



## Transcriptions

### The Valid Purposes of Theological Education

Ted Ward

**Annotation:** *Staley Lectures: Reform of Theological Education, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, MA, November 1979.* Ted Ward reflects voices of insight about theological education from national leaders and missionary educators in the majority world.



May I read a letter to you from a missionary educator who as we are here is laboring in the very real world in Taiwan. I will not mention his name because the letter is from a detailed private correspondence that is one of a number that I conduct with great encouragement and joy, especially with people who have been in our program or who are waiting to enter our program. This man falls into the latter category and I won't even identify by name the institution where he did his theological education except to say that in several ways he's one of your own.

Ted, I've been doing some deep re-evaluation. That's good. It is growth and it is process. It's self-education and I am in constant need of re-education for the days that I'm living in. It is exiting, exhausting, but extremely important. I'm learning more about myself than anything else. But I sense within our students and within some of the faculty the same frustrations that I've had. Also, as I make more and more contact with graduates of our school here in Taiwan who are now in their own ministries, they are sharing their frustrations in ministry because they have not received training from us that identifies them with the ministry that they face. I am learning that, even though I want to push, I must learn to just go along as equals walking together as we search together with the Chinese for the best training for the needs here in Taiwan. That in itself is a miracle for I've always been a pusher. I still am a pusher. I hope I always will be. But my methods are becoming more sensitive and

I think more realistic. I want to be an innovator yet I'm beginning to realize that innovators are human just like everyone else and they more than anyone must remember the frailty of humanity.

My frustrations continue but my view toward those frustrations is changing. They continue to be frustrations, alright, but they are also now learning experiences and I thank the Lord for giving each one of them to me. Each day I believe more firmly that we are only playing games with much that we do in the training of Christian workers. Until we get serious about looking at what we're trying to do, we're going to continue to play games.

I talk to you about a serious matter. The world is very present with us. The people we talk about here are just as real as you and I. I do not speak from abstract theory. I speak from contact reality with human beings. I'm attempting to represent not a voice of insight from Michigan, but reflecting voices of insight of God's people in the Third World—both Third World national persons and missionary educators in the Third World. One of the reasons that I've used so extensively the quotations of other people in these lectures is to demonstrate to you that it is not my insights uniquely but a very large and growing voice that has a very, very similar kind of ring from place to place, region to region, as the church of Jesus Christ mobilizes in the Third World.

There are many things in the Third World that are more Christian about the church than are characteristic of many of the churches in the so-called "developed world." We have learned to live with that kind of secularism, that kind of accommodation to secular values that has undermined much of the integrity of the church. We're dealing with people who have learned how to confront secularism and have learned to make the church the unique organism that it really is. The church of Jesus Christ is more than just one more organization. It is an organization with a spiritual dimension and a mystical reality. It is of these people and these realities that we speak and it is from these people that we can learn lessons, some of which may apply to what we think of as theological education in North America.

We're learning specifically a number of lessons from TEE (Theological Education by Extension). As we said yesterday it arose from a kind of pragmatic American-style response to, What do you do when you don't have enough students anymore? What do you do when the people that you're dealing with don't seem to be the leaders of the church? How do you get out to where people really are? And you make the good old American investment in a jeep and you move your baggage to the other side of the mountain and you begin unloading your trunks in a different situation. But as we unload our educational trunks, we discover that these people that we're dealing with on the other side of the mountain are different. One of the lessons, of course, that we've learned in TEE is that it makes a considerable difference who it is that we're dealing with in theological education.

