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**FAITH UNDER FIRE: PROMISE AND HOPE FOR THE  
FUTURE OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL  
THEOLOGICAL CENTER**

You cannot discover new oceans unless you have the courage to lose  
sight of the shore. - Anonymous

**Introduction**

People are desperately searching for answers to the questions, "Have Black religious leaders given up the fight on racism?", "Are my children safe at school, at church?", "Are our retirement funds and children's college funds safely invested?", and "WHERE IS GOD?" Not surprisingly, "churched" and "unchurched" people are looking to those of us "presumed" to be in *good and regular standing* with God to give them clear and credible explanations and solutions.

Regrettably, in areas where meaningful dialogue could occur, the theological academic community is virtually invisible—the Black Church is frighteningly silent. C. Eric Lincoln says:

Some will be quick to point out that all or most of these concerns are the business of society and not properly the business of the church. . . . [T]he business of the church cannot be separated from the business of society for a man or a woman is both soul and body, and to salvage the one often requires healing the

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other. This is good practical theology properly informed with the social consciousness of the Sermon on the Mount. But it is a theology that requires empowerment, both spiritual and economic.<sup>1</sup>

As the mission of the Black Church broadens its perspectives, covering the whole spectrum of humanitarian needs within and beyond its membership, it will, of course, require increasingly sophisticated leadership skills at the administrative level. The Black Church should find these competencies in the bright young men and women now in seminaries and in the increasing number of second-career persons entering the ministry and seminary after successful careers in business, education, medicine, law, and other professions. However, there are serious deficiencies in the seminary's core curriculum. Unfortunately, the strategies of economic empowerment, community development, and social justice are not included in the training of church leadership. This problem is exacerbated for Black clergy who seldom have access to family traditions of economic and social empowerment to call upon in crisis situations. The social crisis in the community should not produce a crisis of leadership in the Black Church. To ensure "ready" public theologians to effectively address our communities' problems is to train them *intensively* and *intentionally* in seminary.

This essay explores how Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), a mere infant forty-five years ago, can be revived, renewed, and reconciled to think philosophically about liberation in order to consistently produce theological, social, and economic liberationists to manifest Jesus Christ in all the world. This pursuit engages three perspectives: trials and triumphs of the past, stresses of the present,

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory J. Reed, *Economic Empowerment Through the Church: A Blueprint for Progressive Community Development*, with a foreword by C. Eric Lincoln (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 14.

and promise and prognosis for the future.

### Trials and Triumphs of the Past

Any attempt to progress forward is preceded by a glance backward to understand one's context. In the case of ITC, glimpsing her past, reveals a testament that the faith of one determined person really can move mountains. Harry V. Richardson entered the scene June 11, 1948, as president of Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>2</sup> Richardson, an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) minister, considered himself an "unusual" choice for this United Methodist seminary—perhaps the major source for the training of Negro ministers in our history. Richardson had inherited a nightmare. By 1948, despite its predominant position as one of only three accredited schools of religion for Blacks in Atlanta, Gammon Seminary faced serious problems: the physical plant in deplorable condition, the dining hall condemned for unsanitary conditions, the dormitory unlivable, a once splendid endowment lost, and its student body and faculty declining in number and quality.<sup>3</sup> Gammon was in critical financial trouble.

The Methodist Church seriously considered closing the school not just for the reasons stated. There was another Methodist seminary in Atlanta, the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. The Methodists were asking themselves did it make sense financially to support two seminaries in the same town. However, there was one sticky issue—"in 1948 Candler was not admitting Negroes into their school."<sup>4</sup> And in the tradition of most Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Gammon had been founded

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<sup>2</sup>Harry V. Richardson, *Walk Together, Children: The Story of the Birth and Growth of the Interdenominational Theological Center* (Atlanta: The ITC Press, 1981), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

to train Negro Methodist ministers who had nowhere else in the South to go. In spite of that fact, this foreboding question still raised its ugly head: "If Candler should someday admit Negroes, would Gammon be needed at all?"

