

# LESSONS FROM 19TH-CENTURY PACIFIC PATTERNS FOR 21ST-CENTURY THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss how theological education was presented in the early 19th century in the Pacific, and the patterns that have been used, and provides analysis on whether the 21st-century Theological Education by Extension (TEE) program has some theological significance for the contemporary Pacific theological education context.

This study will be approached from three perspectives: firstly, from a theological perspective; secondly, from an indigenous Melanesian perspective; and thirdly, from an indigenous evangelical Christian perspective. Its argument will be that: *the 20th-century TEE is a vital teaching model for doing theological education across the Pacific in the 21st century.*

## THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Theological education has to begin with God. “The acid test of theology was well expressed by Thomas Aquinas, ‘Theology is taught by God, teaches of God and leads to God.’”<sup>1</sup> Over the centuries, “churches have increasingly affirmed that theological training is central to their life and witness. It is assumed that theological education, in whatever way it is conceived and practised, is necessary for the training of those who, in

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<sup>1</sup> *New Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “theology”.

turn, are called to mobilise and equip the people of God for ministry and mission.”<sup>2</sup> This, of course, comes in many forms, e.g., “study centres, lay training centres, other decentralised programs, community-based theological learning, cell groups for Bible study, theological education by extension, etc.”<sup>3</sup> We will, therefore, firstly focus on the early 19th-century Pacific patterns of theological education.

## **EARLY 19TH-CENTURY PACIFIC PATTERNS OF THEOLOGICAL TRAINING**

The improvement of native society, and, above all, the communication of the Christian religion to the Pacific people, does not appear to have been thought of by those who either directed, or performed, the early voyages to the South Seas Islands. The published accounts of the voyages from Britain to the South Seas, in the latter part of the 18th century, produced a strong feeling of wonder and delight, and excited considerable interest on behalf of the inhabitants of the remote and isolated regions. The late Excellent Countess Dowager of Huntingdon was exceedingly solicitous that efforts should be made to convey to them knowledge of the Christian religion.<sup>4</sup>

“The first evangelical missionaries sailed on the *Duff* for Tahiti, and landed on its shores on March 7, 1797.”<sup>5</sup> It was by their sacrificial effort that the gospel was deposited in the Pacific Islands. We shall now examine some of the theological education methods applied in their missionary endeavours.

### **NON-CENTRALISED LEARNING MODE**

There are evidences of non-centralised learning in the early stages of the missionary penetration in the Pacific, which helped to groom the islanders in their knowledge of, and participation in, Christianity. Prior

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<sup>2</sup> Ross Kinsler, *Ministry by the People* (Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1983), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 4 vols (London UK: Henry Bohn, 1859), pp. 2:2-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

to propagating the gospel to a new people, with diverse cultures, the early missionaries envisaged embarking on the following activities.

### **LEARNING NATIVE DIALECT**

In order to evangelise, the early missionaries resorted to learning the islanders' tongue, by "mingling with them, hearing and asking them questions".<sup>6</sup> This was the only alternative, as, "not knowing the language of the people makes it hard for the people to understand them".<sup>7</sup> However, later missionaries in New Guinea realised the necessity, "when they were supposed to learn the local language, and bring the people under church influence"<sup>8</sup> before preaching the gospel. Ellis says the missionaries were "studiously endeavouring to gain an acquaintance with the native language, which was considered essential to the accomplishment of their objects".<sup>9</sup> A second-generation missionary, hearing the natives singing praises for the first time, was astounded, as Williams says, "In the evening, we heard the praises of God rise in the Tahitian tongue, from various dwellings around our residence."<sup>10</sup> Even to date, missionaries who have not learned local languages, find it hard to share the gospel.

Some methodologies of theological education in the early period were:

### **SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES**

The traditional avenue of receiving God's word was the Sunday morning worship service. Williams recalls:

When we arrived at the islands, we were much struck with the attention, which the people paid, while the gospel was preached,

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<sup>6</sup> John Williams did this when he came to Eimeo, Huahine, and Raiatea, as a means to learn the Tahitian language adequately. Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, p. 2:45.

