

## **TEE—Theological Education by Extension**

[Mission Seminar, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, January 21, 1975]

*by Wilbert R. Gawrisch*

Theological Education by Extension, generally known by its acronym, TEE, came to our Synod's attention for the first time in the *Book of Reports and Memorials for the Forty-Second Convention* of our Synod, which met at New Ulm, Minnesota, August 8 to 15, 1973. Both the Executive Secretary of the Board for World Missions, Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, and the Executive Committee for the Lutheran Church of Central Africa devoted a portion of their reports to TEE.

The Executive Committee for the Lutheran Church of Central Africa stated, "The TEE program is designed to train African layworkers in theological studies and in practical church work in the village setting." It pointed out that this program, used by some Protestant mission agencies, had been studied by our missionaries in Africa and by the Executive Committee. I might add that our Seminary faculty also studied the plan. An evaluation was published in the July 1973 issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

The Synod was informed that the Executive Committee had decided to use the TEE program in a modified form. Missionary E. H. Wendland was designated to head the program. To make this possible he was relieved of some of his other duties. He was given the assignment to prepare some instructional materials for the new undertaking.

The Executive Committee listed two reasons for initiating the TEE plan in our African field. It stated:

1. It appears that for some time congregations, particularly in the rural areas, will be small and unable to support a called worker, either pastor or evangelist. The use of lay leaders to do some of the congregational work under the guidance of a called worker offers a way of serving these congregations. The TEE program is designed to give the workers the training they should have if they are to serve the congregations of which they are also members.

2. TEE materials are so arranged that they should also serve as valuable instruction guides for use in the Bible Institute, particularly over against the time when more of the teaching is done by our national workers.

A year later, in its *Report to the Ten Districts* in May 1974, the Executive Committee was able to report that four courses had been prepared at the beginner's level. They have the titles: "*Know Your Bible*," "*Go and Teach*," "*Feed My Lambs*," and "*Feed My Sheep*." These courses are now being used on a trial basis. The results will be carefully studied before more such materials are produced.

The Program Committee of our Mission Seminar has asked me to give you some information on TEE—what it is, how it originated, what its goals and methods are, what use our African Church expects to make of it, and finally what TEE materials actually are like.

### **What is TEE?**

Almost all of you who are students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have left your homes and come to Mequon to study theology. You are all full-time students, though most of you also have a part-time job to help you pay the expenses of your education.

Imagine for a moment, however, that you are back at your home in, say, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. There you have a full-time job in the feed mill of the Midland Co-op. But you are also a part-time student. You spend eight hours at the Co-op. Then in the evening, after supper, you spread out your books on the kitchen table while your wife shushes the kids and keeps her favorite TV program turned low so as not to disturb you. For an hour or two or three, depending on the number of courses you are taking, you pore over your books. You study the Bible and related theological subjects.

On Saturday you drive to the urban center of New Ulm. There you spend the day together with a half dozen other students from Essig, Courtland, Nicollet, St. Peter, and LeSueur at the Mequon Extension Center in the basement of Turner Hall. You devote the time to joint Bible study, research in the small library, discussions, fellowship, and personal consultation with your instructor, Prof. Fredrich, who checks on your progress and answers all your questions.

Once a month you and your fellow students pile into a couple cars to make the trip to Mequon. Here for two days you take part in inspirational services, take exams, have the opportunity to hear lectures by the Seminary faculty and outstanding speakers such as Mission Executives Berg and Hoenecke. No small part of the Mequon trip is the Christian fellowship you enjoy with other students who have come from Seminary Extension Centers as far away as the bush country of Saginaw, Michigan, and Mobridge, South Dakota.

Late Sunday afternoon you head back for Sleepy Eye, spiritually refreshed and stimulated. You are glad for such stimulation and encouragement because the daily routine at the feed mill, the evenings spent in plowing through yourself-study courses, and the time you give to your local St. John's congregation as one of its lay leaders makes yours a full and demanding schedule and calls for much self-discipline.