The struggles of Gammon were typical for a "Negro" school in 1948. After all of that time in our history, Blacks did not have the financial or political clout as evidenced today. White philanthropists usually gave enough money to open schools for Blacks, but the necessary funds to maintain them were lacking. Unfortunately, this same reality of struggle exists today for most private Black colleges. Ernie Suggs, highlights how intense financial pressures, brought on by a lack of corporate dollars and by anemic alumni/ae support, threaten the existence of private Black colleges, which cannot rely on taxpayers for assistance. Suggs further states that "since 1976, at least 10 Black colleges have closed for lack of funding, lack of good leadership and/or inadequate programs. In the 1990s, at least three schools have been on the verge of shutting their doors."<sup>5</sup>

In 2003, private funding is still scarce and public funding for Black colleges continues to trail our predominately white counterparts. With the financial struggles come crumbling facilities and buildings, creating an image that Black colleges are second-rate. Too many African-American institutions respond to organizational decline by restructuring rather than by seeking revival. The frequent pattern in organizations is from the vision of a man or a woman, to the beginning of a movement, to the formation of a machine, and finally to the establishment of a monument. This direction from an original God-inspired vision or dream to eventual death is not inevitable—it is a sociological tendency.

So, four years into a new century—and 166 years after the

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<sup>5</sup>Ernie Suggs, "Invisible Colleges: Steeped in History, Black Colleges Push to Find Their Place in the 21st Century," *The Herald-Sun*, 9 February 1997.

Institute for Colored Youth was founded by a Quaker philanthropist to train Black teachers and forty-five years after ITC was founded by a consortium of four schools of religion to train Black preachers—states, politicians, funding sources, and even some Blacks are asking the question: “Do we still need historically Black colleges and universities?” “Do we still need ITC?” Henry Ponder, president of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, says, “The question should never be asked. No one ever asks if we need Notre Dame or Brandeis. No one ever asks if we need white schools or Hispanic schools or Native American schools, VMI or The Citadel. It is a racist question out of a racist society.”<sup>6</sup> The question should be asked. Any institution should be able to justify its existence. Black institutions of higher learning, both public and private, ought to state emphatically, numerically, and academically the reason for their existence. However, ITC would have to respond to that question differently from forty-five years ago. ITC can no longer say that she exists solely because aspiring Black theologians are not allowed to enroll at Ivy League seminaries, or that Black theological scholars are not sought after for faculty positions in the upper echelons of academia. **In fact, just the opposite is true.** According to The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the accreditation agency for theological institutions in the U.S. and Canada, as of fall 2003, 81.7 percent of all racial/ethnic theologians taught at predominately white theological institutions and 80 percent of the 6,423 black seminarians enrolled in theological programs were attending predominantly white institutions.<sup>7</sup> (Candler School of Theology of Emory University enrolled its first Black student in the fall of

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Lewis Charles Willard, ed. *Fact Book on Theological Education* [book online] (Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, 2003-2004, accessed 28 May 2004); available from <http://www.ats.edu/download/factbook/factloc.html>; Internet.

1965.)<sup>8</sup> The 2003 ATS *Fact Book* indicates that the total number of Blacks enrolled in all U.S. ATS member schools is 8,020 (male and female). The total number of Blacks enrolled in historically Black theological institutions is 1,597, which is only 19.9 percent of the total Black enrollment in U.S. ATS member schools. (These schools are: Hood Theological Seminary, 212; Howard University Divinity School, 262; Interdenominational Theological Center, 448; Payne Theological Seminary, 122; Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University, 390; and Shaw University Divinity School, 163.)

Given these numbers, as recorded by ATS, the number of Blacks enrolled in white seminaries is 6,423, which is roughly 80 percent of the total Black enrollment in U.S. ATS member schools. For a similar enrollment in 2000, this writer cited 40 percent. This means that the number of blacks enrolled in white theological schools has doubled within three years!

According to Marsha Foster Boyd, ATS's Director of Accreditation and Leadership, this high percentage is attributed to numerous factors, including but not limited to: the unwillingness of established career persons to uproot their families and relocate to another city. Persons may have a strong desire to attend an ITC, a Howard, or a Virginia Union, but the financial strain, emotional stress on children and spouses, lack of scholarship monies force many to enroll in an institution closer or closest to home. For instance, if you are Black and United Methodist and from Texas, although you desire to attend ITC's Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, and Perkins School of Theology, in Dallas, Texas, or their campus in Houston, Texas, offers a partial or full scholarship, it is difficult—if not impossible—to pass that up.

