

## **SPECIAL ADDRESS**

### **THREE REASONS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION**

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**Dr Thomas Schirrmacher**

**Chairman of the WEA Theological Commission**

(Also President of Martin Bucer Seminary with TEE programs in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Czech Republic and Turkey)



*(Transcript from the recording)*

First of all, I bring greetings from the International Director of the World Evangelical Alliance, Geoff Tunnicliffe. I especially bring greetings from John Langlois, member of the International Council of WEA, who is mentioned in the article by Patricia Harrison on the history of TEE in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* [28 (2004) 4: 315-328, p. 317], which you all received prior to the conference. Along with others, he was instrumental in bringing TEE to the wider Church, when working for the Theological Commission of WEA - at that time called the WEF. In 1969 the Commission visited Guatemala, where TEE started, and discussed how it could come to Asia. After networking for some time, he finally left TEE in Asian hands. He sends his warmest greetings.

#### *One of our biggest problems*

In the Theological Commission, we discuss TEE often! Why? It is one of the biggest problems of the evangelical movement worldwide that it has been too successful! There are vast numbers of people getting baptized in Christian churches with no background in the Christian religion e.g., through a Christian family. The number of Evangelicals is growing so fast that the number of leaders does not grow in proportion. Thus many new converts are not trained properly and leave our churches again. You probably know that in Latin America or China, this doesn't just mean that people lose their faith but that they often move away from orthodox Christian faith towards heresies or just nowhere, so that there are already millions of 'post-evangelicals' and 'post-charismatics;' we don't really know how to categorize them. It is clear that if we don't train good leaders, then bad leaders will arise. We discuss this problem often.

I represent WEA's Theological Commission here. The WEA sees TEE training as an integral part of the evangelical world. Imagine what would have happened without the work of TEE starting in the late 1960s and 1970s! We would miss thousands of Evangelical leaders today.

#### *My experience and TEE - my father*

My father became a Christian at the age of 34 from an atheistic background. At that age, he was said to be 'too old' for the ministry. Nobody could really tell you why. No one could point to any Bible verse or to anything in history that decreed you could only train for the pastoral ministry when you were young. However, the general understanding was that by the age of 34 you should stay in your secular profession for the rest of your life. So my

father prayed that his children would go into the pastoral ministry. When my father was 63, he retired as professor of engineering and started to work fulltime, building up Christian schools. He retired from this job when he was 88, that is 25 years later! He always told me that he missed a theological training program which he could have visited while teaching at university.

#### *My experience and TEE - my senior pastor*

My senior pastor was 55 years old, when he became a pastor, and became one of the most successful evangelical pastors we ever had in Germany. His call to pastoral ministry came after a career in industry earning much money. But the first church hiring him did not say happily, 'Great! What an experienced man!' but hesitated to hire him, because he had no theological training, nor a means of getting one. I was his junior pastor and was training under him, when I was a professor of theology already, and I learned a lot. He always urged me, 'Thomas, someone like me, starting church ministry at the age 55, needs some way to get training while he is on the job. I have run big businesses, so why shouldn't I become a leader in the church? But why is there no way to get training while I'm working as a pastor?'

I could give you further stories like this that convinced us to add TEE to the training possibilities in Western Europe.

#### *My experience and TEE - my seminary teachers*

I myself went to study theology for four years. I decided that even though I would need to do my training and have a career in the system in order to be accepted in the German context, this system would not be a solution for the future. Most of the teachers I had while training had not been in active church ministry for 20-30 years. They were seminary professors.

Some time later, I was invited to speak at a residential school. It was one of the best evangelical schools in Germany. I had been 12 years in pastoral ministry and they invited me to give a guest lecture. There were eleven faculty members there, and I worked out that between them they had a total of only ten year's pastoral ministry experience! Looking back, I realized that I too had been taught by 'medical doctors' who had never actually practiced themselves. Their teaching was theoretical.

#### *My experience and TEE - Martin Bucer Seminary*

During the socialist era, the church in East Germany was virtually wiped out. After 1990, evangelical churches in the former communist Germany were practically non-existent. Everyone wanted to move from the east to the west because of economic hardship, including theological students. So the seminary I am involved with, Martin Bucer Seminary (officially Martin Bucer European School of Theology and Research Institutes) planted several of our TEE centers in East Germany. There was much debate about this, and much opposition, especially from the State Church. That was a big deal! But when the best students go to the big seminaries in the West, they don't return. It did not take long until even the State Church thanked us for assuring that top leaders would stay in the region!

