



Theological Education and the Church: *An Interview with Ted Ward*¹

Abstract. Ted Ward is described as one who keeps “an eye on the future” as he seeks to make a difference in the present.² Over a long and distinguished career in education, missions, and international development, TW has never shied away from asking hard questions, sharing his perspectives, or tackling an injustice. He is, for most of us, the epitome of the world Christian, and there’s hardly a place on earth that hasn’t felt the impact of his expertise and his compassion. As we sat together on his balcony on the Florida coast, we talked about issues related to theological education and the church. You will note that Ted’s comments range around the world, move easily between theoretical analysis and practical realities, and, as always, confront controversial issues head on.

LC: It is generally assumed that theological education exists to serve the church—to “prepare,” or “equip” men and women for the service of the church . . .

TW: . . . I doubt that many people in the church today, across the world, think seriously of institutions truly serving the church. They view the educational institution as a place where people go in order to get this or that competency, and when they graduate they are assumed to be eligible for church ministry. I find that, in most instances, churches presume that the pastor or other staff member will be “finished” when they get him or her, and there’s nothing else to do. You just “get” the “finished product,” put it in place, and it works. Theological schools are the institutions the church assigns to produce these competencies, and if the graduates are deficient in any way, then it’s the institution’s fault. . . . [T]he institutionalization of education and missions clearly exemplifies the church’s tendency to hire an institution and then dismiss the task from mind. I can’t help but notice that it is in missions and leadership development where the church has most specifically institutionalized the tasks and pushed them off at arm’s length: Outreach and leadership development should be at the core of the church’s responsibility.

LC: If you’re right, then churches and schools are mutually confused about their respective purposes.

TW: Clearly, the contrast between the purposes of the church and the purposes of the seminary has become a more substantial issue in recent years. I’d say that for at least one or two centuries, there has been a kind of naïve trust between the church and its educating institutions that assumes that things are being done the way they ought to be done, and that if we just let the institution take care of things, it will all come out all right. Today, there is a much sharper tension between the church and its educating institutions. What has emerged is a rejection of the benign, naïve trust and an insistence on some kind of substantial evidence of the worthiness of the partnership and the validity of the basis of the trust.

¹ Ted Ward and Linda Cannell. Theological Education and the Church. *Christian Education Journal* 3NS (1999), pp. 29-47. This article is copyrighted and is posted here with permission of the *Christian Education Journal*.

² See Duane Elmer and Lois McKinney (eds). *With an Eye on the Future, Development and Mission in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of Ted Ward*. Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 1996

I am encountering churches that ask such questions as, “What do the things learned in seminary have to do with anything that is really important in our church?” “We’ve trusted for so long that training was being done in a way that would benefit the church. What we’re wondering now is does that kind of learning—especially the way it’s being done—truly benefit the church?” Then, from the theological school you hear, “But don’t you see how important these foundational learnings are and how important the foundational truth we teach pastors is to the whole reality of the church? Without that, the churches are lost.” As long as theological institutions fail to see that the issue is not *just* the importance of truth, but of how that truth is taught and how it is learned, there will continue to be tension between the church and school.

The point is that both the church and the seminary are going to have to come to terms with the fact that the issue isn’t the importance of truth, but the capacity to operate on the basis of that truth—the fashioning of a substantial connection between the *truth* and a true *life*. Churches tend to dismiss the theological “stuff,” the academic knowledge base, as irrelevant to ministry; and the schooling people say, “That’s the very thing we don’t dare neglect.” The point is they’re not hearing each other, they’re not understanding each other. To me it is imperative that the response of the church has to be nurtured and shepherded in such a way that the *truth* isn’t thrown out with the rejection of *the ineffectiveness of the means of learning the truth*.

LC: Underlying that comment seems to be a fundamental concern that what we have evolved into over time is one institution serving another institution, rather than both institutions serving some larger purpose. As theological education began to serve another institution, i.e., the church, it became more functional; and out of that came all kinds of standards so that the institution-to-institution parity could be maintained. . . .

TW: I think that’s fair, and you could build a helpful analysis around that presumption. I have a slightly different question that, for me, works better: What happens when a serving institution becomes so concerned with fulfilling its *own* context that it no longer pays adequate attention to the ways that it serves the institutions it is intended to serve? It seems to me that the purposes of much theological education are too narrowly academic. The purposes of the church are *not* academic. The academic habits of theological education are centered, typically, on the knowledge-base in almost a technical sense. The schools assume that if you don’t have your knowledge base right, then you won’t do ministry right. That may be a reasonable argument, but when theological education primarily serves its own academic agenda, it is apt not to be sufficiently attentive to the service demands and the qualitative characteristics of the churches.

