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# Forty Years On: The Evolution Of Theological Education By Extension (TEE)

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## Genesis

In the early 1960s the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Guatemala faced an enviable problem: their churches were growing too fast to provide adequate shepherding for their flocks.<sup>1</sup> The theological college simply could not keep up with the demand for trained pastors, so congregations often

had to make do with untrained leaders, *functional pastors*. Their problem was replicated in a number of Latin American Protestant Churches at the time. These pastors were usually mature men who could not leave their jobs and their families for years of training in a city seminary. Searching for creative solutions, the Presbyterians first decided to move their seminary from the capital to the village of San Felipe in a rural area nearer to many of their churches. However, they soon discovered that leaders in need of training could no more leave jobs and families to attend a seminary twenty miles away than one two hundred miles away.

Undeterred, the Seminary staff and faculty concluded that if the students could not come to the seminary, the seminary must go to the students. So in rural Guatemala in 1962, Theological

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<sup>1</sup> I am reliant on memory for many of the historical references in this article and would appreciate correction of any factual errors. Too many people were involved in the development of TEE to name them all; I mention those best known to me and regret any important, unintentional omissions.

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Education by Extension (TEE) was born. In time, the number of extension students far outnumbered those in the residential program, and those being trained were primarily those who had demonstrated their commitment to ministry. Ralph Winter and James Emery designed and commenced the program; Ross Kinsler, Benjamin and Nelly Jacobs, Jose Carrera, Baudilio Recinos, Charles Ainley and others were soon to contribute much to its development. They never dreamed their model of theological education would reverberate around the world.

### Exodus

The TEE model could not be long confined to one small country. Word spread quickly across Latin America through mission and denominational networks. Others wondered whether TEE might solve some of their problems. One of the earliest programs was in Bolivia, where Ray Morris of the then Andes Evangelical Mission was a prime mover. In 1967 the TEE concept caught the imagination of participants in a conference of theological educators in Armenia, Colombia, and similar programs soon sprang up across Central and South America. Innovative variations on the original model emerged, such as the Conservative Baptist program for marginally-literate peasant farmers involved in church planting in Honduras.

By the early 1970s the new extension model was spreading rapidly across Asia, Africa and the Pacific. The TEE concept was spread by word of mouth and print within missions and denominations, by papers and discussion at international conferences, and

by the many seminars and workshops staffed by international and regional organizations, notably the WEF (now WEA) Theological Commission and the EFMA/IFMA Committee to Assist Missionary Education Overseas (CAMEO—later, Committee to Assist Ministry Education Overseas). These were generally sponsored by local organizations, such as the Asia Theological Association, the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, and national Evangelical Alliances. Later the WCC Programme on Theological Education (now Ecumenical Theological Education) became involved, spreading the word among a different constituency.

The pioneers of TEE soon realized they were developing not just a method for training more people, but a radical new concept of theological education. However, the significance of this was not always grasped by those who adopted the model. TEE was sometimes adopted more as an emergency measure to cope with unprecedented church growth, or because it was seen as cheap leadership training. Limited goals and understanding accounted for some of the problems subsequently encountered.

### Chronicles

In the 1970s and '80s the number of new TEE programs exploded as more and more churches and missions became involved. Initially, most were in the developing world and most were evangelical. Somewhat later, conciliar churches grasped the potential of TEE, particularly when Ross Kinsler served a term with the WCC Programme on Theological Education. TEE made lim-

ited appearances in Europe, North America and Australia. Courses were produced in many languages, and at all levels from basic literate to graduate. Hundreds of students became thousands. National TEE associations were formed and international conferences built new networks.

