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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The following article, written by our late Director and Editor, Nelly Castillo de Jacobs, and Kenneth R. Mulholland, focuses on the Guatemalan Presbyterian Seminary [[(GPS)]] as the theological institution which gave birth to a theological education program that became a model copied, modified and admired all over the world. The co-authors briefly trace the GPS's history, its problems and some proposed solutions. Besides this, they do not hesitate to bring to light some powerful tensions that have developed in the nearly twenty years of TEE in the school. Rather they try to analyze the tensions and to find new and proper solutions precisely because the tensions threaten to destroy not only the system of TEE, but also (and more importantly) the philosophy and mentality needed to be able to continue developing a truly popular theological educational program for the Guatemalan Presbyterian Church. In our next issue we hope to be able to offer our readers another article that continues treating this theme within the GPS.

We are grateful to the Program for Theological Education for the permission to publish this article which will later appear together with other articles on TEE throughout the world in a book to be entitled *Ministry by the People*, edited by F. Ross Kinsler.

PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY OF GUATEMALA: A MODEST EXPERIMENT BECOMES A MODEL FOR CHANGE

by Kenneth B. Mulholland and Nelly Castillo de Jacobs

Destined to become a global model for change, theological education by extension originally arose in 1963 at the Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary of Guatemala as a modest experiment. It did not result from the implantation of a carefully pre-designed theoretical model with a fully developed theology of ministry or philosophy of education, but rather in response to the needs of a church faithfully engaged in mission in an obscure corner of a small Central American republic.

It is the contention of both this writer and of the late Professor Nelly C. de Jacobs that theological education by extension is truest to its original intent when it is seen as a renewal movement aimed at the integral growth of the church through ministry by the whole people of God. As such, theological education by extension is a change agent capable of promoting the positive transformation of both church and society. This is not to deny the distinction between clergy and laity, nor the need to "equip the equippers". It is simply to affirm the essential oneness of God's people in their common calling.

The Presbyterian Church of Guatemala was founded in 1882 by missionaries who entered the country in response to an invitation extended by President Justo Rufino Barrios. Throughout most of the succeeding century work was confined to a 100 by 300 mile rectangle in the southwestern quadrant of that nation. In this zone, which includes both steaming tropical plains and cold, windswept highlands, one finds the entire spectrum of Guatemalan society: urban professionals; the rising middle class, rural Latins; both progressive and isolated Indian tribes.

Theological education by extension took shape in the Presbyterian Seminary as a series of responses to a series of problems encountered in the ongoing task of ministerial formation among the sectors of society represented in the Presbyterian Church:

Problem: The numerical growth of the church led to the need for trained national leadership.

Solution: In 1935, a seminary was founded in the city of Guatemala, the nation's capital, to train leadership for the entire denomination.

Problem: Most of the graduates trained by the seminary either never entered the specific ministry for which they were trained or else left it in order to enter non-church related occupations. In fact, a 1962 inventory disclosed that after 25 years, only ten of the more than 200 students who enrolled in the seminary were still functioning as pastors. Once accustomed to urban life, many students of rural background did not return to the agriculturally rich, but unhealthy and economically depressed areas from which they had come.

Solution: In 1962 the seminary was moved from the capital city to a rural area closer to the majority of churches and more geographically accessible to the leaders of local congregations. By now the denomination numbered 10,000 communicant members with a total community estimated between 30,000 and 40,000 members. A network of 65 organized congregations included ten in the major cities of Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City. In addition there were 140 unorganized preaching points.

Problem: The genuine leaders in the rural areas could not go even a few miles to attend a residence program because of job and family responsibilities.

Solution: In 1963, the seminary leaders took the daring step of minimizing the residence program in order to begin an extension system. They organized several regional centers located so that nearly all who desired could attend. These professors met for a three-hour seminar each week with students. The seminary paid student travel expenses. Periodically during the school year – once a month at first – meetings were held at the central campus for all the students from all the centers. Thus, the extension movement was born.

Problem: "Take home" studies used by the extension students included lengthy reading assignments. These, however, were simply not being digested, especially by the more non-academically-oriented rural students.