ITC could decrease these statistics by implementing a first-class

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<sup>8</sup>Boone M. Bowen, *The Candler School of Theology - Sixty Years of Service* (Atlanta: CSA Printing and Bindery, Inc., 1974), 112-116, especially 115.

distance education degree program, developing a weekend-degree program, and providing additional scholarships (partial or full). Dr. Michael Battle, president of ITC, indicates that these ideas are currently under consideration.

### Strains and Stresses of the Present

In light of these great strides in inclusivity by our white counterparts, dare we ask the question: has ITC outlived the mission envisioned by Dr. Harry V. Richardson and Drs. Colwell, Van Dusen, Patterson, Holmes, and Roberts at the first planning meeting for the formation of ITC on October 17, 1956?<sup>9</sup> After all, ITC has been hailed as the finest example of cooperative theological education in all of Protestantism. Is not this enough laurel to sit on for the next 100 years and reflect and say, when ITC was in existence, she was the best? It is the opinion of this writer that ITC has a faculty of theologians that is the envy of every serious theological institution. The current student body is astute and diverse.<sup>10</sup> Is there more to the mission of ITC than the training of Black ministers for Sunday services and mid-week Bible studies? The answer to that question is ITC's 1961 Inaugural Address, "The Nature and Purpose of a Theological School," delivered by Dean Liston Pope of Yale Divinity School:

The Interdenominational Theological Center is heir, in these times of tension and [crisis], of brave and humble men and women who knew not [what] they were building but had a profound sense that they were building under Him without

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<sup>9</sup>Richardson, *Walk Together, Children*, 35, 78.

<sup>10</sup>Personal assessment of the writer based on personal and professional interaction with ITC students.

whom nothing stands. No more valuable legacy could seal your own efforts as you move into an unknown future, devoted, as were they, to the reconciliation and furtherance of sound learning and true piety. . . . And so one could wish for your school a future in which the name and example and power of Christ are regnant—a future in which denominational jealousies, regional prejudices, and civic provincialisms have no important place. This school has the promise of being one of the foremost theological seminaries. . . . The promise must be fulfilled. As a school that stands at the juncture of history and destiny, that promise is yours to claim or cast away.<sup>11</sup>

This forty-five-year-old prophetic message is as poignantly relevant today as when first delivered. ITC has not been outlived by time. The need for unparalleled, uncompromising, cutting-edge ministry is more acute than ever before. This promise has yet to be fulfilled by any existing Black *or* white theological institution.

ITC, by her foundational vision alone, is poised to lead in developing this nation's liberationists. If we are to have this vision fulfilled in us and through us, we have to construct a consensus on what we mean by "doing" liberation theology. Robert Beckford, in *Jesus Is Dread*, says:

Liberation is concerned with representing the interests of oppressed people in theological language and action. When applied to theology, it expresses a desire to know what God is doing about oppression, and what the role of the Christian is in God's liberative work in the world. Liberation is both internal, concerned with mental emancipation, as well as external, concerned with social justice. . . . The struggle for racial justice

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<sup>11</sup>Richardson, *Walk Together, Children*, 79.



in education, housing and the criminal justice system are but a few areas where the lives of Black people are under siege. Black liberation should concern all Black Christians of every class and context. However to be concerned with liberation is more than just recognizing the work of evil in the world: it is about a radical commitment to work for social justice, and not just being concerned with social welfare.<sup>12</sup>

This writer fully agrees with Beckford that most Black churches or Christians do not have a clue in making a distinction between social justice and social welfare. Beckford comments further that the Black church is a brilliant social welfare institution. It was modeled for us early in the Black Baptist church that people will look out for you and ensure that you have enough to get by, no matter what the situation. "Rarely," says Beckford, "does the Black church engage in social justice. Social justice involves more than meeting a need: it is about finding long-term solutions to the problems."<sup>13</sup> As America gradually opened its doors in the 1970s and 1980s to include African Americans in selected benefits of citizenship, the Black Church gradually reduced (and sometimes forgot) the survival aspects of its ministry, and became focused almost exclusively on the life to come. We know now that such a determination was premature. Our secular institutions cannot guard with the commitment of Christian love the humanitarian interests of all people. Only the church can do that. C. Eric Lincoln issues a stern warning to all who practice pseudonymic ministry:

