# KOLKATA STATEMENT
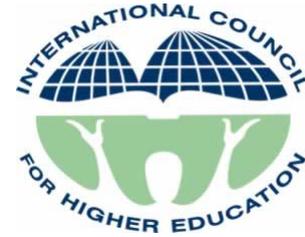
**International Council for Higher Education**
**Conference on Education and Mission, Kolkata, India**
**23-26 February 2004**

## 1. PREAMBLE

From February 23 to 26, 2004, the International Council for Higher Education (ICHE) convened a conference in Kolkata (Calcutta), India to discuss the relationship between Christian education and the Christian mission. The conference was asked to produce specific and practical proposals that might serve to advance Christian education programs, while also recognizing their diversity.

Participants came from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America and were quick to acknowledge the varied political, social, religious and economic contexts within which the world church functions. In addition, the need was recognized to work as educationists within the parameters set by governments and the constraints of available resources both human and material.

The conference was aware of the danger of triumphalism, an unreal expectation of what influence Christian educationists and Christian educational institutions might have on the wider world of education. However, there was a glad acknowledgment that added to our capacity was the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, who has done more than the Church could ask, think or dare to hope for throughout history.

The conference was eager to emphasize that the issue of Christian education embraced the entire spectrum of academic disciplines and every level of church and mission related educational endeavor.

## 2. PRIMARY ISSUES

Commencing with the keynote addresses and supporting presentations, the conference developed its consultation along two distinct, though related tracks:
- Education and Mission and
- Designing Appropriate Programs.

The intent of this report is to identify the primary educational issues that arose in the presentations and discussions, without attempting to relate those issues to a particular source.

## 3. EDUCATION AND MISSION

3.1. The Christian education endeavor is to be distinguished from more general programs of education in that it should always be related to the purposes of God in relation to the world, and particularly to humanity.  The educational process should inform and equip the student of the Christian perspective as reflected in God's Word, and then initiate a positive and practical dialogue with the world.

3.2. The Great Commission as outlined in the Gospel of Matthew authoritatively associates education and mission, "Go…make disciples…teach." There is a need to move Christian education forward from cognitive learning to discipleship. If we study history, we should also learn from history. If we study politics, we should learn the limited power of the politicians and the consequent need of the spiritual contribution made possible by the involvement of Christians.

3.3. Christian education will interrogate all the academic disciplines, asking how the events and theories we study relate to the purposes of God. We need to be concerned not merely to describe the event but also to examine its implied morality. Christian education clearly includes theology, but beyond that has a Biblical and Christian concern with all the academic disciplines, e.g. history, economics, engineering, law, philosophy, physics, biology, psychology, etc. Christianity and Christian education is holistic and its potential for personal and social transformation is unlimited.

3.4. Our education and mission is conducted amid poverty, illness, exploitation, discrimination and oppression, which are contrary to the will of a loving Creator revealed to us in Jesus Christ.  The Christian education program relates to the mission of the church to explain and to resolve human meaninglessness and suffering. It goes beyond secular education to the removal, or at least the alleviation, of these pressures, thereby demonstrating the influence of the Kingdom.

3.5. So that we may effectively integrate Christian education and mission, we must more clearly define our terms:

- **Christian education** – Where all *effective* education will focus on the student, Christian education focuses on *the student created in the image of God*.

- **The church** – Church should be more than a Sunday congregation; it should be a seven-days-a-week community. Therefore, if we think in terms of faith community, rather than a church congregation, what should be the characteristics to be developed in that community in the world?

- **Christian values** – Since the mission of the church includes the proclamation of distinct values, what are those values? These must be developed in relation to the individual, family, society and the world in general.

3.6. Christian schools are frequently recognized for not only offering superior standards of education but also serving to lead some to faith, and inculcating Christian *values* into many of those who nevertheless do not embrace the Christian *faith*.

3.7. The role of women in the advancement of the mission of education must be recognized. Christian women have contributed greatly to this mission, as evidenced by the lives of missionaries Isabella Thoburn and Edith Brown, both of whom founded pioneering institutions of higher education in India. Their contributions to the Kingdom are but a sample of the many women who have played a central role in both education and mission.