<sup>7</sup> Herwig Wagner, and Hermann Reiner, eds, *The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea: The First Hundred Years* (Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1986), p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> Mary R. Mennis, *Hagen Saga* (Boroko PNG: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies 1982), p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, p. 2:13

<sup>10</sup> Ebenezer Prout, *Memoirs of Revd John Williams* (New York NY: M. D. Dodd, 1843), p. 35.

our hearts were much affected. It rejoiced us to hear them singing the praises of Jesus. On the Sabbath morning after our arrival, we went and stood outside their place of worship, and heard one of the natives engage in prayer, he began addressing God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . and that the missionaries would soon attain their language, and teach them the word of truth.<sup>11</sup>

### **FAMILY PRAYER/DEVOTION**

After the missionaries acquired a good command of the islanders' dialect, the islanders were then encouraged to interact with God in their own homes. Williams tells how "the inhabitants were engaged in family prayer, which is observed throughout the Islands".<sup>12</sup> Of course, this does not mean that the islanders had completely done away with their old ways. Their heathen state was still prevalent, as the divine word was yet to penetrate their hearts. However, the point here is that the missionaries realised that the family is an important force, from which theological education can be taught, by way of catechism, prayer, and the sharing of scripture.

### **MENTORING/APPRENTICESHIP**

Mentoring was very effective in those early years. Some islanders were specifically mentored to take on the responsibility, as, "Iro, who has been mentored by Pitman, was put in charge of a large outstation at Ngatangiia, and proved to be a steady and excellent man",<sup>13</sup> in the execution of his duties. "Tauraki was appointed as an assistant teacher in the institution in his mid-teen years; he was mentored by Jane and James Chalmers, when he was ten years old."<sup>14</sup> These are some of the examples of effective mentoring. Although they may not have been qualified in other areas of ministry, they had proven their capability to be

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Raeburn Lange, "The Beginning of a Cook Island Ministry", in *The Origins of the Christian Ministry in the Cook Islands and Samoa*, Macmillan Brown Working Paper Series, No 6 (Christchurch NZ: University of Canterbury, 1977), pp. 5-9.

<sup>14</sup> John M. Hitchen, "Training 'Tamate': Formation of the 19th-century Missionary Worldview: The Case of James Chalmers of New Guinea", Ph.D. thesis (Aberdeen UK: University of Aberdeen, 1984), p. 12.

utilised, in whatever capacity, to ease the immediate need. “They [the Chalmers] also converted their home into a classroom to teach the student wives, which was a tradition established by Buzacott and Jane Hardie at the Malua Institute, Samoa.”<sup>15</sup> Thus we see that specially mentored and apprenticed candidates are a useful means of ministry delegation.

### **SMALL-GROUP CATECHISMS/BIBLE STUDY**

Sunday services were not the only method of teaching. Small-group Bible studies and catechisms were another means of providing theological education. “Without any direct encouragement from the missionary, most church members also gathered in the homes of one of their deacons for evening devotions.”<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to see that the church members were involved, in the absence of the pastors and teachers, and “eventually some members were chosen as deacons”,<sup>17</sup> to help in the work of the ministry.

### **EXTENSION MODE**

The early missionaries also had gospel tracts printed, and circulated to the external students throughout the islands, which had a dramatic impact. Many islanders, who already knew how to read, had the opportunity to study and interact with the materials, at their own pace, and, at times, were tutored by teachers. Williams explains:

To the rapid improvement effected at Raiatea, during the first year’s residence of the missionaries on the island, it must not be overlooked that the printing press contributed its due share, that mighty instrument, set up by Ellis, who, with devoted zeal and labour, carried forward their good work. From this source, 800 copies of the gospel by Luke, and a supply of elementary books, early found their way to Raiatea, and were distributed by the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Marjorie Tuaiakare Grocombe, tran., *Cannibals and Converts: Radical Change in the Cook Islands* (Suva Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1983), p. 159.

missionaries amongst numerous eager applicants. This gift had a most important influence upon the people.<sup>18</sup>

The missionaries saw the people's need. Ellis writes:

An edition of 2,300 copies of the Tahitian Catechism, and a collection of texts, or extracts from scriptures, were also printed; after which Luke's gospel, which had been translated by Mr Nott, was put to press.<sup>19</sup>

Many came from their villages to the centre, and bought the materials. This method convinced the Islanders to learn more about the scriptures. However, while this gained momentum, the missionaries had other plans.

### **CENTRALISED MODE**

As the ministry expanded, the missionaries realised the need for a centralised mode of training to further equip the islanders at a higher level, for further expansion of the gospel throughout Polynesia and the Western Pacific.

### **TRAINING INSTITUTION**

Williams found opportunities for promoting, by other means, the prosperity of the South Sea Mission. He submitted to the directors in England for an establishment of a self-supporting theological college in Rarotonga, which was approved.<sup>20</sup>

“Back at Rarotonga, the matter was further deliberated with the brethren, natives, Williams, and Buzacott for the establishment of a college to educate pious and intelligent young men for missionary work.”<sup>21</sup> In the process, Takamoā Theological Institution in Rarotonga was established, and “by 1884, a total of 30 men and women had entered the

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<sup>18</sup> Prout, *Memoirs of John Williams*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>19</sup> Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, pp. 2:18-21.

