

By CHARLES SARGENT, ALJOSIE B. YARBOROUGH,  
MILTON C. FROYD and DANNY A. JOSLYN

## The Future of a Vision

*(The Story of ITC's Venture in Planning)*

ITC has embarked upon a year of institutional planning. More than that — it will be a venture involving all of its many constituencies, everyone having a stake in its future.

This is viewed as a move of major importance in the life of our school. It is a move that calls for heavy investment of time and energy from all who participate. It is a move that recognizes in the main that this will be asked not from people who have the time and energy to spare, but from the kind who are already over invested in many areas of significant concern. They will be people who consent to such participation not because they can afford the investment, but because they see the matter as of such importance that it warrants whatever arrangement in personal priorities this commitment may require.

ITC is not suffering from some serious illness that has suddenly overtaken it. To the contrary, the school is basically healthy and strong. But as someone put it, "You don't have to be sick to become better!"

In 1983 ITC will be celebrating its 25th Anniversary. The vision that gave it birth 17 years ago enabled the school not only to survive but to grow through one of the most convulsive periods of history. There is no accounting for ITC's survival power apart from this vision of what it had been created to become.

Our need now therefore is not for a new vision but for a fresh recovery of what has been there from the beginning. That vision will become buried in the past unless it is allowed to become the basis for an even more vital future. This vision is our legacy. The principle of a legacy can be handled in one or two ways — by living off it and spending it, or by investing it. With the former the capital will eventually disappear. With the latter its supporting power becomes reproduced in new forms for the long future. This is the time when there is need for deciding what to do about our legacy in the ITC vision — whether to live off it or to invest it.

In the light of that legacy, our taking out time for a careful look at who we are and where we are going is seen by many as one of the most important things ITC can do at this time. It could well be that the step from 1976 to 1983 (8 years) may prove to be a bigger stride than the step from 1958 to 1975 (17 years). Should that turn out to be so, it will be so only because the first step made possible the second.

Many developments in the life of the church, in the Center itself, and the world about us, have contributed to making this the *time* for

such a move. But the galvanizing of these developments into a growing core of concern came through the voice of our new President upon the occasion of his first public address after assuming office in January. In what was outwardly a mildly spoken statement he gave notice to a vision that sparked something in our midst that couldn't be stopped.

This seemed to be one of those rare situations of speaking the right word at the right time. What was there about what President Shockley had to say that packed the power it did? Basically because it gave new clarity and new horizon to a vision that was waiting for language to say it. This was not a new vision with which he was dealing. Rather it was an excitingly fresh opening up of a vision that had given birth to ITC in the first place.

A note of urgency came to be associated with this vision from the day it was first suggested in the chapel address back in January. That urgency gathered force when in February the President shared it even more fully in consultation with the entire ITC community — faculty, students, trustees, church and community leaders. From that time on excitement over the vision began to mount. Thereafter it was picked up and probed in a variety of ways — committees, conferences, research projects, brain-storming sessions.

A climax was reached when the matter was reported to the Board of Trustees at its April meeting. At that time a decision was made to authorize the President and his staff to move full steam ahead to flesh out the vision in a way that would involve participation of every segment of ITC's many constituencies. It called for a report of what had happened to this charge at its meeting next October.

This vision has to do with what a school can become when seven denominations get together to focus all energies having to do with education for ministry in one place and on a single Center for theological study.

This involved a measure of partnership between Church and Center for which there was no precedent. The planning design recognizes that as an ecumenical enterprise of this kind gets older the vision tends more and more to be taken for granted. And on this account the forces for staying put tend to become stronger than the forces pressing for movement to new levels of creative possibility. What is needed is a fresh commitment on the part of all constituting bodies to the vision that brought ITC into being in the first place. Not commitment to a vision in terms of what it meant then, but commitment to the vision in terms of what it must mean now. Whether or not a new sense of corporate commitment to the original vision becomes possible — determines the success of every other aspect of the planning process.

The temptation in institutional planning is to leave it up to the pros — faculty and administration. No matter how strongly it is intended to be otherwise, this is the way it generally winds up. Provision might be made for the participation of trustees, students, representatives

of church and community, but in subtle ways — despite all maneuvering to make it otherwise — that participation tends to become marginal. Sooner or later the participants begin to say, we are not really part of it. We are not being taken seriously. Or what is worse, we really have nothing to contribute.

When therefore we speak of the goal in planning as a product that belongs to each of us, belonging needs to be seen as something to which we are all committed. Hopefully this product, this vision of what ITC can become *now* and in the *years ahead*, becomes something for which each is willing to fight in the sense of each becoming dedicated to doing everything possible to help bring that vision to reality wherever his life touches a constituency upon which ITC and its future will have to depend.