What we have today is a real misfit between academic theology and the contemporary church. I do believe that academic theology has permitted this; and that’s where theological seminaries, especially those that become obsessed by their own academic standards and the direction that accrediting associations push them, tend to look at the church and say, “But you don’t understand. We really have to be this way.” I want to ask, “*Why* do you have to be that way?” The honest answer to that question is, “Because we are not really in business to serve the church. We’re in business to serve the academic standards of academic theology.” That to me is one of the key problems.

LC: But, do you believe there is a place for, what we might call, a community of scholars in relation to the church?

TW: I would describe that in terms of the “resident scholar complex.” What do you do with people who are terribly brilliant and who produce much of the literature that needs to be read? In every field there are people who do important thinking, but who may not be able to teach their way out of a paper bag. Is there a place for these people in the so-called teaching establishments? I’m convinced that in the fields where the knowledge base is especially worthy, or expanding rapidly, we need places where scholars can retreat to create the pieces that will be fed into an educational enterprise that can evaluate and critique those pieces, and then encourage the experimental behavior that is necessary to test the consequences of those thoughts and reflections. We must have provisions for intellectual thought, and a tradition for educational thought that is critical of the ways truth is implemented. We’ve got to have people in the churches and in the schools who deeply value both the *scholarly* and the *experiential* worth of knowledge.

In other words, even though I recognize the need for resident scholars in scholarly communities, I wonder—do I really want a person who is simply a writer, a thinker of great thoughts, and a do-er of great scholarly gymnastics? Can I defend a role for the scholar that is devoid of any thought of how truth is to be implemented? I think not, but I still have to have some place to put the resident scholar. As I look at it, I don’t think we’re going to resolve the growing impasse between the church and seminary until we set up a third category: the church/seminary/scholarly center and differentiate those three.

It may be that the problem is of the sort that will not be resolved by asking “How do we bridge the seminary to the churches?” but, rather, “How do we re-define the sectors where we can invest human effort, in order to articulate diverse human effort for a more productive vitality for the work of the church?” In other words, I just don’t think the gap between the seminary and the church can be bridged.

LC: Not in the current mode.

TW: Right. And it’s just dawned on me fairly recently that there’s a sector of learning resources that neither the seminary nor the church has tapped into very purposively, and that’s the professional seminar or the conference. This sector is usually left out of primary concerns of the church and outside the domain of the seminary, yet it’s potentially very valuable. How can that sector be tapped by the churches *and* by the seminary? Take a triangle at this point. Put three sectors on it: churches, formal education institutions, and nonformal agencies that provide learning services.

LC: That reminds me of your references in other contexts to the need for an ecology of education. In your descriptions of triangles or elements you are really arguing for an ecology of education that recognizes the several elements that need to work together for the sake of the development of the whole people of God. It might be that the future of theological education will not be recognized as a place—but as a network of experiences.

TW: Absolutely. We still aren’t taking nonformal education seriously enough. On the international scene, we became aware of nonformal education as a key problem when so many of the post-colonial nations invested all their educational funds in expanding formal schooling. A school-centered view of learning asks the typical school-like, kiddie-school questions, rather than asking questions related to effectiveness and outcomes. In other words, the formal education question is,

“What is the right way?” The nonformal question is, “What is the effective way?” or “What are the consequences of learning things in certain ways?” More and more churches are asking questions related to the nonformal paradigm which leads me to believe that churches are going to be less and less interested in simply copying the values, habits and the ideals of a schooling model. Churches today, are coming to reject a curriculum that looks like a seminary curriculum, especially in those areas where they feel that the pastors they have hired from seminary have not been able to make any effective use of a major portion of that curriculum. They will reject that which may be deemed important for some theoretical reason, but has not contributed to the pastor’s effectiveness—as they understand effectiveness.

LC: Theological education is criticized as being too specialized and fragmented, organized around content and propositions almost to the exclusion of contemporary issues and relevancies. Okay. So a church sees that a pastor coming out of a seminary is not effective—he or she is described as a “head” person. Two concerns: First, who helps churches decide if their notion of leadership effectiveness is biblically consistent and serves the theological reality of the people of God? Second, if the church decides to get into the business of training leaders, it will tend to reject those aspects of the curriculum that produce “head” people. However, if in trying to correct the “head” problem, the church creates an excessively functional or practical curriculum, that curriculum will be as flawed and unbalanced as the specialized, content-driven curriculum of the seminary. In time, the church’s training models will also become irrelevant.

