

Are not the patterns and contents of theological education in Asia "too traditional" and even an anachronism in failing to speak to the human need caused by the tremendous changes taking place among the people of Asia by the historic force of urbanization? Rev. Richard P. Poethig, Director of the Inter-Seminary Urban-Industrial Institute, has been related since 1957 to the urban-industrial mission of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Theological Education and the Urban Situation in Asia

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The sudden shift from a rurally-oriented to an urban-dominated society has affected all the countries of Asia in the last 25 years. The movement of people off the land into the cities has upset the development plans of all governments; it has also raised questions about the effectivity of the present forms of educational training in relation to the needs of a growing urban-suburban society. One of the educational institutions directly affected by the shift is the theological seminary.

Recent journeys to Northeast and Southeast Asia have increased my awareness of the ever-widening gap between the present realities of the urban situation and our system of theological education. Evidence gathered from recent consultations and seminars on theological education supports this view of the situation and strengthens the belief that drastic changes will need to take place in educational procedures if the organized church is not to become an anachronism in urban Asia.

The urgency of the unfolding situation can best be illustrated by two profiles: one of the present and developing urban situations, the other of the style of theological education existing in Asia.

A Profile of the Urban Situation

Throughout Asia, population pressures and economic policies have pushed the growth of the cities. The facts are:

- An increasing proportion of Asian population is moving into the urban areas. Urban agglomeration in Asia will grow from 16 per cent of the population in 1960 to 29 per cent in 2000.¹ Major cities such as Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei, Manila and Bangkok, which are growing at a rate of 5 to 10 per cent annually, are already metropolitan regions and moving toward becoming megalopoli.
- Population will be disproportionately distributed within urban areas in relation to total land area. High density living will put pressure on public facilities and governmental functioning. High rise housing patterns will change interactions between people.

1. Population Studies No. 44, U.N. Publications, E. 69 XIII 3.

- A sizeable sector of the urban population will belong to the urban poor. Squatting will continue as a means of urban habitation, particularly in those cities in tropical regions. In 1970, squatters comprised 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the urban population in Southeast Asia.
- Employment in the Asian city will be widely diversified. The largest number of workers will belong to a broadly-defined service sector. A smaller percentage will earn their livelihood from the technically-oriented industrial sector. As the city grows economically, the occupational structure will become highly specialized. Organizations related to expanding urban life will multiply. Social grouping will become more diverse and cosmopolitan.
- Suburbanization will become a major factor as the rising middle class evacuates downtown areas and seeks housing in the growing fringes of the city. As the city grows outward, it will encompass smaller outlying towns and create a metropolitan region.

A Profile of the Theological Education Situation

The institutional forms of the church and the content of the church's ministry are basically pre-technological in character. The present body of the church grew in response to work in basically rural societies. The seminary profile is oriented toward:

- the preparation of men for traditional preaching and officiating ministries to single congregations.
- congregations which are presumed to be homogeneous groups of people with little differentiation in occupation and interests.
- the presentation of an individualistic ethic.
- making seminarians repositories of sacred knowledge. (This strengthens the belief that, by their knowledge, the clergy are the church.)
- teaching concepts of charity which emphasize welfare service to individuals or families, apart from the Christian responsibility to work for more far-reaching community and national change.
- emphasis on a specialized curriculum which isolates the seminarian from other disciplines.
- geographical and psychological isolation from the main forces shaping society.

Theological education has not moved fast enough to keep pace with the changes taking place today. Even those urban-industrial ministries presently going on in Asia grew up outside normal seminary channels. Many of the new ministries were initiated by individuals who were responding to the social forces in modern society and not to seminary teaching. In fairness to seminary administrations, it should be said that church officials have not given encouragement to new ministries which they fear would compete with traditional church jobs for manpower.

Dysfunctional Characteristics of Theological Education and Recommendations for Change

Here let me draw three characteristics from our profile of theological education which limit its function in contemporary life and offer recommendations for change.

1. **Theological education has been 'for clergy only.'** The efforts of theological education are concentrated on less than one per cent of the body of Christians. The hope of theological education is, of course, that this one per cent will spread the benefits of their knowledge to the remaining ninety-nine per cent. This hope is not fulfilled. One of the reasons this does not happen is the breakdown in communication. The man in the pulpit does not speak the language of the man in the pew. Theological education tends to impart a body of knowledge which has little relationship to the concerns and experience of the people.

