my firm conviction that ecumenical theological education to be able not only to survive, but also to give life and lead to renewal, must have a *common point of reference*. Otherwise, we run the danger to view any local context and experience as authentic expressions of our Christian faith.<sup>4</sup> Allow me at this point to bring to our memory the accurate observation by the late Nikos Nissiotis, exactly ten years after his tragic death, that we must not exclude the possibility of a universally and fully authoritative theology, perhaps even on the basis of the transcendent anthropology of contextual theology,<sup>5</sup> which suggests possibilities for making corrective adjustments to the contextual methodology.

In the 2nd Congress of WOCATI (World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions), held in Nairobi Kenya (27 June-3 July 1996), it was rightly emphasized, that the most important and necessary perspectives in contemporary theological education are both catholicity<sup>6</sup> and contextuality: *catholicity*, in the sense of the search for a coherent, ecumenical, global, and catholic awareness of the theological task, and *contextuality* as the unique expression of it in the various particular contexts. Coherence is important in that it expresses the authenticity and distinctiveness of different contextual theologies, as well as the need to bring these contextual theologies into inter-relationship with others.

Of course, the way in which this coherent, ecumenical, global, and catholic perspective is to be achieved, is not an easy task. But central in this respect is not only the concept of *dialogue*, but also of *unity*, i.e. the question of where does the locus of Christian faith reside. In other words, without denying the contextual nature of theology, and taking account of the indispensable nature of dialogue to the theological task ecumenical theological education, the question: "Wherein does the *unity* of Christian theology reside?" needs to be answered.

However, for theology to seek for a coherent, ecumenical, global perspective requires the recognition that Christian theology, no matter how many and varied be its expressions, must have a *common point of reference*, a unifying element within all forms of ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation. It is necessary to focus upon the issue of unity in both general terms and in the specific ecclesiological use of the term as the on-going search to restore the given unity of the Church. This includes consideration of the unifying and saving nature of the Christ event, continually re-enacted through his Body, the Church, in the life-giving and communion-restoring Holy Spirit. After all, theological education is a worldwide enterprise fundamental to the mission of the Church.

This given unity of the Church, which does not necessarily mean a strict unified structure, is given expression in an adherence to a *broad understanding of Christian tradition*. Such an understanding affirms not only the centrality of Christology, but also the constitutive nature of Pneumatology, i.e. the normative nature of a trinitarian understanding of Christian revelation. This trinitarian understanding affirms the ultimate goal of the divine economy, not only in terms of Christ becoming all in all both in an anthropological, i.e. soteriological, and in a cosmological way, but also in terms of the Holy Spirit constituting authentic communion and restoring the union of all.

The communion God seeks and initiates is not only with the Church in the conventional sense, but with the whole cosmos. Thus the unity of divine revelation, as represented in the broad understanding of Christian tradition, is for the entire created world, not only for believers. This understanding of unity is important to keep in mind as it challenges a potential distortion wherein unity is identified with the maintenance of denominational loyalty, which in turn can be an exercise of oppression, excluding suffering people from the community of the people of God.

This understanding of unity in ecumenical theological education informs and challenges all expressions of contextual theology. It does not locate the unity inherent within Christian theology with any ecclesiastical or doctrinal system, and recognizes the varied forms of human and social existence. In this way, it is congruent with the methodologies and goals of contextual theology. However, it also challenges these theologies in pointing out the indispensability of an adherence to a broad understanding and acceptance of Christian tradition as that which gives expression to the given unity of the Church.

## II

In my view, the main reason of the inability of modern Christianity to overcome the existing “theological misunderstandings” is the issue of the criteria of truth. And this is due to the inability to reconcile contextuality with the text/word/proclamation syndrome of modern Christian theology. It is time, I think, to distance ourselves as much as possible from the dominant to modern scholarship syndrome of the priority of the texts over the experience, of *theology* over *ecclesiology*, of kerygma and mission over the Eucharist. There are many scholars who cling to the dogma, imposed by the post-Enlightenment and post-Reformation hegemony over all scholarly theological outlook (and not only in the field of biblical scholarship or of western and in particular Protestant theology), which can be summarized as follows: what constitutes the core of our Ch-

ristian faith, should be based exclusively on a certain *depositum fidei*, be it the Bible, the writings of the Fathers, the canons and certain decisions of the Councils, denominational declarations etc.; very rarely is there any serious reference to the *eucharistic communion event*, which after all has been responsible and produced this *depositum fidei*.

The ecclesiological problem, which is so important an issue in today's ecumenical discussions, is a matter not so much of church organization and structure, as it is a matter of eschatological orientation. The whole Christian tradition from Jesus' preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God through the Ignatian concept of the Church as a eucharistic community (with the Bishop as the image of Christ), and down to the later Christian tradition (which, by the way, understands the Eucharist as the mystery of the Church and not a mystery among others), reveals that it is the eschatological and not the hierarchical (*episcopal, conciliar, congregational* etc.) nature of the Church that it was stressed.

Should we not remind ourselves again that the Church does not draw her identity from what she *is*, or from what it was given to her as institution, but from what she *will be*, i.e. from the eschaton? Should we not reaffirm our understanding of the Church as portraying the Kingdom of God on earth, in fact as being a glimpse or foretaste of the Kingdom to come? After all the main concern of all great theologians of the apostolic, post-apostolic was to maintain clearly the vision of that Kingdom before the eyes of God's people. And the *episcopo-centric* (and by no means *episcopo-critic*) structure of the Church- the main stumbling block for the titanic effort towards the visible unity of the Church - was nothing more than an essential part of that vision. The bishop as presiding in love in the Eucharist is not a vicar or representative, or ambassador of Christ, but an image (*eikon*) of Christ. So with the rest of the ministries of the Church: in their authentic expression they are not parallel to, or given by, but identical with those of, Christ.<sup>7</sup> That is also why Christian theology and life should always refer to the resurrection. The Church exists not because Christ died on the cross but because he is risen from the dead, thus becoming the *aparche* of all humanity.

The importance of Eucharist, and of the «eucharistic theology» (more precisely of the «eucharistic ecclesiology»), in the ecumenical debate has only recently been rediscovered and realized. The proper understanding of the Eucharist has been always a stumbling block in Christian theology and life; not only at the start of the Christian community, when the Church had to struggle against a multitude of mystery cults, but also much later, even within the ecumenical era. In vain distinguished theologians (mainly in the East) attempted to redefine the Christian sacramental theology on the basis of the trinitarian theology.

Seen from a modern theological perspective, this was a desperate attempt to reject certain tendencies which overemphasized the importance of Christology at the expense of the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit. The theological issues of *filioque* and the *epiclesis* have no doubt thoroughly discussed and a great progress has been achieved in recent years through initiatives commonly undertaken by the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church; but their real consequences to the meaning of the sacramental theology of the Church, and consequently to theological education, have yet to be fully and systematically examined. Theological education should no longer treat the Church either as a cultic religion or as a proclaiming/confessing institution.

The Eucharist has not been more successfully interpreted than with the use of the «trinitarian theology», i.e. not only as *the* Mystery of Church, but also as a projection of the inner dynamics (love, communion, equality, diaconia, sharing etc.) of the Holy Trinity into the world and cosmic realities. Ecumenical theological education, therefore, and ministerial formation should focus not so much on a doctrinal accommodation and of organization and structure (Faith and Order) of the Church(es), but on a diaconal attitude and on an eschatological orientation. In other words on a «*costly eucharistic vision*».

### III

With such a costly eucharistic vision our future theological education can not only develop gender sensitivity; not only articulate a new paradigm to equip the whole people of God; not only allow an innovative, experimental, people-centered approach; it can also ensure that the processes of formation be relevant and renewing to individuals and communities of faith.

After all, our theological education can no longer be conducted *in abstracto*, as if its object, God (cf. theo-logia= logos/word about God), was a solitary ultimate being. It should always refer to a Triune God, the perfect expression of communion, a direct result of the eucharistic eschatological experience; an experience directed toward the vision of the Kingdom, and centered around the communion (*koinonia*), which includes justice, peace, abundance of life and respect to the created world.

What comes out of such an affirmation is self-evident: theological education should always refer to reconciliation, and to communion as an ultimate constitutive element of being. In other words it should have relevance to the relational dimension of life, and therefore be in a continuous and dynamic dialogue, not only in the form of theological conversation among Churches or Chri-



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stian communities in order to promote the visible unity of the one body of Christ, but also with people of other faiths; after all theological reflection on God's self-revelation to humankind can no longer be done from a Christendom perspective.

### NOTES

1. Cf. also my article "The Future of Theological Education in Europe," *Oikoumene and Theology: The 1993-95 Erasmus Lectures in Ecumenical Theology*, Thessaloniki 1996, pp. 11-24.
2. More in my "Orthodoxy and Ecumenism" above.
3. It is tragic irony that the 1971 Louvain Conference of the Faith and Order commission almost led to a break because of the presidential address of the late Fr. John Meyendorff, moderator then of the Faith and Order Commission, and one of the leading Orthodox ecumenists. And twenty years later, with the initiative of an Orthodox theological faculty, that of the University of Thessaloniki, an attempt was made to clarify the relationship between Orthodox theology and contextuality. More on this in my "Orthodoxie und kontextuelle Theologie," *ÖR* 42 (1993), pp. 452-460.
4. Cf. Kuncheria Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue: A Study of the Methodological Development in the Commission on «Faith and Order» of the World Council of Churches*, Bangalore 1981, pp. 393ff; also Konrad Raiser, *Identität und Sozialität*, München 1971; and *Ecumenism in Transition*, Geneva 1991.
5. Nikos Nissiotis, «Ecclesial Theology in Context», in Choan-Seng Song (ed.), *Doing Theology Today*, Madras 1976, (minutes of the Bossey conferences, 101-124, p. 124. Cf. also the special issue of *Study Encounter*, Vol. VIII No. 3 [1972]).
6. Although the term used was "globalization", it was stressed that this very term can imply another form of domination which would endanger the autonomy of the various contextual theologies.
7. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, New York 1985, p. 163.

**THE 3rd WOCATI CONGRESS  
(Chiangmai 2002)**

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

*by Zenaida Lumba, Acting President  
(ATESEA)*

## **Greetings and Welcome**

In Hawaii, as our friend Yeow Choo Lak would vouch, they say "Aloha" for welcome. In the Philippines, we say "Mabuhay!". But in Thailand the word is Yindee Tonrup. I wish I could greet you all in your respective mother tongue to express my heartiest welcome to the Chiangmai WOCATI assembly. The latest list I received says that there are 42 of us gathered in this exciting city of Chiangmai, ready to make historic decisions on the future of global theological networking.

It is believed that the birthing of the first child is the most painful experience of a mother. If the putting up of a theological congress of universal magnitude were a birthing process, the Chiangmai WOCATI should not be painful anymore since this is already the third of its kind. But holding it after a long interval of six years, made it like we are starting WOCATI all over again; like the first child is just born.

From the communications received from the esteemed delegates of this august body. I notice that 91% are new. Some even asked me "Please tell me what WOCATI is all about", while others wrote "We thought WOCATI does not exist anymore." Good question and observation. WOCATI is still around. But it may cease to exist. The answer is in our hands.

## **A Quick Flashback**

Years ago. Dr. Samuel Amirham, then the Director of the Programme of Theological Education (PTE) of the World Council of Churches, now known as Ecumenical Theological Education, saw the need for theological associations in the world to network closely. He, therefore, initiated meetings of executive directors of theological associations in Africa, America, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin and Central America. The meeting in Singapore in 1987 breathed life into the World Conference of Association of Theological Associations. It was, however, in Kaliurang, Indonesia where its first birthday was celebrated and the inaugural meeting was held.

A number of persons performed nurturing roles during WOCATI's infancy. Foremost of them is Dr. Leon Pacala, then Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS). He was appointed to raise funds for WOCATI, a task which he fulfilled magnificently. Dr. Yeow Choo Lak, then the Executive Director of the Association of Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA), as the secretary of (WOCATI) Executive Committee, did the paper work with the strong support of his counterparts from the rest of the world. It was generous grants from The Pew Char-

itable Trusts and Lilly Endowment Inc. that enabled WOCATI to carry on its operation.

### **The WOCATI Congress**

The first WOCATI congress was held in 1992 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania while the second congress was held in 1996 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The third congress should have been held in 2000 but it had to be postponed for two reasons: There have been resignations from the Executive Committee. The first to resign was Dr. Kigasung Wesley due to his election as bishop of New Guinea. Dr. Ian Williams, our secretary-treasurer, followed since he left the academy to work in a parish where, he believed, he felt called to serve. Our president, Dr. Barbara Brown Zikmund, was the third to resign. This she did after leaving Hartford Seminary and accepting a new job in Kyoto, Japan. Just before this assembly, our five members from Africa, Douglas Waruta and Mary Getui stopped writing. From eight the Executive Committee members became three: Leonor Rojas, Petros Vassiliadis and myself. As the vice-president of WOCATI, I suddenly found myself its reluctant president. On that same year I was elected president of an 8,000-student-university. The work in the university, while planning for this Congress, has been mentally, emotionally and physically demanding. The university, Wesleyan University-Philippines, which used to have one campus, now has three located in the northern part of the country.

The resignation problem was compounded by lack of financial resources. There has been a heavy competition for funds from foundations. Then, too, for some reason, many of the member associations do not remit membership dues. The Executive Committee could not meet or the little funds left would be eaten up by airfares and board and lodging expenses. ATS came to rescue WOCATI. Its staff put this organization on the internet at no cost on our part. It tried to raise funds for us but that seemed to have failed.

### **We Are Here To Decide**

There is no need to overemphasize the problems that WOCATI faces. We need a strong leadership that is committed to make WOCATI go. But that is not all. We need resources that will support that leadership.

Dr. Barbara B. Zikmund once wrote that congresses like what we have now are very expensive and that it makes more sense to have small regional meetings. Is this the need of the hour? There is a TV program in the Philippines entitled "Fine, whatever." But that we cannot say of WOCATI. We need to decide. Whatever is not fine!

And the decision is whether to revive WOCATI, inject new life into its dying stage or just let it die naturally and be more merciful and apply euthanasia. The answer is in your hands.

### **A World of Gratitude and Appreciation**

Let me end by saying that this assembly would have not been a reality without the committed and able support of particularly two friends, Chris Meinzer of the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada (ATS) who worked from the United States and Salvador Martinez who patiently did the ground work from here in Chiangmai. I was in the Philippines, trying to reach out to all of you, very often wondering to the verge of frustration why answers to my letters would not come as early as I expected them to. There is, however, another person who has been working for WOCATI behind the scene. What you read on the web about WOCATI is her creative work. That person is Loretta Groff of ATS. Electronics supplied the speed we all needed to make this assembly happen. Thanks be to God. Thank you to all of you. May God continue to bless WOCATI.

**THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN A POSTMODERN ERA**

*Msgr. Jeremiah J. McCarthy Ph.D.*

*Director of Accreditation/Institutional Evaluation*

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The Petrine admonition to "give a reason for the hope that lies within you" is the biblical anchor for the interrogation and exploration of the data of revelation that constitutes "theological inquiry." This process of intellectual inquiry is the enduring task of communities of faith, aptly captured in the revered axiom of St. Anselm, "fides quaerens intellectum" (faith seeking understanding). The ordering of faithful, gospel life with life in the world always occurs in the context of specific settings of time and space. Responding to new challenges and demands is a dynamic process of engagement with diverse and oftentimes, "conflictual" construals of life and its ultimate meaning. Whether it is the gathering of the apostles in Jerusalem at the first ecclesial council (Acts 15), or the contentious Christological debates that characterized the councils of Nicea, Chalcedon, and Ephesus, or the missionary outreach of the Christian community that now reaches into every part of globe, these challenges have required the willingness to engage forthrightly and critically, patterns of thought that both converge with and diverge from the ongoing, lived experience of the Christian community.

As Cardinal Newman, the leading Anglican/Catholic theologian of the nineteenth century observed, "in heaven it is otherwise, but here below, to live is to change, and to live well, is to have changed often." For Newman, "change" did not imply wholesale departure from the substance of the Christian deposit of faith, but rather a willingness to plumb its depths, to perceive new lines of development that tap into the vibrant power of faith and action. Theological reflection, then, is a critical task, a task at once holding fast to the accrued wisdom of the church, but is also willing to risk the promise of an encounter with the "stranger" who may come in the guise of diverse races, cultures, and genders, and intellectual traditions. Such engagement, then, is nothing new, and the fact that we continue this process in our own time, with new questions, perhaps, that have arisen from the emergence of both "modern" and "postmodern" assessments should not alarm us. As with every encounter with the "other" there is both danger and opportunity. "Postmodernity," I suggest, presents both of these realities, much like the twinned masks of comedy and tragedy that symbolize the stage and theatrical drama.

