

A Strategy for Theological Education in an Era of Ecumenism

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In 1945 the Christian Literature Society published *The Christian Minister in India, His Vocation and Training*. It was a study by C. W. Ranson, then secretary of the National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon, based on a survey of theological education in India at that time. Although its title suggests that the book deals with the vocation and training of ministers of all the churches in India, its contents are limited to the ministry of the churches affiliated to the N.C.C. The survey of the theological institutions connected with the N.C.C. was completed by the end of 1943, and an *Interim Report* was presented before the Committee on Theological Education, the precursor of the present Board of Theological Education, in January 1944. Both these documents are of great value to students of the history of Theological Education in this country, and some of the recommendations in the *Interim Report* are still relevant in the 1970's.

The Christian Minister in India was published before the formation of the Church of South India in 1947, and before the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches met in Amsterdam in 1948. It likewise precedes the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1959. Since then many great and important changes have taken place in the world at large, and in the Church in particular. Ranson's book belonged to the era of denominations; and the institutions which he describes were mostly denominational in character. Even in the so-called United Theological Colleges and seminaries, only Christian missions which had a great measure of 'family likeness' had actually united. The Christian leaders, not to speak of the people, would not and could not think of the Ecumenical Movement of the 1960's; and therefore Ranson's book has nothing to say about the seminaries of the Roman Catholic Church or of the Orthodox Syrian Churches in India.

The Christian Minister in India was also written in the pre-independence period, when the Christians of India were not so mobile as at present. The dispersion of the Syrian Christian, Roman Catholic and Mar Thoma Churches is a post-independence phenomenon. The Orthodox Syrians have about 50 parishes outside Kerala; and the Mar Thomites 67. The Tamil and Telegu Christians have their centres of worship outside the limits of their states. The Roman Catholic Church has, since 1945, grown greatly in numbers and influence; so much so that 33 out of their 70 dioceses were formed after 1945. All the Churches in India have now moved from an era

of denominations into an era of ecumenism, when there is need to structure the Theological Education of this period to meet the needs of the emerging 'great Church' of India.

There are already some signs in the sphere of Theological Education in India which indicate that in the not too distant future theological educators of all the Churches would want to come together to think of their common purpose, goal and strategy of action. For example, the Roman, Orthodox and Protestant theological teachers meet together for friendly discussion on theological subjects with an openness unthinkable in the 1950's. There is also a certain measure of exchange of professors for special lectures and regular classes. Theological students are encouraged to take part in inter-collegiate seminars, discussions and conferences. R.C. students are allowed to study in non-Roman colleges and *vice versa*. Whenever the B.T.E. of the N.C.C. has organised consultations, R.C. observers have been invited and have participated without reservation. There is an openness which suggests that the time has come when bolder steps should be taken to think and plan for Theological Education of all the Churches, rather than of the denominations. In the secular sphere there is already a Joint Council of Roman and non-Roman Christian colleges for university education, and there is also a joint medical council. In social and development programmes the Churches now co-operate: should not the Roman and non-Roman theological institutions now move from the present stage of spasmodic consultation to co-operation in the central and significant aspect of Theological Education? But who is going to bell the cat?

It is in the Theological Colleges that presumably most of the theological thinking and writing will take place. The Church in India cannot be content with what has been done in Europe in Latin, German or English. Indians need to produce their own theological literature in their own languages. Something has already been attempted, with a great measure of success: the *Student's Christian Library* series was planned and produced under the auspices of Serampore College, the Theological Literature Committees of most of the Indian languages are integrally connected with theological institutions, the Pontifical Seminary at Alwaye has undertaken the publication of four magazines, two of which deal with the doctrine of the Church. However, all these are at present undertaken more or less in splendid isolation.

