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CLAI/WCC Regional Group meeting, held in Asunción, Paraguay, 11-14 October 2008



This biannual 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 Ecumenical Theological Education.

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Ministerial Formation - 111

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CONTENTS

Letter from Staff.....	3
Editorial from Latin American ETE Consultant.....	5
José Duque	
Note on Contributors.....	8
Theological Education for Peace.....	9
Elsa Tamez	
Jesus Pedagogy as Transformation	13
Jairo Alfredo Roa Barreto	
Theological Education and Pastoral Psychology.....	18
Sara Baltodano	
Theological Education and Public Education in Latin America.....	28
Leopoldo Cervantes	
Theological Education for Life.....	31
Ross Kinsler	
Listening to learn – Education as a journey to discovery the other.....	43
<i>A short meditation from indigenous background</i>	
Antonio Otzoy	
Manifesto of Quality Theological Education in Latin America.....	44
Matthias Preiswerk and others	

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International Encounter on Peace Theology and alternatives to violence.....	52
CETELA, Bogota’s Letter	
First Latin American Consultation on Theology and Dissabilities.....	56
EDAN, Quito’s Letter	
Message from CLAI/WCC Regional Group meeting in Asuncion, Paraguay.....	58
Mission and Ecumenism Course.....	61
Rudolph von Sinner and others	
The Forest of Theological Education.....	63
José Duque	
Important Websites of Major Latin American Associations.....	68

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LETTER FROM STAFF

Dietrich Werner

With this issue of Ministerial Formation we present a collection of voices from the Latin American discourse on theological education. The last special issue of MF on Latin America was from 1992 when a major consultation on Theological Education in 'Abya-Yala' was documented in this journal, a consultation held in San Jose, Costa Rica (July 19-24, 1992), organized by CETELA and ETE. It is interesting to realize how fast developments have progressed on this continent since then, while some challenges remain the same. Walter Altmann had summarized key insights of the debates at that time which were about rediscovering a new identity in theological education in affirming liberation of oppressed identities of indigenous people, of black people, of the urban and rural poor and those oppressed since centuries in these lands. Altmann stated: „'Abya-Yala', a mature land: this is the rediscovery of an identity many thought had been lost, that is made concrete in the respect for spaces and their value. As we look at theological education and at the institutions that we represent, what are the spaces that we have available for the despised of the earth? How could we open new spaces for the women, for the indigenous peoples, for the Blacks – spaces set aside for them to fulfill as they please? Are we able to respect their otherness, their way of life, their culture and their religiosity? How can we respond concretely to these challenges?...Our institutions have a long way to go and much to learn in this respect. To what extent do we reflect this way of doing theology in our programs? We speak here of the need for an ecumenical and transcultural theological education. Certainly an ecumenical theological education is much more than the acceptance of formal participation of more than two churches in the program. It undoubtedly has a broader dimension including the perspectives of specified groups. The term 'trans-culture', therefore, interprets and deepens the meaning of 'ecumenical'. The challenge to our institutions and our programs is to integrate these perspectives; to integrate them not in the sense of domesticating them, but to occupy spaces, with mutual interaction and enrichment. For this reason we also speak of the dialectical dimension of unity and diversity that must be present in the programs and in the daily tasks of our institutions“.¹

This issue of Ministerial Formation which was prepared by Prof. Dr. Jose Duque from UBL in Costa Rica reflects some of the answers to this challenge formulated more than 15 years ago.

The recent meeting of CLAI/WCC Regional Group meeting, held in Asuncion, Paraguay 11-14 October 2008 made a strong plea for focusing again on the deeper significance, the

¹ Walter Altmann, An attempt to summarize, from the „Theological Education in Abya-Yala“ which was held in San Jose, Costa Rica July 19-24 1992, documented in: Ministerial Formation 59, 1992, p. 4ff, here p. 53f.

content and the changed contexts of “ecumenical theological education“ in Latin America in recommending to

- “organize a meeting between the Theological Commission of CLAI and the WCC Ecumenical Theological Education Programme with a diverse group of representatives of theological seminaries to address issues such as Pentecostalism and ecumenism, with a view to integrating these subjects in theological education and curricula. Also to include seminaries that do not yet belong to the ecumenical family.

And also

- to “link with the social sciences so as to analyze the context from the point of view of economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights and thus strengthen the biblical-theological perspective”.

We are looking forward to the formation of a Forum of Latin American Associations of Theological Schools which is going to have its first meeting probably 14-18 May 2009 in Buenos Aires – a development which is also of significance for other regions in the global family of associations of theological schools.

There will be a Spanish version of this issue of Ministerial Formation printed in Costa Rica. We express our heartfelt gratitude for Jose Duque for not only preparing this special issue, but also for his untiring and passionate service and ministry in accompanying and assisting innovative processes and projects for ecumenical theological education in Latin America.

Ministerial Formation has served for some 30 years now - founded and initiated by Ross Kinsler, former PTE assistant director - as a unique and indispensable forum of debate and exchange of ideas in the discourse on global theological education. There still is an ongoing need for a forum of exchange and vital link between the different (some 25-30) associations of theological education around the world we believe.

However, as conditions and financial means for program work in WCC have changed and are continuing to change considerably in past years the WCC has decided to discontinue Ministerial Formation from 2009 onwards and to look for other ways to support exchange of ideas and concepts within the global community of theological educators and theological institutions, as it needs to focus on strengthening its two major journals, International Review of Mission (IRM) and Ecumenical Review (EcRev) in future. We are glad to announce that in the year 2009 one issue of IRM will be devoted to issues of theological education completely and for 2010 similar plans are under way with regard to a special issue in Ecumenical Review. We will make sure that present and past subscribers of Ministerial Formation will continue to receive the future special issues devoted to theological education which will be prepared in terms of content by ETE.

With all our best wishes for your work in institutions and networks of theological education
We remain with cordial greetings

Dietrich Werner
ETE Programme Coordinator



Gamaliel Biblical Seminary of the Pentecostal Church of God, Lima Perú

José Duque taught a one-week course of about 100, pastors, professors and church leaders, men and women from September 29th to October 4th, 2008

EDITORIAL FROM LATIN AMERICAN ETE CONSULTANT

José Duque

The Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation and its Programme on Theological Education (ETE) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), takes pleasure in presenting this special issue of the *Ministerial Formation Bulletin*, as a contribution from the Latin American context. The intention of these articles is to outline or to detect some existing conditions in the historical reality where theological education is being taught in our region. We caution that this is not a final exposition, but that it should be seen as an unfinished sketch; even so, it profiles intuitions and verifiable aspects in this context.

The following are some of the contents of this issue of MF. Elsa Tamez provides an introduction with her article, “Education for Peace,” in which she seriously questions education that conspires with a hegemonic system. We have placed this first in our index because it gives a general overview of the educational context. This kind of education legitimizes financial profit, dehumanization, exclusion, selfishness and, therefore, violence. The article not only questions this educational reality, but recommends theoretical guidelines and suggests a praxis in theological education capable of constructing paths for peace.

Jairo Roa, in his article “The Pedagogy of Jesus as a Transforming Practice,” surprises us by presenting an extraordinary experience of theological education in an important Pentecostal seminary in Bogotá. His work there is worthy of being highlighted, although it was conducted without publicity.

The third article was written by Professor Sara Baltodano, entitled “Theological Education and Pastoral Psychology: An Epistemological Proposal with a Latin American Perspective.” Professor Baltodano’s intuition is that Pastoral Psychology, as a discipline related to Practical Theology, has to seek an epistemological reference different from that which is customary in the Natural Sciences. Therefore, she proposes the theological framework of Latin American Liberation Theology, because that, in its critical option for change, has produced and is producing epistemological and methodological ruptures in the perspective of the Kingdom of God and its justice.

The fourth article is by Professor Ofelia Ortega who, based on her many years of experience in theological education throughout the world, presents us with a thought-provoking text, entitled “Ecumenical Theological Formation,” in which she proposes looking back on relevant historical processes in relation to ecumenical theological education. In her call to attention, she recommends that we stop to observe three relevant aspects: the search for quality in theological education; the current challenges for theological education and ecumenical formation; as well as keeping in mind the basic elements in ecumenical formation.

The next article was written by Professor Reineiro Arce and is entitled, “Notes on Ecumenical Theological Education.” In this text, the reader will find some indispensable criteria for the work of ecumenical theological education, which assure a broad view of the horizon of theological education in addition to seeking common cause with those who are involved in this educational task and, hopefully, to overcome aspects of crisis that haunt our theological schools.

Immediately after that, we present two meditations by Professor Antonio Otzoy, which emerge from deep within Guatemala—that is, from the Mayan culture. Although these texts have an underlying theoretical framework, they can also be read as meditations on the road because they are an invitation to the spirit of an encounter with our neighbor.

We then introduce the excellent “Magna Carta” of Professor Dietrich Werner.² This is like a universal declaration summarized in “ten key convictions” about ecumenical formation in theological education at the beginning of the 21st century. This document insists on the centrality of ecumenical formation, not only in theological education but also in the life and mission of the Church. Werner reminds us that this priority of ecumenical formation is a commitment made by the WCC, which was accepted in the General Assembly in Puerto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006.

We also include a written metaphor by José Duque, entitled “The Forest of Theological Education,” which makes an analogy between the tropical rain forests and the seminaries of ecumenical theological education. The metaphor consists in referring to seminaries as seedbeds (they have the same etymological root) to be used for reforesting all the human, cultural and spiritual tissues of humanity, which have been so destroyed by utilitarianism and unjust exploitation, both of individuals and of nature.

² This document is only included in the spanish version of this issue, as the english text was published already in MF 110, the last issue.

We then present a document prepared by Pedagogical-Theological Services (STP), the final editing of which is the work of Professor Matthias Preiswerk, although approximately 40 educators in the area of pedagogy, philosophy, theology and economics participated in crafting it. The document is entitled, “Declaration: For a Quality Theological Education.” This is not a text to simply read, it is a text to study in each faculty, school, institute and seminary of theological education in the region.

Lastly, readers will find two letters. The first is “The Quito Letter,” which is a call from those who have disabilities, and the challenges this poses for the Church and theological education. The letter was written at a conference on “Disability and Theology,” sponsored by EDAN and ETE in Quito, Ecuador.

The second letter, “The Bogotá Letter,” was written in the scenario of generalized violence in Colombia in an effort to seek alternatives to violence. It was composed at an international conference on Peace and Theology, which was convened by CETELA and many other theological education institutions and Colombian peace organizations.

We hope that those who read this magazine will find some light for the life and mission of the Church, as well as for the task of ecumenical education and formation.

José Duque

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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR PEACE³

Elsa Tamez

We are witnessing major scientific-technological advances of every kind taking place today. It has been said that with the science of today it would be possible to resolve world hunger. However, this scientific knowledge is more inclined to create the most sophisticated weapons of death in history, and toward high-technology inventions that benefit a very small sector of the world's population. We ask ourselves, why? Well, because there is a relationship of mutual support between the globalization of the market that is bringing about growing and deep-felt inequalities and inhumane exclusion. And, both science and technology are self-generating and mutually reinforcing. This systemic total, says Assmann, is out of tune with nearly all living beings. If this is true, we are seeing a crisis of civilization of such magnitude that we need a radical change in civilization.

The way of thinking about things and education that concentrates on the accumulation of knowledge and established truths have been accomplices in the creation of this systemic total. There are forms of prejudicial knowledge when we are limited to just one aspect of the cognitive process. We continue to be dominated by the rationalism inherited from rigid, lineal, dichotomized and accumulative thinking because we believe that is the unsurpassable form of knowledge. Others—skills, experience, solidarity, subjectivity, spirituality, mysticism and the fulfillment of the person as a social and individual being—are adornments; it is something independent; it belongs to other spaces that are unconnected to knowledge or the cognitive process. That is why what we perceive in society is dehumanization and homogenization, and that is largely because of the excessive centrality of the word, of *logos*: it is not far from this centrality to verticality or authoritarianism and domination. For example, according to Saussure, the excessive unification of linguistic abilities is the product of fascist behavior.

So then, there is dehumanization, a lack of solidarity and peace, not only because of the selfish, combative economic reality that we are experiencing, but also because of the way we learn and are shaped as human beings. Theological education is not far removed from this manner of imparting knowledge. I find this to be extremely ironic, because it deals with knowledge about transcendence, mystery, the ultimate, inexpressible reality. This should not be so. Theological education should be at the forefront of new ways of acquiring knowledge in the learning process.

The educational system and the manner of learning to learn, that is, of education, are being called into question today. Edgar Marin, in the introduction to *Los siete saberes necesarios para la educación del futuro*, states that the historical development of the forms of knowledge and the accumulation of human knowledge carries with it a deformation that is profoundly anti-solidarity. He refers to that as “the blind spots of knowledge.” Because reality, he states, is so extremely complex that it cannot be reduced to understanding everything as cause and affect, we learn from nature and also from human history that everything is so complexly intertwined that it is impossible to be explained by the rationale of cause and effect.

³ Thoughts based mainly on the book by Hugo Assmann and Jung Mo Sung: *Competencia e Sensibilidade Solidaria. Educar para la Esperanza (Competence and Solidarity Sensitivity. Educating for Hope)*.

Therefore, if these forms of knowledge have an intrinsic anti-solidarity deformation, we need forms of knowledge that have congenital forms of relating, that have a dimension of solidarity in their manner of learning, in the origin of its own thinking—in other words, in its cognizance. We are now talking about ecological cognizance and of vital niches between human beings.

We are, then, facing a very important challenge in which education is crucial; and this institution, the UBL, is an educational institution, so we cannot ignore the new pedagogical and epistemological proposals that are emerging.

People are not naturally sensitive; they are not born with a desire for solidarity or to do only good, according to Pierre Lalloz. People only become sensitive when they have been sensitized (Assmann, p. 231). By this he means that sensitivity is not a universal fact of nature, but that it is necessary to educate for sensibilization.

We must look for ways of thinking that simultaneously imply the affirmation of the subjectivity of those who learn and the openness to inter-subjectivity and social sensitivity. Join to this cognitive process gestures and words, looks and attentiveness, and we are positioned as human beings who respond and dialogue, because words alone can create fear, as well as lineal and analytical thinking. There is a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke that explains this beautifully:

I Shudder with Fear for the Human Word

I shudder with fear for the human word.
Everything they proclaim is so precise.
This is called Dog and that is called House,
And here is the beginning and there is the end.

I worry about their sense, their play with mockery.
They know everything that's been and shall be;
No mountain is still to them wonderful:
their gardens and goods border directly on God.

I want always to warn and resist: Stay away!
To hear things sing is what pleases me most.
You touch them; they are stiff and mute.
You cut to the ground everything that is dear.

(Translation from German to English by Cliff Crego)

Even in the 19th century, this German poet (1879-1926) saw the problem of the concentration of words and thinking as a monolithic form that benefitted communication and knowledge. He says, it makes me afraid, and that is because a dehumanization process is occurring—becoming proud, feeling superior and of seeing other people, those who they know are different, as inferior, which leads to war, violence and destruction. The gods of Popul Vuh were wise when they took away the Fifth Humanity that was created with the ability to see everything, even beyond things. Marvel before the mountains, smell the strawberries, touch thistles and snakes, listen to the song of things that are part of knowledge. Things do not always have to be understood or to be super-clear. According to Assmann, we must

recognize that there are many things that are not completely clear, which is a fundamental aspect in the human manner of knowledge.

A positive aspect that is occurring is that current neoliberal policies are being questioned everywhere, and at the same time our concepts about knowledge and learning are being questioned. I believe that this is our opportunity to intervene as an institution of theological education. No matter how much we talk about a theology impregnated with calls to solidarity, peace and justice, if the way we teach theological knowledge continues in the parameters of acquiring traditional knowledge, we are not going to achieve much, even when we reach a consensus about the need for solidarity because it is only the state of intellectual consciousness that participates in the consensus; that which is unconscious, habits, the way of intuitively being in solidarity, the body, feelings and subjectivity do not participate.

It is interesting to note that in 1996 UNESCO took on four pillars of education that came from a report of the international commission on education for the 21st century:

Learning to know, which means prioritizing learning experiences.

Learning to do, which emphasis the operational capacity, the abilities.

Learning to live together, which unites competitiveness and solidarity.

Learning to be, which means to fulfill yourself as a person, an individual and a social being.

I read here about four pillars of education in which the words accumulation of knowledge or information are not found.

We have heard this on many occasions. However, it seems to me that we have not taken it seriously, because this means the total restructuring of all university teaching—the curriculum, methodology, organization—and living together. This means giving up destructive rivalries, sacrificing time that we think is precious for acquiring information, adapting ourselves to numerous understandings. But, it also means acceptance of many other capabilities and different logos; it means putting into practice the dream of more humane inter-human relations and more universal or holistic relations in nature.

If, as Teilhard de Chardin says, the progress of a civilization is measured by the increase of sensibility between people, we are obliged to radically change the direction of civilization towards sensibility and solidarity with humans and nature, because currently our civilization and the educational processes are going in the other direction.