Help for new TEE providers came in the various forms, much of it provided by the WEF Theological Commission and CAMEO, in cooperation with national and regional associations, many of them affiliates of WEF. Several books and dissertations appeared, now mostly out-of-print.<sup>2</sup> There were economically produced newsletters, such as the *Extension Seminary Bulletin* from Guatemala, which appeared in Spanish and English, and a bulletin entitled *Programming News* (1969-1976) edited by Martin Dainton, a missionary to Indonesia. This newsletter made an important contribution at the time, when programmed instruction was then intimately connected with TEE. It subsequently broadened its coverage and became *Theological Education Today (TET)*, which I edited from 1976 to 1983. John Langlois of the Theological Commission did a ster-

ling job from Guernsey, arranging the art work, production and distribution. We sometimes struggled to recruit contributors; the best teachers were often too busy teaching to tell us how they did it, but there was always enough material to fill an eight-page quarterly!

Our primary target was national (and missionary) faculty teaching in developing countries at fairly basic levels in Bible schools and TEE, since it is at these levels that the vast majority of Third World pastors are trained. There was no charge to recipients, so the publication could circulate more readily in less affluent parts of the world. The emphasis was on practical help for teachers, rather than on academic articles about theological education, which could be found elsewhere; feedback was very positive. After several years, and pressure from one or two sources (but not from its readership) to make it a more academic publication, *TET* was reduced, mainly for financial reasons, to a page or two in WEF's *Theological News*, and then disappeared altogether. An anthology of articles, *The Best of TET*, was published by the TC in 1983. There is probably still a need for a publication of this type. In more recent years we have seen *The T.E.E. Journal*, based in South Africa, a useful publication of a different type.

A second important source of help for TEE workers came from regional seminars, and from the cooperative partnerships that often grew out of these. Those wishing to start TEE programs would generally attend a workshop. A number of these were sponsored by the WEF Theological Commission or by regional associations linked to WEF, such as Asia Theologi-

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2 Early books on TEE included Ralph Winter's *Theological Education by Extension* (Wm Carey Library, 1969), Ted and Margaret Ward's *Programmed Instruction for Theological Education by Extension* (Lansing, MI, CAMEO, 1970), Fred Holland's *Teaching through TEE* (Kenya: Evangel Press, 1975), Ross Kinsler's *The Extension Movement in Theological Education* (Wm Carey Library, 1978, rev edn 1981), Kinsler (ed) *Ministry by the People* (WCC/Orbis) (a collection of case studies in TEE from around the world), and a number of others.

cal Association and the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar. Workshops in many countries were run initially by Ralph Winter, Ross Kinsler, Ted Ward, Lois McKinney, Fred Holland, Ian McCleary, Peter Savage, myself and various others. Their expertise was variously derived from early experience of TEE, plus a background in cross-cultural theological and/or secular education, and familiarity with programmed instruction.

Because running a TEE program was quickly seen to be a daunting task, most providers sooner or later sought some level of cooperation with others, at least in the development of home-study materials. TEE workshops did much to facilitate such cooperation, often bringing together people from surprisingly diverse denominational backgrounds.

Various models of cooperation were explored and continue to be used. One model is a single, integrated, interdenominational program, like TAFTEE in India. Programs of this type could be run from an existing campus, like the Christian Leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea, or simply from a central office. Another model is the national or regional association of extension programs. Such associations may cooperate in sponsoring workshops, producing study materials, sharing ideas and insights, etc. Variations in the degree of central policy formation and control are possible. Examples of regional associations are PAFTEE in the Philippines, AETTE in Brazil, and TEEAC in Cambodia.

Cooperative course design developed, and to varying degrees continued, from the first *Intertext* project in

Latin America to the *Text Africa* project from Evangel Publishing House in Kenya, and *SEAN* courses, originally developed by Anglicans in Argentina and now distributed to many parts of the world from the UK. Ambitious projects sometimes floundered as busy people failed to find time to produce the courses they had agreed to write, but over time, a good number of courses did appear.

TAFTEE produced courses for India. AETTE brought together study materials from various denominations in Brazil. PAFTEE gave its imprimatur to materials that met its standards in the Philippines. The Christian Leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea produced the first of its TEE courses. Cooperative ecumenical text production also began, and the Programme on Theological Education (formerly the Theological Education Fund) gave prominence to TEE in its quarterly, *Ministerial Formation*. TEE seemed unstoppable!