TW: Right. Let me put it this way: If we look at the classical curriculum in theological schools we see several categories of valuable learning. I can make a reasonable defense for each category. It grieves me to give up a category simply to add something that is apt to be taught similarly atomistically. The problem lies deeper: the curriculum is taught piece-meal in so many institutions. It just doesn’t hold together. It doesn’t add up to effective leadership for the churches. Increasing criticism argues that the classical ways are not working. I agree that certain subjects have not been working as well as they should, but that does not justify giving up on the values of those subjects.

LC: The popular tendency now is to complain about the deficiencies of the leader and claim that it’s the theoretical experiences that must be at fault. Instead we should be asking questions about values and biblical principles, or questions about curriculum design and effective teaching and learning, or questions about what needs to be part of the equipping or shaping of a leader.

TW: It’s all of that, but there’s another piece too. There’s a sense in which curricular judgments are often made on the basis of methodological incompetency. If you have a category of curriculum that is notoriously badly taught, then that whole category will suffer because the category itself will be seen as having lost its functional value. The truth is that the category is likely needed, but the way it’s being taught just doesn’t allow its importance to come through. If I’m organizing a curriculum, I can’t leave the question of methodology to the last because there are many important things that will not be valuable unless they are done right. It’s awfully hard to get a good discussion of this because, too often, educators can’t even imagine teaching their pet courses in any way other than the way they’ve been doing it all along. And, typically, students are just as hung up; they can’t envision being taught any other way.

Let me give you a practical example that is causing a lot of concern right now in certain schools. I do believe it's appropriate that some, perhaps many, people in ministry handle the biblical languages quite knowledgeably. In the interest of seeing that everybody is able to use the languages, certain seminaries are, in fact, watering them down to the point where they're making Greek and Hebrew teachable to all. Which guarantees that nobody, really, is going to become proficient in the critical understanding and analytic use of the languages. Using a musical analogy: You don't train every violinist to be a conductor. You don't train every flutist to be a composer. It's obvious that conductors have to pay attention to things that violinists don't have to pay attention to, except in the obvious matters of following the score. I think there are theological competencies that are like following the score. Not everyone needs to become an originating translator.

When you argue that "everyone has to do it," then, in my judgment, you're arguing that it really isn't all that important that some be excellent in it. I think we need more people than at present, *really* skilled in biblical languages at a much higher level of competency. But the minute you make "learning the languages" a common requirement two problems emerge. First, the churches will say, "We don't understand why (because the purpose and value of the languages won't show through very well—in the majority of pastors). And second, the really good teachers of Greek and Hebrew will be spread too thin. Are we encouraging stultified sermons wherein the recent graduate says, "Now, in the Greek it says such-and-such." I doubt seriously that there are a significant proportion of outstanding pastors, and I use that word advisedly, who are truly competent translators because of Greek and Hebrew. They may be competent in part, and maybe in main, because of respect for Scripture, and they know how to do word studies at a low level, but that's not the same as *real* competency in Greek and Hebrew. Let's accept the opportunities of new technologies and get every seminarian into computer-based helping tools. It would free up professors and space in the curriculum.

I think the biblical languages is going to become a much more heated battleground before this issue goes away; because, in some seminaries it has become a litmus test for commitment to academic values. Others are dodging the issue by simply eliminating the language requirement. Sad. I would argue that even the seminaries that insist on the languages don't take them as seriously as I would want to take them!

LC: No doubt, there are other areas of the curriculum that shouldn't be required of all, or shouldn't be required in the same way of all, even in the same degree program. Unfortunately, there are few things in schools that generate as much heat and as little light as curriculum reform. And because of this, we are missing opportunities to create some effective ways to give students alternative experiences in the curriculum to develop other competencies and knowledge, if you will. One despairs, sometimes, of formal modes of education.

You have spent a great deal of your life serving institutions, and you are, obviously, committed to modes of formal education. But you are also known as a strong advocate for nonformal education. In fact, you see one of your major contributions as stimulating awareness, around the world, of the importance of nonformal education. Why, then, did you stay in a formal education career? Is there a continuing role for formal education? Will the nonformal modes, for example, church based theological education, supplant the formal seminary?

TW: How do I justify the emphasis on nonformal education when I've spent all my career in formal education? The institutions of formal education, especially the stronger graduate schools of education, are really the only place in society where questions of educational decision-making are focused.

