

The Shape of Theological Education in the 70's *

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There is in recent years a call for self-examination in the life of the church. Such self-examination leads to a renewal of theological education. Theological education is the task given to the seminary and the seminary is the creation of the church's need for a well-educated ministry. Graduates of the seminary inevitably as leaders of the church leave imprint of their education on the life of the church.

In most instances theological education in the seminary has been the fertile ground for renewal in the church's life. As one who has been involved in the theological education for the last 14 years, I see that today's theological education is under great pressure that calls for changes and new trends for tomorrow's task. What are these pressures?

1. Today's life is full of fundamental and qualitative change, especially in human culture. Man is able to fully implement the injunction of God to "have dominion over all the earth." The secular world of today has come about due to man's capacity for systematic application of experimental reason. He is able to control the world about him: the physical order of nature, society, and the psychological forces. All these, man is able to control and direct.

In the "intellectual revolution" of today's world, the prime movers are men of science and technology. Yet in spite of such dramatic results, we know that our mission to uplift the poor, and eradicate the "cult of poverty" still remains with us. How to eliminate the causes of poverty

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from two-thirds of the whole human race, lies in our hands as God's creation. We are to use the planned and systematic "application of reason, experimentation, and organization."

True, we have the "rationalization process" in our secular world, yet in the midst of secularization or rationalization there is the continued search for meaning and purpose of life. For as man continues to "have dominion over the earth" there is also the losing of contact with the ultimate values of life.

Such is our context — a secularized world— that impinges upon our task of theological education.

2. The other pressure is from students in theological education. We have today students unlike those in previous generations. Students of years gone by came to the seminary with a found-Christian faith. They were young men and women brought up in a Christian family and reared in the local congregation. They came to the seminary already with a "found" faith. They were the second or third generation Christians. But there is a growing number of students today who come to the seminary without the Christian faith. They come seeking for faith.

Perhaps some of them are first generation Christians if not "Christians not-yet." They come with the hope that the seminary will give them answers to the questions raised by the secular world.

3. The third pressure comes from the new breed of theological professors. Influenced by the scientific and technological world the age of specialization has arrived. We have theological professors who are trained in specific fields of teaching. They are specialized in their own areas of discipline, such as Bible, Systematic Theology, Church History, Christian Education and Pastoralia. In a discipline, there are specializations. In Bible, for example, one may specialize in Old Testament, and even in the Old Testament, one may specialize in the different books: such as, the Pentateuch. In the New Testament, one can go down the line of specialization as is done in the other theological disciplines.

The age of "Secular-Specialization" changes the trend of theological education today.

A PROFILE OF THE PRESENT THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

1. Theological education in our seminaries today is too much "institutional-local-oriented" rather than

“world-directed.” True, the reality of the Church universal is the local group of believers. Yet much of theological education today is too narrow and limited to that of the traditional, historical, institutional church domination. It tends merely to prepare young men and women as pastors and/or deaconesses for a local congregation. By so doing, too much energy of the Church is spent on “building churches, strengthening finances, on-going administration, etc.” Theological education is often limited to preparing men for the on-going functions of the structure of the institutional church, forgetting and neglecting the people outside its wall of membership. (An example of such direction in line with the old concept of the church as the Arch of Noah, theological education appears to be concerned with trying to save men drowning in the sea of sin. Thus, the concern of students in present theological education is to get men and women into the Arch – the institutional local congregation – neglecting the development of leadership in their communities.

2. Such emphasis on the “institutional-local church denomination” brings into theological education another concern: that of “doctrine

defense” education. Theological studies become a study of certain doctrines to be applied to a given situation rather giving meaning and purpose of Life. “Doctrines come out of life itself.” God in Christ is encountered in the events of human life, in the midst of human communities. The concern of the Church is out of her own very nature. The Church is the creation of God out of His covenanting relationship. It is the people of God who participate in God’s activity of creation, redemption and fulfillment. His mission is to liberate man, and to give man his full sense of humanity; to give man His sense of worth; responsibility and capacity for self determination into full maturity.