3.8. Righteousness and justice are the key themes of both the Old Testament and New Testament. The faith community should itself learn how to live out these concepts and foster them in the wider community, especially through its education programs. Rather than concentrating on the wealthy and on those who might be expected to be influential in the future, Christian education should concentrate on those so often denied education precisely because of their poverty, and on all who, for whatever reason, are denied adequate education.

3.9. The apostle Paul writes, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil," and it is dangerously possible for Christian educational projects to lose their initial concern for the poor and underprivileged and look rather for profitability. Consequently, Christian educational projects in developing countries are right to keep their costs and their fees as low as possible, making them open to the poor. Moreover, this implies that in the developed world the church should be prepared to contribute financially to such projects.

## 4. DESIGNING APPROPRIATE PROGRAMS

4.1. Within the church there is a need to clarify the concept of education for its members. Five areas were suggested:

- **Doxology** – the understanding of the broad themes of worship.

- **Practicality** – the ministry of the Church in terms of *koinonia* – fellowship and *diakonia* – service.

- **Testimony** – the patterns of personal expressions of faith into a yet unredeemed society.

- **Stewardship** – the ability to discern, respect and so develop individual gifts and group resources, spiritual and material.

- **Transformation** – the initiation, facilitation of peace and reconciliation across ethnic and cultural barriers.

4.2. In the context of communities in the early stages of economic development, Christian education should lay emphasis on community-based *skills training*. We should rightly be concerned to assist in remedying situations of the denial of education to women and to other disadvantaged groups in society, such as the physically handicapped and the often-neglected nomadic communities.

4.3. No one form of educational program or any one pattern of learning should be imposed on the church. On the contrary, eclectic methods that employ appropriate elements of traditional formal teaching, community-based experimental learning projects, distance learning, practical placements and apprenticeships, short term intensive courses, and information and communication technologies would enable programs of Christian education to be flexible and sensitive to the social contexts within which they are expected to operate.

4.4. The growing problem of affordability of educational programs is of concern,

particularly at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and its implications for countries in the developing world.

Although information technology and computerization may appear initially to be either too expensive or too complex to introduce in communities lacking the appropriate infrastructure (e.g. roads, postal services, electricity, and telephones), new technology is steadily making such services unnecessary for IT delivery. While computers may be beyond the purchasing power of individuals, community learning centers equipped with computers, can allow the individual access to the Internet and so to direct contact not merely with educational program but also with resource persons.

It is salutary to remember that in the developed world, because of the incredibly rapid developments in technology, computers are discarded and replaced after as little as two years. Cooperation between the business world that can afford this practice and the Church should enable such marginally outdated hardware and software to be re-deployed in the developing world.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1. Education and Mission

5.1.1. We recognize that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 authoritatively associates teaching and mission. That is our authority for linking these two.

5.1.2. We suggest that education should be recognized as a lifetime process originating in the creative and redemptive act of God, affecting both the faith community and as yet unredeemed world. We are to move on "from milk to meat," to use biblical terminology.

5.1.3. We recommend that the church community of faith be challenged to recognize that in being obedient to the Great Commission, it explore further ways in which it can use education to enable people to discover the redemptive work of God and his righteousness and to discover what this might mean for their own lives and the lives of their communities.

5.1.4. We recommend that the education of the faith community as currently practiced should be evaluated in terms of the pattern demonstrated by the relationship between Jesus and his immediate followers. The end result should be to add to cognitive learning the development of radical discipleship so that Christians may understand and function within their own communities to relate appropriately and responsibly to the outside world, while remaining obedient to the mission calling of God.

5.1.5. We suggest that the faith community has a responsibility to communicate to society as a whole the foundational creative act of God and the consequent responsibility placed on society both to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and our responsibility as guardians of His creation.

5.1.6. We recommend that Christians should be involved wherever feasible, in *primary* education, but avoid the tendency to undervalue Christian institutions of *higher* education. Our responsibility for education covers the whole spectrum of education, and the Church should encourage individuals involved in state-run education as well as offering support to those specifically Christian educational institutions that play such an important role in Christian mission.

