

World Council of Churches  
Education and Ecumenical Formation

October 2001



*Ecumenical learning for Finnish group of youth.*



This quarterly journal aims to encourage sharing and cooperation among all who are working for the renewal of the churches through programmes of ministerial formation. All correspondence regarding MINISTERIAL FORMATION should be sent to the address below. Submission of relevant articles, reports and news is welcomed. Items in this journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the WCC and its programme on Education and Ecumenical Formation (formerly Programme on Theological Education).

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Cover Page: Ecumenical learning for Finnish group of youth.

## ***LETTER FROM THE STAFF***

Dear friend and colleague,

The second meeting of the WCC Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation was held on 18<sup>th</sup> –22<sup>nd</sup> September 2001 at Cartigny, Switzerland soon after the tragic events on September 11<sup>th</sup> in Pennsylvania, New York City and Washington DC, USA. As much as we tried to articulate the objectives of the meeting and to write a report, it increasingly became clear that life was no longer the same and that this small group of people who had travelled from different parts of the world were going through some kind of frustration that was not being addressed. In due course, one member, Dr. Dan P. Moseley (Herald B. Monroe Professor of Practical Parish Ministry, Christian Theological Seminary, USA) spoke words that helped most of us to stop, reflect and move on. We share these words with you (with permission) as we struggle to envision a future where “fear, destruction and death” are not the last words.

As I have listened to the group through this week, I have felt some frustration. As I have listened to myself, I have discovered frustration. Our response to the listeners’ report reflects frustration. In reflecting on this frustration, I wonder if this may not be related to September 11. On September 11 something died. In the tragedies in New York and Washington DC something died. We don’t know what. Each of us will experience it differently. What died will vary according to our own particular context.

But, we don’t really know what died. We can’t yet name it. When someone dies, we know she is dead. But it takes a long time of telling stories to completely discover what died. It takes time to know what of our world died with her.

But, the fact is when there is a death, there is a change in us and around us and we must adapt to it. When something dies, there is disillusionment, disenchantment, disengagement and disorientation. During these days I have felt all of these things. My experience of grieving has taught me that these are normal responses to a death.

Therefore, I believe that some of my frustration with this meeting has been the result of the context of the world in confusion. My disorientation makes it difficult for me to project what should be done in the future. Before September 11 I had some clear ideas how to do Peace education. Now, I don't know. I have some underlying doubt about what I believed before. It is hard to establish priorities when one doesn't know how the world will be shaped in the future

So, I am trying not to be so hard on myself in this meeting. I am trying to receive grace. I am trying to accept the fact that I am not satisfied with my work or the work of our commission. But, I don't know that we can find satisfaction at the present time. Our ideas seem inadequate in relationship to the confusion and disorientation we may feel in our hearts.

So, I would invite you to receive grace as well. We will make a report. It will be the best we can do in this situation. We will then move ahead and hope that our future work will be closer to what we would hope for ourselves. Thank you.

*Nyambura Njoroge*

*Elis Widen (Intern from Indonesia)*

*Françoise Faure*

*Magali Roussel*

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***OFFERING LIFE-GIVING, TRANSFORMING AND HEALING THEOLOGIES***

*Nyambura Njoroge*

No doubt these are hard times. How do we, those of us charged with the task and responsibility of recruiting, mentoring, equipping and preparing children, youth, women and men for leadership in the life and mission of the Church of Christ interpret these times? How do we articulate what is happening to millions of people who live in extreme poverty, violent-infested communities, war, terrorism, fear, and whose lives are threatened and destroyed by diseases and hunger, floods, earth quakes and many other calamities? Indeed these are times we must ask hard questions, do critical soul-searching and create comforting, life-giving, transforming and healing theologies and spiritualities. We must take a hard look at ourselves, the promises we pronounce from the scriptures and Christian traditions and reconsider if for sure we mean what we say and teach.

Here in the World Council of Churches, the staff struggles to understand and articulate the injustices and suffering that result, for instance, from racism, sexism, all forms of violence and discrimination, globalization, divisions in churches and communities, religious intolerance and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, to name just a few. We work with member churches, theological and ecumenical institutions, laity training and academic centres and many other networks that have developed over the years. For those of us who work on ecumenical theological education we are particularly interested to know how theological institutions (this includes bible schools, pastoral institutes, seminaries, colleges, theological education by extension and distance education programmes and faculties of religion and theology in universities) create curricula that address these life-threatening issues of our time. How well do we engage theological students and pastors (in continuing education) in articulating and formulating theologies that will breathe encouragement, creativity and wellbeing in the daily lives of the people?

Moreover, we are reminded of the daunting task in the hands of theological administrators and educators in equipping, training and preparing women and men who will undertake various leadership responsibilities in the churches and communities. Leaders who at times are called upon to address critical and tragic events like the one of September 11<sup>th</sup> and its

aftermath of war in Afghanistan, the escalating violent-deaths and destruction in the Middle East (among the Israeli and Palestinians). Women and men who must address shameful and tragic cases of sexual abuse of children in the church (by church leaders) as articulated in a new WCC Risk Book Series, (2001) *The Hidden Shame of the Church* by Ron O'Grady. Leaders who like boy Samuel, son of Hanna and Elkanah, are called to prepare for prophetic leadership in place of a crooked and irresponsible priesthood (1 Samuel 1-3). A time when the word of the Lord was rare and visions were not widespread! When the ark of God had been captured and the glory had departed from Israel and so Eli's newly born grandson was named Ichabod (1 Samuel 4). Like the prophets of old, we are called into church leadership at a critical, tragic, violent and destructive time. What do we do?

Similarly, with the escalating wave of denominationalism described by leading Japanese theologian and theological educator Kosuke Koyama, as “deadly, demonic and tearing apart” (Koyama, 1999: 143) we need leadership that will embrace and facilitate ecumenical learning and formation in our churches and theological institutions. We need to create safe spaces and encounters where Christians can talk about our differences without nurturing hatred and divisions that preach contrary to the gospel message of love, transformation and healing. During the second Commission meeting of Education and Ecumenical Formation Team (18<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> September 2001), we heard of the need to foster and develop ecumenism which bridges the different wings within denominations and traditions. Like in the days of Paul, Peter and Apollos, we desperately need leaders who are committed to confront the tensions, quarrels, power games and differences that portray a divided Christ (I Corinthians 1-3) and a dysfunctional body of Christ. We need leaders who will give respect, mutuality, diversity of gifts, love, compassion and peace a chance. Leaders who stay away from power struggle, status and divisive tactics.

Finally, we are aware that many theological institutions in our networks are ill-equipped with modern theological books and other ways of communicating life-giving, transforming and healing theologies and spirituality. We therefore encourage theological educators to take seriously mentoring and instructing students on how to research, write, edit and interpret knowledge to ensure production of quality and relevant theological literature. In the same light, we are encouraging publishers to see that potential theological scholars are introduced to the art of writing for publication and to ensure efficient distribution of books already published but which never reach theological libraries. With today's rapidly developing Information Communication Technology (ICT), we also need to explore other ways of preserving, collecting and disseminating information that will improve and create different

ways of learning. Equipping our libraries with relevant literature and technology is yet another area that demands skillful and effective leadership, which unfortunately is lacking in many theological institutions in the South.

In this last issue of 2001, we present a number of case studies from a few members of the ETE Working Group and a former staff of ETE, whose work involve(d) reflecting on some of the items we have highlighted above. We also include two articles addressing ecumenism in Africa, which were originally meant to be included in the WCC publications: *The Ecumenical Review* on “Transforming Ecumenism in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (Volume 53, Number 3, July 2001). The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) held its fifth general assembly in Quito, Ecuador and we are pleased to include its message.

Last but not the least, included here is a very important announcement on a major project that is happening in Africa that will hopefully help the continent deal with some of the most pressing issues related to theological education and ecumenical formation. We invite all concerned to prayerfully and critically study the proposal and to do the necessary to make the journey of hope in Africa a reality.

### **Further Reading**

Amadiume, Ifi (1997) *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion & Culture*. New York & London: Zed Books Ltd.

Dube, Musa W. ed. (2001) *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*. (Geneva: WCC Publications & Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature (SBL).

Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A. (2001) *Refiner’s Fire: A Religious Engagement with Violence*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press.

Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). *Voices from the Third World: Life Affirming Spirituality Source of Justice and Righteousness*. Vol. XV, No. 1, June 1992.

Koyoma, Kosuke. (1999) *Water Buffalo Theology: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition Revised and Expanded*. New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books.



***THE ETS EXPERIENCE: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY  
OF DOING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION***

*Luna L. Dingayan*

I would like to share with you our experience at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary (ETS), which is considered by many as an alternative way of doing theological education in our own part of the world.

***THE BIRTH OF ETS***

The birth of ETS is like the birth of a child: it is painful, but it is also joyful and fulfilling. It is painful because some could not accept this new “*child*”. While some would view it as an illegitimate “*child*”, **so to speak, others would look at it as an added burden for the church and too expensive to raise it up.** But it is also joyful and fulfilling, for it is seen as a fulfillment of a vision that has been there for a long time, an expression and realization of a continuous search for a relevant theological education in our own time and place.

With the recommendation of seven out of nine conferences in the North Luzon Jurisdiction (NLJ) of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), followed by the approval of the NLJ Cabinet on October 13, 1995, and the subsequent endorsement of the UCCP Council of Bishops; the UCCP General Assembly through its Executive Committee had approved on May 23, 1996, the establishment of ETS in Baguio City, Philippines, under the supervision of the UCCP Council of Bishops through the NLJ Bishop’s Office. Then, on May 28, 1998, the UCCP General Assembly approved and accredited ETS as one of UCCP’s five ministerial formation centers. In a sense, the UCCP as a whole is the midwife of this new *child*.

An organizing board was formed to run the Seminary under the chairmanship of the incumbent NLJ Bishop, the Rev. Alan Ray B. Sarte. Conferences under the NLJ were represented in the Board by their Conference Ministers on a rotation basis. A Constitution and by-laws was drafted and approved by the Board. A seminary logo was designed, and a seminary hymn was composed.

On June 13, 1996, a convocation was held to mark the formal opening of the Seminary. The first day of classes was on June 17, 1996, with thirty-four (34) students enrolled. And to date, we have a total of two hundred sixty-four (264) students enrolled in the various curricular programs, coming from different denominations and nationalities. We have been experiencing one hundred percent increase in our enrolment each year since the Seminary’s founding in 1996. ETS was accepted as a member of the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA) in November 2000.

***WHAT IS IN A NAME?***

After the birth of this new “*child*”, the next problem we faced was to give it a name. At first, we called it “*Ecumenical Center for Theological Studies*”, but we dropped this name in favor of “*Ecumenical Theological Seminary*”. But why *Ecumenical Theological Seminary*? What is in a name? Many are asking us these questions. Needless to say, name for us is very important. A name, for us, carries with it the very nature and character of that which is being named, following the Biblical tradition of naming. Jesus, for instance, was named *Jesus*, which literally means *Savior*; because of the faith and hope of his

parents that “*he will save his own people from their sins*” (Mt. 1:21). Being true to our Biblical tradition, we do not therefore name our ministerial formation center by any kind of name. There should be good reasons for the name, which could be reflected in the very nature, character, and purpose of the institution we are building.

And so why do we name our seminary *Ecumenical* in the first place? Of course, there are practical and programmatic reasons for this, like the vision for the establishment of a consortium of all UCCP ministerial formation centers in North Luzon, as well as, the vision to make ETS a nucleus of a future seminary for all member churches of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) in the area. There are deeper reasons, however, for naming it *ecumenical*.

First, our church, the UCCP, has been claiming from the very beginning to be “*a united and uniting church*”(cf. *UCCP Constitution and By-Laws*, Art.II, Sec.2, p.9). Hence, it is but proper and fitting that our own UCCP Seminary should reflect the spirit of being a “*united and uniting church*” even in its name. Our Seminary should be oriented towards unity in terms of its life and ministry.

Second, if there is any heritage of our Church that should be renewed, it is no other than its ecumenical heritage. This is the very reason for our existence as a church. Our Church is a product of the ecumenical movement in our country. As a matter of fact, it is perhaps one of the most successful experiments in organic union in this part of the world. Hence, by naming our own seminary *ecumenical*, we are also declaring our firm resolve to renew our commitment to unity.

Third, part of our Lord’s mission entrusted to us is to be one so that “*the world may believe*”(cf. Jn.17). In its life and witness, the Early Church tried to show the kind of unity founded in Jesus Christ our Lord (cf. Acts 2:43-47). Our Seminary shares with the missiological vision of Christ and His church. It endeavors to prepare men and women to be bearers as well as instruments of such unity in Christ. Hence, this missiological vision for unity should be reflected in our own Seminary’s name.

Fourth, the Christ in whom we believe is an ecumenical Christ. He is the Christ for everyone. In Him, “*there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female*” (cf. Gal. 3:28). He transcends all human barriers. He is open to each one of us. He accepts us just as we are and transforms us into the kind of person we ought to be. Hence, a seminary, like ETS, that affirms faith in the ecumenical Christ must therefore bear witness to Him in word and in deed, and thus even in its name.

And fifth, we affirm our faith in God who is “*One: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer*” as our UCCP Statement of Faith rightly declares. The word *ecumenical* comes from the Greek word *oikoumene*, which means “*the whole inhabited earth*”. Our God is the God of the whole-inhabited earth. Hence, the unity that God seeks, and that we believers should also seek, is a unity not only of churches or Christians, but the unity of *the whole-inhabited earth*, the unity, not only of the human world, but of the whole creation. Affirming our faith in the ecumenical God would mean, therefore, that our seminary should not only be ecumenical in name, but also in its life and works, in its orientation and programs. In other words, the name *ecumenical* captures the very reason of our Seminary’s being and becoming, and therefore removing it from its name would mean the loss of its essence as an institution of ministerial formation founded on faith in the ecumenical God.

The second word in our Seminary’s name is the term *theological*. But why theological? Why not Biblical, or missionary or evangelical, as others do? The term *theological* as commonly understood comes from the word *theology*, which is a combination of two Greek words: *theos* and *logos*, which simply mean *God* and *study*, respectively. Thus, the word *theology* literally means *the study of God*.

What is actually being studied and understood in theological studies is not God in Godself, but God's revelations. Human minds could not really fathom God's mysteries. God is understood only in so far as God reveals Godself to us. As Prophet Isaiah declares, "My thoughts" says the Lord, "are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours"(Is.55: 8-9).

God, however, reveals Godself in many ways, sometimes in ways we could not fully understand. God reveals Godself in nature, in the Scriptures, in Israel's historical experiences, in church's mission and evangelistic work, and most specially in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. The Magnificat declares that God's power is shown in historical events: in bringing down the mighty from their thrones and in lifting up the lowly, in sending away the rich empty and in feeding the hungry (Lk.1: 52-53). We do believe God is continuously revealing Godself in our own historical life as a people and as a church in our own time and situation. All these manifold expressions and historical experiences concerning God's revelation are raw materials for doing theology.

Hence, we use the word *theological* in our Seminary's name, simply because it is more encompassing. It embraces all the varied facets of God's revelation in life and history, which anyone in the Christian ministry should be exposed to. Of course, this does not mean that we don't recognize the importance and significance of the Bible, and of mission and evangelism, as instruments of God's revelation. What we are simply saying is that we don't limit our study of God's revelation to the Bible and to the work of mission and evangelism. We have to go beyond the study of Scriptures, because God is far greater than what the Scriptures could contain. Thus, we call our Seminary a *theological seminary*, and not by any other name.

The third word in our Seminary's name is the word *seminary* itself. Again, why *seminary*, not school, or institute or simply formation center? The word *seminary* comes from the Latin word *seminarium* which is a combination of two words: *semin* which means *seed*, and *arium* which means *plot*. Thus, *seminarium* simply means a *seed plot* or *seedbed* or a nursery. Hence, there are at least two images or metaphors that may come to our mind when we talk about the word *seminary*.

First is the picture of a seedbed. A seedbed as we know is where we scatter seeds that would grow into seedlings, and later on, would be transplanted into the ricefields. This would mean, therefore, that a seminary is where the seed of faith, so to speak, is nurtured to germinate into seedlings, and to be transplanted into the "fields" of Christian mission and ministry in order to grow and bear fruits.

The other image is that of a mother's womb. It is in the mother's womb, where the seed of life is formed and nurtured. And then in due time, this new life is born into this world. A seminary is like a mother's womb, where the seed of faith is formed and nurtured, and later on, would give birth to a new way of life.

These two powerful metaphors would show us that a seminary is there not only to supply the needs of the churches in terms of trained personnel, but more importantly to help germinate new and innovative ways and ideas relevant for church mission and ministry. In other words, a seminary true to its name should continuously seek to develop new ways of being church and of doing theology. This, we believe, is what makes a ministerial formation center a *seminary* in the real sense of the word. This is also the reason why we name our Institution a *seminary*.

The name *Ecumenical Theological Seminary*, therefore, is not just a mere play of words. For the name carries what the institution stands for. It states what the institution has been, what it is, and what it hopes to be. It is *ecumenical*. It is *theological*. It is a *seminary*. We, therefore, continue to call our ministerial formation center in Baguio City, Philippines, the *Ecumenical Theological Seminary*. And we do hope and pray that it would remain true and faithful to its name.

### ***VISION-MISSION-GOALS***

One of the first things we did as soon as we had organized our new Seminary was to conduct a strategic planning. Members of the Seminary community - board, faculty and staff, and student representatives - gathered together for a three-day activity and came up with a strategic plan, indicating our Seminary's Vision-Mission-Goals. Thus, our seminary "*envision(s) a caring, sharing, and life-enhancing Christian community involved with others in the struggle for a just and humane society that upholds the integrity of creation.*" Our Seminary's mission is "*to equip the clergy and lay to bring about an ecumenical, contextual, and liberating ways of being church and of doing theology.*"

To concretize this mission, our Seminary has the following goals: First, "*To have Christian communities and individuals empowered to do contextual theology with the community, expressing it through messages, arts, drama, cultural dances, liturgy, music, corporate worship, and other creative ways;* Second, "*To have a seminary that is closely linked and related with local churches and conferences, other theological communities, people's organizations, and other religious groups, and work side by side with them;* Third, "*To widen the number of churches advocating and living out transformative values and caring ministries, addressing social concerns and issues, and continually enabling themselves and the communities where they are, to have a foretaste of as well as becoming a sign of shalom;* And fourth, "*To have a seminary that is widely recognized as a center in the promotion of an ecumenical way of being church and of doing theology, expressed in cooperative efforts with member churches of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines in terms of faculty and students, regular South-to-South exchange program, and accreditation and membership in ecumenical theological associations in the Philippines and in Asia.*"

These are our Seminary's Vision-Mission-Goals. There are several things that our Seminary's vision significantly implies: First of all, our Seminary's vision is beyond the institution itself. We are envisioning something not only for our Seminary, but also for the wider community; not only for the Christian community, but for the whole created order.

Traditionally, seminaries have the tendency to separate themselves from the outside world, thinking perhaps that the world out there is incurably evil. We, however, think otherwise. For us, the Christian community can do something to bring about a better world, a just and humane society. This hope is founded, not in the power of the human, but in the power of the resurrected Christ, who has overcome the forces of evil and death.

Moreover, our Seminary's vision also implies that Christian community should not do this task of transforming society alone by itself. It should do it in partnership with others in the wider communities, who also share the same vision and the same struggle. Our God is a universal God. God is not a monopoly of the Christian community. God is free to do God's work of salvation in the world. Our struggle for a just and humane society is our response in obedience to God's call to redeem and transform the world. Realizing this would help us guard ourselves from being self-righteous and triumphalistic in our attitudes.

Our Seminary's vision further implies that something should be done to the Christian community in order to become an agent of transformation in the wider community. It should first of all be itself a "caring, sharing, and life-enhancing Christian community." In other words, what the Christian community expects to happen in the wider community should be reflected first and foremost in the life of the Christian community itself. To help bring about such kind of Christian community is our Seminary's ultimate concern. Hence, our Seminary has the mission "to equip the clergy and lay to bring about an ecumenical, contextual, and liberating way of being church and of doing theology."

*Traditionally, the mission of a seminary is to train people to become clergy. But our Seminary goes beyond such traditional mission. We extend our concerns, and train even those who are already in the field, meaning the clergy and lay people in the churches. And if the people could not come to the Seminary for various reasons, then our Seminary should go to the people.*

There are three adjectives used to describe our own understanding of a new way of being church and of doing theology, namely: ecumenical, *contextual*, and *liberating*. The first word is *ecumenical*. As we said earlier, an ecumenical church is one that exemplifies and promotes unity. It is not only unity among Christian denominations and among various world religions, but also unity among different ideologies and sectors of society as well as unity between the human world and the rest of God's creation. In short, it is a unity that affirms the Lordship of God over all creation.

Doing theology ecumenically would also mean that theologizing or the task of interpreting the Christian faith is no longer the monopoly of the so-called professional theologians. Rather, it is now the task of the whole people of God. It is now a theology of the people. It is a theology that would come out of people's reflections on their own experiences in the light of God's Word. Theological discussions would be focused not only on God or the human, but also on "the whole inhabited earth."

The word *contextual* would mean that theology and the church should take the Filipino culture seriously. Christianity should become truly Filipino. The hopes and dreams, aspirations and struggles of the Filipino should be reflected in the theology as well as in church's life and witness. As some missiologists keep on saying, Christianity in our country is like a "potted plant", transported by missionaries from foreign lands. Hence, in order for Christianity to become truly Filipino, it should be taken out of the pot, and should be planted in Philippine soil, so to speak, so that it would touch the ground, take root and find nourishment in Filipino culture. Otherwise, the church as well as theology would alienate Filipinos from their own native culture.

Then, the word *liberating* could be the opposite of domesticating. Religion can be both domesticating and liberating. Historically, the Christian religion was used by colonizers to domesticate Filipinos, so that they would be subservient to them, and they could easily impose their own will upon the people. But history would also show that religion could also be a source of liberation. In his study on the role of religion in Philippine Revolution, Reynaldo C. Ileto claims that the *Pasyon* (a story in verse on the life, passion, and suffering of Jesus) was a very important organizing element of the *Katipunan* (a mass movement against Spanish colonization in the Philippines). The *Katipuneros* (revolutionaries) believed that they were sharing with Christ's sufferings and struggles in their fight for freedom ( cf. *Pasyon and Revolution*, p.15-16).

Our experiences with Christianity in our country show us that the Gospel has a liberating nature, and no amount of manipulative and repressive forces could ever stop the liberating elements of the Gospel to come out. It will always come out in the fullness of time, and will break the chains of oppression. The

colonizers might have tried to use Christianity to enslave our people, but the Christ in Christianity, the Word made flesh, has inspired and continue to inspire our people to struggle to be free.

Liberation, however, does not only mean fighting for freedom; more importantly, it would also mean living in freedom. Sometimes, to live in freedom is the most difficult thing to do. Perhaps, the worst thing that may happen to us as a people and nation is when we claim to be free, yet we do not live like one.

### **PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

To realize our Vision-Mission-Goals, we are offering programs and services for both clergy and lay people. We offer degree programs, like: Bachelor of Ministry for those who have finished at least high school; Bachelor of Church Music, for those preparing themselves for music ministry; Bachelor of Theology, for those who finished at least two years in college; and Master of Divinity for those who have government-recognized college degree. We also offer short courses for our lay people, like the Diploma in Biblical Studies, and the Diploma in Church Ministries. And for those who possess a basic theological degree and at least two years in the field, we provide them a professional degree which we call Master of Ministry in Biblical Studies.

Our programs and services have at least three unique features:

#### **Action-Reflection-Action Approach -**

First, we follow what we call *Action-Reflection-Action Approach* to theological education. All our students are assigned in local churches or church-related programs or projects. Then, they come to the Seminary by batch once a month for one week of lectures, discussions, reports, reflections, and examinations. For the rest of the month, the students are in their respective church assignments and participate in the ministry of the church, do their required readings, and write their papers. This approach is based on the philosophy that theological education happens not only in the classrooms, but also in the concrete life situations where people live and work.

Based on our own experiences, there are at least four problems we face in theological education: the problem of housing, problem of scholarship, problem of discipline, and the problem of the integration of theory and practice. Through the Action-Reflection-Action Approach, these problems are greatly minimized. Though we have a very small space and a growing student population, we could still accommodate our students because they come by schedule and by batch. By assigning students to the local churches, the churches themselves are indirectly helping in the scholarships as well as in the discipline of students. Local churches are giving our students honorarium, allowances or even salary. Of course, many of our students have already been pastoring churches for a long time. Apparently, students become more mature if they are given responsibilities in the church. They come to the seminary with their raw experiences from the field to be processed in the field education courses and in the different courses they enrolled in. Then, they return to the field with their fresh insights and theories learned, ready to test their validity in concrete situations. Hence, there is a constant dialogue between theory and practice. Besides, through this process new experiences and situations from the field could be immediately considered in the revision of curriculum and of the content of syllabus.

#### **Ladderized Curriculum -**

Second, our curriculum is ladderized. This would mean, for instance, that after finishing the first year of a four-year degree program, students are awarded a Diploma in Theology, which would entitle them to be lay preachers in the church. Then, after finishing the second year, we give them Associate in

Theology, and they could also serve as licentiate pastors. The curriculum is designed according to the task that they would be doing after finishing the year level. We designed it this way so that those who would stop after their first year or second year could still take certain responsibilities in the church.

### **Open Seminary Program -**

And third, our Seminary is an open seminary. Since normally there are very few people who come to the seminaries to study for various reasons, our Seminary is designed to bring theological education to where the people are and train them where they are. It is a reality in North Luzon Jurisdiction, and I'm sure even in other UCCP jurisdictions, that most of our church workers in the field are lay people without formal theological education. Yet, these are the people who are in the frontlines of our church mission and ministry. We have to respond to this urgent need of our churches to train our lay church workers.

### **RESOURCES AND SUPPORT**

How are we supporting all these programs and services? Personally, I am, is also wondering how we are able to survive up to now. We started from scratch. For almost a year my work in our Seminary is purely voluntary, devoid of any monetary remuneration, yet my family did not starve. What we only had then was a vision, a vision for the church and what the church can do. We shared this vision to others - to our friends and partners in the ministry, to our leaders in the church. And they also shared this vision. And this shared vision generated support far and wide, in a way that we ourselves had not expected.

Our Church allowed us to use the NLJ Peace Center in Baguio City as our temporary campus. Partners here and abroad donated books that comprise our basic library. Our UCCP General Assembly provided us scholarship assistance for our UCCP students. Generous individuals, churches, institutions, organizations, and foundations donated scholarships to our Socialized Scholarship Fund. This Fund was designed to provide equal opportunities to all our students to have scholarship assistance, so that all our students will have something to eat. Some also donated computers, fax machine, xerox machine, tables, cabinets and many others for our office. But perhaps, the greatest help we received came from the local churches, who received and supported our students to work with them and at the same time study in our Seminary. Indeed, we are touched by the generosity of people who shared with our vision and are willing to pay the price to realize this vision.

Our qualified pastors and church leaders in the area as well as our partners abroad shared in our faculty of instruction. Our visiting professors from Germany, Japan, Canada, and the U.S. helped a lot in strengthening our faculty line up.

### **WHAT LIES AHEAD**

We are now in our sixth year of operation. And it seems that we are up for many years. And so, we have lined up two priority projects for our seminary: **First is to build our own Seminary campus.** Although we keep on saying that our Open Seminary has the world as its campus, our growing student population still requires a physical structure to house our programs and services. We will be formally launching our "BUILD A VISION, ONE MILLION PEOPLE" campaign during our Foundation Day celebration in March, 2002, although we have already started distributing brochures for this campaign and have started

receiving donations. The whole idea is to get one million people all over the world to donate one dollar or its equivalent for building our Seminary campus and to support our programs and services. If it is possible to get one million people to bring a tyrant down, then perhaps it is also possible to get one million people to build a seminary up. I do believe it is possible, for I have been inspired by an example of this in the Latin American Biblical University in Costa Rica. We do appreciate very much if friends out there could help us in the realization of this project.

And second is to prepare our Seminary faculty. We'll be sending to Australia next year one of our faculty members for further studies in the area of New Testament. We need to have at least one person trained in each of the basic theological disciplines. Of course, we are deeply grateful to our partner churches abroad for sharing with us their human resources. But in the long run, we need to develop our own Filipino faculty. Like our students, our present Filipino faculty are not only teaching; they are also assigned as church workers in the local churches, or connected with certain ministries of the church. Also, next year we'll be training adjunct instructors among qualified church workers in the various churches to serve as field education supervisors and teachers in our study centers or extension classes.

#### WORD OF THANKS

Thank you very much for this opportunity to share with you our experiences, visions and hopes at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary. We don't know if you would consider this an alternative way of doing theological education. What we surely know is that God has shown us the need and we responded in faith. Looking back to what God has done in and through the life and works of our Seminary, we can say with a deep sense of humility and gratitude that God's grace, indeed, is sufficient for us.