<sup>20</sup> Prout, *Memoirs of John Williams*, p. 284.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

institution”.<sup>22</sup> Over the years, the graduates were utilised in Polynesia and Melanesia. There were also other Bible colleges and institutions, which were established later.

We have identified and discussed some early 19th-century theological education methods that were applied by the missionaries. We will now focus, in the next section, on a new 20th-century model of theological education, which, in a very short time, became global.

### **THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION: A NEW 20TH-CENTURY MODEL**

What is Theological Education by Extension (TEE)? Mulholland explains “TEE is simply decentralised theological education; it is a field-based approach that does not interrupt the learners’ productive relationships to society”.<sup>23</sup> McGavran explains its value:

Theological education in the rich, powerful denominations of Europe and America, which can readily establish a theological seminary, costing five million dollars, and be content to grow at the same rate as the general population, is a poor pattern for theological education demanded by expanding younger churches. The recent Western pattern of theological training has served to produce highly-trained and well-paid ministers and executives, but, as the church grows, as congregations multiply exceedingly, this type of minister is not needed.<sup>24</sup>

As a result, with the surpassing need in growing and expanding churches, TEE was born.

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<sup>22</sup> Lange, *The Origins of the Christian Ministry*, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Mulholland, “TEE Comes of Age: A Candid Assessment after Two Decades”, pp. 1-6. Provided by Pamela Harding, Entrust, Colorado Springs, March 21, 2007. Email address: [pharding@entrust4.org](mailto:pharding@entrust4.org), internet site: [www.entrust4.org](http://www.entrust4.org).

<sup>24</sup> Donald A. McGavran, “Foreword”, in *Theological Education by Extension*, Ralph D. Winter, ed. (South Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1969), pp. 7-8.

## **HISTORY OF TEE**

TEE began in Guatemala in 1963, a country in Central America, where there was a rapid growth of the Presbyterian churches in the rural areas. The seminary that was located in the capital city had come to realise that they were not able to train enough pastors to meet the needs of the fast-growing churches. Nevertheless those

seminary graduates seldom wanted to go back to their rural areas, because they became accustomed to the city life. Also, the training they received was not relevant to the rural churches. Out of the 200 pastors, who graduated from the seminary in its 25-year history, only 20 were still active in the churches, while most were in the cities.<sup>25</sup>

Conflicts were also prevalent among the seminary graduates, and the experienced pastors, and lay leaders of the rural churches.

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 congregation without pay. To remove these lay leaders from their homes and occupations for a long period of seminary training would remove the natural, functioning leadership of the churches.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, the seminary teachers decided that they were to take the teaching out to the rural areas, where most of the local churches were located. However, they soon came to realise that those who came were not interested in big textbooks, and a heavy academic program. The students that came were, indeed, the true church leaders, but many of them had little formal schooling, and even fewer had theological knowledge. Because of this, the seminary teachers changed their plans.

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<sup>25</sup> David Rowsome, "The TEE Tutor's Guide", CLTC TEE Study Manual (Banz PNG: CLTC, 1998), p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Smith, "An Evaluation of Participants' Perceptions of the Value of Selected Aspects of TEE's Educational Methodology and Curriculum as Effective Preparation for a Selected Range of Christian Ministries in Bangladesh", M.Th. thesis (Auckland NZ: Tyndale-Carey School of Theology, 2008), pp. 2-9.

Firstly, they put aside all the big textbooks, and started writing materials, which would suit the pastors. Then, instead of bringing the pastors into the seminary to attend classes, the seminary teachers went out by foot, bicycle, motorbike, and truck, to take the teachings to the pastors and leaders in each local church.<sup>27</sup>

By training persons where they lived, the seminary was able to reach into various subcultures, without uprooting people from their environment. Thus, it was able to enlist, and equip for ministry, those persons best suited and gifted to minister.<sup>28</sup>

### **TEE: A WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT**

Since then, there has been much enthusiasm about TEE, and many churches and denominations have seen the potential for TEE in their part of the world. TEE was taken from Guatemala, and planted on every continent. It is still growing and expanding today, with many TEE programs around the world. Our current “TEE email network serves 146 recipients, representing many countries and distant-learning programs. We count it as an immense privilege to serve in this work”.<sup>29</sup> TEE networkers around the world enjoy constant dialogue, partnership, and sharing. Could this be an ideal model for the Pacific? TEE was born in the Pacific three decades ago. Here is the story of how it happened.

