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4. In order to enlarge its membership, ICAA should actively recruit associate members from around the world. We should also grant our associate members a more efficient voice in the direction of ICAA affairs. For example, the ICAA associate membership should be granted representation on the ICAA executive.
5. We need to accord priority to improving cordial cooperative relationships with our parent body, the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission. To achieve this, we should for example request a permanent representation of ICAA on the executive committee of the Theological Commission.
6. I also suggest that ICAA aggressively bolster its public relations in order to increase its visibility. If we do not attend to this, ICAA may be no more than a well-kept secret.
7. It is of urgent importance that we should republish the ICAA *Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education* in a handy, attractive format, in order to facilitate wide distribution. We should also actively promote familiarity with its contents among our constituency, and find the means to focus commitment among theological educators to its practical implementation, lest the *Manifesto* remain one more document filed in the archives.

May God grant ICAA's second decade to be even more fruitful than its first.

Dr. Tite Tiénou of Abijan, Cote D'Ivoire, is the founding principal of the Christian and Missionary Alliance theological seminary. He served for many years with ACTEA in a variety of positions. [p. 292](#)

The Contextualization of Overseas Theological Education

Michael Griffiths

We all know that good exegesis requires the context of a text to be given proper consideration. The text means what it means, because of the context in which it is found. In a similar way, good theological education depends upon how it relates with its own context. Traditional academic theological education has tended to become more and more detached from any context at all apart from its own internally inherited criteria. For us, good theological education must be defined as that which relates to its own context, in the churches whose workers it seeks to train. It can never be an independent, autonomous ideological island. It needs also to relate to its own social, cultural and historical context. We must not allow it to become isolated or distanced from the realities of the churches and the societies it seeks to serve. Just as those teaching individual disciplines have to be forced off centrifugally into their own little world, so also we have to resist the temptation to think and act as though we each reign in little theological kingdoms of our own, independent of, and unrelated to the rest of the real world. The world of the library (and even more the world of the computer terminal) can become a private fantasy world where theological Walter Mittys lead their own secret, and sadly irrelevant lives!

My approach is going to be extremely practical and concrete based upon specific examples from various parts of the world. I worked across most of the Far East for twenty-three years; then back in London and more widely within Europe for nine years; and now more recently in North America. Comments about Africa and Latin America then derive from friends and from what has been written.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SECURING YOUR THEOLOGICAL BASE

Many countries have existing theological colleges, founded by older denominational missions, usually liberal ecumenical in overall orientation: e.g. the somewhat comical acronym ATSEA (Association of Theological Schools in East Asia). The work of some evangelical missions **P. 293** was vitiated because when their most gifted proteges went to more liberal seminaries they came out less committed to Scripture, and sometimes with no gospel to preach. For example, in **Thailand**: many graduates of the Presbyterian college used it as an academic ladder, so joining the brain drain, so that only a few went into the pastoral ministry in Thai churches. The faculty tended to be drawn from a wide spectrum of traditions. In Thailand, therefore, other missions started their own alternative theological colleges: Bangkok Bible College, the Phayao Bible Training Centre and the Southern Baptist Seminary.

Conservative mission agencies were often torn between their desire to exert some biblical influence in a theological college and the pressure from the North America segment of their constituency: 'How could evangelicals teach there without being coresponsible for the teaching of error?' asked home supporters in North America who had been brought up within a separatist tradition.

In **Singapore**, Dr. Alan Cole had to transfer from the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in order to teach at Trinity College, where he was something of a lone evangelical voice for many years. Largely through the faith, prayer and persistence of evangelical Methodists, the complexion of the college was completely turned around. A Chinese Lutheran principal who was an evangelical was appointed, and Alan Cole is back there again with many like-minded colleagues. A number of evangelical colleges have come into being since then, including Singapore Bible College, Far Eastern Bible College and the Discipleship Training Centre.

The history in Peninsular **Malaysia** has been very similar, with gifted lecturers in both streams training under the same evangelical scholars in the West, aided by some scholarships from wise missionary agencies.

The wisest approach seems to be to go both routes—i.e. by not writing 'ichabod' over the older seminary (how ever much it seems to deserve it) and praying for its return to biblical convictions, and then at the same time also starting something specifically evangelical.