Because you are taking more than one course at a time, you look forward to graduating in ten instead of the 15 years it would take if you were not so ambitious. What a great day the day of your ordination will be!

This, in brief, is the TEE concept for training Christian workers to meet the dire need for pastors and evangelists in world missions. Since it is impossible for many students to go to the Seminary, the Seminary goes to the students.

The plan, as our Board for World Missions proposed to utilize it, was described by Pastor Hoenecke in his 1973 report in these words:

Our mission in Central Africa has already taken the lead under the guidance of Prof. E. H. Wendland in training national workers within their own villages. The plan is an adaptation of the T.E.E. program (Theological Education by Extension), first developed by the Presbyterian mission in Guatemala. No radical change is planned in our present pastoral training program at the Bible Institute and Seminary.

The basic elements of the plan are the Seminary faculty, a set of special training courses, adjusted to the varying levels of education of those to be trained, and carefully screened, mature villagers of good reputation, Christian consecration, and the intelligence that will qualify them for service as village pastoral leaders.

As soon as the special training courses have been prepared, several missionaries will be trained and assigned to go to village centers once a week to instruct the students from a group of neighboring villages in the Holy Bible, Lutheran doctrine and practice, and the elementary techniques of teaching and preaching. Candid, open discussions will be encouraged, and the homework for the next week will be assigned and explained.

The study material is divided into ten-week courses, and, upon completion of a course, the students will be encouraged to enroll for succeeding courses. One day every month is to be set aside for a conference get-together of all the students at the Lusaka Seminary.

As soon as they are found apt to teach, the trainees are expected to conduct simple services and instruction classes in their villages without remuneration and, at first, under the supervision of a missionary or trained evangelist. Those who prove to be qualified for the holy ministry will be encouraged to enroll in the Bible Institute and Seminary.

While it is designed to train more village pastoral leaders, the program also promises to help overcome the problem of the institutional type of training which so easily leads nationals to demand living standards for themselves conformable to those of the expatriates.

Someone, according to Missionary Wendland, has called TEE “the hottest thing to hit the mission circuit since the indigenous church policy.” Since its inception a dozen years ago, it has been enthusiastically welcomed as a new way of training nationals for positions of leadership in the church in developing countries. While it probably will not and should not supplant the more thorough kind of training offered by the traditional, institutional seminary program, it does offer a method of reaching and training workers who would otherwise never be able to receive a theological education.

### **How TEE Originated**

The beginnings of TEE take us back about a dozen years to Guatemala. The Presbyterians had been working in Guatemala for some 80 years. They had a seminary in Guatemala City, the capital, but it did not provide nearly enough national pastors to meet the need. Many of their churches, especially in the rural areas, were without a pastor. These congregations were generally too small and too poor to support a full-time pastor, or even to share one with neighboring congregations. It often happened also that graduates of the seminary, even those who originally came from rural areas, were unwilling to serve rural congregations, since the standard of living in those areas was lower than in the city. Problems frequently developed also because the young, inexperienced pastors who did accept such calls ran into conflict with the older, respected lay leaders of the churches. As a result, about half of the graduates the seminary did produce dropped out of the ministry. Some never entered the ministry because the status their education gave them enabled them to command much higher salaries in the business world or in government.

In the hope of attracting more students from the rural areas and keeping them in a rural environment, the church relocated its seminary to a rural setting. But this still did not solve the

problem because the people they hoped to recruit as students were simply unable to undertake a program of full-time study. Even the younger men were generally married and tied to their jobs by the need to support their families. They still could not attend the seminary.

It was observed, however, that the many congregations which had no ordained pastors were not without leadership. The lay elders were actually acting as pastors. Though they had little or no formal training, they were carrying on a kind of tent-making ministry. They were serving their congregations without pay. They were like the presbyters, or elders, chosen by the mission congregations established by the Apostle Paul (Ac 14:23; Tt 1:5).

To remove these lay leaders from their homes and occupations for a long period of seminary training would be expensive, undesirable, and usually impossible. But would there not be some way of giving these men a theological education that would enable them to do a better job at what they were already doing?