My task in this paper is to suggest how theological schools might engage critically with the cultural and intellectual challenges that come under the rubric of "postmodernity." The very term "postmodern" is subject to intense debate about its meaning, and I do not intend to enter into an exhaustive discussion or critique of this literature. However, I do want to make clear my operating understanding of the term "postmodernity" in order to situate my remarks about its implications for us as theological educators for the task of accrediting schools of theology.



In one of her sonnets, the American poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, writes:  
(1)

"...Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour,  
Falls from the sky a meteoric shower  
Of facts... they lie unquestioned, uncombined.  
Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill  
Is daily spun; but there exists no loom  
To weave it into fabric..."

This absence of "loom to weave it into fabric" highlights a characteristic of a postmodern ethos, namely the perception that there is no controlling meta-narrative or grand conceptual scheme to order the complexity of reality. In the apt phrase of the evangelical theologian, Stanley Grenz, the hallmark of postmodernity is "centerless pluralism," or, as the Irish poet William Butler Yeats has remarked in his powerful poem, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," the perception that "the center does not hold." The twentieth century's witness to two global conflicts, genocides and other forms of mass murder, certainly gives one pause about the Enlightenment confidence in the power of reason to conquer, alone, the forces of darkness. To a large extent, postmodernity is a reaction to modernity, hence the emphasis on "post" modern. The "modern" world, for my purposes, and according to my interpretation of the literature, is code language for the Enlightenment project of the 18th century to accentuate the capacity of human intellectual capacity, "reason," to order and improve the world.

According to postmodern critics, the success of Enlightenment reason in science, industry, politics, economics and social relations has often privileged the pragmatic, utilitarian and technical uses of knowledge leading to forms of discourse that are powerful tools for preserving the particular interests of stakeholders in a given power structure. The unmasking of such "totalizing" interests by intellectual, economic and political elites in society has lead postmodern "masters of suspicion" to a strategy of resistance by affirming the irreducibility of the "other." The central commitment to the "face of the other" constitutes for the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who was deeply affected by the Holocaust of the Second World War, the fundamental moral imperative for ethical analysis.

For my purposes, the term "postmodernity," does not speak to a single but many expressions of intellectual, moral and spiritual concerns. Accordingly, I find quite useful the appraisal given to these concerns by the American philosopher of religion at Fuller Seminary in California, Nancey Murphy.(2) Relying on the resources of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, Murphy reviews three critical issues that have an impact on philosophy, and I will contend, also

have an impact on theological education.

The first issue surrounds the philosophy of language. Critical philosophical work has shifted the understanding of language from an "expressivist-referential" model to a different conception of language as "use" and as an action situated and driven by social conventions. The "expressivist-referential" model reflects a perspective that sees language as "picturing" or representing a state of affairs. The image of language as a "mirror" exactly portraying or corresponding to states of affairs in the world was actually quite restrictive in its range of application. In this conception, discourse that did not fit into a narrow "picture-theory" such as ethical analysis or religious understandings, was marginalized and dismissed as lacking meaning.

By drawing a sharp and impermeable distinction between "facts" and "values," logical positivists asserted that ethical reflections could not be objectively assessed and assigned them to the realm of private feeling or subjectivity. Thus characterized as "emotivist" preferences of the individual, ethical discourse was effectively removed from any publicly defensible warrants for justification of its truth claims. To the contrary, the work of Wittgenstein and his followers has unmasked this flawed understanding by highlighting the multiple purposes served by language schemes, and it has demonstrated the need for language users to cultivate the skills necessary for communication in a variety of contexts, including ethics and religious discourse. According to Murphy, this critical re-conceptualization about language opens up new possibilities for ethical and religious understandings as participants in the larger public conversation about life, its purpose, and ultimate meaning.

The second impact of contemporary Anglo-American postmodernity, deals with the philosophy of knowledge, epistemology. The reigning model of knowledge in the West, inherited from Rene Descartes, is a picture of knowledge as resting upon indisputable building blocks, or "foundations." According to Descartes, only these foundations can secure knowledge from the corrosive effects of skepticism and relativism. However, the critical weakness with "foundationalism" is that the purported foundations are not immune from the inherent historicity, context and particular settings from which they emerge. The alternative to foundationalism is not necessarily utter relativism or perpetual skepticism. Rather, knowledge is better approached not as series of impervious building blocks, but as a web or network of interactive strands of meaning that influence one another and provide self-correcting strategies that respect, on the one hand, well-established traditions, and, on the other hand, blend an openness to new insights and conceptualizations. In other words, the postmodern turn from the solitary epistemology of modernity and its Cartesian, mathematical certitude about reality, to the social epistemology of knowledge as a skillful "dance"

with many players does not entail a collapse into relativism, but rather a humble awareness that all of our knowing is a "partial" purchase on the complexity of reality.

Related to these two features of Anglo-American postmodernity, is Murphy's third observation that the philosophy of science has shifted in a similar vein. Because reality itself is complex, it must be interrogated not with a singular, empirical lens, but with multiple research paradigms that are better attuned to grasping the complexity of the scientific enterprise. Atomistic thinking, that is, the view that reality is composed of irreducible bits of matter, has collapsed as we have begun to understand the systemic impact of organizational structures when individual elements of matter are gathered into complex "wholes" such as organisms or organ systems. According to Murphy, philosophy of science has begun to see the integration of such multiple systems as evidence not only of "bottom up" knowledge, the traditional perspective of the individual experimental disciplines of chemistry, biology, physics and so on, but also the "top down" influence of larger conceptual matrices that interact with and alter the causal links among the individual elements of the system.

According to Murphy, different metaphors emerge from a critical engagement with postmodern thought. The common thread in these new metaphors is that they help overcome some of the "reductionism" in the Enlightenment project of modernity. Language is not a picture but an action rooted in social conventions and appropriate rules for knowing how to go on, akin to Wittgenstein's metaphor of language as a form of rule-governed activity like a game, e.g., chess or cricket; knowledge is not so much a construction site of building blocks or foundations, but a web or network of convictions, beliefs and concepts that are historically conditioned by traditions of intellectual inquiry; and reality is multi-faceted, characterized by "top-down" organization, as well as by "bottom-up" structures of organization. The interplay between individual organs in the human body and the functioning of the body as a whole exemplify these interrelated patterns of organization. Murphy's appraisal of these postmodern moves avoids the corrosive relativism to be found in certain strands of postmodernity, for example, the textual relativism of Derrida.

Derrida shares with his philosophical contemporaries a concern to resist the reduction of the "other" to the unifying abstractions of the modern philosophical tradition. "Alterity," Otherness, has primordial status, and texts can imprison and obfuscate as well as liberate and enlighten. "Logocentrism," or the tyranny of imposed meaning and tradition, is to be continually subverted by a process of "double-reading." Simon Critchley refers to this Derridian strategy as "clotural" reading, a word trading on the French term that implies not only an enclosed space like a convent or cloister, but also a boundary that suggests or intimates

a surplus of meaning that is hidden from view.<sup>(3)</sup> Murphy astutely notes, in my view, that these tactics of Derrida only make sense provided that he presumes an understanding of the text that is not subject to his "free play" strategy of endless critique.

To summarize, postmodernity captures a bewildering array of responses and reactions to the modern project of the Enlightenment to ground knowledge or "reason" as a timeless, universal construct, immune from the corrosive forces of history, the contingent, the particular, or the individual human subject. This enduring dream of modernity, however, should not be minimized or dismissed out of hand, and it has realized many achievements such as a concern for universal human rights, a concern for justice and equality, that deserve commendation and praise. The postmodern turn with its resistance to "totalizing" universal schemes, its affirmation of "differ(a)nce" and its commitment to the singular, particular, contextual nature of reality, can be seen as a complementary and necessary "correction" to the weaknesses of modernity. These weaknesses, as argued persuasively in my view by Nancey Murphy, are distorted, minimalistic notions of language, "foundationalism" in epistemology, and univocal understandings of scientific research.

What, then, are some implications of this admittedly selective assessment of postmodernity for the enterprise of theological education? According to Evangelical theologian, Stanley Grenz, a critical assessment of the limitations and assets of postmodernity poses some opportunities for re-shaping theological education, a perspective that is also shared by Catholic theologian, Thomas Guarino. Allow me to reprise some of these perspectives and then I will conclude with some implications of these reflections for those of us involved in the activity of accrediting theological education.

For Grenz, there are many "posts" in postmodern philosophical assessments that bear consideration by theologians, and that are promising for re-conceiving the theological task in response to the challenge of postmodernity.<sup>(4)</sup> Grenz is quite clear that Christian theology must stand firm against the postmodern rejection, tout court, of any "universal" or unifying center to reality. In other words, wholesale rejection of "metanarratives" or "universals" is not possible if Christian witness is to maintain its identity and credibility. Nonetheless, Grenz finds sympathy for the postmodern critiques of Enlightenment epistemology, especially its rejection of Enlightenment optimism about the capacity of human reason to deliver timeless and objective truth. In postmodern critiques, reason is capable of error, a theme that is coherent with Reformation doctrines concerning the prevalence of sin in human judgments. Moreover, Grenz finds a warrant for Christian endorsement of the critique of Enlightenment objectivity in the Augustinian tradition with its emphasis upon personal convictions and

historical location as crucial components of our ability to know truth. This conviction equally provides a warrant for suspecting the Enlightenment assumption about the goodness of knowledge, given our experience of splitting the atom and the prospect of the abuse of genetic science in our own times.

Grenz argues that a "post-individualistic" gospel can emerge from the postmodern critique of absolute autonomy. In particular, the emphasis on communitarian forms of discourse and action actually enhances the Christian conviction about the importance of the Church and its Trinitarian structure as a communion of saints in fellowship with the Trinity. A second positive outcome from postmodernity is the emergence of a "post-rationalistic" gospel, that is a gospel that is not "anti-intellectual" but rather a gospel that is open to "mystery" and a humble awareness of the inadequacy of human propositions, no matter how well-crafted, to capture the fullness of God's life and action in the world. Propositions or doctrines, then, are "second-order" discourse that depend upon the revealed, lived experience of God's ways with us. Catholic theologian, Cardinal Avery Dulles S.J., echoes a similar thought in his book, *The Survival of Dogma*, in which he points out that dogmas are "entry-points" into the mysteries of faith and are not exhaustive descriptions of the fullness of their meaning.(5) For Grenz, postmodern critique can be helpful in achieving a "post-dualistic" gospel, that is, one in which artificial dichotomies such as that between "body" and "soul" can be overcome with a deeper sense of holistic salvation that is inclusive and relational, that holds together not only the "intellectual-rational" features of our humanity, but also the "emotional-affective" aspects as well. Finally, Grenz favors a "post-noeticentric" gospel, committed to the pursuit of "wisdom" that integrates faith with intellectual insight rather than the Enlightenment ideal of reason alone as the means to achieving a just and equitable society.

From an Evangelical perspective, therefore, Grenz is critical of some aspects of the postmodern turn, but also finds within its critiques positive resources for re-casting and re-shaping the mission of the church to spread the gospel. Thomas Guarino, a Catholic theologian, has written insightfully in the same vein.(6) According to Guarino, while Catholic theology has learned a great deal from postmodernity, he shares with Grenz a need to depart from some of its more radical claims. To cite but one example from Guarino's richly and finely honed essay, postmodern concerns about the irreducibility of the "Other" are indeed valuable reminders that theological language can never encapsulate or fully capture divine mystery. The long apophatic tradition of theological discourse that emphasizes the "via negativa" is reflected in the work of the Cappadocian Fathers, especially Gregory Nazianzen, and in Aquinas. For Guarino, theologians who have embraced postmodern critique, for example Jean Luc-Marion in *God Beyond Being*, have underestimated the depth to which the classical tradition

was aware of the limitations of language to speak of the Ultimate Other, God. Against the postmodern suspicion of any enduring textual meaning, Guarino maintains that theological language must have some degree of intelligibility to "refer" to God in order to preserve identity and continuity in the tradition. In other words, a modest appropriation of postmodern insights can be of great assistance in maintaining a critical sense of the theological task, but wholesale rejection of the tradition is not a necessary conclusion flowing from postmodern critiques of the limitations of language and epistemology.

Given these appraisals of postmodernity, what are some implications for those of us involved in the process of assessment of theological education and accreditation of theological schools? In thinking about this question, I reviewed the process of redevelopment of the standards of accreditation in the ATS, and detected several implications for theological education. A critical assessment and retrieval of some postmodern themes can provide some interesting support for the following objectives of theological education that are woven into the redeveloped standards adopted by the ATS at its Biennium in 1996: (1) The cultivation of critical thinking skills captured in the concept of the "habitus" of theological reflection; (2) Integral learning, that is, holistic education that integrates intellectual mastery of the tradition with pastoral competence, and personal, spiritual capacities of the candidate, and (3) A public, dialogical set of capacities to engage the pluralistic, diverse, global context of theological education and ministry.

When the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada determined that the existing accrediting standards which had remained virtually unchanged for more than thirty years required updating and development, it wisely embarked on an association wide project to re-imagine and "re-vision" the standards. The "Quality of Theological Education" project began with a series of intentional conversations to explore the expectations of the Churches and seminaries with respect to the fundamental purposes of theological education. This undertaking was greatly assisted by timely monographs by thoughtful theologians who had been grappling with precisely the kinds of questions that I have previously outlined. Among this research, the books by David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* and Edward Farley's, *Theologia, The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, are particularly distinguished for their insight into the contemporary postmodern landscape and for their diagnosis and prognosis about the challenges facing theological education.(7) Kelsey's book highlighted the historical setting of theological education in the West, particularly the "Berlin" model of theology as "Wissenschaft" or scientific knowledge. This shift of theology from its traditional anchor in the Church to the academy as represented by "Berlin" has become in-



creasingly problematic and Kelsey argues that formation for ministry continues to be an essential context for understanding and "doing" theology. Farley's volume addresses the fragmentation in theological scholarship, and argues for a return to the classical Athenian ideal of wisdom or "paideia" as an integrating component of particular theological disciplines.

From these conversations and this research, the standards were re-written completely. Indeed, there are some interesting "postmodern" concerns reflected in the standards. There is clearly a recognition of enduring, but adaptive, normative patterns that are essential and non-negotiable, for example, theological scholarship understood as embracing teaching and learning as well as individual, faculty research, commitment to quality improvement by ongoing and demonstrated practices of evaluation. Essential resources such as faculty, information technologies, financial capacity, appropriate governance mechanisms, continue to be normative and are reflected by the use of the word "shall" to indicate that compliance is required. On the other hand, there is flexibility in recognizing that the standards can accommodate a complex and diverse constituency of schools, including Orthodox schools, Evangelical traditions, and Roman Catholics in addition to the founding institutions of ATS, the mainline Protestant seminaries and university-related divinity schools.

The standard on governance, for example, is intentionally capacious in its expectations, to accommodate a wide variety of patterns in ATS schools, including those schools who have strong confessional commitments, such as the community of Southern Baptist seminaries and the Roman Catholic schools, whose "nesting" within the larger governance structures of their respective churches, does not, therefore, entail an inability to fulfill their mission and purpose, as well as to secure appropriate academic freedom for their faculty members.

Furthermore, the standards are imbued with an ethos of quality improvement of theological education, and use aspirational language, captured by the word "should" to invite this ongoing reflection and assessment. There is a "web" like use of key themes that permeate the standards. These themes are planning and evaluation, freedom of inquiry, diversity, and globalization. That is, these attributes are "woven" throughout each of the degree standards so that they permeate the ethos of the standard, rather than being confined to a separate standard. The emphasis on diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, as well as globalization (itself a term subject to multiple interpretations), is not a nod to passing fads in postmodern culture, but stem from a theological conviction that respect for the "other," for the "stranger" in our midst, is a value embedded in the gospel and not merely a product of postmodern philosophy. The standards are normative, and they also encompass a recognition that there are many valid ways

of meeting the criteria for fulfilling the requirements for accreditation. The heightened awareness of diversity is a recognition, flowing from the "Quality in Accreditation" Project that tilled the soil for the newly re-developed standards, that the "modernity" stemming from the Enlightenment, is also the product of a particular, social, political, economic and intellectual location. For that reason, the intrinsic character and irreducible value of non-European cultures and religious traditions cannot be subsumed or interpreted exclusively through an Enlightenment, Euro-centric filter. Each culture and religious tradition has its distinctive character and integrity and must be viewed in its own particularity. Certainly, critical conversation and interaction with other perspectives, including the contributions of Enlightenment philosophy, are part of the mix, but a positive appropriation of the postmodern resistance to "totalizing" or "reductionistic" schemes, is a contribution that has found its way into the standards.