There's a possibility that, in the future, some of these decisions will be driven away from the academy and into environments that are more like the industrial think-tank. I wouldn't rule out the possibility, but it hasn't happened yet; and I don't believe that even the mega-churches are going to be what the business and industry sector have become to the university. Mega-churches could do it, yet the pastors are so often closed to intellectual dialogue that they are not likely to do it. When a mega-church is led badly by a domineering leader who is convinced that his (and it's typically a male) is the only voice that matters, how could one build any kind of an educational enterprise in that institution without a direct confrontation with the pastor? Can a mega-church be utilized, stimulated, or encouraged to go toward a model of leadership that is not being exemplified in the senior pastor without completely alienating him? This is a real-life problem, and it's the main reason why I have stayed in the formal institution. Schools and churches, because they are not ideal, become places within which to think, and within which to engage in praxis. I have to figure out how to cope with real problems. I can utilize the formal environment to learn more effectively the issues of educational choice and decision-making that either support or hinder the contributions of that institution.

LC: You are recognizing that, even in a limiting situation, that there is the potential for the "good thing." There are worthy values, models, and principles resident even in what we would see as a restrictive environment. But the mechanisms, the procedures, the processes, even the theological biases in that environment, are such that the good thinking is often obscured.

TW: Right. Let me pick that up by illustrating a couple of contrasts. New York Theological Seminary is a good example of a school that was widely known for its fervency for Scripture—much like Trinity's reputation today. Fervency for Scripture is something I happen to believe in, but I can see that if the fervency for Scripture becomes an end in itself, and everything else is evaluated through it, the seminary can ultimately restrict its effectiveness and thus contribute fewer people to the profession who will be able to adequately come to terms with the contemporary problems of church and society. So what can I do? Do I have to choose one or the other of the two models on the basis of just one value—in this case, fervency for Scripture? No, I think I have the option of saying, "What are the *goods* in the one and the *goods* in the other situation?" "And what are the effects of those *goods* in relation to the church? What were their pastors like?" In other words, I would see one of the goods of New York Theological today in the way they require that all their faculty and students be active in church ministries. You can't even be admitted if you're not in a church ministry, and you can't stay on the faculty if you leave the church's ministry. To me, that's a mark of quality in theological education.

But, that raises another question, and I think this is for today one of the most crucial questions. "In what ways do the good outcomes interfere with each other?" Is it possible that part of our problem is that several of the *goods* that we seek are incompatible or antithetical to some extent? And what accommodations do you make so that these antithetical characteristics become less apt to cancel each other? For example, if *ministry* is a built-in requirement, that will cut into time and effort that you otherwise would spend in *biblical exegesis*. Now how do you minimize the competing effect of these "goods" and how do you find the balance point? To me that's one of the critical things in curriculum thinking in theological education today. Many times we argue for a given outcome, and then ignore the consequences of that emphasis on other priorities.

Getting back to my primary point, if one starts with the presumption that the educational categories and strategies have to pass the test of effectiveness, then the standard of evaluation will be far more than simply asking, "How well does the curriculum conform to classical categories?" I think theological education, historically, has been evaluated in terms of accreditation in an academic climate

that asks the latter question, “How well does it conform to the past?” Now we’re being forced by circumstances in the world around us to ask the *effectiveness* question, which may respect the past, but asks how well does it deal with the contemporary situation and the future?

We need an academic environment that provides opportunities not only for thought, but also provides a place for praxis, for reflection on experience. One of the things that grieves me about theological education is that I know of very few forms of education that are less inclined to be self-critical and experimental in the sense of trying alternative models of curriculum or even alternative views of teaching. When I started in formal education as a music teacher, the first thing that hit me negatively was the tendency of the music field to be very repetitive and to do things over and over again year after year. You run through the same music with a new batch of people and you put on the same sorts of programs and concerts and expose people to a performance standard that was good *yesterday*. That’s what caused me to leave music as a career and to broaden out into education. When I got into education in two state universities, I found out that, indeed, many in the field of education had this same tendency to evaluate in terms of *yesterday* and to copy previous experiences and successes. But, at least, there was freedom and encouragement to engage in experimental alternatives. It was legitimate in the education field to say, “Let’s try it a different way.”

I must say that the field of theological education does not have that same spirit of experimentalism. I believe this is partly because the theological mind is constantly searching for the eternal verity, not for the contemporary alternative; and if one is committed to the eternal verity and denying the importance of the contemporary improvements in style and technique, then clearly you’ve got your curriculum questions focusing on content and purpose to such an extent that you can’t entertain adequately the equally important questions of procedure and application.

LC: It seems to me that the problems in theological education are not simply analysis of the issues around equipping leaders, or creating a functional curriculum, or theory versus practice. The real problems are much more complex and difficult, and perhaps it will be years before we are able and willing to try and identify these.