A study conducted in 1965 among 170 Philippine seminary graduates substantiated this point.² The graduates were asked what they considered their major problems in the pastorate. The pastors put communication at the top of the list. They expressed an inability to communicate with their people, particularly in the early years of their ministry. A large number of young pastors have a series of one or two year pastorates and are never able to settle down. Many of the respondents suggested that the learning they received from the seminary was not translatable in terms of the layman's experience. To some extent this is a defense mechanism. Theological learning provides seminarians with a special status in the church. In preserving this status they develop their own language which further diminishes their effectivity in reaching their people.

Recommendation:

Theological education should be more profoundly related to the laity. The resources of theological education have been concentrated in seminary buildings and limited to a small segment of the church. The task facing the seminaries is how to use their resources more effectively in reaching the laymen and laywomen in the church. This will mean developing programs which will use both faculty and library resources in a more mobile way.

Model.

The Divinity School at Silliman University has begun a program which sends some of its faculty members to teach at seminars in cities and towns within its region. This has been on an experimental level but needs to become a regular part of the seminary's function. It has also been suggested that seminary teachers participate in the Inter-Seminary Urban-Industrial Institute summer program of seminarians-in-industry in a supervisory capacity or in an actual work experience, if this is feasible.

2. "Occupational Mobility Among Philippine Protestant Seminary Graduates." R. P. Poethig, *St. Louis Quarterly*, Vol. 5, March-June 1967, Nos. 1-2.

Faculty should be regularly assigned to teach in city and town churches where larger number of laity can be drawn together. Several things can be achieved in these encounters. First, the theological faculty will recognize the importance of expressing theological truths in a more relevant and contemporary way. Second, they will recognize the importance of taking into account the experience and the thinking of the laity. Third, the dialogue between contemporary experience and theological thought will provide the basis from which new theological insights are drawn.

Faculty should be in dialogue with those people and groups who compose urban society. Here the example of the evangelical lay academies is appropriate. Centers like the Kansai Seminar House on the edge of Kyoto bring laity together around occupational concerns or to discuss particular issues. Theological faculty need to systematically sharpen their thinking and deepen their participation by being in touch with trade union groups, students, politicians, technocrats, consumer and community organizations.

2. **Theological education has been noetic.** It is taught as knowledge to be grasped rationally. The seminarian learns about the Christian faith by hearing, thinking and discussing. In turn he is expected to convey this knowledge in a rational way to his congregation.

It is true that the faith which the seminarians are taught in the classroom is the live experience of the prophets, the apostles, as the saints of the past. But this faith-experience must intersect with the experience of contemporary society if it is to be alive today. Theological education which is out of touch with this society, or touches it only on the abstract ideational level, is not preparing pastors for the multi-dimensional lives their people live today. It is for this reason that theological education, learned in the context of the classroom, often fails to make a significant penetration into the life of the ordinary layman.

In the classroom, students only see God at work in the past events recorded in books. What is needed is to expose seminarians to other arenas where they see God at work in present events, and where they hear the questions people ask about the purpose of life today.

The heights and depths of the biblical faith were reached at those points where God-filled men were participating in their own contemporary history. The words of the prophets of the Old Testament came from men who saw God's confrontation of Israel in events of their day. The words of the apostle Paul were forged by his efforts to make the faith come alive in a hostile Roman world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian who has most influenced the contemporary generation, left behind a heritage of Christian writing born out of his struggle to liberate Germany from Hitler. Not every theologian will be called upon to play the role of a Bonhoeffer, but all are called upon to bring theology to bear upon contemporary events and to widen the horizon of the classroom to include our present world.

Recommendation:

In compensating for the noetic style of theological education, the classroom can and should be anywhere that the confrontation between past truth and present experience can take place. It should be the continuing concern of theological education to help people perceive God's action in current events.

Model. In Chiba Prefecture outside Tokyo, Pastor Minoru Ishimaru has brought theological education out of the seminary classroom into the activities of his people in the rapidly growing Keiyo industrial complex which houses 750 companies. Pastor Ishimaru began teaching his people by using seminary notes and curriculum outlines. He soon found that his people's own experiences raised more pertinent theological questions and provided more profound encounters with modern society than the classroom material he had collected. His people have grown through the theological dialogues and in turn have become teachers. They have organized themselves to confront the issues raised in the Keiyo industrial complex. Pastor Ishimaru has also organized the Keiyo Culture and Education Center through which he brings together people of different ideologies and interests for encounters on specific community issues.