**OBJETIVOS EMANCIPADORES EN LA EDUCACIÓN TEOLÓGICA**  
*Un ensayo desde el proyecto educativo de la UBL <sup>1</sup>*

*José Duque*

*Los sistemas son relativos*

La realidad socio-histórica está ocupada por innumerables sistemas debidamente estructurados. El mundo social, igual que la realidad biológica está organizada en múltiples sistemas dentro y con los cuales se produce y reproduce la vida. Pero dejando a un lado los fascinantes sistemas biológicos, nos interesa en este ensayo, destacar el hecho de que en todas las relaciones humanas dadas en la producción y reproducción de la vida, participan una compleja variedad de sistemas bien estructurados.

Es decir, toda la realidad histórico-social esta estructurada en sistemas complejos o simples que conviven entre sí aunque haya algunos que se imponen y se hacen dominantes sobre los demás.

Dentro de esa multiplicidad de sistemas, existen, sin embargo, una buena cantidad de ellos que por voluntad humana oprimen, marginan, excluyen y alienan una gran parte de la sociedad. No importa si esos sistemas son de carácter social, religioso, económico, político, pedagógico o de cualquier otro ámbito de la cultura poseen una ponzoña amenazante contra la vida. Pueden ser sistemas macro estructurales o igualmente micro sistemas de la vida cotidiana. Se trata también de sistemas que rigen desde la realidad objetiva o de aquella realidad subjetiva. Es decir, se trata de sistemas que ocupan innumerables espacios de las relaciones humano vitales, los cuales, proponiéndoselo o no, son deshumanizantes.

Hoy muchos de estos sistemas, no sólo son reconocidos como inhumanos, sino que ya han sido debidamente identificados como malvados, lo cual ha hecho posible denunciarlos. Sin embargo, aún funcionan e imponen su irracionalidad sin escrúpulos, en nombre del orden, la autoridad o de otros valores mientras esconden el dolor y la miseria humana que producen.

Esta realidad puede constatararse, por ejemplo, en un sistema patriarcal, que aún con tiernas manifestaciones de amor en el cotidiano calor del hogar, mantenga desiguales e injustas relaciones en la familia. Igual experiencia puede contarse de ciertos sistemas religiosos, como algunos de los eclesiásticos, construidos en su tiempo y contexto para responder a necesidades de la comunidad de fe, han llegado a perpetuarse como sistemas absolutos aunque su práctica hoy, a la luz del día, sea fragantemente excluyente y marginadora de amplios sectores del mismo pueblo de Dios.

Lo anterior nos dice entonces, que en los sistemas, como los dos que acabamos de ilustrar, pueden contener simultáneamente, prácticas efectivamente humanizadoras como al revés, es decir, deshumanizadoras. Así pues, un padre machista puede manifestar satisfactorias relaciones de ternura paterna a uno de sus seres queridos y, simultáneamente apelar a los más crueles códigos de autoritarismo. Aunque no cabe duda, que en la doblez del comportamiento de este papá, propio de un sistema patriarcalista, domina y se impone con creces sobre el sentimiento de la ternura, el cruel autoritarismo.

*Ocupando sistemas y creando espacios alternativos*

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<sup>1</sup>La UBL (Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana) es una institución de educación teológica con casi 80 años de experiencia. De origen protestante, es ecuménica y regional (América Latina y el Caribe). Hasta 1997 se llamó Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano (SBL). Su sede está en San José, Costa Rica. Es una institución autónoma, es decir no depende oficialmente de ninguna iglesia ni de ningún otro organismo.

La alusión a la realidad anterior sobre los sistemas, resultaría inútil si no completamos su descripción con un elemento adicional. Ningún sistema, aunque se diga absoluto puede ocupar de una manera total todos los espacios de la realidad. No hay poder sistémico que sea capaz de ocupar y controlar todos y cada uno de los espacios existentes en una realidad socio-histórica. Esto significa que en cualquier realidad, por precarios que sean los espacios de libertad, siempre quedarán lugares para recrear alternativos sistemas humanistas de convivencia. Es decir, no importa el poder opresor, marginador y excluyente de un determinado sistema, siempre será posible rescatar espacios y convertirlos en lugares alternativos para recrear relaciones sociales sanas.

Lo dicho anteriormente, nos introduce, por interés propio, a la siguiente pregunta: es posible encontrar espacios de libertad alternativa dentro del actual y contundentemente dominante sistema capitalista en su fase más desarrollada de la globalización y su impronta neoliberal? Dicho de otra manera, quedan aún, al interior de este sistema globalizado espacios posibles para construir primicias de una sociedad donde quepan todos y todas?

Desde nuestro interés educativo, preguntamos, si encontraremos espacios para construir una escuela transformadora al interior del actual contexto mundial de la globalización, que pareciera penetrar y ocupar casi todos los espacios de la realidad?

Estas preguntas suenan retóricas si no volvemos nuestra mirada a la realidad y constatamos que efectivamente hay muchos espacios libres y bien aprovechados donde se desarrollan o construyen creativos proyectos alternativos de sociedad en todos los países de la región. Es decir, contamos con una reserva testimonial creativa, rica y abundante en diversos espacios religiosos, educativos, sociales etc. Ese acumulado testimonial constituye, sin duda, la fuerza y motivación para seguir intentando ocupar o emancipar espacios para recrear sistemas alternativos.

Sin embargo, tales proyectos creativos, no caen del cielo como regalo celestial. Hay que construirlos, hay que aprovechar los espacios y las condiciones cuando estos se dan. Este es ciertamente el caso del modelo educativo que testimonialmente queremos usar aquí para ilustrar que sí es posible, aunque haya que pagar precios y desprecios muy altos, ocupar espacios y construir un modelo educativo alternativo con objetivos emancipadores. En este esfuerzo mancomunado, la pregunta guiadora ha sido ¿cómo construir una escuela donde la educación teológica no siga sirviendo para afirmar los sistemas pedagógicos y teológicos dominantes con su carga excluyente y afirmadores del statu quo? Qué se necesita para transformar esta escuela teológica en una escuela transformadora? Puede una escuela de formación teológica tradicional transformarse en una escuela inclusiva, con proporciones simétricas y que acoja y cultive sueños emancipadores?

Evidentemente que desde sus comienzos, esas preocupaciones tenían su génesis en la emoción de poner en marcha una escuela que desencadenara todos los sueños posibles, para entonces entre movimientos eclesiales, ecuménicos y teológicos, dirigidos hacia la esperanza de construir una iglesia y una sociedad nueva, orientada por las imágenes del reinado de Dios y su justicia.

Cierto que esas expectativas, eran parte de un sueño muy generalizado por los años sesenta y setenta en la sociedad latinoamericana. También es cierto que se trataba de una osadía, de estudiantes y docentes impactados por el contexto revolucionario de aquella época.

Hoy, podemos decir, que aún con las limitaciones de un proyecto del tercer mundo, la UBL ha logrado crear un espacio a donde llegan anualmente centenares de estudiantes buscando una experiencia sólida y agradable de formación teológica alternativa. Cómo lo ha logrado? Y que elementos han constituido las

condiciones necesarias para tal fin? Los elementos combinados para constituir la realidad de un modelo educativo como el de la UBL actual, ciertamente son muchos. Quizá entre los factores más destacados podemos mencionar: el ambiente de cambio existente en la sociedad de entonces, la autonomía institucional lograda por el entonces SBL, la voluntad de especificar la opción epistemológica, clarificar el referente eclesial y, construir de una manera comunitaria los objetivos estratégicos del naciente nuevo proyecto educativo.

Por cuestión de espacio, tomaremos solamente el último de los elementos mencionados como constitutivos para construir el modelo educativo actual, de la UBL. Es decir, sintetizaremos algunas reflexiones entorno a los objetivos estratégicos de este proyecto educativo. Pero no queremos hacer un simple relato descriptivo, es decir del mero dato material, sino observar, hasta donde podamos, los subyacentes epistemológicos no explícitos en la letra del tal modelo educativo.

### *Opción epistemológica*

Ya en 1990, en un documento colectivo del cuerpo docente, se definía la misión del entonces SBL de la siguiente forma:

La educación teológica ha venido desarrollándose como un vehículo dedicado primordialmente a informar, capacitar y formar a agentes pastorales para guiar a las iglesias en sus múltiples ministerios. <sup>2</sup>

Dejada así literalmente esa definición, como objetivo o misión de la educación teológica, creo que cualquier institución teológica educativa, la asumiría como suya sin reparos. Porque las escuelas, incluso las más tradicionales con pedagogías “bancarias”, siempre han sido informativas, siempre han sido capacitadoras e igualmente siempre se han afirmado como formadoras. Es decir, esos conceptos repetidos literalmente no aportan nada nuevo y quedan expuestos a cualquier contenido semántico.

Sin embargo, la sospecha epistemológica nos permite cavar un poco más los sentidos profundos, hasta ocultos, de las filosofías educativas. Además nos prevé de que en una escuela alternativa, informar no es repetir fórmulas prefabricadas, que capacitar no es mecánica tecnológica y que formar no es mera reproducción de conocimientos. Por ello, esa sospecha nos interroga con preguntas como, ¿informar qué? ¿Capacitar para qué? Y formar ¿cómo y a quién? Es decir, la epistemología nos pregunta también por las cargas semánticas que portan dichos conceptos. Sin estas preguntas sospechosas, la educación no es más que un círculo cerrado en si mismo y para si mismo. De un sistema educativo así, los agentes egresados no pasarían de ser un calco robotizado para integrarse en la maquinaria funcional del sistema dominante.

Además, siendo un poco más exigentes con los requerimientos de una escuela alternativa nos damos cuenta que, no se trata únicamente de la estructuración de un curriculum, que incluyan materias actualizadas. Significa del mismo modo que las dimensiones de una escuela alternativa no se limita a la renovación didáctica. Tampoco se descarga su capacidad transformadora en las meras pedagogías innovadoras. De la misma manera, es insuficiente la tecnificación del aula. El aula virtual más sofisticado, por ejemplo, puede repetir y reproducir con mayor eficacia los viejos sistemas patriarcales, excluyentes y opresores de nuestra sociedad globalizada.

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<sup>2</sup> « Educación teológica como afirmación de la vida : un modelo de educación teológica diversificada » Este es un documento del Cuerpo Docente del entonces SBL, el cual trata de poner al día el marco categorial liberador de la escuela teológica de esta institución. Vida y Pensamiento, pp. 27-39. Pero para ampliar criterios sobre ese marco teórico también se puede consultar Duque y Foulkes « El quehacer teológico en la UBL : herencia, desafíos, horizontes » en Vida y Pensamiento, pp.34- 70., también Ross K insler »Por un mundo donde quepan todos » en la revista citada., pp.16-33.

Lo que estamos diciendo, es que un sistema educativo alternativo no se desarrolla en su constitución epistemológica transformadora, solo con factores materiales. El constitutivo transformador, requiere más que excelentes aulas, o que un curriculum impecablemente ordenado, más que abundancia de contenidos, moderna tecnología, docentes prestigiosamente cualificados, biblioteca cargada de buenos recursos bibliográficos, un sistema escolar bien ordenado requiere más que abundantes recursos económicos. La óptima materialidad de un sistema educativo, no garantiza en absoluto el constitutivo alternativo de una escuela.

Entonces, dónde estaría la puerta para entrar en un proceso de transformación educativa? O más bien, nos interrogamos cuáles son los factores que comportan el constitutivo transformador en la formación teológica? Por supuesto que estas preguntas no se satisfacen con respuestas provenientes del *marketing* que ofrece fórmulas prefabricadas al dos por uno. Es más, estas preguntas no tienen respuestas únicas, porque se trata de una sofisticada interrelación vertical, horizontal y transversal, de una multiplicidad de elementos que se conjugan para producir unas determinadas y propicias condiciones.

Pero al decir que se conjugan y producen determinadas condiciones, no estamos insinuando un automatismo ambiental educativo. Al contrario, se trata de una situación muy compleja y necesariamente intervenida por el factor humano. Ya lo dijimos no son condiciones que caen del cielo. Además de compleja, no es una experiencia circunscrita al sistema intraescolar, sino que es una situación dada en el amplio universo histórico contextual.

Debido a todo este tejido de factores, dinamizados por los deseos, gustos, aspiraciones y necesidades humanas, insistimos, el informar, capacitar y formar, quedan como conceptos llevados por cualquier viento de doctrina. Quedan disponibles para cualquier sistema educativo, aunque sea excluyente y establecido en los estrados de los poderes dominantes de este siglo. Es decir, en la oscuridad de las tinieblas. Son conceptos que recitados sin explicitar su orientación pedagógica y epistemológica, pueden ser el marco conceptual de una escuela donde informar es manipular los mecanismos legales e institucionales del sistema, sea escolar o social vigente. Por eso se dice en el mundo de las comunicaciones de hoy que quien está informado tiene poder. En una escuela así, capacitarse, es manejar reglamentos, esquemas, doctrinas y dogmas para mantener el orden establecido. Igualmente, formarse puede ser nada más que memorización de técnicas específicas y didácticas pragmáticas de punta, siempre frescas en el mercado de la globalización, para reproducirlas ante cualquier contexto y situación de aprendizaje. En fin, estas constituyen hoy por hoy, las escuelas de éxito, porque supuestamente tienen la capacidad de tratar “eficazmente”, con esquemas copiados de un *software*, cualquier pregunta del aula, sin necesidad de pensar.

En la UBL, la puerta para entrar en un proceso de transformación educativa teológico, que recoja y haga suyas las necesidades y desafíos urgentes de transformación de las iglesias y de la sociedad, ha requerido una visión crítica y esperanzadora también recogida del contexto de la región. Esta visión crítica motivada por una carga acumulada de esperanza, y recogida de nuestra realidad nos ha provisto de algunos principios, tomados por nosotros como objetivos para articular el modelo educativo actual. Todos estos principios bíblico-teológicos, pastorales, antropológicos, pedagógicos y sociales constituyen el tejido que explicita en la UBL el marco categorial y el fondo epistemológico de su modelo educativo. No pretendemos aquí hacer una completa exposición de tales objetivos, solamente mencionaremos algunos de ellos.

### 1) Encarnación y contextualización

La encarnación de Dios en nuestra condición humana, en nuestra historia y en nuestra realidad marcó el camino de nuestra fe. De ahí viene el imperativo de la contextualización de la iglesia, de la teología y de la educación teológica. Esto significa conocer no solo los datos materializados y crueles de la realidad, sino tratar de explicitar todo aquello que permanece oculto y que son los causales del dolor, la precariedad y la injusticia humana. Por ello se acude a las ciencias humanas para que nos ayuden a conocer las causas, las estructuras, las ideologías, y los artífices de los sistemas de marginación, opresión, exclusión, destrucción y muerte. Conocer la realidad para encarnarse en ella tratando de seguir el modelo mesiánico de Jesucristo. Una escuela transformadora, lo será desde el contexto y profundamente encarnada, en aquella condición humana amenazada por la muerte prematura que produce el pecado, a fin de iluminar caminos de vida alternativos: la salvación.

### 2) El horizonte del reinado de Dios

Nosotros no estamos jalonados por cualquier viento de doctrina humanista. Nuestro horizonte está jalonado por el reinado de Dios y su justicia. En la teología bíblica se destaca que el centro de la predicación de Jesús está el mensaje del reinado de Dios. (Mr. 1:14-15). Jesucristo mismo es quien lo anuncia, lo hace presente y lo proyecta en perspectiva de plenitud. Esto significa que el ministerio de Jesús fue una concreción histórica de primicias y anticipos de la Buena Noticia del reino.

Hoy el reinado de Dios es una noción teológica central en la reflexión teológica latinoamericana. Por ello ya sabemos con suficiente base bíblico-exegética, que la iglesia no es el reino de Dios, como se había osado anunciar en otros tiempos. Aunque ella tiene la comisión de anunciarlo y de mostrar primicias y anticipos concretos en las relaciones de la comunidad de los creyentes.

Pero la historia humana, como historia de la salvación puede condensar anticipos y primicias del reinado de Dios. Por ello un proyecto de sociedad justa, inclusiva y simétrica para todos y todas podremos decir que está en perspectiva del reinado de Dios. Pero, aunque la redención incluye toda la creación, ningún proyecto socio-político debe ser confundido, en ninguna manera, con el reinado de Dios.

De ahí que el compromiso social para construir sociedades con sistemas justos aquí y ahora es parte del seguimiento de Jesús, aunque la plenitud de la vida definitiva sólo será posible cuando ¡venga tu reino! Es igualmente el compromiso de una escuela alternativa, una escuela que marcha en el horizonte del reinado de Dios.

### 3) El círculo hermenéutico

Este es otro legado de la teología latinoamericana acogido en nuestra escuela teológica. Los elementos sueltos y separados aunque sean parte de un todo (sistema), no pueden contener una carga semántica como aquella que resulta cuando se relacionan vertical, horizontal, diagonal y transversalmente en tensión dialéctica esos elementos. Eso es lo que sugiere el llamado círculo hermenéutico. Así una lectura del texto bíblico, la realidad histórica y la praxis pastoral vinculadas y circulando en todas las direcciones mencionadas, pueden contribuir a la transformación personal, eclesial y social.

Pero el círculo hermenéutico es una herramienta transformadora cuando está situada en un determinado contexto y jalonada por el horizonte del reinado de Dios y su justicia, en perspectiva de la opción por los pobres y excluidos.

#### 4) La opción pedagógica

En casi todas las escuelas se cultiva el estudio con la motivación individualista de “salir adelante”, se insiste al estudiantado que se educan para “llegar a ser profesionales exitosos”, para “ser alguien en la vida”, para “asegurar el futuro”. Sin duda esas son escuelas arribistas, clasistas y elitistas sin escrúpulos éticos. Hacia dónde nos conducen estas escuelas, qué ser humano fabrican y para cuál mundo futuro?

Ya en la década de los años setenta, una promoción de graduados del SBL tuvieron como lema de su graduación: “Capacitados para servir”. Sí, para servir a Cristo en la iglesia, en la sociedad. Pero capacitar agentes pastorales y docentes para el servicio requiere de aulas con sistemas educativos simétricos. El aula también es escuela en las relaciones que allí se establecen entre dicentes (estudiantes) mismos, como entre dicentes y docentes. Una relación de iguales entre género, raza, etnia, confesión, nacionalidad y escolaridad al interior de las aulas, hará de esa escuela un modelo de cambio. Se requieren aulas con relaciones de iguales y relaciones de solidaridad. A las aulas de la escuela se entra objetivamente en condiciones desiguales, allí llegan pobres, excluidos, marginados y otros estudiantes con tremendas desventajas. Una escuela con sensibilidad acoge preferencialmente a quienes sufren estas desventajas. Esa acogida hace posible relaciones solidaria para con “los pequeñitos”.

Pero el aula no es toda la escuela. El aprendizaje envuelve todas las dimensiones de la vida de una persona que vive en sociedad. Además, el aprendizaje tiene que ver con todas las relaciones humanas como también con la naturaleza. La formación continua en los recreos, en la vida cotidiana, en los compromisos transformadores eclesiales, sociales y familiares en los cuales se pone a prueba el desarrollo de habilidades, conocimientos y actitudes. Toda la vida es escuela.

Por ello el analfabetismo no es sólo no saber leer y escribir, existen también analfabetas religiosos porque ignoran cómo son manipulados y hasta explotados por sus propias religiones e iglesias. Podríamos hablar igualmente de analfabetas políticos y de analfabetas socio culturales.<sup>3</sup>

Una escuela transformadora es una escuela que además de saber leer y escribir, cultiva en la comunidad educativa, el conocimiento de su realidad para escapar de las manipulaciones sean estas religiosas, políticas, pedagógicas o culturales. La escuela es iluminación de la realidad.

#### 5) El horizonte ecuménico

En las actuales escuelas de teología de la región, como en la UBL, se encuentran estudiantes, hombres y mujeres procedentes de casi todas las confesiones y denominaciones cristianas. Aunque también hay estudiantes que proceden de contextos de nacionalidades indígenas y afros donde sobreviven religiones ancestrales.

Además, en esas aulas, se encuentran personas, que siendo de la misma denominación, comportan diversas tendencias teológicas. Entre esta diversidad hay conservadores (evangelicals), liberales, radicales, fundamentalistas y de la teología de la liberación.

<sup>3</sup> Hugo Assmann dice que « Son tres los analfabetismos por derrotar hoy : el de la lecto-escritura (saber leer y escribir), el socio-cultural (saber en qué tipo de sociedad se vive, p. ej., saber lo que son mecanismos de mercado), y el tecnológico (saber interactuar con máquinas complejas). Nosotros compartimos los dos primeros, puesto que el analfabetismo tecnológico no es una opción para las escuelas sin recursos. **Reencantar a educacao**, p. 32.

Ese cuadro resulta entonces, plurireligioso, pluriétnico, plurinacional, pluriteológico y pluriracial. Sin embargo, muy a pesar de esta rica excepcional pluralidad, no necesariamente se establecen automáticamente transformadoras relaciones ecuménicas.

Las relaciones ecuménicas son una opción, una necesidad cultivada y una voluntad organizada.

Pero hoy las barreras de separación, exclusión y opresión existentes y vigentes en los sistemas educativos como en otros sistemas sociales, se ocultan hoy debido a la falacia de la globalización y el mercado, que se presenta como alternativa de libertad. Esa falacia, constituyen el más grande desafío ecuménico de hoy en nuestras escuelas teológicas, en la iglesia y en la sociedad. La unidad ecuménica es camino para la reconciliación de la humanidad en justicia y paz. Pero hay que encender la luz de la sabiduría para superar la oscuridad de la falacia.

#### 6) Los artífices de la formación teológica

Ya se ha hablado con buena base de “la irrupción de los nuevos sujetos”, en la producción teológica latinoamericana. <sup>4</sup> Anaida Pascual nos propone usar el término “artífice” <sup>5</sup> para denotar la fuerza subjetiva transformadora.

Lo cierto es que en años muy recientes empezamos a oír la razón teológica de personas de grupos étnicos que han soportado el silencio por casi 500 años de exclusión y opresión. Igual ha pasado con los grupos afro y también con las mujeres. Pero han sido las iglesias, las escuelas y las sociedades excluyentes las que no han oído la voz de estos hermanos y hermanas. Es decir, no es que ellos y ellas no hayan hablado, sino que nuestros sistemas dominantes no les permitieron ser oídos.

Hoy esos grupos sociales irrumpen con su fuerza subjetiva dentro de las instituciones teológicas para convertirse en artífices de su propia formación. Pero no se trata, por supuesto, de darles sólo un lugar físico en la escuela, se trata de un lugar subjetivo, que es un lugar pedagógico, un lugar semántico y epistemológico. Esto significa, un lugar para procesar y transmitir información, un lugar para generar capacitación y un lugar para desarrollar la formación. Entonces las aulas de la escuela, serán un lugar emancipatorio.

Se trata de luchas emancipadoras llevadas hacia adelante por los y las mismas artífices, contra todos y cualquier sistema de exclusión, opresión y la marginación. Una emancipación, jalonada por los sueños de una iglesia, y una sociedad donde quepan todos y todas con dignidad y justicia. Teológicamente jalonada por las imágenes del reino de Dios y su justicia que tanto soñamos los cristianos.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Fernando Torres, Por caminos propios : construcción pedagógica de la teología popular. *Especialmente el capítulo cuatro pp. 109ss.*

<sup>5</sup> Esta educadora puertorriqueña, dice : « Propongo el vocablo Artífice –en contraposición a sujeto- para expresar mis reservas en torno a su significado e inclusividad y para connotar el enorme y dinámico potencial para la construcción histórica y creadora de cada ser humano. Además, porque como tantas otras mujeres, me resisto a que se me denomine Sujeto o, peor aún, Sujeta. » P.I. Lastimosamente no tenemos espacio aquí para profundizar esta sugerente propuesta de Anaida, pero debemos retomarla tan pronto podamos.

### *Conclusión*

Estas notas son en realidad reflexiones testimoniales de un proyecto educativo como el de la UBL actual. Son reflexiones en cuanto constituyen parte del marco de categorías y principios que orientan esta escuela teológica. Pero preferimos decir que son parte de nuestros objetivos, porque es un proceso largo, lento y complejo. Si no aclaramos esto, estuviéramos hablando de una escuela perfecta. No es así, la lucha continua y gran parte del desarrollo de este modelo educativo queda y está en manos de los propios artífices de la educación: alumnos, estudiantes, docentes y también de los docentes.

Es testimonial, porque desde 1990, cuando se oficializó este modelo educativo en la UBL, se ha ido desarrollando como descentralizado: se han convenido acuerdos con casi una veintena de instituciones de educación teológica en diversos países de la América Latina y el Caribe, para crear una unidad que llamamos “Hermandad” para desarrollar juntos este modelo.

Es testimonial porque hemos tratado de hacer un sistema educativo que ha venido saliendo de la práctica educativa de la Hermandad. Este ha sido y es un esfuerzo mancomunado, socializado y en cierto sentido experimental. Ya ha sido evaluado en el año 2000 y parece que ha pasado la etapa experimental. Por ello hoy se está consolidando.

Elaborar objetivos emancipadores en la educación teológica, si participan las y los artífices, es una tarea difícil pero en la UBL se ha logrado. Organizar el sistema para que opere según el marco razonado, es una tarea compleja, pero posible. Por ello hay que juntar voluntades y recursos. Con Hugo Assmann decimos: “Hoy, educar significa defender vidas”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Op. Cit. P. 22.



**LIBERATING OBJECTIVES IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>**  
*An essay based on the educational project of UBL<sup>2</sup>*

*José Duque*

*Systems are relative*

Our social-historic reality encompasses countless structured systems. The social world, like the biological world, is organized in multiple systems with which it produces and reproduces life. But setting aside the fascinating world of biological systems, in this essay we are interested in emphasizing the fact that every human relationship involved in the production and reproduction of life participates in a complex variety of well structured systems. In other words, all social-historic reality is structured in complex or simple systems that are interrelated, with some imposing themselves as dominant over the rest.

Within this multiplicity of systems there are, however, a vast number, that in response to human will, oppress, marginalize, exclude and alienate a large part of society. Whether these systems are social, religious, economic, political, pedagogic or belonging to any other realm of culture, they are a venomous threat to life. They may be macro systems or micro systems of everyday life. They may be systems that involve objective reality as well as those that govern subjective reality. These are systems that are found in multiple areas affecting vital human relations, which, whether they set out to be or not, are dehumanizing. Today many of these systems are not only recognized as being inhuman, but have already been duly identified as malevolent, and thus it is possible to denounce them. However, they continue to function and to impose their unscrupulous irrationality in the name of order, authority and other values, while they hid the pain and human misery they produce.

This reality can be verified, for example, in the patriarchal system that, in spite of tender manifestations of love in the daily life of the home, maintains unequal and unjust relationships in the family. The same experience can be found in certain religious systems, created for a specific time and context to respond to the needs of the community of faith, that have perpetuated themselves as absolute systems, in spite of the fact that their practice today is excluding and marginalizing large sectors of the very people of God.

All this tells us, then, that systems such as those we have just illustrated can simultaneously contain effectively humanizing practices as well as the opposite. Thus a “machista” father can manifest satisfactory relationships of paternal concern toward one of his loved ones and at the same time be a part of the cruelest of authoritarian codes. Without a doubt, however, within this dualistic behavior of the father which is characteristic of the patriarchal system, cruel authoritarianism greatly overshadows the tender sentiments of fatherhood.

*Occupying systems and creating alternative spaces*

Our mention of the reality concerning systems would be useless if we did not complete the description with an additional element. No system, however absolute it would seem to be, can occupy every space of

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Spanish by WCC Language Service

<sup>2</sup> The UBL (Latin American Biblical University) is an institution for theological education with almost 80 years experience. Of Protestant origin, the UBL is ecumenical and regional (Latin America and the Caribbean). Until 1997 it was known as the Latin American Biblical Seminary (SBL). It is headquartered in San José, Costa Rica and is an autonomous institution that does not depend on any church denomination or other organization.

reality. There is no systemic power capable of occupying and controlling each and every one of the existing spaces in a social- historic reality. This means that in any reality, however precarious its spaces of freedom, there will always be a place for creating alternative humanistic systems for coexistence. No matter what the oppressing, marginalizing and excluding power of a particular system, it will always be possible to rescue certain spaces and transform them into alternative places for recreating healthy social relationships.

The aforementioned introduces us to the following question: is it possible to find alternative spaces for freedom within the current overwhelmingly dominant capitalist system in this, its most developed phase of globalization and its neoliberal trademark? To put it another way, are there still spaces within this globalized system in which the beginnings of a society, with room for everyone and everybody, can be built? From the perspective of our interest in education we ask more specifically, will we be able to find spaces for building a transformative school in the current world context of globalization that seems to penetrate and occupy almost every space of reality?

These questions would sound rhetorical if we didn't turn our eyes to the current reality and confirm that in fact there are many opportunities available and well taken advantage of where creative alternative projects of society are being developed or built in every country in the region. Thus, we have available to us a creative, rich and abundant reserve of testimonies in diverse religious, educational, social and other spaces. This accumulated testimony constitutes, without a doubt, the strength and motivation for continuing to seek to occupy or liberate spaces for recreating alternative systems.