TW: Yes, it’s an extremely complicated matter because almost everything we can talk about, everything we can see, is symptomatic. Like many a human remediation effort, we tend to attack the symptoms, or we tend to attack the consequences of a thing without understanding the causes and contributors. That’s why I keep coming back to institutionalism because if you understand the way institutions serve society, you can easily understand how dangerous institutions become when they become an end in themselves. Even theological institutions can become self-seeking and self-centered. Is that because they’re theological? No, it’s because they are part of the human establishment and that’s the way human institutions tend to work.

Historically, this was first evident in the guilds of the Middle Ages which became the protective structure for labor and, particularly, for the artisans and the skilled laborers who could protect themselves by creating a social class around their particular craft. One of the consequences of the guilds was that the structure became the *right way* to do things. So if the king wanted a tower built for his castle, he had a hard time finding artisans who would do it the way he wanted it done, because they had to do it the *right way*—their way.

As the free societies emerged, one of the first issues to deal with was the issue of the restrictive guilds. Switzerland was the first example of a democracy in modern history and its constitution was written

while the guilds were strong. How would the democracy handle them? Wisely, they didn't attack the guilds directly. The Confederation, the new democratic regime, merely insisted that no guild could claim to be the exclusive door to a given employment category. There had to be a second route. Any career had to have at least two alternative entry doors. That still stands in Switzerland. No school or union can claim the exclusive means of qualification. This is often used as an illustration of the importance of alternatives in education. Several of us popularized this example twenty years ago as the probable source of attention to nonformal education in modern-day Switzerland. The issue is not nonformal versus formal, it's the issue of the multiplicity, the openness to alternative ways of doing education. Over the years, accreditation has worked to standardize ministry in the same way that the guilds worked to limit and to standardize the crafts. More is the pity.

LC: So, today the churches are creating their own alternative. . .

TW: . . . There aren't enough people who think theoretically about this to be able to say, "This is why they're doing it." But I think the Swiss experience underscores one important point in all this. It's not that you don't have a good way to train bakers and a good set of standards by which bakers are guild bakers. That you need. But you have to avoid letting that training and those standards become the monopoly; because if they do, they seek their own ends, and to perpetuate themselves so that they become unresponsive to society. That's the fear I have in theological education.

LC: Now, taking that line and extrapolating. If this trend continues and theological education does, in fact, become part of the church's mission, we could have the same problem—just a different kind of monopoly.

TW: Exactly. And that's why you find yourself at one moment pushing in one direction; and, then, once you begin to get the beast to move in that direction, you've got to get in front of it and start to push back, or to the side, because human greed, pride and fear, particularly pride and fear, are destructive elements in any educational monopoly. Any time you let something become exclusive or privileged, you're going to have the besetting sins of pride, fear and greed all over the place.

LC: What do you envision as the next steps in theological education?

TW: Two things are extremely important. The church needs to be helped to take accountable responsibility for its role in the development of ministry. At the same time we must attend to the appropriate reciprocal work in society and in other institutions—such as theological schools.

While I was at Michigan State University, for example, I had little voice with reference to theological education. My early exposure to theological education was in the overseas context. I found that few institutions really looked at cost and fewer were aware of the money being poured into the development of overseas pastors through modes of training that were barely effective. Because so few actually stayed in ministry after leaving the Bible school or seminary and because missionary-faculty costs were "off the books," the whole enterprise was very costly.

Another source of weakness was the lack of concern for functional outcomes. Prospective pastors were run through a process, and as long as they were exposed to certain bodies of knowledge and got stamped out a certain way, that was sufficient. At this time, I didn't have much access to churches, but I could at least encourage the churches to recognize the many ways in which their work is intensively educational. I always had to be careful how I said that, because some people tend to make churches

look more and more like schools and that's not good. I have been trying to say that the church is responsible for the development of people: spiritual development, leadership competencies, and social wisdom. So churches ought to understand that one of their key responsibilities is education--but not *formal* education!

At this stage of my life, I'm having fun interacting with theological schools and with churches, pushing both institutions toward each other, and especially to consider creating alternatives to their ways of doing their ministries. And the task in the work with the churches is to help them assert themselves wisely and effectively in taking on responsibility for development of leadership without falling into the trap of becoming like the classical seminary.

LC: As the pendulum shifts away from control by the academic institution, and shifts back toward the church, the corresponding fear is that the church will take the power role. Will the academy go out of existence altogether? An underlying assumption in what you're saying is that there needs to be some kind of mechanism that keeps these two agencies in tension; that assumes the need for the continued existence of both these institutions. The problem is that institutions tend to be in competition with each other—even among their own kind! The church and school compete rather than coming back to more fundamental questions of why do both exist!