Theologically, we need to be converted, to be born again. Speaking metaphorically, to enter our mother's womb and be born as new people with intentions, visions, habits, desires and dreams of a culture of solidarity and peace. How is it possible to develop this inter-human sensibility. This deals with designing a more spiritual exercise than an abstract theory. Hugo Assmann states that one of the ways to develop this humanizing sensibility is to be consciously attentive to the richness of other's experiences, pay attention to others, give them affection, even though the experience is negative or positive, encouraging or repulsive. To know how to pay attention to others means that we must first be aware that we, ourselves, are constantly in need of this attention, this affection.

Although it seems simplistic, Assmann's proposal has an anthropological foundation that comes from the theory called neotenia of Dutch anatomist Louis Bolk (1926), which proves that the human species, unlike that of chimpanzees, had to face extreme challenges in the

increase of cerebral capacity, premature birth, bare skin, total dependence on being cared for by a mother or others after birth, retention of fetal characteristics and later of youth (never elderly, unlike the brains of chimpanzees), achieving a great adaptive capacity. According to this theory, the prolongation of infancy and of maternal care (external uterus) favored the neuronal and social complexity at the same time. Instincts are substituted by learning, but a type of communicative learning in which all the senses participate. From there, curiosity, creativity, lucidity, danger, and so forth, have made the human species develop flexible, plastic behaviors. This is part of the *neotenic* evolution, which is an anthropological characteristic of being human. For Assmann, a “second neotenia,” is needed to pass from simply human to humanization. In other words, a new birth in which the “external uterus” is prolonged, with care, attention and affection in inter-personal relations, that is, with the intention of perceiving complex thinking and new adaptive learning oriented towards solidarity and peace.

In summary, everything I have said here means that confronting the reality in which we live, which is self-destructive and in which the manner of learning—education—is an accomplice, we must radically change the manner of learning and the way we teach, using as a starting point complex thinking (which includes not only words, but living together, gestures, sensitivity, body, emotion, etc.); interactive communication; a serious consideration of multiple understandings; all in the midst of a violent, complex society.

THE PEDAGOGY OF JESUS AS A TRANSFORMING PRACTICE

Jairo Alfredo Roa Barreto⁴

“Christianity is not a system or a doctrine but an existential message and, therefore, cannot be demonstrated or understood but only lived.” (Kierkegaard)

1. Introduction

Although I dedicate part of my time to theological education on different theological faculties of Catholic and Protestant theological seminaries, a few months ago I was surprised to receive an invitation from the Central Biblical Seminary of the Assemblies of God⁵ in Colombia. The seminary has extension offices in the principal cities, with more than 5,000 students and 200 professors throughout the country. During several months I had the opportunity of teaching a course about the Theological Task and another on Contemporary Theological Currents. In addition, I was invited to speak to professors from the Seminary’s different locations at two conferences on theological education and pedagogy. Truly, this was a profoundly significant experience. While many Protestant theological institutions are having serious difficulties regarding students, professors, infrastructure and financial resources, this institution enjoys great energy and growth and seeks to respond to pastoral formation in the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal churches in the country.

During the conferences mentioned above we reflected on the importance of pedagogy for theological formation. It was an extraordinary opportunity to think, not only in the current framework of the principal pedagogical discussions, but also to find in Jesus a vital pedagogical paradigm for Pentecostal theological formation. Using the text of Luke 10:25-37⁶, some basic parameters were identified:

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⁵ The Assembly of God is currently one of the largest Pentecostal churches in the world.

⁶ 25 ...an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 “What is written in the Law” he replied. “How do you read it?” 27 He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you have may have.’ 36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” 37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

2. The Parable of the Good Samaritan as Pedagogical Practice

Without question, this is one of the most important passages of the Christian faith. Here we find significant elements and relevant contributions, not only for practicing the Christian life, but also for theological formation.

2.1 The role of the questioner, of the subject of formation.

People play a central role in theological formation. In this case, we find how Jesus *recognizes* in the interpreter (expert) of the law a valid spokesperson. The expert in the law has the right to think differently, to believe in a different manner and to disagree with Jesus' proposal. An understanding of this is so important for Jesus that he allows the expert to question him; he interrogates him and even tests him. Although it is obvious that the intention of the questioner is not completely honest, given that it includes the desire to test Jesus, Jesus was interested in centering on the transformation of the person and not on the shameful intentions that this might have. Jesus is not unaware of the intentions of the person speaking to him, but he was not trapped in them. *The recognition of the other person as legitimate is a fundamental aspect of theological formation.* It is important not only to recognize, but also to accept the differences and the dissension of the other person.

2.2 The role questions play in formation.

As Kant has already suggested, the person who has questions has an open mind; the person who does not have questions has a closed mind. Jesus is more interested in the quality of the question than in the intention of the expert of the law. The expert's questions are not only relevant for him but also for Jesus. These are profoundly existential questions and form part of the main concerns of human beings. Because of that, the questions of the expert in the law are an extraordinary opportunity for the questioner himself to reorient his direction and what he is looking for. The implorations play a fundamental role in the formation and transformation of people. More than a problem, questions provide an extraordinary opportunity for theological formation. They make it possible to open the discussion and broaden the horizon regarding theological reflection.

2.3 The role interpretation of the text plays in Christian formation.

This is a very important aspect for educators and institutions of theological formation. The two questions Jesus asked seek to expose one of the causes of the problem: What is written in the law? And, "How do you read that? The problem is not with the questioner, but rather the way he is reading the text. In this respect, there are interpretations of the text that can distort the Gospel's practice. Moreover, legitimate religious practices exist because of interpretations of the biblical text that can distort the practice of love and mercy. Therefore, the interpretation of the biblical text cannot be naïve or hasty, but must be assumed with responsibility and commitment by educators and theological formation institutions. This is not an attempt to condemn the interpreter's interpretation, but rather of the "salvation" or the "conversion" of the questioner.

2.4 The role answers play in theological formation.

Many times, questions seek to demonstrate that one already knows the answer. In this respect, the question is not as important as legitimizing the answers already known. Jesus gives the interpreter of the law the opportunity of discovering for himself the validity of his answers. This is not about the courtesy or academic kindness of Jesus, but about a process of

formation. Jesus leads the expert of the law to discover the answers and to give a new significance to their actions. More than an academic interest about who has the truth, Jesus is interested in the transformation of people. This aspect has profound significance for theological formation because it gives the questioners the opportunity of discovering for themselves the answers in order to redirect their actions

2.5 The role praxis plays in theological formation.

This is another central aspect of the Good Samaritan passage. Theological, biblical and pastoral “truths” must pass through the praxis of mercy. As Luther posed when he said “*Crux probat omnia*,” the cross is the test of everything. The validation of interpretations must pass through the “pedagogy of the cross;” it is important to pass our theological “truths” and our practices through the cross. The expert in the law had the “correct doctrine,” but that did not withstand the test of mercy. This aspect is fundamental for theological formation; it not only deals with teaching “correct doctrines” or “sound doctrine” but also of contrasting these “doctrines” with the praxis of the Gospel.

2.6 The role that the justification of the questioner plays in theological formation.

Possibly, many will feel happy when the interpreter of the law is exposed. However, Jesus is not in a hurry; he is willing to make a pause and give his questioner time. Jesus knows how to listen and also knows how to wait. Waiting has to do with hope. Those who do not know how to wait will despair and commit sin. Jesus waits, and in his waiting he has hope that the interpreter will understand what it means to be a new human being. In the pedagogy of hope, Jesus allows him to defend himself, justify himself, dissent and disagree. The hope of Jesus comprehends the real problem of the expert in the law. The true cause is a basic problem that is not resolved with more doctrine, such as more sermons or more teaching. Permitting the questioners of theological formation to take the time they need to understand the practice of the Gospel becomes a fundamental requirement for people.

2.7 The role the neighbor plays in theological formation.

The neighbor becomes a legitimizing criterion of the practices of theological formation. This point is in relation to the point of the praxis mentioned previously. The question “Who is my neighbor?” is extremely complicated. In the best of cases, the neighbor is seen as the person in need, as the “other,” as the person in a vulnerable situation. There will also be some who see the neighbor as their equal, that is, a person of the same race, culture, gender or religious belief. Responding to the question about the neighbor is fundamental for theological formation and because of that it requires special pedagogical consideration.

2.8 The role of parables in theological formation.

As it is important to ask ourselves about *what to teach* in theological formation, it is important also to ask about *how to teach* and *how to learn*. Here, the use of parables plays an important role in formative processes. The parable forms part of what has been called poetic language. Both Jesus and the interpreter have made use of prose: law, interpreter, eternal life, neighbor, etc. However, this language is inadequate when teaching and learning the message of the Gospel. Jesus turns to parables, metaphors and similes to make the message of salvation understandable. A parable makes it possible to understand the most important components of the teaching-learning process. Jesus is not concerned about conceptual or academic precision, but about the comprehension of the Gospel’s message, which transforms people. Through

parables, Jesus does not intend to convince, but to disturb; he does not want to demonstrate, but to provoke; he does not seek closure, but wants to open possibilities of giving life a new significance. In the parable, Jesus makes it possible for the interpreter to understand how religious practices can be inhumane and, therefore, anti-Christian. Many people, in this case the priest and the Levite, are not willing to sacrifice their religious privileges for the practice of mercy. These kinds of individuals can be “outstanding” religious people – they comply with all the standards, accept and defend “sound doctrine” – but they are not willing to sacrifice in order to practice mercy. Truths and religious practices are legitimized by the praxis of mercy. Without ignoring the importance of prosaic language that is technical and precise for theological formation, the use of poetic language becomes a basic resource for teaching and learning theology.

2.9 The role of practical challenges for theological formation.

It is important to firm up the truths that have been given new significance in concrete and ordinary aspects in the pedagogy of Jesus. Theological truths cannot remain in the abstract; as Ignacio Ellacuría says, the concepts must be free of ideological considerations; they must have concrete faces and specific contexts. In this respect, it is important to reiterate the questioner’s initial questions. The questions that made the formation process possible cannot be forgotten, and much less camouflaged by a false reply or with an answer that has nothing to do with the questions posed.

The questions are now taken up again from a new understanding of the teaching, and the response raises a question or is implicitly suggested in the question as clues to give direction to new practices. It is preferable to pose answers in terms of clues that guide to new practices and not of rules and norms of what must be done. Restating the initial question “Who is my neighbor?” by “Who of the three do you think was the neighbor of the man who fell into the hands of thieves?” leaves no room for doubt. This restating of the question, based on the parable, demands that the questioner takes a position and makes a decision. It is a question that changes the initial intention: the “neighbor” is not the one who fell into the hands of thieves, rather the “neighbor” is among those who “have no needs.” Those who have no needs are the truly needy; the truly needy are the priests and the Levites who have made religion their lifestyle, but their religious practices are anti-Christian and demonic because they do not allow for mercy, love and justice. A theological formation that restricts the “truths” of the Gospel from becoming an aspect of practical life can create “expert theologians,” but not necessarily disciples of Jesus.

2.9 The role of the self-understanding of the questioner in theological formation.

Jesus’ pedagogical process begins with questions for the expert in the law and ends with the reinterpretation of the latter. It is he who takes the response and makes it his. This process is important for educators and theological institutions; it does not deal with repetition or memorization, but with achieving a transformation in the questioners. Because of this, Jesus sets him free, he leaves the way open, he does not close it, he prefers to leave him with an invitation: “Go and do the same.” The teacher cannot become a “spy of the Kingdom” who is worried about whether the disciple has really understood and applied what was taught. The “spies of the Kingdom” are those who are hunting for evil deeds, for the sins of the learner, in order to justify and legitimize their lessons and their presence.

Jesus left the invitation open and gave the other person the freedom of choice as a way to show his deep love. In this respect, the pedagogical proposal of Jesus goes beyond learning to

knowing; it has to do with learning to do, with learning to live with others and of learning to be. These are permanent challenges for theological formation at present. Lastly, the pedagogical proposal of Jesus is characterized by being *of* and *for* freedom, that is, of promoting the autonomy of people. It is a pedagogy that opens the horizon for people, allowing them to discover for themselves the answers and to give new significance to their daily activities. The pedagogy of Jesus has profound implications for current theological formation. Without ignoring contemporary pedagogical contributions, the Pentecostals find in Jesus a pedagogical paradigm in which theological formation processes are based.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROPOSAL WITH A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE⁷

Sara Baltodano

Introduction

We agree with Martínez (2003:1) when he states that one of the greatest criticisms of psychological currents—that want to be considered a science in academic environments—is their epistemological structure, which is shaped by the natural sciences. This desire to be accepted within scientific circles led the psychological sciences to make the mistake of using the scientific method as the criteria of truth. And this is the same danger that any focus on pastoral psychology faces that is based on this criterion.

The purpose of this article is to share this concern and to open a space for discussion regarding this issue in theological schools and faculties. This could contribute to our search for an epistemology that responds to the Latin American context. We use the theological framework of Latin American Liberation Theology, which continues to create alternatives that produce epistemological and methodological ruptures and that have the Kingdom of God and His justice as their horizon.

The two working questions we ask ourselves in this article are:

- How should we teach the theory of practical theology in Latin America?
- What foundations and methodology do we propose as the way to approximate the unjust, oppressive reality as we seek another possible world?

The article is divided into six topics that we consider to be pillars in this epistemological proposal for education in pastoral psychology. We present them as breaks from one epistemology to another:

1. From imposed and closed knowledge to knowledge critically constructed.
2. From the beginning of theoretical knowledge to the beginning of practical knowledge.
3. From the exclusive action of minorities to the participative action of the popular majorities.
4. From a one-directional relationship, subject to object, to a multi-focus interrelation, subject to subject.
5. From the domination of a unanimous and universal voice to the liberating shout of multiple voices and experiences.
6. From a critical knowledge that is aseptic and neutral, to a transforming, committed knowledge.

⁷ This document is a translation from Spanish of an article published in *Vida y Pensamiento* (a theological magazine published by the Latin American Biblical University, Costa Rica), Vol. 28, No. 1, 2008:95-110.

We understand an epistemological rupture to be the collapse of a barrier that should be abolished. This means that there are epistemological obstacles, which are those concepts or methods that hinder a rupture, that are the remains of earlier ways of thinking, that block the progress of a new way of critically understanding the current reality, regardless of their value in the past.

We believe that the rupture with positivist thinking is the primary and necessary step that leads us to a hermeneutic of suspicion and, therefore, to a critique that allows us to transform our reality. From this first aspect, the other points that we will discuss below, will follow.

1. From imposed and closed knowledge to knowledge critically constructed.

The term hermeneutics is used in the sense of a theory of interpretation and all acts of knowledge suppose an interpretation that pursues the comprehension of meaning. Hermeneutical epistemology emerges as a reaction to a positivist epistemology in an attempt to distance itself from an inferiority complex in the face of science.

Hermeneutical epistemology also has been called the “hermeneutic of suspicion,” which introduces a reconstructive critique of reality, a critique of the interpretation of biblical texts, positivist theology and the dominant political and ecclesiastical systems. In this case, the critique consists of imposing limits on any all-encompassing and fundamentalist pretension. The hermeneutical epistemology critiques the positivist conception that limits the possibility of understanding reality.

Positivism, a doctrine originated by Auguste Comte in the 19th century, states that in reality a single order exists that leads to the indefinite progress of society and that everything that happens responds to this natural order that must be discovered, known and accepted. The purpose of knowledge for Positivism is to explain the cause of phenomena by general and universal laws.

Therefore, in positivist epistemology, knowledge has already been given, elaborated and finished, *and does not permit problematization*, which consists of asking critical questions about the unjust, oppressive reality, which challenges practical theology. In this way, positivist thinking states that human beings are not constructors of the social reality, which proposes a kind of *paralysis in people towards social change*. As an historical methodology, the fundamental priority in positivism is establishing documented proof, while general interpretations are devalued. Therefore, works of this nature usually *suffer from excessive documental accumulation and slight interpretative synthesis*.

*What place does that which is singular, contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints
have in that which is given as universal, necessary and obligatory?*

Michel Foucault
What is illustration?

Therefore, as a reaction to positivist epistemology, hermeneutical epistemology appeared. Ricoeur, who coined the expression “Masters of Suspicion” in reference to Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, observed how those authors unveiled, or unmasked, a hidden meaning: Marx

reveals the ideology as a false conscience or inverted conscience; Nietzsche unmasks the false values; and Freud exposed the disguises of unconscious drives (cf. Ricoeur 1973).

These authors give clues about ways of unmasking or interpreting reality, but this assumes the constant shift from one mask to another, because behind one mask others are hidden, which leads to the *danger of an excess of, or a deficiency of, interpretation*. That is why the hermeneutic circle is important (cf. Floristán 1993:206) as a methodology of practical theology, which is in constant revision and dialogue with other interpretations of reality.

However, Ricoeur believes that, together with the hermeneutic of suspicion, a hermeneutic of listening, capable of fully capturing meaning, should be realized (which is fundamental in pastoral accompaniment). The hermeneutic of listening promotes a meaning that is not unique; there is always the possibility that the known subject says different things to different interpreters.

The concept of hermeneutics can no longer be understood as merely a technical aspect, belonging to an exegetical science that seeks to discover meanings. Interpretation, the primary objective of hermeneutics, is a constant search for meaning and in this way assumes an encounter with oneself, or, in other words, with the need to *unveil the meaning of being*. Therefore, the concept of interpretation does not belong to a strictly methodological dimension but rather it approaches an ontological line.

