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6. Why has Protestantism in Latin America made little or no creative contribution of its own to these issues? Should there be a distinctively Protestant evaluation of the value of Marxism to theological reflection?

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New Styles in Theological Education

by SAMUEL AMIRTHAM

This excerpt from the report of the Principal of the leading ecumenical seminary in the state of Tamil Nadu, South India, comes as a healthy challenge to the comfortable isolation of many evangelical theological schools. Apart from regular or periodic evangelistic commando raids into the neighbourhood, and preaching in local churches they have little identification with the world of human suffering and inequality.

The charge that our training programmes are irrelevant is often justified. The spirit of the report represents a genuine response to a situation of poverty and oppression and stands in sharp contrast to many reports from seminaries training for ministry in middle class suburbia in affluent communities. It is clear that the context where training takes place affects the structures and even content of theological education.

However the report raises questions of other issues important to evangelicals which need to be discussed. In the concern for contextualisation how is the authority of the revealed text preserved? Involvement in society and understanding how the world sees the Church will certainly force our faculty and students to re-examine their own understanding of the message of the Bible. But how should we maintain the discipline of careful exegesis of the text of Scripture using biblically sound hermeneutical tools? How should students relate their biblical theology to the dynamic interaction of action and reflection?

Further, what relationship does training students in methods of evangelism directed towards conversion, baptism and church growth have with training for service to the poor and oppressed? What should be the place of training in spiritual piety, church renewal and revival? These fundamental questions need answers. Response in the form of articles or letters will be welcomed.

(Editor)

The style of theological education that is being attempted at the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Arasaradi, Madurai, South India, includes the following four aspects: p. 120

A New Style of Learning

A New Style of Ministry

A New Style of Living

A New Style of Spirituality

A. A NEW STYLE OF LEARNING

An effective style of theological learning must be *student oriented* and *praxis oriented*.

1. In *student-oriented* learning, lectures and monologues by teachers are reduced to the minimum. Students in general prefer private study, seminar and discussion methods of learning. Of course some will always want to be dependent on the teacher and are not willing to put forth maximum individual effort. The final year B.D. students have worked into late hours with their N.T. teacher, the Rev. Dhyanchand Carr, and have produced a commentary which brings together their own reflection and material from available books. This will be the best contextualised commentary for future students. We try to make the students the subjects in the learning process.

2. Theological education must also be *praxis oriented*. Praxis is not just activity or action but a dynamic interaction of action and reflection. Involvement programmes are built into the curriculum so that students can relate themselves to the realities of life situations.

a. A first observation to make here is that in theological work the unity of theory and practice is vital. The rarefied atmosphere of theological scholarship must be related to the real life of the churches at the grassroot level. We are consciously attempting to avoid “self-centred pursuit of academic theology” and to gear the training towards the needs of the Church. Students get opportunities to preach, conduct worship, lead youth groups, teach Sunday Schools, etc. in churches in and around Madurai, thanks to the cooperation of the churches. From the first year onwards each student is assigned 4 or 5 families in the city whom he is expected to visit three times a year and keep pastoral contact for the whole period of his stay in Madurai. The friends in Madurai welcome gladly this ministry of our students and thus also participate in the training of their future pastors. In November students [p.121](#) and staff visited many of the churches in the diocese. With the encouragement and the blessing of the bishop this has become a very effective means of contact with the churches and of interpreting the seminary’s thrusts.

The finance development department’s work must be seen in this context not mainly as raising funds that we so badly need but as building contacts with the members of our churches. We have about 6000 loyal Friends of Arasaradi, who help us with their gifts and uphold us with their prayers. They write to us their appreciation and criticism.

The teaching mission, under the imaginative leadership of Rev. Thomas Thangaraj, is in great demand and provides a unique opportunity for weekend concentrated teaching in congregations and living with the people. A group of students and teachers go and live in a parish for week-ends and, using light music and new songs, give basic biblical teaching on baptism, salvation and mission, etc. Through these experiences students and teachers also come into a creative dialogue with “parish theology”.