## Numbers

At this point we should pause and consider exactly what we mean by TEE. Definitions of *extension education* and *TEE* are many and various, often vague enough to include evening school, correspondence courses or today, online learning. It is not particularly helpful to label such a wide variety of delivery methods 'TEE'; there are already enough generic terms like *distance education*, *continuing education*, *external studies*, and *flexible delivery* in various languages. Imprecise labelling has sometimes caused genuine TEE to be disregarded ('*we've tried that*') or brought into disrepute. It is better to

promote a more specific definition, based on the original Guatemalan model, but allowing for some variation.

### Components of TEE

As developed in Guatemala, TEE has three specific components: *self-study materials*, *regular seminars* and *life experience and ministry* in the students' own context. It was intended that these be closely intertwined. None of these components was unique or new in the sixties. It was the particular *combination and inter-relationship* of these elements that was distinctive. TEE is not a correspondence course, it is not a part-time night school and it is not a series of short seminars.

### Self-Instructional Materials.

If theological education is to *extend* geographically, it must break away from dependence on lectures to deliver content. But mere provision of 'notes' is an inadequate substitute for a good teacher, especially when students have had limited education. The architects of TEE believed that study materials must be genuinely self-instructional. They do not replace a teacher, since regular seminars are still a critical part of the process; they do replace most of the teacher's *lecturing* function.

There is a crucial difference between TEE and a part-time lecture course with homework. When students work through self-instructional materials in TEE they are not simply doing 'homework'. Rather, *the bulk of the course content—the informational input—is provided by these materials*. This dispenses with the need for a subject-matter-expert to visit all the cen-

tres to deliver lectures. Hence the materials make it possible to *extend* training far more widely than is possible with, say, an evening lecture class.

In the sixties and seventies, programmed instruction materials (PIM) were popular in some educational circles. They could help students study more actively. Working through a good programmed lesson was the next best thing to having a tutor alongside, prompting one to think, respond and review, and providing immediate feedback. It seemed an ideal, affordable method to use in designing home-study materials.

Some experimentation with computer-assisted learning was emerging at the time, but this was of little interest to TEE leaders. Computers were not too common, and were expensive and bulky. TEE centres were, and often still are, in poor or remote villages with no electricity. So Programmed Instruction ('PI') did not involve software; it was produced in books or in a more affordable stencilled format.

Thus programmed instruction, introduced at the outset, soon became so widely associated with TEE that many believed it to be an indispensable component. Those of us who led TEE writers' workshops around the world had studied PI and sought to pass on what we had learned. I also took private tutoring in California from an expert in the field. Strangely, I was soon to find myself engaged in a campaign to dissociate TEE from programmed instruction.

### Tutorials/Seminars

Regular meetings of students and tutors were an essential component of

TEE from the outset. In communal societies the value of regular, face-to-face classes is particularly important. But the use of home-study materials alters the purpose of these meetings. With no need for lectures, class time is freed up for clarification, discussion, reinforcement, enrichment, testing, practical exercises—indeed for anything that cannot be adequately taught in the printed materials. The tutorials are intended to be highly participatory learning experiences, and to include an important element of bonding through worship, sharing and mutual pastoral care.

This dramatically alters the role of the tutor, who need not be the author of the materials nor even a subject matter expert. What is essential is to have a good overall grasp of the subject, to have prepared adequately, and to be willing and able to serve as a facilitator of learning rather than as a lecturer. For some, this can be a difficult transition.

### Life and Ministry Experience

Over recent decades theological educators have learned much from Clinical Pastoral Education and from field education in the secular helping professions. This has helped shape the move from the earlier, often *unsupervised field work* to the more focused concept of *supervised field education*.