#### *My experience and TEE - The Theological Commission*

The Theological Commission is aware that our biggest theological problem is not to define our theology, but to make sure that everyone who becomes a Christian gets a chance to

understand at least the basics of our faith. Otherwise we'll have a situation where only the top people know their theology. The top tier will become more and more knowledgeable and we'll lose the millions on the bottom, even while we may rejoice at huge numbers apparently coming to Christian faith. But this is against everything Evangelicals stand for! Every believer should read his Bible, study the world around him, and become a solid mature world Christian!

In China for example, no one knows how many of the tens of millions of believers are truly evangelicals. Many strange movements are active there. But it's likely that there are more evangelical Christians in China than in the USA! So forget your English, and start learning Chinese! If China opens its borders one day, then all evangelical textbooks will soon be written in Chinese, not English! The Chinese are often convinced evangelicals, and they have a worldwide network with other Chinese. So if China 'opens,' be ready for thousands of Chinese missionaries! With the huge number of Christians in China, there are certainly ways of running residential schools, but they cannot train enough people. For larger numbers, we need TEE.

### *My experience and TEE - The Religious Liberty Commission*

The WEA also has a Religious Liberty Commission. It was founded to fight persecution, defend our persecuted brothers and sisters, and to work for religious freedom in the political realm. This is not a new development: it's not suddenly WEA has become involved in politics! It's an integral part of our history. In 1849, there was a high ranking commission of the newly founded WEA who visited the Sultan of Turkey on behalf of Christians in Turkey. In 1852, a commission visited the Czar in Russia. In most cases, those commissions weren't acting on behalf of evangelicals. Sometimes they did, but usually they were looking for freedom for the ordinary people there.

The topic of persecution becomes more important year by year. This is a vital question. How can we cope with it? It's a political question. Persecution takes us into all states of the world, the free countries as well as those with repression.

So the WEA and regional alliances, even in free countries, have to start defending religious freedom. This becomes a major topic, including the question of theological education in countries where there is persecution. Even if we were to say for a moment, 'Non-TEE programs are better than TEE programs,' we would still be forced to have TEE programs in many countries - because there is no other way to do theological training under persecution, if you may not have a seminary building.

For example, in Turkey residential religious schools and colleges are forbidden for Christians (as well as for other forms of Islam than the one commanded by the state). On the other hand, there is still a degree of freedom in Turkey if you don't go too public. Of course this is no problem for TEE. We change the location of the seminar every time! The police know where we are, but we do not make trouble, and we do not shame anyone by something great you can see. We tell our students not to call themselves 'students of theology,' and our training programs are *full* of students, many of them non-evangelicals.

In fact, the majority of evangelical students (or at least of the possible students) worldwide live where there is persecution or at least discrimination. And we cannot stop theological training there but need to look for forms that keep us out of trouble as far as possible.

There are three kinds of reasons for TEE:

## **1. Theological reasons.**

Now I don't mean that TEE is supported by adequate theological reasons and other forms of training are not. I mean that theological education is basic to the Church. Besides dying for our sins, theological education was the only reason Jesus came into the world. In John 17 Jesus speaks to his Father, saying 'I revealed your name to those you have given me out of the world.' Thinking of the twelve, how did he get those twelve? What did he do? He went to a mountain, and prayed to His Father. Now the gospels tell us that he called them in order "that they might be with Him and that he might send them out" (Mark 3:13). They lived together with Jesus; they had private lectures, public lectures, personal experience and counseling, practical experience: they had it all!

First Jesus preached. They watched him. Next time, Jesus and the twelve were both preaching. Then Jesus wasn't preaching, but the twelve were sent out and later reported back. At this stage they went out for just a short time. 'We had power over the bad spirits!' they said. Jesus, the theological teacher, told them, 'That's true. Not wrong, but you have your priorities in the wrong order' (Luke 10:17-21). Now in Jesus' way of discipling the twelve, you can see a program of education. It's rather like bringing up children!

Here is our theological basis for TEE: the content of the teaching and the demonstration of how to live and how to serve belong together.

You cannot teach in the seminary that someone should love their neighbor when for practical purposes they have no neighbor. You can't say, 'If you have a neighbor in 5 years time, then you should love him.' That's nonsense! We speak of loving our neighbor NOW. How difficult that can be from time to time! We speak of the neighbors of our students and they too will find out how difficult it is.