TW: That's right. Part of the problem in understanding this is to consider the danger of thinking in terms of the pendulum imagery or paradigm. Pendulums only explain the most superficial changes in society. They presuppose a predictable geometric pattern of movement. That's what a pendulum is all about: it never moves any farther *this* way than it went *that* way. Furthermore, it always traverses in a predictable path. The energy that it represents is a balanced energy. The pendulum is one of the most common metaphors of educational change, but the conditions of the true pendulum never actually exist. What we have are differential pressures that are not in some kind of orderly balance. It is more like the game of tug-of-war over a pond. Both teams pull like crazy surging this way, then that way. But it never matches. It goes farther one way, and then less the other way, and so on. Somebody gets wet and lets go of the rope.

I see human change a lot more like a game of tug-of-war, and ultimately, somebody is pulled in the pond! That's not a pendulum. I don't like the pendulum as the way to understand change, because the pressures in change are not balanced. I think we are in a period of unbalanced energies wherein the churches are going to assert themselves and the seminaries are going to go on the defensive. I think that's going to be unproductive for many, and it is apt to result in a reaction in which the seminary will either shatter or diversify. I'm expecting to see greater diversification in seminaries and many seminaries taking on different kinds of roles and tasks instead of all arguing, "But we can't do that because the accreditation agencies won't allow it." We can't be controlled by accreditation standardization; we're going to have to undertake some very different missions, and do those things with excellence. It is conceivable possible that ATS could go out of business, especially as more and more schools move to the regional accrediting bodies which have proved to be more tolerant of diversity and alternatives. And if the regional associations survive, they will accommodate specialization, and do so in such a way as to encourage a greater variety of modes of theological education. [In effect, as the regional accreditation bodies have become more restrictive some seminaries, not embedded in universities, are choosing ATS as their exclusive accrediting agency. LC]

Many of the prominent theological schools are affiliated with universities and are already accredited under university accreditation. If these schools perceive ATS as restrictive, they could simply reject it.

I don't see the demise of these theological institutions, except to add the phrase "the demise of these institutions as we know them." There are, of course, some institutions that are so dysfunctional that if they don't change, the churches will ignore them, and if the churches ignore them, they won't have sufficient enrollment.

I don't anticipate the demise of as many seminaries as I once did. We're seeing today a new infusion of enthusiasm and money that I couldn't have predicted five years ago. It's coming about because of some foundations that don't want to see theological education go down the drain. Maybe that's good. Again, it's back to the image of the tug-of-war. The way you win a tug-of-war is to yell to some of your buddies to help you pull. That's what I think is going on today.

LC: What will be tragic in all of this is if the new game players join in simply because they have friends in the game, but don't understand the issues involved in the game.

TW: Yes, that worries me, too, and that's one reason why, frankly, I am hoping that the accrediting process will be fractured, not necessarily destroyed, but fractured to the point where they have to recognize difference, that they have to make more accommodation to difference.

The greatest fear I have right now is that the churches who are showing the most interest in doing something about theological education reform may grow weary of it. That would be very sad. Or, that we may find some fundamental flaw in the way change is understood in the churches. The new reform movement could be as seriously flawed as the situation that emerged from the TEE movement. The key flaw in the TEE movement was that there just weren't enough educators whose skills matched the needs. So they formalized reform from top down, and, as usual, that was destructive. I'm not sure yet what hidden flaw will emerge as churches assume responsibility for theological education; but I am suspicious of one thing. Much of the hopefulness about churches emerging and taking responsibility for theological education is occurring in clusters of churches and individual churches that are led by *power* people . . .

LC: . . . with a common agenda . . .

TW: . . . Yes, but not always in common with the needs of the laity.

LC: Given all this complexity, what competencies will educational leadership need in the future, or right now in this transitional period?

TW: I think one of the reasons why theological education institutions have not excelled, and I don't think they have, is partly because they draw their leadership from the trade.

LC: The guild?

TW: Yes. It would be almost like Harvard Business School being led by people who have spent their life working for Walmart. Why not get all your leadership people from one career source? It would lead toward some important weaknesses. Number one: You would have a group of people who think alike. You'd have a bunch of people who would not be able to conceptualize different situations. Second, you'd have a research paradigm that presupposes that all useful hypotheses about the future would grow out of the traditions that they have known at Walmart. Thus you would have as leaders people who don't really believe diverse sources and broad literature. Now I don't want to be hard on

Walmart leadership, but it doesn't follow that anybody who wants to get ahead at Walmart would want to spend a whole lot of time reading about the history of Woolworth's.

LC: Unless they want to read about them as a competitor.

TW: Yes. And that competitiveness is a significant problem in theological education. Theological education leadership for the future needs a greater breadth of consciousness, and a keener sense of the range of variables that are available to them and available to, if you please, the industry—to churches—because leaders can think creatively and synthetically about different ways to put things together.