TEE students have plenty of life experience, and most are engaged in practical ministry in their churches. Adequate extension training must help them connect their studies with everyday life and ministry. In traditional seminaries, most students are extracted from their home contexts, so

field education placements have to be engineered. Such placements may provide new and challenging learning experiences; at other times placements can become somewhat artificial, or at worst, boring.

TEE may be less able to provide *new* field education experiences, but it is ideally placed to help students connect new learning with ongoing ministry in their own contexts. All programs involve participants in discussions intended to apply what they have learned, but sufficiently strong connections between theory and practice have not always been made.

### Extension

Another dimension in an adequate definition of TEE is its capacity to *extend* theological education in various ways.

First, TEE *extends geographical coverage* well beyond the environs of the seminary. It trains students in their own contexts instead of extracting them for long periods, and so is positioned near the *extension* end of an *extraction-extension* continuum in education. This helps to ensure that rural parishes have a continuing supply of pastors, as (unlike the graduates of many urban seminaries) most TEE graduates remain in their own areas and continue to serve churches there. The structure of TEE enables it to extend training across a wide area while retaining regular personal contact among teachers and students. Correspondence courses, by contrast, can only cover a wide area by reducing personal contact to zero, while lecture-based courses are much more limited geographically.

Second, TEE greatly *extends the*

*potential student body.* Traditionally, theological education has been offered mainly in fulltime residential colleges in the cities. To access such training in a poor country, students must have money or be heavily subsidised, usually from abroad. It is too expensive for colleges to house and feed many families, so the majority of students are single. In practice, Bible colleges in less affluent countries cater mainly for *promising young men*, who, it is hoped, might one day make good pastors.

Each of these three words conceals a limitation. There are relatively few places or scholarships for *women* students, particularly in higher-level Evangelical seminaries. While *older*, married students may be welcome in principle, it is usually financially impractical to leave work and move to the city for several years. The gifts and calling of most young students, while perhaps *promising*, are unproven. Few have even served on church committees or held the office of deacon or elder. Proven, experienced leaders and functional pastors are largely excluded from traditional forms of theological education, though they may sorely need and greatly desire it.

TEE does not turn the young away, but it opens training opportunities to many more besides. Some see TEE as part of wider move from fulltime training for a small elite towards a greater *democratisation* of theological education. Ideally, it is said, if all the people of God should be able to 'do theology', then so far as possible, all should have access to the tools for the task.

There are important policy questions about whether a TEE program should take over the adult Christian education function of the local church

or whether it should concentrate on training leaders who themselves can 'teach others also', an approach more in the spirit of 2 Timothy 2:2. On the other hand, where lay believers seek serious theological education at a higher level, there is room for more innovative thought in developing curricula for lay people; their learning needs differ significantly from those of clergy.

It sometimes happens that seminaries whose main goal is to train pastors find themselves inadvertently training mainly lay workers. In some developing countries Bible colleges attract school leavers, some with little real interest in the ministry. They enrol after failing to gain admission to a preferred institution such as university or teachers' college. Such students will often seek secular employment after graduation, or become reluctant pastors. Christian training doubtless benefits these lay graduates and their churches, but an expensive residential program is not a cost-efficient way to train them, especially if at the same time, the college cannot produce enough pastors.

## Judges

There appears to be an idea in some circles that TEE has had its day. In fact reports of the death of TEE have been greatly exaggerated! Admittedly, for a variety of reasons, some extension programs have disappeared or have been replaced by other forms of training. Not all have functioned well.

Nevertheless numerous programs, many fairly recent, continue to operate today in Africa, Asia, South America, the Pacific, and the former USSR, as



well as among Native Americans and Australian Aborigines. TEE also exists in some more affluent western settings, where it has now generally introduced online and other computer-based components. In some cases, changes are such that these programs may no longer meet our definition of TEE.