These creative projects, however, don't fall from the sky like a gift from heaven. They must be built. We must take advantage of the spaces and conditions when they appear. This is certainly the case with respect to the educational model that we will share here to illustrate that it is indeed possible, although at a high cost and risk, to occupy spaces and build an alternative educational model with liberating objectives. In this joint effort, the guiding question has been how to build a school where theological education ceases to affirm the dominant pedagogical and theological systems with their excluding and status quo affirming burdens? What is needed in order to transform this educational institution into an institution for educational transformation? Can an institution of traditional theological education transform itself into an inclusive place of education, of symmetrical proportions, that welcomes and cultivates liberating dreams?

In our example, these concerns had their origin in the desire to place in motion an educational institution that would unleash all possible dreams among ecclesial, ecumenical and theological movements. It was moved by the hope of building a new church and society oriented by the images of the kingdom of God and its justice. It is true that these expectations were part of a dream that became commonplace due to the experiences of the sixties and seventies in Latin America. It is also true that the dream arose from the boldness and daring of students and professors who were impacted by the revolutionary context of that time.

Today we can say that in spite of the limitation of being a Third World project, the UBL has managed to create a space where yearly hundreds of students seek a solid and enjoyable experience of alternative theological education. How has this been achieved? What elements have constituted the necessary conditions for achieving this end? The combined elements for constituting the reality of an educational model such as that of UBL today are certainly many. Perhaps among the most notable elements we could mention are: the environment of change existing in society at the time the model was introduced, the institutional autonomy achieved by the then SBL, the will to specify an epistemological option, to clarify the ecclesial reference point and build together, as a community, the strategic objectives of the emerging new educational project.

Due to space constraints here, we will explore only the last of the elements mentioned above, as contributing to the development of the current educational model of UBL. We will summarize some reflections concerning the strategic objectives of this educational project. But we don't want to limit ourselves to a simple description or mere raw data, but rather we wish to observe, as far as is possible, the implicit underlying epistemological foundation that is not explicit in the letter of this educational model.

*Epistemological option*

In 1990 a collective document of the professorial body defines the mission of the then SBL:

*Theological education has developed as a means dedicated primarily to informing, training and educating pastoral agents to guide the churches in their diverse ministries.*<sup>3</sup>

As is, this objective for the mission of theological education is one I believe any institution of theological education would adopt without hesitation. Educational institutions, including the most traditional ones characterized by “banking” pedagogies, have always been informative, have always been committed to training and have affirmed themselves to be dedicated to education. Thus repeating these concepts literally does not contribute anything new and leaves them exposed to a range of semantic contents.

Our epistemological suspicion, however, allows us to dig a little further into the deep, even hidden, meanings of educational philosophies. It alerts us to the fact that in an alternative educational system, to inform is not to repeat prefabricated formulas, to train is not limited to technology and to educate is not merely to reproduce knowledge. This suspicion generates questions such as: inform what?, train for what?, educate who and how? Epistemology questions us about the semantic weight these concepts carry. Without these questions, education is no more than a circle closed on itself and for itself. Pastoral agents moving through this type of educational system would be no more than a roboticized copy prepared to integrate itself in the functional machinery of the dominant system.

In addition, if we allow ourselves to be more demanding with the requirements of an alternative educational system, we realize that it is not limited to the structuring of a curriculum with up-to-date subjects. This also means that the dimensions of an alternative educational institution are not limited to didactic renewal. Neither does its transforming capacity focus solely on mere innovative pedagogies. It is insufficient to technify the classroom. The most sophisticated virtual classroom, for example, can repeat and reproduce with even more efficiency the old patriarchal, excluding, and oppressive systems of our globalized society.

In summary then, an alternative educational system with a transforming epistemological constituent cannot be developed only with material elements. The constituent educational element requires more than excellent classrooms or a impeccably organized curriculum. More than an abundance of contents, modern technology, prestigious qualified professors or a library well stocked with bibliographic resources, a well ordered educational system requires more than abundant economic resources. Optimum material resources in an educational system do not in any way guarantee an alternative constituent composition of an educational institution.

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<sup>3</sup> “Educación teológica como afirmación de la vida: un modelo de educación teológica diversificada”. This is the document of the professorial body of the then SBL which seeks to bring up-to-date the categorial liberating framework of the school of theology of this institution. *Vida y pensamiento*, pp.27-39. For a broader description of the criteria of this theoretical framework see also Duque and Foulkes, “El quehacer teológico en la UBL: herencia, desafíos, horizontes”, en *Vida y pensamiento*, pp.34-70, also Ross Kinsler, “Por un mundo donde quepan todos” in *ibid*, pp.16-33

Where, then, is the path for entering a process of educational transformation? Or more clearly, what factors make up the transforming constitutive elements in theological education? Of course these questions cannot be satisfied with answers from the field of marketing, which offers ready prefabricated formulas. Indeed, these questions don't have only one answer, because we are dealing with a sophisticated vertical, horizontal, and transversal relationship of a multiplicity of elements that come together to produce specific propitious conditions.

But when we say that they come together to produce specific conditions, we are not insinuating educational environmental automatism. On the contrary, it is a complex situation, with the necessary intervention of a human element. We have already stated that these conditions don't fall from the sky. Besides being complex, this experience is not circumscribed to the internal aspects of the educational system, but rather takes place in the broader contextual historic universe.

Due to this network of factors, and moved by human desires, tastes, aspirations and needs, we insist that to inform, train, and educate remain as concepts tending to be blown about by any wind of doctrine. They are available to any educational system, including those that are excluding and established in the dominant stratum of the powers of this age — in other words, in darkness and shadows. These are concepts that if simply stated, without making explicit their pedagogic and epistemological orientation, can be the conceptual framework of an educational institution where to inform is to manipulate the legal and institutional mechanisms of the system, be it educational or social. That is why in the world of communications today it is said that information is power. In this type of educational institution, to be trained is to learn to manage rules, patterns, doctrines and dogmas in a way that maintain the established order. To be educated may be nothing more than the memorization of specific didactic pragmatic cutting edge techniques, always freshly available in the market of globalization to be reproduced in any context and situation of learning. These constitute, today, the so called successful educational institutions, because they supposedly have the ability to deal efficiently with software systems and any classroom question without the need to think.

At UBL taking the path toward a process of transformation in theological education, that takes into account and assumes the needs and urgent challenges for transformation of the churches and of society, has required a critical vision, as well as one full of hope, also gathered from the context of the region. This critical vision, motivated by an accumulated cargo of hope, and gathered from our reality, has provided us with some principles which we have incorporated as objectives for articulating the current educational model. All these biblical-theological, pastoral, anthropological, pedagogical and social principles constitute the fabric that makes up the framework and epistemological foundation of UBL's educational model. We do not pretend here to provide a complete exposition of these objectives, but rather to briefly mention some of them.

#### 1) Incarnation and contextualization

The incarnation of God in our human condition, in our history, and in our reality has made its mark on our walk of faith. From this incarnation comes the imperative for the contextualization of the church, of theology and of theological education. This means not only to know the cruel and material facts of reality, but also to try to make known all that which remains hidden and causes human pain, precarious existence and injustice. We go to the human sciences to help us understand the causes, the structures, the ideologies and the architects of the systems of marginalization, oppression, exclusion, destruction and death. We seek to know reality in order to incarnate ourselves in it in keeping with the messianic model of Jesus Christ. An educational institution will be transformational through a profound incarnation in the context, in that human condition that is threatened by the premature death produced by sin, in order to illuminate alternative means for life: salvation.

2) The horizon of the reign of God

We are not moved about by every wind of humanist doctrine. Our horizon is marked by the kingdom of God and God's justice. Biblical theology points out that the center of the preaching of Jesus is the message of the kingdom of God (Mk 1.14-15). Jesus himself announces this kingdom, makes it present and projects it in the perspective of fullness. This means that the ministry of Jesus was a historic concretion of the first fruits and foretastes of the Good News of the kingdom.

Today the kingdom of God is a central theological theme in Latin American theological reflection. Thus we have sufficient biblical-exegetical basis for understanding that the church is not the kingdom of God, as some had dared to announce in other times — although she is commissioned to announce and demonstrate concrete signs and foretastes of the kingdom in the relationships of the community of believers. But human history, like the history of salvation, can condense the first fruits and foretastes of the kingdom of God. Thus we can say that a project for a just, inclusive, equal society for all is within the perspective of the kingdom of God. But although redemption includes all of creation, no social-political project should be confused, in any way, with the kingdom of God.

From this conviction arises the social commitment to build just societies, here and now as part of following Jesus, in spite of the fact that definitive fullness of life will only be possible when "Thy kingdom comes!" From this same conviction arises our commitment to an alternative educational institution, an institution that moves on the horizon of the kingdom of God.

3) The hermeneutic circle

This is another legacy of Latin American theology welcomed in our school of theology. Elements that are separate and unconnected, in spite of belonging to a whole (system), cannot contain the semantic weight that results when they are related vertically, horizontally, diagonally and transversally in dialectic tension. This is what the hermeneutic circle suggests. Thus a reading of the Biblical text, historical reality and pastoral praxis in which all are related and circulate in all the directions mentioned, can contribute to personal, ecclesial, and social transformation. But the hermeneutic circle is a tool for transformation only when it is situated in a particular context and directed by the horizon of the kingdom of God and God's justice, from the perspective of the option for the poor and excluded.

4) The pedagogic option

In almost all educational institutions, the motivation for study is the individualistic desire to "get ahead". The insistence is that the students be educated in order to "become successful professionals", to "be someone in life" to "secure their future". Without a doubt these are classist, elitist, social-climbing schools lacking ethical scruples. Where are these institutions of education taking us? What kind of human being are they creating and for what future world?

In the 70's one of the graduating classes of the SBL had as their graduation theme "Educated to serve". Yes, to serve Christ in the church, in society. But to train pastoral agents and teachers for service, demands a classroom with symmetric educational systems. The classroom is also a place of learning with respect to the relationships that are established there between the students, as well as between students and professors. A relationship of equality in the midst of diversity — gender, race, ethnic background, religious confession, nationality, and education — within the classroom will make the school a model of change. We need classrooms with relationships of equality and solidarity. Students enter the school

rooms in objective conditions of inequality - the poor, the excluded, the marginalized, and others with tremendous disadvantages come to the classroom. A school with sensitivity will preferentially welcome those who suffer from these disadvantages. This welcome makes possible relationships of solidarity with the “little ones”.

But a classroom is not the whole school. Learning involves all dimensions of the life of a person in society. Besides, learning has to do with all human relationships and with nature as well. Education continues in recess, in daily life, in transforming ecclesial, social, and family commitments that put to the test the development of abilities, knowledge, and attitudes. All of life is a school.

That is why illiteracy is not only not knowing how to read and write; there are also religious illiterates who are ignorant of how they are manipulated and even exploited by their very own religions and churches. We could speak as well of political and social-cultural illiterates.<sup>4</sup>

A transforming educational institution is one that, besides teaching to read and write, cultivates in the educational community knowledge of their reality in order to escape from manipulations, be they religious, political, pedagogic, or cultural. The educational institution is the illuminator of reality.

#### 5) The ecumenical horizon

In the existing institutions of theological education in the region, as in the UBL, there are students, both men and women, from practically all Christian confessions and denominations. There are also students who come from the context of indigenous as well as afro nationalities where ancestral religions survive. We also find in these classrooms students who in spite of being from the same denomination, have diverse theological leanings. In the midst of this diversity we find conservatives (evangelicals) liberals, radicals, fundamentalists, and those who adhere to liberation theology. This picture then is plurireligious, pluriethnic, plurinational, pluritheological, and pluriracial. However, in spite of this exceptionally rich plurality, transforming ecumenical relationships are not necessarily established automatically. Ecumenical relationships are an option, a cultivated need, an organized will.

#### 6) The artifices of theological formation

A good foundation has been laid for speaking of the “irruption of new active subjects” in Latin American theological production.<sup>5</sup> Anaida Pacual proposes the term “artifice”<sup>6</sup> to denote the active subjects and

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<sup>4</sup> Hugo Assman says that “There are three illiteracies to be defeated today: reading and writing, social-cultural (to know what type of society we live in, for example, to recognize the mechanisms of the market) and technological (to know how to interact with complex machines). We share the first two, since technological illiteracy is not an option for schools with resources. *Reencantar a educacao.*, p.32.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Fernando Torres, *Por caminos propios: construcción pedagógica de la teología popular*. Especially chapter 4, pp. 109ff.

<sup>6</sup> The Puertorican educator says: “I propose the word artifice - as opposed to active subject - to express my reserves concerning its meaning and inclusivity and to connote the enormous and dynamic potential for historic and creative construction of each human being. Besides, because like so many other women, I resist being labeled as a “subject”, p.1. Unfortunately we don’t have room here to explore this suggestive proposal, but we must return to it when we are able.

their strength for transformation. In recent years we have begun to hear the theological reflection from people belonging to ethnic groups that have withstood silence for almost 500 years of exclusion and oppression. The same thing has happened with afro groups and women. But the exclusive churches, schools, and societies have not heard the voices of these brothers and sisters. These voices have not been silent, but our systems of domination have not allowed them to be heard.

Today these social groups irrupt with their subjective strength in theological institutions to become artifices of their own formation. But it is not simply a matter of giving them a physical space in a school, it is a matter of subjective space, that is a pedagogic, semantic, and epistemological space. This means a place to process and transmit information, a place to generate training, and a place to carry out education. Only then will the classrooms of the school be a place of liberation.

We are talking about struggles for freedom carried forward by the very artifices, against any and every system of exclusion, oppression and marginalization. About liberation driven by the dreams of a church and a society where there will be room for all with dignity and justice — theological driven by the images of the kingdom of God and God's justice that as Christians we dream about.

### *Conclusion*

These reflections are in reality testimonies of an educational project, that of UBL today. They are reflections in that they form part of the framework of categories and principles that orient this educational institution. But we prefer to say that they are part of our objectives, because it is a long, slow and complex process. If we didn't make this clarification, we would be talking about a perfect educational institution. But it isn't. The struggle continues and a large part of the development of this educational model is yet to be seen and is in the hands of the very artifices of the education: students, pupils as well as professors.

It is a testimony because since 1990, when this educational model was officially implemented at UBL, it has been developing through decentralization: agreements have been signed with some twenty theological education institutions in different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to create a unified group we call the "Hermandad" (brotherhood/sisterhood) to develop this model together.

It is a testimony because we have tried to create an educational system based on the educational practice of the "Hermandad". This has been and is a joint effort, socialized and in a certain sense experimental. It was evaluated in the year 2000 and seems to have survived the experimental stage and is today being strengthened.

The task of developing liberating objectives for theological education, with the participation of the artifices, is a difficult one, but at UBL it is being done. To organize the system so that it functions in accordance with the desired framework is a complex job, but possible. But to achieve these goals it is necessary to join wills and resources. With Hugo Assman we say: "Today, to educate means to defend lives."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Op.Cit., p.22.

**A CASE STUDY:  
KETKO - TRAINING PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL AND ECUMENICAL WORK  
TETE - TRAINING ECUMENICAL TRAINERS IN EUROPE**

*Minnamari Helaseppä*

**KETKO**

About 30 young people aged from 18 to 30 years are gathered together in a big classroom behind their desks. Although all of them are Finns they seem to represent as many different countries as their number is. One careful look at the nameplates in front of each representative show they also represent quite a large number of different christian denominations, also those not existing in Finland. The atmosphere in the classroom is quite exciting. The chairperson opens the discussion about the theme “Marriage, Family Planning and Women“. What is going on?

A simultaneous-exercise of the so-called KETKO-training, **Training Program for International and Ecumenical Work**, is just about to finish the course for this time. An English-speaking exercise of an ecumenical meeting in a form of a role game has been organised in order to show to the participants, how things might work in “real“. KETKO-training is meant to provide young people interested in ecumenical work with basic skills and background knowledge to be able to work in the international ecumenical movement. KETKO was initiated by the Finnish Ecumenical Council<sup>1</sup> and first organised in 1983 in order to address the constant need to find suitable young people to be sent to international and ecumenical meetings. The Youth Division of the Finnish Ecumenical Council started a program to train potential youth conference delegates. During the 18 years this training program has proved to be a success-story. Combining theoretical knowledge and real-experience in ecumenism, it has enabled young people from different backgrounds to enter the ecumenical movement and to take on international assignments and responsibilities. In addition and maybe even more importantly, KETKO has been able to arouse interest among the young people about ecumenical questions. Approximately 86 % of the Finns still being Lutheran, KETKO offers many young people the chance to really get in touch with other christian groups in their own country, maybe even for the first time.

**Goals**

The goals of the training today are the following:

- a) To introduce young people to different confessions and traditions of the christian church and their ways of worship and prayer.
- b) To encourage participation in the ecumenical movement at all levels.
- c) To prepare young people for taking part in ecumenical meetings, conferences and youth events on local, national and international level.
- d) To prepare young people for working in interdenominational and intercultural situations.

The main emphasis of the training lies on active participation of different traditions of christian faith. This is put into practice through taking part in the worship of different denominations and inviting representatives of these groups to introduce themselves. It is highly appreciated, one gets the information first hand and not only in a theoretical way.

**Themes**

The training includes two major themes: different christian churches and different international and ecumenical organisations, both of which are discussed on every training period. This enables the training

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<sup>1</sup> Finnish Ecumenical Council consists of eleven member churches and several observers' bodies.



to include information about the major christian denominations as they are in Finland and the following aspects of the ecumenical movement: basic issues related to ecumenical youth work, inter-cultural and inter-confessional learning and participation in international meetings. For example this year all four training-periods will have one major theme: Anglican, Orthodox, Free Churches and Roman-Catholic traditions. Also contemporary questions in the ecumenical movement and principles of cross-cultural dialogue are discussed.

#### KETKO today

The course consists of four training periods of two or three days within six months. The training periods are situated on weekends, starting on Friday evening or Saturday morning and continuing until Sunday evening. The weekends are hosted by different churches or christian organisations. Altogether the program consists of 70 hours of work.

Methods used in this training vary from lectures and introductions to work in small groups and role games. Learning by experience is emphasized; the training includes participating in worship of different churches and also an English-speaking simulation of an international conference, as already described above.

Training includes also some homework assignments that are related to the issues relevant at that time. The subjects of assignments can include themes from international ecumenical dialogues or e.g. finding out what kind of attitudes one's own community has towards ecumenical work. One of the assignments is a written report from a visit to a worship representing a different tradition than the participants own. Within the period of training everybody also gets a chance to contribute in a practical way to ecumenism. Before the end of the course all participants take time to initiate and plan some kind of an ecumenical project that suits their own environment. As a youthworker you may consider an ecumenical prayer for young people. As a theology student you might rather plan a lecture about the bilateral dialogue between Finnish lutherans and pentecostalists during the last two decades.

It is the purpose of the training to encourage everybody to take an active role in one's own context. After the course one should be better equipped to start in the future with one's own ideas. An inspiration might even be those ideas heard from other participants during the training. Although activating young people to international ecumenical work is one of the main goals of the project, the main focus of KETKO can still be seen on national and local level. How is it possible to be realistic and at the same time innovative at the international level if one is not aware of one's own context first?

#### Trainers

Trainers on the KETKO-course are experts on various fields who work for different churches or christian, ecumenical or international youth organisations. Also professors from the University of Helsinki have often given lectures about ecumenism especially from systematic theology, exegetical or church-history point of view. Although KETKO has never been an official part of the studies of theological faculties of Helsinki, Joensuu or Turku<sup>2</sup>, it has always been in the interest of the faculties to support this undertaking. Maybe, because half of the participants of KETKO are theology students anyway. Accepting KETKO as a part of the studies has especially been discussed with some smaller christian educational institutions. Another important group of trainers is young people from different backgrounds actively involved in

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<sup>1</sup> The biggest theological Faculty in Finland is at the University of Helsinki. Studies in Orthodox theology and from this year on also in so called "western theology" can be studied at the University of Joensuu. In addition there is a small Swedish-speaking theological faculty at the University of Turku

ecumenical and international work. This gives one further chance for young people who have already participated in KETKO earlier to get involved with spreading the ecumenical message wider. As often seen, a peertutor or –teacher might be the best encourager.

#### Planning and arrangements

The thematic planning and organizing of the weekends is taken care of by KETKO training secretary, who is appointed by the Youth Division of the Finnish Ecumenical Council. This responsibility is normally taken over by one person for a couple of years at the time. The KETKO-secretary is assisted by a project committee that consists of young volunteers representing different churches.

#### Finances

Financial costs of KETKO training are reasonable. This is because most of the speakers come on voluntary basis and many churches welcome the course to use their facilities free of charge. Due to this the Youth Division has been able to give financial support to cover travel costs of those students coming from outside the capital area. This enables the participation of many young people who live further away from Helsinki. The training is financially supported by the Finnish Ecumenical Council and an organisation called “Center for Christian Education“ (Kristillinen Opintokeskus). The Finnish Ecumenical Council has also kindly given KETKO the privilege to use its office for practical arrangements.

#### Challenges

One of the biggest challenges of the program is how to respond to the very different starting levels of the participants. Many of the participants being theological students it is very important to create such an atmosphere for the discussion that is open to all kinds of questions and needs. How to keep the program at such a level that it is still interesting for theological students, who get some basic information about ecumenism anyway, and how on the other hand to take serious notice of those maybe not at all familiar with theological vocabulary or never heard of ecumenical organisations? It is also a challenge to spread the information about KETKO-training among lay-people adequately. Among theological students the program is well known.

#### TETE

After having encouraging experiences with KETKO-program for years the idea emerged among some KETKO-trainers that the project would be worth of a wider audience. As the office of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) was located for some years in Helsinki a course based on the Finnish KETKO was adopted to be part of its work. The first so-called TETE-training, **Training Ecumenical Trainers in Europe**, was organised in 1998 in Budapest, Hungary. After the first TETE-course was organised the main focus still being in the ecumenical experience and theological basics, the need of a wider practical education emerged. The former TETE-training “Get orientated ecumenically“ was widened to two new sections “Get organised“ and “Get active in your organisation“. These new sections are supposed to handle difficulties for example arising in project planning and in financing (budgets, fund-raising). In addition, also themes like presentation skills, teamwork, group dynamic, conflict resolution, evaluation and moderating are discussed. TETE according to its name is meant to educate trainers in

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<sup>1</sup> John Pobee (ed.), “*Towards Viable Theological Education. Ecumenical Imperative, Catalyst of Renewal.*” WCC Publications, Geneva 1997, pp.158-162

ecumenical matters for local needs.

ETE Consultation in Oslo 1996 and KETKO/TETE?

Concerning the suggestions mentioned in the report of the Ecumenical Theological Education, Consultation held in Oslo 1996, KETKO and TETE seem to respond to at least two contemporary challenges pictured by it.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, theological faculties in the North were encouraged to open their curriculum and working styles to ecumenical challenges and enrichment. Through KETKO at least several individual professors from the Theological Faculty of Helsinki participate on the teaching in a non-academic, ecumenical-educational program and the common attitude towards this project in the faculties is positive. Secondly, KETKO and TETE -projects do not only try to encourage lay-people to participate in ecumenical activities or open for them an ecumenical horizon, but they give this group of people a direct chance to become oneself a trainer or a coordinator of an ecumenical educational project. This way, also others than full-time, professional ministers can contribute in ecumenical theological matters as teachers. On the other hand, also non-theologians will have a chance to meet with professors from theological faculties and learn more about ecumenism from an academic point of view. In addition, KETKO and TETE seem to offer a good forum for lay-people and clergy to meet, co-operate, and exchange thoughts about ecumenical matters and to learn from each other.

**LES EDITIONS CLE DE YAOUNDE  
POUR UNE REVOLUTION DE LA PENSEE THEOLOGIQUE EN AFRIQUE**

*Tharcisse Gatwa*

Les Editions CLE ont été créées en 1963 par les Eglises et missions suivantes : Eglises et Missions de la Fédération Evangélique du Cameroun et de l’Afrique Centrale, Conseil Protestant du Congo Léopoldville, Fédération Evangélique du Togo, Eglise Méthodiste du Dahomey (Bénin), Sociétés Bibliques d’Afrique française (sic), Centre des Techniques Audiovisuelles de Yaoundé, Eglise Evangélique du Congo, Eglise Evangélique du Gabon, Eglise Méthodiste de Côte d’Ivoire, les Eglises de la Haute Volta, du Mali, de la Guinée et du Sénégal, les Eglises du Rwanda et du Burundi, les Eglises Réformées des Pays-Bas, la Conférence des Eglises de Toute l’Afrique. Elles sont devenues une association d’utilité publique en août 1991.

La philosophie des éditions CLE, pour paraphraser Merfyn Temple, un des tous premiers auteurs publiés par CLE se résume en ceci : “il n’y aura en Afrique de théologie populaire que lorsque les Africains l’auront eux-mêmes élaborée (...) Je sais que l’histoire de l’homme et de son péché, de Dieu et de son amour, reste encore à raconter dans l’espoir et la langue de l’Afrique d’aujourd’hui. Tout ce que j’espère, c’est qu’il se trouvera un Mulenga ou un Ndlovu assez mécontent de ma tentative pour prendre la plume et écrire le livre que son peuple attend encore”.

Le but du Centre de Littérature Evangélique (Editions CLE) est :

1. Servir Dieu qui nous a été révélé en Jésus Christ en encourageant la production et la diffusion de la littérature Chrétienne en Afrique d’expression française
2. Cette littérature a comme but :
  - d’annoncer et d’expliquer le message de salut contenu dans la Bible et exprimé en particulier dans le symbole des apôtres, en vue de l’édification des chrétiens et du témoignage dans le monde,
  - d’exprimer les conséquences de ce message dans tous les domaines de la vie des chrétiens et de l’Afrique, qu’il s’agisse de sa vie personnelle ou de sa responsabilité au sein de la société.

Cela implique :

- fournir et tenir à jour une documentation sur la littérature chrétienne utilisable en Afrique, en langue française ou dans une langue africaine,
- encourager l’édition et la production par des Africains d’une littérature chrétienne,
- Traduire en français des livres existant dans une autre langue.

Bien que le but des Editions CLE, comme nous venons de le rappeler était la production et la diffusion de la littérature chrétienne dans un sens large, dix ans plus tard, en 1974, elles étaient devenues la maison d’édition la plus importante de l’Afrique francophone. Elles produisaient des romans, pièces de théâtre, poésie et livres philosophiques avec, à cette époque, 150 titres dont 60% était de la littérature chrétienne. En 1977 elles avaient publié 183 titres dont 42 % était de la littérature chrétienne.

En 1995, 34 manuscrits ont passé le stade de sélection. De ceux-ci, 3 avaient trait à la théologie ou vie de l’église. En 1996, sur 40 manuscrits sélectionnés, 10 étaient d’ordre théologique ou vie chrétienne. En 2000, nous avons produit 29 nouveaux titres y compris 12 volumes de manuels d’enseignement religieux pour le Secrétariat de l’Enseignement Protestant. De ces nouveautés, 6 titres plus les 12 volumes de l’enseignement protestant sont du domaine de la littérature chrétienne.

Nos auteurs viennent d'horizons différents. Ainsi, parmi 200 auteurs et plus qui ont été publiés par CLE, le Cameroun en compte 110. Viennent ensuite la France avec 12 auteurs, le Congo Brazzaville avec 9, la Suisse avec 8, le Bénin et la Côte d'Ivoire avec 7 chacun, la RDC (Zaïre) avec 6, les Etats-Unis d'Amérique et les Pays-Bas avec 6 chacun, le Togo et la Grande Bretagne avec 4 auteurs, la Guinée Conakry avec trois, le Nigeria, le Sénégal et le Burkina Faso, le Canada, le Kenya, le Gabon et le Tchad avec 2 chacun, l'Allemagne, la Belgique, la République Centrafricaine, la Tanzanie et le Rwanda, avec un auteur chacun.

Pendant la période de 1963 à 1973, le tirage moyen était de 3000 à 5000 exemplaires pour la littérature générale (poésie, roman, point de vue, étude et documents) et de 5000 à 8000 exemplaires pour la littérature chrétienne, voire de 10.000 exemplaires pour la collection "pour tous". Cette production abondante a été rendue possible grâce à une subvention accordée à CLE par "EZE" de Bonn sous forme de fonds de roulement pour soutenir la littérature générale. C'était une production diversifiée dans le but de répondre aux nombreuses sollicitations de toute l'Afrique.

C'est à proprement parler l'âge d'or des Editions CLE, d'abord parce qu'elle n'avait pas de concurrente sur le plan africain, ensuite parce que la production était soit subventionnée soit soutenue par un fonds à titre de prêt. Cette période des années fastes est également celle des publications à succès. Cinq titres ont été lauréats du Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire : Le fils d'Agatha Moudio, en 1968, La Palabre Stérile, de Guy Menga en 1969, Tribaliqes, de Henri Lopes en 1972, L'Homme Dieu de Bisso, de Etienne Yanou en 1975 et Trois Prétendants... Un mari, de Guillaume Oyono Mbia qui a obtenu le Prix Ahamadou Ahidjo en 1970. Des ouvrages de CLE ont été inscrits dans une collection du Club du Livre africain, éditions africaines (NEA) et l'UNESCO. D'autres ouvrages ont été traduits en d'autres langues à l'instar de Le fils d'Agatha Moudio. Entre 1985 et 1997, CLE a tenté de nombreuses expériences de coédition ou de cession de droits d'exploitation avec divers éditeurs africains, européens et américains aussi bien dans le domaine scolaire, de la littérature générale que de la littérature théologique.