Another thing that I'm concerned about is that we have people who are "truth advocates" leading institutions. I would feel better about that if I were really sure it was *truth* they were advocating. I'm afraid it is more often particular truth and particular views of truth being promoted. I don't think we're going to get anywhere as long as our institutions are led by that kind of Atruth advocate." We need a deep commitment to truth of revelation, but a more careful avoidance of particularized truth and pet ideas. The reason that many of the big name evangelical leaders come to prominence is because they're invested in a particular subset of truth. If we put people like that at the top of our theological schools, the church will suffer.

LC: Where will the people come from that we need?

TW: They're going to have to come from a broadly educated, and yes, a very bright group of people, who draw upon a greater range of knowledge as they look at theological questions. It's not a popular position, but I don't believe that the range we need is possible without a view of history and social science, broadly defined, as well as a foundation in theological understanding. Leaders in the church have to have mental and social tools to lead effectively. They're not going to get those tools from a narrow, exclusive form of education.

Emerging leaders must understand the truth, and that requires more than theological abstraction. Effective ministry with godliness requires a broad perspective on human society and human behavior.

LC: You would like to see leaders who have an understanding of institutions, who are conversant with theories of organizations, how they work . . .

TW: Yes, that's one of the components of understanding society.

LC: There are still so many things we could talk about—for example, we haven't talked about the impact distance learning is having increasingly on the structures of formal theological education. But, before we run out of time, I want to shift to another of your concerns: the institutionalization of missions. It seems that missions are more aware of the need to train national leaders, therefore, people are needed to go out and train nationals. But, if that training is located in seminaries, we will tend to take our instructional paradigm from the west, transplant it in these countries, and create the same problems that we're creating here in the training of leaders.

TW: That's exactly right. The missionary, still so typically, goes to the field to do institutional work, and the institutionalizing of the education tasks has justified increasing the allocation of missionaries

to the institutional education roles. At the beginning of the twentieth century, substantial numbers of missionaries were going into medical work overseas. By the end of the twentieth century, medical work has shrunk, and proportionately the emphasis has shifted over into institutionalized education work. There are denominations that have their hands in so many educational institutions that they hardly think of missionaries as anything other than teachers of one sort or another in various kinds of Christian education institutions where the inner core of the curriculum is still pastoral development and Bible teaching.

Early in my career in international work, I believed that one of the great contributions America was making in the post-colonial world was institution-building. And I remember writing several articles in praise of this effort. I pointed out why Americans were so good at getting institutions built and getting them to work. We could come in and build a school, technical institute, or university and in a short time it would be operational and functioning rather well. Soon I realized that this motive was often wrong. I came to realize that institution-building was at the crux of what Americans were doing *wrong*. We were good at coming in and building institutions that we assumed showed concern for local persons, local needs, and local characteristics. But they were molded and framed around the presuppositions and the paradigms that we were most familiar with. What I didn't realize, at first, was that as hard as we might try to make institutions more uniquely fitted to local need and local circumstances, the very strategies by which an institution was doing its work was typically shaped around the ideas that we transplanted from our own national experience.

LC: And you became aware of this while you were actually working in different countries?

TW: Oh yes! At first, we fancied ourselves to be the white knights of change, bringing people along so they could understand how to do things more effectively. We knew we couldn't do things in a foreign context in the same way we did them back home. But it was impossible to have the degree of control that we had by virtue of having the money in our hand, and at the same time, try to fulfill that image, or that ideal, of indigenization. The standing joke became: "How many Americans makes a majority?" Just like in the missions circle, "How many missionaries makes a majority?" Sadly, the answer is "one."

For example, one of my first overseas assignments in a mission context was in the Philippines consulting with an institution organized largely like a western seminary or western Bible college. It had had a series of missionary Americans as president. The board was national as a majority, and their complaint was that they were having no success in making the transition to a national president. Both the nationals and the missionaries said they wanted a national president. But, in fact, the standards for the selection of a president were largely modeled on the expectations that Americans would have for a president; and there weren't many people in the Philippines in the sector of the churches that were represented who, at that point, had the kind of educational background and competency recognized as valid by the missionaries. The nationals went along with the missionaries' conclusion that there just wasn't anybody yet available from among the Filipinos.

I realized that they would never get a Filipino president so long as they persisted in thinking, planning, and talking the way they were, because the missionaries' standards would change and shift upwards as potential candidates came closer to emerging. I've seen that situation over and over again where the presumption of the West is always to set standards, especially academic standards, just high enough so that the emergence of national leaders can never quite happen. We agree that it's a good thing; we agree that we're working toward it; but it doesn't quite happen because we keep raising the criteria.