The first big question that has been raised then by the Theological Education by Extension movement is an old question: Who is theological education for? Three facets:

First of all, the issue of preparation versus equipping. Much of theological education in North America and to a great extent in Western Europe is preparational education. Many theological schools and virtually all Bible schools are, in fact, pre-service preparation stations for people who are supposed ultimately to be able to go out and use their training. If we've learned nothing else from the Theological Education by Extension movement, we've learned that it makes a whale of a difference if you are dealing not with people preparing to go into the ministry (many of

whom, in fact, turn out not to be going into the ministry) but that you deal with people who are already demonstrably in ministry and in service to a church; that church which can become a partner in that person's continuing development as a fitted, equipped minister. *Preparation versus equipping—issue number one.*

Issue number two within this question of “who” are the highly literate on one hand and the illiterate on the other hand. From the developed world it is hard for us to recognize that, in fact, the church of Jesus Christ is pastored by people who are substantially less learned than we assume to be even minimal learning in North America. If we were to line up all the pastors who, in fact, are serving responsible churches of Jesus Christ in the world in one great long string in terms of their most to least academic competency and we had the absolute illiterate at one end (and there are plenty of churches being pastored by illiterate pastors who can neither read nor write and who must depend on oral communications—and many of them in cultures where oral communication is a very highly refined art, don't forget, rely on oral communications about and of the Word of God; many relying now on technologies of tape, many relying on radio, many relying on other oral modes for their education). If we had those people on one hand and we had the Harvard Ph.D. who has the great church in the great metropolitan center of the United States at the other extreme and we came halfway down that line from either end, what sort of an educational experience would we find as modal or typical of this whole? A sub-high school graduate.

The reality of the church in the world today then is not an issue of how much more education beyond college, but how can we get educational resources to people who are not qualified for college? That has to be dealt with just as surely as the question of what is an appropriate high form of education for those who will be ministering within a society and within a community where the rank and file of the Christian church members are highly educated themselves. I think that it is vulnerable for the church to have pastors who are educated substantially less than their congregation. I'm not holding out for that by a moment. But I would argue that one of the things, especially within the Third World context that we have to face, is that the rapid growth of the church is not altogether urban but it is also substantially rural. And by definition in the Third World, rural people generally are very little educated. But they have pastors and those pastors are real men of God who have hearts and who have involvement with their people that sometimes would put some of our highly educated pastors to shame for their level of concern. *Issue number two: How do we relate to both the highly literate and the illiterate?*

Issue number three: Who is theological education for, the clergy or laypersons? Now never mind the question at this point about what is our biblical root for believing that that is a valid distinction between clergy and laity. That would shake you, of course, in terms of your particular callings to your very roots. We would have to wonder, however, through the experiences in the Third World if we are not seeing something in the hands of God the Holy Spirit moving educational resources into availability of congregations not simply of clergy. This is one of the bigger issues that is being dealt with overseas. Let me read to you from Dr. Nage [?] again the Lutheran World Federation, *A World Perspective*. He says, “Theological Education throughout the world today is being regarded more and more as the education of the total congregation, the whole people of God. Training of pastors and theologians, yes, training of voluntary church workers, yes, but education of the whole church, the whole Christian community, this is theological education. Theological training should not be a privilege of the few pastors and theologians of the church but must include the whole people of God. It means the inclusion of women, voluntary church workers and so-called lay members of the church in an education under the Word of God. Indeed, this is an ongoing task

which can never be completed. This requires both an understanding of the nature of the church as well as of the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of the believers.”

Dr. Nage [?] goes on to give a practical illustration. And some of you in conversations last night at supper and this morning at breakfast have said, can you give me any practical illustrations? Surely! Let me take you to Santiago where the United Protestant Theological Seminary in Santiago, Chile, has these characteristics within its program: In a very confined circle it trains pastors through daytime lectures and seminars in very traditional training methods. In other words, they have not abandoned what they’ve always been doing. But number two: In a wider circle, it gives the congregation members the possibility of being trained as church workers through evening courses within the span of some years without their having to abandon their secular professions or finance the support of their families. Third: In the third and widest circle, professors go from time-to-time for three to four weeks to parishes in various parts of the country to hold lectures and courses concerning Christian life for all parish members. [Seminary could not be found on the Internet.]

And, parenthetically, at this point if somebody says, are those for credit? you miss the point. This parish course in the country is held only after careful long-term planning and at the request of the local congregations. In the most confined circle, 20 to 30 pastoral candidates are trained. In the second circle, 200 to 300 parish helpers are being trained. And in the third widest circle, thousands of church members are reached from year-to-year and are advised by the theological educators in matters of Christian faith and life. But notice, this is done in concert with the planning and evaluation of the churches themselves.