In turn, within hermeneutics, there is an opportunity for criticism in the search for general and universal laws, because that necessarily leaves out the elements that cannot be generalized. So, some biblical interpreters defend an *ideographic knowledge* (more precise knowledge, but less able to be generalized), than *nomothetic knowledge* (of general laws).

Lastly, from a hermeneutical position, the *need to know the internal causes* of phenomena was proposed, a question that was distant from the external explanation of phenomena. So, instead of looking for the explanation, the interpreters seek to understand the phenomena.

However, Habermas (1984) went one step farther, surpassing the positivist and interpretative postures and looking towards *social transformation*. He questioned reductionism and the supposed neutrality of positivism and the conservatism of hermeneutics, which proposed a socio-critical paradigm that was founded on the philosophical tradition of critical social theory.

Critical theory, of which Habermas was a part, shows that knowledge in practical theology should be a focus that goes beyond interpretation and that, even though it is very important to deal with interpreting reality, one should *expand one's work to the transformation of the world*. This orientation towards transformation is what characterizes critical theory as opposed to positivist theory. World views and people are constantly being changed and constructed. People and society, as well as nature, are incomplete and open to processes of humanization (Baldinot 2006).

Martínez Escárcega (2003:5) states that the educational process should be the *product of interaction* between the cognoscente and the learning subject through transforming action.

The object (sic) and the subject are equally important; they relate to each other in a dialectic manner, with mutual determination. Scientific knowledge is objective and subjective at the same time. Knowledge is objective as long as it is possible to explain reality and transform it. But, it is subjective and relative in relation to the historic moment in which it produces the knowledge and the impossibility of arriving at absolute truths in time. This model is different than others because of the commitment it assumes with the radical transformation of reality, on the side of the oppressed classes in their struggle for a world without exploitation.

Because of this, we believe that practical theology cannot fulfill this transforming function in isolation but rather in an *interdisciplinary* manner. The research proposed by critical theory is intended to be a theory of social reality investigated as an integrated whole, which is why it rejects attempts to create specialized focuses in segments of society, because that diverts the understanding of society as an interrelated totality.

This critical paradigm contributes a praxis guide (Popkewitz 1988:75, quoted by Ventura 2005: 308):

- (a) Approach reality and understand it as praxis;
- (b) Unite theory and practice;
- (c) Unite knowledge, action and values;
- (d) Guide knowledge to freeing and liberating human beings;
- (e) Implies the participation of teachers beginning with self-reflection.

The following table gives us a comparative view of the different epistemologies applied to education and, in our case, to education in pastoral psychology.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH PARADIGMS
(Koetting 1984:296, quoted by Ventura 2005:309)

DIMENSION	POSITIVIST	INTERPRETATIVE	CRITICAL
INTERESTS	Explain, control, predict	Understand, interpret (shared mutual understanding)	Free, criticize and identify the potential for change
NATURE OF REALITY	Given, singular, tangible, fragmentable, convergent	Constructed, holistic, divergent, multiple	Constructed, holistic
RELATION IN INVESTIGACIÓN	SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONSHIP Independent, neutral, objective, free of values	SUBJECT-SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP Interrelationship. Relation influenced by subjective factors	SUBJECT-SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP Interrelationship. Relation influenced by a strong commitment for change
PURPOSE	Free generalizations about context and time, laws, explanations (nomotheticals): - Deductive - Quantitative - Centered on similarities	Work hypothesis in a given context and time, ideographic, inductive, qualitative explanations, centered on differences	Same as interpretative
EXPLANATION	It is causal. Real, temporary, previous or simultaneous causes	Interaction of factors	
AXIOLOGY (role of values)	Without values	Given values. Influence in selection of the problem, theory, method and analysis	Given values. Critical of ideology.

2. From the beginning of theoretical knowledge to the beginning of practical knowledge.

According to Foucault (1993:8), practical knowledge consists neither in taking the self-referential representations of human beings, nor the conditions that determine them without their knowing, but rather *that which they do and the way they do it*. In other words, on the one hand all epistemology should begin with the forms of rationality that are behind the forms of action (the *technological aspect* of the practical systems) and, on the other hand, with the freedom with which they act and react to what other people do, modifying, to a certain point, the rules of the game (the strategic aspect of the practical systems). This means that, instead of using the deductive method, the inductive method is utilized.

In the field of practical theology, Casiano Floistán (1993:136) calls this starting point the first act of Christian praxis. By incorporating the theological task into concrete, daily life, joys and sorrows, a new theological place appears. This view starts from the faith lived by people (not from scientific conceptualizations—that would be the second act) whose historical praxis forms part of the intelligence of faith (Vilanova 1997:444). Faith lived in a specific reality about which a critical analysis is made becomes the “first word” of practical theology.

In his book *Primado de la praxis* (1979), Metz points out the fact that the term “fundamental practical theology” is unusual and is strange for many people: “it is an indication that theory and praxis are not understood here in their usual meaning and relation, according to which praxis is understood as realization, application or “specification” of a previously elaborated theory” (p. 65). He continues, “Fundamental practical theology insists on the intelligible force of praxis itself, in the sense of theory-praxis dialectic. And, in this way submits theology to the “primacy of praxis” (p. 265).

A fundamental practical theology starts from the basis that all trials that try to base theology on “pure theory” or on “absolute reflection” are acritical and pseudo-theoretical. By proceeding thusly, fundamental practical theology does not first resort to the extra-theological conceptions, so influential today (1979), of theory and critique, according to which all the “pure theories” are found inserted in a more general context of communication and action, in such a way that without reference to praxis they cannot be critical theories, but rather appeal to the practical fundamental status of the *logos* of Christian theology (p. 66).

With these lines the author asserts that the Christian idea of God is itself a practical idea, because one cannot think about God without this affecting the worldview of those trying to think about God. Thinking about God produces transformation. “*Metanoia*,” conversion and exodus are not pure moral or pedagogical categories, but also are *noetic* categories (p. 66).

The experiences of conversion stories enter into this *noetic* category; these are not merely dramatic vestments of a “pure,” preconceived theology, but in reality are a part of the basic phenomena of this theology. In other words, thinking or speaking about God has a reminiscent or narrative structure, not as an adornment, but rather as theological essence. The same can be said of the praxis of following Jesus Christ that is not just “thinking it” but rather is the expression of a practical knowledge – because only by following him, Christians know in whom they have trusted and who gives them salvation. In this sense, Metz states (p. 67) that all Christology is subject to the primacy of praxis:

In the New Testament, accounts of following this Christological dialectic is clearly observed. There is no precise distinction between narration and command by which the listener could first hear the stories of Jesus and later reflect on the consequences that could or could not be obtained for him or her self. Those stories about following Jesus are, in themselves, implorations and commands. Telling the story intends to transform the subject who listens and is thus prepared to follow Jesus (p. 67).

3. From the exclusive action of minorities to the participative action of the popular majorities.

Practical theology is done from the vision of suffering people. Theology is not done from my own theoretical position of practical theology *for* people who suffer. Doing practical theology from the position of the impoverished is the epistemological place *par excellence*, and it is a space by choice. This is not just any space, but rather it is the beginning of constructing the knowledge of theology and, in our case, of practical theology. And this should develop side by side with other social movements committed to liberation from different forms of oppression due to gender, race, religion, social class or age, and in harmony with critical thinking, global social movements and resistance organizations. How is pastoral accompaniment seen by people in communities of faith in contrast to church hierarchies or by congregational leaders? Has enough effort been made to create educational ministry by those being educated and not from a pedagogical verticality; liturgy by the participants in a Christian worship service; ministry with the elderly from a life and death point of view?

Unfortunately, it is most common to do pastoral theology *for* people, from the vision of those who appropriate the decision-making. What we should seek is not to think for the people or for them to adapt to our plans or that we resolve their problems, but rather to *think, theoretically, with them from their situation*. Only from the people who suffer will it be possible to discover and construct existential truth (Martín-Baró 1998:298). It is important to turn our gaze toward the marginalized, because they are the neediest. Orient the manner of doing science to:

... give priority and preferential attention to the interests of the subjugated groups, the problems of the popular majorities, the hopes and dreams of those vast sectors of the Latin American population that continue struggling with the commonplace demands of satisfying their most basic material needs (Martín Baró 1989:328 ff.).

4. From a one-directional relationship, subject to object, to a multi-focus interrelation, subject to subject

Simply to participate produces “a voluntary and living breach between the asymmetrical relationship of submission and dependence, implicit in the subject/object binomial” (Fals Borda 1985:130).

In the field of positivist paradigm, which corresponds to a mechanistic theory of science, relations in pastoral psychology respond to the unavoidable principle of objectivization. That is, it demands the hypothesis of an observer who is outside the world, who is changed into a distant subject, which is falsely “neutral” in the face of personal or collective pain.

Because of that, we reject this kind of relation and propose an interrelation that makes it impossible to “objectify” the reality lived by other people. On the contrary, this kind of interrelation is participative and refers to a configuration in which both parts can transform reality and are able to create history. The participative method takes into account the

dynamism of history, the conversion of pastoral agents with the community, and the relation of agent-community-context. This relation is considered to be the object of pastoral investigation.

A serious posture exists in the construction of knowledge that considers the model of subject-subject relations. Observation, reflection and analysis are conducted with rigor and keeping in view the relation between agent-community-context, seeking for biblical, theological anthropological illumination and planning. By carrying out this process, pastoral agents investigate their own practice and activity (Balbinot 2006).

The teaching of pastoral psychology in no way intends to consider the subjects as homogenous entities, but rather as people formed by the complex and rich variety of genders, ethnicities and cultures that form Latin America's social and political life.

5. From the domination of a unanimous and universal voice to the liberating shout of multiple voices and experiences

The hierarchical, analytical and reductive thinking of positivism set up a universalistic and unique representation of the world. This posture closed the way to the diversity and plurality of other ways of understanding and interpreting the world. We believe that we must see reality as a result of inter-subjectivity and in the interrelation of voices and experiences that avoid all determinism and the idea that one thought or interpretation is superior to another. The scenario prepared by modern rationality regarding reality is fragmented, mechanistic, observable, quantifiable and predictable. However, on the level of reality, history produces:

...individuals with attitudes, values, perceptions, feelings that make them behave in unexpected or unpredictable ways (...) who move in a space that transcends from the physical to the virtual. This deals, therefore, with a complex reality without borders (...) in which the intangible predominates (Rodríguez 2007:87).

Because of this, the hermeneutical posture that we propose seeks to consider a contextualized view of the world, in a plural and diverse manner, from the idea of complexity.

6. From a critical knowledge that is aseptic and neutral, to a transforming, committed knowledge

Martin-Baró states that all knowledge is conditioned by the limits imposed by reality; this appears to us to be obscure. Only when we act to transform it can we see it more clearly. What we see and how we see it is definitely conditioned by our perspective, by the place from which we are looking at history; but, this is conditioned also by our own reality. Therefore, to acquire a new understanding, it is not enough to place ourselves within the perspective of the discriminated and oppressed majorities, but rather we must become involved in a new praxis, "an activity that transforms reality and allows us to understand it—not only about what it is, but rather what it is not, in the measure by which we try to direct it towards what should be" (Martin-Baró, 1998:299).

With this posture, the horizon is always open, in a continual process of construction; therefore, communities and those who accompany them pastorally also are open to the process of constructing liberation. A critical reading of the context is one of the determining factors in the process of developing a practical theology that is committed to transformation directed to a more just society. That is part of the subject of investigation and is dialectally

related to people in the community—and to the pastoral agents. An interpretation of reality emerges from a re-reading of the context. Pastoral theologians are unable to comprehend the full breadth of the context, which is precisely the reason for having a continual interaction of action-reflection with the community, which we believe is the praxis, and a transforming praxis.

Conclusion

In closing, we can say that teaching pastoral psychology with a Latin American perspective is that which begins from praxis, not from theory. It works contextually from a reality that is lived and experienced, it is ecumenical and interdisciplinary, it has an option for people and groups that are discriminated against and ignored, and it has the Kingdom of God and his justice as its horizon. Its educational methodology uses community participation as the subject of their own transformation and promotes equity, in which the relation of power emphasizes power-in-doing instead of power-over. Lastly, the teaching of pastoral psychology recognizes the proposals of the community in search of a new, transforming, freeing praxis that promotes hope.

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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz

1. Monitoring Theological Education

One of the most urgent tasks for theological education in the Americas is to permanently monitor its current status, given that we do not have hard data about the real characteristics of this educational aspect for which, in the majority of cases, the various countries do not have official statistics. In only a few cases, precisely in universities or institutions of higher education that include theological formation in their study plans, is it possible to find trustworthy information, which is dependent on its effective presence in the general educational plan. If governments do not perform this function, then we must ask, who should monitor what occurs in the field of theological education? The different organizations that bring together seminaries, universities and other kinds of schools, such as CETELA, ALIET and others, are taking concrete steps to integrate plans and programs that standardize educational guidelines for the tasks carried out by these institutions, whether they are large or small. But, at times, these do not have enough autonomy to be able to decide their own fate because they are at the mercy of denominational or confessional guidelines that sponsor them. Thus, there is not a great deal of objectivity in describing the reality of the schools because, for the most part, they follow the official ecclesiastical policies.

The Latin American Theological Commission, an initiative of the Latin American Council of Churches, and other entities such as World Vision and the Forum of Seminaries, are just the beginning of a process to properly monitoring theological education, in contrast to what is happening on other continents. Perhaps it is the historical influence of liberalism and liberal governments in the region that has caused churches to feel that creating long-term educational projects that in a real way demonstrate a solid and quantitatively measurable presence is not a part of their activity. Likewise, the confusion between *theological education* and *Christian education*, inherited from a certain interpretation of missionary practices, continue to cause many communities to suppose, in practice, that theological education is only attributable to pastors, to the clergy, that is, to people who are dedicated “full-time to theology.”

The Latin American Biblical University (Costa Rica), the ISEDET University (Argentina), the Methodist University of São Paulo (Brazil) and the Martin Luther King Evangelical University (Nicaragua), which are the exceptions rather than the rule, exemplify intensive efforts to acquire a serious educational profile, beyond the inclinations that have been the educational norms for church-dominated schools. The different organizations to which the institutions belong could well prepare annual or biannual reports about the state of theological education, for example, through specific assessments of the degree of insertion of graduates in church life and the effective transfer of what was learned to situations in the community. Otherwise, the divorce between seminaries and churches will continue in detriment of the new militant generations that need and demand a higher level of teaching and preaching. Some countries, such as Argentina and Brazil, have reached certain goals regulated by access to the records in the national educational institutions. Others, such as Mexico, Peru and Chile, still live in the uncertainty that the graduates from their seminaries can only exercise a theological profession in the church environment, because outside of the church their studies are not recognized. Some others, like Paraguay or Belize, do not have sufficient representation in the spectrum of the associations of institutions.

In some spaces, the models of “united seminaries” or “theological communities” did not take shape and the dispersion of denominational efforts means that there is a multiplication of

unconnected efforts that do not adequately crystallize because of their low level of formation. The best people in each institution struggle in an environment where there is a lack of interest to achieve better educational standards. The difficulty in using other languages (mainly English) to access theological literature from other parts of the world is a great handicap for many students who are unable to update their education and are obliged to wait for basic textbooks to be translated. And to this is added the increasingly limited possibility of carrying out postgraduate studies; due to the well-known remoteness of their countries and communities the problem becomes an authentic disaster for theological education in Latin America. No one can deny that the explosion of Latin American theology in the 1970s and 1980s failed to achieve an adequate expression, or a solid and permanent transformation, in terms of making progress in theological formation. Because of this, there seems to be an urgent need to better articulate integration efforts in aspects such as curriculum equalization through managing equivalents between courses taught in the different institutions. The old system of “Bible institutes,” which is still practiced in some local churches, has left a profoundly ambiguous impact; and its legacy should be discussed in order to understand that this exhausted model is one more sign of the way in which the socio-economic and political systems have had an irreversible impact on new generations of pastors and church directors. Theological education at the gender level is another variable that is forcefully hitting the sectors that refuse to recognize the ecclesiastical status of women students in seminaries, and later, the women students do not find adequate opportunity to put into practice what they have learned. Even when this problem has been favorably channeled in countries that you never would have imagined (such as Guatemala), the enrollment of women has not increased proportionally to the female population in the churches. Unfortunately, the more traditional communities are permeated with an association of the female figure to teaching children and subordination to the power of men, and submission to authority is still the rule.

