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obedience of faith*

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The benefit of the document is in the unpacking of it as it is applied to particular contexts. It is included with the hope that others who have not seen it before will take it and use it.

The papers from the various consultations have generally been published by ICCA. It is the intention of ICAA to print future papers—and reprint past papers—in a series of numbered monographs. At present four monographs are in print with the expectation that others will be published in due course. Those in print are:

1. *Evangelical Theological Education: An International Agenda*, Paul Bowers, editor
2. *TEE Come of Age*, Robert Youngblood, editor
3. *Excellence and Renewal in Theological Education*, Robert Youngblood, editor
5. *Text and Context in Theological Education*, Roger Kemp, editor

All of the papers published in this edition will be included in the monograph series—each one then being found in the context of a specific theme. Future consultations will also have papers published in monograph form, making reference quicker and easier.

One sentence from the *Manifesto* introductions sums up well what is being attempted in this edition:

We who serve within evangelical theological education throughout the world today, and who find ourselves now linked together in growing international cooperation, wish to give united voice to our longing and prayer for the renewal of evangelical theological education today—for a renewal in form and in substance, a renewal in vision and in power, a renewal in commitment and in direction.

Paul Bowers

'The WEF Theological Commission, the founding body of ICAA welcomes this specific edition of ERT on Excellence in Theological Education and edited by Dr Roger Kemp, General Secretary of ICAA and Dr Paul Bowers of Zimbabwe. We believe it deserves careful reading and wide circulation. The Theological Commission and ICAA maintain a close working relationship at executive, institutional and project levels. For further information on ICAA write to Dr Roger Kemp 4A Paterson Road, Springwood, NSW 2777, Australia.'

The Editors p. 213

Opportunities for International Cooperation in Evangelical Theological Education

Bong Rin Ro

INTRODUCTION

A traditional Korean story tells of a dying father who had seven children. On his death bed he called all seven children and gave them final instructions. He asked each to bring a chopstick. As they knelt in front of their ailing father, he took one chopstick and very easily

broke it. Then he tied the seven chopsticks together and asked each son and daughter to break them in half. Each tried but could not break them. The father said, 'My dear children, if you stand alone, the people will break you down like a single chopstick; but if you stand together, nobody will be able to break you. Love each other and work together among yourselves and you will succeed in all your endeavours.'

This simple story illustrates what I wish to consider in this paper. The measure of success which we may experience in evangelical theological programmes, particularly in the Third World, will largely depend on the measure of effective cooperation which can be achieved among evangelical theological leaders at national, regional, and international levels. I wish to put forward some detailed proposals for such cooperation at the international level.

Before I outline these proposals, it would be very helpful to review very briefly the present situation of evangelical theological education. Let me remind you of some of the leading factors affecting such education, especially in the Third World.

Evangelical theological education has been largely characterized by fragmentation. The majority of the schools seem to have a relatively small student body, a limited teaching staff, a minimal library and in administration and finances are still often directly dependent on overseas sources. One consequence of this is a generally low level of academic quality. Given the rapid rise in educational standards in many Third World countries in recent years, this poor quality poses one of the more serious challenges facing the younger churches of the Third World.

Another characteristic has been that in the majority of these areas the top ecclesiastical and theological leadership of evangelical churches is [p. 214](#) still being trained in the West. There is an urgent need to see that the advanced levels of leadership training for evangelical groups in the Third World take place in the Third World itself. As I have mentioned elsewhere earlier, this would allow such training to be more culturally relevant, it would cut down on the brain drain to the West, it would limit the influx of western liberalism, and it would make much better sense financially.

As the direct result of a general awakening among evangelicals in many places to the need for upgrading and adjusting their theological training programmes, accreditation movements have recently developed among evangelicals in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe. Like a young child learning to walk and talk, these newly born bodies have been learning how to develop their individual accreditation schemes. Contact between us has come naturally, as we have tried to benefit from one another's ideas and experience. The experience of our longer established sister body in North America has been especially helpful. One critical factor as yet not entirely resolved is the cultivation of credibility for our new accreditation schemes. In this area, and in many others, we have begun to recognize that contact and cooperation at an international level could prove mutually beneficial, for our individual agencies, for the accrediting schemes, for our constituent schools, and most of all for evangelical theological education as a whole.

The time indeed is now ripe for such a step, for providing for regular international contact and cooperation to deal with common problems, address common issues, and take advantage of common opportunities. Therefore I wish to commend the suggestion, already circulated among us, to form a global alliance among our various evangelical accrediting bodies.

Proposal 1: That an International Council of Accrediting Agencies for evangelical theological education (ICAA) be formed, to provide a medium for international cooperation in evangelical theological education.