LC: Some might argue that it's the purpose of a serving nation or a ministering nation to keep standards high. If somebody doesn't keep the standards high, then the whole enterprise could founder. So the other side of your argument could be that America was actually doing the country a service by keeping standards high.

TW: Oh, we believe that. We believe that fervently. The problem is that if you use that method to keep the standards high, you're also keeping the level of responsibility low.

LC: Clearly, in any discussion of theological education and its relationships with the church, we cannot simply focus on what is happening in North America. One has to wonder to what extent the loss of confidence in our institutions, and the vested interests in existing procedures and structures, will hinder the development that is needed in theological education for the whole people of God worldwide.

TW: I think one of the things I'm most anxious about is the quality of theological education today, especially overseas. The real issue is how can the church be served. Which asks the question not only of what kind of leadership do we need, but what is the church? If we can once get down to that baseline, then we can begin to see the problem differently: "Okay, if that's the church and these are the people of God, then what is God doing in their midst, and what sorts of things are needed, and what sorts of things should be avoided in leadership development and theological education?"

I'm not sure that a theological education institution that is trying to develop leadership in the church and train theologians to hold chairs in theological establishments all within the same kind of program is going to help the church. I think it is potentially hurtful for the church because it takes its guidelines and its rubric and its logic of quality out of an academic frame of reference that I think within the framework of the church is somewhat off target. I don't believe that our Lord asks us to be less than our best, but I find no place to justify a thematic thrust towards excellence in the process of development of the church. I find instead a broad-based concern for the development of everybody and the broadly distributed gifts which has to mean that some of those gifts are going to come through in less than excellent form, human beings being what they are.

LC: Your "broad-based concern" is much deeper than a concern for an integrative curriculum isn't it?

TW: Let me answer that with a story. In 1970 or 1971 I was at a seminar focused on feedback theory and how it relates to communication problems within theological education. I was sitting on the floor using newsprint and felt pens to map out schematics on feedback theory. One of the people in the seminar was Edmund Clowney, at that time the president of Westminster Seminary. I respected him and always enjoyed his company. He leaned forward and asked, "Ted, what's the theological implication of feedback theory?" I said, "Well, Dr. Clowney. You're a theologian. I'm a social scientist. The question you raise is a theological question. Therefore, the question is yours to answer." Clowney with the same seriousness leaned forward even further, and said to me, "No, Ted, you're a Christian. I'm a Christian. The question I raised is a theological question, therefore it's *our* question." That probably did more to change me as an intellectual person than any other moment that I can put a finger on in my whole life, because it was then that I said, "Okay, I cannot speak to theological education as it exists without accepting a share of the responsibility for why it is the way it is. Not just in terms of its structure and curriculum, but in terms of its substantive, theological character and its relationship to the church. I think it is part of any pilgrimage to recognize that the whole question of the development of leadership for the church is an *everybody* question within the community of Christ.

Our concerns about formal education should be, therefore, more than educational structure concerns. They are fundamentally theological concerns. Formal education has produced categories. The categories have become lines across which stuff does not flow. For example, it's possible that the category system of theological education doesn't really hurt a person as an eloquent preacher, but it may create handicaps in one becoming an effective pastor. I think for me the important re-learning or unlearning had to do with breaking down some categories so that no longer was I saying, "The theological questions are yours, the sociological questions are mine. You answer yours and I'll answer mine." Instead Ed Clowney was saying, "If sociology and communication are real, they're part of God's reality. Therefore they have theological dimensions and they must be understood that way."

Now if I can only translate that truth into what it says about the development of leadership in the church. At least, it demands that I should be wary about how formal education builds up those categories and barriers within people's consciousness; and maybe I should be wary of how much of that kind of exposure I encourage on people in the name of becoming an ordained pastor. It may be that I am forcing on people the very thing that is going to make it less feasible that they will become effective. So when somebody asks, "How do we make it better?" I reply, "Maybe we ought to make it *different*. Or not do it at all."

I believe that we're going to see a de-emphasis of formal education. That de-emphasis is not simply going to be a matter of doing away with education, but doing other things, in especially a nonformal educational frame of reference. I think we're going to see a trend in which educators, even those whom today we would call very square formal educators, are going to come to the awareness that there really are a lot more valid ways to carry out education than the ways commonly used.

We will see new forms of institutional education. Some have raised the question already: "Is there any place today for theological education?" That question is an important one, but probably ought to be rephrased: In what ways can today's model of institutional education be transformed so that it truly serves the church?