2. Theological Education in the Framework of Public and Private Education

The importance of statistics for evaluating reading capabilities and other basic skills apparently has no equivalence in theological education. This is one of the enormous challenges for those who study these problems. The interpretative canons or frameworks of categories for analyzing these problems continue to be inserted in the ecclesiastical dynamic: training for mission and evangelization, adequate Bible knowledge, pastoral training for dealing with family situations, optimal psychological management of conflicts, among others. This analytical blockade hinders perspectives for overcoming the natural limitations of theological education itself, that is to say, by being at the service of the churches “extra-ecclesiastical” factors are not assessed, such as the educational level of students when they enter a program of formal theological education, or the sometimes very apparent disconnection between that and the real problems of public and private education. Strictly speaking, theological education corresponds to the system of *private* education and, therefore, responds to some of its characteristics, but on the other hand, it includes some elements of *public* education, which is also problematic. In other words, the indiscriminate increase of theological education institutions corresponds to a similar situation in the non-religious area and to the difficulties faced by governments to regulate said increase. In Costa Rica, for example, a country with a population of almost five-million people, the number of private schools is very disproportionate and the quality of education is seen to be decreasing. By taking on the educational task as a profitable business, the businessmen that open private schools must lower costs and they do that precisely at the expense of the “product” they offer. So, when there is a multiplication of theological schools there is not much hope for maintaining standardized educational levels, including those that are called “universities.” To the point that we can assess the current development, it appears that only in Brazil and

Nicaragua has it been understood that a Christian (or Evangelical) university, in order to be worthy of being called a university, must teach not only theology or religion, but as in other countries must include a wide variety of majors for professional education in harmony with the diversification of social needs.

The previous insistence on what was called popular education has evolved towards the acceptance—tacit or explicit—in which, in the final case, the formation for performing pastoral work does not necessarily require optimal knowledge of theological developments. Given that the “success” of new churches is being observed, the predominant tendency is to be annoyed when “pastoral candidates” are “contaminated” by theology and begin to develop critical perspectives about their own work. When this happens, you don’t have to wait long for complaints from churches and communities. To mention some general cases, they argue: “When they went to study they were passionate about evangelization. When they returned, they only wanted to be critical intellectuals and they neglect their communities.” This apparent lack of balance between the church reality and theological studies is the religious and church face of the conflict experienced between higher education (university) and real social needs: production, competitiveness, economic reality, promotion of a business spirit, and so on. Churches consider themselves to be a business that sends their future leaders to be educated with a productive mentality that guarantees their immediate incorporation in the processes of ideological reproduction of the “symbolic goods of salvation.” The assessment of the work of graduates of theological education institutions is made based on their capacity to understand and carry out the mechanisms of numerical and economical growth demanded by the church or denomination.

It is to be expected that, as the years pass, some institutions will continue to be stable and cohesive, and that in other areas, where it has been very difficult to understand the function of theological education institutions, effective service projects are developed not only for churches, but also for society, in the sense that theology itself, as an interdisciplinary and inclusive discipline, can and should contribute its transforming word from the humility of its specificity, but also from its vocation as the interpreter of a divine will of permanent humanization in every area of experience.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR LIFE

Ross Kinsler⁸

The year 2008 marks several global milestones for theological education and the ecumenical movement. The office of Ecumenical Theological Education (formerly the Theological Education Fund and the Program on Theological Education) of the World Council of Churches is celebrating 50 years of engagement with theological education, including the formation of some 25 regional associations of theological institutions, provision of funding and other resources for many of those associations and institutions, and dialogue with them on critical theological and missional issues. The World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions, which has for 20 years provided global coordination among these associations, held its quadrennial in Greece in June 2008 under the theme, “Theological Education: A Radical Reappraisal.”

Theological education in general and this network in particular are facing growing needs and significant cutbacks in resources. At such a time, instead of pulling back or turning inward, stakeholders may rather turn outward with new visions and proposals for theological education for God’s mission in the world of the 21st Century. This paper is intended to initiate a conversation about a critical challenge, an extraordinary opportunity, and a concrete proposal for new directions in ecumenical theological education.

There can be no question about the urgent threats to life that we and our children all must face. Economic injustice, the unprecedented concentration of wealth and deepening of poverty, is the main cause of unnecessary death by hunger, treatable diseases, and impure water supplies of 30,000 to 50,000 people every day. We must find a way for the human race as a whole to overcome this blight on our very being as a human race. The ecological crisis, in particular the threat of global warming, is finally entering our consciousness, but there is still little evidence that we will make the necessary changes to avert immeasurable disaster in the next 30 to 50 years. The instability caused by these two evils, economic polarization and ecological destruction, exacerbates the perennial political and military threats to peace globally and regionally. All three dimensions of today’s struggle for life challenge theological education to clarify its peculiar response, in cooperation with many others, to the burning need, overall, of education for life.

A CRITICAL CHALLENGE

Diversified Theological Education—Equipping All God’s People

Twenty-five years ago the WCC and Orbis Books published *Ministry by the People: Theological Education by Extension*, a collection of 29 reports of TEE programs around the world. This year (2008) has seen the publication of *Diversified Theological Education: Equipping All God’s People*, an anthology of 13 case studies of very diverse programs of theological education in very diverse contexts (William Carey International University Press). These publications demonstrate that there are creative possibilities for our theological schools and their partners that can equip large numbers of leaders in our churches and communities.

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The challenge of decentralized, contextual theological education is to consider carefully—in response to the current threats to life--what are the priorities for God’s mission in today’s world, what new theological foci and educational models are called for, what agents of human and ecological transformation offer greatest possibilities.

Health Education by Extension—Primary Healthcare

In *Ministerial Formation 5* (1979), under the title, “Ministry by the People,” we published a critical challenge comparing Theological Education by Extension and new developments in health education. We had discovered that remarkable parallels between the two were developing right in Central America, where we were working. In both fields the dominant, Western approach was providing high level academic formation for a few professionals, but this was not resolving the basic health needs or pastoral needs in poor countries. In fact it was limiting or excluding the participation of ordinary people, disqualifying them for these essential tasks, which were (and are) the almost exclusive responsibility of the corresponding professionals. In response to this analysis the World Health Organization of the United Nations and the Christian Medical Commission of the WCC decided to dedicate their resources to the training of local health promoters who had only very limited schooling but represented their communities most effectively. This was/is called Primary Health Care. Ronald and Edith Seaton captured that vision with their book, *Here’s How: Health Education by Extension* (William Carey Library, 1976). At the same time Theological Education by Extension was spreading rapidly, especially among poor countries, reaching out to the natural leaders of the churches and their communities. This might be called Primary Pastoral Ministry. Then we began to consider the possibility, undergirded by a holistic understanding of life and of the Gospel, that the churches might combine HEE and TEE. That possibility is yet to be explored.

Education for Self-Development—Ecological Economics

As in theological education and health education, ordinary people should be equipped as the primary agents of development, especially in poor areas where they must struggle to meet basic needs such as food, water, housing, sanitation. It has now become evident that we must update this concern for basic development in terms of wider economic and ecological realities. As we have noted, the struggle for life must deal with the major forces for death, which are economic injustice (poverty) and environmental destruction (including global warming). Response to these forces requires the full participation of civil society as well as governmental agencies, church professionals and members in general, community leaders of all kinds in all social and economic situations, for the wellbeing of present and future generations. So the real challenge is to work with the larger population on all three fronts: theology, health, and economics, which are integrally interrelated in both the Global North and the Global South. Each of these three can be greatly advanced through integration with other two.

AN EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY

To Overcome Dualisms—Holistic Good News

One of the greatest obstacles to participation in social and economic concerns is the long-standing divorce between the “material” and “spiritual” dimensions of life. We know, of course, that the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures do not make such a radical distinction but rather treat life holistically. The foundational experience of Israel as people of Yahweh was

the Exodus, the liberation of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, which has remained down through history--for Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others--as faith in a God who continues to liberate from social, economic, political, patriarchal, and military discrimination and bondage—not just from personal sin. The whole biblical story stands in marked contrast to the later “spiritualization” of the history of salvation and the continuing divorce of socioeconomic concerns from personal piety and collective worship. The churches and their theological institutions must enable their members to overcome this “great divorce” in order to proclaim and demonstrate holistic Good News for the 21st Century.

To Build A New Paradigm—Jubilee Spirituality

The challenge before all of us is to rediscover the holistic Good News that began with the Exodus, continued with Jesus’ life and teachings, death and resurrection, was experienced in the early church, and has reemerged periodically at significant times and places. One urgently needed paradigm for our time has been called Sabbath Economics or Jubilee Spirituality. The first great lesson for the Hebrew slaves, liberated from imperial Egypt, was the lesson of the manna and the introduction of the Sabbath Day (Exodus 16). All God’s people must take only their fair share of Earth’s bounty, so that there will be enough for everyone. Clearly, when some are allowed to accumulate more, which is the dominant note in today’s economy (the “free market”), many go hungry. Second, through the cancellation of debts and freeing of slaves in the Sabbath Year (Deuteronomy 15), God provided for the correction of the main economic mechanisms that create poverty and wealth. Third, the Priestly Tradition mandated the return of mortgaged lands and houses in the fiftieth year, the Jubilee Year, insuring economic, social, and spiritual wellbeing for all the families of Israel (Leviticus 25). This economic/social/spiritual thread runs not only through the Torah but also the prophets, the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation. Most dramatic is Jesus’ inaugural sermon in Luke, where he affirms that his mission is to bring Good News to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberation of the oppressed, all of which is summed up as proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor, the Jubilee (Luke 4:18-19). At Pentecost Jesus’ followers, empowered by the Spirit, enacted the Jubilee challenge by sharing all their possessions (Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-35). The Apostle Paul cited the lesson of the manna in his exhortation to the Corinthian believers to share generously of their abundance for the benefit of needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8-9).

To Broaden and Deepen Participation—Mass Movement for Transformation

Theological education committed to such a vision of education for life, life abundant for all, would need the full collaboration of theological institutions at upper academic levels and their graduates, the many, diverse pastoral or Bible institutes, and the churches’ leadership training programs. It would have to develop, with the churches and relevant social sectors, a massive movement for social and ecological transformation. The potential for such a movement is evident among the base ecclesial communities of Latin America, the African Instituted Churches, and Pentecostal or charismatic churches around the world. It is also evident at the World Social Forum, which each year gathers hundreds of thousands of activists from around the world, including secular and religious and inter-religious movements. To pursue a holistic vision, theological education might combine the best elements and models of Theological Education by Extension, Health Education by Extension, and Education for Self-Development. It would need to be empowered by an awakening such as took place at Pentecost, a new evangelization that would incorporate all God’s people in that struggle for life, for Jubilee, for holistic salvation.

A CONCRETE PROPOSAL

For Theological Colleges and Seminaries

Many theological institutions have already engaged in Theological Education by Extension, but too often this is seen as marginal and secondary, not central and primary. We may have overcome the longstanding dualisms of Western culture, at least intellectually, but almost none of our programs have even begun to incorporate healthcare and self-development in their curricula. We have not succeeded in projecting widely a holistic vision capable of overcoming the ideology of individualism, neoliberalism, and empire. There are innumerable programs and projects for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation, but there is still no massive movement for integral human and ecological development. There is only a very limited debate about such concerns, at a time of unbridled economic imperialism, militarism, materialism, and ecological disaster.

Proposal: The regional associations of theological education might gather information about existing programs and materials dedicated to holistic human and ecological development, including decentralized, contextual programs of theological, health, and development education, share that information among member institutions and sister associations, and explore new possibilities in this direction.

For the Churches

Ultimately the churches carry primary responsibility for mobilizing and educating God's people for God's mission in today's world. There have been excellent initiatives toward justice in the global and local economy and justice in the Earth, such as the 2004 Letter from Accra of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. But many congregations have yet to make such matters central to their worship, educational programs, and ministries. Most members of these congregations have yet to realize that their daily lives are the primary frontier for God's mission, the struggle for life, abundant life for all, i.e., the elimination of poverty and oppression. We all can and should become primary agents for the biblical Jubilee.

Proposal: Local churches and their regional and national bodies might reexamine their mission statements and programs, separately and ecumenically, in terms of the great struggles for life in the 21st Century, identify advances and obstacles in those struggles, and consider how they can contribute to the building of a mass movement for transformation.

For Non-Governmental Organizations

As our churches are forced to cut back on their service ministries, we need to explore the possibility of linking these ministries more directly with non-governmental entities that mobilize enormous resources and programs around the world. Insofar as the churches and theological schools take seriously the integral relationship between the so-called spiritual and the so-called material and pursue a common, holistic vision or paradigm for the Good News, these ties between the churches and NGOs can be enormously productive for the life of all God's people and all God's creatures. Consider the potential of engaging all people of concern with at least one of the following: Christian Aid, Bread for the World, World Vision, Amnesty International, Heifer International, Habitat for Humanity, the Green Belt Movement of Africa, the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, Oikocredit, and many more. These non-governmental organizations are engaged in building self-generating networks that reach out to

local villages and barrios across large regions. The churches and the NGOs together might multiply many times their potential for life abundant for all God's people.

Proposal: One or more NGOs could set aside a special fund to provide for an office of coordination to work with the World Council of Churches' program for Ecumenical Theological Education and the regional associations of theological schools in the launching of the proposals identified here, with the understanding that this proposal itself is intended to bridge the long-standing separation of development education, health education, and theological education and their funding channels.

SOME EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Current analyses of our world, from the local to the global, cannot help but be pessimistic. The forces of death and destruction seem at times to be recalcitrant and overwhelming. At the same time we can find multiple resources for the defense and pursuit of life, i.e., for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation . . . for hope. The following paragraphs will describe some of the latter, starting from a North American perspective and relating necessarily to both the Global North and the Global South. We recommend that others undertake a similar exercise, whatever their starting point. Just look around you for publications and networks, even appeals for funding, and consider ways in which literally millions like us can engage in education for life. In all these examples our underlying assumption is that the primary resource for human and ecological transformation is the people . . . ourselves. And we the people bring to these challenges our faith and our commitment to abundant life for all. These samples point to a much wider number of publications and networks that can provide a curriculum of Education for Life that goes beyond charity to systemic, personal, social, and ecological justice.

1. The May/June 2008 issue of *WorldArk (Ending Hunger, Saving the Earth)*, which is the main publication of Heifer International, focuses on "Our Carbon Hoofprint: The fragile balance between livestock and the environment." Up to 20% of global greenhouse gases are produced by the livestock industry, specifically industrial production of meat. On the other hand Third World farms that sustain millions of farmers and their families, produce meat and pollution on a very small scale, which is where Heifer helps to reduce the environmental footprint through agroecology, the sustainable use of natural resources. The genius of Heifer's struggle for life is the focus of "Passing on the Gift," by which all recipients of livestock make their commitment to give their first animal offspring to other needy families, thus creating self-generating chains of economic, social, ecological, and spiritual development. Heifer hopes to reach ten million families in this decade. (www.heifer.org)

2. The same issue of *WorldArk* deals with "Water: Why water matters." One of the great challenges of our time is the pursuit of safe water for all, but current statistics indicate that by the year 2025 some 3.4 billion people will still be living in "water-scarce" countries. "Unsafe water and lack of sanitation are major factors underlying many of the 10 million child deaths every year." The International Decade for Action: "Water for Life" 2005-2015 calls upon all of the world's people to respond to this challenge.

3. The Number 1, 2008 issue of *Global Future (A World Vision Journal of Human Development)* treats "Improving sanitation for the world's poor" as a matter of life and death. Diseases related to poor hygiene kill five million people a year, mostly children, but "better sanitation could reduce diarrhea-related morbidity by more than one third, and

improved hygiene, such as proper hand-washing, can halve the rate of diarrheal disease and respiratory tract infections in the first place.” One of the Millenium Development Goals is to provide safe water for all by 2015. The UN has declared 2008 the International Year of Sanitation. “Every dollar spent improving sanitation creates an average return of \$9.10.” Surely we the people are the main resource for saving millions of lives each year in response to this challenge. (www.globalfutureonline.org)

4. The Number 2, 2007 issue of *Global Future* deals with the question, “Can we close the education gap?” Another Millenium Development Goal is to provide universal primary education by the year 2015, but current results indicate that 75 countries won’t achieve that goal by 2100, much less by 2015. Today 800 million adults are unable to read and write. 80 million children, mostly girls, are not in school. “Education is a basic human right. Education is critical for lifting people out of poverty, generating economic growth, fighting ill health (including HIV) and improving people’s (especially women’s) ability to realize their rights.” There has been significant progress. “Since 2000, 37 million more children have entered the school gates. Brazil, Nicaragua, Cambodia, South Africa and the Gambia have all seen the number of children completing primary school increase by 20%.” “The Global Campaign for Education pressures governments and the international community to deliver on their promises of quality, free, compulsory education for all.” The G8 have promised that no country should fail for lack of funding. But here again the people and their families and communities must play the primary role.