Reflected in the standards is an appreciation of the complexity of preparing ministerial candidates for the service of the church. Theological education includes, certainly, a commitment to providing students with a critical and deep immersion into the patterns of theological thinking captured in the "classics" of the tradition. But, this intellectual mastery also requires the development and acquisition of formational capacities of personal maturity, character, and pastoral wisdom, to meet the demands of ministry. Assessing this complex panoply of skills and capacities is the challenge facing all of us in theological education today. For this reason, the reinvigorated conversation about theological reflection as a "habitus" or lifelong skill of integrating theology rigorously into one's affective and relational ministerial skills, seeks to overcome the "fragmentation" of modernity as identified by Edward Farley.

In my view, postmodern thinkers who insist on resisting "totalizing" intellectual strategies that assume "universal" consensus remind us of the importance of keeping the conversation going, rather than stopping the "flux" of thinking. Heidegger's emphasis that Dasein, "Being," manifests itself by way of disclosing in time and history a dialectic of both "presence" and "absence," as well as Derrida's maddening word-plays, that he calls "clotural" readings of texts that "de-construct" our "closed" understandings of textual meaning, show us the complexity of reality and the difficulty of reaching "absolute" certainty, or certainty of any kind at all.

While I accept the admonition to epistemological humility, I do not think that complexity precludes our capacity to identify commonality and similarities in perspectives, including cross-cultural learning, nor as a Catholic moral theologian, do I despair of the possibility of arriving at "universalizable" ethical standards. It occurs to me that the postmodern resistance to any universal set of principles, or even the possibility of a metanarrative, is, paradoxically, a universal



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claim in its own right, dare I say, a postmodern metanarrative? I trust that I am not remiss in suggesting that being true to the postmodern spirit of critique indicates that this denial of universals or metanarratives deserves to be critiqued as well. The virtue of the tradition of "natural law" in Catholic moral theology has been its commitment to shared understandings of the moral life and the moral good that can be recognized by human beings "trans-culturally." The critique, of course, is that this desideratum has often been too optimistically conceived without recognizing the distortions that come from human limitations as well as human sinfulness. Like the Enlightenment ideal of reason, natural law philosophy has been subjected to the same postmodern critique, namely that in seeking a "birds-eye" view of reality, or as Thomas Nagel aptly states, "The View from Nowhere," both pure reason and natural law forget the particular locations from which they emerge, and the fact that every notion is, in my words, a "View from Somewhere."<sup>(8)</sup> It is interesting that those who are suspicious of natural law, nonetheless find other ways in which to address the real capacity of human beings to speak across particular locations and to arrive at moral consensus. Good illustrations of this process can be seen in the development of "narrative theology" and the emphasis on character and virtue as categories that name qualities that contribute identity and continuity to the moral enterprise. Otherwise, there is no possibility for any form of mutual understanding to occur.

A good example of the kind of tensions involved in a critical appropriation of postmodern insights can be seen in the work of Stanley Fish, dean of the school of liberal arts and sciences at the University of Chicago, Illinois. His op-ed piece about the 9/11 tragedy that appeared in the *New York Times*, "Condemnation Without Absolutes," while deeply sympathetic to postmodern suspicions of "universal" ethical constructs, nonetheless finds that there can be condemnation of horrors such as the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States without necessarily becoming mired in the quest for false absolutes. It is hard to imagine a set of circumstances in which the 9/11 tragedy could not be condemned. Whatever merit Dr. Fish may find in being able to "walk in the shoes" of the terrorists in order to better understand their motives, I do not share his reluctance concerning the possibility of real and authentic consensus on moral matters even to the extent of agreement that there are principles, such as the killing of the innocent, that are capable of being judged to be "virtually exceptionless" in their scope and range of meaning. That it may be difficult to arrive at such norms I readily grant. However, the difficulty of the task does not mean that it is impossible, postmodern dogma to this effect notwithstanding.

I have come to the conclusion that postmodern thinkers have not brought an end to philosophy or theology for that matter. The image that comes to mind is

familiar to those of us who travel by air. At the airport, we are accustomed to rigorous screening of our luggage. Postmodern thinkers serve as critical reviewers of our intellectual "luggage," including our theological traditions. In that capacity, they serve a useful function of detecting possible distortions or difficulties in the conceptual apparatus of our traditions, but their particular screens or filters are themselves subject to critical assessment. To the extent that good, critical questions identify "problems" in the luggage, they are helpful. But, good screening doesn't eliminate the luggage, nor does it prevent the luggage from reaching its destination. Embedded within these critiques or screens is the drive for totality, completion and wholeness that is never an achieved, once for all artifact, but rather an ongoing process of discovery.

As I read this literature, postmodern thinkers, far from dismantling the legacy of the philosophical tradition, are, for the most part, engaged in the normal activity of philosophy as a therapeutic exercise of exposing weaknesses and distortions in our understanding. Wittgenstein's examination of conundrums in the philosophy of language, including mind/body interactions, is an exercise in this kind of therapeutic appraisal designed to deliver us from "bewitchments to our intelligence" stemming from previous philosophical formulations. Theological education can derive some desirable insights from this kind of searching examination without, I think, losing its own soul in the process.

Theological education that equips students to think critically, to embrace diversity from within a stance that values the irreducible particularity and genius of the Christian tradition, to form ministers holistically with integrated skills of intellect, heart, and pastoral competence, and to engage the public square with a distinctive voice, is the crucial challenge facing us as accreditors of theological schools. To the extent that engagement with postmodern currents galvanizes and energizes our capacity to meet the needs of the church as it faces dialogue with the great world religions and the enormous challenges of a planet that is becoming more and not less connected, globally and across cultures, then it continues to provide a useful tool for theological education. I have indicated a few ways in which the standards of the ATS reflect some of these trends. However, the distinctive identity and mission of theological schools and the task of theological education are not threatened by the challenge of critical voices that emerge in every age, including our perceived "postmodern" age. Christians are ever subject to the admonition "to give a reason for the hope that lies within you." I intend that my remarks provide some assistance in providing resources for meeting the postmodern challenge today. At the very least, we certainly can stand our ground with postmodernity as we meet, perhaps, on a common footing, namely in the commitment so dear to postmodern thinkers, that we "stay in the flux" and "keep the conversation going."

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**NOTES**

1. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Sonnet," in her collected poems, *Huntsman, What Quarry?* (New York: Harper Brothers, c. 1933): 92.
2. Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion and Ethics*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).
3. Simon Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction, Derrida and Levinas*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).
4. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996): 161-174.
5. Avery Dulles, *Survival of Dogma: Faith, Authority and Dogma in a changing world*, (New York: Crossroads, 1982).
6. Thomas Guarino, "Postmodernity and five fundamental theological issues," *Theological Studies* 57 (December, 1996, Issue 4): 654ff.
7. David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993). Also by the same author, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).
8. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

**THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN A POSTMODERN ERA  
A RESPONSE**

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Against the background of what is known in Western philosophical and theological Institutions as 'post-modernity', and in recognition of the challenges which it presents, Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy in his Paper 'Theological Education in a Post-modern Era,' discusses its implications for theological educators who have the task of accrediting schools of theology, as well as of preparing ministers for fulfilling their mission in a post-modern world. Msgr. correctly points to the fact that such a discussion is not peculiar to our times, but has historical precedence in that the process of theological reflection has been a task of the Church, which from its inception has found it expedient to give a reason for the hope which it cherishes (cf1 Peter 3:5). The paper acknowledges that all genuine intellectual enquiry invites change, each new context posing its peculiar questions.

Our attention is drawn to the tension inherent in theological reflection viz (a) holding fast to the accrued wisdom of the Church (b) the willingness to risk an encounter with the 'stranger' race, culture, gender and intellectual tradition. However, one would wish that there had been in the paper an elaboration of these two points. For instance it would be interesting to know. (I) Whether the reference to 'Church' is to the Church universal, or to a particular Church in its cultural setting. (II) Similarly we may ask what is the nature of this "accrued wisdom" [1] Has there been fed into it the 'wisdom' deriving from Christianity's transcultural, trans-racial, trans-gender experience?

Modernity is defined in the Paper as being the product of the Enlightenment project of the eighteenth century. There is general agreement with postmodernists that the Enlightenment's claim, that the power of reason is able to overcome the forces of darkness, dissipated with the twentieth century configuration of almost total warfare, mass murder etc.

It is, I think, of some theological relevance that I pause to contemplate this reference to Enlightenment and Modernity. Coming as I do from that part of the world designated 'Third', it is legitimate for me to point out that for the majority of our people, both modernity and post-modernity have to all intents and purposes passed us by. It may be that an attempt to locate us will find us in a pre-Enlightenment world. There are of course varying interpretations of 'Enlightenment.' That under review derives from an early modern rendezvous with the classical Greek philosophical construct of the logos (reason) conceived of as permeating the universe, and accepted by Greeks and Graeco-philosophers as a kind of *raison d'être*. We know of course that there are other concepts of 'Enlightenment' for example the Buddhist's. Stress is here given to the human being's ability to achieve 'enlightenment' and thus to overcome the dysfunction inherent in human nature. We do so not by the exercise of reason so much as by following certain rules of conduct, which lead ultimately to the union of one's

atman (individual soul), with Brahman (world-soul). Or for that matter there is that Isaianic prophetic cry:

"Arise, Shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.....and the Gentiles shall come to thy light." (Isaiah 60: 1-3).

And what of the Fourth Evangelist's exultation that a light had come into the world which darkness could not put out. (John 1:1-6).

The point is that in a 'post-modern' era, theologians in a theological institution must bring critical analysis to bear upon every aspect of the tradition handed down. Apparently, it is such critical analysis that has produced the post-modernist critique of modernity. They have exposed the flaws inherent in the Greek concept of 'wisdom' and 'enlightenment' and have thus shattered Enlightenment's confidence. However, Enlightenment's misjudgement was shattered long before the twentieth century's global conflicts, the splitting of the atom, and genetic engineering, and before the terrorism at the beginning of the twenty-first century took place. Indeed, the forces of darkness were very strong in the Ages that gave rise to Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Conquistadores-but the theological enterprise then could be used to justify, legalize, and implement the most intense force of darkness, which descended upon millions of Africans slaves in diasporan bondage.

Msgr. McCarthy applies to theological education Nancy Murphy's analysis of critical issues which impact philosophy eg. language, knowledge, science. We will have a brief look at language and knowledge.

Language--Wittgenstein's challenge that language users cultivate the communication skills necessary for a variety of contexts, and Murphy's assessment that such a reconceptualization would cater to the inclusion of ethical and religious understandings, is welcomed. Such religious understanding may lead to the demystification and de-sacralization of theological discourse, rendering it accessible to the pew. Such a reconceptualization would hopefully affirm theological freedom to interface with the linguistic expressions of our lived experience, as we begin to treat with theological seriousness indigenous thought-forms.

Knowledge--(epistemology) For too long, the Cartesian definition has been dominant in Western theories of knowledge, and the dependency syndrome that characterizes so much of our theological experience in much of the rest of the world has resulted in the risk of this interpretation of knowledge dominating our theological education. Reality is indeed complex, and the Cartesian mathematical approach is light-years away from the dominant Caribbean world-view. There is virtue in the observation made in the Paper that "all our knowing is a 'partial' purchase on the complexity of reality". Therefore, no 'knowledge' ought to be dismissed as being incongruous with theological reflection.

The limitations of Post-modernity as a guide to theological education-It is pointed out in the Paper, that modernity succeeded in realizing such social benefits as universal human rights, concern for justice, and equality - this in spite of post-modernity's critique of modernity's elevation of reason as a universal construct. One wonders however whether these benefits are the products of reason per se. Surely not logos (reason), but *sum pathos* (deep feeling) led women in the nineteen-eighties to camp at Greenham Common in Britain, to march on the streets of Argentina in protest against the disappearance of their children, and led a father with a lost son, in a parable told by Jesus, to keep looking out for him. Yet, Thomas Guarino (Catholic) and Stanley Grenz (Evangelical) are correct in pointing to the need for a critical assessment of the limitations as well as the assets of post-modernity, in our utilization of its findings for the furtherance of theological education. Grenz' proposition of a post-individualistic, post-dualistic and post-noetricentric Gospel, has much to commend it. The proclamation of such a Gospel would emphasize its communal character as opposed to absolute autonomy, would erase dichotomies such as that between body and soul, would not be anti-intellectual, would be sensitive to divine mystery, and would integrate faith with intellectual insight. At the same time it is admitted that universals cannot be dismissed entirely, if Christian witness is to maintain its identity and credibility. A 'unifying centre to reality' is recommended in opposition to what was termed the 'centreless pluralism of post-modernity'. This however raises the question as to what effect such a 'unifying centre' would have on the autonomy of theology in its local context.

Accreditation - Msgr. McCarthy, representing as he does the primary North American theological education accrediting agency, is concerned about the implications of post-modern thought for those responsible for the assessment of theological education and the accreditation of theological colleges. He refers us to the standards adopted at the ATS in 1996 viz the cultivation of critical thinking, a holistic education that integrates intellectual mastery of the tradition with pastoral competence, and the ability to engage dialogically 'the pluralistic, diverse, global context of theological education and ministry.'

Msgr. McCarthy identifies the essential and non negotiable normative patterns of theological education eg. theological scholarship embracing teaching and learning, individual faculty research, on-going practices of evaluation etc. He underscores such themes as freedom of inquiry, diversity, and globalization. He acknowledges that there are diverse and valid ways of 'meeting the criteria and fulfilling the requirements for accreditation,' and professes respect for 'the intrinsic character and irreducible value of non-European cultures and religious traditions.' He is aware that theological education is in the business of preparing ministerial candidates for the service of the Church of our time.



It would have been helpful had he given examples of the "universalizable ethical standards" which would be used as general accreditation tools, as well as indicated the extent to which he is prepared to allow for authentic diversity. At WOCATI 1996 consideration was given to the idea that we should acknowledge the diversity of the system we deal with instead of trying to create a synthesis. Dr. Burchell Taylor, Caribbean theologian, at a Faith and Order Symposium held in Kingston, Jamaica in 1991, reminded those gathered that the influence of theological imperialism has been as strong as other forms in our time. What then is the future of the authenticity and credibility of theological education in the Caribbean in a post-modern globalized world? Sister Robyn Reynolds, in her response to Dr. Petros Vassiliades' Paper on Theological Scholarship and Research at that same WOCATI Conference 1996, said that conforming to Western Standards and theological approaches stifles contextualization within this context. To what does Msgr. refer when he suggests that theological education equip students "to think critically, to embrace diversity from within a stance that values the irreducible particularity and genius of the Christian Tradition?" [emphasis mine]

In closing may I call attention to what I consider to be critical issues which challenge theological education in the Caribbean in a 'post-modern' era, and which I had hoped would have been given some mention by Msgr. McCarthy.

Pluralism. What objectives do we seek as Christian theologians to realize in our Inter-Faith dialogue? Christianity has not got a good historical track record for dealing with the violence inherent in the human psyche. How shall our theological education train the Servants of the Lord for the clash of religious cultures in, a post-modern era? How can globalism support and enhance theological education in the particularity of its context.

Classical Theology is not sacrosanct. It really should not be considered in a post-modern era, the yardstick by which other theologies are measured. Our critical lens need to be focused on Creeds, doctrines, decrees and the ideologies of our pet theological icons, in a post-modern era.

Tradition. In 1988, leaders of the Evangelical Church in Latin America met at Medellin in Columbia to reflect on theology from an evangelical and biblical perspective. Amongst the things said was this: "in order to achieve the contextualization that does justice to the biblical texts and at the same time answer adequately the questions raised by Liberation Theologians, two factors are indispensable - serious exegetical study of the Text itself and a thorough knowledge of our socio-cultural context." [2] This concern arises from the conviction of these theologians that the biblical text should take precedence over tradition. It is of some interest that Liberation Theology was not mentioned in this Paper. Surely it has a place in theological education in a post-modern era.



The Curriculum. A thorough transformation is required in a post-modern era. The content of every subject studied should come under scrutiny. The Bible department must not be allowed to become obsolete or marginalized. Biblical languages should be a requirement for theological education in a post-modern era. Church History needs to be re-visited and made to include events that have not been given recognition, or proper evaluation.