A new programme to encourage Congregational Commitment for Reading was started this year with the help of the World Association for Christian Communication. Mr. Samuel Mathuram, one of our external students, visited churches and helped to run small parish book shops, encouraging readers’ circles and persuading pastors to introduce a book every month in the sermons. This was received well in the churches.

Theological Education for Christian Commitment and Action is another programme that involves us in the life of the churches. This is a programme for theological education of the laity. After the unexpected success of the first programme, the Rev. Honest Chinniah caught the vision of TECCA by TECCA, i.e. that the students of TECCA start their own groups for theologically educating other Christians. We did raise questions whether this is in keeping with the original vision, whether this will help persons to take their vocation of being Christian in the world seriously, and whether this will not make them slip into the easier task of becoming theological teachers (!) and forget their primary vocation. But

we were persuaded otherwise. Honest's report says that the response of the churches reveals nothing less than a movement of the Holy Spirit. p. 122

b. I would like to make another observation regarding *praxis* in theology. Usually, we understand theology's task as interpreting what the church says and believes, or how the church sees society. A new perspective is now emphasised. According to Choan-Seng Song, "In order to do theology Christian thinkers are now obliged to see, understand and interpret how the world sees the church and how society challenges the church within its own context to re-examine the message of the Bible and to restate the nature of the Christian faith."

If this is a valid point of view, the only way to gain this perspective is to be involved in the society around us. Through work in the Subramaniapuram and Mahaboopalayam and Heera Nagar slums, through involvement in rural development at Avaniapuram, we hope at least to be able to listen to the questions that society poses to us, so that we can discern afresh the meaning of the Gospel.

We have established sufficient rapport with people to make this involvement meaningful. Mr. Gandhi Yesudian, the slum coordinator, and the volunteers and students spend a lot of their time with the people, listening to their needs, such as indebtedness, land rights, community health, children's education, unemployment etc. and have together with the people themselves been able to find solutions to some of these. The rural development institute with Mr. Sivalingam, another of our old students, is doing a good job in farmer's education. Students are organising evening classes for adults to foster social awareness and make them literate. They have drawn up a new curriculum for this. Plans are prepared at Chinnaodaippu to deal with caste animosity and in Kusavankundu to redeem the jasmine growers from the exploitation of middle men. Having built up adequate involvement projects, we are now struggling with the question, "How can this lead on to theological productivity?"

Two things, I believe, are essential. First, it is necessary to move beyond involvement to a sharing of the agony of the people. C.S. Song puts it beautifully, "Aching of heart is the beginning of theology," for, he continues, "God's heart aches." An empathetic participation in people's suffering is one factor. Secondly, minds must be trained to be critical and articulate. Where these two are present, there theology is born. I have had some occasions this year to be thankful for in this respect. p. 123

One was a sermon in chapel the other day. The theme was the knowledge of God. The student preacher expounded the knowledge of God as an intimate personal relationship. This meant, he said, knowing the heart of God, the heart of God for the world. The Church often fails to know God in this respect, to perceive the depths of God's heart. He went on with an illustration. The scene is that of a bereaved family. The darling daughter is dead and lies dressed-up in the coffin; the bereaved father sits silent, deeply immersed in his grief. The little son comes, sees the beautiful dress on his sister and asks the father for a similar dress for himself, not realising the grief of the father, nor the seriousness of the situation. The father with a wry smile looks at the child, pitying its naivete and failure to perceive the depths of the father's heart. So does the church find itself, often not being able to know the agony of God for a dying world. And there stands nearby the older brother, the theological seminaries, spanking the child and chiding the little fellow, for failing to fathom his father's heart. But the father is grieved yet more now at the incapacity of the older son to understand his father's smile or the level of understanding of the little son. Grief upon grief for the father. So, the young theologian went on, unlike the older brother, we are called upon to know the heart of our Father at both levels. Here was theology blossoming out.