Seminarians should receive part of their theological training in situations similar to the one cited above. Several seminarians should be assigned to larger urban-industrial complexes under the supervision of a pastor or through a group ministry. In such situations some seminarians could be assigned to actual job experience or to civic organizations. Besides Tokyo, urban-industrial complexes already exist in Osaka, Seoul, Taipei, Hongkong, Singapore, Petaling Jaya, Manila, Bangkok. With urban expansion and the growth of industrial sectors, theological faculty should be designated to teach in the urban-industrial complex ministries, providing more specialized sessions for those seminarians assigned to the area at the same time as they are holding theological dialogues with those groups living and employed in these situations.

- 3. Theological education has been limited to the narrow concerns of the institutional church.** The church has been largely concerned with gathering in and conserving members. In carrying out its task, theological education has assumed a basic homogeneous constituency among the churches. It has taught men to preach the Gospel in a singular way without distinguishing the heterogeneity which exists among the people. Little thought has been given to the ways in which the church must carry out its ministry in a pluralistic society.

There is need today to see the working of God in the complex interests and specialized functions men perform in an urban society. The rapid expansion of urban society has broadened the Christian laymen's experience of the world. The mixed population of the city has put him in touch with a wide variety of people. Mass communication has opened up contacts with a world far beyond his own borders. Multiplying organizational structures offer new job opportunities

and an expanding field of knowledge. All these innovations are occurring faster than the theological educational structures can keep abreast of them. The curriculum of the seminaries cannot absorb the changes nor is their faculty flexible enough to prepare the seminarian for life in a dynamic and pluralistic world.

Recommendation:

Urban society is made up of a vast number of groups of people. Not all city people have the means to fully participate in this society. The church needs to prepare its pastors to be in touch with the many dimensions of urban life and to work for the participation of different groups of people in shaping the city.

Model. In Kwangju, a rapidly growing satellite city of 40,000 people 20 miles outside Seoul, a pastor-theologian, Pastor Sung C. Chun has been effective in organizing the resettled people against the government's action to charge the people high prices for land which the government bought for much less. Although a pastor of only a small congregation, Pastor Chun's past political experience in a high government post has made him effective in confronting the government with its responsibilities to the people of Kwangju in providing facilities and services, and in stimulating jobs in the community.

Seminarians should be trained in another field of specialization alongside their theological training. Such training would broaden their opportunity to be in touch with another group of people in urban society and would enhance their ability to participate at another point in the decision-making process. Such possibilities have already been seized upon in some countries. In Korea, the Institute of Urban Studies and Development under Dr. Chung Hyun Ro at Yonsei University, trains pastors to know the city and organize people for change in urban society. The Institute has both a research and a community action program. In Japan, the Kansai Institute for Workers' Culture and Education, an agency stimulated by industrial pastors, provides a forum for the discussion of the impact of Japanese industrialization, not only in Japan, but in the rest of Asia. The Kansai Institute has carried its program beyond Japan by bringing Japanese trade unionists, economists and other professionals to other Southeast Asian countries to become aware of the effect of Japanese industrialization in these countries. Pastor Satoshi Hirata has sought the assignment of seminary students to the program of the Kansai Institute.

In the Philippines, the facilities of secular agencies outside the church have been used to put seminarians and pastors in touch with another segment of society. For the last fourteen years, seminarians and pastors have received training with trade union leaders at the Asian Labor Education Center. Some pastors have used their training in the organization of communities of the urban poor around the issues of land and employment.

It should be emphasized, however, that experience or training in another field of work does not relieve the seminarian from the res-

possibility of becoming a first-rate theologian. If he is to participate creatively in urban society he will need to help people think theologically about the issues and their own professions or work.

The task of theological education is thus two-fold. In the growing complexity of an urbanizing world, it needs to help students relate to the new forces shaping society. At the same time it needs to continue theology's main task of searching out and interpreting the meaning of life and ultimately catalyzing men to action in the world on behalf of justice and righteousness.