Cependant, entre 1986 et 1990, la maison CLE a évolué avec des directeurs par intérim, il y en a eu au total quatre. C'est la période la plus sombre de son histoire, marquée par d'énormes difficultés de gestion. En 1990 et 1991, CLE n'avait sorti aucune nouveauté, seuls les titres de littérature inscrits au programme scolaire de certains pays africains avaient été réimprimés. Il a fallu attendre novembre 1992 avec l'arrivée d'un nouveau directeur, pour que commence un programme de restructuration qui a permis de relancer les activités de la maison sur le plan administratif et de la production.

La remise à flots des Editions CLE semble se confirmer malgré la morosité économique ambiante. Sa production a repris pour plafonner à 19 titres en 1996. Pour l'année 2001 nous comptons réaliser un record de 30 nouvelles publications sans compter que nous avons réimprimé plus de 20 titres inscrits aux programmes scolaires. La maison a pu réaliser une percée dans le scolaire, en réalisant avec EDICEF les 12 cahiers d'activités de français et de mathématiques (collection Les Champions) actuellement au programme officiel de l'enseignement primaire au Cameroun. Aujourd'hui, avec plus de 500 titres au répertoire, les Editions CLE publient et diffusent un large éventail de collections : roman, nouvelle, conte, théâtre, essai, document, scolaire, parascolaire, santé, vie pratique et bien d'autres.

La vitalité de la politique de relance s'est traduite par la sympathie de certains partenaires. C'est le cas de EZE/EMW pour le lancement d'une collection de la littérature enfantine ou de MDO (Eglises des Pays-Bas) pour la relance des publications théologiques. De même, le service du COE chargé de la formation théologique oecuménique (ETE) a accepté de financer au moins un livre théologique par an. Voilà donc des occasions que nous avons offertes aux théologiens et qui leur demandent de ne plus pleurnicher quant aux possibilités de publier leurs recherches. Les Editions CLE ont lancé la balle dans leur camp et il convient de le souligner, ces possibilités ne seront éternelles que si nous savons nous en servir.

### ***Affronter la réalité africaine avec lucidité***

La réussite de la mission chrétienne en Afrique dépendra de la manière dont elles éviteront les erreurs de l'Occident dit "chrétien" qui a transformé en fiasco l'entreprise de christianisation.

Premièrement, le christianisme en Afrique ne peut pas se comprendre sans le placer dans la perspective historique. Trois expériences majeures d'évangélisation ont eu lieu pendant les 2000 ans du christianisme sur le continent. Dans les 4 premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne, le christianisme s'est implanté en Egypte, en Afrique du Nord, en Ethiopie et en Nubie. En Afrique du Nord, le projet fut un fiasco puisque l'église était restée tournée vers l'extérieur, Rome, qu'elle ne faisait aucun effort d'inculturer l'évangile et de former des leaders contrairement en Egypte et en Ethiopie, où malgré les persécutions, les leaders chrétiens faisaient un effort pour enraciner l'évangile dans le terroir.

La deuxième expérience d'évangélisation du 15e et 16e siècles dans les royaumes d'Angola, Kongo, Matamba et Wari, le christianisme fut un échec pour une raison majeure : les missionnaires et autres "fonctionnaires de Dieu" se sont transformés en commerçants d'esclaves. Dans un excellent ouvrage, *l'Eglise et le commerce transatlantique*, A. Quénum analyse tous les avatars de cette mission qui pourtant, dès les premiers contacts, avait impressionné les peuples de l'Afrique centrale et leurs rois.

Enfin au 18e, 19e et 20e siècles, le mouvement missionnaire qui se déploie dans le monde est marqué par l'évolution des sciences sociales dont le néodarwinisme, le siècle des lumières qui a été à la base de la sécularisation et enfin les conquêtes impériales et la colonisation qui n'avait rien laissé de côté pour l'exploitation des ressources naturelles.

A ces trois grandes péripéties de l'histoire des peuples noirs, il convient d'ajouter, en paraphrasant une des grandes figures du christianisme africain, Ajayi Crowther, une mentalité terrorisée par les forces du mal enchaînées et par les puissances démoniaques qui ont rendu possible l'horrible système du commerce des esclaves. Cette mentalité qui encore aujourd'hui enferme l'homme dans des visions du monde qui détruisent la vie à travers des pratiques inhumaines comme le sacrifice humain ou l'adoration des idoles. C'est à dire des puissances de la nature ou de la société auxquelles on confère le statut absolu de Dieu et face auxquelles il n'y a plus d'autre attitude pour les humains que la peur, l'asservissement et l'irrationalité. Cette mentalité, il me semble, rend une certaine Afrique incapable de générer des bonds en avant pour anticiper de nouveaux aléas, car comme le disait André Karamaga dans les années 1980, l'humanité qui n'a pas protégé l'Afrique contre l'esclavage, contre le colonialisme ou le néocolonialisme ne le protégera pas contre d'autres tragédies comme les fratricides et autres génocides (ceci s'est révélé vrai dans le cas de son pays, le Rwanda, en 1994).

### **Catalyseur d'une pensée théologique créative**

Notre souci majeur est d'aider les chrétiens africains à partager avec le reste du monde comment ils expriment leur foi en Christ dans leur vie quotidienne. Il s'agit d'autre part d'aider les théologiens, les responsables ecclésiastiques et laïcs à montrer la signification et l'orientation qu'ils donnent à l'Eglise en cette fin du second millénaire par rapport à toutes les questions cruciales - politiques, économiques, culturelles, sécuritaires - qui déchirent notre continent.

Aux Editions CLE, servir Dieu dans la production et la diffusion de la littérature chrétienne en Afrique requiert que nous réfléchissions avec les chrétiens et surtout avec ceux qui sont chargés de la formation de futurs dirigeants de communautés chrétiennes sur un certain nombre de points. Par exemple, la version du christianisme qui est arrivé au 18e et 19e siècle en Afrique portait l'habit de l'empire. D'une part l'on

veut totalement ignorer le fait que le christianisme est une réalité vivante qui n'a pas discontinué sur le continent depuis le temps des apôtres - les historiens parmi vous sont mieux placés pour établir le lien entre - et d'autre part du fait de l'habit idéologique nourri par les théories de l'époque sur la prétendue inégalité des races, l'on créa une table rase en ce qui concerne les valeurs sociales, culturelles, humanistes et de l'harmonie relationnelle dans nos sociétés. Ma conviction : notre devoir, vous dans les institutions de formation théologique et nous dans les maisons d'édition et de publication est de réhabiliter le rôle de l'Afrique dans l'histoire biblique. On peut s'éterniser sur les terminologies. Mais ce qui est sûr, l'Afrique est connue dans la Table des nations (Gen.10). Elle a joué un rôle fondamental dans l'accomplissement de l'Alliance de Dieu avec l'humanité (A et NT). L'Afrique n'a pas fermé ses frontières ni exigé aux fugitifs de la famine et des génocides de prouver l'authenticité de leur demande d'hospitalité et de protection par des papiers délivrés par leurs bourreaux. L'Afrique a donc été la terre d'hospitalité des patriarches d'Israël. Elle est le terrain de réconciliation qui permit l'existence de la nation d'Israël. Elle a donné asile à l'enfant Jésus sans lui demander de décliner son identité avec des pièces d'identité fournies par Hérode. Nous savons cependant, pour paraphraser un adage rwandais qui dit que les deux pieds de l'humain alternent pour faire un pas en avant, qu'il y eu de mauvais Pharaons après de meilleurs. Nous connaissons la suite.

La littérature chrétienne en Afrique devra donc prouver, sans chauvinisme, que l'Afrique est le continent qui incarne le plus la manifestation de Dieu dans le monde, envers les humains. Dieu, par Jésus Christ s'est humilié, a souffert, est mort et crucifié. Mais Il est ressuscité. Quelle autre région du monde a souffert la dévastation, l'humiliation, la déshumanisation ? Depuis le 15e siècle, les génocides de l'esclavage et du colonialisme, le néocolonialisme, ravages de dictatures sanguinaires de la période post-indépendance ont agonisé les humains de notre continent. Mais comme Jésus-Christ dit : si la graine ne tombe pas dans le sol et ne meurt, elle ne donnera pas de fruits. Peut-être comme me le déclarait récemment l'écrivain camerounais Mongo Béti malgré une teinte de pessimisme : "nous avons fini de descendre dans le fond de l'abîme qu'il ne nous reste plus qu'à remonter". Dévastés mais pas détruits selon le thème de la dernière assemblée de la CETA.

La Bible nous confirme dans le fait que les temps du renouvellement viennent toujours après les grands moments de crise. Et c'est ce message que nous devons proclamer en Afrique pour exorciser tous les prophétismes de malheurs. Nous devons travailler jour et nuit pour ce temps de la renaissance, en réveillant les génies créateurs des Africains dans nos villages, dans nos institutions de théologie, nos écoles primaires et dans chacune de nos communautés de foi.

Dans une articulation de la vocation de la théologie africaine de la reconstruction, le théologien kenyan, Jesse Mugambi estime que le mythe d'une Afrique des ténèbres, l'Afrique de la misère et de la pauvreté, le mythe d'un continent de conflits et de la faim doit être remplacée par le mythe d'un continent d'avenir, l'avenir du christianisme, le continent où le soleil se lève, le continent qui peut nourrir ses enfants. Cette analyse soutient tous les travaux de Mugambi et de nombreux autres théologiens africains qui mènent un travail de pionnier pour la reconstruction morale, sociale, économique, culturelle et politique du continent y compris André Karamaga, Kä Mana et les autres. Un certain nombre d'Afro-américains et d'Africanistes se sont préoccupé de l'image du continent à l'extérieur. L'histoire des peuples africains se confond au récit de déni de liberté, de dignité, de vie. En Europe, en Amériques comme ailleurs, l'Afrique est le seul continent qui soit encore à ce jour désigné par la couleur de la peau de population. Il est communément appelé "le continent noir". De l'avis des observateurs, cette perception est fondée sur la situation de pauvreté et de dépendance économique, des catastrophes et autres maux qui le minent car d'autres continents abritent des peuples présentant des diversités culturelles, physiologiques, et biogéographiques, mais ne sont jamais désignés par leur différence.

Jared Diamond, dans son livre “De l’inégalité parmi les sociétés” (Nouveaux Horizons, 1997) décrit, dans un chapitre consacré à l’Afrique comment ce continent qui était habité par les populations les plus diversifiées de la planète, est devenu “le continent noir”. Diamond présente les diversités de populations, les langues, les mouvements de populations et les conquêtes, le rôle de la domestication des espèces végétales et animales dans la formation du destin du continent, et les raisons pour lesquelles les Européens ont colonisé les Africains et non l’inverse. La thèse de Diamond est celle-ci : du fait d’un postulat universellement connu. Les populations qui ont hérité ou développé des productions alimentaires ont absorbé celles qui étaient moins loties.

Les greniers africains ont sauvé l’humanité mais ses enfants meurent de faim aujourd’hui (famines du Sahel, Afrique de l’Est, déluges en Afrique australe), on économie et ses ressources ont sauvé le peuple de la promesse contre la destruction mais aujourd’hui, ses richesses sont pillées par les multinationales et le reste racketté par une bourgeoisie rongeur pendant que les peuples sont laissés dans la précarité la plus abjecte.

Plusieurs conflits déchirent le continent d’est en ouest, du nord au centre : la corne de l’Afrique avec les frères ennemis d’Ethiopie et d’Erythrée, l’Afrique centrale (Burundi, Rwanda, RDC, Congo-Brazzaville, Angola), le Soudan, le Liberia et la Sierra Leone. Si nous sommes incapables de résoudre ces conflits pour léguer à nos enfants et petits-enfants une paix durable, tout au moins transmettons leur une tentative d’analyse de causes économiques, politiques, religieuses et géostratégiques qui les motivent. L’Afrique est intervenue en des moments cruciaux de l’histoire du peuple d’Israël voire du salut de l’humanité. C’est une interpellation au christianisme africain contemporain face aux contextes du moment (dérive totalitaire, guerres sanglantes, intolérance), contexte économique (famines, appauvrissement et dettes), culturel et religieux (intolérance religieuse et sectes, invasion des cultures de consommation et érosion des cultures et langues locales par les multinationales médiatiques).

Mais il est un autre devoir qu’un certain nombre de théologiens africains et africanistes assignent au christianisme africain. Le professeur écossais André Walls, distingué historien des missions, de même que le Ghanéen théologien Bediako et tant d’autres estiment que devant la récession d’un christianisme occidental confus, le christianisme africain, malgré les péripéties du continent, est devenu le standard et la représentante de la foi chrétienne et est en passe d’en fixer l’ordre du jour. Cependant, il convient d’éviter tout triomphalisme. Un observateur averti, Mgr Aloys Bigirumwami, premier évêque Noir dans les anciennes colonies belges, s’était étonné de la superficialité du christianisme africain qu’il avait comparé à une ruche suspendue dans les branches d’un arbre.

Si les théologiens africains prennent aujourd’hui l’engagement de s’investir dans l’évangélisation de leur continent et d’édifier la théologie universelle, il conviendra pour ce qui est de l’Afrique, d’appréhender une histoire toujours à refaire et ainsi d’initier une pédagogie radicale pour une autre vision du christianisme. Il s’agira de redonner une base théorique aux valeurs africaines d’hospitalité, de tolérance, d’harmonie relationnelle, de médiation et de réconciliation pour qu’elles puissent enrichir la théologie et l’éthique chrétienne. En même temps, il s’agira d’aider les chrétiens à donner l’exemple pour combattre la démobilisation et le découragement, les aider à restaurer la confiance en eux-mêmes, le respect mutuel et l’intégrité. Les Editions CLE ont donc mis en place un plan d’action pour aider les théologiens à produire pour édifier la théologie chrétienne.



### **1. Collection littérature pour jeunesse et enfants**

Suite aux projets que nous avons identifiés dans notre Plan d'action 2000-2004, la collection "Clé pour l'avenir" destinée aux jeunes et enfants a démarré en 1977. Elle vient de recevoir un appui ferme de la part de nos partenaires de EMW. Dans le cadre de notre plan, nous pourrions ainsi financer 5 titres au moins par an. Il s'agira pour les adultes ainsi que les jeunes qui ont les dons d'écrire pour enfants, de dépasser les histoires du lièvre et de la tortue pour emmener les enfants africains à être plus créatifs, inventifs, et conquérir les sciences, les mathématiques, l'environnement, l'espace. Il s'agira aussi d'aborder les thèmes d'éducation, du caractère de l'enfant, fables, nouvelles, romans, bandes dessinées, abécédaires, albums... Ainsi par exemple, en 2001 nous publierons, entre autre, un dictionnaire des personnes célèbres, une encyclopédie des sciences et de l'environnement, des recueils de contes, des romans.

### **2. Réflexion théologique du Sud**

La collection a été lancée en 1999. L'intention est de publier 2 livres par an en anglais et en français. Le livre ne devra pas dépasser 50.000 mots. Le tiers des auteurs devrait être de femmes. La moitié des livres devrait être écrite par des personnes appartenant à la tendance catholique, œcuménique ou évangélique. Nous avons constitué une liste liminaire, mais voudrions élargir le cercle grâce aux propositions que nombre de nos partenaires nous feront et qui pourraient éventuellement soumettre de manuscrits pour une autre collection. Le livre est publié en français et en anglais pour un prix modeste en vue de favoriser une large diffusion, 20FF en Afrique et 60FF en Europe. La collection est pilotée par un comité comprenant plusieurs théologiens chevronnés.

### **3. Livres de référence académique**

Lancée en 2001, cette collection répond à un triple objectif. Il s'agit premièrement d'amener les théologiens africains à participer à la recherche et à la création du savoir dans le domaine des sciences sociales et religieuses. De ceci découle un deuxième devoir : participer à l'édification de la pensée et la théologie chrétienne. Enfin, nous voulons combler la carence des ouvrages de référence académique dans le cadre de l'enseignement des disciplines théologiques et des sciences sociales en Afrique francophone. Ainsi nous sommes disposés à produire 5 titres par an au moins dans les diverses disciplines théologiques à la condition que nos théologiens- qui ont été suffisamment sensibilisés à travers nos multiples contacts et correspondances - nous soumettent des manuscrits. Les prévisions de publication pour 2001 portaient sur 5 titres dans les disciplines suivantes : exégèse, théologie et herméneutique du Nouveau Testament, Monde, Eglise et Royaume de Dieu, anthropologie et ecclésiologie, intégration de la communication dans la formation théologique en Afrique.

En fait les théologiens africains sont aux prises constantes avec de multiples exigences à la fois académiques, pastorales et sociales qui annihilent presque totalement toute ambition de recherche scientifique. Lors de leur troisième assemblée générale, à Yaoundé, du 6 au 11 août 2001, les écoles et facultés de théologie d'Afrique francophone ont décidé de relever le défi en mettant en place un plan de travail pour produire ces ouvrages. Ils se proposent à cet effet d'organiser des ateliers annuels dans lesquels les experts de chaque discipline se retrouveront pour étoffer les textes à remettre aux Editions CLE pour la publication.

#### 4. Témoins africains de l'Évangile

Avec cette collection lancée cette année, les Editions voudraient offrir aux lecteurs et aux chrétiens une série de mémoires et de témoignages sur des personnages pionniers de l'Évangile en Afrique. Il s'agit de ceux dont la vie, l'œuvre et l'histoire méritent d'être contées. Il s'agit aussi de reconstituer le fil des événements qui accompagnent chacun de ces hommes dans leur cheminement singulier, leur engagement, leur vie et influence, leur vocation et leur mission en vue de l'instruction et de l'éducation du peuple de Dieu en Afrique. Ces publications de mémoires et monographies sur les personnes qui ont été "les pionniers de l'Évangile en Afrique" sans que leurs noms apparaissent dans les grandes bibliographies et encyclopédies missionnaires, donneront l'occasion aux Africains d'écrire le récit de leur conversion et de leur baptême et de dire, indépendamment de toute influence, ce qu'ils veulent faire de leur foi en Jésus-Christ.

#### 5. Littérature d'appui à la liturgie

Notre plan d'action 2000-2004 a identifié quelques domaines dans lesquels le ministère des Editions CLE peut compléter celui des églises en matière de littérature chrétienne et théologique. Il s'agit de :

- supports de culte et prière (hymnes, catéchismes, liturgies, livres de prière),
- thèmes divers d'éducation et éthique chrétienne.

Nous avons étoffé un plan de production pour chaque Eglise membre au cours de notre assemblée générale de janvier 2001 à Douala. Mais ici comme dans les autres collections, la réussite est tributaire de la réponse des théologiens et chrétiens qui se décideraient à mobiliser les énergies nécessaires pour graver dans les cultures et la conscience de leurs peuples la nourriture spirituelle en vue d'une croissance normale.

La réalité actuelle en Afrique est celle d'Eglises dirigées par des nationaux et il y a plus de leaders formés qu'il y a 3 ou 5 siècles. Mais comme le rappelle Antoine Babe (*Eglises d'Afrique : de l'émancipation à la responsabilité*) et Paulin Poucouta (*Lettres aux Eglises d'Afrique*), beaucoup d'Africains ont pris les rênes des affaires mais ils n'arrivent pas à mesurer la responsabilité qui incombe à cette fonction soit de véritablement prêcher l'Évangile qui libère les peuples de la colonisation et l'impérialisme spirituel, de la mendicité financière et qui les guérit des stigmates des préjugés de la race. Très peu ont fait un effort pour inculturer l'évangile dans le terroir. Et rares sont les missionnaires qui ont mis l'accent sur le rôle de l'Afrique dans l'histoire de la rédemption de l'humanité. Pour qu'elle soit réhabilitée dans son rôle historique, pour que les chrétiens africains soient mis en confiance comme étant des citoyens d'un continent de l'avenir du christianisme un travail en profondeur doit être mené.

Si les théologiens africains prennent aujourd'hui l'engagement de s'investir dans l'évangélisation de leur continent et d'édifier la théologie universelle, il conviendra pour ce qui est de l'Afrique, d'appréhender une histoire toujours à refaire et ainsi d'initier une pédagogie radicale pour une autre vision du christianisme.

**EDITIONS CLE, YAOUNDÉ**  
**FOR A REVOLUTION IN THEOLOGICAL THINKING IN AFRICA<sup>1</sup>**

***Tharcisse Gatwa***

The Centre for Evangelical Literature (Editions CLE) was set up in 1963 by the Churches and Missions of the Evangelical Federation of Cameroon and Central Africa; the Protestant Council of Congo Léopoldville; the Evangelical Federation of Togo; the Methodist Church of Dahomey (Benin); the Bible Societies of French Speaking Africa; the Centre for Audio-visual Techniques of Yaoundé; the Evangelical Church of Congo; the Evangelical Church of Gabon; the Methodist Church of Côte d'Ivoire; the Churches of Upper Volta, Mali, Guinea and Senegal; the Churches of Rwanda and Burundi; the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands; the All Africa Conference of Churches. It became a non-profit association in August 1991.

To paraphrase the words of Merfyn Temple, one of the very first authors published by CLE, the philosophy of the group may be summed up as follows: “there will be no popular theology in Africa until Africans have elaborated one for themselves (...) I know that the history of human beings and their sins, of God and his love has yet to be told in hope in the language of Africa today. I only hope there will be a Mulenga or a Ndlovu dissatisfied enough with my attempt to take up his pen and write the book his people are waiting for.”

The aim of the Centre for Evangelical Literature (Editions CLE) is:

1. to serve God who was revealed to us in Jesus Christ by encouraging the production and distribution of Christian literature in French-speaking Africa.
2. This literature seeks
  - to proclaim and explain the message of salvation contained in the Bible, and expressed in particular in the Apostles' Creed, for the building up of Christians and Christian witness in the world,
  - to express the consequences of this message for Christians and for Africa in all areas of life, both personal life and responsibility in society,
  - It does this by providing and maintaining documentation on Christian literature that can be used in Africa, in French or an African language,
  - encouraging the publication and production of Christian literature by Africans,
  - having books in other languages translated into French.

Although, as we have seen, the aim of Editions CLE was to produce and disseminate Christian literature as widely as possible, ten years later, in 1974, it had become the largest publishing house in French-speaking Africa. It was producing novels, plays, poetry and philosophical books. At that time some 60% of its 150 titles were Christian literature. In 1977 it published 183 titles, of which 42% were Christian literature. In 1995, 34 manuscripts passed the selection stage, of which 3 had to do with theology or church life. In 1996, 10 out of 40 manuscripts selected were of a theological or church-related nature. In 2000, we produced 29 new titles, including 12 volumes of religious instruction handbooks for the Protestant Education Office. Six of these new titles plus the 12 Protestant educational volumes come under the heading of Christian literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from French by WCC Language Service

Our authors come from a variety of backgrounds. Of the 200 and more authors published by CLE, 110 are from Cameroon, followed by France with 12, Congo Brazzaville with 9, Switzerland with 8, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire with 7 each, Democratic Republic of Congo [Zaire] with 6, United States of America and the Netherlands with 6 apiece, Togo and the United Kingdom with 4, Guinea Conakry with 3, Nigeria, Senegal and Burkina Faso, Canada, Kenya, Gabon and Chad, each with 2 authors, and Germany, Belgium, Central Africa, Tanzania and Rwanda with 1 each.

In the period from 1963 to 1973, the average printing was from 3000 to 5000 copies for general literature (poetry, novels, opinion, studies and documents) and 5000 to 8000 copies for Christian literature, with up to 10,000 in the “*Pour Tous*” collection. This large output was made possible by a grant to CLE from “EZE” (EED-Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst) in Bonn, in the form of a revolving fund to support general literature. Production was diversified in the attempt to respond to the many demands coming from all over Africa.

This was in many ways the “golden age” of Editions CLE, first of all because it had no competitors in Africa, and secondly because production was either subsidised or supported by funds in the form of loans. These “fat years” were also a time of successful publications. Five titles were awarded the *Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire* [*Le fils d'Agathe Moudio* (The Son of Agatha Moudio) in 1968; *Le palabre stérile* by Guy Menga in 1969; *Tribaliques* by Henri Lopes in 1972; *L'Homme Dieu de Bisso* by Etienne Yanou in 1975 and *Trois prétendants..un mari* (Three suitors, one husband) by Guillaume Oyono Mbia, which won the *Prix Ahamadou Ahidjo* in 1970. Some CLE books have been included in a collection of the “*Club du Livre Africain*”, Editions Africaines (NEA) and UNESCO. Other works have been translated into other languages, like “The Son of Agatha Moudio”. Between 1986 and 1997 Editions CLE engaged in numerous co-publishing ventures or transfers of rights with various African, European and American publishing houses, in the field of school text books as well as general and theological literature.

From 1986 to 1990, however, Editions CLE was working with interim directors. There were four in all during that period, the darkest in its history, marked by huge management difficulties. In 1990 and 1991 it did not publish any new titles but simply reprinted books that appeared on school curricula in a few African countries. It was not until November 1992, with the arrival of a new director, that a programme of restructuring was begun and the publishing house's activities could get off to a fresh start on both the administrative and production sides.

The relaunching of Editions CLE seems to be on course despite the generally morose economic climate. Production has resumed, reaching a ceiling of 19 titles in 1996. For 2001 we expect to achieve a record of 30 new publications, not to speak of the 20 or more schoolbooks that have been reprinted. CLE has achieved a break-through in schoolbook production, by producing with EDICEF the 12 French and Mathematics exercise books (*Les Champions* Collection) at present on the official primary school curriculum in Cameroon. Today, with more than 500 titles in its catalogue, Editions CLE publishes and distributes a wide range of collections: novels, short stories, plays, essays, documents, school-books, educational books for children, books on health, practical living and many others.

The vigorous policy adopted to relaunch CLE has been reflected in the sympathetic response of some of its partners, such as EZE/EMW (EED-Evangelischer-Entwicklungsdienst/Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland) for a collection of children's books or MDO (churches in the Netherlands) to get theological publications going again. The World Council of Churches department responsible for ecumenical theological education has also agreed to finance at least one theological book a year. These are opportunities open to theologians and they should make the best of them rather than grumbling about the difficulty of publishing their research. Editions CLE has put the ball in their court, and it should be stressed that these possibilities will only last if we use them properly.

*A lucid approach to African reality*

The success of Christian mission in Africa will depend on its avoiding the mistakes made by the so-called “Christian” West which turned the enterprise of christianization into a fiasco.

To be understood, Christianity in Africa first has to be placed in its historical perspective. Three major periods of evangelization have taken place in the course of 2000 years of Christianity in the continent. In the first four centuries of the Christian era, Christianity became established in Egypt, in North Africa, Ethiopia and Nubia. In North Africa the project was a failure because the church remained exogenous, looking towards Rome and made no attempt to inculturate the gospel and form leaders, unlike in Egypt and Ethiopia where, despite persecutions, Christian leaders tried to give the gospel roots in the country. The second surge of evangelism came in the 15th and 16th centuries in the kingdoms of Angola, Kongo, Matamba and Wari. Christianity failed there for one major reason: the missionaries and other “servants of God” turned into slave traders. In an excellent book on the Church and transatlantic trade, A. Quénum analyses all the misadventures of this mission which had nevertheless impressed the peoples of Central Africa and their kings after the first contacts.

Lastly, in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries the missionary movement unfolding in the world was marked by the evolution of the social sciences, including neo-Darwinism, the century of enlightenment which laid the foundations for secularisation and, of course, the conquest of empire and colonialism which hesitated at nothing in order to exploit natural resources.

To these three great episodes in the history of the black peoples must be added – to paraphrase the words of one of the great figures of African Christianity, Ajayi Crowther – a mentality terrorised by the forces of evil, enchained by the demonic powers that made the horrible system of the slave trade possible. A mentality that even today still holds human beings locked into visions of the world which destroy life through inhuman practices like human sacrifice or the worship of idols. That is to say, powers of nature or society which are given the absolute status of God and before which the only attitude a human being can have is irrational fear and servility. It is this mentality which, I believe, makes one part of Africa incapable of taking a great leap forward to meet new challenges. For, as André Karamaga said in the 80s, the humanity which did not protect Africa from slavery, and colonialism or neo-colonialism will not protect it from other tragedies, like fratricide or genocide (as proved to be the case in his country, Rwanda, in 1994).

*Generating creative theological thinking*

Our principal concern is to help African Christians to share with the rest of the world the way in which they express their faith in Christ in their daily living. It is also a matter of helping theologians, church leaders and lay-people to show what the church means to them and the direction they want it to take at the end of this second millennium in relation to all the crucial political, economic, cultural and security questions that are dividing our continent.