As examples of flourishing extension programs, I mention two with which I have had recent connections. The TEE Association of Cambodia (TEEAC) has brought together workers from a variety of churches, missions and NGOs, to produce and deliver courses to several hundred pastors and other church leaders across the nation—an impressive accomplishment, given the recent history of that country. While member organizations, and TEEAC itself, run their own programs, virtually all policy issues, standards, etc., are centrally determined by TEEAC. The high degree of cooperation and fellowship has done much to strengthen and expand the overall impact of TEE on the churches.

Another example is the flourishing interdenominational TEE program run (alongside a residential program) by CLTC in Papua New Guinea. This program peaked in the year 2000 with some 5000 students across the young nation. Unrest in parts of the country and the tripling of postage rates have reduced numbers somewhat since then, but enrolments remain strong, and include some high school students, whose Religious Education teachers have chosen to use TEE materials. New courses have continually been developed, both in English (the language of education) and in Tok Pisin (the Pidgin lingua franca of much of the country).

TEE has its critics, and sometimes I am asked whether it 'works'. This is an impossible question to answer *in vacuo*. One could as well ask whether Bible College or Sunday School works. TEE is not a single program. It is one *vehicle* for delivering training. Aside from general comparisons of delivery systems, questions about efficacy can most usefully be asked of a *particular* TEE program: Is TEE the best training choice in *this* situation? Are quality materials being used, and are these properly matched to students' educational levels? Is there a sound theological base? How well contextualised are the materials, and do they lend themselves to real-life application? Are the seminars run properly, and how well trained are the tutors? How effective is the overall administration?

Particularly in its early days, sweeping claims were sometimes made for TEE, and its presumed superiority over traditional Bible colleges. An unnecessary competitive aspect was introduced, and expectations were raised that could not always be fulfilled. Such situations sometimes led to judgmental remarks.

However, criticisms of TEE frequently turn out to be criticisms of one or two aspects of a particular program. Sometimes the critic's problem is really with the ethos or theological position of a program, or with poor materials or inexperienced tutors s/he has encountered. Sometimes the sticking point is that programmed instruction is seen as a domesticating form of instruction—as *poor* PI (or what sometimes passes for PI) can indeed be, especially when written at a basic level. But these days PI should no longer be seen as an indispensable

component of TEE.

It must be recognized that, despite some undoubted failings, TEE has made a major contribution to theological education in many countries, and has brought biblical knowledge and practical training to thousands who could otherwise never have had access to it. This is a tremendous achievement. As with any other type of training, there is a continuum of quality. TEE programs can be excellent, mediocre, or by any criteria, quite poor.

Objective evaluation of educational programs can be difficult where there is no benchmark and nothing in the region with which to compare it. Students in poor-quality programs, whether delivered in college or by extension, often have no idea what they are *not* learning. When keen Christians who previously had no access to theological education are provided with TEE courses, they are often lavish in their praise. The courses may or may not merit such admiration, but something is almost always better—much better—than nothing!

Any educational system is prone to particular strengths and weaknesses, and TEE is no exception. I have enumerated below some factors I believe are important in developing an effective TEE program. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, and emphasizes the situation in developing countries, where TEE is most used. My comments necessarily reflects my own biases and experience. Some of the same factors are also critical to good seminary or Bible college training.

## Proverbs

In my experience, a high quality TEE program in a developing country typically has all or most of the following features:

The sponsoring organization recognizes the importance of leadership training overall, and of the TEE program specifically. It therefore accords TEE high priority in funding and provision of personnel. Too often, in practice if not explicitly, TEE is viewed as secondary or inferior to the traditional residential school and is resourced accordingly, virtually guaranteeing inferior quality. Allocation of resources is generally a good guide to true priorities. One is sometimes tempted to ask, *'What are all these other things that are so much more important than the training of national Christian leaders?'*

Too often, missionaries and Bible College teachers, already overworked, are asked to take on the design and teaching of TEE courses as an 'extra' task, with little if any reduction in existing duties. They simply do not have time to do this properly. *A Church or a theological college cannot expect to plan and implement a quality TEE program without employing extra staff.* It should also be noted that the successful addition of any major program to the work of an existing organization would benefit greatly from some understanding of change dynamics.