5. The Spring 2008 *Food First News & Views* reports on the 2007 activities of its Institute for Food and Development Policy and plans for 2008. The lead article affirms “Agrofuels mania hijacks food prices (and degrades the land, water and air): a loss for eaters . . . huge profits for big agribusiness and big oil.” It includes an article on “From Food Rebellions to Food Sovereignty: Urgent call to fix a broken food system.” To solve the food crisis this article proposes Step 1: Reactivate the peasant sector in the Global South, Step 2: Moratorium on Agrofuels, Step 3: Rebuild national food economies, and Step 4: Prioritize Agroecology. Concerned people of the Global North and the Global South can participate in these recommendations. (www.foodfirst.org)

6. The June 2008 issue of *Habitat World* provides extended stories of low cost housing projects in Latin America and brief reports from around the world. Habitat for Humanity has already built or improved homes for one million needy families, largely through volunteer labor, in all 50 states of the U.S. and over 80 other countries. “Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit, Christian housing ministry that works both to eliminate poverty housing around the world and to make adequate housing a matter of conscience and action. Habitat welcomes to the table partners from any faith—or from no faith—who are willing to pick up a hammer to help improve the lives of families needing decent shelter.” (www.habitat.org)

7. The Summer 2008 issue of *Christian Aid News* reports on efforts to aid cyclone victims in Burma and earthquake victims in China--and news from Haiti, Zimbabwe, Peru, and Brazil. An NGO in the UK, “Christian Aid works with the world’s poorest people in around 50 countries, regardless of race or faith. [It tackles] the causes and consequences of poverty and injustice.” It has played a major role in advocating Third World debt cancellation and demanding more just trade arrangements, and it is now involved in the international campaign concerning climate change, “calling for a fair deal for the world’s poor.” Christian Aid is known for mobilizing massive support for its concerns and related legislation. (www.christianaid.org.uk)

8. The May 2008 issue of *Sojourners* focuses on “Faith and Your Finances.” “The mission of *Sojourners* is to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world.” The economic anxiety of many in the U.S. today is only exceeded by the Great Depression of the 1930s due to exorbitant gasoline prices, falling home values, the sub-prime mortgage crisis, grocery inflation, bank failures, job losses, etc. At such a time people of faith need to examine their spiritual roots and seek biblical guidance. The resources gathered here are both theoretical and practical, in order to build the movement for justice and peace we are all called to build. (www.sojo.net)

9. *Presbyterians Today* is one of dozens of denominational magazines. Its June/July 2008 issue has a cover story on “Proclaim Freedom! The fight against modern-day slavery.” The editor comments, “The number of people enduring the horrors of slavery today is higher—by millions—than the total number of Africans enslaved from the 16th to the 19th Centuries.” She calls ours “a sin-infested world” and reminds us that Jesus “confronted this world by feeding and healing and loving—and empowering his followers to do the same.” This issue presents “A Social Creed for the 21st Century,” which has just been drafted and presented for adoption at this year’s General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and at other denominational and inter-denominational gatherings on the 100th Anniversary of “a similar document to address harsh working conditions spawned by the Industrial Revolution.” It also includes reports and reflections on a new mission initiative, “Joining Hearts & Hands,” which seeks to raise significant funding for new church developments in the U.S. and mission efforts around the world, including ecumenical projects and inter-religious dialogue. It includes the work and witness of many individuals and organizations across the church, which has over 11,000 local congregations, for economic and ecological justice and spiritual integrity. (www.pcusa.org/today)

10. *Oikocredit: Investing in People* is the newsletter published by the Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society based in the Netherlands. It is a service to economically disadvantaged people around the world who need access to small amounts of money for their development projects and for their own survival. The 2007/1 issue celebrates the awarding of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for 2006 to Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which after three decades had 6.6 million borrowers, 97% of them women, with 2226 branches among Bangladesh’s 71,371 villages. Loans average \$130; the bank has made more than 5.7 billion in loans; about two-thirds of the depositors are themselves borrowers. Oikocredit is also a service to investors who want their funds to serve just causes in partnership with banks, other financial institutions, cooperatives, credit unions, and non profit organizations. (www.oikocredit.org)

11. The focus of the Fall 2007 issue of *Yes! (Building a Just and Sustainable World)* is “Stand Up to Corporate Power.” The purpose of this quarterly journal “is to support you and other people worldwide in building a just, sustainable, and compassionate world. Each issue of *Yes!* looks at a different theme through the lenses of “New Visions,” “World & Community,” “The Power of One,” and “Breaking Open.” The Board of Directors, chaired by Founder David Korten and Executive Director Frances Korten, is called Positive Futures Network, which pursues the hope for that positive future. Additional articles in the Fall 2007 issue are “Who Will Rule?” “Communities Take Power,” “Who’s Standing Up?” “Common Knowledge,” “Democracy Unlimited,” “5 Ways to get Free,” and “Protecting Our Commons.” A list of organizations, grassroots

actions, and films is provided under the heading, “How to Take on Corporations.” (www.yesmagazine.org)

12. Bread for the World’s April-May 2008 newsletter, *Bread*, summarizes the organization’s “Values and Priorities for 2009” and affirms “U.S. commitments to fight global hunger and poverty must be reflected in the federal budget.” This issue includes a Background Paper on “Getting Out Of Poverty For Good.” Contributions designated for the Bread for the World Institute, which does research on causes of and solutions for hunger, are tax exempt. Funding for political action and lobbying, which are major efforts toward ending hunger, are not. In recent years BFW has partnered with other charities, Christian and Jewish groups, universities, corporations, and unions to build a movement to overcome hunger, called the ONE Campaign. The exciting challenge to all of us is expressed by Bread for the World in these words: “Hunger is one problem we can actually solve!” (www.bread.org)

13. The Summer 2008 issue of *Amnesty International* “reflects the dizzying pace of our activism.” Articles illustrate a “rich variety of tactics . . . letter campaigns, Congressional lobbying, research and reporting, and multi-media educational tools” in response to the critical human rights issues of our time. Among them are the International Criminal Court, the death penalty, prostitution and sex trafficking, torture interrogation, Darfur genocide, human rights records in 150 countries, Guantanamo, etc. Every one of us can be in touch with at least one of these concerns. (www.amnestyusa.org)

14. *NACLA Report on the Americas* is published bimonthly by the North American Congress on Latin America, which was “founded in 1966 to research the political economy of the Americas and U.S. policy toward the region”—seen from the region. The July/August 2008 issue offers extensive reports on AIDS in that region under the title, “A Cautious Hope: HIV/AIDS in Latin America.” It also comments on the global food situation, the new ex-bishop president of Paraguay, and mercenary recruiters in Latin America for the Iraq war. (www.nacla.org)

15. The Summer 2008 issue of the *Co-op America Quarterly* provides extensive lists of recommendations for energy efficiency, beginning with the home (Level 1: Simple Things You Can Do Today; Level 2: A Little More Time, A Lot More Savings; Level 3: Bigger Changes, Better Paybacks) and going beyond the home. “Co-op America is dedicated to creating a just and sustainable society by harnessing economic power for positive change.” Its programs are designed to “educate people about how to use their spending and investing power to bring the values of social justice and environmental sustainability into the economy.” In addition to the *Quarterly*, Co-op publishes *National Green Pages*, “a 200-page directory of products and services for people and the planet,” and *Real Money*, a bi-monthly newsletter. (www.coopamerica.org)

This brief list of resources—primarily from the North—for Theological Education for Life can of course be multiplied many times over, perhaps hundreds of times, in many different places. The critical question is, How can ordinary people like us—all of us—be engaged and equipped through these and other resources personally in the struggle for life, near and far, all around the world, with particular concern for Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. Such resources can help us learn to apply our own resources—our energy, our relationships, our material resources, our organizing potential, our imagination, our spirituality—to educate ourselves and others in the struggle for life. This challenge might turn into an awakening of vast proportions, and the awards for ourselves and

others can be limitless. We might even discover that this is essentially how we will find deeper meaning for our own lives and hope for our world.

SOME EDUCATIONAL MODELS

This paper carries a sense of urgency and a call to action. The loss and diminution of life have reached unconscionable levels, but there are growing resources dedicated to the reversal of those trends. We now turn to existing and possible educational models. Some are explicitly theological or ecclesiological; others are not; but all can be considered in the struggle for life that we all must face. In order to give concrete meaning to this conversation, we have chosen to start with reference to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) promoted by the United Nations and undersigned by most of the countries of the world. Realistic or not, these goals direct our attention to evident, urgent needs for the survival of millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, indeed, for the planet as we know it.

At the Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 Heads of State and Governments firmly committed to work together and build a safer, more prosperous and equitable world for all by 2015. They adopted eight Millennium Development Goals that put people-centered development at the heart of global, national and local agendas.

The purpose of this campaign is to build political will for the achievement of these eight goals. It makes the dramatic affirmation that these goals can be achieved by 2015 if governments are held accountable for their promises.

- 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
- 2. Ensure that all boys and girls complete primary school**
- 3. Promote gender equality and empower women**
- 4. Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five**
- 5. Reduce by three quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth**
- 6. Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and incidence of malaria and other major diseases**
- 7. Ensure environmental sustainability**
- 8. Develop a global partnership for development**

Subsequent studies have indicated that many countries are falling behind in their commitments. Nevertheless all people of conscience may find in this campaign some of the greatest challenges facing this generation. The underlying problem for achieving all of these goals is, of course, poverty, i.e., the unjust distribution of resources. But the Executive Coordinator of the campaign, Eveline Herfkens, declares, “We are the first generation that can eradicate poverty, and we refuse to miss this opportunity.” How then are we going to engage and equip the whole human family, together with our governments and civil society and faith communities, to achieve these goals? Following are some educational models that individually and together could offer widespread possibilities, if they were part of a concerted, mass movement for life. Many of these examples have yet to deal directly with the Millennium Development Goals; we are dealing here with the potential use of these educational models toward that end.

- 1. *The Church of the Savior* in Washington, D.C. pursues a vision remarkably different from the predominant concern among most churches in the U.S. for numerical growth. Size is not important. Members make discipleship commitments and participate in diverse mission communities as their primary focus for worship and action. Their Servant**

Leadership School offers serious biblical, theological, and pastoral training throughout the year. This model is emulated across the country, but it might be extended much more widely. It could be linked directly to the Millennium Development Goals to great effect.

2. **The Base Ecclesial Communities** throughout Latin America offer a dramatic contrast to the historic Catholic Church in that region. Supported by some bishops and priests but rejected by others, this model depends primarily on the believers, in most cases campesinos with very limited schooling, much less theological education. They gather regularly to reflect on their life situations in light of the Scriptures, build their communities, and carry one another's burdens as children of God.
3. Widely used around the world by groups and institutions of all kinds is the **Hermeneutical Circle**, also known as the **Pastoral Circle**. The three basic components, which can be pursued in any order, are social analysis, biblical-theological reflection, and pastoral action. Each component leads to and is reinforced by the other two. The immediate context may be worship, study, planning, devotions, or a special occasion. Most important is immersion in the given reality of oppression and liberation, locally and more widely.
4. **Paulo Freire** is no doubt the most influential educator of the past century, notably for his concept of **conscientization**, which can take place among the poorest and least schooled and can fail to take place among the most advantaged and highly schooled. It is fundamentally a matter of awakening to one's human identity and dignity in the face of surrounding forces of alienation and oppression. It can be considered spiritual, for it is transformational.
5. **The Rail Fence Analogy**, which is widely used by Theological Education by Extension, focuses the learning process on three interrelated elements that are readily available without leaving normal living situations. Materials for guided, ongoing, independent study are like one rail of the fence; practical experience that runs parallel to that study is the other ongoing rail; and regular group meetings are the posts that hold up and integrate and confirm and deepen learnings from these two rails at regular intervals. Critical is the motivation and guidance that these three elements produce when they are balanced and oriented by the purpose and seriousness of the fence—such as the MDG.
6. Insofar as we are working toward the Millennium Development Goals, which call for the elimination of poverty, we must of necessity deal with the question of **Nonviolence**. Conflict is inevitable, but in the tradition of Gandhi and Jesus it can lead us to nonviolent, direct action, action that seeks not retributive justice but restorative justice, even to the extent of loving our enemies, of accepting suffering rather than meting it out. Recent years have witnessed the widespread success of nonviolence to resolve deep, longstanding conflicts in Poland, East Germany, the Ukraine, South Africa, the Philippines, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere. It can become an essential ingredient of Theological Education for Life.
7. The current **Jubilee** movement has intensified around the world in relation to the year 2000, which is considered to be a Jubilee year. According to Leviticus 25 the Jubilee should be celebrated every 50 years with the cancellation of debts and devolution of properties and freeing of slaves, restoring to all the families of Israel the means for economic, social, and spiritual wellbeing. Organizations in the Global North and the Global South have taken up this challenge widely, though it takes on different forms in the

perception and pursuit of those ideals, which are closely related to the Millennium Development Goals. This movement utilizes legislative advocacy, public protest, journalism, educational events, and other kinds of activism. Some churches encourage their congregations to take up these means and identify themselves as Jubilee congregations.

8. Since the 1960s *Community Organizing* has become the most widespread approach to urban mission in the U.S.A., both secular and religious. Through countless individual and small group and larger meetings, people build relationships and power to solve problems and improve their lives. Sociologist Saul Alinsky worked with unions and churches to establish city-wide organizations, most notably the Industrial Areas Foundation. He used a pedagogy of empowerment for transformation through continuing cycles of action leading to reflection and reflection leading to further action.
9. One of the most remarkable models of Education for Life comes from a national movement in Venezuela called “*El Sistema*” (The System). Children are recruited at a very young age, primarily from poor barrios, for a large network of youth orchestras. They are given instruments and lessons at no cost, supported by the national health department. Participation generates a high level of motivation and pride. Enrollment has passed 250,000 and is headed toward one million. Performances are given by local orchestras; the National Youth Orchestra, which selects the best players, has performed in top scenarios across Europe and North America. The movement already has a spin-off in Los Angeles called the Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles, and a graduate of the Venezuela Youth Orchestra, Gustavo Dudamel, will soon become the Director of the LA Philharmonic Orchestra. At stake in this movement is not simply training in instrumental music but personal and social transformation—the ability to learn complex skills, to work with a group toward a common goal, to make a meaningful contribution to the community, to celebrate beauty and meaning for life.
10. For many of us—especially in Latin America and South Africa, among women and racial-ethnic minorities, and in general among the poor—a critical element of Theological Education for Life is *a Biblical Hermeneutic of Liberation*. The liberation paradigm requires a methodological shift in which the Bible is read from the perspective of the poor and marginalized and oppressed, the non-persons, with a message of liberation and fullness of life for all God’s people. The Bible is not to be relegated to “religious” and “spiritual” matters but is fundamentally concerned about social relations, economics, and human wholeness in community—locally, globally, and ecologically.

No doubt this entire exercise raises more questions than answers. What is the relevance of current seminary mission statements, curricula, and educational models in the face of 21st Century realities? What is the relevance of the challenges and proposals, resources, and educational models listed above for the mission of the churches and their theological institutions? What changes are needed, and what changes are realistically possible? What next steps in this conversation might be recommended?

The churches and their theological institutions may well be considered very minor players in world affairs or even national and local affairs. But the critical issues of our time call upon all sectors to do whatever we can for the sake of economic justice, ecological sustainability, and peace—before it is too late to halt or reverse the rampant forces of death. So we have begun this conversation about Theological Education for Life, about contributing to the mass movement for change that is absolutely necessary for the wellbeing of humankind and the

environment. Surely our churches and theological institutions have more to contribute, drawing on our many faith traditions, prophetic movements, and inter-religious partnerships. The recent collapse of Wall Street and global financial markets will no doubt aggravate the failure of our economic structures to overcome the plague of poverty, the failure to provide minimal sustenance for one third of the world's population. The global ecological prognosis is even more devastating, comparable only to the great extinctions 65 million years ago, when the dinosaurs and many other species disappeared. And the global domination of the military-industrial-media establishment, in the face of its own demise, promises only more conflict and alienation. These three areas converge and reinforce each other. They call upon all of us to offer light, hope, education for life for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren.

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

LISTENING TO LEARN

Education as a journey to discover the other - a short meditation from indigenous background

Antonio Otzoy⁹

How do we train our ears to develop their capacity to listen?

Listening originates in the brain. Listening leads us to understanding; understanding leads us to learning.

Listening begins in the heart; learning to listen is learning to sympathize with others, to affirm one's support with another.

If there is no keen listening, there is no understanding and no learning.

Listening expands our horizons, our life experiences.

The act of listening captures the harmony of life. In the midst of so much noise, learning to discern that which is essential, that which is human, and that which is authentic. Learning to discern the painful groans of others, the exclamations of joy or creativity, the simplicity and the force of words that come from the depths of the human experience.

Listening: Understand. Learn. Sympathize. Affirm support with others. A lifelong process.

BEGIN AND PERSEVERE

To begin and to persevere is to become educated. When starting this new stage, you must be grounded on your inner strength, so that the blossoming of the Spirit will bring your entire being into harmony.

It is assumed that it is easy to begin a project when you have all the needed resources and good educational planning. But a true beginning must start with the preparation of mind and spirit. Ignoring this step leads many people to initiate a project with a beginning that is precise and impeccable, but that is sterile—without happiness and without personal involvement.

Continual activity generates surprising results—but the people leading those projects experience permanent stress and show all kinds of physical and psychological symptoms: pain in the waist, tension in the shoulders, a stiff neck, insomnia, shattered nerves.

It is so easy to place more importance on the results than on life itself.

Because of this, it is important to persevere in learning. Every hour of every day we must be grounded on our interior strength—cultivate it, listen to it, let it illuminate our work. It is the Spirit who brings harmony to everything.

⁹ Antonio Otzoy is from indigenous background from the Maya culture in Guatemala

FOR A QUALITY THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION MANIFESTO

SERVICIOS PEDAGÓGICOS Y TEOLÓGICOS (SPT)¹⁰, (PEDAGOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SERVICES)

Matthias Preiswerk and others

1. To Promote a Debate

We are people committed to Theological Education (TE), taking as a starting point the diversity of our practices: from the classroom as well as from the church, from the university and from non-formal education, from research as well as from political commitment, from theology as well as from the science of religion, from somewhere in Abya Yala¹¹ or from other areas committed to this reality.