### **FOUNDING OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS’ TRAINING COLLEGE (CLTC)**

John M. Hitchen, a pioneer missionary to Papua New Guinea in the early 1960s, and former Principal of the Christian Leaders’ Training College, states:

The Christian Leaders’ Training College of Papua New Guinea, an evangelical, interdenominational Bible and Theological College, commenced teaching at Banz in the Western Highlands Province of PNG in 1965, serving the evangelical and mainline churches.

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<sup>27</sup> Rowsome, “The TEE Tutor’s Guide”, pp. 5-7.

<sup>28</sup> Mulholland, “TEE Come of Age”, pp. 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Huggins, email March 30, 2007. Huggins is the Field Director with Oxen Ministries (ORTA Russia, Increase, Matheteuo, and TEEN Net), based in the UK. His email address is [michaelhuggins@binternet.com](mailto:michaelhuggins@binternet.com).

... The College's beginnings can be traced to an initiative of George Sexton, the Field Leader of the then Unevangelized Fields Mission (later Asia Pacific Christian Mission, and now Pioneers). Following a UFM field leaders' discussion, Sexton circulated to other evangelical mission leaders, in March, 1959, a letter giving reasons for the suggestion: "*Would it not be possible for the evangelical missions to get together and establish a 'Central Bible Training School'?*" He proposed discussing this at the next Government-Missions Conference the following year.

In the process, the Melbourne Bible Institute (MBI) Council accepted the challenge, and set up a subcommittee to explore the possibility. By 1963, the MBI had appointed Revd Gilbert McArthur as Principal-elect of the new College. A suitable location was acquired in the Wahgi Valley near Banz, confirmed to be the Giramben property in the Western Highlands District of PNG. Thus, in February, 1965, the first group of 18 students arrived at the College.<sup>30</sup>

## **BIRTH OF CLTC TEE**

Hitchen continues to explain that:

Alongside the core of the residential programmes, CLTC has developed alternative modes for delivering their educational ministry. In 1970, the then Dean of the College was deeply impressed by reading of the impact of the Theological Education by Extension movement in Central America. He prepared a staff study paper on the nature of TEE, and how it could supplement the College's residential ministries. Two years later, in 1972, the College presented the challenge of extension theological education

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<sup>30</sup> John M. Hitchen, "Evangelicals Equipping Men and Women In Melanesia – CLTC Educational Ministries, 1965-2005", pp. 1-15. Paper prepared for the Evangelical Identities Conference, Auckland NZ, March 29-30, 2007. Also cited, "The Concept of Theological Education by Extension and its Relevance for Melanesia", a study paper presented by John M. Hitchen to the Evangelical Alliance Meeting, CLTC, Banz PNG, August, 1970.

as a topic for consideration at the annual meetings of the Evangelical Alliance.

No significant development took place until 1975, when the first TEE pilot course in English was conducted in the first half of the year in Mt Hagen, and then repeated in Port Moresby, and other centres in the second half, with a second pilot of the new course continuing in Mt Hagen. New staff member, Ian Malins, conducted that second pilot, and, from that point, took responsibility for the development of a TEE program to extend the ministry of the College around the country. The number of students, courses, and extension centres expanded rapidly each year, and the programme, now called Distance Theological Education, with extension centres in Port Moresby, capital of PNG, and Lae, continues to prove a very significant part of the work.<sup>31</sup>

## **THE IMPACT**

Since its establishment in 1975, CLTC TEE has been instrumental in motivating, equipping, and enabling the people of God to develop their gifts, and give their lives in meaningful service to others. CLTC TEE has brought many TEE students from the spiritual darkness to the marvellous light, to have a closer walk with the Lord Jesus. Over the years, hundreds of TEE students have made personal commitments to follow Jesus Christ. This is the real achievement in meeting the overarching goal for which the ministry of TEE was established.

The table below indicates the statistics of total enrolments, and completion rates, from 1975 to 2007, inclusive, as demonstrated by the DTE database.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hitchen, "Equipping Men and Women in Melanesia", p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> This statistical information is collected from the Distance Theological Education Database at CLTC, Banz PNG.

<b>English: All Courses</b>	<b>Started</b>	<b>Completed</b>
Isolated Students	4,472	2,305
Group Students	9,401	5,561
<b>Tok Pisin: All Courses</b>	<b>Started</b>	<b>Completed</b>
Isolated Students	637	498
Group Students	5,220	3,275
Other Countries	250	198

CLTC TEE is the provider of extension materials to Papua New Guinea, the South Pacific Islands, and the world. There is an annual enrolment of 1,000-plus students. A national TEE director oversees this program. Pacific Theological College in Fiji is also running an extension program, which is more academic in nature.