The pastor who forgets, or who ignores the fact that his basic responsibilities must begin where the people are, does so at his peril, and at the peril of his parish. The black church is poor, but

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<sup>12</sup>Robert Beckford, *Jesus Is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998), 12-13.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 13.

it is still a multi-billion dollar enterprise, and its poverty does not have to be a characteristic feature of its existence. An effective ministry today requires effective funding and effective stewardship. Since the black church is by all odds the best-funded institution in the black community, and since the spectrum of African American needs continues to broaden and to escalate, effective stewardship in the Black church can no longer ignore the call to black economic empowerment and still claim responsible leadership. We are poised for freedom, or we are programmed for disaster. The time for new directions is now. . . . Now the Black churches face the gravest challenge of all: The challenge to sustain with economic empowerment the hard-won freedoms that came with open access to education and the legal availability of civil rights. It is quite clear that none of the freedoms we cherish can survive in a vacuum of economic deprivation, and that spiritual redemption begins with a full stomach, a warm place to sleep, and a hope for something better than perpetual handouts.<sup>14</sup>

The Kingdom of God is not only spiritual; it is intensely practical. The church today must move beyond its traditional role if it is to truly fulfill its mission. It can no longer respond only to spiritual needs and speak only to people's hearts. The church is called to be a force for change in the world, especially where the needs are greatest: the inner-city neighborhoods where crime, violence, and unemployment are the order of the day.

If the Black Church is to make the Kingdom of God a reality in this present world, it needs leadership that generates a valid theology for its ministry. Thereafter, everything it does in witness and

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<sup>14</sup>Reed, foreword, 15.

ministry should be done in accord with that theology. As the people of God on a mission with Christ in the world, the church has a task unlike that of any institution. A congregation must claim its true identity, determine its God-given purpose, and continually design its witness and ministry to be faithful to its calling.

We at ITC will need to come to grips with the fact that as society changes, the way of "doing" ministry must change, and as the way of "doing" ministry changes, the church must change in the way it looks at allocating human and monetary resources for ministry. If the church changes, she cannot afford to have short-sighted, unenlightened, and underexposed leadership and still expect to be on the leading edge of liberating the oppressed. The only way Black churches, communities, and the Black oppressed will ever be the beneficiaries of well-prepared, well-read and well-rounded, liberated, visionary leaders is that Black theological institutions; namely ITC, produce and send them forth. It is absolutely imperative that ITC as a theological community formally adopt an agreed upon, valid theology for "doing" ministry. Yes, we have agreed that we will provide a theological education, but have we agreed that we are going to come out of our safe, philosophical boxes and start concentrating on "practicing" theology? We must adopt an activist stance in the global community, built on the principles of Black liberation, Black theology, ancestral expectations, and the mandate of Matthew 28.

For some at ITC, these "leaps of faith," may be difficult to envision because of flaws in our own outlook. We have always been content to emulate others, instead of functioning as leaders ourselves. Black schools have accepted too easily the historical mythology about their limitations. We ought to be tired of hearing governing boards, presidents, tenured administrators, and faculty turn defensive or evasive when discussing the environmental handicaps, low admission standards, and financial picture of ITC. The more

we emphasize our shortcomings and inferior status as a Black institution, the more we are inclined to overlook deficiencies instead of working to eliminate them. Worse, the more useless we consider our task, the easier we will find excuses for not doing an optimal job for student/professionals and the global church community.