I. COOPERATION IN DEVELOPING ACCREDITATION

International cooperation would be beneficial, first of all, in the area of accreditation. The key emphasis of any such cooperation should be upon the existing regional accreditation efforts. Any action at the international level should be focused on strengthening the hand of the regional accrediting bodies. There are a number of ways in which this could be done.

A. ICAA recognition of regional agencies

Just as individual theological schools are examined by the regional agencies and then recognized, so the regional agencies should also be examined by ICAA and then recognized. ICAA would in this regard function like the Council on Post-secondary Accreditation (COPA), which accredits over fifty educational accrediting bodies in North America. ICAA would provide international expertise in helping the individual agencies evaluate and upgrade the quality of their services, [p. 215](#) and then would publically recognize the achievement. Such international recognition of the individual accrediting schemes would certainly strengthen evangelical accrediting endeavours in the various regions, and help win confidence and cooperation for them both from evangelical schools and from other secular and religious agencies.

Proposal 2: That ICAA strengthen the regional accrediting agencies, by developing criteria, procedure, and facilities for evaluating their accreditation schemes and recognizing them.

B. ICAA Standardization of degree programmes

The great variety of educational patterns existing in the world today brings difficulty in achieving mutual intelligibility in theological education between various areas of the world. Owing to long colonial control over the Third World by western nations, we have different educational models: English, American, Dutch, French. For example, British primary, secondary, and tertiary education is different from that of the Americans. The British system is basically an examination-oriented programme, while in the American system one must have a certain number of credit hours before graduating. As a result apparently parallel degrees do not always mean equivalent programmes. Examples could be multiplied. A theological college in Singapore has an accredited four year B.D. programme for the student who holds a higher school certificate (equivalent to the first year of college in America). In effect this B.D. programme takes two years less than an M.Div programme in the American system. Some standardization of patterns in degree programmes would certainly help schools both in the West and in the Third World to find a basis for understanding and recognizing one another's degree programmes, and would also facilitate the exchange of students.

Proposal 3: That ICAA develop commonly agreed academic standards for the accredited degrees of member agencies, and the facilities for monitoring practice in order to assure everyone that the standards are being maintained in each participating area.

C. ICAA periodical

Mutual communication on accreditation between regions would be very helpful. ICAA should disseminate information, research, news, and new ideas on accreditation through a regular publication.

Proposal 4: That ICAA publish a quarterly bulletin on accreditation for the accredited theological schools of its member agencies and for other interested schools and individuals throughout the world.

D. ICAA consultations

ICAA should plan to organize top-level international consultations in order to study and discuss in depth various issues of major concern in evangelical theological education, such as equivalency of academic standards, post-graduate theological training in the Third World, TEE, and relationships with other secular and religious accrediting agencies.

Proposal 5: That ICAA sponsor periodic international consultations to deal with various issues of importance in evangelical theological education. p. 216

E. ICAA financial assistance to regional bodies

It takes money to put accreditation and other services into operation on a continental basis. Travel, for example, is essential in the administration of such services, and yet travel costs alone are becoming almost prohibitive. It has been our experience in Asia that the schools which are visited by accreditation evaluation teams are able to pay for only a third of the total expenses of the visitation. Since some church organizations and Christian foundations prefer to deal with international bodies, the distribution of finances will be facilitated if ICAA could serve as a recipient and conduit in place of regional or national agencies. Each regional agency would then make its financial requests to ICAA, and ICAA would allocate funds for different projects and agencies.

Proposal 6: That ICAA in its budget include financial assistance to its member agencies, particularly in the Third World.

II. COOPERATION IN ADVANCED THEOLOGICAL PROGRAMMES

In accordance with the rapidly rising educational standard in the Third World, theological education in those areas must raise its academic standards to meet the advancing intellectual demands of the Christian communities there. It is sad to observe in countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, that evangelical theological students cannot enrol in an evangelical seminary on the B.D. level, because no such graduate seminary exists in those countries. Therefore, it is imperative for each major country or sub-region to have at least one or two evangelical graduate seminaries for training national leadership. ICAA would be able to assist the regional bodies in promoting the development of post-graduate study programmes.

A. Areas for post-graduate studies

In each region we must seek to develop cooperative post-graduate programmes in several different major areas. I have received scores of letters from all over Asia inquiring about specialized graduate training in areas such as: Old and New Testament, theology, church history, Christian education, communications (mass media, TV/radio, films, journalism), counselling, evangelism, church growth, missions, sacred music, TEE, and living religions. Because we do not have graduate studies in these areas in Asia, except the general B.D. or M.Div. and Th.M. programmes in biblical studies, I have had to recommend overseas training in the West for these students.