Solution: To meet this challenge, the faculty developed a series of workbooks utilizing inductive methodology for the study of the Bible and traditional theological

textbooks. They geared them especially for individual study. As time passed, elements of programmed instruction and open education were incorporated into the program.

Problem: Immense diversity in the educational and socio-economic levels of the students was evident. Persons of equally keen leadership and spiritual qualifications possessed radically different cultural heritages, social levels, and academic backgrounds.

Solution: The very flexibility of a decentralized pattern allowed "breathing room" for multi-cultural and multi-social diversity. However, academic differences made it necessary to build a multi-level structure into the curriculum design itself. This enabled students to build their theological studies upon the highest level of secular education previously attained, whether at the level of primary, secondary, or university education. Thus, while all students covered the same basic assignments together, the more advanced students were expected to go "a second and third mile" in reading assignments, reports and projects.

Problem: Particularly in the rural areas, many gifted leaders with innate intelligence had such meager academic training that they could not even do the sixth grade level work required for the most basic courses.

Solution: To meet this need for "pre-theological education", a second extension program was established on a nationwide basis to help not only prospective seminary candidates but also other interested persons complete their primary schooling and receive their government-recognized primary school diploma. With the passing of time, similar government programs have been initiated making this second system unnecessary.

Nearly all of the above steps met with opposition from one segment or another of the Presbyterian Church of Guatemala. However, by 1966 not only had a coherent extension program emerged, but it was beginning to attract continent-wide attention. With no increase in funds, the student body of the Presbyterian Seminary had increased from 7 to 200, taught by 3 full-time and 12 part-time faculty members. And many of the evident needs of the churches were being met.

By training persons where they lived, the seminary was able to reach into various Sub-cultures without uprooting persons from their environments. Thus, it was able to enlist and equip for ministry those persons best suited and gifted for such ministry. The extension study proved more difficult than expected, because it placed a great demand for personal discipline on the student, yet it also proved to be valuable as a vast screening process. It filtered out unequipped or unmotivated candidates without exposing them to the trauma of re-entry into their previous environment. Although the average age of the student body climbed into the thirties, the number of younger students also increased. The quality of academic work improved over that of the residence program, due largely to the greater maturity of students and the consistency resulting from the development of life-long personal study habits. In addition, a full theological education was made available to many lay leaders in the congregations who wanted to deepen their faith and understanding without committing themselves to candidacy for ordination.

The Guatemalan model had now assumed definitive form: self-instructional home study materials for daily preparations; decentralized weekly seminars of students and teachers, periodic extended meetings at a central location of students from any or all centers.

As the extension movement developed beyond its Guatemalan base, too often it was promoted as a set formula. The product was elevated and the process was ignored. Too often a clone of the creature born in Guatemala was adopted as a panacea for the ills of theological education.

Meanwhile in Guatemala, the next decade was one of consolidation, "plateauing", even stagnation. The time and energy of the missionary and national personnel who had produced a major breakthrough was absorbed in editing and producing the quarterly *Extension Seminary*, writing numerous articles expounding and defending TEE, leading many workshops around the world, directing a training program for Latin American theological educators on the site of the Guatemalan campus. Needed developments were postponed. Few additional professors were trained specifically for the Presbyterian Seminary. As a result, too much of the teaching remained in the hands of overworked expatriate missionary personnel and their national colleagues. They were forced to range over wide areas to cover their centers each week. The needed revision of courses hurriedly constructed in the early and mid-1960's was

put off for lack of time to do final editing or proofreading. The incorporation of Indian leaders with limited Spanish language fluency into the seminary program was also delayed and serious re-thinking of the place of residence education within the Presbyterian Church was resisted.

In the mid-1970's the administration and faculty faced squarely a number of issues:

1) Adjunct Professors: The geographical expansion of the Presbyterian Church, which generated the need for increasingly far flung centers, and the world energy crisis, which made the cost of servicing those centers formidable, combined to bring about the expansion of the teaching staff to include adjunct professors. These are teachers – certified by the seminary – who teach a course or two in the area in which they live. Many are pastors of local congregations who have graduated from the seminary. As teaching elders (in the Presbyterian tradition) they receive no economic remuneration for teaching in one center, but are paid if they attend to a second center. These adjunct professors are trained and supervised by the full-time staff of the seminary. Their incorporation into the extension program has allowed the seminary enrollment to nearly double and has brought the training program into even closer conjunction with the churches at the grass roots level.