Now I need to say two things: first, not every TEE program automatically combines teaching, real life, and learning effectively! And second, it is not impossible to do this in a residential school. Teachers in an effective residential school might build better relationships with students than tutors in poor TEE groups. But the principle is: We do not teach theory, but we teach what we want to live and do together. And TEE is a great way to do this.

## **2. Practical reasons**

### *1. Many people are 'too old' for residential seminary training.*

In the seminary where I trained, there were fifty students aged 18 to 19, and all came from Christian families. And if you were attending a seminary, it was extremely rare that you were a new convert who had come to Christ in the previous two or three years. Now if you confine theological training to eighteen- and nineteen-year olds, you have to rely on children of Christian families. This did not really work when I started as a student, and it certainly doesn't work today. If we rely on the teenage children of Christian families alone, we will lose the game.

### *2. We need to train future leaders.*

Don't think that I am totally opposed to residential schools. I'm not. But the reason that I left that system was that after some years, I discovered I wasn't training future leaders. The vast majority of the students I taught never entered positions of spiritual influence. I may have influenced them, but I did not influence the world through (most of) them. And

there were many leaders in the churches who never went through theological training. I thought, 'Why not train those in the church who are already leading, who will immediately use what I am teaching them?'

We just had a convocation at our TEE center in Switzerland, and H. was the only student to finish there. The Board members were sad they had so few students. They wanted to be a big institution, but we just had one graduate. After giving H. his degree, I asked the Board members, 'Is the effort you put into him worth it?' They answered, 'This man is reaching thousands through his nightly blogging, so it is worth it.' I'm not saying all graduates should be bloggers, but this man was using his blogging to influence the world. I told the Board, if I had the choice to choose between him and twenty others who are not influencing the world, I will always choose to train this one. Not the twenty who later disappear. He was active while studying, putting into practice what he was being taught while being taught. It is those we need in the long run.

*3. We don't have the money to train all the leaders we need.*

We don't have it in Germany, and we certainly do not have it in Nepal. It's a fact. We don't have the money for the many buildings we would need for residential Bible schools to provide the leaders for the 50,000 Evangelicals from a non-Christian backgrounds who are baptized daily! 50,000! We would never be able to train enough leaders without the cheap way of TEE.

*4. We can't afford to take all the potential leaders out of their local churches.*

When I finished schooling in Germany at the age of eighteen and went to study 500 km away in Switzerland, I left a church that didn't need me. It was a church that was several generations old. This may be the situation in a very few contexts nowadays - perhaps in the Bible Belt in the States or in some areas of Korea. But it is becoming rare. Even in Germany now the situation has changed. But in most countries the leaders that you want to send off to seminary are desperately needed in their home churches! In many Western countries there is a real shortage of Christian leadership. We no longer have enough people to train. In the past, in some countries like Germany, it was taken for granted that most Christian families would give one child to go into the pastoral ministry - often the second son. In the family of my mother this was the case since Reformation, for 450 years. It's not like that any longer! I can't tell my kids, 'Look, for five hundred years someone in my family has always studied theology, so one of you two must become a pastor!' It doesn't work in this generation!

In France for the first time in history, the evangelical Church is growing - not fast, but growing. In every local church, there is one, or at best two people who can lead it. France is very atheistic. If we took 120 leaders out of the evangelical churches in France to form a seminary, then virtually all the churches would be left without a leader. That would be just one seminary. We'd feel good having one full seminary, but those people would be desperately needed in local churches! So this is a real issue not just in the East, but also the West.

I know so many situations where taking one person away for training could endanger the whole church. It's not always the case, we're thankful if it is not the case, and it shouldn't be the case, but sometimes the church has just one key leader, and we can't afford to take that person out of the church.

**3. Reasons for TEE that were not thought of in the 1960's.**

*1. The question of unity.*

We definitely have to discuss what the WEA is there for: to bring unity among Christians, and evangelicals in particular. We need to find ways of theological education that don't divide us, making us say 'I was trained here' or 'I was trained there,' and setting us up as rivals.

### *2. The question of persecution.*

In Guatemala, TEE was a new way of doing theological education, but not as a result of persecution. Thank God for free countries. Now because TEE is not so visible, not so high profile, it is suitable for difficult situations. Studying part-time means you don't have to leave your work. This is a major reason for TEE. I don't need to be a prophet to see that the number of evangelicals living in difficult situations of persecution or discrimination is on the rise. Therefore we must invest in a theology of persecution: this is not theoretical - this is what people are experiencing now.