Owing to the lack of evangelical resources in personnel and finance in the Third World, we need to cooperate in each region in order to produce a few quality educational centres with top faculty and research libraries. In Asia there are four evangelical institutions where Asian students can get their Th.M. level training in Biblical studies: Asian Centre for Theological Studies and Missions (ACTS) in Seoul, Korea; p. 217 China Graduate School of Theology (CGST) in Hong Kong; Asia Theological Seminary (ATS) in Manila, Philippines;

and Union Biblical Seminary (UBS) in Pune, India. We are trying to establish similar graduate level training in Asia for the other disciplines mentioned above.

B. Strategy for advanced study centres

It is very difficult for the national church in Asia to achieve an effective graduate training programme without close cooperation from evangelical churches and theological schools in the West. We must establish communication between theological educators and schools in the Third World and those in the West. Evangelical post-graduate seminaries in the West need to understand the situation of theological education in the Third World and apply specific policies in connection with the Third World leadership training taking place on their campuses. For example, many Asian students have come over to western theological schools for training, when they can get the same level of training in their country or region. Western schools should not accept these students unless it is absolutely certain that the type of education the international student is seeking cannot be offered in Asia.

The exchange of professors for sabbatical periods should be promoted between western and Third World schools. Western theologians should be encouraged to spend their time in teaching in the Third World. There is special value for a graduate school in the West to establish a working relationship with a graduate school in the Third World. The western school can help build up an evangelical counterpart in the Third World. Nevertheless, the degree offered by the Third World school must be a Third World degree, accredited in the Third World.

ICAA must also emphatically call the evangelical missions societies and missiological institutions in the West to recognize that the training of national leadership for the Third World church must be treated as one of the top priorities in modern missions. Missionary personnel and funds for theological education, lay training, and other areas of leadership training should be expanded. Grass roots evangelism should be left to the national church.

Proposal 7: That ICAA, in collaboration with the WEF Theological Commission, call an international consultation to develop guidelines, policies, and suggestions for professional contact and cooperation between evangelical theological educators and schools in the West and in the Third World, and to address the matter of training Third World nationals in the West.

Proposal 8: That ICAA, in collaboration with the WEF Theological Commission, plan with western missions leaders three separate consultations, in North America, the United Kingdom, and West Germany, to consider how western mission societies might more effectively relate to the needs of Third World evangelical churches in theological education. [p. 218](#)

III. COOPERATION IN DEVELOPING EXTENSION THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

In many parts of the world, owing to the lack of trained leadership in the local church, responsibilities of the local church fall upon the shoulders of lay leaders. Therefore, there is a crying need in the local church to train lay leaders for spiritual leadership. Continuing education for local pastors is another area of need. In Asia, fifteen nations have developed TEE to train lay leaders. ATA sponsored the first Pan-Asia TEE consultation in Hong Kong, January 1974. The ATA TEE Coordinator has been working with the different TEE national groups throughout Asia.

Some extension institutions, such as the International Correspondence Institute of the Assemblies of God, based in Belgium, are seeking regional accreditation on the degree level. Non-residential and extension theological education must be given its proper recognition in the accreditation movement.

I see a need for more world-wide contact and communication among TEE programmes, in order to create further stimulation and information on TEE in the various continents. The lack of information and communication among TEE workers within a country, within a continent, and world-wide has hampered the progress of the extension movement.

Proposal 9: That ICAA establish an extension education taskforce to seek means of cooperation with TEE programmes world-wide, towards providing needed international contact and coordination, including the possibility of a world-wide TEE bulletin, and the question of accreditation of TEE programmes.

IV. COOPERATION IN DEVELOPING TEXTBOOK AND LIBRARY RESOURCES

In the West it would be inconceivable for a theological student to have no theological books in his personal library. Yet this situation is true for many theological students in the Third World. Often all they have is the Bible and their notebooks. How can we remedy the situation? We need to find ways to provide both students and schools not only with books in English or other European languages, but also with ones that have been translated into major local languages, and, even better, with original materials produced indigenously. Without substantial improvement in textbook production and in theological library holdings, evangelical theological education in the Third World will face continuous obstacles. We must encourage the translation of the more relevant titles in western evangelical theological literature and the accelerated production of indigenous textbooks. And we must seek means of aiding Third World schools in building up their theological libraries.

Proposal 10: That ICAA, in close collaboration with the regional bodies, seek assistance from major evangelical publishers and foundations in a concerted theological textbook and library development effort.

CONCLUSION

Here then are ten practical proposals for international cooperation in evangelical theological education. There is an urgent need to strengthen **P. 219** such education in many parts of the world. The recently established accrediting bodies, by working cooperatively at the international level, not only will be able to see their own efforts reinforced through global collaboration, but will more importantly be able significantly to advance evangelical theological education as a whole world-wide—and thus play a strategic role in the vital task of equipping men and women of God for building up his church in every nation.

Dr. Bong Ro, of Seoul, Korea is the executive secretary of the WEF Theological Commission. He is an ex-officio member of the ICAA executive committee. **p. 220**