We start this document with an attempt to define what we mean for TE (Section 2), then we try to substantiate our choice and use of the term “quality” (3) within the challenges of the current situation (4), linking it to the quality of life (5), which is being increasingly threatened in our Abya Yala. We conceive of TE as a practice embedded in the Christian mission (6) as well as in general education (7), that seeks a way in which both spheres are to face out to the struggle for everyone to enjoy an abundant life. TE, as a systematic, rigorous effort, needs the critical support of theology and of pedagogy, as well as of many other disciplines. We point out some characteristics of a quality theology (9) and pedagogy (10), starting from a paradigm (8) suited to integrate both aspects in a liberating and intercultural framework. Finally, we relate some of the particular characteristics of a quality TE (11) with the institutions (12) in which it can be achieved, suggesting some possible uses of this manifesto (13).

¹⁰ The Manifesto was published Christmas 2007 and made available by PTS. Pedagogical and Theological Services (PTS) is available to accompany and coordinate the development of this kind of initiative, taking into consideration the particular reality of each institution, and has qualified professionals to assist in this area. Those people interested can write to serviciospt@gmail.com. The manifesto, the fruit of a collective reflection that was encouraged by PTS, was endorsed by and enriched by individual contributions from the following individuals: Nancy E. Bedford, Theologian, Argentina and the USA; Heinz Bichsel, Theologian, Switzerland; Fernando Bortoletto F., Theologian, Brazil; Beatriz Cajías, Educator, Bolivia; María Chávez, Theologian, Bolivia; Víctor Codina, Theologian, Bolivia; Manoel Bernardino de Santana F., Theologian, Brazil; Hans de Wit, Theologian, The Netherlands; Wanda Deifelt, Theologian, Brazil and the USA; José Duque, Theologian, Costa Rica; Welvi Enríquez, Theologian, Uruguay; Benito Fernández, Educator, Bolivia; Raúl Fonet Betancourt, Philosopher and Theologian, Cuba and Germany; Verena Grüter, Theologian, Germany; Dante Ibáñez, Educator and Theologian, Argentina; Nelson Kirst Theologian, Brazil; Néstor Míguez, Theologian, Argentina; Anaida Pascual, Educator, Puerto Rico; Mattias Preiswerk, Theologian and Educator, Bolivia; Luis Rivera-Pagán, Theologian, Puerto Rico; Jairo Roa, Theologian and Economist, Colombia; Juan Sepúlveda, Theologian, Chile; Guillermo Steinfeld, Theologian, Argentina; Danilo Streck, Educator and Theologian, Brazil; Jung Mo Sung, Theologian and Philosopher, Brazil; Roberto Zwetsch, Theologian, Brazil

The following people also support this proposal: Nancy Cardoso, Theologian, Brazil; Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz, Theologian, Mexico; Abraham Colque, Theologian, Bolivia; José Luis Claure, Educator and Theologian, Bolivia; Alejandro Dausá, Theologian, Cuba; Jieun Kang, Philosopher, Paraguay; René Krüger, Theologian, Argentina; Janeth May, Theologian, Costa Rica; Violeta Rocha, Theologian, Nicaragua; Harold Segura, Theologian, Colombia; Elsa Támez, Theologian, Costa Rica; Cherie White, Theologian, Mexico

¹¹ Given the colonialist and Eurocentric bias of the words “America” and “Latin,” we join those who for years have used the Kuna expression “Abya Yala” to symbolically refer to Latin America and the Caribbean. In the Kuna language, an ethnic group of Panama and Colombia, Abya Yala means “land in its full maturity” or, according to some, “living land” or “flowering land.”

2. What We Mean by Theological Education

We understand TE to be part of the Church's mission of announcing and anticipating the Kingdom of God in history. It deals with a particular kind of education connected to the creative, organized and critical learning of those who reflect on their faith—that is, those who do theology—from the diversity of their gifts and ministries. TE differs from other responsibilities in the Christian community, such as initiation into faith, catechesis, liturgy, proclaiming the Good News and the diaconal, although it is supported by those. We propose a TE that is open to all believers, that is a constant throughout their lives, and affecting different spheres and degrees of specialization. To accomplish that, TE must dialogue with political practices, cultural expressions and the sciences committed to the defense of all aspects of life. We vindicate a TE that is articulated in a “jesuánica” theology {based on Jesus} and produced by a Church that is not self-centered but directed toward the Kingdom of God.

We envisage a TE devoted to encourage the defense of life; such TE need to be contextual, open, conversant, change-bearing, interdisciplinary and intercultural, that assumes and goes beyond traditions and cultures, as well as pastoral and particular educational models. In addition to being at the service of the churches, we would like a TE open to questioning by explicit or implicit theologies in the religious, cultural and contemporary traditions of Abya Yala. Thus, we are talking about a TE that is assumed within the framework of the Christian faith, but from an inter-religious context and perspective.

3. Why do we speak of Quality in Theological Education?

In this global world, the term “quality” is used frequently and in very diverse ways. Invariably, in every corner of our planet, people have tried to define what a “good education” would be, but the different approaches to quality are historically and culturally conditioned. In the 1980s, the neo-liberals imposed on education and other social practices a discourse of quality similar to the quest for “excellence” or “total quality” in the business world. Among other things, this approach aims to separate arbitrarily the technical from the political, as if education could be isolated from the social environment. However, despite our criticism, we appropriate some of the challenges posed by the quality trend. We want to adapt this language and its demands and refashion them from an ethical, political and theological perspective, as we think it would be beneficial to our experiences of TE and our churches.

We don't talk much about quality in theology. To do so, particularly from Abya Yala, we need to assume and overcome several tensions and contradictions. Following the example of Jesus, Christian quality would:

- Integrate the inspiring and transforming (*Pneuma*) Word with a normative discourse (*Logos*);
- Assume the creative tension between the faith of the people of God and the sophistication of a discourse regarding faith;
- Be nourished by the transforming struggle as well as a kind of mystical silence;
- Move between cultures with emerging rationality and the legacy of a dominant culture and rationality; and
- Know that “truth is done” {podría entenderse como algo que está hecho y no como algo que se hace} and that there is always the risk of being “imprisoned in injustice.”

To seek quality in the theological undertaking means combining the search for the *relevance* of theology in the context of the overwhelmingly pressing reality of Abya Yala, and to do it in a creative way as to the *pertinence* of a discipline that has its own epistemological identity and demands.

4. The Vulnerability of Theological Education Demands Greater Responsibility from Us

It is crucial that we respond for the quality of our work in Abya Yala, above all, in higher education, because it is becoming more difficult to justify the very existence of TE:

- Churches question us about the real service that we provide;
- Social movements pressure us to explain our relationship with their struggles;
- Ancestral and emerging cultures ask us about our complicity with the colonial past and with a present that is sometimes neocolonial and that influences the way of learning, teaching and investigating;
- Educational institutions (academic as well as non-formal) demand that we give an account of our pedagogy and didactics;
- Governments, through their respective ministries of education, impose ever stricter formal requirements on our institutions to grant recognition at the university level; and
- Funding agencies demand well-founded theological-pedagogical plans, as well as transparent and efficient financial administration.

Because of the vulnerability of TE we must demonstrate greater responsibility. To face this challenge we must relate the quality of TE with the general context, as well as with the practices, disciplines and paradigms that are a part of it.

5. For an Abundant Life

Within the Christian faith, life is lived as a gift, as something that precedes us, that continually transcends and transforms us, even beyond death. We remember that God is the author of life and that we are part of a Creation without boundaries, which includes all living beings in the world.

Quality of life is not a state of being, but a dynamic and relational goal: no one can achieve a true quality of life while the lives of others are threatened. The quality of life is integral: material and spiritual, physical and intellectual, moral and esthetic, personal and communal, natural and cultural. It embraces both needs and desires.

We recognize that, in general, our societies, cultures and churches do not guarantee, not even within themselves, an abundant life for everyone. On the other hand, neither do our practices or our theological and pedagogical projects always assume the centrality of life and its defense.

As Christians we catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God as the horizon of abundant life, of a shared and harmonious life. It is this utopia that moves us to craft a quality of life together with other cultures and beliefs that point to life. In every context, place and circumstance, we must discern how we can creatively articulate this utopia to different actors and movements within a particular project of the community, of society and of citizens. We recognize that, while pointing to this same utopia, we have different and even contradictory visions and practices depending on our social or cultural origin, our gender, generation, and so forth. We admit that such a diversity of utopian visions is conflictive.

Faced with the colonization of minds that intends to impose a dominant system, faced with the globalization of a belated capitalism, the “virtualization” of reality and the destruction as well as privatization of public spaces, we put our faith in quality education—including TE—capable of creating spaces that demonstrate ways of living that make it possible not only to resist these impositions, but to create a subjectivity that anticipates new life styles. The eschatological tension of faith and Christian theology—its inevitable dimension of hope—is the invitation to think, believe and work in terms of the “new human being,” of “the new creation in Christ.” In this way, the theological formation that we propose remains open to new experiences of faith, a renewed future—without remaining closed in predetermined systems or schemes, or to be won over by the ideology of a single system—which carries with it deep anthropological implications.

6. For a Transforming Mission

We understand by quality “mission” both a project and the practices of those who follow Christ, at the service of an abundant life, and the anticipation of the Kingdom. It is the Mission of God before it is the work of people or specific institutions. The mission, for Christians, must be a creating and transforming practice. Its quality emanates from its closeness and conformity with the practice of Jesus and all of those witnesses who, throughout history and in their own context, were inspired by the Holy Spirit and traveled, continued and actualized the same path.

Simultaneously, we recognize that the Christian mission always presents a contradictory aspect, which defines a permanent tension between the ideal and the real, between the coming of the Kingdom of God, the incompleteness of the person and the ambiguity of any human project. We see the mission to which we are indebted from the perspective of TE:

- A response to the Mission of God as a call or demand that precedes our initiatives;
- A Church that is selfless, at the service of the excluded and of an abundant life;
- Denouncing and resisting all powers (economic, political, religious, moral, sexist) that intend to become absolute;
- Development and participation in alternative and liberating social practices that lead us on paths to greater equity, justice, peace, non-violence and preservation of creation;
- Accompaniment and consolation of people who suffer; and
- Inclusion and integrality: an inclusive focus (at the service of all humanity) as well as integral (for all the dimensions of a person).

7. For an Education at the Service of Life

We are struggling for an education at the service of an abundant life, which means a continual and permanent high quality education for all people. By denouncing the divorce between quality and equity, we vindicate the democratic nature of education, the ethical concern for building responsible citizens and the struggle for living together in solidarity. We believe that, among many other criteria, quality education is sustained by:

- Diversity, accessibility and the permanence of diverse educational modalities and specializations throughout life;
- Critical knowledge of reality and the systematic nature of analysis;

- Emphasis on learning, on learning to learn, on learning to be, on learning to live together, and on learning to embark on a path that redounds in a culture of peace;
- Respect for the different ways in which people give sense to their life;
- Articulation for fair production, distribution and consumption of goods;
- Consistency between discourse, theory and practice;
- Social, cultural and citizen participation;
- Leadership and interdependence of the subjects in educational communities;
- Permanent evaluation of the leadership and of their goals in consideration of their pertinence and impact on specific contexts; and
- Construction of educator-student and of student-educator relations in agreement with a political project that improves the quality of life.

We inherit many of these challenges from the Popular Education movement.

8. For an Intercultural Paradigm

As a part of the political, pastoral and educational practices that point to quality of life, we relate TE to theology and pedagogy, and these to a broader paradigm within which they operate. This has to do with an epistemological framework in which different viewpoints and dimensions of action and human thought meet. Even at the risk of staying at a very abstract level, we tentatively describe this paradigm as:

- Inter/transdisciplinary and intercultural;
- Integral and multifaceted (multiplicity of forms of knowledge and the complexity of their relations);
- Includes many rationalities and human potentialities (emotional, cognitive, physical, spiritual, moral, intuitive, creative, etc.);
- Contextual and historical (articulated in historical circumstances and in economic, political, cultural, gender, etc., contexts)
- Problematic and transforming (toward changes that tend toward a greater quality of life for all people);
- Intuitive and unedited (open to unexplored dimensions of the person and of human life, of history, of other cultures, etc.); and
- Procedural, in an ascending spiral (that is, with successive interpretations, contextualized and transcending).

9. For a Liberated and Liberating Theology

We are putting our faith in a quality theology in which the practices, contents and methods are in permanent interaction. Its method, in addition to using the paradigm previously described, will present its particularities that are peculiar to hermeneutical, communal, ecumenical, and other spheres. A quality theology integrates and articulates from its context the emerging theologies with theologies that have interpreted the Christian faith in its multiple expressions throughout the history of the Church. The evangelical hallmark of this theology comes from a revelation intended more to “fools and children” than to “wise men and erudites.”

The community of faith produces and takes an active part in theology and is not only a recipient. Its activity articulates the technical and regulating role of the professional theologian, as well as of the Church or of church tradition.

We want a theology that critically assumes its own identity and specificity in dialogue and interaction with other theologies. In addition, in the context of an ethical and hopeful horizon, we will construct the quality of theology in dialogue with other spiritualities, sciences, cultural and ideological expressions. We will seek to assure some of the following dimensions, in the contents of a quality theology:

- Prophetic, sapiential, and mystical;
- Trinitarian, that is, in creative interaction between its theological, christological and pneumatological dynamic;
- Practical, biblical and hermeneutical;
- Provisional, because it is attentive to the grace that invades in an unexpected manner in different situations and circumstances;
- Liberated and liberating from intellectual, political and ecclesiastical systems that act against an abundant life;
- Inscribed in a specific tradition (theology is always conjugated in the plural, there is no theological synthesis that subsumes all of the particular traditions);
- Articulator of the spiritual with the political; and
- Open and receptive to the richness and teachings of other beliefs, worldviews and spiritualities.

Many of these theological characteristics were richly transmitted to us by the Latin American Theology of Liberation.

10. For a Pedagogy of Hope

A quality pedagogy is that which we are able to build and renew continually, from emerging educational experiences, without enclosing ourselves in any particular pedagogical current, but making it relevant in the specific context or circumstances. Such a pedagogy keeps a critical distance from educational practices, looking to accompany and strengthen its quality without legitimizing them. It is the fruit of permanent inter/transdisciplinary work with all the sciences and arts of education. We count on a rich tradition to produce quality from the pedagogies:

- Of hope, related to a broader political project;
- Of transformation and of context;
- Of diversity (diversified pedagogy depending on the subjects, knowledge, projects, methods, contents, types of learning, etc.);
- Of the dialogue of knowledge and cultural negotiation;
- Of creativity (assuming the multiplicity of expressions and promoting autonomous learning);
- Democratizing and democratic (in matters of human rights, culture of peace, gender equity, inter-generational, ethnicity, etc.);
- Of criticism, participation and dialogue;
- Popular, that is to say, attentive to the presence of excluded people, of those marginalized by power structures; connected to cultures produced by people who were ignored by consecrated knowledge.

11. For a Quality Theological Education

Expressed with the characteristics and criteria that we have already indicated, we closely relate TE with the search for the quality of life (personal, spiritual, institutional, political, etc.). We want to open TE to a multiplicity of actors who respond to charismas and ministries connected to different kinds of theological students and modalities of teaching. This means recognizing the diversity of needs, interests, intelligence and talents, according to gender, generation, culture, beliefs, sexual preference, and so forth, of each one. We want to translate the recognition of diversity into a coherent interaction between theological-pedagogical theory and practice.

If we propose a TE that would make a critical and constructive contribution to the mission of the Church, we will have to aim toward:

- A reciprocal or cross-fertilization between popular theology (communal, biblical, artistic, political) and the academic exercise of theology;
- Continuity and diversity of TE throughout all of life and in all environments;
- Resolution of the tension between vocation, critical reflection and acquisition of tools for Christian commitment in general and pastoral work in particular;
- Construction of bridges between theology and the pastorate, between ecclesiastical commitment and the transformation of society, between comfort and denouncement;
- Articulation and complementarity between the different areas of theological work;
- Critical, creative and interactive use of the principal mediations of theological work (spiritual, practical, hermeneutical); and

- Relevance and impact of TE (in the family, community, church, cultural, social, political, etc., context) in relation with the pertinence of theology as a discipline.

12. For Quality in Theological Education Institutions

We relate the quality of a TE institution with the quality of life and of TE itself. The kind of human relations within an institution foreshadows the climate and quality of its institutional life. Quality management in the institutional life is measured by the level of learning, security, welfare, mutual trust, initiative, as well as by other general criteria linked to an inclusive character, diversity and gender equity. The quality of management and of administration, regulated by planning, monitoring and evaluation techniques, is subject to the project and to the participative performance of TE. In other words, the administrative model also should respond to the criteria of service and pedagogical criteria in the search for a true learning community. Because relationships connected to knowledge are inevitably relations of power, the management of a quality TE institution needs:

- Democratic, political participation;
- A style of relations based on mutual trust and transforming professional commitment;
- Transparency, flexibility;
- A solidarity efficiency (as an alternative to that which is dictated by the desire for wealth);
- Empowerment of the various actors;
- Distribution of information;
- Sustainability (less dependence, more self-management);
- Etc.