### **SCRIPTURAL PATTERNS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

We have discussed how God has been training men and women in the Pacific, through the TEE models. These guiding principles for Christian workers in the Pacific may still be applicable today. However, is there any theological pattern for us to learn from the scriptures, since theological education is about learning to know God, and making Him known? We shall now discuss some of the biblical patterns of training.

#### **OLD TESTAMENT PATTERN OF TRAINING**

Moses, an Israelite, was raised in Pharaoh's royal household, receiving the best education. After killing a man, Moses was humbled during his years of hiding in the wilderness. God then called, commissioned, and enabled Moses to lead the Israelites from bondage. "This was the curriculum Moses followed."<sup>33</sup> Joshua, prepared as a leader under Moses' tutelage, took on leadership responsibilities at an early age. David took on responsibility as a musician and shepherd, learning to deal with failure and success.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John M. Hitchen, "Some Biblical Patterns of Ministerial Training and their Relevance for Melanesia Today", p. 2. Paper presented at the Study Institute of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools held at CLTC, Banz PNG, January, 1976. John Hitchen was Principal of CLTC at the time.

<sup>34</sup> Hitchen, "Some Biblical Patterns of Ministerial Training", p. 3.

From the training of the above three Old Testament servants of God, we see certain principles. God Himself chooses His workmen, and a personal encounter with the Lord leads to a wholehearted commitment. Personal knowledge of the burdens of people is essential for leaders, and personal apprenticeship under a proven leader is also an important aspect of training.

### **NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN OF TRAINING**

As we turn to the scripture records, we find that the Lord Jesus followed many of the principles of the OT, but He also added new principles, in the ways He selected His disciples for ministry. Hitchen explains:

Many people, from all walks of life, came to Him, some upon recommendation of others, some through the witness of others, and, on many occasions, Jesus Himself went and found individuals. At other times, people came with curiosity, or when they were in need. Nonetheless, the disciples, whom He himself had chosen, stayed with Him, and continued in His service to the end, except Judas.<sup>35</sup>

Prior to discussing the methods, we will identify some features that were true of Christ, in training His people.

#### ***Personal Fellowship With Christ***

“Personal fellowship with Christ is at the centre of all the training Christ gives. In the Old Testament examples, we noted that a personal meeting with God was central to the workman’s preparation.”<sup>36</sup> Also, in the gospels, we find that, when Jesus trained someone, He first called that person to be with Him. The disciples lived with Him, ate with Him, talked with Him, and shared in all that Jesus did for nearly three years.

#### ***Instruction/Right Teaching***

Hitchen notes: “Instruction or right teaching was central in all Christ’s work of training. ‘Rabbi’ or ‘Teacher’ was the most common title

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-13.

people used in speaking to Jesus. ‘Disciples’ or ‘student-learners’ was the most common name given to His followers.”<sup>37</sup>

In an age when we are uncertain about truth, and afraid of authority, we easily forget the central place Jesus Christ gave to careful regular teaching for those who would be His workers.

### ***Making Clear the Nature of Mission***

Hitchen again: “Jesus is careful to make the nature of Christian ministry clear; Jesus Christ was training His disciples for a distinctive kind of work. He was very concerned to make the nature of His work clear. Those who work for Him must become His servants.”<sup>38</sup> That was the Lord’s way.

### **LATER NEW TESTAMENT TRAINING**

We read of Paul’s encounter with the Lord on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16). As with the many OT men of God, Paul clearly knew that the Lord had chosen him for a very special purpose. If we place these “hidden years”, after his calling, in a Melanesian context: we look to “these years as traditional initiation periods, when the young men went into isolation for varying lengths of time”,<sup>39</sup> prior to being recognised as mature individuals to participate in the affairs of the community. Likewise, Paul actually was going through what Fountain defines as a “spiritual formation”<sup>40</sup> for future ministry. For Paul, those hidden years were his in-service training. Afterwards, he immediately became involved in public preaching and witnessing. His religious upbringing, and formal education in the best educational school of his day, were of much help in his God-anointed ministry.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Joshua Daimoi, “Spiritual Formation in Bible and Theological Colleges”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 5-2 (1989), p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> Ossie Fountain, “Contextualisation and Globalisation in the Bible Training Ministry of the Christian Brethren churches of Papua New Guinea, Part 2 of 4”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 19-2 (2003), p. 59.