**The key stakeholders in the TEE program understand it, are convinced of its value, and are keen to implement and promote it.** This includes national church leaders. Too often TEE is initiated more because of its presumed economy than because of

its inherent value as a form of theological education. Expecting people to staff a program they do not really understand or believe in quickly leads to discontent and perfunctory performance. The philosophy of TEE needs to be carefully explained to all.

One reason some TEE programs have struggled has been that they have never really been 'owned' by the national churches. TEE was sometimes initiated by keen missionaries who failed to consult sufficiently with local church leaders. Such programs are vulnerable, especially in an unstable political situation. If the mission has to withdraw, the TEE program will soon run down or close.

Church leaders may want a college like those of other churches. Pastors who were themselves trained in a residential college may feel this is the only 'real' theological education; they suspect the missionaries are offering them a cheap, 'second-best' alternative. Some pastors feel threatened at the prospect of members of their congregation embarking on serious theological studies. They may then believe it is in their interests to emphasize the superiority of their own seminary training. For such reasons, as well as for their knowledge of their people and culture, it is important to include local leaders in planning, administration and teaching. A senior pastor without teaching or administrative skills might play a valuable role as chaplain to the students. A small pilot program in a situation where pastors will not feel threatened can be one way to help them understand the value of TEE.

All TEE workers receive appropriate training for the tasks they will perform, and attend periodic in-service

seminars to review basics, study principles of adult education, and maintain motivation. Curriculum designers, course writers, translators, area coordinators and tutors are given detailed training by persons with appropriate educational knowledge and TEE experience. Experience suggests that a workshop of at least two weeks is minimal for training course designers, with a longer duration preferred. If courses are actually to be written within a reasonable time, the best approach is usually to schedule a series of production workshops with a trained facilitator. Promises by busy people to write courses in their 'spare time' usually result in long delays or no new courses!

A common failing is that once initial training has been provided, no ongoing provision is made for training *new* tutors or course writers, or for in-service refresher seminars for continuing workers. After a few years with gradual turnover of personnel, there is hardly a trained tutor or course writer to be found. There were never enough new workers *at one time* to justify another workshop, so it is assumed newcomers can just 'pick it up', or perhaps learn enough by reading a tutors' booklet. *Such gradual attrition of trained leaders, tutors and course writers can dramatically reduce the effectiveness of a program.* Definite plans are required to train new workers, even if they arrive in ones and twos. It is easier to provide ongoing training in the context of a broader consortium.

**The TEE program has clear objectives and caters appropriately for a well-defined target group.** Leaders decide at what educational level the program will function, making sure

they do not raise the entrance standards so high that they exclude most of the students! They decide whether they will target mainly leaders, or laity. It can be great to have large numbers of students, but TEE is not essentially 'a numbers game'. Some centres in the original Guatemalan program have had only one or two students. *What is important is training the key people.* TEE programs are usually designed primarily for pastors and leaders, who are then encouraged to develop their own gifts in reteaching some of the material to others at a simpler level, probably with little requirement of home study. *Careful thought should be given to the social and cultural implications of placing an untrained pastor in the same classroom as members of his or her congregation.*

It is very important that TEE students be selected partly on the basis of strong motivation. Without this, they will not persevere long enough to complete their studies. Acceptance into the program should not be automatic, and high standards of home study and attendance should be required. Otherwise some will soon become slack and complain of 'too much homework'. They will come to class unprepared. Once this happens, an essential component of TEE is lost. Diligent students also suffer as standards drop, and as there are few others to form serious discussion groups; TEE does not provide for auditors. Once we succumb to such pressures, the whole program will plummet in quality and depth, and in time, accreditation may lapse.

Some see extension training as appropriate only for basic training, and fail to see its potential for ministerial formation at higher levels. Such situations as that just described feed that

perception and make it harder for TEE to be accepted as a serious training model.