Theological education must not forget the mission of God in Jesus Christ, “who became flesh and dwelt among men, and we behold his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth (John 1:14). It is among men, in the midst of human communities, that God is known and His acts of love realized. So theological education should not limit itself to doctrine-defense, especially of a particular institutional-local denomination.

3. The present theological education, due to the historical events of the life of the Institutional Church, becomes too narrow and limited. Such has produced men and women who follow the same footsteps, repeat a vicious circle of "doctrine-defense" type of education. A doctrine-defense education also leads to an emphasis of an evangelistic effort converting men's souls, forgetting his material needs, making man dualistic rather than looking at him as a total reality. Theological education today must seek emphasis in connection with human development and nation-building. The very physical needs of man is part and partial of his totality and of the Gospel of our Lord. It is a worldly redemption that Jesus Christ came for "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

4. The narrow and limited meaning of evangelism has led to a theological education which is very conservative, and has a deep sense of fear of experimentation. Of all educational processes, theological education is afraid of experimentation as over against that of academic and scientific education, that encourages students as well as faculty to experiment on new things. If Christian faith in Christ "makes all things

new," I hope that theological education can be one that shall not be afraid of the new, one that shall take the risk and adventure into the unknown.

NATURE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Theological education is based on the concept of the nature and mission of the Church (God's People). In the Book of Exodus (19:5-6), we hear God's word: "Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all people, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

From the Old Testament, we see the Chosen Israel as the People of the Covenant, and in the New Covenant of the New Testament, we read (I Peter 2:9-10): "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

The Church is God's creation through His Son, Jesus Christ, and is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The covenanting God creates His people, the Church. The basic function of the Church is to declare in word and in deed the wonderful deeds of her Lord. These deeds are that of "liberating and developing men into mature manhood in Jesus Christ," to restore the fallen humanity into his full humanity, and to participate and get involved in the ongoing process of change.

If this is so, then theological education must be girded to the liberation and development of humanity in contemporary society.

TRENDS IN THE 70's

Theological education must develop from its understanding of the nature and mission of the Church.

1. Basically, Theological Education in the 70's must be planned for liberation and human development, i.e., theological education must be *secular*. It must be concerned with the totality of man's life, his total setting: political, economic, social, and cultural life; not as of old, when its concern was limited to the "religious." We need to recover the Gospel (God's Good News) -- God's faith in man, God's love for man,

and God's hope with man *in* and *for* the world.

It is God's steadfast faith in man in spite of man's unfaithfulness, God's love for man in spite of man's sinfulness, God's hope with man in spite of the darkness in man. God's acts of creation, redemption, and fulfillment must be known and participated in.

2. Theological education in the 70's must be academic, in the sense that theological education must meet the very purpose of education. It is education *of* life and *for* life. The student is the raw material of education. One may have all the buildings and well-qualified theological professors, yet, if there are no students there is no theological education.

It must be academic in the sense that it must be set within an academic setting. The days of theological education in isolation of other disciplines of study set up in a mountain are gone. It must be set within the "intellectual community" of a college or university. Theological students and faculty must be willing to struggle in the age of "intellectual or rational revolution" with others, and maintain high standards of scholarship.

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Christ. No seminary can stand alone in our secular-academic world. And for the Philippines, it calls for systematic planning and organizing with each seminary, of each denomination. We are called to be good stewards of God's gift of finances, properties and personnel.

Ecumenical Theological Education will not be merely to discover, to discern, and to manifest the unity given to it among the institutional churches but the very unity given by Christ for all *Mankind*.

Theological Education

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3. Theological education in the 70's must be ecumenical, in the sense that it is based on the life and mission of the Church. The Church (God's People) is to manifest the very unity that God in Christ has called the church into being, a unity that draws all the diversities of different institutional church bodies unto the Head of the Church, Jesus