## **PAUL'S METHODS OF TRAINING BY EXTENSION**

We can now learn some of Paul's methods by studying the way he trained his leaders in the early churches. Acts 14:21-23 tells us that local Christians were appointed as elders in each congregation. These appointments were made, in dependence upon God, to select the right people. Paul also wrote letters to the churches (Gal 6:6). They served to warn, rebuke, teach, and correct, and to give in-service training for the elders. Providing proper support was an important key to ministerial development. We notice that this method was used by the early missionaries in the Pacific.

The New Testament apostles made other missionary journeys, and selected young men for further training (Acts 15:36-16:5). Those, who selected the first leaders, were concerned to see how they were performing, and so conducted further in-service training. Likewise, we find that John Williams sent out island teachers, and he made follow-up visits to see how they were faring. In the same way, Paul arranged for Timothy, an itinerant Bible teacher, to spend some time with the young churches (2 Tim 4:10). Likewise, here at CLTC, the College receives personnel from Australia, New Zealand, and America to give in-service training, encouragement, and spiritual nourishment, in order to keep the program functioning at a steady pace.

We have seen that some of Paul's "extension" methods of training were prevalent in the early Pacific missions, and in our own context, too. That does not mean all training programs were perfect, as they also encountered disappointments, frustrations, and hindrances. Theological education in the 21st century is no exception, as already there are erroneous teachings in the villages.

## **PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

A local village church deacon interpreted Heb 10:24-25 like this: "Drinking with friends in a public bar, gambling with friends, or going to a 24-hour disco dance are some ways of meeting together, and enjoying

Christian fellowship.”<sup>41</sup> This illustrates that, while theological educators are performing to their utmost ability, there are serious problems stemming from various aspects of life in the church and society. Most pastors, in rural and remote localities, who received theological training some 10 or 15 years ago, are in need of further formal theological training, while the more highly-qualified theological graduates are seeking greener pastures in urban churches, or going to higher-paying jobs. Perhaps, until now, our churches have not been able to offer formal training for lay people.

“Churches in the rural and remote localities urgently need sound biblical teaching. Many are drifting towards cultism, and many splinter groups are creating divisions in the churches.”<sup>42</sup> This is posing a very serious threat to the evangelical churches. Perhaps Boseto was right when he said, “Stop introducing more religious groups into the Pacific, the Pacific is no longer a mission field.”<sup>43</sup> But, sadly, it is too late to take heed of this warning. With a massive intrusion of wealthy cults, the evangelical churches have inadequate strength to withstand the assault, and their members fall prey to false philosophies. “There are avenues, where students and leaders may gladly do some study, if they could do it, while they live and work at their normal careers.”<sup>44</sup> What then is the best strategy to help our grade 10 and 12 young people, who are without work in our congregations? The issues, observed some three decades ago in PNG, are still prevalent today. Observers have pointed out the neglect and inefficiency of theological educators, who have not produced quality theological students.

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<sup>41</sup> This incident happened in 1984, in a remote village in Chimbu Province PNG. A pastor present at the meeting reported the matter to the author.

<sup>42</sup> George Mombi, interview by author, June 30, 2008. Mombi is the Principal of the Assemblies of God Northern Region Bible College, Maprik, in East Sepik Province of PNG.

<sup>43</sup> Allan K. Davidson, “The Pacific is no Longer a Mission Field: Conversion in the South Pacific in the Twentieth Century”, in *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, Donald M. Lewis, ed. (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 133-154.

<sup>44</sup> “Theological Education by Extension” (CLTC Banz PNG, April, 1976), pp. 1-6. The paper was circulated to PNG churches to encourage them to do TEE.

Tofaeono, responding to the issue of violence against women, stresses, “there is a problem with theological education, and the violence against women lies with the theological educators’ inability to address the problem”.<sup>45</sup> She emphasises that the cause is “deeply rooted in inadequate theological interpretation and assumptions, because theological students are not equipped with the analytical and pastoral know how”.<sup>46</sup> Kadiba also points out that theological educators tended to “teach traditional theological subjects, and follow methods and approaches, inherited from Western models”.<sup>47</sup> “It is sad to hear ‘out of context’ sermons and teachings in some PNG rural and remote local churches.”<sup>48</sup> These are crucial issues. How they should be corrected needs urgent deliberation by theological educators.

Daimoi has identified one of the main causes of the dilemma. “Training, in Melanesia, therefore, must be deeply rooted in true spirituality. Biblically understood, this spirituality is rooted in Christ, through the mediatorship of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>49</sup> As communal and relational people, “theological colleges in Melanesia must be flexible and innovative, if they are to keep abreast of the changing Melanesian situation, and to depart from traditional models of [t]heological education brought from outside”.<sup>50</sup> These crucial issues demand answers from the Pacific people.