5.1.7. We recognize the powerful contribution of women to education and mission and urge the faith community to both honor what has been accomplished and to facilitate its further development. In many parts of the world women are still discriminated against, and this is particularly so in the area of education. We recommend that the faith community should seek to remedy that situation.

## 5.2. Designing Appropriate Programs

We recognize that the process of educational renewal is an ongoing effort in educational leadership. We celebrate the work of colleagues from the past and present who have been engaged in educational renewal for Christian education.

The subsequent recommendations are a clarification of the theological assumptions that underpin our educational models.
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5.2.1. We recommend that education that is properly directed toward personal, ecological and societal transformation should take account of the following foundational elements:

- Program design that has a clear and comprehensive understanding of the various contexts (political, social, intellectual, economic) in which it will be used.

- Foundational elements which integrate cognitive (knowledge and awareness), affective (values and attitudes) and skill development.

- Programs that are cost effective, sustainable, linked to employability, and sensitive to all interest groups.

Concerns addressed in our program development should include the following:

- Social justice and awareness with social analysis skills; capacity building with teachers and students; and an innovative and reform orientation.

- Programs that seek to eliminate unhealthy trends of dependence which have marred the witness of Christians in many countries.

- Exploration of institutional partnerships with civil or local society or some other strategic alliance to develop community.

- Christ centered and value-based in program design.

5.2.2. We recommend that program design should be cognizant of the content of traditional and formal curricula. Elements to be included are:

- Multi-track programs with employment orientation.

- Continuation and development of existing classical programs.

- Gender development programs.

- Curricula which address the needs of the community, and through which the community has open and easy access to programs and curricula.

- Programs for training literacy teachers.

5.2.3. We recommend that program design should be cognizant of non-formal and informal curriculum. Elements to be included are:

- Short courses that address immediate needs or social concerns.

- Non-formal skills development.

- Literacy programs for children and adults.

- Community education programs (e.g. democratic initiatives, basic civil rights).

5.2.4. In program design we recognize the special case of restricted/"creative access areas" where formal Christian education is restricted or not permitted. Therefore, we recommend that:

- The *mode of delivery* in these locations will often be through IT Education (delivery by electronic, e-mail or Internet). In every case, delivery of education must be done with professional credibility.

- Our efforts in design should be reproducible programs that can be carried on by national leaders and with local resources.

- Our efforts should take cognizance of marginalized and displaced peoples.

- Program design should take cognizance of professional assistance and training in special education for disabled students.

5.2.5. By way of summary, we recommend the following in designing appropriate programs:

- All forms of Christian education need to be encouraged by the church, particularly to facilitate God's mission and our acceptance in restricted access countries.

- Christian institutions need to partner with the church rather than function apart from the church, so that each ministers to the other.

- Christian educators should have an expertise that can properly understand and interpret their societies and provide services relevant to them.

- Theological institutions need to revise their curricula so as to promote God's total mission. Human rights and responsibilities, church and state, wealth distribution, and the study of exploited and underprivileged groups should be included.

- Theological institutions need to help students develop community-organizing skills so that they will take this knowledge to their churches and teach their congregations how to apply these skills in their respective communities.

- Christian institutions should help the Christian community integrate theology and practice in church and society, so as to bring about social transformation.

- Wherever possible, Christian educators should seek to widen their influence to reach out to the community through appropriate initiatives in order to fulfill our goal of a more effective and relevant Christian witness.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The conference was eager to stress that Christian education, education directed to humanity made in the image of God, should be seen not as something apart from the Christian mission, but rather in accordance with the Great Commission as an integral and essential element.

Following the example of Christ, it seems clear that the Christian mission is holistic so that Christian education similarly should be holistic, not content with the secular curriculum but determined to educate and inform Christians of the vast sweep of their responsibilities.

The approval of our work as Christian educators may come from our governments and education authorities, but ultimately it is God who will be the judge of our labors. So we publish this Kolkata Statement in the hope that those who read it will be encouraged to ask how far the principles suggested here serve to form, guide and direct their own individual ministries, whether in churches, schools or institutions of higher education.