From the Orient we hear a voice such as Jonathan Chow saying, “Programs should not be limited to ministerial training aimed at producing an elite professional group but should extend to the laity as a whole. There should be flexibility and adaptability in the creation of training models and methods which arise out of local creative initiatives and are in keeping with biblical standards.”

Now question number two: *What is the purpose of Theological Education?* There are several that we could make that would be obviously easily assessed as valid. Let’s consider them.

First of all, it is a valid purpose of theological education to be teaching how to minister to the people of God and with the people of God how to evangelize. There’s hardly a question but what this is a valid purpose of theological education. Similarly, the purpose of teaching how to handle the Word of God with humility. And I put the tag line “with humility” partly because those things that we learn in terms of tool skills in language and exegetical processes quite often are not handled with humility. And if we do not learn that affective involvement of humility, we use these things as clubs to demonstrate that the people of God cannot really for themselves handle the Word of God and we create of the Bible yet another closed book that can be understood only by those who knew the modern equivalent of the Vulgate Latin. The Reformation was all about that, folks. Third, the providing of examples of servant/leader. And here’s a point of heavy challenge. It is clearly a valid purpose of theological education to provide examples of servant/leader, but quite often the servant is disconnected from the leader and the examples that are provided are much more dominating sorts of models of authority and of authoritarian behavior.

Overall, we could summarize the valid purposes of theological education perhaps overly simplistically yet validly by arguing that the overall purpose is to equip the equippers; to make it

possible for those who will be equipping the saints in what Paul and others have described as the role of the ministry in the church.

Now there are some questionable purposes being served by theological education and I would raise these as a challenge because they are being raised to a high level of challenge in the Third World.

The questionable purpose first of all is that of serving as a screening, evaluating, and certifying agent on behalf of the church. In other words, technologizing the ministry of the Spirit in calling out those who are to be ordained to service. The Scriptural model as we said yesterday in Timothy and in Titus is that of traits and attributes, not of academic competencies. And yet today the church in the developed world has delegated this particular responsibility over to the educational establishment to screen, to evaluate, and ultimately to certify for the church. Now in various denominations this is modified in various ways. But, by and large, theological education in North America is the ticket to a church and survival in the academic rat race is the way one buys that ticket. And I submit that this is a questionable purpose of theological education.

Second, I believe that it is a questionable purpose of theological education to put a primary focus on creating preachers whose superiority as lecturers about the Bible inspires awe and adulation and great flocking to winter conferences. I suspect that the ministry of the Word of God should be perceived much more in a local context of the development of God's people and that it is not inherent in the nature of the ministry that a person be an able public speaker as a primary criterion. Again, the Scriptural criteria talk about apt to teach. The Scriptural criteria talk about responsible handling of the Word of God. All of which suggests that a person has responsible exegetical skills and responsible homiletic skills, but that ultimately the criterion is not the elegance of the speaker, but the effectiveness of the ministry of helps to those in the congregation who are growing in a collective assembly.

Third questionable purpose of theological education and this one I will grant is slightly snide, but it is an apparent purpose. And, by the way, when people are not very clear about their purposes, I quite often go in and infer what the purpose must be. And as I've observed theological education and as I've observed churches, it seems to me that somebody must have somewhere in his agenda the purpose of creating little Jesus figures whose handling of God's people is as a shepherd handling dumb sheep. I believe that to create the undershepherds with the perception of the sheep as dumb beasts is to misuse by exaggeration the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep. We are reminded in Matthew 23 that we are not even to allow people to call us good teacher. We are not even to allow people to call us leader because to do so violates a relationship with those people of brother and compatriot under the discipleship of one Lord. I cannot make a disciple of you. I must help you to find a discipleship of the Lord and I can be involved in my discipleship with your discipleship. But we are disciples not of each other, but of one Lord.

Harvie Conn, missionary in Korea for many years, now at Westminster Theological Seminary says this: "Few critics of the traditional pedagogic element, if any, disparage the need for highly trained ministry. The frustration is not over the needs for scholarship or adequate preparation; it is over the hidden assumption behind the terminology which too often equates the schooling with true education—Western patterns of learning with patterns appropriate to distinct cultures; cognitive orientation with contextual response."