Once this question was asked, TEE was born. The solution was obviously to bring the seminary to the student.

### **What are TEE's Goals and Methods?**

The TEE plan is to establish a number of seminary extension centers. These serve as a base from which to educate people where they are. The hope is that the more mature men who are already serving the churches as lay leaders can be enlisted in a systematic in-service training program. The goal is to supply the church with a trained ministry by way of in-service training instead of pre-service training.

But there are also other goals. One of these is to supply the small, poverty-stricken congregations with pastoral care provided by people who can help to support themselves, receiving only limited financial remuneration from the church—in other words, a tent-making ministry. Another is to enable students with various levels of pre-seminary training to prepare themselves for the ministry. Closely related to this is the goal of supplying pastors for various types of congregations. City churches with educated members are, generally dissatisfied with pastors who have had only a primary education, and more highly educated pastors are usually not willing to serve the less educated or illiterate members of rural congregations.

As originally conceived, the TEE plan utilized a method known as programmed learning. This is a method of self-study by which the student teaches himself by using a skillfully written workbook. It is a method that was developed and used by industry and the armed services.

In programmed learning the material is arranged in short capsules, called frames. The student digests one capsule at a time. In each frame he is given some information; then he is required to answer some questions to determine whether he has understood what he has read; and finally he is given the correct answers to the questions so that he can ascertain for himself whether he has actually grasped the material.

After he has mastered one frame, he moves on to the next one and so works his way through the lesson. He studies one lesson a day.

In the TEE program the student meets once a week with his teacher and other students from the area at the seminary extension center. The teacher checks on the student's progress and helps him to understand things he may not have grasped. The discussions with his fellow students help him to clarify his ideas, to learn how to express himself and to communicate what he has learned, and to see the practical significance of what he is studying. Pastoral, personal, and administrative problems are frankly discussed. The weekly meetings also offer an

opportunity for joint Bible study and fellowship. They serve also to encourage the student to keep up with his studies. They are a feature of the program that distinguishes it from a correspondence course. In a correspondence course the student may never have the opportunity to meet personally with his instructor. The student's lesson and the instructor's reactions pass through the mail. In the TEE plan there is regular student-teacher consultation

Another feature is the monthly visit to the seminary, which is the hub, so to speak, of the wheel. It is the home base from which the teachers go out, spending one day a week at each of the various extension centers. It is the central meeting place where all the students from the scattered extension centers gather periodically for inspiration, testing, discussion, and fellowship.

In Guatemala the Presbyterian seminary offers five courses each year. Students in the regular resident program at the seminary take all five, but extension students may take from one to five, depending on their motivation, the time available to them, and their financial resources. Each one is permitted to move ahead at his own speed. It could, therefore, conceivably take 15 years to complete the program.

The student buys his own textbooks and materials and pays a small fee for each course he takes. In this way he gradually acquires his own small library. The fee he pays tends to lead him to value the education he is receiving more highly.

The problem of working with students who have had previous education ranging all the way from nothing beyond the primary grades to the university level is met by designing courses on three levels, the first level for those who have completed the sixth grade, the second for those who have completed two years of junior high school, and the third level for those who have had some university training.

To us at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, where the entrance requirements are a B.A. degree or its equivalent and a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, the thought of conducting a seminary program with students on the sixth grade level may seem incredible. But we must remember that in Guatemala not one person in a thousand has a college education, and in the entire country 96 people out of a hundred have not gone beyond the sixth grade. Many, especially in the rural areas, have not gone beyond the third grade. The large Indian population is for the most part illiterate. This situation is general in Latin America. Consequently, the choice for the 60 seminaries and 300 Bible schools in Latin America has been either to lower the standards or to have no students.

The three levels in the TEE program differ in the following respects: on the first level the questions and exercises deal basically with the facts to be learned; on the second level the questions deal with the implications of the material and make appropriate applications; on the third level the student is required to do further research and make further applications.