### Promise and Prognosis for the Future

In order to broach the issue of positive change in theological education, we must first grasp an understanding of how theological institutions as a whole view their culture, purpose, and mission. Robert Banks, in *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, states that:

Theological institutions have a complex organizational culture. It is a mosaic of traditions, values, practices, relationships, structures and styles. Understanding the importance of this is not yet as strong as it is within the business community. One point at which there does tend to be more awareness in seminaries is the link between its own culture and that of the academy and the church. Though the nature of this link—and consequently of the degree of overlap or demarcation between them—is interpreted differently, every so often it does become a matter for discussion. Except in seminaries that place a strong reliance on maintaining a strong devotional and communal ethos—as in Orthodox, Catholic, and some Evangelical schools—there is less appreciation of the fact that reform only takes root if the organizational culture also undergoes change. Even less appreciated is the fact that change in seminaries can only take place if this is also happening in the cultures of the academy and church. . . . But in all theological institutions, changes will not fully take place without change in the culture

of all the interlocking institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Now let us look for a moment at the early beginnings of theological education and how it has since evolved. According to Ray Anderson in *Ministry on the Fireline*,

The first organized efforts in theological education focused attention on the intellectual and moral formation of students rather than on 'active service' instruction and learning. . . . Also, they did not operate by means of a fixed curriculum based on lectures but on a dynamic life-based dialogue between teacher and students. They were schools for training in virtue of the 'whole person,' where the teacher was a model as well as instructor. It is here that the idea of imitation as well as spiritual formation first became central in theological education.<sup>16</sup>

Noted theologian Edward Farley states:

This model remained in force until Middle Ages when, through figures like Thomas Aquinas, it began to include a more discursive analysis, comparison, and synthesis of beliefs. At this stage theological education became university education, and though this prepared people for various professions, all the education that took place was essentially theological. Though the formation of character and wisdom was still paramount, education was now directed to nurturing leadership for

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<sup>15</sup>Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 208.

<sup>16</sup>Ray S. Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline: A Practical Theology for an Empowered Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 200; quoted in Robert J. Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 182, n. 68.

a broader range of important institutions in society.<sup>17</sup>

In light of how theological education began, the primary question for us today according to Banks is:

What is the proper 'sphere' of theological education and institutions? We start with the seminary. Is it a dimension of the church? Is it a part of the academy? Is it an amalgam of both? Or is it, whatever elements it has in common with the others, a distinct entity in itself? . . . It is also a matter of accountability. . . . Divinity schools have mostly seen themselves as an extension of the academy, and regarded overt religious activities as a matter of individual preference or on the edge of their institutional concerns. . . . Seminaries have varied in their approach, often depending on how much there has been a struggle for control of their affairs by denominational bodies, and how much they have understood their mission to include influencing the wider world of scholarship.<sup>18</sup>

Mostly they have made more of their connection with the church. Influential here is H. Richard Niebuhr's view that the seminary was the intellectual dimension, the center or form of the church's life.<sup>19</sup> Banks further expounds this concept:

It is right in considering whether elements of the academy

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<sup>17</sup>Edward Farley, "Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm," in Don S. Browning, ed., *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 21-41; quoted in Robert J. Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 183, n. 70.

<sup>18</sup>Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 208-209.

<sup>19</sup>See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Mission: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 23, 107-108.

or the church are present in the seminary or other theological institutions, but wrong to assume that these are the only two categories relevant to it. The proper role of a seminary is not reducible to that of an academy, or church, or some combination of the two. It is not a manifestation or agency of either, but comes under another sphere. . . . Its proper sphere, as we have already seen, was mission, not primarily education on the one hand or fellowship on the other, even though it contained strong elements of both. In an analogous way, the seminary turns itself into an academy, often but not only in the classroom, and at times it turns itself into a church, certainly but not only in the chapel. Therefore, it should be no more ashamed of saying it has an ecclesial dimension than of saying it has an academic one, and vice versa. We can rightly speak of any institution for formal theological education as containing some academic element and as a parachurch nonprofit organization, but neither term nor the combining of these terms fully comprehends its character. It is more than either and more than both. Therefore, institutions of theological education must be able to develop their own distinctive culture.<sup>20</sup>

With this in mind, the situation at ITC is not hopeless, but it does call for drastically different approaches to theological education, characterized by uniqueness and concern. We are unique because the mission and vision that God has designed for ITC differ from other theological schools. We exhibit concern because we must go beyond the usual bureaucratic demands, which shield the school from the necessity to change. Preliminary to meaningful change must be the elimination of much of the authoritarian atmosphere and needless bureaucratic procedures. These stifle indi-

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<sup>20</sup>Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 209-210.

vidual effort and slow growth. Any reversal of established procedure is regarded with hostility by the bureaucracy. Without these fundamental changes, the work of individual professors to help students reaches no further than the classroom door. Partial and haphazard attempts at reform at ITC will not make our institution effective, nor will they ensure our viability in an increasingly financially hostile and academically competitive environment.