Anthropology. The question of identity in terms of race, colour, sex, class, is a burning issue in some Caribbean areas. Who am I in my essential being? Who do others say that I am? Has Western Theology yet dealt with this human predicament in its particularity? Has Hegel's thesis yet been rebutted? [3]

Many years ago a gentleman whom I designated my philosopher said to me: "Civilization is at the crossroads and Christianity must lead it in the right direction." It would appear that in our post-modern era, Christianity itself is at the crossroads. May our discussions and deliberations lead to a reformation in our theological education that will enable it to lead the Christianity of our post-modern era in the right direction.

## NOTES

1. Cf. reference to the 'departure from the substance of the Christian deposit of faith' p. 1
2. Looking at the Theology of Liberation Together. Ed. Revd. Burchell Taylor (Kingston. Jamaica 1991)
3. Georg W. F. Hegel: The Philosophy of History (Dover Publications Inc., New York 1956).

**MISSION AND SOCIAL DIMENSION  
OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

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## INTRODUCTION

It is quite a challenge to attempt to get into the subject as proposed in this title. In my situation, coming from one of the corners of the world, a presentation on this wide issue certainly involves many obvious limitations. Therefore one of the standpoints of this contribution has to connect with our own experience and understanding, in and from Latin America, which may run the risk of not being accurate in its approach.

A personal word: it is interesting how oneself can be a sort of combination of social dimensions of Christian theological education. I was raised in a Christian home in a context of extreme poverty, in southern Chile. My grandparents and parents came from the coal mining zone in the town of Lota, near the city of Concepcion, a place that is regarded as the having the poorest of the poverty in our country. What was exploitation and worker abuse for decades in the last century in that town, my non-Christian grandfather used to transform for us into great storytelling about life, with much innocence and little resentment. When, after 50 years of a working life, my grandfather finally applied for retirement, he, right there, at the Company office was told that he had never had records of monthly retirement payments at all, despite the fact that he was actually charged for it in his monthly wages his entire working life. So, without legal defense, too poor to defy the Company, he finally was denied his right to retirement. He died twenty years later without justice. In this hard context of human injustice the preaching of the Gospel extended quickly in this geographical area. Among the newly converted people were my 20 year old parents who later became church and community leaders. Standing from Christian faith, they served their people their whole life, and taught their children, myself in the middle of five, the love of God and the hope of the Kingdom. It happens that Maria, my mother, was the second graduate of the Women's Theological Institute in 1945. No doubt that theological, church and family education played a huge role in transforming our family life and hope. We, as their five children, received university and Christian education which formed us in a combination of church piety and social service. Life continues on and now our own children are growing in this environment of Christian faith and social commitment.

In order to clarify words, allow me to refer to the concept of 'social dimensions' as areas involved in all fields and disciplines where human realities and needs are expressed. This concept goes beyond the traditional connotation of Third World poverty as stigmatized. Poverty is one of those polysemic words that include many meanings and touch different areas such as economic, educational, social, emotional, spiritual and so on, that an explanation of its use is needed. Certainly there is poverty in the so-called Third World, as well as in what is called First World. There is neediness in the life of an upper class family from

an industrialized country where abuse and individualism destroy quality of life everyday. There is also deprivation for a teenage generation of a country where educational options are few. There is also desperate poverty in an extreme where we find the infamous shame of starvation in so many places in this present world.

Hopeless human needs in the world touch deeply lives of those whose sensibility matters more than indifference. Social injustice, war, extreme poverty, infirmities, corruption, unemployment, malnutrition, drug and alcohol abuse, drug dealers, violation of human right and dignity of the people, prostitution, pollution and ecological disaster, illiteracy, denial of education, women abuse, AIDS, to name only some needs.

Human needs are not the only concern of social involvement. There are also fields of knowledge, culture and human relationship that are part of this challenge too. I mean that social impact also has to do with the whole influence of our faith in philosophy, anthropology, politics or art, as well as communications, aesthetics, or sociological research. One example of this form of impact is the translation of the Bible into languages that exist without a grammar, where the mere translation has helped to keep the language stronger and more alive.

Many of us serving in Theological Education ask whether our theology, mission, curriculum, methodology, programs and mentoring are well connected with the needs of the real world. Do our institutions fulfill their mission still in a social strike,[1] or focus generational training into an integral concept of our Christian mission? Are our graduate students prepared enough to face these never ending challenges in our social contexts?

## **I. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH'S MISSION**

Theological education is placed in the mission of the Christian church, and church meaning the whole body of believers in Christ. Then, one of the key issues to touch, first of all, is what the mission of the Christian church is in the present world. Once we have cleared our bases on mission, we can afterward approach social dimensions of theological education more adequately.

It is interesting to contrast the heavy volumes of theology of the early decades of the past Century in which mission of the Church was not an issue at all. One example is the reformed 'Systematic theology' authored by L. Berkhof, first published in 1938, which does not refer to the mission of the Church in any way, and only mentions in one short paragraph, out of a one thousand page book, that preaching is the form of 'training the Church to be the mother of all believers'. One can see the contrast if comparing this to the massive amount of books that have been written in the last two decades about the mission of the Church.

Beginning in the early 20th Century, reformed theologian J. Gresham Machen, deceased in 1937, wrote in 1912: 'Christianity has to saturate not only all nations, but also all human thinking. It cannot feel indifference before any subject of human importance. The Kingdom of God has to be promoted, nor only to bring every human being for Christ, but also to win the human being as a whole.'[2] In this writing Dr. Machen criticizes theological faculties because they have become mere centers of religious emotions, instead of places where students are truly educated to develop the deep conviction of the mature ones, not the thoughtless faith of childhood, in a world that urges the Christian church to present the complete and true Gospel of Jesus Christ. He affirms that the Church is dying for lack of thoughtfulness, and not for excess of it; it is fading because she, the Church, is not impacting all aspects of social reality with the power of God, and also because it is not training its leaders to produce true transformation in society. There is a great need to find great leaders to fulfill the mission of the Church to impact our world. Machen says: 'The hope of finding such men and women is the only real hope in the life of any theological institution.'[3]

Spanish writer Dr. José Grau wrote in 1972 a one-sentence definition of what mission is. He said: 'Mission is to deliver the whole Gospel, to the whole human person, through the whole Church, to whole world.'

This view of the Christian mission, focusing in all areas of culture, soon became strong in Church statements, denominational orientations, conferences and congresses of the past Century. One of those was the Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization.

Dr. Samuel Escobar, a Peruvian missiologist went up to the platform of Lausanne Congress in 1974 with these his first words:

'Let us try to imagine that the whole world population is concentrated in a town of one hundred inhabitants. In this town 67 people out of the 100 are poor. The other 33 enjoy different degrees of well being. From this population, only seven are North American. The other 93 see how the North Americans spend 50% of all money, eat one seventh of all food and use one half of all bathrooms. These seven have ten times medical attention than the rest. According the time passes, these seven get richer, and the 93 poorer. [4]

This author states that Christians have had two traditional attitudes when confronted by social challenges in society; one is to support uncritically the establishment of western nations and the second is a spiritualized indifference. On the contrary, the true mission of the Christian church is 'to serve the needy people not as a matter of preference, nor something we do because we want. The church has to serve the world because service is a sign of the new life in the Gospel of Christ.' [HYPERLINK "http://www.wocati.org/fonseca.html"](http://www.wocati.org/fonseca.html) \l "anchor655253" 5

Escobar introduces three situations in the world as a way to identify challenges for the Christian church in being faithful to God's call. The first situation is related to societies where Christians are a small minority, in which faithfulness means to live the whole Gospel with integrity to signalize the difference with the common life style of the people. A second situation is presented in societies where Christianity has a long tradition of social influence, where it appears that the church has been much influenced by worldly living, instead of the goal of the Gospel that is the church transforming society. The challenge for Christians living in this sort of context seems very much associated with going back to their Christian roots in order to be faithful disciples of Christ. A third situation would be those contexts where anti-Christianism is a dominant power, where an ideology or religion is official. We can see this milieu in totalitarian, violent or fundamentalist regimes in the world today. In these places Christians have to suffer persecution to continue the communication of the Good News and to be creative in ways to survive in community. The call of God for Christians living in these so different conditions is always the same: to keep faithful to Him, and to do the mission.

The whole Lausanne Congress was shaped by this concept. The Lausanne Covenant and many other conferences resulting from this congress gave worldwide affirmation that mission and evangelization are not separated, and that certainly Christian mission includes social transformation.[6]

In 1979 Puerto Rican missiologist Dr. Orlando Costas, who died late in 1987, wrote 'The integrity of Mission' [7]. In this book Costas addressed what is mission and its implications. He states that mission is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, in obedient discipleship, that mobilizes the believers with sacrificial commitment towards an integral growth that helps to liberate people in order to live Christianity in celebration until consummation of times arrive. For growing with integrity in Church life he defines three dimensions: width (statistical), depth (maturity), and height (impact). Our Christian ministries need to put strong accent in this tri-dimensional growth. So, the mission of the Church should stress an expansion in numbers, as well as in profundity of Christian life, and also in the size of the influence its presence brings to the community where the ministry is fulfilled.

Dr. René Padilla, an Ecuadorian-Argentinean theologian, wrote in 1986 in his famous 'Misión integral' that 'Christian mission is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of all, and through whose work human beings are liberated both from guilt and from the power of sin, and are thus integrated to the purpose of God of placing all things under Christ's authority.[8] HYPERLINK "<http://www.wocati.org/fonseca.html>" \l "anchor676774" This author stresses that mission and evangelization go hand to hand, involving the

whole call to repentance. This message of repentance is key to point to social dimensions of the Christian faith. He says that repentance is much more than merely a private and individual issue, it concerns the total reorientation of life in the world, in the midst of humankind, including personal, communitarian and even structural changes as a result of true repentance. Evangelization and mission cannot be the supplying of purely spiritual benefits obtained for us through Jesus with results of social quietism. The true Christian mission take repentance seriously because it takes the sin in the world seriously. Not to take women and men out of the world, but exactly the contrary, to place them in the world with a living message of hope and transformation. When Padilla is asked about the huge social challenges in our world and what the Christian church can do, he answers that 'the church as the community of disciples is not called to solve all social upheaval, but to be faithful to God with what she has. The Church has to be a reconciliation community breaking all barriers that fragment the world; has to be a fellowship of personal authenticity in which all people can be healed and accepted; and also has to be a society of giving and service. Our greatest need is to live a more biblical Gospel and to build a more biblical church' [9]

Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana, or Latin American Theological Fraternity, FTL, organized in 1969, 1979, 1992 and 2000 the four Latin American congresses on Evangelization, called CLADE. They have been remarkably insightful and educational for professor, pastors and leaders, women and men, in the generational formation of people committed to the Kingdom of God in mission and service to the world with an integral base. The Protestant and Evangelical world in Latin America have no doubt been shaped by the strong influence of FTL over these three last decades. So, in a way, one cannot say that Lausanne or other movements influenced FTL, rather than the opposite, in its theology of mission.

In Roman Catholicism, the impact of liberation theology as a strong movement of return to biblical foundations, based on communitarian way of expressing the Gospel (base-communities) and service together with prophetic *kerugma* at the evil of the times, cannot be forgotten. Many have seen this movement as a natural result of Vatican II, however it has been under heavy criticism on the side of the more traditional hierarchy. Besides the preferential option for the poor, the Roman Catholic Church has shown changes in liturgy, pastoral action, and development that comprise nowadays very much the more missional side of this Church.

## **II. SOCIAL CHALLENGES FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

Theological education cannot be seen just as an institution, but as a process that takes place in many different avenues, not only in Faculties or seminaries.



As someone has put it: theological education begins at home, it deepens in church, it is articulated in an institution and it is proved in community. Then, our first concern should be how could we interconnect these places where we educate in order to fulfill our whole formational task.

It is not my intention to list social fields and needs where T.E. should play a significant role. Actually, in all fields and needs this role should be well performed. Perhaps a sound contribution would be the presentation of few principles to keep in mind when we see the challenges of the social agenda for T.E. To briefly explain these principles, let me say that T.E. should be mission centered, evangelical and ecumenical, and resistant and proactive.

### **1. Mission centered**

If T.E. is understood as a holistic process, where the integral mission of the Church is crucial, then it should include family, church, institution and community, as levels in which this process is accomplished. T.E. must never be apart from these levels. An institutionalized instruction that does not matter for the family or church background of the students, will only teach courses without forming people. Dr. René Padilla wrote that 'we could avoid much trouble if the seminarie could focus its task taking into account that T.E. exists because of the Church and as her servant. T.E. is no more than a tool to fulfill the goals of the Church. When this is not clear, T.E. misses its purpose, and it constitutes itself just as a training for mere ecclesial officers.'<sup>[10]</sup> It is interesting to note that in our context those theological institutions that with the years have become centers of education apart from their original churches or denominations, have soon disappeared.

If the mission of the Church is basic foundation for T.E. so social fields of knowledge and human needs are certainly part of it. As in Jesus' life, our challenges are right here, around us, in our communities. We ought to face social challenges in two ways: influence and service. We must influence all fields of social knowledge with Christian cosmovision. This is one social dimension of T.E. We also have to serve in every area of social distress in the present world. This is another dimension of T.E.

If T.E. is built in the tract of mission, the whole theological institution serves in missions, and students, personnel and faculty are involved in it. A professor can teach in the classroom what is then neglected in life, as well as any other member of a theological institution. Therefore, the best way to teach involvement in social aspects of culture and society, to do humanitarian service or to make a contribution to influence any social field, is to get involved together with the students. Certainly, students do not judge only lectures at the classroom, but also family, church and communitarian commitment of faculty.



## **2. Evangelical and ecumenical**

In this world of pluralism and secularism, our T.E. process should be strongly oriented towards being radically evangelical and firmly ecumenical. By evangelical we mean faithful to the Evangel, the Gospel of Christ. Present pluralism is a test to challenge our openness to diversity in our evermore heterogeneous world. Though for many pluralism is interpreted to mean the blocking of all forms of proclamation, we should stress faithfulness in preaching the Gospel with respect for others and dignity for oneself.

By ecumenical we mean that our ministry has in perspective the whole catholic Church,[11] with all her gifts and potential in the world. Ecumenical ministry is seen here in the better sense of inclusiveness of all true believers in Christ. A process of T.E. that rejects other traditions, serves behind closed doors and in isolation from other Christians is condemned to be unsuccessful. This certainly means we must be cooperative in ministry, in the spirit of oneness and unity in Christ. So many programs in our institutions as well as in church can express this spirit of cooperation.

## **3. Resistant and proactive**

T.E. also has to take seriously the challenges of the present globalized world. Many Christians are accepting globalization enthusiastically without any sort of critical spirit. Francois Houtart s.j. has written that Christianity has to commit its future into the building of new resistances against globalization, or worldlization of social capitalist relationships. He maintains that it is necessary to create a culture of resistance among all sectors of society with consciousness of the huge injustices globalization establishes in our societies.[12] Sharing the same concerns, Dr. Rene Padilla warns about the dangers of being naive to the consequences of the internationalization of the western culture, as a massive adoption of values of a way of life characterized by individualism, hedonism, materialism and consumerism. These dangers are in turning our living faith into free market rules, making a new gospel (with small letter) as a consumer product and the Christian faith as a private religious experience. [13]

Proactiveness should also be part how we see the social dimensions of T.E. The understanding of being proactive goes through dynamic initiatives that answer realities and needs surrounding the process. Normally our institutions are known as guardians of tradition. However, in this changing and always dynamic world we should also be ready to openness to new focuses, renewing of institutional elements of T.E. and moreover all sort of creativity in order to be faithful to our role as theological educators. Being proactive necessarily demands an attitude of readiness to transformation since everything in T.E. is in permanent movement. Both resistance and proactiveness will show the true health in doing our T.E. ministry.

## CONCLUSION

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said there are two ways that Christians elude social responsibility: one is to evade the world, changing the Gospel into a content of spiritualism and religious life strange to the realities of the world. The other way is to secularize our ministry, 'with a disposition to cultivate the rights of God on the earth, but at the same time fleeing from a sound relationship with Him'.

Theological education is a process that is being accomplished in the context of the whole mission of the Christian church, which unavoidably includes social realities and human needs.

An experience to finish these words: a government of a Latin American country asked a team of professionals including some theological education professors to join a consultant commission to shape the national law against all types of discrimination. There were two Evangelical seminaries involved, one of them argued that it was much too busy with internal activities and quit the membership in the commission. The other remained faithful until the end of that process, including a leading participation of one professor in the final national program to limit discrimination. One institution gained credibility and respect, the other is still busy with domestic calendars.