What results has the Presbyterian seminary in Guatemala had with this new program? The most obvious result was an increase in the number of students from 10 or 15 in the old residence program to 143 in the TEE program three years later. Secondly, though larger amounts had to be spent for travel both by teachers and students, there was a significant drop in the cost per student. Thirdly, it was found that the extension program did not produce in the students the professional orientation of the institutional system, which tended to separate the students from the common problems of the laity. Furthermore, extension students did not develop the feeling that the church owed them a living, an unwholesome attitude that graduates of the residential program often developed as a result of many years of support by the church. The transition to a tent-making ministry is therefore expected to be easier. As anticipated, students on various levels

can be accommodated more readily. And finally, men of more maturity have been gained as students.

At an interdenominational workshop held by the more conservative Protestants in Guatemala City in 1966 the interest and support of CAMEO, the interdenominational Committee to Assist Missioner Education Overseas, were enlisted in the TEE cause. The immediate need was to write and publish the large number of new-style textbooks the new program called for. The only way this seemed possible was through a joint effort in which a basic set of texts would be produced that would be acceptable to all the denominations represented. Each denomination would then prepare supplementary materials in which its distinctive doctrines or practices would be presented.

Though some skepticism was voiced concerning the effectiveness of TEE, the new idea was quite generally hailed as offering a solution to the critical need in Latin America for trained pastors. Of some 150,000 men serving congregations in Central and South America, at least 90% reportedly lack an adequate training. By 1968 at least 18 theological schools in Latin America had some kind of TEE program. From there it was carried to Africa and the Far East. Presbyterians, Evangelicals, Baptists, Methodists, Mennonites, and LCA Lutherans became involved. Various interdenominational organizations sponsored the publication of materials. A variation of the original programmed learning method has been attempted by some, apparently with considerable success. This is the "guided personal study" method. Simple textbooks accompanied by a study guide are used. This method makes it necessary for the teacher to do more actual teaching in the weekly study sessions, however. The material that has been covered by the student in his private study forms the basis for a seminar-type discussion under the guidance of the instructor.

Dr. Milton Baker of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society has said, "TEE is the significant development in theological education in the Twentieth Century." It must be remembered, however, that despite the effort that has gone into TEE in the past dozen years, it is still an experiment. Sufficient materials have not yet been prepared to carry out the full program on all levels at any one place. It will be impossible to make a conclusive judgment for some time because of the fact that the average student will take from 12 to 15 years to complete the course covered in an institutional program in three years. As Missionary Wendland has said, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof. The pudding hasn't been fully prepared, much less entirely eaten." Nevertheless, his thorough study of the TEE plan and his intimate acquaintance with the needs and problems of the work in Central Africa led him to make a number of suggestions and conclusions which in turn led to the decisions of the Executive Committee to adapt and experiment with the TEE program in our African field.

### **What Use Does Our African Church Expect to Make of TEE?**

For this part of our presentation we can do no better than to let our seasoned missionary, Prof. Wendland, speak to you in his own words. He writes:

1. Everyone seems agreed that TEE offers excellent opportunities for *more intensive Bible study for local church leaders*. Since we can't indefinitely supply and subsidize fully-paid workers for every local congregation, and since they can't seem to come close to supporting such men themselves, we are going to have to come to grips sooner or later with a lay leadership program. Here we mean local congregational leaders

who are willing to conduct services with little or no pay, *working under the supervision of itinerant pastors*. How are these men to be trained? Or are we simply going to let a problem such as this ride without facing it already now? TEE would offer hope, at least, toward an eventual solution.

2. Local congregational leaders who are willing to serve the Lord without pay are *the best source of students for resident study*. Our own emphasis has been upon mature men of proven dedication, not academic proficiency. Even by exercising extreme caution in accepting applicants, we have not always been too successful in getting students of the best caliber. It would seem that *by testing local congregational leaders through use of an extension program*, we could have even greater assurance that the right men are being sent on to the institution, where the cost of housing and support for men with families is quite an investment.