In a similar way in the **United Kingdom** evangelical theologians wanted to recapture the university faculties from liberalism, but saw the London Bible College as an alternative expedient, not unlike the Free Faculty established by the **Norwegians** in competition with the older State faculty supported by a State Lutheran Church.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING INDIGENOUS PROBLEMS

One of the principal problems of studying in Europe or North America is that students become involved in issues largely irrelevant to their own church context. Thus for evangelicals in Europe and North America major issues for debate have been inspiration and authority of Scripture; the substitutionary atonement; attitudes towards the

Ecumenical movement or controversies concerning Creative Evolution or Flood-theories. These are rarely key issues outside of Europe and North America. Just as the Monroe Doctrine attempted to forbid the importation P. 294 into the Americas of alien political theories or interference with a nation's internal affairs, we need a corresponding doctrine to prevent the export of Western issues into the Two-thirds world.

For example in the **Philippines**, the importation of a North American eschatology—a premillenarian, dispensational package—made it very difficult in the Asia Theological Seminary and the Association of Bible Churches of the Philippines, for non-Americans who had an equally biblical but different eschatology.

However the more serious problem is the reverse of this—viz, that issues crucial to the indigenous churches in Africa and Asia may not be touched at all in western-type theological curricula, so that the graduating student will not be prepared for his/her cultural and church context. In **Africa** for example, witchcraft, ancestor-worship and polygyny are all issues very unlikely to be covered in European and American seminaries. The church history of their own area is much more relevant than European church history.

For this reason, in spite of the stimulus of cross-fertilization of ideas in both ways, a graduate school in Africa is probably to be preferred in training people for their own context than attendance at a school in the West.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING TAUGHT BY THOSE WHO KNOW THE CONTEXT

National teachers who have returned from study overseas may not know theological terms in their own language! Often such teachers try to reproduce the kind of system they knew overseas because that is the one they have been familiar with. We must think carefully to ensure that our theological education is in context!

Expatriates who have not served their apprenticeship within the indigenous churches may be ignorant of the context for which they are training workers. It is folly to think we can teach because we have theological qualifications in the West, without first studying the target audience in cultural context.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING THOSE WHO WILL REALLY BE LEADERS

There is sometimes a danger of training young people who carry little or no status in their own communities. At one time in **Thailand**, missionaries with a Bible school background in North America, encouraged teenagers to come for training—some even sent their bad boys to the college to reform them! We ought not to think they will be recognized as spiritual leaders when they have no voice in a society ruled by elders twenty to thirty years older than themselves! In some cultures the young and unmarried carry little credibility as pastors.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING AT A LEVEL APPROPRIATE TO CONTEXT

(a) Expecting non-graduates to minister to graduate technocrats.

For example in **Indonesia**: generally, those entering theological colleges are mainly 18–19 year olds who have failed to gain university entrance. In **Ghana** semi-literate high-school dropouts go to seminary for education. This may put the church in peril of schism,

for born again graduates converted through p. 295 Scripture Union in high schools or Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) in universities, gifted professionals, academics and technocrats are dismissive of non-graduate ministers who seem to be timeservers rather than truly spiritual leaders.

In **Singapore**, of the first thousand graduates from IVCF, only three were in full-time Christian work, so Bobby Sng, who became the general secretary of Fellowship of Evangelical Students (FES) Singapore, appealed for a prayer target of ten graduates per year to train for full-time ministry. This wise step is transforming the situation. But this is a universal problem in developing countries. It can be extreme as in **Sarawak**. In the capital city of Kuching, the church includes many gifted graduates—a cabinet minister, medical consultants, the managing director of the dock company—but ministers with primary education and Bible college training. No matter how good and godly those ministers are, they are not equipped to give relevant help to the new university educated elite. We need to train graduates willing to make the financial sacrifice in committing their lives to serve either full-time or part-time in the churches.

(b) Theological education which is at too high a level for the context (the reverse problem!).

When I was principal of London Bible College we were constantly embarrassed by applications from Africans with denominational college diplomas, who wanted to upgrade to an honours degree, often involving the great expense of moving a whole family, or separation from family for years. When the question was asked why they could not study at excellent seminaries in Africa, they would explain that they could not, because they were not graduates! Here again is the mistake of exporting from the West the concept of a 'graduate' school, when the need of a non-graduate upgrading school has not first been met. Clearly we need both if we are going to meet the needs of the contemporary context.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING PEOPLE FOR THE TASK TO BE PERFORMED

In an earlier published lecture (*Vox Evangelica* 1990) I wrote about the importance of a goal-oriented approach to theological education. That is, determining the product (what a successful graduate would have learned to do) before designing the course. In this way we may discover the need for training people at a whole variety of different levels, depending upon the skills appropriate to the task.