## NOTES

1. C. Lalive D'Apinay, *El Refugio de las Masas*, 1968, an study of the Pentecostal behavior that brought this idea of 'social strike' as rejection of social involvement of the Christian church.
2. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and culture*, Madrid: FELIRE, 1980. Translated by Francis Schaeffer
3. *Ibid*, page 119.
4. Samuel Escobar, *Evangelization and human search for justice*, Lausanne Conference for World Evangelization, July 1974. Escobar is quoting Schipper and Smedes, *Who in the world*, Eerdmans, 1972. Printed in Spanish as '*Evangelio y realidad social*', Lima, Per : Editorial Presencia, page 79.
5. *Ibid*, page 88.
6. 'We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary ex-

pressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead! Lausanne Covenant

7. Costas, Orlando, *The integrity of mission*, Miami: CELEP, 1979, 160 pages.
8. Padilla, René, *Misión integral*, Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 1986, page 10.
9. Padilla, *Ibid.* page 44.
10. René Padilla, *Discipulado y misión*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 1997, pag.113. Translation is mine.
11. Dr Justo Gonzalez has written the recent book 'La historia tambien tiene su historia', or 'History has also its story', published by our Theological association ASIT, in which he goes back to the true concept of 'catholic' meaning the inclusiveness of all parts. From the Greek 'kata olos' 'according to all'. He states that 'catholic' may be used in two meanings: one is universal, that is one because it extends to all parts with the same, thus catholic points to uniformity; second, is universal because includes all views of the different parts, so catholic in this sense focus in inclusion and acceptance of diversity. So, for catholic we better mean this second connotation.
12. Francois Houtart, *Globalization of the resistance, towards a globalized civil society*, paper presented at the World Alternative Forum, University of Louvain, Belgium, March 2001. See also: *Market and religion*, ADEI: San José, Costa Rica, 2001, 192 pages.
13. Rene Padilla, *Discipulado y misión*, page 220.

**CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER FAITHS:  
EMERGING THEOLOGICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL  
DISCUSSIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF ASIAN PLURALITY**

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### **Asia's Reality of Plurality**

The world in which we live today is pluralistic in every aspect. Asia stands out as a distinct and unique manifestation of pluralism. If we look at the Asian spectrum, Asia is a colourful mosaic of Religions, Cultures, Languages, Ethnicities, Ideologies, Philosophies, Races, Tribes etc., Hence, Plurality is one of Asia's richest resources. It is the very nature of reality. One has to realize that plurality is something given and that he or she must find creative ways to deal with it and live within that context. However, this plurality very often leads to rivalries and enmities. They turn out to be competitive with one another thus destroying the true design of human relations. Therefore, plurality tends to be a challenging one.

According to Raimundo Pannikar, Pluralism is today a human existential problem, which raises acute questions about how we are going to live our lives in the midst of so many options. Pluralism is no longer just the old school book question about the One-and-the-Many; it has become the concrete day-to-day dilemma occasioned by the encounter of mutually incompatible worldviews and philosophies. Today we face pluralism as the very practical question of planetary co-existence.[1]

Pannikar makes it very clear that we have to deal with the reality of pluralism. The problem with pluralism arises when one particular component/aspect of plurality tries to dominate society by denying the legitimacy of others as irrelevant.

### **Mission Trends in Asia**

In a book published by the World Council of Churches, *Not Without My Neighbor: Issues in Interfaith Dialogue*,[2] its author Dr Wesley Ariarajah offers a profound introduction to the key issues that arise when the churches enter into conversation with the People of Other Faiths.

The Church, it is said, does not justify the existence of mission. Rather, the mission of God (*missio Dei*) justifies the existence of the church, which is called to participate in the movement of God's turning toward God's People. As such, the mission of the church takes a fresh leap forward. Any God-Talk that claims to be authentically Asian must pay attention to the complexities of the Asian situation where we are called to live, proclaim and celebrate our faith. Theologizing can never be done in a vacuum. It has to be always done in relation to the actual life-situation. Therefore, the mission of the church, while it is basically *missio Dei*, it has to be necessarily Mission in Context.

An important fact of the Asian Continent is that it is a place where the Christians are a minority and the majority belongs to either diverse faiths or secular ideologies. Any mission activity cannot be insensitive to the tremendous con-

tribution the Other Faiths have made and are still making to the shaping of Asian culture. We have come to a point where we cannot theologize apart from making relevant connections with the Religions among which we are placed. While it is encouraging that a number of churches are beginning to take note of this important fact, many still continue to focus purely on numerical growth of the church thus ignoring the harmony of Asian society.

As Pannikar says the problem of pluralism is the problem of the other. Quite often we are made to think that the 'Other' can intimidate or threaten us. The very presence of the 'Other' calls us for self-understanding of who we are or what we are! The question is whether, the churches are not perhaps, able to overcome their fear of the 'Other's strangeness.' The churches are called to develop a genuine sensitivity, an understanding and a liking for 'diversity,' rather than complaining about them. It is quite pertinence to quote what the French philosopher Simone Weil has said in her Diaries, "The opposite must be also true." [3] What Simone Weil tried to say was that how a flat, one-dimensional way of thinking could miss the reality of life and hence, the truth! We have to learn to appreciate 'The otherness of the other.' Mission is possible only when we are able to delight in the distinctiveness of the other.

Historically speaking, the mission activities of Christians, especially of the early missionaries to many parts of Asia were comprised of 'over against' attitudes. The basic problem has to do with the way the 'imperative to proclaim the Gospel' has been understood in the context of colonialism, where there had been a distortion of power relations. Several assumptions made about Other Faiths and Cultures have affected the way the imperative was interpreted. For example, the assumptions such as, that the other faith traditions are devoid of revelatory impulses; that they were in error; that they need to be replaced by the Christian tradition; that there is no continuity between them and the Gospel message etc., But, when we try to develop paradigms 'in relation to the other,' we also begin to learn something quite different and new. Openness and mutual learning are solicited. What Wilfred Cantwell Smith said is noteworthy:

We have something to learn from them. By knowing other cultures, we can come to know our culture better, and can make it better we recognize that the we/they business is today outgrown; we are all in this together, and can learn from each other. "We" now means "us human beings" in our diversity and yet in our overriding humanity, even community. We are all heirs now of many cultures, and we face the future together: our common future, multi-cultural. [4]

However, it has to be admitted that conflicts do occur at a point when the 'Other' appears to be so different and mutually exclusive. The reason is that differences are seen as threatening realities. In a pluralistic world, one has to be enlightened about the position other than his or her own. This ambiguity will be

overcome when one understands difference as 'otherness.'

What is envisaged is that of a 'Spatial Perspective,' where space permits or allows different standpoints to be one comprehensive whole in which each and everyone has its and his/her place. Here, one complements the other in the spirit of koinonia. This is the real spirit of 'Dialogue.' It is an attempt to help/understand/accept 'the other' in its/his/her 'otherness.' This process (dialogue) will make people 'at home' with 'plurality' and help develop an appreciation for 'diversity.' In other words, dialogue is basically, building community of conversation of heart and mind. In this light what Raimundo Pannikar had said is worth observing.

Pluralism means existential acceptance of the other as the other i.e., without being able to understand or co-opt him. Pluralism is humble, only knows that I or we may not possess the whole truth and does not pass judgement as to whether the other may also be right or, as it may turn out, wrong.[5]

#### Dialogue - Difficulties and Possibilities

Dr Ariarajah deals with "Five Movements" through which the dialogue concern has gone in the recent past, especially in the Ecumenical Circles. These may be summed up as the concept of dialogue itself, the search for 'community' with neighbours of other faiths, adequate foundations for that new relationship, the pastoral issues that need attention in this context and the impact of the rising secular, technological and global culture on all the religions and religious life. He says that these five phases/dimensions are, in fact, inter-related, the first of them being the concept of dialogue itself.[6]

Pluralism calls us to a ministry of 'connectedness.' Hence, it is important to deal with the issues that connect us with one another. Dialogue, I believe, does this great contribution of connecting people with one another in a caring and sharing fellowship. However, right from the beginning, people have expressed "fears" in getting involved in dialogue. They feared that dialogue with people of Other Faiths might lead to a betrayal of Christian mission. Three fundamental reasons have been given as to why dialogue or dialogical relationships with People of Other Faiths is not valid or advisable. Dr Ariarajah calls these as "the three classical fears of the missionary movement." They are, the fear of compromising the uniqueness of Christ; the fear of losing the 'urgency of world mission'; and the fear of acknowledging the 'salvific significance in the religious life of our neighbors'.[7]

When analyzing the hesitation and reluctance of those who have negative views of dialogue, Stanley J. Samartha identifies two obvious reasons. One is the fear of syncretism and the other is the assumption that that any recognition of the presence of God or Christ or the Spirit in the lives of other faiths leads to the danger of relativism.[8] While Hendrik Kraemer called syncretism as "ille-



gitimate mingling of different religious elements",[9] Samartha described it as "an uncritical mixture of elements from different religions without a center or integrating principle." [10] It is quite telling that the proponents of this view put forward certain basic affirmations they are supposed to make always, of which at least three can be easily identified viz., the mandate given in the 'Great Commission' as recorded in Matthew 28; the belief that Christ is the 'only way' to salvation and the jubilant confidence that 'every knee would bow and every tongue confess' that Jesus Christ is Lord.

If one goes into the analysis of Kraemer's reaction to dialogue not only through his writing but also what he vehemently argued at the International Missionary Council (IMC) at Tambaram, India in 1938, it may be evident that he was, in fact, reacting to what had already been said in the previous International Missionary Council at Jerusalem in 1928. The latter Council attempted to focus on the spiritual values of other religious traditions. It had called for a joint struggle of Christians and other religions against secularism. Kraemer argued that 'the point of contact' could have to do only with the relationship between the Christian and other person, but not with other religions. Kraemer made a distinction between the monistic, naturalistic religions of self-realization and the prophetic religions of revelation. For him syncretism belongs to the first category. He firmly believed that prophetic religion of biblical realism does not show syncretistic and relativist trend. Therefore, he wrote: "The prophetic religion of biblical realism could not be mingled with naturalist and monistic religion." [11]

Kraemer was of the strong opinion that Christian religion is based primarily on revelation. He believed that God has revealed the Way and the Life and the Truth in Jesus Christ and wills that this should be known through the entire world. He said: "What is truth in religion is more urgent and more obscure than ever. This question is particularly urgent for Christianity, because it claims as its source and basis a divine revelation which at the same time is claimed to be the standard or reference for all truth and all religion" [12]

If we are ever to know what true and divinely willed religion is, we can do this only through God's revelation in Jesus Christ and through nothing else. [13]

We have to frankly admit that the exclusivist claims come chiefly from the Protestant circle. Even the prominent theologians like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Emil Brunner were not exceptional. Emil Brunner's comment about other religions is,

Jesus Christ is both the Fulfillment of all religions and the Judgement of all religions. As the Fulfller, He is the Truth, which these religions seek in vain. There is no phenomenon in the history of religion that does not point towards Him He is also the Judgement of all religions. Viewed in this light, all religious systems appear untrue, unbelieving and indeed godless. [14]



Paul Tillich found it possible to neglect other religions. Karl Barth held the view that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that is attested in Holy Scripture is the only guiding principle to which every theological concern is subject. It is quite interesting to note the witty but profound comment made by Bishop Sabapathy Kulandran, Bishop of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of India in Sri Lanka who himself was a participant at the World Mission Conference in Tambaram along with people like Kraemer in reaction to Karl Barth's dismissal of non-Christian religions.

D.T. Niles recalled that in his first meeting with Karl Barth in 1935, Barth said: 'Other religions are just unbelief.' Niles asked: 'How many Hindus, Dr Barth, have you met?' Barth answered: 'No one.' Niles said: 'How then do you know that Hinduism is unbelief?' Barth replied: 'A priori.' Niles concluded: 'I simply shook my head and smiled.' [15]

These show the exclusivistic claims in the Protestant Tradition. The International Congress on World Evangelization that gathered the evangelicals in the year 1974 made a statement on "The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ" in the following words. It may be of interest to see how often the word 'only' appears.

We affirm that there is only one Savior and only one Gospel, although there is a wide diversity of evangelistic approaches. We recognize that all men have some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature. But we deny that this can save, for men suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the Gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue that implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which we must be saved. All men are perishing because of sin, but God loves all men, not wishing that any should perish but that all should repent. Yet, those who reject Christ repudiate the joy of salvation and condemn themselves to eternal separation from God. To proclaim Jesus as 'the Savior of the World' is not to affirm that all men are either automatically or ultimately saved, still less to affirm that all religions offer salvation in Christ. Rather it is to proclaim God's love for a world of sinners and to invite all men to respond to him as Savior and Lord in the whole-hearted personal commitment of repentance and faith. Jesus Christ has been exalted above every other name; we long for the day when every knee shall bow to him and every tongue shall confess him Lord. (Gal. 1.6-9; Rom. 1.18-32; 1 Tim. 2.5,6; Acts 4.12; John 3.16-19; II Pet. 3.19; II Thess. 1.7-9; John 4.42; Matt. 11.28; Eph. 1.20,21; Phil. 2.9-11). [16]

Kraemer, in his later work, [17] tried to set aright what he thought to as a deficiency in his earlier book 'The Christian Message.' He could acknowledge his

negligence in not recognizing the awareness of God in non-Christian religions. However, to what extent it made any impact, is another question to ponder. Later, in the same book, Kraemer when trying to distinguish between syncretism and absorption, clearly expressed the exclusivist trend. He said that Christianity had absorbed many extraneous elements. However, it is by nature exclusive and immune to syncretistic spirit. Taking up elements which are contrary to the authentic soul of the absorbing religion has to be avoided. The remedy for such, as Kraemer sees, is none other than deeper delving into the Bible, which he calls 'a matter of faith in biblical realism'.[18]

Regarding the issue of dialogue, he says that one cannot enter into dialogue except with the conviction of the exclusivist claims of the biblical message. Therefore, he says, "This exclusiveness has nothing to do with religious arrogance, intolerance or dogmatic assertions."[19]

This view definitely holds the opinion that the true religion is Christ-centered and theology should be Christo-centric. All other religions are human strivings for the simple reason that they do not receive the unique revelation of God in Christ Jesus. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which is the only criterion to judge all religions. The common factor in the exclusivist approach is its appeal to Scripture for an unquestioned authority. There are quite a number of exclusive verses in the Bible which present Christ as unique and the only way to salvation. Some of them are sayings of Jesus himself. For example:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.[20]

Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.[21] When Peter and John were brought before the High Priest following the healing of a man born lame, Peter witnessed to Christ in the following words: There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.[22]

On the nature of salvation Jesus is said to have brought, Paul says, "This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all- this was attested at the right time.[23]

Reading the Bible with New Eyes

These are lucid and unequivocal statements from the Bible to support the exclusivist position. These have to be examined carefully. We should not fall into

the temptation of developing our theology or missiology on the basis of selective verses from the Bible. How do we then understand these sayings? Here comes the issue of 'Reading the Bible With New Eyes', a program organized by the Programme Area on "Faith, Mission and Unity" of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA-FMU). It is important to see a 'different witness to Jesus' and this will give a totally different picture than what is given when all these exclusive sayings are put together! We have to understand these sayings from the standpoint of 'language of faith.' Jesus, who touched and transformed the lives of others also became and remained the Christ of Faith. They have to be understood in the context of the faith commitment of the early Christian community. It is important to know that there is 'Christ of faith' to whom a very clear witness is given in the New Testament. These sayings derive their meaning in the context of faith. Therefore, they cannot have any meaning outside the community of faith.

The confessions given in exclusive overtone should not be made definitive. They have to be understood in the language of faith and love. They are not to be used to discredit other beliefs. The harmonious relationship and communion envisaged by God in God's creative acts are marred when we turn this language of faith and love into absolute truths. Here comes the question of "Truth and Truth Claims". The truth and our truth claims are not identical. What we are discussing are truth claims. But, truth in the absolute sense is beyond anyone's grasp. We have to recognize the different levels in which such language is used and/or the different standpoints from which these claims are made in order to have a proper understanding of these exclusive statements about Christ.

One more point to be taken note of before we delve into the next stage. The sola scriptura or 'scripture alone' principle of the Reformation does not in any way mean that the Bible can be read in isolation from what has happened and what is happening in the world. 'Sola' does not refer to 'isolation' but to a 'strong engagement.' This engagement reminds us of God's engagement with the world and humanity. God relates to the people in love and there can be no other way since love is the essence of God. God's love is unconditional. This is what the Bible speaks to us. It affirms God's loving relationship with humanbeings. We have to understand that the Bible does not authenticate itself. It is God speaking through the Bible that authenticates it!