In addition to the value of TEE for training church leaders, there are exciting possibilities for developing curricula for educated lay people. These studies could relate theological understanding to certain professional areas, such as business, law, medicine, education, economics, politics and government. As Christian professionals learn to apply theological understanding and Christian ethics to their vocations, they can make a significant contribution to national life and culture.

At the other end of the educational spectrum are the many TEE students with limited educational backgrounds. It is not sufficient to provide materials in the mother tongue; a TEE program can still easily fail if it makes unrealistic demands on the literacy levels of students. I have often suggested that most Bible Colleges and TEE programs would benefit from having at least one faculty member with specialized training in relevant aspects of language teaching and remedial reading. Such training might be acquired at graduate level as part of a sabbatical or furlough study program, in lieu perhaps of writing one more thesis on a well-worn theological topic.

TEE has been conducted among marginal literates, but many adaptations and special expertise are needed to achieve success. Some of my own workshops over the years have dealt with training illiterates and semi-literates, but it should be remembered that TEE is not suitable for every situation.

**The administration is well organized, fits the local context, functions with integrity, and is ade-**

**quately funded.** There need to be sufficient structures for the program to operate relatively smoothly and accountably, but without unnecessary administrative layers or red tape. National requirements for registration of educational programs, accreditation, etc., will need to be met. Adequate student services and pastoral care should be provided and the program needs checks and balances to ensure ongoing integrity, especially in moral and financial matters. Example speaks louder than preaching!

A carefully crafted and contextualised curriculum is followed, and periodic workshops are held for curriculum updating and review. Most TEE curricula include essential foundational subjects and ample biblical content, though often, modern processes of curriculum design have not been followed, so the curriculum simply reflects a slightly adapted western course of studies.

A major problem is that many programs have been insufficiently contextualised. Real needs in the churches and community are inadequately and often only incidentally addressed. The same problem exists in many Bible colleges, but can be more acute in TEE for reasons noted below. I am convinced that the importance of *deep contextualisation* is often gravely underestimated. Without this, much of our teaching is destined to be little more than transient head knowledge that fails to inform or transform life and work.

**Quality self-instructional materials are used, with all or most designed for the context.** A major reason for poor contextualisation in much TEE is the propensity for 'borrowing' courses from other countries. This is

different from importing textbooks for use with a teacher in a traditional classroom, because in TEE the self-instructional materials themselves play a kind of 'teacher' role. Furthermore, TEE tutors frequently have less training than Bible college teachers and may find it harder to help students contextualise what they read.

Since many TEE programs are under-resourced it is hardly surprising if they fail to develop courses that really meet the needs of their own constituencies. Recognizing that the design of good self-instructional materials requires expertise, time and money they do not have, they prefer to buy translation rights from others.

The old idea, still current in some circles, that TEE should be written in programmed instructional format must also have deterred some would-be writers. PI looks deceptively easy to write, but is in fact quite difficult, especially if the writer wants to produce an interesting, varied course. Much that passes for PI is not PI! After leading a number of programming workshops in the early days of TEE, we realized that few participants actually went on to write any PI. Those lessons that were produced were often dull and repetitive, and used a lot of paper. Since that time I have generally taught writers how to design workbooks, with better results.

Some early TEE programs imported courses on almost anything from almost anywhere, a practice that too easily resulted in patchwork curricula with little cohesion. The imported courses were designed for a variety of educational levels and were of different lengths. Some set one lesson a week, others four or five. Quality and

style varied greatly. Courses sometimes overlapped, while there was no assurance that everything students needed to know would be included somewhere. If students in a centre had completed the existing courses, it was felt that they could not be kept waiting. There followed a rush to obtain more courses. So materials written for one situation were translated, adapted (often in token ways), and recycled in vastly different situations.