In this area, the radical criticisms of Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire are worth listening to. Among other things, both these men demand that living, learning, and working be interconnected and contextual.

The third big question that is being raised out of the Theological Education by Extension movement is where should all of these things be done? Now there are all sorts of warnings that pastors should be trained within the context of the church or, specifically, within the context of local churches. Listen for a moment to Hugo Soria, powerful leader of the church in Latin America: “The seminaries go in one direction while the church wrestles in another. Non-contextualized churches carry out a ministry not suited to their reality while seminaries perpetuate theologies, methods, and strategies best suited to churches in an opulent and wealthy society.” And, by the way, that voice of Hugo Soria is having a substantial effect on seminary education in Central and South America. [While not doubting this quotation, the name, Hugo Soria could not be confirmed in a Google search. Several Soria’s in Latin America but no reference to *Hugo Soria*.]

Listen for a moment to an Indian, Samuel Amirtham: “First, it is necessary to move beyond involvement to a sharing of the agony of the people aching of heart since the beginning of theology. God’s heart aches. An empathetic participation in people’s suffering is a key factor in theological education.” Repeat, empathetic participation in people’s suffering is a key factor in theological education. “Secondly, minds must be trained to be critical and articulate.” But notice the first and the second and the order in which he puts these: “Where these two things are present, there theology is born.”

Listen again to Jonathan Chow: “Goals cannot be adequately developed by the traditional approaches through classroom instruction and fixed curriculum alone. The ministry of the church as a whole becomes the school ground for the training in servanthood. To do less is to let the academic system dominate the ministry.”

And some of this we can hear even in the writings of theologians and theological educators in the U.S. Echoing from North America the voice of Douglas Miller, Eastern Baptist Seminary: “Theological Education will in all probability become more field-oriented. Experience in the field may even emerge as the center of the whole curriculum.” Experience in the field may even emerge as the center of the whole curriculum. “It will concentrate on the actual problems facing people in the world. Students will be encouraged to practice their faith. Learning will be then organized around their experiences.”

I see three sectors in theological education and today and tomorrow we will deal with this same transparency, not altogether today. A common element in all of those who are involved in theological education (of course under the general responsible rubric of “to serve the church”) are those who are called to service. And it is these that I am modeling on this particular diagram. Some are actively engaged (and that pertains to these two columns) and some are not only called “engaged” but they are writing. They are serving as seminal contributors to the literature of the development of the church. But today I want to deal primarily with these two zones which we might think of as those that the Third World is telling us through their experiences are ideally conducted in the context of pastoral service. This one, ideally conducted as a community of contributing servants, we will look at in more detail tomorrow.

In terms of the type, the “emphasis, and the gifts”. Type: Pre-service Ministerial Training. Most of you know that rather well. Type here: In-service Ministerial Development (and some of you fit in that category, but probably more of your night students do). Emphasis: Preparatory Skills; Emphasis: Functional Competencies. Gifts: Discovery of Gifts, Enhancement of Gifts. The literature in theological education, especially rising out of the Third World, argues that these two channels should be conducted ideally in the context of pastoral service.

Furthermore, there is a good bit of evidence that as we are seeing transformation occur, what’s happening is that institutions that were created to be primarily in this column (the first column) are now becoming more focused in the second column, and little by little this model is beginning to fall away. I would not argue that it ought to fall away, but I would argue that this one is far more important partly because of the very real difference in the kinds of students that are dealt with. We will be coming back to this transparency again tomorrow. [Unavailable.]

There are three views of educational purpose that I would like to share with you now. Begin with a premise: the purposes of any educational process can be described as a combination of to *know*, to *do*, and to *be*. In other words, if you ask people to tell why they are teaching something or what they expect to have happen as a result of their teaching, whether it’s a course or a whole curriculum, the answer is something with reference to “I think students should *know* . . .” and then you get all kinds of statements. “I think students should *do* . . .” and you get all kinds of statements. And “I think students should *be* . . .” and you get all kinds of statements. Virtually everything in educational purpose is expressible in one of those three concepts.