The church also took an exclusive stance mainly on the basis of some of the exclusive biblical sayings mentioned above. The thought of non-Christian being an outsider was even institutionalized. Right from the time of the Church Fathers, this thought began to take shape. The axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, outside the church, no salvation, was formulated by Origen and Cyprian used it freely. This axiom began to play a decisive role in the Roman Catholic

Church. Pope Boniface of the fourteenth century emphatically pronounced that outside the one Catholic Church there is neither salvation nor remission of sins and he pontificated by saying, "Furthermore, we declare, say, define and proclaim to every creature that they, by necessity for salvation, are entirely subject to the Roman Pontiff." [24] Those who were considered to be outside of the church were issued a warning by the Council of Florence in 1442 with these words: "Those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews and heretics and schismatics, cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart into everlasting fire unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock." [25]

The question that has to be dealt with is whether God is revealing Godself only in the Christ-Event. Those who take up the exclusivist verses from the Bible stick to this view so that Religious Pluralism appears to them as threatening reality to be rejected. Religious pluralism has to be considered as a reality to come to terms with. Even if they accept the universal salvific act of God in other faiths, they always add a qualifier to it to make the difference obvious. They find it difficult to get involved in a dialogical relationship with people of other faiths that God's purpose for the world and humanity could be realized. The attitude of making definitive blanket judgement about other faiths has to be shunned. How can one do that even without knowing or studying the other faiths? When a person says that people of other faiths are outside the salvific act of God, what kind of statement it could be? Such a person does not realize that such statement is not only a depiction of his/her attitude against the other person, but also and necessarily a statement about his/her God! The question is whether we are in mission because God has not revealed Godself to our neighbour or in spite and indeed because of it. The grace of God is available in all religions. God's grace and God's love are not exclusive claims of any one religion. It is tantamount to say that what is revealed in other faiths is not salvific and of no significance. It may be pertinent to quote what Kazoh Kitamori, the Japanese theologian said, "Jesus Christ is in pain in order to include those who are excluded." [26]

David Bosch, in his *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, [27] talks about the shift from the 'mission of the church' to the 'mission of God' as a significant leap forward in the understanding of mission. The concept of *missio Dei*, though came into the parlance of the Ecumenical Movement in Willingen in 1952, actually emerged as a mission paradigm at the first meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) held in Mexico City in 1963. This paradigm shift helped many to put many things in perspective. Now, it began to be understood clearly that primary motive of mission is the love of God towards all of God's creation. Therefore, church is understood as an instrument in the hand of God to participate and fulfill God's own

purpose for the world and humanity.

When analyzing the axis of the mission and message of Jesus, one will find that it was the Reign of God [Basileia tou Theou], as Jesus called. According to Dermot Lane, "Indeed, everything that Jesus says and does is inspired from beginning to end by his personal commitment to the coming Reign of God into the world. The controlling horizon of the mission and ministry of Jesus is the Kingdom of God. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus derive their meaning from the Announcement of the Kingdom of God".[28]

Jon Sobrino, in his 'Spirituality of Liberation: Toward A Political Holiness,' puts this fact in a lucid way when he says that Jesus did not simply preach 'God.' 'God' is not simply and absolutely Jesus' ultimate pole of reference.[29] HYPERLINK "<http://www.wocati.org/thiagara.html>" \l "anchor166702" What he said was that whenever Jesus referred to God, he was not speaking about a reality that, by itself, could be known or used as a criterion for judgement. There was something else that 'mediated' the absoluteness of God and so was identified with the divine absoluteness. This was not the church or the Kingdom of heaven. The reality of the Divine is not found primarily or ultimately either in heaven or in the church.[30] In his later writing, Jon Sobrino emphasizes this more forcefully;

The ultimate for Jesus is the Kingdom of God, that is, God not in relation to Godself but in relation to this Earth, to this history. For Jesus, as for any authentic Jewish prophet, God is a God-of, a God-for, a God-in, never a God-in-himself.[31]

Hence, the final reality for Jesus was not simply 'God' but 'the Reign of God.' The Abba whom Jesus proclaimed cannot be known or worshipped apart from the Reign of God [Basileia tou Theou]. It is important to be borne in mind that Jesus never attempted to give a definition of the Reign of God. Rather he spoke of it as 'this-worldly reality.' It is a reality that would change human society. If the church at one time defined the uniqueness of Christianity in the proclamation *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, today it is called to find it in the proclamation *extra mundum nulla salus*, that is, 'outside the world no salvation.' Hence what Juan Luis Segundo said is noteworthy: "Jesus' listeners understood one thing perfectly: while the force behind the Kingdom was for him the force of God, the reality of the Kingdom was something to be achieved on earth, so that society as a whole would reflect the will of God".[32]

Our task is to be co-partners with God in God's 'turning' (shub) in grace towards humanity. Ariarajah puts it succinctly when he says, "We need to move to a genuinely inclusive understanding of mission that places the loving, caring, judging and compassionate presence and mission of God in the heart of all human affairs, despite all its ambiguities." [33] God desired to have a dialogi-

cal relationship with humanity in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, whose life was always God-centered, God-dependent and God-ward. We are able to do this by way of dialogue, which is an activity related to the building of the 'Reign of God'. When dialogue ends, the forces of evil and darkness take hold of us. It is imperative to make a commitment to peace with justice by way of a common struggle towards a reconciled human community.

We will realize that the century that passed by was shaken and challenged by two important currents or movements viz., the liberation theology and the Christian response to the People of Other Living Faiths. This made us aware that the "suffering Other" and the "religious Other" belong together. In that process we were made to realize that we should move beyond the emphases on "Christocentrism" and "Theocentrism" to "Soteriocentrism." The soteriocentric understanding of the Reign of God makes us come to grips with 'the character of God,' 'the ministry of Jesus,' and 'the mission of the church' being understood from the perspective of the blossoming new reality where the poor are vindicated and the marginalized, the wounded and the excluded are accepted and included.

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**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:  
"You can do to them whatever you wish"**

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The issue that I will address in this presentation is only one way in which we have been violated as human persons by the forces from within and without. Before I continue on I will also like to highlight that our social location, (home) and our beings as God's created "beings" have been tremendously violated through the usage of our homeland as the testing ground for nuclear weapon, as the dumping site for nuclear wastes and the immediate obvious effects of global warming and sea level rising.

## INTRODUCTION

What is an issue that is not only an issue for women but also urgently needs to be addressed in theological education in the Pacific island nations/Oceania[1] and in this gathering today? This was the question that I wrestled with when I was given the task to write on "Women's Issues in the Pacific" for this Conference.[2] I did not need to go far. The answer was right there all around me as not a day goes by that I do not hear, read and see of cases of violence in the media.

The issue that is of urgency to address, especially in theological education, is 'violence' in all forms.[3] It is one of the deadliest hu/man-made sicknesses and the cause of many afflictions in the world today, especially for women and children. Volumes of literature have been written and documented internationally on this social ill.[4] [HYPERLINK "http://www.wocati.org/tofaeono.html"](http://www.wocati.org/tofaeono.html) \l "anchor946451" Attempts have been made globally to eradicate this problem.[5] Yet the problem continues to spread like an un-curable epidemic. It seems that it gets perfected as each year goes by.[6] [HYPERLINK "http://www.wocati.org/tofaeono.html"](http://www.wocati.org/tofaeono.html) \l "anchor958530" The human race continuously comes up with new means and forms of violence to conquer and control others.[7]

The first section of this presentation looks at the social reality of the island communities in Oceania and the complicated web of sources that contribute to the problem of domestic violence against women. The second section will analyze the problem by drawing on the experiences of victims and their families and raising questions on how these experiences should be recognized. The third section will question the role which theological education plays in the problem. The final section will pinpoint clues for transformation that are helpful in the search to overcome domestic violence against women.

### **1. The Living Social Reality: Violence**

I believe each and every one of us present here today was and has been a victim of some form of violence once or more times in our lives. There is also no doubt that we were and perhaps still are perpetrators of violence in various forms to the powerless and the marginalised in our midst.

The topic of violence is very broad and complicated in itself. We have just experienced what it is like to be put on the spot in front of a circle of academics and well known theologians. I am sure you said to yourself silently, or to your neighbor, "How dare she ask us such a question? Who does she think she is?" You probably even questioned how the organisers could allow such a person to do such a thing. What was your inner reaction when you were asked to look at yourself and identify if you were a victim as well as a perpetrator of violence to anyone at all? Who among us here would like to reveal a dark side of our lives especially in an academic setting as this. If you felt that it was unnecessary to put you in an extremely embarrassing and humiliating experience, can you imagine what it is like to hide the shame of being in an abusive relationship from the very people you know and live with for most of your life? Can you understand why many choose to keep the abuse in secrecy for a long time or forever? Do you also see the need for us to break our silence and do something about the violence within and around ourselves?

It is sickening to read, for instance, in the Fijian newspapers every day[8] of cases of violent brutality[9] and insanity[10] in the form of child molestation,[11] incest,[12] rape, etc.,[13] especially within the family and against children[14] and women. The two most common and serious forms of such violence are sexual[15] and domestic[16] violence.

This paper, owing to the expectation of the organisers to write on a women's issue, and to the limited time and space, unfortunately will not address the seriousness of the problem of violence also against children.[17] Nor will it discuss the forms and the roots of violence. Rather, it will only focus on discussing domestic violence against women as an issue from Oceania. However, it should be highlighted that the violence against children is just as much as the women if not much greater. Therefore, cases of abuse against children will also be cited to share the seriousness of the problem.

The issue itself is and can be very controversial when different perspectives are laid bare for discussion. This presentation seeks to get a point across and to disclose a painful but truthful fact that violence, especially domestic violence, is a problem affecting the lives of many women in the Pacific; and that the Pacific churches and theological institutions in Oceania need to break their silence and their passive behavior on the issue and do something about it.

### *1.1 Experiences of Violence*

#### *Case One*

Two young girls who were raped and assaulted by their father submitted letters of reconciliation in court. Proceedings at the Lautoka court were closed to

the public after the 47-year-old man told the court that his daughters and wife had forgiven him and produced the letters. He said he was very stressed and was in financial difficulty when he committed the offences. The alleged offences began almost six years ago when his elder daughter was 15 years old. He admitted raping his elder daughter and trying to rape and indecently assaulting the younger one, who was 12 years old. The matter came to light when the older daughter told a neighbor of the alleged incidents.[18]

#### Case Two

A 34 year-old soldier charged with assault appeared before the Chief Magistrate for assaulting his wife. The complainant approached the accused to discuss family problems. During the discussion an argument developed between the couple whereby the accused allegedly started punching the complainant. The complainant suffered injuries as a result and reported the matter to police.[19]

#### Case Three

A clergy couple, who strongly believed and most of the time practiced partnership in their marriage relationship, worked at a theological institution which in a way still adopts a hierarchical structure. He became somehow a victim of this hierarchy and dirty politics. This affected their relationship at home as their frustration was often let out on each other. One day their disappointment with the system contributed to a verbal argument which led to her saying a comment that really upset him. It made him so furious that he turned around and slapped her. She in return slapped him back, thus ending in a fist fight that gave both a share of bodily ache. She reported the incident to the Principal who met with them. After a session of sharing, the couple was told to go home, reconcile and pray about their problem. As the couple left, the Principal shared this confidential incident with his spouse, the project manager of the College and his vice-Principal, who in return spread it as a gossip to his colleagues and the students from his ethics group. The spouse of the principal as well as the project manager also shared the information with their colleagues. The news of the gossip got back to the couple who then regretted going to the College leaders for pastoral support, as it became a source of destruction rather than an agent of healing.[20]

Case One is only one example cited of the few reported cases of sexual abuse within and without the family. Many more cases remain unreported and are kept safe in the community and family closets. Most of those reported are incest cases where the perpetrators are either a brother, father, uncle, cousin, or grandfather. The victims of incest are as young as 3 months and as old as eighty-plus years. It is at such an alarmingly disgusting growth rate that one questions if the world

has grown insane and is controlled by evil forces.

It is no doubt that there are many more cases of incest safely kept in secrecy to safeguard the name and the integrity of the family and the perpetrators, who are mostly family members or close friends and relatives. What about the integrity and the "being" of the children who have been ripped apart at the core of their existence? They are either forced to reconcile with the perpetrator, or the families seek means of reconciling with each other without taking the children's feelings into consideration at all.

Case Two speaks of an experience that many Pacific Islands women have in common. But only a few have the courage to report such an assault to the police or to seek support from a care-giving agency. Most of the women have at one time if not more times in their lives experienced an assault resulting within a relationship, marital or de facto.[21 [HYPERLINK "http://www.wocati.org/to-faeono.html"](http://www.wocati.org/to-faeono.html) \l "anchor1013289" Couples, especially the men, resort[22] to physical violence to end conflicts in relationships. In doing so, the family problems are neither resolved nor dissolved. It only gets suppressed whereby one partner must bail out of a disagreement. It is often the woman who is silenced in most disputes through the use of domestic violence.

Case Three explains the inability and the un-preparedness of leaders in theological institutions to play their pastoral roles when presented with real-life situations. In this case the leaders were very successful in turning one family dilemma into a topic for gossip. This is exactly the greatest fear of many women who are victims of domestic abuse in theological institutions: that their family problems will become a juicy gossip for the institutional community. Hence, the silence. Worst of all, hardly anyone offers to help or raise domestic violence as a problem that must be addressed and dealt with in theological institutions.[23]

It is no longer a secret that many ordained (male) clergy around the world and in Oceania are themselves perpetrators of sexual and domestic abuse. Often when cases of domestic and sexual violence[24] by clergy are reported, the churches either transfer the clergy perpetrators to other parishes or countries as a discipline, or the incidents are covered up by the church. Very few are made to face the consequences of their acts.

Domestic violence must no longer be treated as something that goes away once the dispute is over. It is a vicious cycle that continues on sucking up victims and perpetrators as it moves from one generation to another. Perpetrators falsely believe that once the tears are dried and the bruises disappear the problem is also over. The victims are expected to be good forgiving Christians. Jesus' sufferings are often brought into play, with the argument that the women's sufferings are not even close to the suffering Jesus went through. Therefore, if Jesus could forgive those who crucified him, then the women must do likewise. This

theological reasoning is extremely problematic when it is used to justify the endurance of continuous violence against women.

## **2. Violence against Women [25]**

"You can do to them, my virgin daughter, and his concubine, whatever you wish ... Such a thing has never been seen or done "[26] This passage from Judges is one of the forgotten passages and perhaps the least referred-to books of the Bible in sermons, bible studies and exegetical work in most theological schools, with the exception of feminist studies and theology. Yet it is one that clearly sanctions the abuse and torture of women at its ugliest. What an absurd text to theologise on even if it is to stress that it was done in the days when there was no king. On the other hand, it is a reminder of the terror of which mostly men are capable. It is not true that such a thing has never been seen or never happens. This horror has been done to the daughters and the spouses - whatever men wish. The ongoing domestic violence against women is a proof of this terror.

There is now more than ever a growing consciousness that violence against women is a serious unjustifiable social ill affecting society at all levels in the Pacific. Numerous factors contribute to the increase of violence against women in the Pacific. As time and space does not allow for an elaboration on these numerous factors, and as this is a gathering for the World Conference of Association of Theological Institutes, this work then argues that theological education has indirectly contributed to the enhancement of this serious dilemma through the mis-interpretation of many biblical passages.

## **3. The Role of Theological Education and the Church**

It has been a concern for many citizens in the island Pacific, especially the women, that the Pacific churches and theological institutions have not been prophetic at all in social issues, such as violence, that are affecting the lives of their members. Even if the church has in some small ways spoken out,[27] it has not been loud enough to be heard. Yet domestic violence poses a life-threatening reality in the lives of most women and children, not only worldwide but right in our midst in the Pacific.[28] The few victims who do have the courage to step forward fortunately can at times find refuge and solace in and from the care-giving services offered by the government,[29] civil societies[30] and private sectors in the Pacific. The Pacific churches, on the other hand, are yet to be heard on this issue. That is a challenge for the churches and all of us here involved as educators in theological institutions. Where is our prophetic voice for and with the victims of violent abuses? What is the role of theological education in addressing this social issue?

Violence, in this case domestic violence against women, is an issue that the

writer believes has been ignored by the churches and has been treated as a non-issue for too long in theological schools in the Pacific. It is time that this is addressed as an issue of concern in the church, especially in theological education. It is in the theological classrooms that the future church leaders and their spouses are supposedly being trained to deal with such cases in their ministries. Theological educators have a central role in raising the awareness of the theological students on how social issues are a 'checks and balances' reality check regarding the validity and the applicability of the theology taught in the classrooms.