For us at CLE, serving God by producing and diffusing Christian literature in Africa requires us to reflect on a number of points with Christians and, above all, with those responsible for training future Christian leaders. To take one example, the version of Christianity that arrived in Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries came in the garb of empire. On the one hand, it totally ignored the fact that Christianity has been a living reality in the continent ever since the time of the apostles - the historians among you will be better able to make the connections - and, on the other, it ignored the fact of its ideological trappings nourished by the theories of the age concerning the alleged inequality of the races and swept aside the

social, cultural and human values and harmonious relations in our societies. I believe it is our duty – you in the institutes of theological education and we in the publishing houses - to rehabilitate the role of Africa in biblical history. Without dwelling at length on terminologies, it is clear that Africa is included in the table of nations (Gen. 10). It played a fundamental role in the fulfilment of God's covenant with humanity (OT and NT). Africa did not close its borders and requires those fleeing from hunger and genocide to prove the authenticity of their plea for hospitality and protection by producing papers issued by their torturers. Africa was the land where the patriarchs of Israel found hospitality. It was the terrain of reconciliation that enabled the nation of Israel to exist. It gave refuge to the infant Jesus without asking him to prove his identity with papers issued by Herod. We know, however - to paraphrase a Rwandan saying, that we take a step forward with our two feet alternately - that there were some bad Pharaohs after some good ones. We know how that story continued.

Christian literature in Africa must therefore show, without chauvinism, that Africa is the continent which most incarnates God's manifestation of himself to human beings in the world. Through Jesus Christ God humbled himself, suffered, was crucified, died and was buried. But he rose again from the dead. What other region of the world has suffered such devastation, humiliation and dehumanisation! Since the 15th century, the genocides committed under slavery, under colonialism, neo-colonialism and the ravages of blood-thirsty dictators in the period after independence have brought agony to the people of our continent. But as Jesus Christ tells us: unless the seed falls in the soil and dies, it will not bear fruit. Perhaps as the Cameroonian writer, Mongo Béti, said to me recently, not without a touch of pessimism, "we have reached the bottom of the abyss, now the only way is up". Troubled but not destroyed, as the theme of the AACC's Assembly (1997) put it.

The Bible confirms for us that times of renewal always come after great moments of crisis, and this is the message we must proclaim to Africa in order to exorcise all the prophecies of doom. We have to work night and day for this time of rebirth for Africa, rousing the creative genius of people in our villages, in our theological institutes, our primary schools and each of our communities of faith.

Articulating the vocation of African theology of reconstruction, the Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi has said that the myth of Africa as the continent of darkness, of hunger and poverty, of conflict has to be replaced by the myth of the continent of the future, the future of Christianity, the continent of the sunrise, the continent that can feed its children. This view underlies all of Mugambi's work and that of many other African theologians, like André Karamaga, Kä Mana, to name but those, who are doing pioneering work for the moral, social, economic, cultural and political reconstruction of the continent. A number of African-Americans and Africanists have expressed concern about the image of the continent in the world at large. The history of the African peoples is synonymous with a story of denial of freedom, dignity and life. In Europe, in the Americas, Africa is the only continent still commonly referred to, even today, by the colour of the population's skin – the black continent. In the opinion of observers, this perception is based on the situation of poverty and economic dependence, disasters and other ills that sap its strength. Other continents also have populations marked by cultural, physiological and biogeographical diversities, but they are never designated by the features that make them different.

Jared Diamond, in his book "Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies" (published in French as "*De l'inégalité parmi les sociétés*" Nouveaux Horizons, Gallimard 2000), in a chapter devoted to Africa, describes how this continent inhabited by the most diverse population on earth became the "Black Continent". Diamond presents the diversities of populations, languages, population movements and conquests, the role played by the domestication of plants and animals in shaping the fate of the continent and the reasons why Europeans colonised Africans and not the reverse. Diamond's theory is: because of

a universally known postulate. The populations which inherited or developed food production absorbed those which were less well-endowed.

The granaries of Africa saved humanity, but today its children die of hunger (famines in the Sahel, East Africa, floods in Southern Africa); its economy and resources saved the people of the promise from destruction but today its riches are pillaged by multinationals and the rest is siphoned off by a greedy elite while the people are left in abject poverty.

Various conflicts are tearing the continent apart in east and west, north and centre: the Horn of Africa with its warring brothers in Ethiopia and Eritrea; Central Africa (Burundi, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congo-Brazzaville, Angola); Sudan; Liberia and Sierra Leone. If we are not able to resolve these conflicts and bequeath a lasting peace to our children and grandchildren, then let us at least leave them a tentative analysis of the economic, political, religious and geostrategic causes underlying them. Africa intervened at crucial moments in the history of the people of Israel and of human salvation. This is a challenge for African Christianity today in the present situation of totalitarian excesses, bloody wars, intolerance; an economic context characterised by famine, impoverishment and debt, and a cultural and religious context marked by religious intolerance and sects, plus the invasion of a consumer culture and the erosion of local languages and cultures by multinational media.

But many African theologians and Africanists see another duty as being incumbent on African Christianity. The Scottish Professor and distinguished mission historian, Andrew Walls, the Ghanaian theologian Bediako and many others believe that, given the decline and confused state of western Christianity, African Christianity has become the standard-bearer and representative of the Christian faith, despite all the continent's difficulties, and is on its way to setting its agenda. There must be no triumphalism, however. One knowledgeable observer, Mgr Aloys Bigirimwami, the first black bishop in the former Belgian colonies, expressed surprise at the superficiality of African Christianity, comparing it to a bee-hive hanging from the branches of a tree.

If African theologians today commit themselves to working for the evangelisation of their continent and edifying universal theology then, as far as Africa is concerned, they will have to work through a history still in need of reinterpretation and launch a radical pedagogy to change the vision of Christianity. They will have to elaborate the theoretical basis of the African values of hospitality, tolerance, harmonious relations, mediation and reconciliation so that these can enrich Christian theology and ethics. At the same time they will have to help Christians set an example to counteract discouragement and passiveness, and help to restore self-confidence, mutual respect and integrity.

Editions CLE has therefore set up a plan of action to help theologians produce work to build up Christian theology.

### **1. Collection for children and young people**

One of the projects highlighted in our plan of action 2000-2004, the Collection *Clé pour l'avenir\** aimed at young people and children, started in 1977. It has recently received firm support from our partners in EMW and, following our plan, we shall be able to finance at least 5 titles a year. Adults (and young people) with the gift of writing for children are urged to get away from stories about the hare and the tortoise and encourage African children to be more creative and inventive, and to come to grips with science, mathematics, the environment and space. Books in this collection will also deal with subjects such as education, the nature of the child, fables, short stories, novels, cartoons, alphabets, albums, etc. In

2001, for instance, our publications will include a dictionary of famous people, an encyclopaedia of science and the environment, collections of stories, novels.

## **2. “Theological Reflections from the South”**

This collection was launched in 1999. The intention is to publish two books a year in English and French. The book should be 50,000 words at most; one third of the authors should be women; half the books should be written by people from catholic, ecumenical or protestant circles. We have drawn up an initial list but we would like to expand our pool thanks to suggestions from our partners of other names who may wish to submit manuscripts for another collection.

The book is published in French and English for a modest price - 20 FF in Africa and 60 FF in Europe - to encourage wide distribution. The collection is guided by committee that includes several senior theologians.

## **3. Academic Reference Books**

This collection, launched in 2001, has three objectives. The first is to encourage African theologians to participate in research and the creation of knowledge in the field of the social sciences and the science of religion. The second, deriving from this, is their duty to participate in edifying Christian thought and theology. And thirdly, we want to remedy the lack of academic reference books in the field of theological education and the social sciences in French-speaking Africa. We are thus prepared to publish at least 5 titles a year in the different theological disciplines, provided our theologians submit manuscripts to us - and they have been sufficiently informed through our many contacts and exchanges of correspondence. Publication plans for 2001 foresaw 5 titles in the following disciplines: New Testament exegesis, theology and hermeneutics; World, Church and Kingdom of God; anthropology and ecclesiology; inclusion of communication in theological formation in Africa.

In fact, African theologians constantly have to struggle with so many demands of an academic, pastoral and social nature that it totally stifles any ambition to engage in scientific research. At their third general assembly in Yaoundé from 6 to 11 August 2001, the schools and faculties of theology in French-speaking Africa decided to take up the challenge by drawing up a plan of work to produce these books. They propose to organise annual workshops where experts in the different disciplines will meet to flesh out the texts to be submitted to Editions CLE for publication.

## **4. African Witnesses to the Gospel**

With this collection, launched this year, Editions CLE wants to offer readers and Christians a series of memoirs and testimonies about some of the pioneers of the Gospel in Africa, people whose life's work and history are worth retelling. These will retrace the events that formed the background to their particular journey, their commitment, their life and influence, their vocation and mission in building up and educating God's people in Africa. The publication of these memoirs and monographs on people who were among the “pioneers of the Gospel in Africa” - even though their names do not appear in the great missionary bibliographies and encyclopaedias - will give Africans an opportunity to write the story of their conversion and baptism and say what they want to make of their faith in Jesus Christ, free of all outside influence.



## **5. Worship materials**

Our plan of action for 2000 – 2004 identified several areas in which the publishing ministry of Editions CLE can supplement that of the churches by providing Christian and theological literature. These are:

- worship and prayer materials (hymns, catechisms, liturgies, prayer books)
- various topics in the field of Christian education and ethics.

We mapped out a production plan for each member church during our general assembly in Douala in January 2001. But here again, as with the other collections, success will depend on the response of theologians and Christians prepared to invest the necessary energy to provide their culture and their people with the nourishment they need for their spiritual growth.

In Africa today the reality is that we have churches led by Africans and there are more trained leaders than 3 or 5 centuries ago. But, as Antoine Babe (*Eglises d'Afrique. De l'émancipation à la responsabilité*) and Paulin Poucouta (*Lettres aux Eglises d'Afrique*) have recalled, many Africans have taken up the reins of leadership but have not appreciated that in this office they have a responsibility really to preach the Gospel which liberates their peoples from spiritual colonialism and imperialism, from financial begging and heals them from the wounds of racial prejudice. Very few of them have made the effort to inculturate the gospel in their soil, and even fewer missionaries have drawn attention to Africa's role in the history of human redemption. If Africa is to be reinstated in its historical role and African Christians gain confidence in themselves as citizens of a continent that holds the future of Christianity, a major effort of in-depth work is needed.

If African theologians today commit themselves to working for the evangelisation of their continent and edifying universal theology then, as far as Africa is concerned, they will have to work through a history still in need of reinterpretation and launch a radical pedagogy to change the vision of Christianity.

## A VIDA (RE)COMEÇA AOS QUARENTA

*Aharon Sapsezian*

Faz quarenta anos, sim. Mas ainda me lembro bem. Tudo fora preparado minuciosamente. Como encarregado *ad hoc* de fazer avançar o projeto Aste, eu tinha visitado, de norte a sul, todos os seminários potencialmente interessados em aderir ao plano de cooperação inter-denominacional. Eram todos evangélicos/protestantes, como exigia o realismo do contexto eclesial; e, óbvio, todos refletiam as peculiares características denominacionais que conhecemos e que eu tinha aprendido a respeitar durante os anos de trabalho na Confederação Evangélica do Brasil. A descoberta nova nessas visitas, porém, era que esses seminários refletiam também enormes disparidades quanto ao próprio conceito e prática da “educação teológica”. Logo nesse setor vital onde queríamos assentar as bases da cooperação! Não é à toa que alguns digam que há um quê de milagre na criação da Aste. O esboço dos estatutos para a nova entidade tinha sido redigido com cuidado, levando em conta suscetibilidades de uns e outros, e enviado previamente aos seminários candidatos. As reações tinham sido boas. Faltava agora que seus representantes decidissem reunir-se para juntos darem sua aprovação e aporem suas assinaturas. E que o fizessem resolutamente, porque tal decisão não valeria grande coisa se lhe faltasse convicção e engajamento. Finalmente, a hora da verdade! Éramos hóspedes da Faculdade Metodista de Teologia, em Rudge Ramos, perto de São Paulo. Eu tinha sido professor de ecumênica nessa escola; seu reitor, Nathanael do Nascimento, era entusiasta do projeto e dava-me total cobertura. Naquela manhã do dia 20 de dezembro de 1961, os representantes dos seminários - quase todos reitores - foram chegando um a um. Muitos deles nem se conheciam, a não ser de nome. A atmosfera era meio solene: gestos de praxe, palavras de boas-vindas, invocação, explicações, pouca discussão, leitura dos estatutos. Chegou a vez das assinaturas, em meio a suspiros de euforia e ansiedade - sentia-se que estava acontecendo algo importante, histórico. A seguir, no mesmo espírito, elegeu-se a diretoria, com Julio Andrade Ferreira na presidência. E coube a mim a honra de ser nomeado secretário-geral (nenhum mérito especial nisso, já que eu era o único candidato!). Epílogo: oração final, cumprimentos, abraços. E o cafezinho, claro. Os pais fundadores exibiam o ar feliz de terem cumprido uma boa missão, de terem dado um passo corajoso. Assim nasceu a Aste, sem muito alarde (que eu saiba, nenhum periódico eclesial, muito menos secular, relatou o fato), mas com alegria e, diria, com bastante motivação.

E assim viveu, com alegria e motivação, pelo menos durante os 9 anos em que eu a acompanhei. Todos Como se vê, o limite era o céu! E, para obrigar-nos a voltar à terra, o orçamento! No primeiro ano da Aste, a tarefa mais absorvente foi assegurar uma base financeira realista. Ninguém era ingênuo: sabíamos que a recém-nascida entidade não podia ir muito longe só com entusiasmo e...brisa. E o maçante era que, nessa questão, não podíamos contar muito com os seminários associados. Muitos deles dependiam de verbas estrangeiras, e outros simplesmente penavam para equilibrar suas contas. Nem sempre “a menina dos olhos da igreja” era prioridade nas finanças das denominações. Mesmo assim, por princípio, desde a primeira reunião da diretoria, adotou-se o sistema de anuidades para cada seminário - anuidades mais que simbólicas, seja dito. E afirmou-se que a Aste caminharia rumo à meta do auto-financiamento. Contávamos, na verdade, com o estímulo do Fundo de Educação Teológica que, lá de sua sede em Londres, nos acenava com a promessa de recursos para nossos programas, desde que ... estes lhe parecessem bem específicos, bem elaborados, convincentes... As agências doadoras são sempre precavidas e desconfiadas (confesso que, bem mais tarde, quando passei a trabalhar do outro lado do binômio doador/recebido, as exigências do Fundo me pareceram menos impertinentes e menos paternalistas! Deformação profissional?). Enfim, aceitamos as regras do jogo deles, batalhamos, negociamos e finalmente conseguimos arrancar o almejado “major grant”. Apesar do nome pomposo, a verba era apenas suficiente para os projetos que estávamos elaborando; mas possibilitou também a aquisição da sede (onde até hoje funciona a Aste e reside o secretário-geral). A etapa estressante, porém crucial, da busca de viabilidade financeira estava assim vencida, pelo menos por ora. Portanto, mãos à obra...

A obra pela frente era mais que evidente. Ela se impunha. Consistia de duas exigências primordiais: primeira, tratar de conseguir que a nova entidade fizesse jus ao nome e se tornasse de fato uma verdadeira “associação”, um lugar de convergência, de encontro, de reflexão comum, de partilha. A segunda era consequência da primeira, isto é, fazer com que essa aproximação mútua dos seminários concorresse para aquilo que todos almejávamos: melhorar a qualidade da formação teológica no país.

Os principais seminários evangélicos brasileiros viviam confinados em sua esfera denominacional, praticamente isolados uns dos outros. Não se sabia, e nem havia muito interesse em saber, o que se passava fora das fronteiras confessionais. A maioria deles contentava-se em perpetuar modelos introduzidos pelos missionários estrangeiros e/ou privilegiava vínculos com instituições teológicas da mesma denominação além-mar. Se havia alguma abertura à problemática brasileira, ela era aleatória, acrítica, empírica. Sair desse casulo redutor para enfrentar uma realidade maior e mais complexa, para descobrir aspectos diferentes da igreja, da teologia e da preparação ministerial, era uma das carências mais prementes dos seminários que formavam a Aste. Era o grande desafio. Daí que encontros, visitas, correspondência, troca de experiências, cultivo de camaradagem, a própria existência da Aste, tudo isso devia proporcionar, e de fato proporcionava, alargamento de horizontes e renovação de perspectivas. Ao mesmo tempo inspirava confiança recíproca. Predispunha a certa cumplicidade e comunhão na tarefa comum de educação teológica. Sim, comunhão é a palavra certa. Admito ser politicamente correto dizer que a Aste não é um organismo “ecumênico”. Esse termo, na verdade, nunca teve trânsito fácil na Aste, certamente em virtude da caricatura que dele faziam na época os detratores do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas. Mas o fato de a Aste mobilizar e irmanar gente de igreja, numa tarefa tão estratégica para a sua vida e missão como a formação ministerial, é indubitavelmente um belo testemunho de coesão do Corpo de Cristo. Chamem isso o que quiserem!

Por importante que fosse, a comunhão em si, porém, não era a finalidade. A Aste tinha sido criada para, em última análise, contribuir para a melhora, para o aprimoramento da educação teológica no Brasil. A questão da qualidade - ou da “excelência”, termo em voga no mundo anglo-saxão da educação teológica dos anos 60 - entusiasmou a Aste desde a origem. Esse entusiasmo decorria talvez daquela convicção - de beato simplismo, diríamos hoje - de que melhor educação teológica produz melhor ministério, e que melhor ministério produz melhor igreja (e que melhor igreja, acrescentariam os de particular sensibilidade social, deve produzir um mundo melhor!). Penso, porém, que o que de fato nutria esse entusiasmo por qualidade era certa difusa exigência calvinista de coerência e integridade: se vamos fazer educação teológica, façamo-lo bem, como se deve, sem improvisação, sem solução de facilidade, com seriedade. Em outras palavras, a missão da igreja no mundo requer nada menos que a melhor preparação possível de seus obreiros. Simplismo beato ou rigor calvinista, o fato é que o entusiasmo pela qualidade era unânime. Mas, na hora de definir qualidade, e dar-lhe substância, as divergências vinham à tona. Alguns seminários entendiam qualidade em termos principalmente acadêmicos: graus, currículo base, boa biblioteca, corpo docente titulado... Outros, sem negar o acadêmico, mas avessos ao seu freqüente pedantismo, davam ênfase ao espiritual, à vida devocional, ao fervor evangelístico, à fidelidade denominacional... Muitos de nós entendíamos que essas duas posições podiam ser complementares e que ambas deviam passar pelo crivo de uma noção mais rica e mais contextual de qualidade, a saber, aquela que valorizasse maturidade humana, liberdade intelectual, aptidão crítica e auto-crítica e, sobretudo, sintonia com a urgência social brasileira. Debate pertinente e fecundo, inerente à educação teológica, que continua ainda hoje, e deve continuar. Por ser mais fácil de quantificar e de medir, e talvez também por ser mais da índole da cultura vigente, a noção acadêmica de qualidade tendia, e ainda tende, a levar vantagem sobre as demais. É o que se constata mormente nos critérios de credenciamento adotados pela Aste e também na procura generalizada de reconhecimento público dos cursos de teologia dos seminários filiados.

A busca da qualidade foi sempre a mola propulsora de todos os programas da Aste. É o que se vê nitidamente em pelo menos dois desses programas que mais se sobressaíram no correr dos anos: o de publicações de livros e os simpósios.

Quem passou por seminário teológico no Brasil antes da década de 60 sabe que livro teológico em língua portuguesa nessa época era coisa rara, quando não inexistente. Aluno que não soubesse ler alguma língua estrangeira - inglês, francês ou alemão - estava condenado a depender passiva e exclusivamente do professor, a ponto de nem ter elementos para avaliar objetivamente a competência deste. E que dizer do caso de o próprio professor não conhecer uma dessas línguas? A Aste entendeu ser seu dever batalhar para remediar essa grave lacuna. Adotou de saída uma espécie de plano de urgência: selecionar, traduzir e publicar, em 10 anos, nem mais nem menos que uma “biblioteca básica” de uns 40 livros. Utópico, diziam alguns. Mas, graças ao apoio incondicional dos seminários, à mobilização de uma equipe de tradutores amadores e à paciência do pessoal da Imprensa Metodista de então, fomos avançando passo a passo, livro a livro, e finalmente não ficamos muito longe de atingir a meta fixada. Tudo isso são fatos conhecidos. O que é menos conhecido, e talvez nem conste nas atas da Aste, é que já naquela época sonhávamos etapas posteriores: publicar, nos 10 anos seguintes, mais 40 livros; só que, desta vez, seriam 20 traduzidos e 20 originais de autores brasileiros. E assim por diante nas décadas seguintes! A produção regular de trabalhos originais, de cunho contextual, primícias de uma autêntica teologia brasileira, seria a etapa definitiva do programa de publicações. Éramos, sem dúvida, impenitentes sonhadores. Pena que nem todos os sonhos se realizem!

Havia o incontornável lado financeiro e comercial desse programa. Tínhamos a sorte de poder contar com uma verba de 20.000 dólares do Fundo de Educação Teológica, de Londres, a ser liberada em parcelas de mil dólares por livro publicado. A idéia era que, uma vez publicados os primeiros 20 livros com essa verba doada, poderíamos continuar financiando o programa com a renda proveniente da venda desses livros, numa espécie de motu continuo. Por que não? Não fosse a brutal crise econômica do país, causada pelo choque petrolífero, que demoliu essas santas pretensões. Os dirigentes atuais da Aste, porém, não se deixem desanimar. O livro teológico é, comercialmente, muito mais viável hoje do que foi nos anos 60. Naquela época, nossa tiragem média era de 3000 exemplares, tendo em conta uma população estudantil teológica - núcleo de nossos clientes potenciais - de uns 1500 alunos. Hoje essa população deve girar em torno de 6000 (número sujeito a verificação). Ademais, seja dito com veemência, os livros da Aste destinam-se também à educação permanente de milhares de pastores pelo Brasil a fora, ao menos daqueles que não perderam o gosto de ler e de aprender. Sem falar dos líderes leigos, parceiros imprescindíveis no sacerdócio universal, por cuja formação teológica ainda quase nada se faz. Em suma, o mercado é amplo. Uma comercialização bem direcionada pode realisticamente tornar autofinanciável, e assim dinamizar ainda mais, o já frutuoso programa de publicações da Aste.

Também os simpósios foram concebidos para serem, antes de tudo, promotores de qualidade em educação teológica. A maioria de nós não queríamos que a Aste fosse um órgão meramente técnico ou logístico. Entendíamos que a vitalidade da Aste e seu compromisso com qualidade dependiam de que ela própria, isto é, os representantes dos seminários e o contingente de professores nesses seminários formassem um núcleo de reflexão crítica, alerta às exigências do tempo, na vanguarda da investigação teológica. Dois simpósios daqueles anos pioneiros, dentre outros, ilustram bem essa linha de ação. O simpósio sobre o Catolicismo Romano foi um deles. Todos sabemos que o protestantismo em geral, e o brasileiro de modo especial, é marcado por uma postura vis-à-vis ao catolicismo romano. Há um reflexo protestante condicionado ao que se passa nessa igreja. E a educação teológica não é isenta desse reflexo. Ora, a atmosfera do pós-Vaticano II e a repercussão no Brasil de certas posições inovadoras tomadas nesse concílio pediam uma reavaliação daquela imagem tradicional do catolicismo que o protestantismo brasileiro

tinha cristalizado em sua consciência coletiva. Tarefa delicada, não sem resistência interna, mas que foi assumida e levada a termo graças à boa disposição de uns e outros. Não me lembro de outro encontro, anterior a esse simpósio, em que teólogos brasileiros católicos e protestantes tenham trabalhado juntos com afinco, durante quatro dias, para arejar velhos temas polêmicos e no desejo de alcançar maior lucidez na compreensão daquilo que realmente une e separa as duas igrejas.

Outro simpósio arrojado foi aquele dedicado ao estudo do Pentecostalismo Brasileiro. O movimento neopentecostal estava começando a explodir. As denominações evangélicas tradicionais já ressentiam, inquietas, seu impacto. Percebiam que o pentecostalismo era uma crítica implícita às suas práticas tradicionais. Mas suas reações eram em geral primárias: de zombaria e desdém, quando não hostis. Só viam suas mazelas e aberrações. Não havia ainda nenhum estudo protestante objetivo do fenômeno. E o interesse dos sociólogos da religião por ele estava apenas despontando. A Aste pressentiu sua importância e entendeu que devia conhecê-lo melhor e estudá-lo sem preconceito. O simpósio, que teve lugar na Universidade Mackenzie, em São Paulo, reuniu líderes pentecostais, pastores protestantes, padres católicos e, naturalmente, professores de seminários. Foi outro encontro sem precedente. Permitiu que o olhar dos participantes evangélicos sobre a realidade pentecostal amadurecesse um pouco. E vice-versa. Começamos todos a entender que o fenômeno pentecostal, apesar das incongruências, representava um esforço legítimo de contextualização da fé cristã; uma versão “crioula” daquele protestantismo ainda marcado pelo ranço cultural europeu; um modelo versátil de igreja que contrastava com os sacrossantos estereótipos denominacionais. Desde então, muita coisa mudou. Hoje há pontes entre evangélicos e pentecostais brasileiros. Pesquisadores protestantes dão-se ao trabalho de analisar e pensar o movimento. Pós-graduandos de teologia fazem teses sobre ele. Seminários pentecostais começam a acercar-se da Aste. Tenho a convicção de que aquele simpósio memorável foi detonador de um processo saudável ainda em curso em nossos dias.

Há muito mais que contar sobre aqueles anos pioneiros. Seria alongar demasiado e cansar o leitor. Afinal, o objetivo destas linhas não é fazer um relato completo do que se passou naquele período. Mas não quero terminar deixando a impressão de que tudo na Aste daqueles tempos era maravilhoso, que todos os empreendimentos eram coroados de êxito, e que navegávamos num eterno mar de rosas. Qual nada! Houve momentos frustrantes e reveses amargos. Dou a seguir alguns exemplos.

A Aste começou com apenas 12 seminários associados e era natural que procurasse se expandir e agregar outros seminários da família evangélica. O que implicava ater-se a uma noção flexível e abrangente da palavra “evangélico” - questão de princípio para um organismo interconfessional. Ora, o Seminário Adventista, que funcionava na região da Grande São Paulo, dava sinais de interesse em entrar na Aste. Visitei-o pessoalmente várias vezes para conhecer a instituição e discutir o assunto com seus dirigentes. A diretoria da Aste, apesar de reconhecer que a matéria era controversa - os adventistas são evangélicos?, perguntavam alguns - pediu-me que prosseguisse os contatos. E que preparasse um relatório com base no qual a Assembléia anual decidiria. Caprichei no relatório e anexei-lhe o pedido formal de filiação do seminário. Escrevi de antemão aos membros da Assembléia procurando persuadí-los da oportunidade de um voto favorável, que significaria alargar as fronteiras da Aste. Na Assembléia, todos sentíamos que a votação seria equilibrada, mas que haveria uma estreita maioria a favor. Porém, na hora da decisão, parece que alguém roeu a corda. Por um voto a moção caiu. Fiquei profundamente decepcionado. A Aste que eu tanto amava me pareceu mesquinha. Senti-me vingado só anos depois, já no exterior, quando soube que, numa nova tentativa, o Seminário Adventista tinha sido finalmente aceito na família da Aste.

A Aste tinha três anos de idade quando se implantou o regime militar no país. Trauma nacional que marcou fundo toda uma geração. Os anos de chumbo pesaram também sobre as igrejas. Falar das implicações sociais do evangelho, ou pregar sobre a justiça do Reino de Deus, passou a ser impatriótico. Ter na biblioteca um mero livro de estudo sobre o marxismo tornou-se subversivo. A caça às bruxas não poupou nem os seminários. Víamos professores e alunos afastados, vocações jovens destroçadas, consciências violentadas. Que fazer na Aste? Tomar posição aberta? Fingir neutralidade? A Aste apenas espelhava o dilema e as ambigüidades da igreja naquela crise. Alguns de nós éramos intelectualmente “de esquerda”, mentalmente contra o regime. Mas pouco mais fazíamos do que citar Barth ou invocar o exemplo de Bonhoeffer durante o nazismo. Outros, tácita ou visivelmente, davam assentimento à ordem instaurada, o que nos parecia traição do evangelho. A tensão era surda mas aguda. O que estava em jogo, no âmago dessa tensão, era o próprio conceito de educação teológica que queríamos ter na Aste: educação teológica tem a ver, ou não, com cidadania responsável? A educação teológica é para capacitar funcionários de igreja ou arautos das boas novas do reino de justiça e amor? Não penso que houve delatores na Aste, mas um clima de suspeita se instaurou certa feita quando um dos membros da diretoria foi convocado para depor no DOPS de São Paulo. Seguiram-se semanas difíceis em que a Aste quase ficou paralisada. Mas se refez e saiu reforçada da crise. Quando a deixei em 1970, em plena vigência do sinistro Ato Institucional, ela já tinha recuperado coesão e embalo para prosseguir sua caminhada. Entrementes, a ditadura foi varrida e a Aste vai muito bem, obrigado!