B. A NEW STYLE OF MINISTRY

Our theological education must enable students to be engaged in a new style of ministry. This new style which we would like to foster is:

1. First of all, a *people-oriented* ministry. It is not pastor-centred but people-centred. It must be a ministry that helps the lay person to minister to other Christians and to the world. The pastoral ministry must become an enabling ministry. The pastor is not primarily the benefactor or an administrator but an enabler.
2. Secondly, it is a *communication-oriented* ministry. It must help the Christians to communicate the Gospel effectively. The Mission Institute at the Seminary is training students in different forms of evangelism through their evangelistic campaign programmes. The training in dialogue and the meetings for religious friends, [p. 124](#) revived this year again by Dr. T. D. F. Francis, are helpful in learning how to communicate the Gospel to the intellectuals. There is also a programme of training for mass communication.
3. Thirdly, it is a *need-oriented* ministry. The seminary has been involved in identifying areas of need and starting new ministries. The jail work that Bill Harris started and the Adaikala Arulagam for girls exploited in immoral traffic that Margaret Harris started are our response to specifically felt areas of needs. The Unemployed Young People's Association at Thirunagar, for which Rev. D. Carr has spent much of his energy, and the recently started Inba Illam for old people who are destitute are also expressions of our concern.

But I would not like you to think that the style of ministry we advocate is an institutionalised one. What we hope is that students will be able to identify areas of needs on their own and find adequate solutions for these. A student came to me the other day very sad and angry. He lives off campus and eats in a hotel. One day when he threw the leaf (customarily used as a plate) in the dust bin he saw a boy trying to redeem it from the mouth of a cow! He had seen so far only boys quarrelling with dogs. It was a revolting sight for him. He was disturbed to the core, and as he related the tale to me his eyes became full. He is now organising something for these boys and is challenging our community to do something for the hostel dust-bin-boys at Arasaradi. While my heart grieved with him at the poverty in our society, I was overwhelmed with the satisfaction of training a future minister who has open eyes to identify areas of need around him.

4. Fourthly, it is a *justice-oriented* ministry. Christian ministry, if it is a ministry of love, must work for structures which promote justice both in the country and in the world. So in our slum and development programmes self reliance and people's organization for participation are emphasised very much. Dr. Karl Reus-Smit of Australia and his family spent two months with us. He gave special lectures on urbanism and helped us to evaluate the content and style of our involvement work from this perspective. We hope that our students will take this perspective into the pastoral ministry also and plan programmes of social and political action. I was glad to hear recently that one of our old students in Ramnad District has started a movement against untouchability, which is an acute problem there. [p. 125](#)

Achieving self-reliance and people's participation in decision-making is an extremely slow and difficult process. I had a happy moment when the friends in Ellis Nagar slum among whom we have been working for some time met us the other day. They make beautifully painted clay models and sell them in Madurai markets. The State Bank was willing to give loans, and we were also prepared to do so. In conversation with them the leader said that they would hesitate to take loans because this would make them debtors and might also break the relationship with us. I was struck by their refusal to take loans.

I wonder how many of us would refuse loans if somebody offered! These men were growing beyond levels of dependence to levels of self-reliance. They only wanted our help to get land rights from the government. It would be too tall a claim that this self-reliance is the result of our work. But I did feel that by God's grace we are to see some results of our attempts.

C. A NEW STYLE OF LIVING

Personal styles of living on the campus vary a good deal. In dress, one finds tight pants and veshtis, guru shirts and safari slacks! In appearance, you will find clean shaven faces and long grown beards! In standards of living, different levels of simplicity and affluence are manifest. I am not referring to these! What we are seeking is a style of living at a deeper level for community, conducive to theological enterprise and in accordance with our theological convictions.

In a community where incomes vary among students, servants, and staff, we ask ourselves, How can we be a sharing and caring community? In addition to the different projects to care for the less privileged of the community, we have this year introduced the community-shared meal on Sunday evenings. All members pay three percent of their income and participate in a common meal once a week on Sundays. Once a week is only a token for real sharing, and we eventually want to extend it to one meal every day. But the purpose is clear; we want to develop a style of community life where inequalities are reduced to the minimum.