In more recent times, a high percentage of new TEE programs have begun to source their materials from just several international suppliers. These suppliers generally provide coherent curricula and self-study materials of quite good quality. Commendably, they encourage users not just to translate, but also to adapt their material. Their courses have enabled a number of TEE programs to attain an acceptable standard. They have perhaps also spared us some much poorer courses that might otherwise have been written in a rush by people denied training and resource for the task.

But there is a downside. The availability of high-profile overseas courses has tended to stifle the design of new courses and innovative curricula. Careful contextualisation is accorded lower priority than it deserves; it is sometimes forgotten that at times it may require as much work to translate and adapt a course well as to write one's own.

To understand the need for serious contextualisation is to recognize that there is no substitute for quality materials designed to meet real, local needs. But this is not to suggest that every individual TEE provider should design a new set of courses! So long as

they are well integrated into the curriculum, some overseas courses may be translated and adapted. Other imported materials may with permission be mined for ideas, illustrative anecdotes, biblical exegesis, and so on. But at least some subjects need to be designed in our own context to meet our own needs. *Context* may be defined broadly enough to suit a given cultural and/or geographic area. For example, good African courses are readily adaptable for use in most of sub-Saharan Africa, and some may, with more adaptation, be usable in tribal societies elsewhere. They are unlikely to work well in a modern European industrial society unless the program is targeting African immigrants.

Creative, facilitative teaching methods are used in the TEE tutorials, with special attention given to the development of thinking and problem-solving skills, and to the transfer of classroom learning to life and ministry. However good the home study materials, TEE will fail in much of its purpose if tutors cannot do their job well. Some tutors try to lecture or spend most of the time providing 'the right answers' to questions in the workbooks. Many do their best to stimulate discussion, but find it hard to compose good 'thought' questions that help students relate the discussion to real life. Tutorials rightly emphasize discussion, but should also provide time for *reinforcement* and *enrichment* of learning, using various approaches and simple media. Cultural and individual learning styles should be taken into account, along with some understanding of adult education.

Some criticisms of TEE centre on concerns that indoctrination may replace education, and piety, critical

thinking. Such concerns may be justified, especially in countries where the whole education system is essentially domesticating. But the problem is hardly confined to TEE; it is just as real in many Bible schools. The difference is that printed TEE courses are more visible to outsiders than what is taught orally within the four walls of a college. Sound theological education needs to help students develop discernment, thinking and problem-solving skills, and ability to draw upon the biblical text and theological understanding in relating faith to life. Pastors who lack such skills typically resort to legalism. But it is no small demand to achieve these ideals, especially at basic educational levels.

For all these reasons, adequate tutor training and support are essential. In addition to training seminars and a general tutors' handbook, *there should be a tutors' guide for each course*, with guidelines and suggestions for every tutorial, including a list of suitable discussion questions. An analogy is the Sunday School teachers' quarterly: it provides detailed lesson plans precisely because most teachers are untrained.

### The Vision Remains

Clearly, not all extension programs meet these criteria, or others that could be added. In addition to personnel and resources, vision, imagination, patience, perseverance and hard work are needed to build quality theological

education of any kind.

The situations in which TEE is developed are often far from ideal; there is always a myriad of constraints. Overworked, under-funded staff do the best they can, and succeed in providing training where previously none existed. Often that training is of high quality. Communication and the sharing of ideas and resources among theological educators around the world have played a critical role in the development of TEE, and of theological education in general. A major contribution at this global level has been made by the Theological Commission, along with regional affiliates of WEF (now WEA). Subsequently, the ICAA did much to consolidate accreditation, and today, under its current name (ICETE) it still continues to make an important international contribution to evangelical theological education.

In conclusion, it is important to affirm the validity and desirability of *choices* in modes of training. There are many things a residential college can do that TEE cannot, and vice versa. Correspondence, radio or online courses may be the only way to reach isolated students. Short seminars can meet particular and immediate goals. Non-formal theological education can contribute a great deal to continuing education of pastors and to lay training. In short, the various modes of delivery all have a role. Some work better in one situation than in another. They should never be seen as mutually exclusive.