Theological thinking and literature, liturgical renewal and change, will affect the shape and mission of the Church more than we can predict now. When all the Churches pray for Unity, it is only to be expected that theological institutions, instead of following the movement with satisfaction and approval, would come to the forefront and prepare the would-be Ministers of the Indian Church for the ecumenical era. Co-operation in Theological Education is surely one of the prime effective means of achieving the unity for which we pray. I am therefore assuming that in the not too distant future the Spirit of God will move someone somewhere in India to take the first step necessary for co-operation between Roman and non-Roman

theological institutions for the training of Christian Ministers. If and when this is done, it will require a survey of all the Churches and their seminaries to discover the needs and resources in men and money, and to make clear the purpose, goal and method of theological education in India. The R.C. Bishops' Conference already has a committee which is concerned with seminaries. The N.C.C. has its B.T.E., which for all practical purposes appears to be moribund. The Serampore Senate hesitates to take on further responsibilities for fear of failing in its already difficult function as an examining and degree-conferring body. Who then is to give a lead in an adventurous leap into co-operation between the Roman and non-Roman Churches?

What seems to be needed to stimulate action in their area of concern, is for theological educators to have an overall picture of the Indian Churches, and of the shape of Theological Education today. In the next section of the paper, certain facts and figures will be presented, which, I think, should be made familiar to all who have anything to do with Theological Education in India. According to the 1971 census there were 14,222,282 Christians in India: i.e. 26 persons in every 1,000 have professed that they are Christians. 14 million is a large number, as much as the population of Australia; but it is an insignificant number alongside the 453 million Hindus and 61 million Moslems.

The Christians are divided into several denominations. Although we live in the era of Ecumenism, there is the hard fact of denominationalism which is also linked with castism, linguism, traditionalism and parochialism. Theology has to face this fact. According to the latest figures, there are 7,666,285 Roman Catholics in India, and this is the only Church which can claim to have members in every State, and probably in all the 350 Districts. The R.C. Church in India is divided into 85 ecclesiastical units: 18 Archdioceses, 59 Dioceses, 4 Prefectures Apostolic, and 4 Exarchates. These are subdivided into 3,585 parishes and 10,940 mission stations. There are 9,211 clergy, 2,272 Brothers and 35,595 Sisters who render different types of Ministry within the Church or outside.

The other denominations, so far as figures are available to me, are here placed in their order of numerical strength, with a reminder that this should not be our only or chief criterion in determining the extent of co-operation in Theological Education.

The C.S.I. has a total strength of 1,371,156 members, divided into 16 Dioceses. Its ordained Ministry numbers 1,012, and there are a further 2,777 Catechists and Evangelists. Its members are chiefly in the four southern States, although there are a few pastorates within the area of the C.N.I.

The Orthodox Syrian Christians do not appear to have any system of counting heads, and generally give their numbers in Families. There appears to be a total membership of about 1 million, divided into 946 parishes, 46 of which are outside Kerala. As far as one can judge, they hesitate to co-operate actively with other denominations, though their members are often educationally and financially far ahead of the other denominations, and some of their clergy and lay

members participate individually in co-operative enterprises with other Churches.

The C.N.I., inaugurated in November 1970, has a total membership of 569,546, divided into 21 dioceses and ministered to by 917 Presbyters, and 1,118 Catechists and Evangelists. The Methodist Episcopal Church of Southern Asia is likely soon to join the C.N.I. and when that happens C.N.I. will be the third largest Church in India in respect both of membership and territory.

The Mar Thoma Syrian Church, formerly called the Malankara Marthoma, has according to its own estimate a total membership of over 300,000 in 500 parishes, 67 of which are outside Kerala. Its lay members are very conscious of being members of an indigenous church with a mission to India; and they have an influence in the counsels of the Church which has no comparison with their actual numbers.

The remaining number of Christians is 3,310,027, belonging to many denominations. It is not possible to give accurate figures, but one knows that most are in the North Eastern States, of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, and are Baptist or Presbyterian. The remainder are Baptists, Lutherans, Assemblies of God, Adventists, Brethren, Indian Pentecostals, etc.