13. How to Work with this Manifesto

The convictions and hopes that we express in this manifesto will have an impact and relevance only in the measure that the actors involved in TE make them theirs, restating them based on each context, church, educational instance, and specific actors. Numbers 5 and 12, and more concretely the last four, can serve as information for holding workshops where people involved in specific TE institutions would translate the norms and guidelines into verifiable indicators within their own practice. We are convinced that the manifesto can stimulate profound debates about some of the pillars on which any TE project rests, for example:

- The general context of TE and of the institution;
- The pedagogical, theological and political project;
- The study plan and curriculum;
- The formation and continual education of professors, the revision of materials;
- Didactics;
- Management and administration;
- Etc.

INTERNATIONAL ENCOUNTER ON PEACE THEOLOGY AND ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE¹²

Letter from Bogotá

We, brothers and sisters coming from different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, representing theological education institutions, entities that work for peace and human rights and churches, were made to feel welcome in the beautiful city of Bogotá, Colombia, having been called together by the Comunidad de Educación Teológica Ecuménica Latinoamericana y Caribeña (CETELA) [Latin American and Caribbean Ecumenical Community for Theological Education] and by the Seminario Bíblico Menonita [Mennonite Biblical Seminary] of Colombia (SBMC). This event had the support of Visión Mundial, JUSTAPAZ (Centro Cristiano Para Justicia, Paz y Acción NoViolenta [Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action] - Colombia), SERPAZ (Serviço de Paz [Service of Peace] – Brasil) and the Mennonite Central Committee. Each morning we experienced moments of intense spirituality and communion, listening to God's word, praising the Lord and sharing experiences of our lives and faith communities.

We began with sharing and getting to know some alternative experiences and pastoral practices dealing with the construction of a culture of peace. Through a participative, playful and intergenerationally respectful dynamic we were able to experience in different moments God's shalom. Thus, recharged internally with this peace, we were able to produce a community environment which permitted us to reflect theologically on the theme of peace from the Colombian context, which is marked by an internal conflict of many years that is producing pain and death, especially in the less protected sectors of society. We were impressed by the work of Latin American communities and organizations which resist and, based on the strength of the Gospel, affirm the possibility of a world without violence.

We share with you, theological institutions, service organizations and churches, our feelings, challenges and commitments which arose during this encounter, inviting you to enrich and take on these perspectives:

- **Biblical-theological perspectives:**

- The need for a biblical approach that opts for peace as a hermeneutical key.
- A rereading of the Bible that affirms God's will for peace, love and incarnation as the greater signs of the reconciliation between God and human beings; between these and nature; between human beings, including nations, peoples and cultures.
- A theological action having peace theologies as a paradigm through which the following themes can be developed: peace with justice (*shalom*); peace and non-violence; peace and reparation; peace and reconciliation (forgiveness and repentance); peace and the construction of churches that can be "peace sanctuaries".
- Encourage cultivating spiritualities of peace and active non-violence which could contemplate:

¹² Spanish version under: **ENCUENTRO INTERNACIONAL DE TEOLOGÍA DE LA PAZ Y ALTERNATIVAS A LA VIOLENCIA**, Bogotá, Colombia, January 28-February 1 of 2008

- Jesus Christ as the greatest example of a path of peace.
- Examples from the history of the church such as that of Rev. Martin Luther King and his work – which cost him his life – for the recognition of civil rights for the Afro-descendant people in the USA, and mainly examples from the first three centuries, showing even martyrdom as an option of non-violent resistance in favor of peace.
- Church reform movements which chose resistance and protest as an option for change which cost the lives of many women and men.
- Recognize and incorporate elements from other non Christian spiritualities which opt for peace, such as the case of Mahatma Gandhi in India.
- **Pedagogical and methodological perspectives:**
 - Live out peace as an internal experience as well as a community experience.
 - The need to implement this living out of peace as an institutional policy recognizing its day to day dimension.
 - Recognize that real life experiences and testimonials should be the starting points in the theological and pastoral training process.
 - Value the different experiences and reflect on them so as to recreate them and produce possibilities of change.
 - Implement various resources for learning: corporal, play, feelings, written texts, new technologies, testimonials, silence, liturgies, symbols, bibliodramas, etc.
 - Welcome heterogeneity in the construction of the knowledge of peace: that which is intercultural, transdisciplinary, inter-religious, environmental, that which has to do with gender and with persons with differentiated capabilities.
 - Foment a participative, autonomous, creative and critical pedagogical model.
 - Develop a continuous practice of systematization, monitoring and evaluation of the theological contents and experiences.
 - Give space permanently and continuously to the work of the Spirit which is renovating and creative thus avoiding academic rigidity.
- **Missiological and pastoral perspectives:**
 - Mission is God's work and the church makes this same mission concrete through its various actions.
 - It is necessary to insert seeking peace as one of the axles of pastoral ministry.

- The vocation of the community: witness and life as the announcement of the Gospel.
- Develop the mystery of forgiveness and reconciliation as peace communities which serve and are voices of this ministry.
- A peace ministry that is appropriate for the different contexts in which it is developed.
- Respect for differences and overcoming the cultural barriers.
- **Social-ecclesiastical perspectives:**
 - Affirm the God of life, the God who walks with the people in history.
 - Establish relations of effective cooperation and coordination with other experiences and instances which generate peace.
 - Maintain a prophetic vision of denouncement and announcement seeking to develop proposals and alternatives in the different scenarios: ecclesiastical, economic, social and political.
 - Think and act locally (micro) taking into account national and international contexts (macro).
 - Have a critical and self-critical spirit with regard to the various ways we live and express power in our churches and institutions, so as not to reproduce the authoritarian exercise of power that prevails in many institutions in society.
 - The victims of violence constitute the starting point for our pastoral and theological reflection and practice.
- **Challenges for theological education:**
 - Articulate personal and community life experience with conceptual theory in educational processes.
 - Include and/or intensify in our curricular programs the theme of peace as a transversal axle and with a transdisciplinary and contextual treatment.
 - Continue coherently building and living out a peace spirituality and practice in our educational institutions.
 - Articulate theological training in peace with the actions of institutions and organizations that work with the same theme.
 - Propitiate exchange and support networks providing persons and educational materials on the themes of peace.

- Resignify the notions of peace, violence and non-violence in our institutions considering the contributions of other disciplines and cultural contexts.
- Socialize the production of knowledge through Internet, newspapers, journals, books, etc.

Following the example of Jesus we encourage you to resist evil by doing good (Luke 6: 27-31). May we walk in the dream of the God of life where swords will be turned into work tools, where nation will no longer rise up against another nation and where our children will no longer be trained in war (Micah 4:3-4). We challenge the theological institutions, churches and service organizations to incorporate the theme of peace and the quest for alternatives to violence as a transversal and transdisciplinary axle in their educational work in favor of transformation.

May the God of peace and life accompany you on your journey.

Bogotá, D. C., February 1, 2008.

FIRST LATIN AMERICAN CONSULTATION ON THEOLOGY AND DISABILITIES

LETTER FROM QUITO

From Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network – EDAN

To Christian churches, theological institutions and Latin American society in general:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Convened by the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) and the Program for Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), an agency of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and with the collaboration of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and World Vision, 48 believers in Jesus Christ from various confessions and 11 countries of the Americas gathered in Quito, Ecuador, from March 26-29, 2008—theologians, Biblicists, people with disabilities and their relatives, and specialists on the topic.

The topics presented by specialists from their biblical and theological positions included the Image of God, Evangelization and Mission, Grace, Bioethics, Gender, Health and Salvation, Violence, Human Rights, Poverty, Children, Theological Education and Indigenous Peoples, all in relation to disabilities. These presentations were combined with the reactions, experiences and testimonies of the men and women present.

As a result of this analysis and reflection, we declare:

Our Concern:

- Because of the high rate of inequity and exclusion that exists in our countries as the result of a system that favors selfishness, individualism and consumerism, there is an increase in conditions that increase disabilities. On the other hand, the Church, the depository of the Gospel's noble values, for the most part does not pay attention to people with disabilities or cares for them with a paternalistic and welfare focus. Likewise, in general, Biblical and Theological institutions have not yet included the topic of disabilities as a part of their work in student formation.

Our Recognition:

- Of the legal dispositions and the establishment of public policies that are being implemented in the majority of our countries based on the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was approved by its General Assembly in March 2007. Likewise, this process, which is still in its beginning stages, is directed to a full and inclusive comprehension of the topic of disabilities, and is being developed within churches and their institutions, ministries, agencies, programs and projects. The positive efforts being carried out by some theological institutions in the region to include the topic of disabilities in their curriculum are also encouraging.

Our Exhortation:

- To persons with disabilities: that they recognize themselves as being in the image of God, able to live in abundance (John 10:10), no matter what their circumstances might be (Philippians 4:11-12), as well as to use their gifts and capabilities to further the Kingdom of God and to recognize themselves as subject with rights: actors in their own development.
- To churches: to recognize in the teachings of Jesus the value of human dignity and the vocation to serve people with disabilities, recognizing and valuing their gifts and aptitudes in order to reach the desired goal of a Church of Everyone and for Everyone.
- To Theological Institutes, Schools, Seminaries and Faculties: to include in their curriculum the topic of disabilities and to be open to the theological formation of this part of the People of God.
- To governments and different actors of society: to work to eliminate the signs of death that are created by an increase of disabilities and social exclusion.

Our Commitment:

- To return to our churches, institutions and communities to increase spaces for a similar process of analysis and reflection, which will multiply the effect of this Consultation.
- To circulate this Letter and the consultation materials in order to raise the awareness of all the “inhabited land” (*Oikumene*) regarding the revelation of a God who does not differentiate between persons” (Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 5:25).

Quito, March 29, 2008

Rev. Noel Osvaldo Fernández Collot
Coordinator for Latin America
Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN)
World Council of Churches

**LATIN AMERICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (CLAI)
WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)**

*“But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.
Always be ready to give an answer to anyone
who demands from you an account
of the hope that is in you” – I Peter 3:15.*

Winds of change, hope that lifts up

On 11-14 October 2008 a group of brothers and sisters from the two Councils (CLAI-WCC) met in Asuncion, Paraguay, to work as a Regional Group to formulate a new proposal for collaboration.

As a working group we took upon ourselves to reflect on the socio-political and economic processes of the changing situation in Latin American and the Caribbean from a biblical and theological perspective, so as to accompany in this way the churches and councils of churches in their efforts at influencing political agendas in the face of new challenges.

We also shared our programs as CLAI and WCC with a view to supporting each other in our programmatic work intended to accompany the work of the churches and the ecumenical movement.

We chose Paraguay for this meeting because we felt that it was important to give more visibility to the ecumenical world in this country and the situation it is experiencing. The idea was to raise the profile of the country during this period of political change which opens a window of hope for the people of Paraguay.

We are also aware that our meeting took place at a time of world economic crisis, as well as both a food and environmental crisis, which affect our peoples, churches and organizations. It also happened to be a period of transition and change for both CLAI and the WCC.

With the help of Paraguayan experts, we began by analyzing the socio-political and ecclesiastic reality of Paraguayan society. We learned about its opportunities and limitations. We placed this reality in the context Latin American and the rest of the world. We could thus observe with great expectations how the people of Latin America have been electing progressive governments with a vocation for care and dedication to the most underprivileged sectors. It was acknowledged that, although poverty in Paraguay has decreased globally, extreme poverty has increased.

We also recognize that elections are not a panacea and that the ensuing transformation processes needed constitute greater obstacles. A platform for dialogue has been proposed to agree on a government programme and the priorities and changes needed. We encourage the churches of Paraguay to contribute to this process of dialogue for the benefit of the people.

We were warmly welcomed by the churches. We spoke with brothers and sisters about the expectations they had for this new era; we listened to their diakonical and prophetic engagement; we preached, reflected and prayed with them and committed to give testimony to the hope that drives them.

We also had the opportunity to meet President Fernando Lugo, express our solidarity and availability to collaborate to help make this project, in which the people have put their hope, be fruitful. We understood that, after 61 years of the same party in the government marking the rhythm of life in this society, it would not be easy to rebuild and the country and ensure its governability. We committed to continue to pray for Paraguay and its authorities, and offered our programmes and relations, so as to accompany this project for the benefit of the Paraguayan people, in particular the poorest of them.

During our joint work and reflection, we felt that the spirit of the Lord had blessed and accompanied us, thus allowing us to reach the following agreements and proposals as recommendations for the two Councils:

- Organize a meeting between the Theological Commission of CLAI and the WCC Ecumenical Theological Education Programme with a diverse group of representatives of theological seminaries to address issues such as Pentecostalism and ecumenism, with a view to integrating these subjects in theological education and curricula. Also to include seminaries that do not yet belong to the ecumenical family.
- Link with the social sciences so as to analyze the context from the point of view of economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights and thus strengthen the biblical-theological perspective (second semester 2009, July-August).
- Promote the participation of CLAI in the programme on the WCC Migration and Social Justice programme. Facilitate meetings with people working on such issues, with a priority on youth participation.
- Strengthen the coordination between existing sub-regional forums in Mesoamerica, South America and the Caribbean, with a view to formulating joint positions and constituting a regional voice on issues of development and global warming among other issues. With the Caribbean Conference of Churches explore new opportunities for mutual support and further coordination.
- Promote the sharing of the youth programme agendas among the WCC, CLAI, WSCF, AIPRAL, CIEMAL as well as among the ecumenical encounters of Brazil. Encourage them to support each other.
- Ensure the involvement of and the mechanisms for the participation of CLAI in the ACT-Development Assembly to be held in May 2009 in Buenos Aires. Also ensure that the WCC staff responsible for Latin America and the Caribbean is present. As a contribution CLAI can organize liturgies with Bible studies. The Assembly organizers would consider inviting one or two people that have already been appointed by CLAI. Ensure that the WCC participates and has a meaningful role, beyond that of convener of the new ACT-Alliance.
- The WCC and CLAI identified a joint concern about the role of ecumenical regional organizations in “ACT-Development”.

- Seek a didactic methodology to facilitate dialogue among different religions and a methodology for mutual cooperation to address issues regarding the relationships between faith, theology and culture, including the relationships with indigenous peoples' and afro-American cultures and religions, and the importance of the struggle to combat racism and discrimination.
- Revisit what has been achieved on the above subject on afro-American religions in Brazil and Cuba, indigenous peoples' in Bolivia and Nicaragua and what has been done by the WCC on guidelines for interreligious dialogue, and continue to generate knowledge in this area based on practice.
- Include this subject in the CLAI's meeting of CONFSSIONAL FAMILIES to be held in 2009 and follow-up with the organization of a workshop aimed at developing a model or guidelines for theological reflection to establish suitable means for churches to enter into interreligious dialogue.
- Collaborate together in celebrating the June 2009 80th anniversary of the First Hispano-American Evangelical Congress in La Habana. In addition to financial support from both CLAI and the WCC, try to raise funds from other ecumenical bodies.
- With a view to strengthening the democracies of Latin America and the Caribbean, ecumenical observers will visit countries with major conflicts at the request of member churches and organizations. With help from the WCC United Nations Office in New York and the Living Letter delegations, among others, men and women observers will be provided the necessary training to be able to conduct actions and analyses aimed at having a political impact.
- The Faith, Science and Technology project invites CLAI to participate in an event to be held in Greece in November 2009 marking the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the 1979 MIT Conference on Faith, Science and Technology.

We ask for God's blessing for this moment of sharing of activities for the benefit of the testimony of the ecumenical movement.

Asunción, Paraguay, 14 October 2008.

MISSION AND ECUMENISM

Proposal for Construction of a Latin American and Caribbean Course¹³

Background and Horizon

In early 2006, at the same time the ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches was being held in Porto Alegre, an ecumenical congress called “Mission and Ecumenism in Latin America” was held in São Leopoldo. This event was the only opportunity for theology students from Latin America and the Caribbean—as well as from other parts of the world—to reflect on that issue, taking advantage of the presence and participation of outstanding actors in theological and pastoral reflection on these topics.

The meeting was held in the Advanced School of Theology with the support of Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), as well as of the Association of Evangelical Theological Seminaries (ASTE), the Community of Ecumenical Theological Education of Latin America and the Caribbean (CETELA), and the Association of Theological Education Institutions (ASIT). To take advantage of the boost and potential of this event we thought it would be appropriate and exciting to intensify, diversify and expand it in the perspective of the remembrance and re-contextualization in Latin America of the 100th anniversary of the first World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910.

Mission and Ecumenicalism: not always a complementary pair

In recent years there has been prolific reflection about missiology in the evangelical world but, in general, little has been achieved regarding an explicit opening to the theme of ecumenicalism. For their part, the circles most consecrated and open to ecumenicalism have not always dedicated the warranted attention to mission. In the theological education curriculum in Latin America there are a meager number of courses, teachers and didactic materials explicitly dedicated to ecumenicalism. There is also a lack of an up-to-date or interdisciplinary focus on missiology. Attention is called to a kind of disenchantment regarding the particular and profound crises of groups that for many years have been considered spokespersons for the ecumenical cause.