In the island Pacific context, religion is the life-giving stream in most communities and the most influential of all is the Christian religion. The ordained ministers who are considered as the earthly messengers of the Christian God are treated with such awe and veneration. They remain still, despite the many changes in society, the most influential persons in the life of the congregation and most communities. The better equipped the ordained clergy are in their theological training to work with persons affected by life crises, the more aware and informed the parishioners will become of their role in the problem and in preventing serious consequences. The application of forgiveness and unconditional Christian love in violent cases only encourages more violence, thus avoiding dealing with the destructive violent behaviors. Forgiveness must go hand in hand with justice.

### *3.1 The Located-ness of Theological Education in the Problem*

The greatest hindrance to the call to combat violence, in this case against women, lies in the inability of theological educators to locate the situated-ness of the problem in theological education. Theological students are either not equipped with the 'know-how' techniques to use in crisis situations, or the age old method of telling the spouses to be tolerant and forgiving is applied.

There is a general mentality among theological educators and theological associations that theological issues must be separated from social issues. It is stressed in many meetings of theological educators that I have attended in Oceania that social issues have no direct connection to theological education. Yet, a theological educator does not need to turn his or her head as the causes of many social issues are right there where he or she is. The problem of violence is deeply rooted in theological interpretations and church teachings. The theological institutions many times concentrate so single-mindedly on perfecting the intellect of the theological students and breeding outstanding academics that they overlook the missing link between the theoretical learning and the practicality of its outworking. Their students become transporters of the theoretical seeds planted in the theological classroom to the various parishes in which they will



be placed. The fruitfulness of the theological nursery is tested when the planters are dispersed to work in the soil and with other gardeners. Often these students struggle to deal with the reality when they are placed in the field.

Those who have been perpetrators of violence against their spouses and children while in theological institutes and were never dealt with will continue to do so wherever they will be. They will also preach a theology that maintains the submission of women as their God-given role. Those who were in institutions where domestic violence cases were never addressed as a problem will also carry that mentality that it is a family matter, and therefore it should be kept within the family.

It cannot be denied that the cultural and Christian teaching that the husband is the head of the family has a lot to do with the perpetration of domestic violence. Women are taught that they must respect men at all times, the men "out of" whose bone she came. It is her sole role to bear and raise children for the continuance of the lineage and to keep the household in order. This is the influence of (the literal) interpretation of the second creation story in Genesis. It is such a central understanding that this paper claims to be a contributing factor to the problem of domestic violence against women.

The mis-interpretation of the second creation story in Genesis is a prime example of how the Bible is often misused. The interpretation alluded to by many Pacific Islanders, for instance to Genesis 2: 23 ("you are bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh out of man this one is taken"), is often distorted to justify violence.

Instead of upholding the created-ness of woman for the sake of partnership and companionship, the emphasis is on ownership and possession.[31] Such distortion often upholds the standards of submissiveness set by the church, based on Biblical misinterpretation, thus leading to domestic violence and the perpetuation of violence.

### *3.2 The Located-ness of the Pacific Churches in the Problem*

The island Pacific societies and communities are just as much in this problem as anywhere in the world. We have already made the case that domestic violence has destroyed the well-being of many women in the Pacific. One secular counselor shared that most of the cases she dealt with were almost always violence related. She shared that the majority of these clientele state that their ministers and their spouses would be the last persons they would consult on their problem. This had to do not only with cultural expectations but also to do with the teachings of the churches on their roles as women in upholding peace within the family.

The Pacific Islanders' churches are thus yet to identify their social location

in this problem and their need to rethink the ways in which their Biblical interpretation and theology have contributed to the problem.

The core of the problem, speaking as a Pacific Islands Christian, has to do with the passivity of the church on this issue. Some aspects of the Church's theology and practices ignite the burning flame of abuse against women. One of the saddest discoveries I have had is the inability of theological students to openly admit and identify domestic violence as a problem. Yet some of them have resorted to violence themselves as a solution to domestic conflicts.

The churches' continuous usage of the traditional marriage rites has been another source of bondage for women in abusive relationships. The rites re-inforce an understanding that the man is given through marriage the divine authority to rule over the woman. This divine authority must never be challenged. Therefore many women endure being abused for life because their church teaches that marriage vows made before God are sacred and must be kept "till death do us part," and that regardless of the hardship "those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder." (Matt. 19:6)

### *3.3 Voices of the Theologically Trained on Violence against Women*

In preparation for this presentation and for a thorough research on the issue addressed above, a questionnaire with nine questions was drafted[32] and distributed to three different groups. One group consisted of international doctoral candidates who were doing a summer course at the San Francisco Theological School in 2002. The other group included theological students at the Pacific Theological College, the only regional ecumenical theological institution in the Pacific island nations,[33] in Suva, Fiji. Students from fourteen different denominations representing eleven ethnic groups are currently enrolled there. In order to get a wider framework within which to work, a group of theological students from one particular ethnic group was also included.

The majority of the persons in the three groups are ordained clergy. This may be reflected in the way they responded to the questions. As a pilot core group it was hoped that 10 responses would come from each group, with a balanced number of five women and five men. The purpose is to find out if and how the theology they are taught in the classroom influences the way they look at the theme addressed in this paper, and whether their social location also determines the way they respond to the questions.

Since the questions address the core of the churches' theology, and especially related to the marriage sacrament, time is definitely needed to sit down and reflect carefully on the questions. The respondents were not given enough time to work on this. This explains why the expected number (30 altogether) was not reached. As a result, only 6 responded from the first group and five from the sec-



ond one. This paper will only discuss these two groups and concentrate on the responses given to two questions.

The six respondents from the first group all answered, in response to one question, that there is a connection between the traditional view of wives as being derived from and subservient to their husband and the sanctioning of violence against women.[34] One commented that if men must always be obeyed without question there will always be questions of 'why'. Another wrote that women have often been told to stress 'obedience to' and have been encouraged to accept their secondary, submissive, even inferior role. She continued that she had had women ask her how they can disobey their husband when they promised to obey them. This understanding is often reflected in sermons also.

The responses from the second group were interesting as they were not only all men but none responded yes or no to the above-mentioned question. Rather, they gave long explanations indicating that women should obey men. One pointed out that women are owned by their husbands in his context, but the men were taught not to "give their hands because the women are weak." Another spelled out that the traditional idea that women were created out of man is the root of all domestic violence against women.

In analysing the two groups it was apparent that both were very cautious in the way they answered the questions, making sure that their churches were not put on the spot. It was also clear that the theology that they are taught and their cultural understanding shaped the way they responded. The second group tended to talk more as a community member defending the communal values and the communal system. The other group reflected more the values of the individual and their own personal experiences. The women respondents were more up-front in pointing out that violence is a universal problem faced by women, and that the teaching and the theology of the church has had a lot to do with it. Men also agreed but more as a generational and cultural problem.

The fact that all of these respondents are theologically trained explains the theologising done in the way they responded.

#### **4. Clues for Transformation**

Associations of Theological Schools are in an influential position to introduce structured devices to implement changes that will shape and form the curriculum of the theological schools to take this up as one of its important programs. What is seriously needed in all theological schools in the Pacific is the development of a curriculum that looks into the teaching and the theology of their churches in relation to the issue of violence. It must be explored how the marriage liturgy in most church traditions upholds the superiority of the male partner in the vows for life partnership before God. A good example is the Pauline

teaching in Ephesians 5: 21-33 : The statement " for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" has been literally interpreted as a support for suppressing women. This was cited by almost all the respondents as the text used almost always in wedding ceremonies, emphasising the places of the couples in their marriage. A section of the curriculum must look at the book of Genesis, especially both creation stories, and how it promotes violence and the subjugation of women.

#### *4.1 Concrete Proposals: One Way Forward*

Weavers, a program of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools advocating for women in theological education, has chosen to focus on Domestic Violence against Women as its core program for the next three years. It is holding a forum for the public and its member schools based in Fiji inviting various experts to talk on "Violence against Women: and the Struggle Against it." This will be followed by a leadership training event for the Clergy Spouses studying with their husbands at the Pacific Theological College, on Conflict Management. The last event for the coming year is a seminar for the 25 SPATS member schools on the same issue. The purpose is to train the trainers to start their own program against violence in their local schools.

#### *4.2 No More Violence in Paradise: A Plea from the Pacific Women*

Strengthened and encouraged by each other and the unconditional love of God we reached out to each other and shared our painful experiences and stories of the violences against women throughout our Pacific Islands.

We heard of lack of support by Governments, churches and the society as a whole for women in violent situations either at home or at work or in society.

We wept for the thousands of women who, because of cultural and religious pressures have suffered violence silently and alone.

We heard that for thousands of women and girls, home is no longer a safe place, but a place of fear, pain and terror. For example, in Papua New Guinea 67% of violence reported in the rural areas and 54% in the urban areas are in the home.

We are confronted with the knowledge that our cultures have been used as justification for violence against women.

We acknowledge that the kind of theology taught by the church not only perpetuates violence against women but often condones violence.

We listened to the stories of the betrayal of women and children's trust by the clergy through acts of sexual harassment and abuse.

We mourn the thousands of women and girls who are raped.

We discover the painful reality that we are often victims of these destruc-

tive acts of violence.

We affirm that we are survivors of the violence and committed to struggle until justice is done.

We listened, we heard, we struggled, we wept and we prayed. (Apia Declaration, March 12-15, 1996. SAMOA: No More Violence in Paradise)

### **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude by stressing that any issue to do with God's creation is an issue for theological discussion in and for the churches and theological institutions. Therefore these issues must be at the core of theological education.

This work concludes with a request to the communities in the Pacific / Oceania and to all of you gathered here to, **FIRST**, assist in identifying our social location in this problem and in rethinking the ways in which Biblical interpretations and theology have contributed to the problem. **SECOND**, it calls us to remember the untold stories of women who have been victims of domestic violence; and **THIRD**, it pleads for a contribution to the call of worldwide activists to overcome violence against women. And most important of all, for us as educators to make a rhythm for justice in theological education with the beat of our hearts, performed by the actions of our hands and rooted in God through the gifts of the spirit; our intellect.

### **NOTES**

1. Oceania is used interchangeably to refer to the Pacific Island nations. The indigenous population of the Pacific Island nations continues to value their strong connectedness to the land (fanua) and the Sea (Moana) as was relayed through their oral tradition by their ancestors. It is also more fitting to refer to this region as Oceania than Pacific as it consists more of ocean and continues to hold the ocean and the land as their sacred heritage.
2. As I am expected to discuss a women's issue from the Pacific, this work deliberately avoids addressing the theme as a purely academic issue. This presentation focuses primarily on citing incidents confronting the lives of the islanders as presented in the local newspapers and not so much on other sources as is expected for a gathering of academics such as this one. The writer is familiar with the viewpoints expressed by various scholar on the issue. She has chosen to dwell only on presenting violence against women as a serious problem that the churches and theological institutes in Oceania must address now.
3. Social issues such as violence are almost never addresses nor included in the curriculum of theological institutes, at least in the Pacific context. There is a mentality that they are issues for social services and civil societies and not for theological education/class-

rooms.

4. See for instance the writings of Marie M. Fortune such as *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers*; *Keeping the Faith: Questions and Answers for Abused Women*; *Love Does no Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us*; *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship*.
5. For example, in an attempt to combat violence worldwide, the World Council of Churches in conjunction with the United Nations launched in February of 2001, in Berlin the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV). Many other care-giving services around the world have been actively involved in finding means to eradicate this problem.
6. "Police statistics reveal reported sexual offences rose by 20 per cent this year compared to last year with incest having the highest figure in the category. As at June last year, 218 cases of sexual offences were reported compared to 262 for the same period this year." Imran Ami "Father under probe for sex crimes," *The Fiji Times*, Friday November 15, 2002, p. 3.
7. The current ongoing crisis in the northern hemisphere is a primary example: The United States of America uses violence to counter violence. Terrorist acts are used to get a message across. These are done at the expense of the innocent and the vulnerables who are predominantly women and children and all in the name of power.
8. The writer is currently working in the islands of Fiji . Therefore she mainly concentrate on the incidents reported in the Fiji media. The actual incidents presented in this paper are taken from the three Fijian newspapers: *The Fiji Times*, *Sun* and the *The Daily Post*. It is by no means indicating that this is the only island nation with an increase in such criminal acts. It is only representative on the evilness of violence affecting all nations and sweeping through the whole universe.
9. B. is alleged to have raped a 24-year old American tourist while she was taking a walk. The victim was repeatedly raped at gunpoint during the night and was only able to escape after B. fell asleep in the early morning. *The Daily Post*, Thursday, September 12, 2002.p. 7.
10. A villager was sentenced to 10 years ... for sexually abusing eight children ... between the ages of four and nine ... The 64-year-old said he had reconciled with church elders and parents of the victims and was forgiven. *The Fiji Times*, Friday. June 28, 2002. P.3.
11. Avinesh Gopal in her article "Child molester goes to prison" reported that "A man was jailed for two years for indecently assaulting his 10-year old neighbor. The accused had gone to the victim's house and told her to send her younger sister to a neighbor's house. When the victim's sister left, the accused then undressed the victim and touched her private parts. He also undressed himself, rubbed his private parts against the victim's thighs and left the house. *The Fiji Times*, Wednesday, April 24, 2002, pp.8.
12. Sanday Gounder a journalist for the *Sun* newspaper in Fiji wrote that "A Lautoka father who has allegedly sexually assaulted his two daughters yesterday pleaded guilty on rape and two counts of indecent assault before the Lautoka Magistrates Court." *Sun*, Tuesday November 12, 2002. Page 2.
13. A 37 year old man was yesterday sentenced to four years imprisonment for abduct-

- ing a girl under the age of 18 years with intent to have carnal knowledge and indecently assaulting her. (He) confronted her by closing her mouth with his hand and dragged her to a nearby vacant house. At the house he forced her to remove her clothes, laid her down and touched her private parts. He took off his trousers and tried to have intercourse with her. Charlotte Peters "Sexual offender cops 4-year term" Sun, Tuesday, November 12, 2002.
14. A (63 year-old) man who indecently assaulted nine children (between the ages of four to eleven) was remanded in custody for his own safety after admitting the offences. The Fiji Times, Wednesday, June 12, 2002, p. 3.
  15. Sakiasi Nawaikama " Sex cases on the increase." The Fiji Times, Monday, April 22, 2002, p.5. The reporter wrote that ' There is an increase in crimes of this nature (sexual assaults), says Women Crisis Center Coordinator Shameema Ali. She said the recent case of a man who raped his younger sister showed the serious level incest cases have reached These cases have been there but they are beginning to come out because it's being talked about. There is an increase in these sort of acts against women."
  16. "An argument broke out between the two (husband and wife) and minutes later the husband started assaulting her and during the process she picked up a cane knife and swung it at him."
  17. A father raped his partially crippled daughter for a period of almost three weeks until she could not hide it anymore and broke the sick news to her mother who then reported the matter to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. She (the victim) is partially crippled from the waist down. This is probably the sickest and biggest sexual offence ever committed in Fiji. Raymond Singh. "Father rapes crippled daughter" in The Daily Post. Wednesday, October 2, 2002, p.1.
  18. Seema Sharma, "Daughter give letters of reconciliation," in The Fiji Times, Wednesday, November 20, 2002 p. 5
  19. The Daily Post, Friday march 22, 2002
  20. The source wishes to remain anonymous.
  21. Often both partners contribute to the misunderstandings in the marriage or a relationship. Both are victims of other forms of violence such as emotional, psychological, verbal etc. The issue here is not to discuss who and what caused the problem. The point is to stress that men are more prone to resort to physical violence to deal with family difficulties. As a consequence the women are almost always the victims of violent abuses. And this is the problem that this paper attempts to highlight.
  22. This is not to say that women are not perpetrators of violence also in other forms. There are also men who are victims of violent women. But they are a small (1 :100) minority in comparison to the many women (8 :10).
  23. One of the longest series of books to be written on violence would be on the experiences of domestic violence of the clergy spouses.
  24. In the last couple of months, cases of priests in the Roman Catholic church in the United States molesting children and other abuses have been the headline in the world news and the media in the Pacific. It is not only in the Roman Catholic church, many ordained clergies in the Pacific are guilty of having extra marital affairs and taking sexual advantages of young women . The only difference is that it is still on the top

- 
- of the secret lists of the churches.
25. This paper is the project section of a dissertation the writer is currently working on titled "Bone of my bones out of man this one is taken: A Theological Problem."
  26. Judges 19: 24, 30. (NIV)
  27. The now dissolved Pacific women's desk of the Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) co-facilitated with the women's desk of the World Council of Churches a seminar on violence against women for selected Pacific women in 1989. As the participants were chosen from among and limited to the spouses of the church leaders and women leaders themselves, this seminar was not known to the other 99% of women and men. And since it was an initiative that came from and by the women, it was never taken up seriously by the Pacific churches. As a result, it was never followed up as an issue of great importance for the church nor was it mandated to be an important program of the PCC.
  28. Many church leaders and theological educators (who are predominantly men) in the Pacific churches will strongly disagree with this statement. While it can not be denied that men (very few, if any at all in the Pacific) also suffer domestic violence, statistics reveal that the majority of domestic related violence are against women and children. The writer believes that the Pacific folk, especially the churches, are slowly in the process of coming out of denying that there is such a major problem. It may take several more years before the church is confident to announce that violence is a problem in the / and for the church. This work therefore focuses only on identifying violence as a serious problem especially for women and children. It also poses the problem of violence, as a challenge for the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) to look at, especially the role theological education plays in this problem as well as other social issues
  29. The "Violence against Women" workshop training for men begins at the Naviti Resort on Sunday. In an earlier meeting members of the taskforce on eliminating violence against women discussed strategies to involve men from all levels of of society. Permanent secretary for Justice Alipate Qetaki said the aim of the project which includes the training of male trainers on November 18, is the formulation of a bill on violence against women. Seinimil Lewa "Men discuss the problems of Women," in *The Fiji Times*, Friday, November 15, 2002, pp. 5.
  30. Civil societies in the Pacific have been very active in addressing social issue that are detrimental to the lives of the Pacific people. Many have been the prophetic voice that is expected of the church.
  31. The majority of the Pacific men and women that I asked responded that the woman was solely created as the helper to the man. And that the Bible clearly states that the husband is the head of the family therefore, she is to obey and do as he wishes.
  32. The questionnaire form is appended as Appendix 1
  33. PTC is owned by 17 member churches from 11 Pacific Island nations. It is an inter-denominational institute with an international faculty and an ecumenical atmosphere.
  34. The six (three women and three men) are member of five different denominations. And their age varies from early 50s to early 70s.