## CRITICAL EVALUATION

In the early 19th century, in the evidence from extension methods of training, we see TEE was being used. The missionaries printed literature, and sent it out. The students, seeing that the materials suited their needs, came to purchase them at the centre. In most cases, the

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<sup>45</sup> Joan A. Filemoni Tofaeono, “Cracking the Silence: The Churches Role in Violence against Women in Oceania”, in *Ministerial Formation* 103 (July, 2004), p. 30.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>47</sup> John Kadiba, “In Search of a Melanesian Theology”, in *The Gospel is Not Western*, Garry Trompf, ed. (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1978), p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> The author has had the opportunity to visit many PNG churches. He has observed that much Bible preaching is out of context, and needs urgent attention.

<sup>49</sup> Daimoi, “Spiritual Formation”, pp. 46-47.

<sup>50</sup> Kadiba, “In Search of a Melanesian Theology”, p. 143.

missionaries revisited the native teachers for follow-up, and conducted in-service training. It is even more challenging to see that Paul used extension methods of training for the elders of the churches. He appointed elders in the churches to take care of them, he wrote letters of instruction, and he sent teachers to follow-up and to provide in-service training for them. The result was that it equipped, strengthened, and enabled them to grow in maturity, and provided spiritual energy for further gospel propagation.

It is sound biblical teaching that is needed. Tofaeono considers that an issue confronting the Pacific today is that theological institutions and Bible colleges have trained incompetent theological students for ministry – “incompetent” in the sense that much of what is taught is not rooted in Christ, and the implementation of such seldom occurs. If we ever want our students to grow to maturity, and handle theological, ethical, and social issues, at a more mature level, we need to think seriously about training that will enable a student to embrace Christ as the Head of the ministry.

Local Bible colleges are staggering and dying in the rural localities, with shallow biblical-teaching programs, and abundant misinterpretation in sermons, many of which are not rooted in Christ. With run down infrastructures, pursuit of self-gain, and mismanagement, which, perhaps, resembles our spiritual immaturity, and lack of mutual dialogue, support, and partnership with other evangelical denominations, the sustainability of the evangelical faith is at stake.

Mombi points out that, “there is a great lack of sound biblical teaching in our churches today; pastors are misinterpreting the gospel, which results in divisions and apostasy, causing splinter groups, because of the congregations’ immaturity”.<sup>51</sup> The church and theological educators are answerable for this dilemma. He asks, “What kind of training are we

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<sup>51</sup> Mombi, interview, June 30, 2008.

giving our students?”<sup>52</sup> It is an onerous question for theological educators to ponder.

Having assessed the positive contributions of CLTC TEE, we see that there are also major weaknesses. In an earlier paper, the author wrote:

Christian Leaders' Training College TEE has served PNG and the Pacific Islands for over three decades, but has lacked vision to upgrade its capacities to meet the 21st-century demand. Extensions of its centres to other Pacific Islands, and development of formal diploma/degree programs to meet the earnest desire of the seekers, are the prerogatives of the stakeholders. CLTC TEE needs directions for the future. There needs to be proper guidelines in place for how courses should be written, and changes done to the establishment. Some policies need to be put in place to ensure that there are standards set. TEE courses must be recognised by the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS). Even the issue of accrediting the TEE courses with the residential courses offered needs to be spelt out clearly. There is a need for a thorough evaluation of the TEE program, in order to effectively meet the needs of the users.<sup>53</sup>

The concern in theological training in the Pacific ought to be the concern for Pacific theologians; it is not for Westerners to dictate, but to provide assistance to develop Pacific theological education programs. Are Pacific theologians prepared to prove to their Western counterparts their capability, accountability, and management in this work? All potential Pacific theologians should pool their experience and knowledge in order to provide and train students with adequate theological training, appropriate and applicable to Pacific people.

In the research undertaken for this paper, the challenge remains that no significant Pacific theologian has developed TEE in this region. Non-Pacific people have been involved in developing TEE over the past

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Bungo, “Distance Theological Education”, SWOT Analysis (Banz PNG: CLTC, February, 2008), pp. 12-14.

decades. Nevertheless, the vision exists. Kadiba spoke of the function of TEE when he stressed, “theological education should be a two-way process, it should educate the people at the grassroots level, and, at the same time, theological educators should be ready to be educated by folk in the villages”.<sup>54</sup>

Boseto unconsciously recommended the principles applied in TEE when he said, “their time should not be limited to worship on Sundays, they [Christians] could also be given opportunity during the week to conduct Bible studies in groups”.<sup>55</sup> My challenge to Pacific theologians is this: TEE was planted on our shores three decades ago. Now is the time for Pacific theologians to catch the vision of TEE, and develop it, as such, instead of looking to traditional Western Bible colleges. This is a call for reshuffling our training programs, and seeking partnership and collaboration with other evangelical theological educators, if evangelical theological educators want to reach a new milestone with input and vision for training, the TEE WAY will reverse the current trend.