Educational approaches vary in terms of the relationships among the purposes. First of all, let’s take a look at the *classical*. Knowing is the largest body of concern. Knowing is thought to be somehow (as the ancient Greeks felt it to be) the very controller of one’s being: what one knows, one is. There are, of course, good biblical arguments to suggest that that is not a clear-cut linkage; that one knows many things that one does not incorporate in his being. And Paul, for one, exhorted people to act on the things that they knew as if the knowing alone (in Paul’s view) was nowhere near adequate. And, of course, in the classical model the doing is somehow demeaned to a sidetrack and that, ultimately, when one has fulfilled all the educational purposes of knowing and being that then the doing will obviously follow from that. In other words, we have a dominance of the *to know* and minimal concern for the *to do*.

Let us bring that into *modern* times and see what modern education is quite often doing. In a technological (boy, look at that spelling of technological. Sorry about that. There is a missing “h” there) and a great deal of emphasis on a large “do” component; many objectives spelled out in terms of doings. [Sentence confused likely because he is reading off the transparency—and got tripped up by the typo. He seems to be linking “technological” with the doing emphasis.] “Knowing” seem to be important within that, but knowing reduced to a kind of subordinated role: knowing only as is necessary to be able to do. Even the American Theological Society has fallen foul of this in some of its attempts to do research on the pastoral role. They have looked at what pastors do and then argued back to, therefore, what pastors ought to know in order to be able to do that. Much of the ATS current effort is technological and many seminaries are resisting it on philosophical grounds. It is an emphasis on doing where knowing is valued mainly as it assists in the doing.

There is a holistic model that is also (as was the classical) quite ancient, though today we explain it with new terminology. It is a praxis relationship between knowing and doing in which the

knowing is seen to arise out of the active (out of the doing) and is a reflection upon the doing that leads to refined doing. So we see in here a kind of interactive loop between *knowing* and *doing* (not one serving the other one exclusively) and the *being*, being nurtured out of that experiential (that praxis) orientation in one's experience (one's learning.) The being ultimately, then, controlling the doing; not being controlled by an environment as the behaviorists would have us to believe, but responsibly out of one's very being ultimately controlling the doing. Now reflect on what two Indian educators are saying in light of these thoughts.

First: Anil Solanki, the Dean of Union Biblical Seminary, Yeotmal, identifies weaknesses in the emphasis on content that is typical in much of theological education as we've described it here, the classical model. He identifies these weaknesses:

First of all, you run foul of the problem of too much content to master. One obvious weakness of the content approach is the impossibility of mastering, even in an infinitesimal part of today's knowledge.

Second problem: The lack of clearly defined idea of end product. The end product depends not so much upon the content we teach, but also it depends on our methods. Our methods communicate and if our methods are not seen as part of our end products, those methods then are often contrary to the end product that we claim.

Third, the dominance of the administrative side in the educational process. By this I mean that there's a tendency to set up a system and expect men to fit into it instead of seeking to understanding the needs of men and setting up a system that meets their needs.

Fourth, the disregard for the affective domain: How is it that theological institutions neglect this tremendously important area of emotion which is the key to all motivation which enriches all social relationships and is so vital in religious experience?

Further, number five, as he points out, "Competition not co-operation is seen as prime motivation." And, by the way, the closer you are to Third World people the more you realize that Christians in other cultures value cooperation the way Americans tend to value competition. "Constant emphasis is put on the belief that students will only work for a prize or from pressure of desire to be first or to receive a certificate or a degree. And all these inducements most students without these inducements most students will not work at all. This seems to be the appalling result of the acquisitive utilitarian aims of our educational system. Hence, our examination-ridden classrooms are no training ground for honesty, sincerity, and free growth toward maturity."

Those are heavy words. Dean, Union Biblical Theological Seminary, generally regarded as a conservative evangelical seminary in India. These are not people out of our sector. These are Third World people in our sector most of them converts or second-generation Christians out of the missionary movement.