Em 1966 tivemos um acirrado debate interno em que eu e alguns companheiros de posição fomos batidos inapelavelmente. Queríamos que os alunos dos seminários associados tivessem alguma forma de representação na Aste. Nosso argumento era que a Aste era uma associação “de seminários” e não só de reitores e professores de seminários. Ora, como parte integrante dos seminários associados, os seminaristas deveriam também estar presentes na vida e atividades da Aste. Como? Com assento e voz nas assembléias anuais, por exemplo. O argumento parecia lógico, mas seus oponentes refletiam uma realidade bruta incontestável: os tais alunos que queríamos ver representados na Aste não tinham nem voz nem assento nas próprias instâncias decisórias de seus seminários. O clima político nacional daqueles anos também pesava no debate. A UNE e outras organizações estudantis estavam na mira dos guardiães da ordem. Estudante universitário era tido por encrenqueiro, anarquista. Acabamos percebendo que insistir seria dar soco em ponta de faca; que tínhamos levantado o assunto em hora imprópria. Cabisbaixos, engavetamos o dossiê! Pelo visto, alguém deve tê-lo achado anos depois e levado adiante a idéia! Porque vemos hoje sinais de esperança nesse setor: a relação professor-seminarista tem mais reciprocidade, seminaristas estão formando corporações e começam a participar dos simpósios da Aste, e há esforços para se criar algum tipo de associação de estudantes de teologia...Termino. Ao deixar a Aste, em 1970, para ir trabalhar no Fundo de Educação Teológica do CMI, eu levava na bagagem a preciosa experiência dos anos pioneiros evocados nessas linhas. Descobri então que aquilo que vivi e aprendi na Aste era altamente pertinente também para a problemática da educação teológica a nível global. Não que eu tivesse a tola pretensão de querer mundializar a experiência da Aste. Mas sim que essa experiência, a trajetória e os sonhos da Aste, suas realizações e frustrações, tudo isso tinha ressonância com a busca de autenticidade em educação teológica mundo afora, apesar das óbvias diferenças de contexto e cultura. E percebi também que, entre as 7 ou 8 associações de seminários teológicos então existentes nos vários continentes, a Aste fazia figura exemplar. Quando, em 1980, ganhei um doutorado honoris causa da Universidade de Serampore, na Índia (“por relevantes serviços prestados à educação teológica no Terceiro Mundo”, como caligrafado no diploma), dediquei o presente à Aste porque, como disse no meu discurso de agradecimento, foi a Aste que me deu a visão e a paixão da educação teológica. Essa mesma Aste cujo trabalho, no correr dos anos, continuei a admirar. Mesmo de longe, vi-a crescer, amadurecer e

afirmar-se. Hoje ela é um componente essencial da realidade protestante brasileira, um fator insubstituível de promoção de boa educação teológica no país. Se não existisse teríamos de inventá-la. Quase caí das nuvens quando o atual secretário-geral me lembrou que ela celebra este ano seu 40º aniversário. Quem diria? Vou festejar a data, à distância, aqui nesta minha pacata aldeia helvética, na certeza de que, pela graça de Deus e pela dedicação de seus atuais responsáveis, ela continuará sua marcha frutuosa, confiante no futuro e com renovado espírito pioneiro. Por que não? A vida não começa aos 40?

**LIFE (RE)STARTS AT FORTY<sup>1</sup>**

Aharon Sapsezian

<sup>2</sup> Yes, it was forty years ago but I still remember well. Everything had been meticulously prepared. As *ad hoc* secretary, in charge of promoting the “ASTE project”, I had visited from north to south all the seminaries potentially interested in joining this interdenominational cooperation scheme - all of them Evangelical/Protestant seminaries, as realistically required by our church context. Obviously, these seminaries reflected the peculiar denominational characteristics we all know, and which I had learned to respect during my years of work at the Evangelical Council of Churches in Brazil (CEB). But the new insight gained from those visits was that these seminaries also reflected enormous differences regarding the very concept and practice of “theological education”. Differences precisely in this crucial area on which we expected to ground the cooperation project! No wonder some people say that there was something of a miracle in the creation of ASTE. The draft Constitution for the new organization had been prepared carefully, taking into account the sensitivities of all parties, and was sent in advance to the interested seminaries. Their reactions had been rather positive. All we needed now was that their representatives come together and formally approve the Constitution by putting their signatures to it; and doing so with resolve (we knew that without conviction and commitment, such a signature would be meaningless). Finally the moment of truth arrived! We were guests of the Methodist Theological College in Rudge Ramos, near São Paulo. I had been professor of Ecumenics at this institution, and its rector, Nathanael do Nascimento, was a strong supporter of the project and gave me his full backing. On that morning of December 20, 1961, the representatives of the seminaries - almost all of them rectors - began arriving one by one. Many of them didn't know each other, or only by name. The atmosphere was cordial but somewhat solemn: conventional gestures, formal expressions of welcome, invocation prayer, reading of the Constitution, but very little discussion... Finally, among contained sighs of euphoria and excitement, it was time for signing. There was a feeling that something important was happening, something historic. In the same mood, the Board was elected and Julio Andrade Ferreira, from the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Campinas, became president. And I was appointed general-secretary (an honor deprived of any merit since I was the only candidate!). Epilogue: closing prayer, greetings, warm handshakes... and coffee, of course. The founding fathers displayed the happy smiles of having done a good job, of having taken a bold step forward. This is how ASTE was born; without much trumpeting - to my knowledge, no church periodical, nor a secular one for that matter, reported the event; but born it was in joy and enthusiasm.

And thus it lived, in joy and enthusiasm, at least during those nine years I walked with it. All of us in ASTE were somehow captured by the feeling that we were partners in an unprecedented and promising adventure, treading unknown paths where every step meant new emotions. For me, having come from the CEB, an aged organization already captive of routine, with symptoms of fatigue (it died a few years later), the contrast was striking. In ASTE everything was creation and invention. We did not have examples to follow, or models to copy. As a matter of fact, at that time there existed only two associations of theological schools in the whole world: one in North America and one in South East Asia. Both our antipodes were, geographically and culturally speaking, inadaptable to our context. As for the five or six embryos of

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Portuguese by the author.

<sup>2</sup> In December 2001, the Brazilian Association of Evangelical Theological Seminaries (ASTE) will complete 40 years of existence. This article, rich in recollections of the struggles and achievements during the first years in the life of this Association, was written by the Rev. Dr. Aharon Sapsezian, its first general-secretary, from 1961-1970, now retired and living in Switzerland.



association which, in the 60s, sprang up in various regions of the world through the incentive of the WCC Theological Education Fund, they did not have much previous experience to rely on either and they too had to create things practically *ex nihilo*. Some of them even wrote letters to ASTE asking for suggestions and advice! Nevertheless, what seemed to be a handicap turned out to be our strength. Necessity forced us to be imaginative, daring and enterprising. At every meeting of the Board or the Assembly somebody came with an original idea, a bright response to a new challenge, a fresh proposal... occasionally extravagant ones too, for that matter! Once, the venerable rector of one of the seminaries wrote me saying that he intended to bring to the Board meeting a proposal for the creation of a post-graduate course on theology. A grandiose project, something like an “ASTE Institute for Post-Graduate Studies”, For newborn ASTE, this was putting the cart before the horse! Luckily, I managed to dissuade him in time. But this shows that, for us, the sky was the limit! Or rather, the sky and - to force us back to earth - the budget.

During the first year of ASTE, the most demanding task was to ensure a realistic financial basis. We were not naïve: we knew that the Association could not go very far with just enthusiasm and wishful thinking. And to complicate things, in the search for funds we could not count very much on the member seminaries. Many of them were themselves dependent on foreign aid, and others had great difficulty in balancing their budgets. The so-called “darling of the church”, as seminaries were known in Brazilian Protestant circles, did not seem to be a top priority in the financial considerations of the churches. In spite of this, as a matter of principle, at the first Board meeting it was decided that each seminary should make a substantial annual contribution to the Association budget, and that the aim should be to ultimately achieve full financial self-reliance. It is true that we counted on the Theological Education Fund which, from its headquarters in London, encouraged us with promises of assistance for our projects...with the proviso that these were to the point, well formulated and convincing...Everyone knows how donor agencies are cautious and sometimes suspicious (I must confess, though, that much later, when I began working on the other side of the donor/receiver relationship, the TEF demands looked to me less impertinent and less paternalistic! Professional deformation, you could say). Anyhow, we accepted the rules of the game, we battled, we negotiated and finally managed to obtain from the TEF the much coveted “major grant”. A rather pompous name, I would say, for a grant barely sufficient for the projects we were already about to launch, though it did allow us to purchase the modest premises where the ASTE offices and the living quarters of the general-secretary are located. Anyhow, the strenuous task of securing our financial viability was satisfactorily completed, at least for the time being. And we could now say on with the work...

And the work ahead was clearly there, just waiting to be tackled. It consisted of two priority requirements: first, to see that our newborn organization lived up to its name; in other words, that ASTE become truly an “association”, a place of convergence, of common reflection and sharing. The second requirement followed on from the first, namely, to make sure that this coming together of the seminaries contributed toward the goal we all had in mind - the improvement of the quality of theological education in our country.

The main evangelical seminaries in Brazil at that time lived more or less within the confinement of their denominational world, virtually isolated from each other. They did not know much about, nor felt the need to know, what happened beyond their confessional boundaries. Most of them were happy to just perpetuate theological education patterns brought in by foreign missionaries, or simply preferred to maintain relationships with theological institutions of their own denomination abroad. If they had any sensitivity with regard to the Brazilian existential complexities, this was rather occasional, naïve and empirical. The need to come out of this protective cocoon and see the greater and defying reality around, to discover new and different concepts of church, theology and ministerial formation, was one of the most pressing challenges facing the seminaries. Addressing this challenge was ASTE’s top priority, the inner purpose of all its activities. Meetings, visits, correspondence, exchange of experiences, comradeship, all these should, and did, contribute

to the broadening of horizons and the renewal of perspectives. All these, likewise, generated mutual trust and favored a sort of complicity, an *esprit de corps*, fellowship, and communion around the common task of theological education. Yes, communion is the right word. It may be politically correct to say, as some do, that ASTE is not an “ecumenical” organization. Actually, this word never had an easy life in ASTE circles, probably because of the caricature made of it by those who, at that time, slandered the World Council of Churches. Yet, the sheer fact that ASTE could mobilize church people and bring them together around a task so crucial for the life and mission of the church, as is ministerial formation, is indeed an eloquent expression of the unity of the Body of Christ. Call it what you want!

However important, though, fellowship or communion was not in itself the ultimate goal. ASTE had been created, after all, to improve, to enhance theological education. The question of quality - or excellence, the word used in the Anglo-Saxon world of education at that time - was the rallying call in ASTE since its inception. This concern was derived in part from the reasoning - naïvely simplistic, we would say today - that a better theological education produces a better ministry, and better ministry produces a better church (and - added those with a higher social sensitivity - a better church produces a better world!). But probably what was behind this concern for quality was a certain pervasive Calvinistic drive for coherence and integrity: if we are going to be in the business of doing theological education, we had better do it well, seriously, without improvisation, without easy solutions. In other words, the mission of the church in the world requires nothing less than the best formation of its ministers. Whether simplistic naïveté or Calvinistic rigour, the fact is that the regard for quality was unanimous. This unanimity only faltered when the moment came to define quality and to give substance to this word. Serious divergences surfaced then. Some seminaries understood quality in mainly academic terms: degrees, base curriculum, upgraded library, graduated faculty... Others, while not rejecting the academic dimension, were weary of its pedantic pretensions and emphasized spiritual formation, devotional life, evangelistic fervor, confessional loyalty... Many of us, however, believed that both these positions could be seen as complementary to each other, and that both should undergo the test of a richer and more contextual concept of quality, namely, one that valued human maturity, intellectual freedom, critical and self-critical aptitude and, foremost, rootedness in the dynamic Brazilian social reality. This was a timely and fruitful debate, inherent to the very concept of theological education; a debate that still goes on and must go on. Given the fact that the academic quality approach was easier to measure and quantify, and perhaps also because of the prevailing tendency of our culture, it had, as it has still today, a better chance to prevail over the others. This is reflected, for instance, in the accreditation policy of ASTE, as well as in the general desire of theological schools in Brazil to obtain government recognition.

The quest for quality was the driving force behind every single ASTE programme. Evidence of this are two programmes which gained particular prominence over the years, namely, publications and symposia.

Any student who passed through a theological seminary in Brazil before the 1960s knows that a theological book in the Portuguese language was at that time a rarity, if non-existent. If he/she could not read a foreign language - English, French or German - he/she was condemned to depend passively and exclusively on the teacher, to the extent of having no means to even evaluate the competence of the teacher. Worse still was the case - not infrequent - when the teacher himself didn't know any of these languages. In face of such a clamorous challenge, ASTE had to do something and to do it quickly and vigorously. From the start it embarked on an emergency programme to select, translate and publish, during the following 10 years, nothing less than a “basic theological education library” of some 40 books. Some judged this programme “utopian” and in a sense it was. Yet, thanks to the unconditional support of the member seminaries, the mobilization of a motivated team of non-professional translators and, not least, the support of the Methodist Press staff, we moved forward, step by step, book by book, until in the end we came

pretty close to the target set. All these are known facts. What perhaps is less known is that, already at that time, we were also dreaming of the next stages of the programme: to publish, during the second decade, another set of 40 books, with the difference this time that 20 would be translations and 20 original books by Brazilian authors. And this rhythm should go on during the following decades...In the long term, the final stage of the publication programme would be the continuing production of original works, contextual in character, as first-fruits of a genuine Brazilian theology. As you can see, we were indeed unrepentant dreamers. Pity that not all dreams come true!

There was the unavoidable financial and commercial aspect of this programme. In the initial stage luckily we could rely on a \$20.000 grant from the Theological Education Fund, released in installments of \$1000 per each book published. The idea was that once we had published the first 20 books with TEF assistance, we should be able to finance the rest of the programme with the income from sales, through some sort of revolving financial operation. Although quite feasible in normal conditions, this scheme was utterly shaken by the oil shock of the early 1970s, which plunged the country into a deep economic crisis. Today's leaders of ASTE, however, should not be discouraged by this past set back. The production of a theological book is, commercially speaking, much more viable today than it was in the 60s. At that time, the average edition was 3000 copies, commensurate with the theological student population of 1500, the core of our potential readers. Today, this population must be about four times as great - 6000 or so. Moreover, let it be said emphatically, the ASTE books are also meant to promote the continuing education of thousands of pastors up and down Brazil, or at least those who still have a taste for reading and learning, not to mention lay leaders, our key partners in the universal priesthood, for whom so little is done in theological formation. In a word, the field of potential buyers is vast. Well-targeted marketing could make the ASTE publication programme realistically self-financing, and thus bring further impetus to this already successful undertaking.

The ASTE symposia (workshops on specific issues relevant to mission and ministerial formation) were also conceived as a means of fostering the quality of theological education. Most of us in leadership did not endorse the idea of ASTE being merely a technical or logistic organization. We believed that the vitality of ASTE and the effectiveness of its commitment to quality depended on its being itself a community of critical reflection, open to the challenges of the times and in the forefront of theological research. Two of the symposia convened during those pioneer years illustrate well this vision. The first was the Symposium on Roman Catholicism. We all know that Protestantism in general, and Brazilian Protestantism in particular, is deeply marked by its posture vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism. There is a Protestant "conditioned reflex" triggered by what goes on in that Church. And Protestant/Evangelical theological education is not immune to this reflex. It so happens that the climate of post-Vatican II, and the repercussion in Brazil of some of the innovative stances taken in that Council, suggested a reassessment of the traditional image of Catholicism which Brazilian Protestantism had crystallized in its collective memory. This was a delicate task. Despite some internal resistance, it was finally assumed and carried through thanks to the good will and determination of all. I do not know of any encounter, prior to this symposium where Brazilian theologians, Catholic and Protestant, worked so diligently together for four days revisiting old polemical themes, trying to reach a clearer understanding of the issues which unite and separate these two churches.

Another pioneering symposium focused on Brazilian Pentecostalism. At that time (1966) the neo-pentecostal movement was beginning to explode. Leaders of the traditional evangelical denominations were already getting worried about its impact. They sensed that Pentecostalism embodied a criticism of their conventional practices. But their reactions were generally superficial: scoffing and disdainful, if not openly hostile. They focused only on the blemishes and aberrations of the Pentecostal "menace". There was not as yet any objective Protestant study of the phenomenon. And sociologists of religion were just discovering the subject. ASTE sensed the importance of the issue and decided to approach it with an open and inquisitive

mind. The symposium took place at Mackenzie University (the prestigious Protestant institution in São Paulo) and brought together Pentecostal leaders, Protestant pastors, Catholic priests and, naturally, seminary teachers, altogether some 50 people. It turned out to be another unprecedented learning event; a unique occasion for us, evangelical participants, to gain a more mature understanding of the Pentecostal reality. We began to see that this reality, despite its contradictions and shortcomings, represented a genuine contextualization effort of the Christian faith; a home-made version of that classical Protestantism still heavily impregnated by the European cultural ethos; a more versatile church model so different from the sacrosanct denominational stereotypes. Since then many things have changed. Nowadays there are bridges that connect Brazilian Pentecostals and Evangelicals; Protestant theologians undertake serious research on the movement; postgraduate theological students write theses on it; Pentecostal seminaries have closer ties with ASTE. I am convinced that that memorable symposium triggered off a healthy dynamics still in action today.

Much more could be told about those pioneer years but it would entail making this article too long and tiresome. After all, the purpose of these lines is not to provide a full report of what happened during that period. Yet, I don't want to finish by leaving the impression that everything in ASTE at that time was marvelous, that all our undertakings were crowned with success that we sailed in an eternally peaceful sea.. Not at all. We had frustrating times as well, and bitter setbacks. Let me share with you a few examples.

At the start, ASTE was made up of only 12 member seminaries. Naturally, it was expected that it try to expand and bring into its membership other theological institutions of the evangelical tradition. This meant having a flexible and inclusive understanding of the word "evangelical" - a matter of principle for an inter-confessional organization. The Adventist Seminary, a large institution located in the Greater São Paulo region, manifested some interest in joining ASTE. I visited this school several times to establish personal contacts with its leaders and discuss with them the membership issue. The ASTE Board, although admitting that the matter was controversial - are the Adventists evangelicals? - authorized me to pursue contact. They also asked me to prepare a report as a basis for an eventual Assembly decision on the matter. I prepared the report meticulously and added to it the seminary's formal membership application. I wrote in advance to the Assembly members trying to convince them of the advantages of a favorable vote since it would mean broadening the frontiers of ASTE. During the Assembly, all felt that the voting would be balanced, but that there would be a narrow majority in favor. Great surprise: at the casting of the votes someone must have changed his mind. The proposal was defeated by one vote. I was deeply disappointed. At that moment, the ASTE, which I so loved, looked mean. Only years later, when I was already living abroad, I felt vindicated on learning that, in a new attempt, the Adventist Seminary had finally been accepted in the ASTE family.

ASTE was just three years old when the military took over in Brazil. We had entered a period of national trauma that marked deeply an entire generation. Those "lead years" weighed heavily on the churches as well. To allude to the social implications of the gospel or to preach on the justice of the Kingdom became unpatriotic. To have a book on Marxism in the library was a subversive act. The witch-hunt did not spare even the seminaries. We saw teachers and students dismissed, young vocations destroyed, consciousness brutalized. What should we do at ASTE? Take a stance openly? Pretend to be neutral? We lived the very same dilemmas and ambiguities that the churches experienced during that crisis. Some of us were intellectually "leftists", mentally against the military. But we didn't do much more than merely quote Barth or refer to Bonhoeffer during the nazi dictatorship. The attitude of others, who, tacitly or not, endorsed the regime, seemed to us a betrayal of the Gospel.

A muted tension reigned in ASTE. At the heart of this tension, the very notion of theological education

was at stake: should theological education foster responsible citizenship? Is the goal of theological education to train functionaries for the church or to inspire heralds of the good-news of the Kingdom? I don't think we had traitors in ASTE; yet, a climate of suspicion enveloped us all when, at the height of the tension, one member of the Board was called to testify at the infamous secret service office (DOPS) in São Paulo. The following weeks were hard to endure and ASTE was almost brought to a halt. Nevertheless, it managed to overcome the test and emerged reinvigorated. When I left ASTE in 1970, during the enforcement of the sinister Institutional Act (security measures by decree), it had already retrieved cohesion and élan to continue the journey. Meanwhile, the dictatorship in Brazil was wiped out, while ASTE is still bravely there and in good shape!

In 1966, a passionate internal debate took place in which some of us were flatly defeated. Our contention was that seminary students should somehow be represented in ASTE. We argued that ASTE was an association of *seminaries*, and not merely of professors and rectors, and that as an integral part of their seminaries, the seminarians should be present in the life and activities of ASTE. But how? Having the right to a seat and to speak at the annual assemblies, for instance! The argument seemed logical. But its opponents responded on the basis of a crude and undeniable reality: those very seminarians whom we wanted to have a seat in ASTE, had neither seat nor voice in the decision making processes of their own seminaries. In addition, the national political climate also weighed upon the debate. The National Union of Students (UNE) and similar organizations were under investigation by the “defenders of the order”. University students were seen by the military authorities as troublemakers, anarchists. We came to realise that we had raised the issue at the wrong time and that it was pointless to insist. Despondently we filed the dossier! Apparently, though, somebody found it years later and carried forward the idea! I say this because nowadays there are several signs of hope in this area: the relationship between teacher and student has gained much more reciprocity; seminarians are in the process of forming corporations; they are beginning to participate in the ASTE symposia; an association of theological students is in creation...

A concluding paragraph. When I left ASTE in 1970 to work at the Theological Education Fund of the WCC, I carried in my luggage the precious experience of those pioneering years described in these pages. I then realized that what I had lived and learned in ASTE was highly pertinent for dealing with the problems of theological education worldwide. Not in the sense that the ASTE experience could be naïvely globalized, but that the concrete struggles and dreams of ASTE, its accomplishments and frustrations, all its efforts to promote theological education in Brazil, seemed to be in line with the quest for authenticity in theological education in a world perspective, despite the obvious cultural and contextual diversities. I also discovered that among the 7 or 8 theological associations that existed on different continents at that time, ASTE was often seen as the exemplar one. When, in 1980, the Serampore University College in India conferred upon me an honorary degree (“for relevant services rendered to theological education” as read in the citation), I offered this gift to ASTE because, as I mentioned in my word of thanks, it was ASTE that gave me the vision and passion for theological education. That very ASTE that continued through the years, faithful to its original calling, ever expanding its services and affirming its presence. ASTE is today an essential component in the Brazilian Protestant landscape, an indispensable factor for the renewal of theological education in the country. If it didn't exist, it would have to be created! I was greatly surprised when the general-secretary Fernando Bortoletto wrote reminding me that this year was ASTE's 40th anniversary. Time flies fast! I will indeed celebrate the occasion, from this distant quiet Swiss village where I live now. And I will do it with the certainty that ASTE, by the grace of the Almighty, and by the steadfastness of its present day leadership, will go forward on its fruitful journey with confidence and with a renewed pioneering spirit. After all, life begins at 40!

***IN SEARCH OF ECUMENISM IN AFRICA  
THAT IS LIFE-GIVING AND HEALING***

*Augustine Musopole*

He was admitted at a Church hospital, but there was little improvement in his condition. The doctor advised that he be taken to a government facility so that he could be taken to a referral hospital which was 200 km away and in another region of the country. He suspected that he was suffering from a terminal illness. The doctors knew it but hoping against hope they wanted to exhaust the available possibilities.

He was taken to the government health facility, but within days he called and asked to be taken home. He refused to go to this referral hospital saying, “I do not want to be thought of as a fool by dying away from my home when I knew I would not recover. I do not want my dead body to be a bother to my children.”

At the end of that month he summoned all his children. He gave them specific instructions about what to do when he is dead. He showed them where he was to be buried. It was on a worm anti-hill close to his homestead. This was far away from the community’s burial grounds. He showed them the cow they were to slaughter and that he should be buried in a sitting position wrapped in the cow’s hide. The children followed the instructions to the letter. It is common practice that such instructions are obeyed and cannot be ignored with impunity for the respect of the deceased.

In almost all the Malawian cultures the instructions of a dying person are taken very seriously. I take the words of Jesus’ priestly prayer in John 17 to qualify as such words and such instructions. As such they need to be followed to the letter. Three times over he prays for the unity of the believing community sanctified by the word of truth (see vs. 11, 21, 23). The unity is to be modeled on that which exists between the Son and the Father. It was to be a perfect unity. Only by the demonstration of that unity, would the world acknowledge Jesus as the Father’s emissary, the Father’s love for the faith community and for Jesus. It was to be a unity rooted in love.

Looking at the church worldwide I do not see that this is the case. The cancer of disunity is seen very early in the life of the church. The diaconate was created to mitigate against manifest disunity in the distribution of resources. The Jewish Gentile divide became such an issue that it had to take divine intervention at Joppa and Caesarea and a whole Council to come up with an acceptable policy.

What came to Africa was not one church in one place. It was not one Christ who was head of the church, but many Christs and many heads of churches. Therefore, it is not surprising that after 20 centuries we are in search of ecumenism that is life-giving and healing. How do we find this after 20 centuries of moving in the wrong direction? How do we in Africa undo 20 centuries of divisions, hatred and disobedience? If love and unity are meant to be the marks of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church, then we are not yet that church and therefore our search is for the establishment of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church so that it becomes the one church in one place.

For the moment the church in Africa is not one and as such it cannot be holy and catholic. The apostolicity of the church is the manifestation of the divine unity to the world, therefore, it is not yet apostolic. If it were one, holy, catholic and apostolic there would be no reason for the search of ecumenism and no need for it to be life-giving and healing. Africa’s own many problems await for the church to wake and live up to its true character of being one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This is an awesome responsibility, but a

responsibility that the church under the direction of the Holy Spirit is called to discharge. The question is how do the churches in Africa achieve this?

Firstly it has to realize who is calling it into being and sending it forth. Jesus declared, “As the Father has sent me even I send you.” (John 2:21) The mission of the church does not start with the Great Commission, but in the very heart of God and is at the center of creation. It is a mission to love creation into existence and fellowship and unity. The church is exhorted to make every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 3:4).

The churches in Africa need to abide in the vine as branches otherwise they are in danger of being pruned off. So far they are abiding in denominationalism which Kosuke Koyama has rightly described as demonic. They are abiding in partial theological perspectives pretending to be comprehensive and complete. They are abiding in truncated spiritualities influenced by every wind of doctrine and manipulations. They are abiding in culturally conditioned ritualism and traditional worldviews in need of redemption. They are abiding and taking pride in archaic theological battles that smell of heresies. They abide in all these when they should abide and obey Jesus the Christ. All churches would claim scriptures to be the final authority in matters of faith and conduct and yet non-of them makes an attempt to obey John 17.

When people have lived under adverse conditions for a long time, they accept them as normal. There are prisoners who have made prison home. We have come to accept divisions, disunity as normal. In the name of God, we are proud to deny others the Lord’s table the very sign of that unity.

Secondly, in order to achieve unity both the leadership of denominations and denominations themselves have to learn to die to self as theological traditions, liturgical institutions, ecclesiastic power structures, claim to truth and to control God. They have to come alive with Christ and his love for all. They have to pull down the walls that divide and to accept others for Christ sake.

Thirdly, our churches must accept mutual enrichment and mutual correction. It is much easier to accept that enriches than that which diminishes us. Those who are our critiques often keep us honest. This is an important service even as uncomfortable as they tend to make us feel. Denominations are really gifts to each other for our common good. Remember the image of the body and its parts. Isolationism can only rob each of our full inheritance in Christ. We are meant to be accountable to one another. We are called to be in dialogue with each other. We are called to learn from each other.

Fourthly, denominations in Africa need to realize that unity, love, and peace are inseparable. One cannot have one without the other. Where there is love, there is unity and peace and where there is love and peace, unity is present. Where there is no love there cannot be unity, and where there is no peace a state of war exists. The churches in their ecumenical effort in Africa are living without ecclesiastical peace and unity as yet. Without the unity of the church, Africa as a political reality cannot know unity and peace. And yet, the churches are complacently pointing a splinter in the politician’s eye and being oblivious of the log in its own eye. This is hypocrisy of the highest order.

It has been stated that the church in Africa is not a missionary church. Missionaries are often white and come to spend some time in Africa. Even African missionaries have been taught to do mission work in another country building little empires for their denomination. The African churches have inherited wrong missionary models, missions that are not part of the local church. There is often a Baptist mission and a Baptist church, Assemblies of God mission and Assemblies of God church. It is the local church, which is meant to be in mission field in the community. We are called to be in Christ for a mission. The moment

early missionaries arrived they were to constitute a local congregation, a local church in their own right to whom new converts could be added. However, since they separated themselves as church planters and not church being planted in the African soil they rendered the new converts without a missionary consciousness. Their evangelistic efforts were not missionary outreach since they were not in mission. Therefore in searching for ecumenism, we have to uncover the many misconceptions that inform our church practice. Only missionaries carry the life-giving word while church members only pay their membership dues to attain to privileges reserved for paid up members. Churches have become religious clubs for members only and not communities – in communion for disciples.