Banks says that "it is not easy to broaden the discussion of changes needed in seminaries beyond those related to teaching. This involves covering the whole constituency, culture and curriculum, as well as the wider world of academy and the church with which they are so intimately related."<sup>21</sup> He continues:

The problem is partly due to the diversity between, and partly to the diversity within, theological schools. . . . Groups of faculty or students may have different views on theological education. Parts of the curriculum may embody approaches that are at odds with others. Various aspects of corporate life may send mixed or different signals. The traditions or even the mission statement of a school may be in tension with its present self-understanding or practice.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to offering practical guideposts for action, Banks says:

At present the debate seems midway between diagnosis and prescription. To move forward we need not only more conceptual breakthroughs but more concrete recommendations that open up our options. . . . It is important here to look not only at what is happening on the edges of mainstream theological education, whether in seminaries, Bible institutes, or

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.



lay programs, but also at what is happening outside seminaries altogether on the margins of Christian experiment. That is the place from which most innovative change comes.<sup>23</sup>

The future is already on the margins. Let us move closer to the center and look at challenges students face in theological education today. A growing number of mid-life persons is entering. While these older students have more ministry involvement, students now have a wider range of vocational choices. It must be recognized that many come with special skills/training and secular corporate experience, compatible with pastoral care and Christian education, and are highly suited for ministering to complex societal issues. Banks says that "it is precisely the church—or work-based experience of life and ministry—that such people bring with them as a strength into their theological training. This gives them a decided advantage over the previous generations of students who were predominantly young, mostly unmarried, and often came straight from college."<sup>24</sup>

Note further:

Though some begin formal theological education with a clear idea of what they wish to do, others come with little sense of direction. The proportion of students on the pastoral track, looking towards ordination, may be as few as one-third of the total body. A growing number of lay persons are attending seminaries, some heading towards church or parachurch work, others wishing to remain in the marketplace. Some surveys indicate that around two-fifths or more of those initially on the pastoral track ultimately end up in the same position.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 190.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 192.

In light of these research findings, the time has come to seriously look at changes and/or enhancements in the curriculum and the experience of theological education. Previous and current student admission surveys indicate that ITC's student body is comprised of doctors, lawyers, journalists, accountants, social workers, politicians, and community activists, to name a few. In order for ITC to carry out her mission of producing "public theologians," the curriculum and degree offerings must be enhanced to reflect the changing demographics among the student body. The establishment of joint degree programs such as a M.Div./M.A. in Economic/Community Development, a M.Div./M.A. in Criminal Justice, a M.Div./M.A. in Public Policy, a M.Div./M.A. in Urban Studies and a M.Div./M.A. in Media/Journalism would begin to address the needs of those not on the pastoral track but who will certainly make significant contributions to ministry.

Banks says another way to enhance the experience of theological education is to introduce more "collaborative courses between a teacher in any of the main theological fields and a practical theologian or reflective practitioner serving in a specific local setting. These would work best over semester-length courses where there is more time for feedback." For example:

- A course on the prophets involving an Old Testament professor and someone involved in urban ministry, in which teacher and students work directly with people in the neighborhood on issues raised by their study.
- An exegetical course involving a New Testament scholar and instructor in preaching, a course that has as its main assignment preparing, giving, and evaluating a relevant sermon in the student's home church.

- A course on the early expansion of Christianity in the early centuries led by a church history professor and a person founding a church, where the material studied throws light on the development of the congregation.
- A course on the person and work of Christ, co-taught by a systematic theologian and a professor of evangelism, in conjunction with a mission involving both them and their students.<sup>26</sup>

We should creatively utilize second-career students who bring a wealth of knowledge to the formal theological setting. According to Cram and Saunders,

The reigning models of theological education, and some proposals to reform it, do not build on this strength. We need to encourage more participatory approaches to learning, in which students become more like junior partners in the learning-doing enterprise, rather than just pupils. While they will continue to look to teachers for the 'big picture,' for knowledge and experience in particular areas, and as personal and vocational models of learning in action, they learn more when they are able to discuss and help shape what they are studying, when they process what they are learning in small groups, and when their learning interacts with their home, work, and neighborhood involvements. Along with leading their group into deeper understanding, teachers become more like theological consultants and educational facilitators. As a result, those around them move beyond an unhealthy dependence on experts and individualistic approaches to learning, and learn to integrate their knowledge more fully with the rest of their lives.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>27</sup>Ronald H. Cram and Stanley P. Saunders, "Feet Partly of Iron and Partly of Clay: Pedagogy and the Curriculum in Theological Education," *Theological Education* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 21-50.

