

By OSWALD P. BRONSON

An Historical Overview of The I.T.C.

This journal is one of several avenues through which the Interdenominational Theological Center invites the reader to tour the I.T.C. community. This tour will highlight important events in I.T.C.'s development, explore its present spiritual and academic sensitivities and suggest possible directions for the future.

WHENCE I.T.C. HAS COME

I.T.C. began as an idea and later a voice before foundations in search of funds to employ a panel of distinguished educators whose task would be to project this idea into a plan of operation. The I.T.C. plan was adopted by four denominations as a cooperative instrument for the theological education of their ministers (Gammon, Phillips, Morehouse, Turner). Following denominational endorsement, two Rockefeller foundations responded with grants. The I.T.C. plan represented the first time predominantly Black denominations developed a workable cooperative approach to theological education. It protected denominational identity in an interdenominational center and placed all matters pertaining to the academic life of the Center under the control of the faculty and the I.T.C. Board of Trustees. Seminarians were afforded the opportunity to attend classes in an interdenominational setting and engage in dialogue across denominational lines without losing their denominational affiliations. Perhaps of greatest significance, the I.T.C. plan provided a facility to enlarge and enhance the conveyance of the good news of the Christian faith to the sufferings and creative potentials of the Black community.

I.T.C.'s PRESENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

That I.T.C. is a growing, expanding, developing theological enterprise is evident in many ways. The enrollment continues to climb. The number of full participating denominations have increased from *four* to *seven* with two others maintaining programmatic relationships. Each denomination is making significant contribution through its Dean in terms of continuing education seminars, Scholar-in-Residence programs, lecture series, concerts, conferences, all of which feature outstanding personalities with vital experiences and information that enriches the total I.T.C. Increasingly, financial contributions are being made beyond basic fees toward programs that serve all I.T.C. students and faculty members.

The faculty's scholarly productivity reaches new milestones each year. Published book reviews and manuscripts are on the increase. Research in the various dimensions of the Black religious experiences

continues to enlighten the I.T.C. community with revelations that should prove profitable for the healing of the entire human community as well as a steady uplift for the oppressed in body, mind and spirit. New programs are being developed that make study and work in the I.T.C. a delightful experience for a growing number of persons. The above is possible because the faculty labors long, hard and creatively.

The students serve I.T.C. in faculty, trustee, denominational, and in inter-institutional meetings. Their presence is felt positively in the Atlanta University Center and in the Atlanta Theological Association both of which provide numerous educational resources for the overall strengthening of our academic program. Of increasing significance is the growing desire of our student body to provide a deep spiritual devotion and a firm theological base to our social involvements as evidenced in the student sponsored revival, Bible study and prayer groups that have occurred during the last several years.

The total staff of I.T.C., library, secretarial, maintenance, Dining Hall, domestic engineers, are expressing high esprit de corps and competence demonstrating their confidence in the mission of our theological community.

GOALS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

On April 24, 1973 the Trustees adopted a statement of purpose which will inform the future direction of I.T.C. The following excerpts from this purpose statement represent the key ideas:

... The Center, at this juncture in her historical existence, proclaims its intent to pursue the entire course of theological education from the perspective of the Christian faith, as this faith has been expressed in the Black witnessing community... Consciously affirming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Center now seeks to explore the theological motifs of liberation and reconciliation in their ultimate depth and to prepare Christian ministers and teachers to speak and act in that light.

The Trustees' decision to adopt the Atlanta University Center Plan of Organization makes available new resources which reinforce I.T.C.'s efforts to realize the above statement of purpose with greater effectiveness in the future. I.T.C.'s expanded involvement in that Atlanta University Center along with the Atlanta Theological Association provides a larger intellectual and faith community in which I.T.C.'s *raison d'être* can be constantly evaluated, updated and refined. Also, I.T.C. is under greater mandate to continue its contributions as the Center's chief communicator and interpreter of moral and spiritual values and in other ways that coordinated planning with the Chancellor and other institutional representatives of the Atlanta University Center may suggest.

Academic programs designed to train persons for graduate-professional ministry will remain central and of highest priority in the foreseeable future. Every effort therefore must be made to insure the centrality of basic degree programs including prior claim on I.T.C.'s finances for

faculty development and expansion, curriculum enrichment and innovation, endowed chairs in each division of our curriculum, better instructional salaries and benefits, and an enrollment goal of 300 to 500 degree students. Additionally, I.T.C.'s work in continuing education will be strengthened and enhanced, especially as funding permits. Increasingly, churchmen are eager to assist with the cost of their involvement and matriculation. We cannot afford to abandon the thousands of clergy and laity who depend upon I.T.C. for short term training programs and refresher courses.

New denominational participation in the future remains a strong possibility. Linkages with evolving African denominations as well as traditional religious bodies will be reviewed thoroughly. Several denominations are considering ways they may share their resources with I.T.C. These movements clearly indicate encouraging trends.

The achievement of the above goals is not without cost. This will require 75% increase in endowment funds as well as additional funds for the construction of two buildings and the expansion of our Dining Hall, student aid, faculty development, urban and rural ministries and improved salaries and benefits for all I.T.C. employees. Also funds will be needed for an expanded program of continuing education and the Black Religion Heritage Project.

A new and exciting day is dawning for I.T.C. It will bring challenges as well as pain that accompanies birth and growth. In the midst of these developments, trends and expectations, your president visualizes an I.T.C. achieving its highest potentials as a theological enterprise of ever expanding greatness and distinction.