Besides the bare facts about the denominations in India, theological educators should know also of the relative strength of the Church in each State, in order to ascertain how thickly or thinly the Christians are spread.¹ The following tables show the number of Christians in each State, and the number of Christians per thousand of population. It will be seen that whereas Kerala is the State with the largest number of Christians, they are only 210 per thousand; while in Nagaland there are only 334,798 Christians but they consist of 667 per thousand. An imaginative understanding of the strength of Christians in each State would enable Church leaders and planners of Theological Education to have a flexible approach in deciding how many men have to be trained for a particular area for the pastoral ministry, how many for the outreach of the Church, and in which selected areas. For example, in an area where there is a concentration of Christians, a pastor may be able to minister to a congregation with 1,000 members, whereas in another area where Christians live far apart and each congregation is small, he may be able to minister effectively to only half that number or less.

Another field in which correct figures are needed is the distribution of Christians between urban and rural areas. 70 per cent of the Indian population live in rural areas or villages; but from this it does not

¹ For the figures I have relied on the *Catholic Directory* (1972), *The South India Churchman* (Silver Jubilee Number, Sept. 1972), *The Kerala Christian Directory* (1969). The Non-Roman Churches do not appear to have an efficient central organisation from which one could secure and quote correct facts and figures. If the Church is to be able to plan for the future, correct and full statistics are necessary. The N.C.C.I. used to publish a *Directory of Churches, Missions etc.*, but this project seems to have been shelved or abandoned.

TABLE 1

(States arranged according to number of Christians)

1. Kerala	4,494,089
2. Tamil Nad	2,367,749
3. Andhra Pradesh	1,823,436
4. Maharashtra	717,174
5. Assam	667,151
6. Bihar	658,717
7. Mysore	613,026
8. Meghalaya	475,267
9. Orissa	378,888
10. Nagaland	344,798
11. Madhya Pradesh	286,072
12. Manipur	279,243
13. Goa and Daman	272,509
14. W. Bengal	251,752
15. Punjab	162,202
16. Uttar Pradesh	131,810
17. Gujarat	109,341
18. Delhi	43,720
19. Pondicherry	41,296
20. Andaman and Nicobar	30,342
21. Rajasthan	30,302
22. Tripura	15,713
23. Haryana	9,802
24. Jammu and Kashmir	7,802
25. Arunachal Pradesh	3,684
26. Himachal Pradesh	3,556
27. Chandigar	2,504
28. Dadra and Nagar Haveli	1,918
29. Laccadives	239

TABLE 2

(States arranged according to number of Christians per 1,000)

1. Nagaland	667
2. Meghalaya	469
3. Goa and Daman	317
4. Andaman and Nicobar	263
5. Manipur	240
6. Kerala	210
7. Pondicherry	87
8. Tamil Nad	57
9. Assam	44
10. Andhra Pradesh	41
11. Dadra and Nagar Haveli	25
12. Mysore	21
13. Orissa	17
14. Maharashtra	14
15. Punjab	12
16. Bihar	11
17. Delhi	10
18. Tripura	10
19. Chandigar	9
20. Arunachal Pradesh	8
21. Laccadives	7
22. Madhya Pradesh	7
23. West Bengal	6
24. Gujarat	4
25. Jammu and Kashmir	1.5
26. Uttar Pradesh	1.5
27. Rajasthan	1
28. Himachal Pradesh	1
29. Haryana	1

follow that 70 per cent of the Christians live in villages. In fact the proportion may differ from State to State, and a detailed study of this aspect is important. Ministers in rural areas require, besides the core content of Theological Education, the special training which will make them acceptable and effective pastors in those areas. The urban Ministers also need special training to equip them for the complex relationships in the cities. Previously, not much attention was given to this problem. It was taken for granted that Ministers in rural areas need be only voluntary, with some kind of *ad hoc* training, whereas the city churches need full-time well-trained Ministers, because the city churches can afford to pay them. The City churches should have a daily celebration of the Eucharist, while in the village churches the Eucharist need be celebrated only occasionally. I am not unaware of the problems which the Church will have to solve in dealing with this imbalance, but they have to be met courageously so that the villager is given equal treatment in the Church and by the Church. Before theological educators can come together to plan in