Five of our students have chosen to live in the slums more or less in the same style as the friends who always have to live there—no p. 126 cots, no tables, no electricity, no comforts. We hear complaints from churches that trained candidates do not like to go to villages because of the less comfortable environment there, compared to that of urban settings. This is no more totally true. The other day a list went up calling for volunteers for slum work for next year, and more than 30 students signed up. Some members of staff are contemplating to go and live on the farm, where students now live and work among the villages. These students cycle up every day about 15 kilometers to come to the classes. One student lives with the poor people in the Inba Illam and another at the Unemployed Young People's Association, both projects partly sponsored by the Seminary.

Students of the second year have been living outside the campus for a whole year. While this promotes a style of living that identifies them with other people in Madurai, the main purpose of the programme is to let the society outside the campus exert an impact on the students and on their theological thinking. In the words of the staff advisers, Mr. E. Ramani and Dr. Bas Wielenga, this scheme facilitates:

- a. *their maturity in discerning the forces in the society which are instrumental in changing and creating new structures and whose impact affects human development;*
- b. *to build up a feeling of security in the absence of such a security that a seminary campus would provide;*
- c. *to help make responsible decisions on stewardship, matters of time and money, etc.;*
- d. *to build up relationships with neighbours in "life-situations";*
- e. *to develop a style of life of their own;*
- f. *to take the seminary insights into the society and to bring the feedback into the seminary in matters of identification, gaps, etc.;*
- g. *to experience the felt needs of a community for specialised ministries.*

The campus is open to the community outside. The children from the nearby slum come to the creche. The hostels accommodate students and young working persons from

outside. At the slum development office one finds always many friends who have come to discuss some problem or other. The fair price shop [p. 127](#) extends its service to the whole community. We do not want to foster a ghetto style of community living. Even the eggs and fruits and chickens from the campus farm sold at the gate have some theological significance from this perspective!

D. A NEW STYLE OF SPIRITUALITY

Christian spirituality has recently become a vital theme for study and discussion. “Combat spirituality” and “involvement spirituality” are terms coined at the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Since Nairobi there has been great interest among theological circles for evolving authentic forms of Christian spirituality. A truly Christian spirituality is one that enables Christians to be firmly rooted in Christ, integrally related to the fellowship of the church, and redemptively involved in the world. It is a commitment spirituality which seeks total obedience to Christ and therefore receives a total freedom to be involved in the world. It is the spirituality which gives us sustaining power through the struggles and uncertainties of involvement and at the same time the joy and freedom that belongs to God’s children.

Therefore we have included commitment as one of the four basic areas in the curriculum. For commitment and reflection do go together. Without reflection commitment can deteriorate to fanaticism and dogmatism, and without commitment reflection can wander on to scepticism and speculation. Students come to the seminary with a certain amount of commitment to Christ and with a sense of call. The seminary encourages them to grow in this commitment through programmes of regular morning worship (begins with quiet time at 6.30 A.M.) and evening worship, daily intercession, weekly communion service, fellowship groups, prayer cells, quiet days and retreats, personal counselling, and discipline.

Attempt is also made to discover a specifically Indian Christian spirituality, appropriating certain devotional exercises and values in the Indian tradition. Bishop Sundaresan’s seminars on Christian Yoga have created sufficient interest that some students continue to use these for their personal devotions. Along with such attempts our emphasis continues to be training students to be leaders in the worship and congregational life of their own church traditions. [p. 128](#)

Training Christian Workers

by ELIZABETH R. JAVALERA

THE late Dr. Clate A. Risley, former Founder-President of the Worldwide Christian Education Ministries, once said, “Humanly speaking, the greatest need of the church has always been and is today the need of trained leaders. The churches today that are making the greatest strides are those who are making time to train leaders.”¹

¹ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Leadership for Church Education* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1940), p. 336.