## APPENDIX

Bone of my Bones and Flesh of my Flesh... out of man this one is taken.

### QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

1. In your church's standard wedding ceremony, are husbands and wives viewed exactly the same, or are there any differences - eg., does the wife promise to 'obey' the husband but not vice-versa; does the liturgy refer to 'man and wife' rather than 'husband and wife'?

2. How have these customs influenced what has been considered to be the acceptable relationship between husbands and wives?

3. What has been your church's traditional teaching in general regarding the relative status and duties of husbands and wives/men and women?

4. What scriptural and theological arguments have been used to back up this teaching?

6. What is your understanding of Adam's statement in Genesis 2:23 - "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one is taken"?

7. How has your church interpreted the above passage traditionally, in terms of the common portrayal of women as being derived from and therefore inferior to men?

8. Do you see any connections between the traditional view of wives as being derived from and subservient to their husbands and the sanctioning of violence against women? Explain:

9. What overall changes are needed in your church's teaching and practice regarding the status of women?

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**AN OVERVIEW OF THE 3RD CONGRESS OF WOCATI**

*Kathleen Williams*  
*ANZATS*

WOCATI exists because of the realisation that theological education, while it must always be local if it is to be relevant to the people it is meant to serve, can no longer avoid also being global. This is so, at least in part, because it «is carried out in a world which is increasingly being made aware of its interdependence and religious pluralism.» (Preamble to the statement of WOCATI Purposes.) Accordingly, this global network is meant to serve, support, and enhance theological education through the commitment of its member associations to closer cooperation at local, regional, national, and international levels. The General Assembly, held at four-yearly intervals, provides a particular opportunity for member associations to give practical expression to their commitment to international cooperation.

### **OPENING WORSHIP**

The Opening Worship was pure gift, beginning with the gift of flowers and a carry bag made by the students for each participant, at the inspiration of Sientje Merentek. The worship focussed the participants on the One in whose name they were gathered, doing so in a way that honoured the many cultures and languages represented, and using the beauty and grace of Thai dance and music to offer praise in body, mind and spirit. It was the students of McGilvary Faculty of Theology of Payap University who made this possible, lead and supported - and enthused! - by Salvador (Buddy) Martinez, faculty member and coordinator of the local organising committee for the Assembly.

### **OPEN FORUM I**

The business of the Assembly got off to a stimulating start with the presentation of the first paper, «Theological Education in the Post Modern Era», by Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy from ATS (and Pittsburgh, PA, U.S.A.), and a thought-provoking Response from Dr. Hyacinth I. Boothe from CATS (and Jamaica). In the discussion it was recognised that both the contributions made and the problems raised by the post-modern era have implications for theological education. Thus, issues of power have surfaced—how are they to be integrated? Post-colonialism cannot be separated from the issue of identity: non-western peoples have tended to internalise the west's understanding of their identity—how are non-western people to deal with this? The real story has not always been told - how can theology validly revisit history?

Given the rationalism and the fragmentation so often seen as associated with modernity and the post-modern era, three ways of making vital connections through theological education were put forward:

Keep thinking, certainly, but remember that there is much more to the human person than the ability to think. Recognising and welcoming feelings, and relating the doing of theology to the local cultural experiences and practices can allow for a dynamic, integrated approach to doing theology.

Keep asking questions, so the conversation can continue.

Practice hospitality, the open-heartedness that welcomes the stranger—the new person, the new idea, the new possibility—and in so doing help ourselves to understand and welcome differences, and train young theologians accordingly. Hospitality is seen as a uniquely potent way of making connections in a fragmented world.

## OPEN FORUM II

The discussion on the second paper, «*Christianity and Other Faiths*», presented by Dr. Daniel Thiagarajah (Hong Kong), and responded by Prof. Vladimir Federov (WCC and St. Petersburg, Russia), was passionate, perhaps indicative of the extent to which the issues raised by the topic are of such crucial importance in the contemporary world.

There were many suggestions made of ways in which theological education might honour the religious pluralism that pertains, welcome the differences, and at the same time speak for Christianity with conviction and commitment.

Suggestions included the following:

- A preliminary realisation was that one's capacity to recognise and to honour the many differences within the Christian communion will significantly affect relations with other faiths. It is suggested that Christian and other faiths can help clarify each other. The challenge then is to develop a theological curriculum that will take this mutual clarification and connection into account.
- Language matters, so we could speak of 'neighbouring', rather than 'other' religions.
- Relationship is integral to dialogue between religions. Accordingly, theology needs to develop a stronger pneumatological, and thus trinitarian, approach to the question of religious pluralism.
- The overarching topic in relation to inter-faith dialogue is missiology, and central to missiological debates is the question «What is salvation?» This raises the question of the need to distinguish clearly between evangelisation and missiology.
- The only future is ecumenical. Pluralism must therefore be provided in the theological curriculum; students will benefit from this.
- There is no room for triumphalism. Again it is suggested that the way to avoid this in approaching inter-faith is to develop a holistic trinitarian theology.

And a question remains: how to bridge the gap between the university and the local parish/pastor? How make theology relevant to the life of the local church?

### OPEN FORUM III

In the Open Forum which followed the third paper, «*Mission and Social Dimensions of Theological Education*», presented by Prof. Josue Fonseca (ASIT and Chile), and responded by Dr. Edison Kalengyo (ATIEA and Uganda), some issues already raised emerged again. The following suggestions were made for theological education:

There is a need to clarify what 'mission' is, and it may help to clarify what it is by saying clearly what it is not. Accordingly,

We need to be careful not to equate 'mission' with 'church', or to confine it to the church. The relation between the two? 'Mission' is God's; the 'church' is the instrument, not the goal; only the Kingdom of God is the goal!

'Mission' does not 'belong to' any particular tradition. Church-centred thinking makes us competitors; Christ-centred thinking makes us partners. Hence, 'mission' is ecumenical.

Proselytism is not mission.

There is a need to critique what could be termed a 'monastic', 'content-filled' model of theological education, because of the danger that the experience of the local churches be lost. The inherited western model of theology does not allow the third-world theologian to address social issues. The challenge is to find better models for theologically educating ministers in a socially authentic way. (It was noted that the church is often well behind the state in addressing social issues!)

The theological curriculum must meet the challenge of making links between spirituality and liberation.

What is 'sinful'? Theology has the task of relating an understanding of what is sinful in the world to the role of the church in 'reconciliation'. Again, the challenge is for relevance in curriculum.

### OPEN FORUM IV

The final paper of the Assembly by Prof. Joan Tofaeono (from SPATS and Fiji) addressed a particularly harrowing and sensitive topic, «*Violence Against Women*». The response was made by Dr. Lee Swee Hong (from the East Asia School of Theology, Singapore).

Small group discussion preceded the Open Forum. The attention of the Assembly had been drawn to the way in which the Bible has so often been invoked

in support of the violent treatment of women. Hence, members were asked to consider relevant biblical passages for and against violence, to think about how they have been interpreted/ taught, and to consider possible ways forward. Following are some of the suggestions made for theological education:

Confessional differences must be recognised.

Given that patriarchal interpretation of the Bible has sanctioned violence against women, there is need to allow a richer understanding of the Canon to inform our interpretation. This calls for commitment to a sound and critical reading of Scripture. There are some texts that must be critiqued.

Theological education has the challenge, which must be met, of considering together the theological legacies of such concepts as suffering, forgiveness, justice.

If the Bible is the frame of reference that informs, e.g., our theological doctrines, there is need to understand what the Bible really says, to understand its dynamics, and to unveil the violence that is to be overcome.

On the understanding that all are capable of it, bring domestic violence to the attention of our students as a theological issue.

Preventive measures are most desirable, and so the inclusion in theological colleges of courses in areas such as counselling, and conflict resolution is recommended.

## **CULTURAL EXPOSURE**

After so much hard work, a day of exposure to the something of the riches of Thai culture was most welcome. And what a day of riches it was! It began with a visit to the elephants, feeding them bananas, watching them take a bath, and then riding them through the forest. For people who usually work at a fast rate, it was a stilling, reflective experience to be carried at such a slow and measured pace for well over an hour. In great contrast to the elephants was the delicate beauty of the orchid farm. Then at the Wat Phra That Doi Suthep the Assembly listened to Dr. John Butt's fascinating and detailed presentation of the life of the Buddha, as illustrated in the paintings that surround the inner courtyard of the monastery. From there the switch was to the jade factory where the beautiful setting of the jewels proved irresistible to many—lots of baht left there!

Finally, a typically northern Thai dinner was enjoyed, followed by the delights of being entertained by the traditional Thai dancing. It was then a case of 'returning home tired but happy'.

**BUSINESS**

On the final day the Assembly considered possible ways of moving WOCATI forward and furthering the implementation of its aims which are as relevant now as they were in the late eighties, when WOCATI was established. Thanks were expressed

- to the much depleted executive committee who with big and generous hearts had taken on the organisation of the Chiang Mai Assembly—Zenaida Lumba (President); Leonor Rojas (Treasurer); and Petros Vassiliadis.
- to the local committee, graciously and unstintingly headed by Buddy Martinez, who had given the executive much appreciated support;
- to many others who had contributed significantly, including Loretta Groff for organising the WOCATI website, and to Chris Meinzer, the chief financial officer of ATS, whose generously made available his considerable administrative and financial skills.

The task of promoting and developing WOCATI for the next four years is now in the hands of the new Executive Committee, duly elected according to the WOCATI constitution (the nomination committee being Yeow Choo Lak, chair, Josué Fonseca, and Hyacinth Boothe) and consisting of:

Petros Vassiliadis (President), from COTS and Eastern Europe, Kang Nam Soon (Vice President), from PTCA and Asia, Bill Hopkinson (Secretary/Treasurer), from ACATE and Western Europe, Tevita Banivanua, from SPATS and the Pacific, Hyacinth Boothe, from CATS and the Caribbean, Edison Kalengyo, from ATIEA and Africa, Leonor Rojas, from ASIT and Latin America, and Kathleen Williams from ANZATS and Australia-New Zealand.

**MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SESSION  
OF THE 2002 WOCATI ASSEMBLY  
(12th December 2002)**

On the final day the Assembly moved to its business session. The session was chaired by Zenaida Lumba (President), assisted by Leonor Rojas (Treasurer), whereas Petros Vassiliadis was asked to take minutes.

First, the President invited Chris Meinzer, the chief financial officer of ATS, to present the treasurer's report. In the ensuing discussion it was suggested (C. Mostert, ANZATS) that in future assemblies it would be more appropriate and helpful for the delegates to have access: (a) to all the minutes of the previous Executive Committee meeting, and (b) more detailed financial sheets. At the end the treasurer's report was unanimously received with appreciation. Thanks were expressed: (a) to the much depleted executive committee who with big and generous hearts had taken on the organisation of the Chiang Mai Assembly (Zenaida Lumba, President, Leonor Rojas, Treasurer, and Petros Vassiliadis); (b) to the local committee, graciously and unstintingly headed by Buddy Martinez, who had given the executive much appreciated support; (c) to many others who had contributed significantly, including Loretta Groff for organising the WOCATI website, and to Chris Meinzer, the chief financial officer of ATS, who generously made available his considerable administrative and financial skills.

Then, the floor was opened to suggest possible ways of moving WOCATI forward and furthering the implementation of its aims which are as relevant now as they were in the late eighties, when WOCATI was established. The following comments were submitted:

Hopkinson (ACATE): WOCATI needs a new mechanism for the future. Yes to a global network, but our associations need something more exciting. Unless a new ground-breaking activity takes place, I doubt whether WOCATI can bring back ACATE.

Fosenc (ASIT): Yes to the continuation of WOCATI in its present form. However, more information for the individual associations is needed, and a productive interaction between them is essential. Consider the possibility of applying the model of tithing to WOCATI, i.e. 1% of the income of ATS and all the rest associations.

Banivanua (SPATS): Yes to the continuation of WOCATI, but we should also consider other events in addition to a Congress every 4 and sometimes 6 years.

Nam Soon (PTCA): WOCATI must be developed into a new entity with a new philosophy, beyond an umbrella of the existing associations.

Boothe (CATS): I am in favor of the continuation of WOCATI, but we need to improve it, to make it more effective, perhaps with the participation of students in addition to executive committee meetings.

Vassiliadis (COCTS): WOCATI is valuable not simply as a network of associations, or as a super-association, but as an ecumenical, worldwide mechanism to introduce both theological and educational ideas, and to help through



regular interaction all theological institutions. To this end, WOCATI can perhaps undertake the websites of those associations that do not have one.

McCarthy (ATS): Cautioned the assembly about WOCATI's capability. We must be pragmatic on what we can do together.

Lo (ATESEA): He underlined the high level of the papers and the discussion, as well as the spirit of friendship developed in the Congress. He added, however, that such conferences should focus more on «education», i.e. on the models of teaching.

Zakaria (PERSETIA): Suggested more sharing of experiences, programs etc.

Larcher (guest from Europe): Expressed his gratefulness for the invitation, promised the formation of an all-European academic association joining WOCATI, and suggested a more universal outlook of WOCATI, and more representational (Catholic etc.).

Mostert (ANZATS) Moved for the continuation of WOCATI. Vassiliadis seconded the motion.

#### THE MOTION WAS ACCEPTED UNANIMOUSLY

Hopkinson, then, suggested a new structure, arguing that WOCATI's future lies on ground-breaking consultations, independently sponsored. WOCATI will survive from what it will offer! He offered himself to the web support.

Taking into account the above unanimous support a nomination committee was set up consisting of Yeow Choo Lak (chairman, former President of WOCATI), Josué Fonseca, and Hyacinth Boothe. During the process of the election some problems with the too complicated constitution and the By-Laws were noted, and a suggestion was made to make them simpler.

At the end, a slate with the new executive committee was proposed to the assembly, which was voted unanimously. The new Executive Committee, duly elected according to the WOCATI Constitution and the By-Laws, with the task of promoting and developing WOCATI for the next four years is the following:

Petros Vassiliadis (President), from COTS and Eastern Europe,  
Kang Nam Soon (Vice President), from PTCA and Asia,  
Bill Hopkinson (Secretary/Treasurer), from ACATE and Western Europe,  
Tevita Banivanua, from SPATS and the Pacific,  
Hyacinth Boothe, from CATS and the Caribbean,  
Edison Kalengyo, from ATIEA and Africa,  
Léonor Rojas, from ASIT and Latin America, and  
Kathleen Williams from ANZATS and Australia-New Zealand.