2) Additional extension: Although extension did succeed in incorporating "Spanish fluent" Indians into the seminary program, it excluded not only those without a primary education, but also those with limited Spanish fluency. Finally, a process was devised in 1975 to meet this problem. An extension program for Mam-speaking Indian leaders was developed. With the help of a specially devised Mam-Spanish theological glossary, the Indian leaders studied the famous six volume SEAN compendium of Pastoral Theology based on the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. While lessons were prepared in Spanish, the seminar meetings were conducted in the Mam language. Completion of the entire course led to a certificate and met the academic qualifications for ordination set by the newly-formed Mam Presbytery. In addition, the certificate was recognized by the seminary as equivalent to five of the fifteen courses required for graduation. Now the Indian leaders had access to theological training which incorporated them in the mainstream of ecclesiastical and national life

3) Accelerated advancement: While theological education by extension did extend the resources of theological education to the people, at the same time it usually extended the time necessary to complete the requirements for a diploma or degree. Slower assimilation of

content coupled with more immediate application probably provided more efficient education and effective ministry. However, the expanded length of time needed to complete the total course sequence also produced impatience, frustration, and even discouragement, particularly to those who were candidates for ordination vows. To meet this problem, intensive courses are offered at the seminary campus or even occasionally in strategic urban centers. This allows students to be exposed to visiting or guest professors, thus broadening the horizons of the students who because of their rootedness may be in danger of parochialism. Students are also permitted to study in residence at the seminary campus. This has always been true, but until recently no money was available from the Synod to subsidize students. Recently, the emphasis on residence study has intensified as a concentrated effort has been made to accelerate the education of selected students by subsidizing their full-time study. The original purpose of extension was the training of mature leaders for ministry in the growing, but scattered, Presbyterian congregations of Guatemala. With the passing of time, it became apparent that TEE carried powerful side effects of a liberating nature. Professor Jacobs maintained that TEE has demonstrated that it is not only a vehicle for leadership development and. the subsequent growth of existing church structures, but that it is also a vehicle for the renewal and beneficial change of both ecclesiastical and social structures.

First, in regard to educational methodology, TEE tends to free students from intellectual domestication. Rather than limiting the student to the role of a passive receptacle of information imparted by an authoritative teacher, it permits and encourages active participation and stimulates theological reflection on the part of each student. "There is communication and the interchange of ideas in which each person both learns and contributes new knowledge," wrote Professor Jacobs. The very fact that TEE opens theological education to students who are actively involved in ministry transforms many centers into gatherings of colleagues in ministry. Each of them, with roots deep in the social reality of Guatemala, has something unique and of value to contribute to the others.

Second, in regard to theological content, TEE tends toward a holistic approach. It overcomes the dichotomy that results when the categories of traditional evangelical pietism are divorced from concrete, earthly realities. Professor Jacobs pointed out that TEE keeps students in contact with "people in their misery". In fact, many of the students themselves are immersed in the poverty and are victims of the oppression which wracks Guatemala. They also adhere

to traditional evangelical theology. "We are not saying that we ought to discard spiritual, abstract, traditional language in order to be mastered by a purely material language," wrote Professor Jacobs. "No, what we want to say is that TEE does not divorce these two factors, rather, it combines them." She argued that it was impossible for the Christian to become involved with the concrete, material reality of people in their misery without being aware of the nature of neighbor love. It is dynamically spiritual in its origin, yet expresses itself in specific action. She writes:

> It is impossible to speak of the multiple problems of people in their misery – their hunger, their sickness – without need of a gigantic faith that, although abstract, is capable of saying to this mountain "Be taken up and cast into the sea" (Mt. 17:20) ... and it is impossible to speak of service, to struggle against earthly evils, without believing in the existence of a just and all-powerful God, who is ready to execute the promise of literation and capable of sending plagues to do it.