the ecumenical context, they need to know accurately about the prevailing patterns of ministry, the numbers of ordained full-time Ministers, full-time Catechists, Evangelists and women workers, the present structure of theological institutions, and those who are studying in them. At one time there were theological colleges where there were more teachers than students, and some where students could not be admitted because there was not adequate qualified staff. Even now there are some non-Roman institutions where men and women are trained for the ministry without knowing where, when or by whom they will be ordained; after completing their training they have to look round for opportunities for full-time service. (This is not to suggest, however, that Theological Education is required only for those who are going to be ordained.)

The Table given below shows the number of ordained Ministers and other Christian workers of those Churches for which I was able to obtain figures; and the number of theological institutions and students.

TABLE 3

<i>Churches</i>			<i>Seminaries</i>	<i>Students</i>
Roman Catholic	Clergy:	9,211 ^a	Major: 18	3,760
	Brothers:	5,789	Minor: 35	
	Nuns:	33,595		
C.S.I.	Clergy:	1,012		
	Lay workers:	2,777		
C.N.I.	Clergy:	917	1	40
	Lay workers:	2,118		
Orthodox Syrian	Clergy:	934	1	35
Mar Thoma	Clergy:	302	1	20

According to the T. E. F. Directory of 1970, there were 29 non-Roman seminaries, containing 1,247 students; according to recent figures there are now 25 non-Roman seminaries, containing 1,585 students.

The statistics for the non-Roman churches are far from complete, but when compared with those for the R.C. Church they do suggest that the present number of the full-time ministry is very inadequate; and it may be that it is poor not only in quantity but in quality. A new pattern of ministry where the pastoral needs of the congregation are met by voluntary or honorary pastors has been talked about by leaders of the Churches for the past two decades, but they have not succeeded in any recognisable measure.

The number of students in theological institutions in both the Roman and non-Roman Churches is encouraging. In 1943 there were only 395 ordinands in the non-Roman institutions surveyed by the N.C.C. team. In 1970 there were 1,247 students. In 1973 the

^a Of these, 5,789 priests are diocesan and 3,422 are Religious. Of the Religious, 2,635 are Indian and 787 are foreign. The diocesan clergy include 3,286 from the State of Kerala, of whom 800 serve in dioceses outside Kerala; of the Religious, 1,700 come from Kerala, 700 of whom at present serve outside Kerala.

number is 1,585. There are also a large number who have registered for the B.D. degree of Serampore externally (U.T.C. Bangalore alone has 67 on its rolls). The total number of theological institutions in India is 90, and the number of students 5,345. In the R.C. seminaries the period of training is usually much longer than in the non-Roman institutions, and ordinands normally join after their school leaving examination. The average number of students in an institution is 60, and the average intake about 1,000 per year. If there is an average of six lecturers per institution, this means that there are about 540 theological seminary lecturers at present in India. These figures do not of course remain static, and it is important that they should be kept under constant review by those engaged in planning for the future.

The planners will have to start with the present situation. The Church in India has about 140 Bishops, 16,000 full-time Ministers and (as we have just seen) 540 theological teachers. The needs of the Church in respect of the ordained ministry and specialised ministers is likely to increase: indeed, it should increase if it is to fulfil its ministry both to its members and to the people of our land. The planners should be able to take the different needs of the Church, project them into the future, and forecast the personnel required in the different States, both to replace those who retire and die, and to take charge of new work, new projects and new programmes. Is not Theological Education as important for the life and mission of the Church as its programmes of secular education and health services? But does it receive the attention it deserves?

If and when the theological educators of all the churches come together and get a vision of the ministry of the coming great Church of India, many more subjects will have to be investigated and studied. I dare not list them here. My prayer is, that the theological educators lift up their eyes, look around, see the total need of the Churches in India, and begin to plan for the teaching and training of ministers for the one united Church we pray for.