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Review, Article

AFTER TEN YEARS

FRANK J. KLINE

Dr. Harrison's 'restudy of the problems and progress of Indian theological education'¹ is yet another evidence of the far-reaching influence of the Tambaram Council of 1938.

Ever since Tambaram, people throughout the world have been increasingly conscious of the need and priority of theological education. Dr. Ranson's report of 1945 was a first step in acquainting the churches of India and their friends with the problems of theological education in India. Dr. Harrison at the end of a decade of progress after the Ranson report was asked to restudy the situation and this book is his answer to that request. He says, 'The purpose of the present report is to arrive at general conclusions affecting Indian theological education as a whole, not to give an appraisal of individual schools or colleges.'

In this way Dr. Harrison has limited the scope of the terms of reference under which he is making this study. He thus distinguishes between the functions of a report which he accepts and the function of an accrediting agency which he does not accept as in the terms of reference of this report.

In his first chapter, Dr. Harrison gives abundant evidence of much first-hand acquaintance with certain typical institutions. He lists the large number of schools and colleges visited in connection with the survey, besides the other institutions with which he was previously acquainted during the years of his long service in India. He also notes with appreciation the various sub-committees and the work which they and others did in bringing together the facts out of which this report is offered.

Dr. Harrison then turns to the changing factors in the life of the Indian sub-continent during this last decade which have had a great effect upon the life of the people and the nation as a whole, and surveys the conditions and impact of these influences upon theological education. Political independence, India's new position and relationships as one of the free nations in an increasingly important Asia, and paralleling this, the growth of church union both in South and North India have been noted as having

¹ *After Ten Years: A Report on Theological Education in India*: by M. H. Harrison. National Christian Council of India, 1957. Price Re.1/00.

particular value and impact upon the study. Together with this are noted certain trends in education, particularly toward a 'new emphasis upon basic education', and the 'syncretistic emphasis in religious life' which trends have had a specific influence upon the potential student body of theological schools and colleges. The three-year degree course in college education with the preparatory pre-university year and the fact of Hindi becoming the official language of India are factors that also must be noted and considered by those who would expect students from Government institutions to present themselves as candidates for theological education. A rather significant interpretation of population factors is made by Dr. Harrison in which he points out the centres of Christian population in the land. This is an important emphasis and should be carefully language-studied and understood by church leaders in terms of its influence upon the location and media of theological education. The fact also that the whole nation is evidencing a rapid trend toward urban residence, due both to the trend toward industrialization and the fact that food has generally been more available in cities, has also to be considered in its influence upon the training of ministers.

Dr. Ranson pointed out the needs of the villages which Dr. Harrison thinks have been somewhat changed due to the above factors. Due emphasis, however, should continue to be made upon the remaining majority in the village and upon the fact that the people who make up these majorities in the cities continue to come from a rural India. All of these various factors have made their contributions to the adequacy (or lack of it) of Christian ministers in the day in which we live. The cumulative effect of what Dr. Harrison has brought to light is an emphasis upon the fact that there are more vacant pulpits in India today than ever before, and the need of training and preparing men for the demands of the Church is increasingly with us. The trained and ordained minister may have to be assisted by the trained and honorary church worker. Some plan for the fulfilment of this, as Dr. Harrison says, 'deserves to be seriously considered'. A final word on the increased responsibility to the Indian Church concludes the second chapter of the report.

Chapter III of Dr. Harrison's report is the heart of his study and deserves to be more carefully reviewed than is practical here, and to be thoroughly understood by everyone who is interested in theological education in India. He has very carefully considered the terminology that is used in classifying existing institutions, calling attention to the fact that terminology, though it may not be universally accepted, nevertheless very well serves the purpose of helping us to understand the function and purpose of each of the institutions in the land. In this area of understanding the nature of the various institutions and their functions and relationship to each other, this report makes a real contribution. Dr. Harrison has very carefully listed for us both the specialized