In **India**, TAFTEE has been using theological education by extension (TEE) at the following levels of extension training, all of which keep in mind the variety of differing levels of church organisation:

- i. the city minister with a congregation full of university graduates all capable of studying by extension;
- ii. the circuit minister with ten congregations, to all of whom he cannot possibly minister properly, and where local elders and deacons need to be trained to teach using extension methods;
- iii. tribal church elders who may be p. 296 only semi-literate, but who must be able to teach their own congregations none the less.

At these different levels, courses and curricula have to be carefully designed to meet the needs and provide the skills appropriate to a specific church context.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT OVERLOADING THE CURRICULUM, ESPECIALLY WHERE FOREIGN LANGUAGES MUST BE LEARNED

One invariable rule of theological education seems to be that new courses can always be added to meet contemporary demands, but nothing can ever be subtracted from the curriculum. This explains why in my generation most Anglican ministers were deemed to need only two years of training (if they were graduates), whereas now they seem to need three! Mainland Europe demands much longer courses.

Curriculum overload is well illustrated in **Indonesia**, where in at least one college, students already speaking both their own language and Indonesian, must also learn Greek, Hebrew, English and German (Dutch) in a five year theological course.

It is not easy to be radical about what to omit or what to leave in, in courses. Where indigenous literature is sparse, it is imperative that English or some other foreign language be mastered in order to have access to theological literature.

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING LIMITED SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS WISELY

In view of the limited financial resources available, some criteria have to be established to determine who will really benefit from overseas study. Some want to study abroad because to have done so is a useful status symbol. But it is not always satisfactory to separate a man from his wife for long periods of time, and the cost of bringing a wife and children to the West adds greatly to the overall expenses. The trauma of culture shock, moving children into a new educational system (and perhaps a different language) and back again a few years later, is considerable.

It is not always good to send people to the West for study. We in the West benefit greatly by having our own vision enlarged by international students, and they benefit from the stimulus of meeting churches that do things differently (though not necessarily better) from their own. This suggests that the following principles of selection may prove useful:

- i. only when individuals have got as far as they can in their own educational system;
- ii. only when no possibilities exist in their own cultural context;
- iii. only when it is essential to the needs of the churches or for providing theological educators. We need to be alert for people who want the prestige of having studies overseas, but are not really the most gifted people in their own context;
- iv. principally for those who will teach their fellow countrymen and can make the transfer to their own context.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO OVERSEAS STUDY

- (1) Free standing, one year Masters programmes. **P. 297** The ATS in the **Philippines** was funded by a missionary agency (OMF) to bring in world class lecturers to reinforce teachers knowing the local context. So Carl Henry, Howard Marshall and Leon Morris each taught for a few weeks, providing a course the quality of which would have been hard to match anywhere in the world. It was a far cheaper alternative to sending Filipinos to study overseas.
- (2) Some Ph.D programmes require a minimum of overseas residence, provided good library facilities and a qualified supervisor in the appropriate discipline are available close at hand. This has the advantage of being more economical, avoiding

unsettling a whole family and leaving the doctoral candidate able to continue lecturing in his/her own cultural context.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AVAILABILITY OF THEOLOGICAL BOOKS IN TARGET LANGUAGE

It has already been noted that in **Indonesia** several languages have to be learned by theological students. If we were to look at a typical minister's 'library' in **Sarawak** we would find in addition to vernacular Bible and hymnbook, one or two Indonesian Christian books and some notebooks of Bible college lectures. That is the minister's total written 'resource'. This is not likely to change unless there is time for him to learn to read English at some stage.

THE IMPORTANCE TO THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH OF COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS

There are various theories of collegiate life, from the intense ashram style where all live in close proximity, to the commuter style where lecturers usually appear only for lectures. The sense of belonging to a community—a fellowship of alumni—can be significant for church unity in later years. In **London** most black Christians segregate themselves in black congregations because they feel unwelcome in white churches and feel more at home with their own style of worship. In this context a mixed college allows black and white students to build lifelong friendships that will help to avoid perpetuating a ghetto segregation indefinitely. This aspect of collegiate theological education is extremely important.

CONCLUSION

As good exegetes relate texts to contexts, so good educators relate theological education to its context. No theological institution can safely behave in isolation. We will not serve the Lord or our churches fruitfully unless we teach theology in context.

Dr. Michael Griffiths of Vancouver, Canada formerly General Director O.M.F. Singapore, is now retired. At the time of writing he was a professor at Regent College, Vancouver. He is a well-known author of books on missions. p. 298

Toward a Theology of Theological Education

Dr. Dieumeme Noelliste

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