Forty-five years ago God anointed Harry V. Richardson to bring the right players together in order to conceive and birth ITC. He and this group accomplished in a year what we have been struggling to do for a decade. He would not take "No" for an answer because he believed what God said in Jeremiah 29:11-14, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a future with hope. When you call on me I will hear you. If you seek me, you will find me. I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where you were in exile."<sup>28</sup>

Richardson raised the funds necessary to build most of what we see today from foundations, friends, and colleagues. He did this in 1955—Jim Crow was king, the Ku Klux Klan crosses burning boldly, no voting rights act yet passed, no multi-million dollar athletes, no Oprah Winfrey Show, no Bill and Camille Cosby donating \$20 million, no star-studded UNCF telethon, no Black Secretary of Education. Richardson did this at a time when the Black Church was not receiving well over two billion dollars a year in dues, donations, and charitable giving as in 2002.<sup>29</sup>

We cannot offer any more excuses for not becoming the world's premiere institution for theological study and reflection. The heat is on. We have no choice but to become a center of excellence committed to educating and training cutting-edge servant leaders for ministry globally. ITC may not have a peer in this arena with whom she will journey. She may face criticism and pressures by accrediting agencies and sister institutions to conform to the traditional standards of academia. So be it. It is time for ITC to step out front and lead the way.

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<sup>28</sup>Jeremiah 29:11-14 NRSV.

<sup>29</sup>Reed, foreword, 14.

Our new president, Michael A. Battle, positioning ITC on the “threshold of greatness,” is **leading the way**. As the school’s chief administrator, he is indeed *the* president “for such a time as this,” seeing our collective task to be the people of God—engaged in leadership development, academic discipline, and spiritual growth. In this process, he prays that God will use us as instruments of renewal, revival, and reconciliation.

“Hitting the ground running,” Dr. Battle quickly introduced his “Fifty Years and Counting: ITC Strategic Plan for 2004-2014” to the community. This initiative will move ITC beyond its fiftieth anniversary in 2008, expanding the reputation of the founding presidents who understood the necessity of ecumenical cooperation.

The plan is visionary. Six task forces, whose composition includes faculty, the Deans’ Council, students, staff, the community, and the Board of Trustees, will examine all aspects of ITC: institutional ethos, academic life, enrollment management and marketing, fiscal integrity, institutional advancement, and student services with a charge to analyze issues and develop strategic goals particular to each area.

ITC eagerly awaits the implementation of the strategic goals as formulated from each task force and approved by the Board of Trustees.\* There is little doubt that this strategic initiative will enable ITC to move from the “threshold of greatness” into another dimension—the articulation of that “greatness”: the proposition that interdenominational cooperation is “the model” for the church as a church, seeking to be an agent of social transfiguration and embracing the God of holistic liberation.

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\**Editor’s note:* The task forces met from October 2003 – March 2004 and presented their preliminary reports at two campus town hall meetings, April 7 and 14, 2004. As this issue of the *Journal* is readied for press, the first draft of the strategic goals was presented to the Board of Trustees on April 16, 2004.

### Conclusion

We have come full circle in our discussion: trials and triumphs of the past, stresses of the present, and promise and prognosis for the future. This writer firmly believes that the potential for ITC's revival, renewal, and reconciliation is firmly upon us. This does not mean, however, that our faith will not be challenged in unimaginable situations. Some are afraid of "the heat" (dissension, ridicule, confrontation, defeat). Our faith is under fire! Brothers and sisters at ITC are challenged to join God in the fire. Our faith and vision will not be consumed. Instead, our faith will be seen by the God of the oppressed and rewarded by the God of liberation who will come into our midst and make ITC the marvel of any theological community.