Fifthly, in our search for ecumenism we have to overcome the dichotomy between the spiritual and secular, and all other dichotomies that result from this. Human beings are ensouled bodies and embodied souls. The Spirit has no problem with matter and so does matter has any problem with the spirit. God is the source of both with all their related functions. While the current interest in spirituality is a welcome corrective to secularism focusing exclusively on it is bound to create new distortions leading to hiccups in the human existential reality. Through the preparation of Pentecostal groups and sects Africa is in the throes of the struggle between spirit and matter and the development of gnostic Christianity.

In Jesus Christ God has affirmed the world of matter as theologically relevant to human salvation. Spiritual escapism is just as bad as material escapism. Ecumenism that is only spiritual or platonic is inadequate to lead to life and healing. Ecumenism that is simply secular – networking for its own sake, will not get us far. The two have to be seen as two sides of the same coin, complementary entities, of equal value in their functions. It has to be an all embracing ecumenism rooted in God and for the unity of all people bound together by God's love.

Sixthly, ecumenism in Africa has to do with the redemption of our culture. Under sin all cultures are subhuman. However, since we are so used to hiring under these subhuman conditions they appear very normal while they are abnormal. Our efforts at development are a crying for abundant life, the very mission for which Christ appeared in the flesh. St. Paul declared, "If anyone is in Christ Jesus, they are a new creation." Behold the old is gone, the new has come." (2 Cor. 5:17) Our cultures need to be renewed otherwise the values of the old culture will continue to devastate the continent with conflict, greed, death, diseases and famine. To know and love the other is to accept them and their cultural insights or God's gift to the church.

The problem with ecumenical institutions is that while they are inspired by the ecumenical spirit and established to serve and service that spirit soon they abandon the spirit or the spirit evaporates and become an end in themselves. The spirit of ecumenism becomes a dead myth, which is invoked from time to time on special occasions, while none pays much attention. Africa's ecumenical institutions have not escaped this. There is a United Theological College where students cannot share the Holy Communion. One asks, whose table is it? Whose covenant are we celebrating? Even in the one denomination, we do not bring to or get from that table the same meaning or signification. While a common view of the Eucharist would be most welcome, it is the one who is the truth and his word, which is also true that should be the primary focus for our common life. Our varied perspective should not be allowed to separate us, but follow from our life together.

I was attending the Senior Executive Church Leaders Management Course at CORAT-AFRICA, Nairobi. Since my Roman Catholic brothers and sisters were having mass in the morning and evening, in pursuance of ecumenism I decided to join them. Of course, I first asked them if that would be fine with them. I was told there is no problem. As soon as I sat, the person (a priest) who said there was no problem approached



me and whispered in my ear, “But do not partake of the element.” I felt hurt and cheated. The worse came when the priest was inviting the congregation to the table. The invitation was open and yet I was told not to participate. I did not belong. It was like allowing a hungry person to the table full of life giving food and telling that person to simply watch others eat. In spite of my pain I still continued to attend the mass.

An ecumenism short of full communion in response to the Lord’s invitation and offer cannot be life giving and healing. I still feel deeply the pain of being excluded from that table. While many would do away with restrictions based on merely human traditions, we are victims of these traditions that stand in the way of the good news of abundant life.

The seventh point is that we are in search of ecumenism, which is life giving and healing because the current ecumenism has failed to deliver life and health. Recently forces of evil have savagely wounded Africa, which have left it a very sick continent.

The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 raised this one troubling question: Where was the church? In a country where 98% claim to be Christians, it was Christians at each other. Jesus was made to serve ethnic identities and struggle for power. Africa continues to be afflicted by wars, famine, corrupt governments, economic mismanagement, bad historical memories, HIV/AIDS, ethnic conflict and discrimination, political naïvety, poverty and debt, globalization, environmental degradation, natural disasters, donor manipulation and fatigue. How does ecumenism once discovered deal with all these ills in order to contribution life and healing?

In our various countries we experience from time to time multi-party conflict. In each party one finds well-meaning Christians who are quiet and do not want to come together and dialogue. In the Democratic Republic of Congo there are Christians sympathetic to each of the warring groups, but there is no dialogue among them. The countries involved in the Great Lakes region there are churches which support the respective government and lack faith to transcend national limits to engage other churches so as to prevail on the aggression and greed of their government. An ecumenism that is life-giving and healing would make this its mission. I am aware of some feeble attempts, which were driven from outside the church themselves.

If ecumenism in Africa has to be life-giving and healing, then it has to set out its own agenda in terms of the values of the reign of God: a new humanity, the power of love, to build communities-in- communion, mutual service for economic and social development, grace repentance and forgiveness for inter-personal relations, eradication of corrupt practices, education for humanness and justice for socio-economic and political relations of which the rule of law is only one aspect. It is to be an agenda for a blessed and abundant life especially for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized – the wretched of the earth.

An ecumenism rooted in the Trinity as Jesus prayed is an ecumenism that can only be realized when humanity as made in the image of God is fully alive. It manifests and promotes authentic humanness as we encounter it in Jesus who did all things well. As such it has to be an ecumenism based on our being made in God’s own image – (umunthu) as seen in the face of Christ.

What Africa needs urgently is an ecumenism of umunthu (humanness). John 3:16 states, “For God so loved humanity in the whole world that God gave the one and only child that whoever trusts the child for ones own life should not perish, but attain life (with an eternal dimension) that has no end.” The target of God’s love is humanity in all the world.

The ecumenism of umunthu arises out of the love of God for humanity – humanity as made in God’s image and redeemed after the image of the Christ.

The ecumenism of umunthu points to authentic humanity to which all civilizations and cultures strive and yet are miserably failing to realize. “For all human beings are under the power of sin and hence continue to come short of God’s given design.” This authentic humanity is seen in the face of Christ.

The ecumenism of umunthu brings all human beings to be members of the one family of God so as to belong together, work together, commune together, suffer together and hope together. “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am.” (John Mbiti) What befalls us here is our joint responsibility. That which walks alone is a wild animal, but where they are two, those are human.

The ecumenism of umunthu builds a community – in – communion. It delights in the sharing of life and resources. It does not treat others functionally, but rather as persons, subjects and not objects.

The ecumenism of umunthu accepts the best in other cultures and civilizations as gifts and expression of the human spirit worldwide. It receives it for its own enrichment of meaning, wisdom, and life itself and never as a threat. It shares its own culture and does not impose it. This means that the various spiritualities, theological perspectives, and rituals and symbols are there to be shared for the common good. Even though Jesus is absolute, he does not impose that absoluteness, but uses it to bring that which is limited into its fold and confidence.

If the glory of God is human beings fully alive, the glory of the church is human beings fully alive to ecumenical.

Our own cultures are gifts to others and we are the richer as a result of them. It is sin to use them to discriminate hate, deprive, and even kill other cultures for being different. It is sin to make one’s culture the standard of authentic humanity when that culture is only a part, an aspect a variation on a common theme.

Life-giving ecumenism is rooted and motivated by a gospel that widens, deepens, heightens, the human meaning. It is an ecumenism that says, “I am my brothers keeper,” and “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:29)

An ecumenism that incorporate the ancestors in the community of umunthu and acknowledges what they have bequeathed the thing.

Healing is related or associated with peace. The wounds of Africa cannot be healed as long as we adopt the attitude of Cain, “Am I my brothers keeper” when the blood of our sibling is crying from the ground. In God, as long as we blame it on others, as long as truth is exchanged for lies, as long as greed is the only moral value that we know, as long as love is not sincere, as long as it does not depend on us to live at peace with all, as long as we do not believe that vengeance belongs to God and God will repay, as long as feeding and praying for the enemy is considered weakness, as long as we believe that power comes from the band of a gun, as long as we are convinced that history is nothing but class conflict, as long as the church will not love as Christ loves.

The question of Jeremiah haunts us still, “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wounds of my people? (Jeremiah 8:22)

The path that Africa is treading at the moment has been trodden by many people and lands before. The historical contradictions of Africa are a reflection of humanity's contradictions everywhere. Where is the root cause of this alienation and how can Africa overcome it? Africa has to look inside itself, in its heart, and not simply at her circumstances and historical force at play. African has to examine the heart of its cultural life, what pollutes it and makes it anemic. Africa has to identify the strength of its collective wisdom that which enables it to choose the right means to the right ends, that is, a community – in – communion and not communities at war and scattered all over its face.

Africa has to be assisted to look to God in and through the true human being Jesus, the Christ. The source of Africa's life is God and the realization of abundant life.

What is the gospel for Africa and for Africans? Is it not the new humanity in Christ?

The abnormality of our humanity under sin with time it becomes the noun. We do not know ourselves truly until we see ourselves and our cultures in the face of Christ. We can not change ourselves except by the agency of God's spirit.

Our growth is stunted or arrested for lack of vital spiritual, social and economic nutrients or resources. God's goal is that "we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Speaking the truth in love we will in all things grow up into him who is head.

**CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TOWARDS DENOMINATIONALISM IN AFRICA**

*Baffour Dokyi Amoa*

The division experienced in the body of Christ can be explained away by spiritual and physical attributes. John 17:20-23 provides us with part of Jesus' prayer for all believers. Significant portions can be highlighted as follows:

*“<sup>20</sup> ...I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one... <sup>22</sup> ... that they may be one as we are one; <sup>23</sup> ...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me....”<sup>1</sup>*

The quotation above may offer some insights as we explore the reasons why all believers since the death of Christ have not, as yet, been brought to complete unity i.e. human interests and fears. To move us on our search for unity, we have had to settle for “unity in diversity” instead of complete union. This is evidenced by the existence of the World Council of Churches as well as the confessional bodies. The prayer for unity of all believers recognizes the self-seeking spirit or fear inherent in the human being. By praying for unity of believers, Jesus knew what was going to happen in his absence because of such human weakness.

Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia 2: 11-14 reads in part,

*“<sup>11</sup> When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong...because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup> The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. <sup>14</sup> when I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish custom?’”*

The references to John and to Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia reveal both theological and non-theological factors that contribute towards denominationalism. This paper however focuses on the non-theological factors.

Ecumenism today is expressed at different levels, be it at the national or international plane. At the global level, there is the World Council of Churches, which is one of the institutions coming up immediately after World War Two, in 1948. At the regional or continental levels, Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Pacific, the Caribbean and North and South America all have ecumenical expressions, all of which are members related to the world ecumenical body.

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1. Unless otherwise indicated biblical quotations are from *The Devotional Study Bible, 1987, The Zondervan Corporation.*
  2. These are Fellowship of Christian Councils in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA); Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa (FECCIWA), and Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA)

Other ecumenical instruments to strengthen ecumenical actions at sub-regional level have emerged in Africa. Today, such fellowships span the West Africa sub-region, the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly at the national levels, there are the National Councils of Churches, which brings together membership from the various denominations. While on one hand, the sub-regional Fellowships provide sub-regional perspectives, they on the other hand, fill a gap between the continental institutions and the National Council, who do not only act as a forum for churches to act in concert, but provide the administrative machinery for transforming their concerns into concrete action.

In Africa, a common history of colonialism left a mark on many of the countries, which were divided by arbitrary boundaries established by the Berlin Conference (1884-5) without regard to ethnic territories. With the colonizers came Christian missionaries from different missionary societies who permeated the religious fabric. Today, there are a host of denominations ranging from orthodox or mainline churches to charismatic and a wide variety of sects. Noting that in some African countries the church is the only viable institution of any size that is parallel to the state, some maintain that in the absence of any opposition party, the church speaks for the whole nation.<sup>3</sup>

The results of divisions in Christendom have resulted in each church struggling to enhance its image. In many African countries though, there is a growing awareness or indeed pragmatic expression of the necessity to free the churches from liturgical forms which are no doubt reminders of the colonial period and which neglect the riches of the African heritage. The ensuing struggle has however resulted in competition to the extent that the much-talked about “Church Unity” is threatening to become mere rhetoric.

But one may ask, is there a favorable disposition towards ecumenism or to put it in another way, is the quest for denominationalism threatening ecumenism in Africa? It is against this background that this paper looks at the contributing factors towards denominationalism and the role of leaders and ecumenical institutions and partners in this regard.

Every denomination has its own hierarchical structure. Inherent in the hierarchical system is the issue of power and authority. No doubt most people aspire to get to a position at the top because it offers not only monetary rewards but enhances one’s social status. However, leaders are unable to shed off their denominational leanings partly because they find that an ecumenical system may not meet or satisfy their quest for status positions and/or titles. There is a growing trend towards denominationalism by church leaders and this is pervasive among many churches today.

In addition, because leaders have been used to their own mode of worship they become wary of settings, which are altogether unfamiliar. Granted that members of ecumenical congregations have opted to belong to those churches, they sometimes portray an apathy towards ecumenical forms of worship.

Again, all leaders belong to and emerge from an identifiable social group. The same can be said for religious leadership vis-à-vis denominations. It is therefore appropriate to examine religio-ethnocentrism. This is a concept used to imply the condition of belonging to a particular religious group or if applied in Christendom, denomination, and doing everything to defend its cause, strive to keep its distinctiveness and enhance its image.

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3. Aboagye-Mensah Robert K, (1994) *Mission and Democracy in Africa*, Asempa Publishers

Ethnocentrism is fraught with feelings of one group feeling superior to members of the other group and the same can be said of religious groupings. This is not peculiar to the African situation but is universal in nature. Such ethnocentric feelings or pride often compel leaders, consciously or unconsciously, to drift towards the enhancement of their ethnic or in this case, denominational interest.

Specifically, because religio-ethnocentrism ignores or downplays the positive sides of those outside “our group”, it hardly permits meaningful and purposeful relationships with others who are not a “part of us”. Is it possible to go beyond these barriers we have set for ourselves and enter into shared mutual relationships? Perhaps, we can go along with what Ugandan Christians have expressed in a document entitled “Political Education” In that document, they note that “cultural diversities are like colors of clothes, the more they are, the more beautiful the congregation. Let us love to see what is different from our own. Let us recognize that ethnic diversities are the real beauties of Uganda....Variety is the spice of life.”<sup>4</sup>

Again, although Katola argues persuasively that ethnicity is more rampant in politics and general leadership than in any other area, he amply demonstrates that ethnicity within the church is not difficult to identify. Many African leaders, he says, tend to identify themselves with their own ethnic groups. The juxtaposition of political and religious experiences reveals little or no difference in leadership characteristics. Using Kenya as a point of reference, the author notes that the Akanba for example, dominates the African Inland Church while the Kisii, Agikuyu and Luhya dominate the Seventh Day Adventist, Presbyterian Church of East Africa and the Quakers respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The same kind of situation exists in other African countries. For example in Ghana, the Basel Missionaries which gave birth to Presbyterianism began their work at Osu in Accra, and later spreading from Accra to the Eastern region, among the people of Akuapem and the Akyem people. Similarly, the Bremen Mission started their work in the Volta region of Ghana among the Ewe people, resulting in what is now known as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church; the Wesley Methodist Mission also began its work at Cape Coast among the Fante, spreading later throughout the country in both the urban and rural communities.

Today, though the Presbyterian Church of Ghana spans a wider ethnic distribution, each congregation may be dominated by a particular ethnic population and therefore the use of the vernacular of the dominant group in worship. This is typical of most Churches in Africa which Katola recognizes and note that although the ethnic patterns may be due to historical reasons, he wonders why for example some churches go to the extent of using the vernacular of the dominant group.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps Nyanhong's study of change of leadership in 1978 in Kenya may give us some pointers. He revealed that with the change, the government ‘Kalenjinized’ key institutions in the country in a manner that exceeded Kenyatta’s ‘Kikuyunization.’<sup>7</sup> Although this study was mainly on political leadership, this style of leadership can also be seen in religious settings. Leaders, it appears, feel secure, powerful and cared for when surrounded by members of their own ethnic or denominational members, i.e. “one of their own”.

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4. Ibid pp.117

5. Michael T. Katola, *Ethnicity in Contemporary African Society with particular reference to Kenya in Africa Challenge: All Africa Journal of Theology*, January 2001, Vol.1, No.1, All Africa Conference of Churches, p. 34

6. Ibid. P.35.

7. Nyanhong, S.A., “Party Politics in Kenya” quoted in Masinde E. et al. (Ed) *The Political Economy of Transition. A Study of Issues and Social Movements in Kenya since 1945*, Nairobi: Eighth Publishers 1999 p.112.

Another factor worth considering is education. In Africa, the strategies pursued by missionaries included the construction of schools. This approach to mission resulted in social transformation. In the main, it also generated unwholesome competition among the different traditions. For instance, there are still to date, Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist or what are commonly referred to as “mission schools”. Such schools were perhaps the easiest way for the different traditions to impart their thinking and way of life. Membership of a particular denomination was a guaranteed way of gaining admission into first cycle and second-cycle of mission schools to the extent that this was sometimes stated on application forms.

Today several denominations are contemplating building tertiary institutions. Even in situations where resources are lacking and it would be prudent to pool resources, each church is determined to go out alone. No doubt, the churches are eager to support government’s efforts to increase educational facilities to cater for the ever-growing educational needs which is a good thing but one does not have to go far to point out that denominational interest is still at play here. The “weistic” feeling is ever present.

Ecumenical institutions as has been noted earlier, span global, regional and national settings. These institutions have sometimes displayed an affinity towards denominationalism in the way for example recruitment and election to decision-making positions are carried out. Very often, staff tends to promote members of their denominations to positions within the organization unless restricted by policy. For instance it is common to recommend members of one’s denominations simply because they are familiar with those people and most of the time can vouch their capabilities.

The benefits arising out of ecumenical institutions are not seen by its members to be sufficient to merit their full commitment. This is evidenced in cases where members require emotional and material support. The same can be said in fund-raising activities where donations are more readily forthcoming in cases of the individual denominations than in ecumenical fund-raising efforts.

The issue of language has also very often been noted as a blocking factor in promoting ecumenism. Many people have bemoaned the sophisticated language used among ecumenical institutions, which are altogether unfamiliar. Ecumenism begins with lay Christians and as such ecumenical institutions should use language that communicates effectively to all Christians, a view, which was reiterated at the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe, December 1998.

Again, there is the notion of ecumenical selectivism, the practice whereby ecumenical agencies maintain ties normally with countries that they had a missionary connection. In such cases such churches and related institutions tend to enjoy massive human and financial external support. This is explained away with the concentration policy derived as a result of diminution of human resource. On the contrary, in countries where ecumenical agencies are not active the Churches are given support by their confessional bodies, thereby furthering denominationalism.

The validity of ecumenical institutions is seen in terms of churches coming together to share fellowship and to further their common witness. In this regard, pooling resources was seen as a necessary action in addressing the issues of justice and peace. Given the economic realities, the churches in the North had more resources than their counterparts in the South. They therefore were able to create ecumenical development agencies to aid work in the South. This relationship was to be understood that the South also had something to offer which necessarily did not have to be financial. This relationship is what has been commonly referred to in the ecumenical family as partnership.

Michael Taylor observes that there is a good deal of talk about “partners in mission” and “partners in development”. He says, often this refers in a rather revealing way to the organizations and churches of the South and of the poor, who are usually thought of as “receivers” rather than “donors”, objects and instruments of development rather than initiators. But as he argues, if the term partners is used only for them, partnership carries the flavour of a secondary role.<sup>8</sup> All this reminds us that equal partnership remains an aspiration and not an achievement.

The notion of partnership vis-à-vis funding agencies has not promoted the value of ecumenical expressions in Africa. This is because less than 10 out of 29 Roundtables established in Africa continue to function. Because the great majority of Christian Councils in the developing world, in general and in Africa in particular rely heavily on external support, they may face financial difficulties unless innovative ways are found to strengthen the financial base. In other words, as long as such ecumenical instruments are weak financially, and human resource woefully inadequate, their value and impact would dwindle, thereby making denominationalism a stronger base for Christian witness and service.

Clearly, the challenge is for ecumenical formation to deal with the reality that many factors are operating to promote denominationalism. The Church is universal, not sectarian and therefore not limited to any geographical or racial grouping. Although the factors mentioned here are not exhaustive, they serve as a point for further discussion within different socio-cultural settings.

In conclusion, I find it pertinent to quote St. Ignatius of Antioch’s (c.115 AD) Letter to the Magnesians:<sup>9</sup>

Do everything in common:  
Unite in one prayer, one petition,  
One mind, one hope,  
In love, and faultless joy.  
All this is Jesus Christ,  
And there is nothing better than he.  
So make haste, all of you,  
To come together as to one temple of God,  
Around one altar,  
Around the one Jesus Christ,  
Who came forth from the one Father,  
While still remaining one with him,  
And has returned to unity with him.

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8. Taylor, Michael (1995) *Not Angels but Agencies, The Ecumenical Response to Poverty – A Primer*. SCM Press, WCC Publications, Geneva.

9. *For All God’s People*, WCC Publication, 1978.



**ANNOUNCEMENT**

***THE JOURNEY OF HOPE IN AFRICA CONTINUED***

- Theme:** A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND ECUMENICAL FORMATION IN AFRICA
- Sponsor:** World Council of Churches, Education and Ecumenical Formation Team and Regional Relations Team, Africa Desk in collaboration with South African Council of Churches (SACC), Faith & Mission Dept.
- Contact Person:**  
Nyambura Njoroge – WCC, Education and Ecumenical Formation Team, 150 Route De Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland, Tel. 41 22 791 6193, Fax: 41 22 791 6406, Email: nn@wcc-coe.org
- Planning Committee:**  
Evelyn Appiah, Simon Oxley, Nyambura Njoroge, William Temu. (There will be another planning committee in Johannesburg)
- Venue:** Kempton Park Conference Centre (Lutheran) Johannesburg, South Africa
- Host:** South African Council of Churches (SACC).
- Dates:** 16 (Arrival)-23 (Departure) September 2002
- Objective:** To engage in an interactive process of critical self-assessment and evaluation on how we prepare youth, women and men for church leadership in laity training centres, capacity building programmes, theological education, ministerial, spiritual and ecumenical formation in residential colleges and by way of theological education by extension and distance education.
- Methodology:** Engage in an interactive process of critical study on key issues regarding theological education and ecumenical formation by asking ourselves: What have we done best in the last fifty years in preparing and equipping youth, women and men for ministry? How can we build on this foundation to move forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What resources have we used and what do we have today? Where have we erred and how can we correct our past mistakes? How can we make a difference in the life and mission of the church and other church-related institutions in Africa?
- Conference:** The interactive process will culminate in a conference of about 100 people, where a representative group of those engaged in the process will gather to dialogue, study and draw a plan of action that will guide our activities in this first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

***WHY INTERACTIVE PROCESS AND CONFERENCE?***

In September 1999, WCC Central Committee held in Geneva, Switzerland affirmed that in the WCC programmes there will be a “Special Focus on Africa” in order to be in solidarity with Africans as they undertake the Journey of Hope as it was depicted in the drama staged during the Eighth (Jubilee) Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, December 1998.

Within their mandates the Education and Ecumenical Formation Team and Regional Relations, Africa Desk are deeply concerned about matters related to how we prepare and equip church leaders for their ministerial and ecumenical ministries. Equally so we are deeply concerned about the critical issues affecting the continent such as extreme poverty, violence, corruption and diseases, to name a few, as we wrestle with faith and life issues. Another crucial area of concern is what kind of theologies and ethical value systems inform and help shape the church, Christianity and ecumenism in Africa.

In order to respond to the WCC 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly decision (Special Focus on Africa) and the Teams’ mandates we have decided to undertake a critical evaluation on how we prepare and equip youth, women and men for church leadership in Africa through theological education, ministerial, spiritual and ecumenical formation. This means critically examining our laity training centres, capacity building and theological programmes and institutions.

We have agreed a conference is not enough. We need to engage in an interactive process. Such a process will allow us to critically explore how theological education, capacity building and laity training are undertaken in their diverse ways in the midst of growing denominationalism, church divisions and the weakening of interdenominational theological institutions and laity centres, which have been supported by WCC through its programmes of theological education, laity training and capacity building. The process would culminate in a Conference whose major outcome will be to draw a Plan of Action for five years after a journey of self-critical interpretation, scrutiny and evaluation on the nature and status of theological education, spiritual, ecumenical, ministerial formation and laity training in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The interactive process and the conference will take into account the recommendations that have emerged from a number of consultations and conferences in the 1990s in the drawing of the Plan of Action. The success and effectiveness of the interactive process and the conference will depend on participants’ creativity and imagination on how best to make use of the time up to the time of the conference. Denominational church leaders and ecumenical workers will be crucial conversation partners in the whole undertaking.

In addition, it was pointed out that Africans are not alone in delivering laity training, capacity building, theological education, ecumenical, spiritual and ministerial formation rather there are churches, colleges, mission agencies, (mostly in the North and to a lesser extent from the East: S.Korea, Japan and Taiwan) and confessional ecumenical institutions that have traveled with Africans and continue to travel with us in diverse ways, including granting of scholarships for students to study in other foreign countries and continents.

The following are some of the major issues we may consider to be studied and discussed in the Interactive Process and the Conference:

- 1) Different kinds of theological institutions/faculties and TEE programmes (Bible schools, seminaries, colleges, universities, etc.).
- 2) Patterns of theological education and TEE tutorial and training.
- 3) What is involved in Ecumenical Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation?
- 4) How theological educators and administrators are trained and equipped?
- 5) Different kinds of Laity Training Centres.
- 6) Transforming curricula for 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.
- 7) Accreditation of theological programmes and degrees.
- 8) Research, writing and publishing theological books.
- 9) Developing African theological libraries.
- 10) The place of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in theological and laity training institutions.
- 11) The place of Religious Departments in State Universities with regard to the formation of church leaders.
- 12) Funding Theological Institutions/Faculties, Laity Training Centres and Associations.
- 13) Scholarships.
- 14) Inter-religious studies and dialogue in seminaries.
- 15) Relationship of theological institutions, laity training centres, the churches and ecumenical institutions.
- 16) Relationship with founder churches and mission boards and missionaries; and Theological Institutions/Faculties and Associations.
- 17) Brain drain of theologians and theological educators.
- 18) Sabbatical studies for theological educators.

Breakdown of institutions in Africa and elsewhere to be involved in the Process

- 1) Interdenominational theological colleges, seminaries and universities (church sponsored).
- 2) Denominational theological colleges, Bible schools, Pastoral Institutes and universities.
- 3) Theological and religious departments in state universities.
- 4) Regional and sub-regional Theological Associations.
- 5) Networks and association of Laity training Centres (ACLCA).
- 6) Capacity building institutions (e.g. CORAT)
- 7) National and sub-regional ecumenical institutions (Council of churches and the Fellowships of Councils of Churches).
- 8) Regional ecumenical institutions (AACC, OAICs, United Bible Societies).
- 9) Regional confessional institutions (Roman Catholic, Association of Evangelicals in Africa, Pentecostals and Charismatic)
- 10) Inter-religious Councils
- 11) Publishers of Theological and Religious books.
- 12) Partner Churches, Theological Faculties, Institutions and Associations, Laity Training Centres and Academies and Mission Boards outside Africa.

*Only self-motivated and committed people can make a difference!*

**INFORMATION**

**LE PÈLERINAGE DE L'ESPÉRANCE EN AFRIQUE SE POURSUIT<sup>1</sup>**

- Thème :** Evaluation critique de l'enseignement théologique et de la formation œcuménique en Afrique
- Parrainage :** Conseil œcuménique des Eglises, équipes « Education et formation œcuménique » et « Relations régionales », Secrétariat de l'Afrique, en collaboration avec le Département Foi et Mission. du Conseil des Eglises d'Afrique du Sud (SACC).
- Personne de contact :** Nyambura Njoroge – COE, équipe « Education et formation œcuménique », 150, route de Ferney, C.P. 2100, 1211 Genève 2, Suisse, tél. 41 22 791 6193, fax 41 22 791 6406, adresse électronique [nn@wcc-coe.org](mailto:nn@wcc-coe.org)
- Comité de planification :** Evelyn Appiah, Simon Oxley, Nyambura Njoroge, William Temu. (Il y aura un autre comité de planification à Johannesburg).
- Lieu :** Kempton Park Conference Centre (Luthérien), Johannesburg, Afrique du Sud
- Hôte :** South Africa Council of Churches (SACC)
- Dates :** Du 16 (arrivées) au 23 (départs) septembre 2002
- Objectif :** Lancer un processus interactif critique d'appréciation et d'évaluation de la manière dont nous préparons les jeunes, les femmes et les hommes à occuper des postes à responsabilités dans l'Eglise : centres de formation des laïcs, programmes de développement du potentiel local, enseignement théologique, préparation au ministère, formation spirituelle et œcuménique dans des collèges avec internat ou dans le cadre de l'enseignement théologique décentralisé et du téléenseignement.
- Méthode :** Lancer un processus interactif d'étude critique des structures de l'enseignement théologique et de la formation œcuménique autour de différentes questions : qu'avons-nous fait de particulièrement valable au cours du demi-siècle écoulé pour préparer et former les jeunes, les femmes et les hommes au ministère ? Comment pouvons-nous, à partir de là, avancer dans le 21<sup>e</sup> siècle ? Quelles ressources avons-nous utilisées et de quoi disposons-nous aujourd'hui ? Où avons-nous commis des erreurs et comment corriger les fautes du passé ? Comment pouvons-nous faire évoluer les choses dans la vie et la mission de l'Eglise et d'autres institutions liées à l'Eglise en Afrique ?
- Conférence :** Le processus interactif débouchera sur une conférence réunissant une centaine de personnes constituant un groupe représentatif des participants au processus, qui discuteront de celui-ci, poursuivront l'étude des questions soulevées et définiront un plan d'action qui guidera nos activités dans cette première décennie du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle.