Persecution arises from mission, and it is also a basic theological topic. Persecution is no accident. It was promised from the beginning. If you compare first century Christianity, the history of Christianity through the centuries, and current Christianity, then you see that if I am living in a free country, where I can preach any nonsense in the street, that's unusual, abnormal! The New Testament reminds us again and again that persecution shouldn't be something we look for, and certainly should not be something we deserve because we've done wrong.

Should we flee persecution? Do we have the right to flee? The question is never answered in the Bible. Jesus' example does not give a clear answer. Most of his life he fled. He would go to another area, but at the end of his life he purposely set out for Jerusalem where he knew he would be persecuted. Everyone has to solve this question in his own heart with God. But, it is a normal thing to be persecuted. Jesus was and he promised we would be. So in any theological training, we must not let persecution appear in the curriculum at the end as an afterthought. It must be taught as an important subject. You can't speak of the suffering of Christ without speaking on the suffering of the church.

I urge you to see TEE as a much-needed answer for theological training under persecution. Make persecution a subject of your training.

### *3. The question of fundamentalism.*

Some days ago Terry Jones wanted to burn a copy of the Koran. Nobody would have taken any notice of him two hundred years ago. But in a globalized world, everyone took notice because of media coverage. If this man had really burned the Koran, thousands of Christians would have had to pay the price. The whole world is talking about it and blaming it on fundamentalist evangelicals. We have to counter it. We are in a delicate situation in our relationship with fundamentalism in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Christianity in the last 50 years has become more peaceful year by year. The Pope has dismissed his Swiss guard. They no longer have any weapons. The Italian police are guarding him. No citizen of the Vatican bears a weapon. The Italian police protect them. This is a symbol that even the Catholic Church abstains from using force and politics to propagate the Christian faith. We are near the end of the process of preparing what we are calling An Ethics Code for Mission. The Vatican, the World Council of Churches, and the WEA have talked about how to do peaceful mission, without putting pressure on anyone, especially as other religions use more violence like the Muslims do. Christianity has become a peaceful religion.

But this creates theological and practical questions we have to discuss. For instance, in Indonesia, if you have mujahidin coming with machine guns, do you tell the Christians

there that they shouldn't defend their families? We need to train the leaders to cope with questions like this one!

We try to get protection from the State where possible. If they won't protect us, we try to put pressure on other States to protect us. But what if no one will protect us? If ten people with machine guns came at you, could you defend yourself? Does your church teach you how to defend yourself against such violence? No. So you are an easy target then. We need theological training that helps people to live in today's strange world, where we have fundamentalists who use violence against others, and where Bible-believing evangelicals are often considered to be just like this. A world where doing mission - just telling others what we believe - is considered as fundamentalism, though we use no violence. My experience is that this kind of problem can only be solved on the spot. You can't teach it to someone who does not have to do with this reality but produces his theology apart from the real world.

In Germany, Evangelicals are seen as dangerous people before we even open our mouths to say a single word. How do you explain this to people if they don't live in that reality? I want my students to live with the Muslim community in our cities and recognize the dangers of Muslim fundamentalism, but on the other hand see that there are real people there we need to learn to love. And to see how open they are to hospitality and to talk about God!

We need leaders who are able to lead the church in the middle of this mess, where anything you say could suddenly be in the papers tomorrow, where any discussion could suddenly become a political problem.

Here in Asia this is an everyday business. So we need to develop leaders, say in India, who can help the church deal with fundamentalism in Hinduism. They have to know the dangers on one hand, yet on the other hand, they must not switch to hatred either. They must learn to love their neighbor. I know it's difficult to generalize about India, and it's hard to generalize about Asia. Anything you might say about India will be true somewhere in India! It's hard to say anything that fits all situations. We need training on the spot, in the context, because, I am convinced, that living with different religious communities and the problems coming out of them will be one of the major tasks of the future. If you take students out of that reality, out of the middle of the problems, we will lack leaders who can lead us out of those problems.

May the Lord give you wisdom to discuss how best you can cooperate together, so that your TEE programs reach out to the right people and train them in leadership positions to become more effective leaders, knowing the Bible, loving their neighbors and leading the flock. And this is all for the glory of the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.