3. *An ongoing study program for our present evangelists, vicars, and pastors is a vital need in Africa*. We are being naive if we think that this is being taken care of. While some of our areas are arranging for conferences of called workers, these conferences up to the present are not adequately supplying this need. Neither has our study program for vicars been sufficiently worked out. We need to ask ourselves seriously to what extent are our men in the field continuing their studies? What access do they have toward study materials and books to challenge their thinking? How many are spending too many hours raising maize or cotton? Is it any wonder that some revert rather quickly to the old ways? We need to be more concerned about this as a part of our efforts toward helping to build a solid church. Here the extension study method also seems to offer a ray of hope.

4. Extension education forces the development of study texts and exercises. Here we are not necessarily thinking only of programmed materials, but any course materials where the basics to be learned are clearly spelled out and tested by means of additional questions and study helps. Such materials are excellent in *aiding national staff workers who teach at resident or extension training schools*. For them the course of study and accompanying exercises must be defined and even programmed, if possible. We are depending more and more on nationals to take over the work. What better way do we have of *assuring ourselves that they will know how to do this than by preparing course materials* of the precise type needed for extension work? When the day comes that we must say to our national brethren, "Here it is. You are now taking our places!"—and this day could come sooner than we think—how well are we prepared for this step? Preparing TEE materials now could have valuable by-products later!

5. *We can think of a number of situations where it would be helpful right now as well as in the foreseeable future to have extension study materials available*. It may be advisable to leave a congregational leader in a remote area right in his home environment rather than to take him away for institutional training, since we have nobody to replace him. Moreover the day may not be far off when Malawi can no longer send students to Zambia. Does this mean another expensive institutional set-up and staff of teachers for Malawi? Furthermore, there are appeals from other parts of Africa before us where it is a financial and practical impossibility to enter with a full-blown institutional program such

as we have in Lusaka. We are not sure that TEE would supply the complete answer. But being able to use such materials would surely be worth a try, rather than to have to say, "Sorry, there is nothing we can do for the present."

These well-reasoned arguments convinced the Executive Committee that we ought to undertake a TEE pilot program. The immediate need was for the necessary study materials. The materials produced by the interdenominational organizations were not suitable for our work. The only solution was to ask our missionaries to begin writing such books.

As far as the nature of such books is concerned, I think you will again be interested in hearing Missionary Wendland's views. He writes:

I am convinced that *theological education on a mission field*, whether on a residential or extension basis, *requires texts and study materials of its own*. The place to begin is in the English language and at the post-elementary level. No matter what level we are eventually reaching for, our theological content must be simple, basic, and it must presuppose nothing. We must assume that those to be taught theology have had little more than a scant knowledge of Bible history and the basics, perhaps, of Luther's six chief parts of doctrine. No matter what languages we shall eventually be using, we must start with English, an elementary English that can be readily translated, free from American idioms, figures of speech, and words and sentences which even we sometimes have difficulty in understanding. The basic courses to begin with would be those generally taught in our first year or two of theological study in a mission field's Bible Institute or seminary. I don't think that a comparison of our respective curricula would show much divergence in basic subjects followed. Since our Lutheran curriculum is unique in its approach to Bible study, church doctrine, and confessions, and since the practical courses are all a reflection of this approach, it would be well to assume from the very beginning that we have our own work cut out for us virtually every step of the way. Whether or not the programmed study methods are better for our needs is open to question. In any case the lesson material would have to be simple, clear, direct and accompanied by review questions and explicit directives designed to encourage further private study and to stimulate group discussion. Any research projects expected of the student for further study would have to be restricted to basic materials like the Bible or theological books available in any basic library.

As was mentioned earlier, four TEE courses have now been published. Though it is not possible for me to evaluate them as far as their usefulness in meeting the needs of the people who are using them is concerned, it does seem to me that they are extremely well done. They are sound; they are simple; they are well organized; and they appear to be practical. We ought to thank the Lord for giving us men in our mission fields of the high caliber of Missionary Wendland. These books give evidence of the faithful and dedicated use to which he has put the talents with which God has so richly blessed him. Through him they constitute a legacy from our church to the Lutheran Church of Central Africa which, under God, will prove to be a rich source of blessing to that church in the years to come.