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<sup>1</sup> Traduit de l'anglais, Service linguistique du COE

## **POURQUOI CE PROCESSUS INTERACTIF ET CETTE CONFÉRENCE ?**

En septembre 1999, le Comité central du COE réuni à Genève, Suisse, a affirmé que les programmes du COE mettraient un « **accent spécial sur l’Afrique** » afin de démontrer leur solidarité avec les Africains qui entreprennent le « **pèlerinage de l’espérance** » décrit dans le spectacle présenté durant la Huitième Assemblée du COE (Assemblée du jubilé) à Harare, Zimbabwe, en décembre 1998.

Dans le cadre de leurs mandats, les équipes « Education et formation œcuménique » et « Relations régionales », Secrétariat de l’Afrique, sont profondément préoccupées par les questions liées à la manière dont nous préparons et formons les responsables des Eglises à leurs tâches pastorales et œcuméniques. Nous sommes également très préoccupés par les graves problèmes qui affectent le continent tels que l’extrême pauvreté, la violence, la corruption et les maladies, pour n’en mentionner que quelques-uns, alors que nous réfléchissons aux questions touchant la foi et la vie. Une autre question fondamentale est de savoir quels types de théologie et quels systèmes de valeurs éthiques sous-tendent et contribuent à façonner l’Eglise, le christianisme et l’œcuménisme en Afrique.

Pour répondre à la décision du Comité central concernant l’accent spécial sur l’Afrique et conformément aux mandats des équipes, nous avons décidé d’entreprendre une évaluation critique de la manière dont nous préparons et formons les jeunes, les femmes et les hommes à assumer des responsabilités dans les Eglises d’Afrique par l’enseignement théologique et la formation pastorale, spirituelle et œcuménique. Cela implique un examen critique de nos centres de formation des laïcs, de nos instruments de développement du potentiel local et de nos programmes et institutions de théologie.

Nous nous sommes mis d’accord sur le fait qu’une conférence ne suffit pas. Nous devons nous engager dans un **processus interactif**, qui nous permettra d’examiner dans un esprit critique la manière dont l’enseignement théologique, le développement du potentiel local et la formation des laïcs sont mis en oeuvre de diverses manières dans un contexte marqué par la croissance du particularisme religieux, les divisions entre Eglises et l’affaiblissement des institutions théologiques et centres de formation des laïcs associant plusieurs dénominations, soutenus par le COE dans le cadre de ses programmes d’enseignement théologique, de formation des laïcs et de développement du potentiel local. Le processus culminera dans une **conférence** qui aura pour tâche principale d’élaborer un **plan d’action** de cinq ans, au terme d’un pèlerinage d’interprétation autocritique, d’examen et d’évaluation de la nature et de l’état de l’enseignement théologique, de la formation spirituelle, œcuménique et pastorale et de la formation des laïcs en Afrique au 21<sup>e</sup> siècle. Dans l’élaboration du **plan d’action**, le processus interactif et la conférence prendront en compte les recommandations formulées par plusieurs colloques et conférences tenus dans les années 90. Le succès et l’efficacité du **processus interactif** et de la **conférence** dépendra de la créativité des participants et de l’imagination dont ils feront preuve pour exploiter au mieux le temps disponible jusqu’à la conférence. Les responsables de dénominations et les collaborateurs œcuméniques seront des partenaires de discussion essentiels tout au long de l’opération.

En outre, il est évident que les Africains ne sont pas seuls à pratiquer la formation des laïcs, le développement du potentiel local, l’enseignement théologique, la formation œcuménique, spirituelle et pastorale ; beaucoup d’Eglises, de collèges, d’institutions missionnaires [en majorité du Nord et, dans une moindre mesure, de l’Est (Corée du Sud, Japon et Taiwan)] et d’institutions œcuméniques et confessionnelles participent au pèlerinage des Africains de diverses manières, notamment en accordant des bourses d’études dans d’autres pays et d’autres continents.

**Le processus interactif et la conférence pourraient articuler leurs réflexions et leurs discussions autour des principales questions suivantes :**

- 1) Différents types d'institutions ou facultés de théologie et programmes d'enseignement théologique décentralisé – écoles bibliques, séminaires, collèges, universités, etc.
- 2) Structures de l'enseignement théologique et organisation de l'enseignement théologique décentralisé (suivi des groupes, formation)
- 3) Qu'entend-on par enseignement théologique œcuménique et formation œcuménique ?
- 4) Comment les formateurs théologiques et les responsables de l'administration sont-ils formés et préparés ?
- 5) Différents types de centres de formation des laïcs
- 6) Transformer les programmes pour répondre aux défis du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle
- 7) Reconnaissance des programmes de théologie et des titres délivrés
- 8) Recherche, rédaction, publication
- 9) Développer les bibliothèques théologiques africaines
- 10) Place des techniques de communication informatique dans les établissements d'enseignement théologique et centres de formation des laïcs
- 11) Place des départements d'études religieuses des universités d'Etat dans la formation des responsables d'Eglises
- 12) Financement des institutions et facultés de théologie et des centres et associations de formation des laïcs
- 13) Bourses
- 14) Etudes et dialogues interreligieux dans les séminaires
- 15) Relations entre institutions théologiques, centres de formation des laïcs, Eglises et institutions œcuméniques
- 16) Relations avec les entités fondatrices – Eglises, département missionnaires, missionnaires ; rapports avec les institutions, facultés et associations de théologie
- 17) Exode des théologiens et formateurs théologiques
- 18) Séjours d'études sabbatiques pour formateurs théologiques

*Catégories d'institutions à inclure dans le processus, en Afrique et ailleurs*

- 1) Collèges, séminaires et universités (sous la parrainage des Eglises) enseignant la théologie dans un cadre interdénominationnel
- 2) Collèges, écoles bibliques, instituts pastoraux et universités enseignant la théologie dans un cadre dénominationnel
- 3) Départements d'études théologiques et religieuses dans les universités d'Etat
- 4) Associations théologiques régionales et sous-régionales
- 5) Réseaux et associations de centres de formation des laïcs
- 6) Institutions de développement du potentiel local (p.ex. CORAT)
- 7) Institutions œcuméniques nationales et sous-régionales (conseils d'Eglises et associations de conseils d'Eglises)
- 8) Institutions œcuméniques régionales (CETA, Organisation des Eglises d'institution africaine, Alliance biblique)
- 9) Institutions confessionnelles régionales (Eglise catholique romaine, Association des protestants en Afrique, communautés pentecôtistes et charismatiques)
- 10) Conseils interreligieux
- 11) Editeurs d'ouvrages théologiques et religieux
- 12) Eglises partenaires, facultés, institutions et associations théologiques, centres de formation des laïcs, départements missionnaires étrangers à l'Afrique

***Seuls des gens solidement motivés et engagés peuvent faire évoluer les choses !***

**ANUNCIO**

***CONTINUANDO A CAMINHADA DE ESPERANÇA NA ÁFRICA***

**Tema:** Uma Avaliação Crítica Da Educação Teológica E Da Formação Ecumênica Na África

**Patrocinador:** Conselho Mundial de Igrejas, através de sua Equipe de Educação e Formação Ecumênica e do seu Escritório para a África da Equipe de Relações Regionais, em colaboração com el Conselho de Igrejas d’Africa do Sul (SACC), Departamento da Fe e missão.

**Pessoa para contato:**

Nyambura Njoroge - CMI, Equipe de Educação e Formação Ecumênica, 150 Route de Ferney, P.O.Box 2100, 1211 Genebra 2, Suíça, tel: 41 22 791 6193, fax: 41 22 791 6406, email: nn@wcc-coe.org

**Comitê planificador:**

Evelyn Appiah, Simon Oxley, Nyambura Njoroge, William Temu (haverá também um outro comitê planificador em Johannesburgo)

**Local:** Kempton Park Conference Centre (Luterano) Johannesburgo, África do Sul

**Anfitrião:** Conselho de Igrejas d’Africa do Sul (SACC)

**Data:** Setembro 16 (llegadas) a 23 (salidas) de 2002

**Objetivo:** Criar um processo interativo de auto-avaliação e verificação crítica de como preparamos jovens, mulheres e homens para a liderança da igreja em centros de treinamento do laicado, programas de capacitação, educação teológica, formação ministerial, espiritual e ecumênica em escolas residenciais e através de educação teológica por extensão e educação à distância.

**Metodologia:** Criar um processo interativo de estudo crítico das questões fundamentais relativas à educação teológica e formação ecumênica perguntando-nos a nós mesmos: o que de melhor temos feito nos últimos 50 anos na preparação e capacitação de jovens, mulheres e homens para o ministério? Fundamentados nessa experiência, como podemos progredir no século 21? Que recursos utilizamos até agora e de que recursos dispomos hoje? Quais os erros que cometemos no passado e como podemos corrigi-los hoje? Como podemos operar transformações na vida e missão da igreja e instituições eclesiais na África?

**Conferência:** O processo interativo culminará numa conferência de umas 100 pessoas, durante a qual um grupo representativo de pessoas que participaram do processo interativo se reunirá para dialogar, estudar e formular um plano de ação que orientará nossas atividades nesta primeira década do século 21.

### **POR QUE UM PROCESSO INTERATIVO E UMA CONFERÊNCIA?**

Em setembro de 1999, o Comitê Central do CMI, reunido em Genebra, Suíça, afirmou que houvesse um “**enfoque especial sobre a África**” nos programas do CMI como expressão de solidariedade com os africanos na sua **caminhada de esperança**, conforme a imagem retratada na peça teatral que foi encenada na VIII Assembléia (Jubilar) de Harare, em Zimbábue, em dezembro de 1998.

Tanto a Equipe de Educação e Formação Ecumênica quanto o Escritório para a África da Equipe de Relações Regionais têm, como parte de seu mandato, profundo interesse em como preparamos e capacitamos os líderes da igreja para o exercício de ministério ecumênico na África. Eles têm profundo interesse também nas questões fundamentais que afetam o continente africano, tais como extrema pobreza, violência, corrupção e doenças, para citar apenas alguns dos problemas de fé e vida que todos enfrentamos. Uma outra área importante de preocupação é saber que tipo de teologias e sistemas de valores éticos contribuem para dar forma à igreja, ao cristianismo e ao ecumenismo na África.

Diante da decisão do Comitê Central do CMI (“enfoque especial sobre a África”) e do mandato das Equipes mencionadas, decidimos proceder a uma avaliação crítica de como preparamos e equipamos jovens, mulheres e homens para a liderança da igreja na África através da educação teológica e da formação ministerial, espiritual e ecumênica. Isso significa examinar criticamente nossos centros de formação do laicado e nossos programas e instituições de capacitação e formação teológica.

Concordamos que apenas uma conferência não basta. O que se necessita é entrar num **processo interativo**. Tal processo permitirá examinar criticamente como educação teológica, capacitação de pessoas e formação do laicado em suas diversas formas são praticadas num contexto de crescente denominacionalismo, de divisões eclesiais, e de enfraquecimento das instituições teológicas e centros de laicado interdenominacionais, as quais recebem apoio do CMI e de seus programas de educação teológica, formação de laicado e capacitação de pessoas. Esse processo deverá culminar com a **conferência** cujo principal resultado será a elaboração de um **plano de ação** para os cinco anos que se seguirão à caminhada de interpretação, análise e avaliação da natureza e situação da educação teológica, da formação espiritual, ecumênica e ministerial, e do treinamento do laicado na África, em pleno século 21. Na elaboração do **plano de ação**, o processo interativo e a conferência terão em conta as recomendações emanadas de numerosas consultas e conferências realizadas ao longo da década de 1990. O êxito e eficácia do **processo interativo** e da **conferência** dependerá da criatividade e imaginação dos participantes na maneira de melhor utilizar o tempo disponível até a data da conferência. Líderes denominacionais e obreiros ecumênicos serão nossos vitais parceiros de conversação durante todo esse empreendimento.

Além disso, sabemos que os africanos não somos os provedores solitários da formação do laicado, da capacitação de pessoas, da educação teológica e da formação ecumênica, espiritual e ministerial. Ao contrário, há igrejas, escolas, agências missionárias (mormente no hemisfério Norte, como também, em menor escala, na Coreia de Sul, no Japão e em Taiwan), e instituições confessionais e ecumênicas que têm colaborado e continuam colaborando com os africanos de diversas maneiras, inclusive oferecendo bolsas para estudos no estrangeiro.

#### **A seguir, algumas das principais questões que poderão ser abordadas e estudadas no Processo Interativo e na Conferência.**

- 1) Diferentes espécies de escolas/instituições teológicas e programas de extensão (escolas bíblicas, seminários, faculdades, universidades, etc.).
- 2) Modelos de educação teológica e de formação e ensino por extensão.
- 3) Em que consiste Educação Teológica Ecumênica e Formação Ecumênica?



- 4) Como são treinados e capacitados os educadores e administradores teológicos?
- 5) Diferentes espécies de Centros de Formação do Laicado.
- 6) Como adaptar os currículos aos desafios do século 21?
- 7) Reconhecimento de programas e diplomas teológicos.
- 8) Pesquisa, produção literária e publicação.
- 9) Desenvolvimento de bibliotecas teológicas africanas.
- 10) O papel da tecnologia de informação e comunicação nas instituições teológicas e de formação do laicado.
- 11) O papel dos departamentos de religião das universidades públicas na formação de líderes eclesiais.
- 12) Financiamento de instituições de ensino teológico, centros de formação do laicado e de associações de instituições teológicas.
- 13) Bolsas de estudo.
- 14) Diálogo e estudo inter-religioso nos seminários.
- 15) Relacionamento entre instituições teológicas, centros de formação do laicado, igrejas e instituições ecumênicas.
- 16) Relacionamento com igrejas fundadoras, entidades de missão e missionários e com suas respectivas instituições teológicas e associações.
- 17) Evasão para o exterior de nossos teólogos e educadores teológicos.
- 18) Estudos sabáticos de educadores teológicos.

**Lista de instituições africanas e outras que participarão do Processo**

- 1) Escolas, seminários e universidades (eclesiais) interdenominacionais.
- 2) Escolas teológicas, institutos bíblicos e pastorais e universidades denominacionais.
- 3) Departamentos de teologia e de religião em universidades públicas.
- 4) Associações teológicas regionais e sub-regionais.
- 5) Redes e associações de centros de formação do laicado.
- 6) Instituições de capacitação de pessoas.
- 7) Instituições ecumênicas nacionais e sub-regionais (conselhos de igrejas e associações de conselhos de igrejas).
- 8) Instituições ecumênicas regionais (AACC, OAICs, Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas).
- 9) Instituições confessionais regionais (católica romana, evangélicas na África, pentecostais, carismáticas).
- 10) Conselhos inter-religiosos.
- 11) Editores de livros teológicos e religiosos.
- 12) Igrejas parceiras; faculdades, instituições e associações teológicas; academias e centros de formação do laicado; organizações missionárias sediadas fora da África.

***Somente pessoas motivadas e engajadas conseguem mudar as coisas!***

**MESSAGE OF HOPE**

***STATEMENT OF THE FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ECUMENICAL  
ASSOCIATION OF THIRD WORLD THEOLOGIANs***

***1. PREAMBLE***

We, the members of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), pitched our tents in the “Casa De Espiritualidad Maria Auxiliadora”, in the beautiful valley of Tumbaco below Quito, Ecuador, for our 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly from September 24 to October 1, 2001. There, surrounded by the lofty Andes, and meeting in the “middle of the world” we celebrated our silver jubilee and deliberated on the theme. “Give an Account of the Hope that is in You: Weaving the Threads of our Continuing Struggles into a Tapestry of Hope in the Twenty-first Century.” The theme of our Assembly was inspired by the text of 1 Peter 3: 15 – 16:

*“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who  
demands from you an account of the hope that is in you”*

This message is addressed to people whose contexts are very similar to our own Third World context, to inspire in them a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We were 62 men and women theologians from 29 countries, representing the regions of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America. We were filled with uncertainty and anxiety in the wake of the acts of terrorism of September 11, 2001 in the United States of America. We sorely missed the presence of our EATWOT, USA minority members who could not attend as a result of this violent situation. As an immediate response, the Assembly sent a letter expressing our solidarity with all those who are suffering as a consequence of the attack, and with those who continue to suffer from so many forms of violence all over the world. We also urged political and church leaders to foster a culture of peace and mutual understanding among communities and nations.

***2. CONTEXT OF THE THIRD WORLD***

Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania, each with its millions of people and vast diversity of cultures, religions and languages have their own problems. All are affected by the phenomenon of globalisation that permeates our world. In spite of its grandiose promises, globalisation has resulted in a greater gap between the rich and the poor and it has intensified the sufferings of people. In a global world, millions (especially women) are forced to migrate. EATWOT proposes that we reflect on this issue and undertake action. We are plagued by impoverishment, the absence of good governance, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, terrorism, and the effects of an idolatry of power and self-indulgence. All of these form the material from which we weave our tapestry of hope.

The people of the Third World are not resigned to their fate. In Ecuador, through exposure to some of the indigenous and African-descended communities, a major prison and centres for women and youths, we encountered women and men who suffer and struggle. We listened to their cries and hopes for a better tomorrow. We sensed a deep spirituality in them, which is rooted in their struggle for survival and dignity. Their resistance itself breeds a theology of hope. The increasing evidence of resistance against absorption or elimination by the dominant cultures confirms their hope that diversity will remain a positive factor in human culture.

### **3. ISSUES, CONCERNS AND RESPONSES**

Peoples from all continents are theologising on the historical processes of exploitation that have deprived them of their rights to ancestral homelands, languages, religions and cultures. As EATWOT we reject theologies and church life that legitimise abuse of mother earth, annihilation of peoples and the invasion of the global market. A radical development of theology is required to help bring justice. As an Association we are committed to resist the exploitation of creation. Indigenous peoples still face problems of endangered cultures and lands. In this regard we favor a theology of creation that will provide them with some reprieve. We are committed to work in solidarity with indigenous and marginalised peoples to preserve the environment. We see this as a divine imperative that we cannot ignore. We also see as a divine imperative the need to analyze and uncover the deceptive language of those who benefit from social exploitation.

In all continents indigenous peoples are offering paradigms in their theology for promoting holistic life, distinct from foreign expressions. It is a sign of hope that we can draw upon native spiritualities with their reverence for mother earth, humanity, and all of nature. There is a holistic interconnectedness and interrelationship in such spiritualities. They help us weave together the threads of our continuing struggles in the tapestry of hope.

Some countries of the Third World are experiencing violent conflicts with religious, ethnic, and class divides. We rejoice, however, at the various attempts at dialogue and engagement with peoples of other faith communities. The role of the African churches in engaging peoples of other faith communities on matters of justice and peace is a sign of hope. Countries at war, including those marked by ethnic or religious divides, are sorely in need of justice, forgiveness, restitution and mutual accountability.

It is a sign of hope that victims of colonisation have found a voice and space for their grievances, especially at the World Conference on Racism in Durban South Africa from August 28 - September 7, 2001. Victims of racism, colonisation and slavery are now demanding reparation and compensation for the harm done to them. We recommend that theological groups undertake studies on the issues of slavery, colonisation and reparation.

Women all over the world are discriminated against and marginalised. Their bodies are used, misused and discarded. In the Third World they are the poorest of the poor (the *anawim*). We cry out to be heard and we dream of a world where violence against women and girls will be only a memory. Women's theology and women's leadership are still relegated to second place. We have struggled and are continuing to struggle against the hierarchical and patriarchal structures in all institutions, be they families, governments, churches, or entire societies.

Many women throughout the earth are nurturing signs of life and hope. All is not lost. There is hope as women and men of faith struggle to engage in gender dialogue and action. We have hope as the suffering bodies of women and men rise in beauty, life, movement and concreteness, connecting with nature. Therefore we affirm an emerging theology of the body. There is hope when we try to understand the word of God through gender perspectives, critiquing texts that are violent and affirming texts that bring wholeness to women and men. Women first bore witness that Jesus Christ was alive. There is hope when women are treated with dignity. There is hope when men listen to women's voices, and when they critique their own socialisation as men for the sake of a new humanity. A particular challenge for men is to redefine their masculinity in the current patriarchal system, as part of human liberation.

There is hope when women and men struggle to break unjust structures and strive to usher in a new humanity and a new creation.

Black religious and social movements have nurtured theology in black communities in the USA, South Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. These theologies have gone through several phases. Today they blend economic and political concerns with ecological, cultural and women's concerns. Our black theologies deconstruct traditional understandings of God, and they develop relationships with ancestors, new expressions of faith in Jesus Christ, and a renewed commitment to justice and reconciliation.

Asia is a continent with a great diversity of cultures, history and religions. It has vast potential. Asia also houses the majority of the world's poor. The impact of globalisation heightens differences and leads to internal strife. Yet the solidarity that is being expressed among peoples of all faiths and cultures in the struggle for full humanity is a strong sign of hope. We affirm that it is in engaging with others that dialogue takes place and that we are enabled to proclaim a spirituality of resistance and struggle.

During the General Assembly we dialogued on controversial theological issues. Among them were new experiences of God's revelation, the names given to God, the meaning of salvation through Christ, other christological issues and the nature of the Church's mission. We commit ourselves to continue to dialogue on these issues.

With regard to interfaith concerns, we spoke about the qualities (e.g. openness, humility, respect for the other, and honesty) needed for dialogue that contributes to justice and peace. We also recognised the need for both a critique of philosophies of absolute truth, and a profound and radical renewal of systematic theology.

Our EATWOT theologies, with their option for the least among us, form a polyphonic chorus consisting of systematic and ethical thought, biblical work, indigenous theologies, black theologies, feminist theologies, and ecological concerns for mother Earth. We reaffirm the steps taken in liberation theologies, with all their myriad developments.

We share in the bread of life offered by Jesus Christ who is with all of humanity in the struggle for bread and freedom. The divisions between and within our churches are nonetheless a painful reality. While seeking to weave the threads of the unity of humankind we need to work together to make manifest the oneness and catholicity of Christ's Church. In this regard, we need a greater effort in doing theology together and making our table fellowship a visible reality. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we open our eyes as we recognise Jesus' presence in the breaking of bread, on our journey towards justice and reverence for creation.

#### **4. CHALLENGES FACING EATWOT**

Our Assembly concluded with a message of life, a sense of accountability and commitment, and many tasks at hand.

As EATWOT, we will contribute to the development of a just and liberating global ethics. The growth of peoples' movements for justice, especially against neo-liberal globalisation, is an indication of the forces building for an alternative economic and social order. EATWOT can support such movements and take advantage of the growth of communication to form or relate to networks for social justice. We see in this the possibilities of some strategies that can be adopted in the future for EATWOT.

Since in today's world there are many fundamentalist movements provoking tragic conflicts, movements which also affect theologies and churches, we reaffirm our macro ecumenical vocation toward unity between Christian denominations and all religions of the earth. We invite our brothers and sisters doing

theology to continue in prophetic engagement with the common, poor and oppressed people, and in a fruitful dialogue with cultural and religious pluralism.

Members of EATWOT are seeking alternative communities and sustainable spiritualities of hope. This implies moving forward with a common focus, giving voice to the hope that needs to be realised in inter-faith praxis for justice and peace with an option for the poor, and integrity of creation. This focus on interfaith praxis is inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-spiritual.

One of the great achievements in EATWOT theologies is a critical and constructive biblical work that we wish to continue, strengthen and deepen. Our re-reading of the Word of God adopts cross-cultural hermeneutics that is gender conscious. Aware that the Bible itself was written within specific socio-cultural and historical contexts, we engage in a reading that respects and at the same time takes a critical stance vis a vis these diverse contexts. In this way we strive to hear anew God's word as good news of liberation for the peoples of our time.

Our economic resources have been diminishing of late. We commit ourselves to exploring new ways of tapping local and regional funds, developing new forms of communication, and organising activities with institutions that have similar concerns. We will share agendas with our partners and seek new models of collaboration.

We warmly invite all churches and theologians, persons of every religion, and all people of good will to continue walking into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with joy and hope. Jesus Christ is our joy and hope.

Our hope is based on foundational inspirations of Christianity and other religions and humanistic persuasions. Our wills are determined to struggle wisely, collectively and courageously for the liberation of the oppressed (Luke 4.18). As EATWOT we are thankful for the graces of the past 25 years and are conscious of our inadequacies. We pledge to work together in the spirit to help realise our Christian vision of a new earth and new heaven. The mission entrusted to us is to be carried out to the ends of the earth with Jesus as our inspiration and leader. To him we bear witness in solidarity with persons of all religions and persuasions through out the world.

We end with some Akan (Ghanaian) words of life and hope which we used many times during the Assembly:

*“Biribi-wo-soro (there is something in the heavens); Nyame, biribi wo soro na, ma embeka yen nsa” (God, there is something in the heavens, let it reach us).*

We know there is unity in heaven  
Let it reach us  
We know there is plurality in heaven  
Let it reach us  
We know there is coherence in heaven  
Let it reach us  
God, there is something in the heavens  
Let it reach us.  
Our hope is real.

**New EATWOT Executive Committee Members**

President: Diego Irarrazabal (Roman Catholic, Peru)  
Vice-President: Meehyun Chung (Protestant, South Korea)  
Executive Secretary: Ramathate Dolamo (Protestant, South Africa)  
Asian Coordinator: Rohan Silva (Roman Catholic, Sri Lanka)  
African Coordinator: Arnold Temple (Protestant, Sierra Leone based in Kenya)  
Latin America Co.: Tania Mara Sampaio (Protestant, Brazil)  
USA Minority Co.: Yung Ha Kim, (Protestant)

**Commissions**

Women's Commission: Philomena Njeri Mwaura (Africa)  
Agustine Prasetyo Murniati (Asia)  
Silvia Regina de Lima Silva (Latin America)  
Theological Commission: Yang En Cheng (Asia)  
Elizabeth Amoa (Africa)  
Luiza Tomita (Latin America)

### **EATWOT STATEMENT ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001**

We the 50 members of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), and observers from 28 countries, from Africa, Asia and Latin America, meeting in General Assembly in Quito, Ecuador, September 24 to October 2, 2001, on the theme “**Giving an Account of the Hope That Is In You**”, having reflected prayerfully on the situation of the World, in the aftermath of the sad events of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, seek to share with you our reflections and declare the following:

We strongly condemn the terrorist attacks of September 11 in New York, Washington DC and Pittsburgh and deeply sympathize with all the victims of these acts and their relatives from the USA and many other countries.

We urge that those responsible for such terrible killings and destruction be duly brought to justice.

We can understand the sudden shock suffered by the people of USA, their sadness and sense of vulnerability and great anger that calls for retaliation.

At the same time we are convinced that the lasting remedy for terrorism is not military action, because such a “war” may be another stage in an endless spiral of violence.

We are convinced that the vast majority of persons of good will in the USA and the rest of the world do not desire war-like actions which can cause death to numerous innocent and long suffering persons in Afghanistan and elsewhere. At the present time, while the machinery for war is ready to go into action, the voices of the peace loving peoples of the world are disparate and almost unheard.

The present unprecedented crisis calls for urgent action for peace, that can move those intending to unleash violence to be more prudent and wise and to seek ways of promoting human understanding and reconciliation.

An utterly undesirable effect of the present situation is the invocation of religion in favor of violence. Our worldwide experience convinces us that the basic message and understanding of the two world religions invoked, Christianity and Islam, is one of peace with justice and promotion of our common humanity.

In these tragic circumstances, we urge the United Nations Organization, all religious and community leaders in the USA and the rest of the world to come forward publicly to become a global voice and promote a powerful movement for peace with justice.

In particular, we ask the following bodies to take up this cause:

- All the Leaders of Major World Religions
- the World Council of Churches
- the Conference of European Churches
- All Leaders of Christian Churches
- the National Council of Churches, USA
- the US Catholic Bishops’ Conference
- the European Bishops’ Conferences
- All Religious Congregations

- Justice and Peace Commissions
- Women and Youth Organizations
- Ecological and Peace Movements.

We suggest that all worship services on Sunday September 30, 2001, throughout the world be an occasion for prayer and sending a message of peace with justice to all decision-makers of the world on this issue.

We ask the mass media of the world to carry this and similar messages of peace to the whole human family that is greatly concerned about this threat of a major war led by the most powerful countries of the world.

We hope that the global response to the present crisis will help us realize the folly of terrorism and war, and help build an effective human coalition for peace with justice to all.

May the blessings of the God of peace and justice be upon all persons and the rest of creation.