FORUM FOR ECUMENICAL INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

Foreword

This paper derives from two related backgrounds. One is the joint experience of the two authors or presenters in the 'Project in Partnership between Black and White' (now the 'Center for Black and White Christian Partnership') in Birmingham, England, where we dealt together with the problems and issues of theological education in a multicultural and multiracial society. The other is the exposure to our respective societies in the Federal Republic of Germany and in South Africa which followed this experience and which gave it a new international missiological dimension.

This paper is also the fruit of the cooperation with many other educators, researchers, ministers and other workers in the field of Black Christianity and Black independent churches, and in the field of intercultural and interracial education.*

The terms 'intercultural' and 'intercultural communication' over the past few years have been applied to a number of different educational efforts in churches, politics, schools, private industries and development agencies, and have sometimes described quite contradictory aims. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, we wish to state that in our definition of 'intercultural,' culture is understood as a dynamic not as a static term, and 'acculturation' as an ongoing process within humankind. 'Intercultural' in this sense includes the social, political and economic dimensions of the life of people. It does not mean to learn the language of others in order to 'sell one's product' more efficiently but rather to be able to respond to the needs of others on a level of mutual respect and equality.

1. Contexts

1.1 The Churches

Independent churches are growing in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and will therefore pose an important ecumenical challenge for the

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future. Many of these churches have also been transplanted into Europe through the migration and settlement of the black diaspora, and are focal points for significant proportions of ethnic minority immigrants and their children. These churches often reflect an oral culture; a charismatic form of Christianity; a ‘black’ theology; and a faith which has responded to concrete human needs and the harsh realities of oppression. On the other hand, the white churches of the Western kind, with their literary cultures, ‘established’ forms of Christianity and European theology, are failing to understand and relate meaningfully to their brothers and sisters in Christ who are not only in the ‘third world’ but in their very midst. They are even failing to understand and relate meaningfully to those foreign congregations which are the products of their own white Western mission but different in cultural expressions. White churches on the whole have tried to combat individual racism, yet they have not sufficiently met the need to counteract institutionalized racism in their own attitudes, decision-making procedures, distribution of resources, appointment to committees and the overall structure of the Church. On the other hand, the black independent churches which have organized and articulated themselves in the face of considerable difficulties, have had experiences and developed expertise which, if shared with ethnic minorities in Europe, may encourage the recognition and development of their own latent abilities and strengths. To give an example, visits of young Black Pentecostal Christians to Frankfurt have helped boosting the self-esteem and dignity of young Turks in the Federal Republic of Germany.

1.2 Third World Theological Competence in Western Institutions

White Western churches are still dominated by the theologies owned by the theological faculties and mission agencies as sole producers of theology proper, which necessarily is monocultural and largely overlooks the theology owned by people of different cultures in the life, work and worship of their communities. There is a need to share the competence of the ‘third world’ Church experience (which is biblical experience) in faith, church life and worship, with the Western educational and ecclesiastical systems. Thus a deeper understanding of an intercultural approach to mission and theology should develop, and also a language which is valid for the whole people of God.