Now hear another Indian, Samuel Amirtham, Principal of the Bible College at Tamilnadu: "Theological education must be student-oriented and praxis-oriented. What is needed is a dynamic interaction of action and reflection, an emphasis on doing." Now he sounds technological but he's asking for that in a praxis of reflection and of scholarly inputs. "Involvement programs must be built into the curriculum so that students can relate themselves to the realities of life situations."

You know, in the history of education there are two major traditions. Down through the history of the world, there are two major traditions in education: One that I orient around the notion of power and the other around the notion of service. Various people use different terms to describe these, but the thesis goes like this:

First of all, that there are different academic approaches to the notion of service; a notion that is very basic to Christian experience. The conception of the role of the educational institution and its relationship to the society it serves determines the meaning of service. Therefore, some of us are trained into service but of what kind? There is a model that we might call the “up, out, over, and down” power model. And the way the up, out, over, and down works is a little like this: people come into this inverted funnel and through it they go up and as they go up, they also go out. And they have finished their education. They have graduated. They’ve, you know, done all those things that the language very nicely speaks to. And then they are supposed to be serving their society by going over and down into. Notice this. The institution then serves its society alright, but it serves it not by relating to it directly, but by a somewhat Rube Goldberg arrangement here of linkages in which the student is the one actually that’s responsible to fulfill this cycle. And the student comes down in but when he gets into this stuff, he only goes down into the leadership sector because, after all, he’s had the benefits of doing this going up thing. So he begins not as servant so much as low-grade leader. And he works back up again to higher-grade leadership within that and never really becomes part of the follower cadre. That’s what we might call the “up, out, over, down” power model.

Now in that situation, education is defined as up and out. “Why are you here?” “To go up and out.” “Will you be of service to the church in the world?” “Sure!” “How?” “By going over and down.” “Who are you as students?” “We’re *not yet* people.” “Who are your alumni?” “They are the people who ought to go and serve.” Notice the *ought*. “Who are the faculty?” “They are people who serve by teaching.” No question, but they serve by teaching.

Now let’s consider another institutional model. And there are plenty of exemplars of both of these. This is not a goodie-goodie and a baddie-baddie comparison. There are plenty of examples of institutions in both models in the United States. There is what we call the “serving/learning” model. Notice the arrow relationship: serving/learning in a cycle so that one is serving and learning and learning through serving and serving as learning. See it? Not disconnecting service from learning or learning from service but interrelating where the school and the society (or the organisms and organizations that that school serves) are in a relationship of reciprocity where needs and services and where supports are flowing back and forth.

Now in this kind of a situation education is defined somewhat differently. Here it’s defined as the development of wisdom through knowledge of experience in service. Knowledge of experience in service. Service itself is defined as a reciprocal meeting of needs not always a one-way meeting of needs but a reciprocal meeting of needs. By the way, one of the most common errors that first-term pastors make is failing to put themselves in need to their constituency (to their parish.) Pastors are people with needs, too. And pastors should be trained to know that the reciprocal meeting of needs also means that within that parish there must be ways that the pastor’s own needs can be met as well.

What are students in this situation? They are participants in service, reflection, and research. What are alumni? They are participants in service, reflection, and research. Do you hear the

distinction? Now what are faculty? They are mentors in service, reflection, and research adding only the notion of the mentor which is properly defined as a wise and faithful counselor. But it's in that kind of collegiality with the people serving and being served and learning through that service that we find the notion of continuing education really coming alive.

The valid purposes of theological education are better served by an institution operating in the service model rather than in the power model. Again, may I end with an observation from Anil Solanki, Union Biblical Seminary, India: "What we need is not just innovations or better methods, but a radical change in our concept of education: learning as experience versus gathering of content." Gathering a body of information. "We must treat our students as persons not as boxes to be filled little by little with logically arraigned packages of information. We must expect them to develop abilities and to grow in the experience of the Lord. Our Lord did not say 'teaching all nations all content that I have commanded you,' but rather 'teaching all nations to observe all that I have commanded you,' with the emphasis on the observe and the active behavior."

So Christian education is teaching everyone to observe, to do, to carry out, to experience all of God's Word to man.

Thank you.