### **HOW DO HISTORICAL COURSES HELP?**

The new 20th-century TEE is the vital teaching model for 21st-century theological training in the Pacific. If it provided positive results in the 19th century mission, and proved effective in Jesus’ and Paul’s ministries, then, perhaps, it could be the pattern for the Pacific today. The TEE movement has “made available basic theological education, and Christian education, to an enormous number of people, who did not previously have these benefits. Many hundreds of pastors have been trained, who would never have been trained by residential methods. Thousands of evangelists have received basic Bible training, and many hundreds of thousands of lay Christians the same.”<sup>56</sup> Two case studies from PNG are presented.

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<sup>54</sup> Kadiba, “In Search of a Melanesian Theology”, p. 143.

<sup>55</sup> Leslie Boseto, “Towards a Pacific Theology of Reality: A Grassroots Response to Winds of Change”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology* Series II No 12 (1994), p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> Stewart G. Snook, *Developing Leaders Through Theological Education by Extension: Case Studies from Africa* (Wheaton IL: Billy Graham Centre, 1992), p. 2.

*Case 1.* The author of this paper was converted in prison in 1982, after he did the CLTC TEE course “Come Follow Me”, a course on discipleship. After being released from prison, he went home and shared his new-found faith in Christ, with the little knowledge he gained from the TEE studies. He had no formal degrees or diplomas, but the benefits grew. In the space of 14 years, six local churches were planted. All the pastors and leaders of the churches were trained, discipled, apprenticed, and mentored through TEE. This was their only means of receiving theological education. Most of them had a grade-6 level of education. After the author came for full-time theological training at CLTC for five years, the churches continued to prosper and thrive under the leadership of those ordinary men and women.<sup>57</sup>

*Case 2.* The Evangelical Brotherhood church (EBC) of PNG has caught the vision of TEE. Ulrich and Christina Spycher recall:

Our first contact with the TEE program goes back to the 1970s. Ian Malins,<sup>58</sup> a lecturer at CLTC Banz, and his family stayed at our guesthouse in Goroka to await the new addition to their young family. It was there and then that Ian Malins was writing his first TEE course. I became interested, and arranged with him to run a pilot project. . . . [F]rom the initial pilot course, we moved on to regular TEE ministry, as part of our yearly program, with a rapid growth of EBC church work in the area. . . . Our commitments also grew, but time has shown that the TEE ministry produced a lasting impact in the lives of many students, and young people are attending these courses.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Philip Bungo, “An Evaluation of the Evangelical Christian Fellowship Church and Proposal for Its Future Development”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 16-2 (2000), pp. 40-77.

<sup>58</sup> Ian Malins wrote many TEE courses during his time as a lecturer at CLTC. Many are still very popular. He and his family are now based in Australia.

<sup>59</sup> Ulrich Spycher, Christina Spycher, *Singaut* magazine 157 (September-December, 2007), pp. 1- 15. *Singaut* is the magazine of the Evangelical Brotherhood church of Papua New Guinea.

The EBC has a national coordinator, who oversees the work of TEE in the EBC churches throughout PNG. Pastors and elders in their own local congregations, and in major prisons around the country, tutor TEE. As a result, the EBC church is one of the fastest-growing denominations in PNG, with firm support from the EBC National Mission Board.

## CONCLUSION

Pacific people are unique, communal, and relational people. New 21st-century TEE could be ideal for Pacific people, but only if individuals and theological educators are serious and committed to embarking on such a journey. Sound biblical teaching in the Pacific is an urgent need today. Syncretism in the Christianity of Melanesia and the Pacific is often mixed with traditional religions. The tendency to drift towards syncretism, apostasy, cults, and the prosperity gospel is gaining momentum. These diversions can be halted by effective teaching of God's Word. The development of biblically-oriented leaders affects the degree to which these trends will be challenged.

Finally, the Bible declares the pattern and result of good training. It was demonstrated by our Lord, and His discipleship model was exhorted by Paul in 2 Tim 2:2 (RSV): "And what you have heard from me, before many witnesses, entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." "Ideally TEE is suited to training leaders as links in a chain. Students are to faithfully teach others what they learn."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Snook, *Developing Leaders*, p. 4.

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