institutions, some of which have grown up since Ranson's report, and the theological colleges, the theological schools, and other institutions, a number of which again are additions since Ranson's report. This statistical report has also included the wives of married students when class-work was provided from them, while this was not the case in the previous tables of Dr. Ranson. The specialized institutions are also given fuller treatment than they were given previously, thus indicating their increased importance. The considerable growth in the number of institutions is noted. Both the increased number of persons engaged in teaching and the increase in student enrolment in theological institutions are shown. All of these points are evidence of the fact that the Church in India has responded to the call of its own need. Certain trends, however, are not as healthy as the institutions involved would no doubt wish. Particularly is this so in the balance between eastern and western members of staff. There is a disappointing lack of progress in Indianization and a predominance of foreign staff which, now clearly witnessed before us, should be very carefully considered and as rapidly as possible corrected. Also, the qualifications of theological teachers have been carefully reviewed. This again gives further evidence of the need for sincere self-evaluation on the part of the schools involved.

The approved functions of theological schools and colleges on the basis of which a self-evaluation may be made are very carefully considered in terms of both the Dornikal conference and of a study of curriculum, teaching method, institutional life, diplomas, degrees and accreditation.

An encouraging chart indicating a comparison of the number of recipients of Serampore degrees and diplomas for the last forty-two years since the Senate began serving the Church in India shows a very healthy development both in the B.D. and the L.Th. departments. Over the last twelve years there have been two-thirds as many B.D.s granted as in the first thirty years, and in the case of the L.Th. the increase is even greater. Mention is also made of the growth in the number of services offered by a group of other institutions. These other institutions, not now related to Serampore, are offering to prepare students for theological distinctions granted by the association of churches represented in their own governing bodies, with only the legal protection of a registration under the 1860 Societies Act. In both instances the increased services and the larger number of students are indications of the ministries of theological training to the Church, and also of the growth of the Church itself.

The duplication of courses and the various means and methods of giving the recognitions granted, however, call attention to the definite need in the theological world in India, as Dr. Harrison continues, for the 'standardization of the meaning of such letters as G.Th.' as well as for all diplomas and degrees in other theological usages in India today. He calls attention to

the work of a number of all-India co-ordinating bodies and among them notes the efforts that have been made toward the establishment of an accrediting agency. Such an agency, he says, 'would have the functions of fixing the connotations of the various distinctions offered, of assessing the facilities available at each institution which wished to avail itself of this arrangement, and of declaring whether the institution was competent to prepare its students for particular diplomas'. One of the good effects of the Harrison report may be seen already, in that the Serampore Senate has this year appointed a committee for further study of such an all-India accrediting or recognizing association.

Again, Dr. Harrison's Chapter IV on the problem of co-operation in the context of the Church in India is a very helpful review of the present situation in this country. It deserves to be read, studied, and used as a basis of careful self-evaluation, and looks toward the possibility of more co-operative activity among the various institutions that are serving the Church in the training of the ministry.

Dr. Harrison in his final chapter on recommendations has very carefully addressed himself to the problem of the united regional theological schools, then to the theological schools whether regional and united or not, then to the theological colleges, and finally to the matter of degrees, diplomas, libraries, advanced studies and finances involved in each and every type of institution. Some may find the most valuable part of this report in this chapter. It is *succinctly* given in the very worthwhile statement by Dr. Harrison—after his long study—on when a theological school or college may be considered adequate. Again, an encouraging word, and one showing real appreciation of Dr. Harrison, and the Board of Theological Education comes from the fact that already some of the recommendations of this report are bearing fruit. The question of a united regional theological school in the Hindi area in North India has already been carefully reconsidered and a proposed solution is even now being brought to the attention of the churches. Dr. Harrison is to be commended upon the careful and thorough survey which he has carried out; for the very high type of objective research ability evidenced in his study; and for the various recommendations for the many varied institutions and situations surveyed. It is to be hoped that this type of work will be continued in relation to the Bible schools, since this is an area that has been discussed for many years and yet is only beginning to be considered carefully by those interested in theological education in all of India.