Lastly, today, as 100 years ago, there are many views that insist on missionary practices and guidelines that create competition between Christian churches. Because of this, and for many other reasons, the task of treating mission and ecumenicalism jointly represents a thought-provoking challenge for all sectors of the large Christian family in Latin America.

A Step-by-Step, Decentralized Process

Taking into consideration the extraordinary cultural, ecclesiastical and regional diversity in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the distances that separate our peoples, churches, students and educators, we propose a three-year development process. This will lead to holding a large continental event that would be the culmination of the previous activities of exploration, formation and production at the national and regional levels. In this way, those who participate in the continental event will have had the opportunity of first being at local events and can be spokespersons for those formative and reflective processes.

¹³ Project outline developed by Matthias Preiswerk; Roberto Zwetsch; Fernando Bortolletto; Welvi Enríquez; Claudia Seiler; José Duque. Rudolf von Sinner.

Objectives

General Objective

To encourage the ecumenical and missiological formation of Latin American students and educators through a process of research and production in order to redefine broad lines of mission and ecumenism in the light of the current challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean while taking into consideration the roots and dreams of the former ecumenism.

Specific Objectives:

- a. Compile and produce materials, information, didactic texts and other content to be shared in the courses and workshops.
- b. Carry out local or sub-regional courses and workshops in 2009 that are cosponsored with the Associations and conduct them in formal and non-formal theological education institutions.
- c. Subsequently, hold a continental conference in 2010, choosing participants from among those who participated in the sub-regional workshops and courses, like the course held in São Leopoldo during the WWC Assembly in 2006.

Organization

In principle, the proposal will be sponsored and coordinated with the associations of theological education (ASIT, ASTE, CETELA). The Latin American Association of Theological Education Institutions (ALIET) is invited to participate in this project whenever it decides to do so. Likewise, the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) is invited.

A balance between regions, nationalities, denominations, gender, race and ethnic groups will be sought, always maintaining an open and inclusive orientation. The course contents will be consensual beginning with a common minimum proposal that also will be crafted collectively. The courses will be semi-open (favoring both practical experience and the capacity for reflection) and will lead to academic recognition by one of the sponsoring agencies. The development of the proposal, methodology and content for the Latin American event in 2010 will be based on the national courses.

Budget

At all the stages and in all the events, the contributions of local institutions will be combined with a small external contribution.

For more information, please write to the following e-mail addresses: Matthias Preiswerk serviciospt@gmail.com; Roberto Zwetsch cetela@est.edu.br; Fernando Bortolletto aste@uol.com.br; Welvi Enríquez welvi@adinet.com; Claudia Seiler claseiler@hotmail.com; José Duque eteduque@gmail.com. Rudolf von Sinner <r.vonsinner@est.edu>.

THE FOREST OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION¹

José Duque

What do tropical forests and theological education have in common? In this short essay I want to show the relationship of these two components as part of one reality. I intend to do this by mixing an approximation to environmental reality with a metaphor. I introduced these ideas during the meetings of the Ecumenical Congress,² in which about 100 students participated, representing every continent and a large variety of churches, nationalities, ethnic groups and races. The organizers took great care to see that there was a balance of participation between women and men. Therefore, the Congress was one of the most profound ecumenical experiences for those of us who participated, and constituted a conference model that all theology students should experience some time in their life. What the students learned during those days of sharing, studying, spirituality and cultural encounter, without a doubt, will make a lasting impression on their lives.

The following is a summary of the ideas that I shared at the Ecumenical Congress. First, I gave a short overview of theological education in Latin America and the Caribbean. I limited the overview (not included in this summary) to the beginning of regional associations such as the Association of Evangelical Theological Seminaries (ASTE), the Association of Theological Institutions (ASIT), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean Ecumenical Theological Education (CETELA), the Latin American Association of Theological Education Institutions (ALIET), and the Association of Theological Schools in the Caribbean (AETC). The second idea that I shared took advantage of being in Brazil, which provided a context for thinking about what the Amazon means to humanity and for all creation; I introduced the reality of tropical forests, their impact and the threats to them. A third idea was the nefarious reality of deforestation as well as environmental and cultural pollution. Immediately after, I emphasized the idea that it is possible to reverse the process of deterioration if we take a prophetic, theological and pastoral role to do so. Lastly, by using a metaphor, I called attention to the tree nurseries of theological education as a means of recreating God's forest.

- **Tropical Forests**

As we know, thanks to scientific studies,³ there are more than one billion hectares of tropical forests that have developed over millions of years and that provide a balanced habitat, not only for the flora and fauna, but for all life forms, including humanity. In Latin America and the Caribbean, tropical forests, thanks to the Equator, constitute a strip of land that goes from

¹ This paper was presented at the Ecumenical Theological Education "Round Table," that was held in São Leopoldo, Brazil, during the Ecumenical Congress for theology students under the title "Mission and Ecumenism in Latin America" during the IX Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Wati Longchar participated in the round table in representation of Asia, Vladimir Fedorov represented Eastern Europe, and José Duque represented Latin America and the Caribbean. Jose Duque is Consultant for Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE/World Council of Churches) and Professor at the Latin American Biblical University

² The Ecumenical Congress for theology students was held during the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in São Leopoldo between February 23 and 25, 2006. The Superior School of Theology (EST), the Association of Evangelical Theological Seminaries (ASTE), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean Ecumenical Theological Education (CETELA) shared responsibility for this Congress. Financial support for the Congress came from various institutions and donor churches of the National Council for Scientific Development of Brazil and of the World Council of Churches, specifically from ETE.

³ Compare these websites: www.jmarcano.com; www.wrm.org.uy; www.somosamigosdelatierra.org

southern Mexico to the Bolivian Amazon. These predominantly rainy jungles are home to as many as 300 distinct tree species per hectare, some of which are 70 meters high. But, the tropical forests are not only vegetation, they also hold the greatest biodiversity on the planet. The animal life in these forests includes a large variety of insects, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. The tropical Amazon zone, considered to be the greatest “lung” of planet earth, also holds the most abundant river basins on the globe. Tropical forests are also the largest of the sophisticated, aromatic and colorful gardens. Tropical forests are a marvel of creation.

- **A Threatened Marvel**

However, tropic forests are being rapidly destroyed by a perverse rationale, that is to say, irrationally. In Central America, 60% of the tropical forests have been cut down, mainly to cultivate pastureland for cattle in order to export meat to make hamburgers in the USA. According to scientists, between 1960 and 1990, in just 30 years, 20% of the tropical forests in the world were destroyed. At this rate of destruction, scientists estimated that 50% of these forests would be destroyed by 2004. Which means that in approximately 50 years, one-half of the sources for life, that had taken millions of years to develop, were destroyed. By this irrational conduct we are destroying a marvelous home, whose construction was a work of grace for humanity.

- **Destructive Causal Factors**

It has been widely demonstrated that deforestation constitutes one of the most direct causes of destruction of the natural and animal world. But, there are many reasons for deforestation, among which we can emphasize: the economic model that places priority on producing for export. This reasoning gives free rein to the exportation of beef, agricultural products and wood. This became the model for the Third World, and included exploiting and exporting its natural resources. This was the recipe for development: exploit and export for economic growth. Then, the doors were opened for exploiting and exporting minerals and petroleum reserves. And, the deforested areas were filled with monocultures, which were accompanied by the respective chemical fertilizers and pesticides that have polluted the air and river basins. We insist that this model of exploitation is sustained by an underlying cause, the instrumental reason for encouraging consumerism and accumulation.⁴ That is, with this model of production, the sustainability of life was no longer a priority; the instrumental reason reoriented the priority toward the rate of profit. The critical ethical criteria were taken off the negotiating table and, with that, the criteria of justice, equity, sustainability and dignity of the entire natural world and of human beings were also removed.

The instrumental reason also has created a passive conscience in individuals as well as in social institutions. Churches have been passive, governments have been passive, society in general has been passive. And, even worse, for theological education seminaries also are passive. Maybe there is something more than passivity—there is no shepherding; there is obvious negligence and abandonment of pastoral responsibilities with our neighbor and with creation.⁵ Because of this negligence and passivity, natural and cultural pollution continues to cause nearly irreparable destruction. But, “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! ... You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost...” (Ez. 34:2 ff).

⁴ Dussel, Enrique, cp. “Algunos principios para una érica ecológica material de liberation” in Pixley, Jorge (ed.), *Por un mundo otro*. Quito: CLAI, 2003, pgs. 29-44.

⁵ Boff, Leonardo, *Saber Cuidar. Ética de lo humano-compasión por la tierra*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2004.

- **Pollution of Nature and of Culture**

The destruction of the forests by the logic of instrumental reason has produced disastrous, nearly irreparable, effects. We can say that deforestation produces serious pollution in nature as well as in cultures. For example, for the peoples who have lived in tropical forests for centuries, deforestation results in the loss of their cultures. When equilibrium is lost in the forests, the cultural balance of the peoples who have lived in the forests is lost. This results in a loss of the production of their own food, a loss of the natural medicines developed by them, a change in their customary use of energy resources; this also means the extinction of their languages and traditional spiritual expressions. After their forest culture is undermined, these peoples have no choice but to migrate to the cities where cultural pollution increases due to unemployment, malnutrition, prostitution, overcrowding and acquiring an inferiority complex.

Cultural pollution also impacts the region and not just the peoples who live in the forest. Without forests water cannot be preserved, soil is eroded, pests appear, there is a proliferation of disease; in addition, the loss of drainage produces floods or prolonged drought. These evils do not deal a death blow just in the local area, deforestation and cultural pollution also produce extremely negative impacts at the global level. According to scientists, deforestation and pollution are producing rapid global warming. In addition, many life forms in both plant and animal life are condemned to extinction. However, the cultural pollution produced by the desire to acquire wealth not only destroys forests but is also producing unprecedented social catastrophes. The cultural pollution in Latin America is now reaching the wealthy countries through waves of immigrants. According to the latest statistics, eleven million undocumented aliens live in the USA, and are now loudly asking for justice. This has occurred because there are 220 million poor people living in the region.⁶ Also, there are nearly 100 million indigent persons living in our region. But if we add together all the population classified as poor and indigent, we are talking about more than 60% of the total population in the region, which is, nearly two-thirds of our total population. It is said that in Latin America and the Caribbean, three of every five children work, and they do so in unhealthy conditions, even though they should be in school.

Cultural pollution also includes ethnic, racial, gender, age, and, of course, class discrimination. But an even more tragic item is that the current neoliberal capitalist system denies a mutually binding sensitivity in favor of the “little ones.” It denies joint liability and all alternative possibilities that would benefit the enormous population of disposed and excluded persons. Moreover, it denies them the possibility of solidarity and transforms this into a diabolic force.⁷ In this way, in addition to cutting down mahogany, cedar, palm, ceiba and other well-known tree varieties, cultural deforestation has cut down prophetic trees such as Francisco Chico Mendes,⁸ or Monsignor Arnulfo Romero, and thousands and thousands of other martyrs—ecologists, educators, defenders of human rights, pastors in all ministries that cry out for justice and peace for the well-being of creation. Because cultural contamination, in addition to cutting down forests, represses, excludes, disposes and exploits.

⁶ Cp. Annual Report of ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), which shows the tragedy of poverty in alarming numbers, www.bbcmundo.com, August 26, 2003.

⁷ Hinkelammert, Franz, “El desarrollo de la América Latina y la cultura de la desesperanza” in, *Educación teológica en Abya-Yala*. San José: UBILA, 1992, pgs. 37 ff.

⁸ Chico Mendes, Brazilian, was assassinated on December 22, 1998 because of his defense of the Amazon against the indiscriminate exploitation by multinational companies. More information at www.somosamigosdelatierra.org

- **Reverse the Process of Destruction: Good News and a Task**

The situation that I have partially outlined is critical and chaotic, but it is not definitive. According to scientists, there is good news, which consists in knowing that it is not only possible to stop the rate of pollution and destruction of the environment, and with it of humanity, but we can reverse it. This means, as a starting point, accepting that the precariousness of the natural and cultural environment is not outside of ourselves; we have something to do with this imbalance. Therefore, to interrupt this situation and reverse it we must accept that we are part of the problem, then begin to think about and organize projects that will help resolve the problems. By this, we understand that such a project will set out to recreate an enormous natural and cultural forest that will recuperate all the tropical as well as the polar areas. In other words, this is not about a project to save only the tropics, but it is a project that will include the well-being of all creation.

- **The Nurseries of Theological Education**

Refining our visions of faith, we can see in the current ecological environment in our region the formation of numerous new nurseries. This deals with novel and diverse nurseries or gardens oriented to cultivating another tropical forest, which will be able to clean up the environmental pollution, biological and cultural, in order to recreate the well-being of creation's life. On the horizon of these hopeful nurseries, similar to the Garden of Eden, the cultivation of heavenly vegetation are taking shape as signs, as a foretaste and first fruit of the new heavens and earth announced from time immemorial by the prophets, such as Isaiah: "Because I will create a new heaven and earth; of the first there will be no memory" (Is. 21:17 ff.).

The nurseries of which we bear witness, give birth to a huge diversity of trees, including the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9), because this is a forest of freedom, created to grow, multiply and produce until all the earth is filled. It will be where all classes of living species, vegetable, animal and mineral will be sheltered, feed and sustained in full health, that together will form the dreamed of forest of life. The forest of God. In this forest of life, crystalline rivers, enormous wetlands and majestic oceans will flow in all directions once again; carefree fish of all colors, sizes and species, including huge sea monsters, will plunge into the waters. The beauty and happiness in this new tropical forest confirms that justice and balance has been fully achieved through the fruit of love. In this environment, neither sounds of weeping nor heartbreaking cries will ever be heard again, and there will be no sorrow or pain. There will never be any orphans, widows, refugees or displaced people; neither will there be immigrants or exiles, much less anyone who works in vain. Children will play pleasantly with all the wild animals and serpents and no one will be harmed. Old people will share their knowledge and live as long as the trees. This will be a forest full of wonderful flowers, aromas, flavors and sounds; it will not be cold or hot and nakedness will be an adornment. Love will be sweeter than honey and its sweetness will remain forever.

Such tree nurseries are nothing more than seedbeds of fertile soil, or altars where worship will cultivate culture. Likewise, all knowledge shared there will redound in wisdom because it deals with a wise knowledge that gives flavor to life. Yes, the nurseries are seedbeds that are known in theological education as seminaries, where seminary students are the seeds of the seed of Abraham full of faith. These become like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream ... its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit (Jer. 17:7 ff). Thus, each seminary student, like a leafy tree, has a place in the forest of life to bear much fruit, because "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life" (Pr. 11:30).

It is, therefore, from the seminaries, where enough trees will go out to radiate life over all the face of the earth that has become a “chaos and confusion and darkness over the surface of the deep (Gn. 1:1). Seminaries, institutes and theology faculties have become seedbeds so that “the land produces vegetation: seed-bearing plants and tress on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds” (Gn. 1:11). In this forest of God, the diversity of species includes at least the conditions of gender, ethnicity, race, confession, nation, generation.

But, in order for the nurseries to produce trees that give fruit, each one according to its specie, the mistaken idea of monoculture must be eradicated. Single-crop production excludes biodiversity and causes the same effects as deforestation. Therefore, the nurseries of theological education are seminaries with an ecumenical spirit, capable of conforming the most varied and fruitful of the forests. The forest of abundant life in its fullest.

Of course, because there are many different species among the trees of the tropical forest none will take prominence as the head, or center, or elite, or more important than the other plants; because they all equally share the task of renewing oxygen, or providing food or energy. Others will be there to heal, others spread their aroma; in other words, all the trees together will balance the most complex and nourishing habitat. Naturally, a tree by itself does not constitute a forest. A tropical forest is made up of many varieties of species that live in communion, in other words, they make community. In the forest many reciprocal relationships are established, for example, in many cases the fertilization and spreading of seeds is carried out thanks to the work of insects and other animals, which transport them from one place to another.⁹

Therefore, a warning to all the trees that have left the restoring nurseries of God’s forest, that while a final balance is being achieved, they will still have to face storms, cyclones, hurricanes and upheavals. They will also have to deal with these disasters, but they are no more than a threat to the forest because the strength of communion will be in control. No, these harsh weather conditions will not destroy God’s forest, on the contrary, they will bring energy to readjust the habitat and to strengthen the endurance of the solid trunks, thereby endowing them with the quality that will make them able to take care of the well-being of creation.

Therefore, the nurseries as seedbeds, the seminaries where seminarians are wisely cultivated, who, with their formation, will recreate and take care of the ecological niches, a sustainable society, their fellow companions, and especially the “little ones,” as well as their own body.¹⁰ There, thanks to this new forest, for the global village, under this balanced care, the Spirit will move, transcending all forms of life to wake the most transforming utopian dreams.

The nurseries of God’s forest are, then, ecumenical seminaries, able to cultivate Grace in the integrity of creation. From these seminaries go out the seeds to cultivate the forests of life where humanity and the integrity of creation will be cared for. Each seminarian, man or women, is a tree of life. “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Ps. 1:3).

⁹ Mires, Fernando, *El discurso de la naturaleza*. San José: DEI, 190, pgs. 135 ff.

¹⁰ Boff, L. *Op. cit.* pgs. 133-155.

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