TEE is also an agent of change in that it challenges the divisions that splinter and compartmentalize the people of God. Two of these divisions, in particular, are being confronted by TEE in Guatemala:

First, the geographical extension to communities where actual and potential church leaders live has opened theological education to many married women active in Sunday School teaching and women's societies, but previously unable to attend the residence school because of family responsibilities. Married women had usually only studied if their husbands were enrolled full-time as residence students, TEE has produced a flowering of increasingly-capable female leadership in a denomination which excludes women from ordination as elders or pastors, while at the same time allowing them to teach in the denomination's theological schools.

Second, TEE has opened up theological education to the laity. In fact, about 80 percent of the students thus far have not been candidates for ordination. Thus, those who have been ordained have been educated not in isolation from the lay leaders of their church, but among them. This has lessened the distance between clergy and laity, activated the laity, and made the candidates for ordination intensely aware of the issues faced by lay persons. In fact, recently the president of the board of the seminary, a distinguished elder and prominent local

businessman, was at the same time an extension student who had completed about a third of the entire study program.

Reviewing the impact of the extension movement on the Presbyterian Church in Guatemala, it is apparent that it has succeeded in its initial goal. It has produced trained leaders for large numbers of congregations previously packing such leadership and in so doing has accelerated the numerical growth, cultural extension, and geographical expansion of the Church. It has enriched the lives of countless persons. It has provided a model for a world-wide movement.

At the same time, because TEE has been an agent for change, it has created tensions within its own denomination. Instead of simply strengthening the educational, theological, and structural status quo, it has called that status quo into question at those points where it is a hindrance to ministry by the people:

1) The educational methodology has produced a dialogical and collegial style of leadership which questions the efficacy of authoritarian and hierarchical leadership patterns.

2) The interaction of evangelical pietism with the concrete realities of the Guatemala situation as the students experience it has brought into focus new concerns: the meaning of God's justice and righteousness; the nature of salvation as liberation; the apolitical stance of the church amid pervasive corruption and violence; the place of human rights in the witness of the Church; faith and ideology; the relationship of church and kingdom; the ordination of women; historic Presbyterianism vis-a-vis renewed Roman Catholicism and maturing Pentecostalism. More traditional sectors of the church remain unready to grapple with these concerns, and at times unwilling.

3) The extension of theological education to minority groups, women, and laity has raised the competency level of these persons to the point where they constitute a threat to the automatic, passive acceptance of the pronouncements handed down by theologically trained males of the predominant socio-cultural group within the church leadership.

At the time of this writing the extension movement within the Presbyterian Church stands in jeopardy. The ascendancy of parochial and rigid traditionalists to denominational leadership threatens the existence of theological education by extension at the very seminary which gave it birth. The new wine of TEE has stretched old skins to the point where they can be kept from

bursting only by setting them in cement. The loss of top-notch leadership due to death, transfer, and retirement, plus the change of other strategic leadership posts at national and international levels weakens the vanguard leadership that the seminary has characteristically enjoyed. The cruel guerrilla warfare plays havoc with the coordination of transportation and communication systems upon which TEE depends. A deteriorating economy drives up the price of paper, books and gasoline while diminishing the power of the church and its students to support a far-reaching extension system.

It has been characteristic of the leadership of the Presbyterian Seminary to find new and creative solutions to pressing problems. Those solutions have been an incalculable blessing to the World Christian Movement. Once again the challenge is before them.

EDITOR'S NOTE

As our readers have noticed, more than six months have passed since we published the last issue of *Extension Seminary*. We apologize for the delay between issues of what we hope soon will become a quarterly bulletin once again. For now we offer you this double issue in order partially to make up for the delays. We feel that we owe you a brief explanation.

In the first place, with the sudden accidental death of our Director and Editor Nelly Castillo de Jacobs, the Guatemalan Center for Theological Studies and Ministry was left without a guiding spirit. Nelly had prepared the quarterly bulletin an organized the TEE workshops, requesting help from one or more of us as she needed. Since her death it has taken us some time to hit our stride. Currently Benjamin Jacobs is the Director of the Center, with James Dekker serving as Editor of *Extension Seminary*. Betty Carrera de Paz has promised to keep us organized from her post as Secretary.

Secondly, in a previous issue we pointed out that the Center was undergoing some changes in its relationship with the Guatemalan Presbyterian Seminary, from which it first sprang. Now it appears that the Center will operate, for the time being at least, independently of the seminary.