

A Response To Dr. Lincoln

It is a pleasure for me to share with my friends in theological education as I react to the address of Dr. C. Eric Lincoln.

Dr. Lincoln is prophetic in describing theological education with a clear understanding of the nature and work of God and at the same time a firm grasp on the nature and needs of persons to whom ministry is provided. His objective of theological education is competence—the treatment of education for ministry to develop those competencies which are required by the churches. One obvious area is the ability to interpret the black religious tradition. Such interpretation is impossible without knowing the tradition, the milieu to which it is interpreted and the various disciplines of interpreting. It is clear to Dr. Lincoln that such education is neither solely cognitive in orientation nor solely skill-orientation. What must be sought after is the development of critical judgments that can be used in analysis of problems and decisions regarding action—a critical judgment that is based on theory, on historical understanding, and on insight derived from both classical and contemporary fields of knowledge.

Theological education has been steeped in the abstract approach to truth through cataloging, defining, exegeting, and building systems. It has been short on examples, biography, historical analysis, supervision of liberating experiences, study of cases of oppression and simulation. What is needed is to move from the abstract to the incarnational, not because it is truer, but because in it the truth becomes real, formative, and active. Incarnational truth is experience oriented, existential, related to persons. Abstract truth may be derived from experience but often seems remote, distant, with little importance for persons. Dr. Lincoln did not make a plea for the rejection of the abstract approach but only for more emphasis on the incarnational so that the truth may be known and become a liberating and enabling force.

The Black church is the major repository of Black religious experience. It is the major source of collective and individual inspiration for Black achievement in secular as well as religious dimensions of the culture. In view of these facts, a Program of Black Culture and Religion has the following purposes:

1. To assist Black students in developing an effective combination of maturity, knowledge, skills, and professional identity, and thereby to

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serve the church as it leads Black people to liberation from racism, from powerlessness, and from socio-economic violence. In an academic, seminary situation liberation includes empowerment through mutual commitment and sharing by Blacks and whites. Blacks must be willing to organize and to discipline their contribution so that it can be integrated into established academic structures. Whites must be willing to delegate that part of seminary training which can best be done by Blacks.

2. To assist the President, Deans and Faculty in the academic areas of ITC programming by developing curriculum modules in Black culture and Black religion. Such modules will include cross-disciplinary studies designed to enable white and Black persons to understand their identities and their causal roles in the history of race relations in the West. Our aim here is to bring this behavior and its rationalizations under the judgment of Christian ethics in a Seminary setting. Another aim is to redirect the Christian missionary focus from foreign to domestic problems. It is a source of continual shame to the Christian church that a person who matriculates in a Seminary as a white racist is almost certain to graduate as a white racist.

Given the variations between individuals and situations, the curriculum modules will not simply consist of individual courses. Rather, each one will be conceived in terms of a constellation of objectives which will include skills, awarenesses, academic content and practical experience. Some modules will embrace sequences, of course, since some objectives cannot be approached without adequate background. Also, the Program will strongly endorse some means of encouraging *all* students to participate in the study of the Black experience. To secure these ends, curriculum modules will be offered which can be integrated with the relevant established disciplines in the entire spectrum of degree programs—including the ITC Atlanta University Ph.D. This latter provision will have the additional feature of enabling the church to provide direct inspiration for fully qualified Black academic leadership.

3. To provide an array of services. These will include consultation and interpretation in the working relationships between ITC, The Conference of U.M., A.M.E.Z., A.M.E., C.M.E. Conferences, and other Black denominations. Also included will be service to, and input from, the Black community in which ITC is situated. The Black community of Atlanta is unique in all the world. It is composed of successful Black scholar-educators, Black politicians, Black diplomats, and historic Black churches. Yet, surrounding this dramatic individual achievement, there are the Black masses-enmeshed in the incredible and almost irreversible poverty and violence of the ghetto. They, too, must benefit from ITC services.

A direction for ITC today is leadership in Black Church union. This must be a conclusion in Dr. Lincoln's lecture. Courses in "Ecumenics" are a constant reminder that the ecumenical movement must and does take seriously theological, historical, biblical and practical questions which are at the center of the churches' life in society. A goal of Black ecumenism is Black Church union.

An ecumenical theology from ITC conceived in the church event as an

ecumenical perspective and in an ecumenical setting, everything that is related to the whole task of the whole church to bring the gospel to the whole world as one mission of one church for one people. This may not be possible with the present structure of Deans and separate Boards.

ITC seeks to give students knowledge about other churches and about the history and present problems of the ecumenical movement and to involve them in the ecumenical dialogue and ecumenical action for union. One of the great obstacles in the ecumenical advance is the profound ignorance, even among graduates and graduate theological students, about the contemporary situation of other churches and about the achievement of earlier generations in the ecumenical movement for Church union.

I served as Dean of Hood Theological Seminary of the A.M.E.Z. Church during the early discussion of our participation in ITC. It was my question then and now of the separate existence of the Seminaries for Black Church union. ITC is destined for the leadership of Black Church union with one President, one Dean, one Faculty, and one Student Body.

We are seeking our share of professional ecumenists from ITC and trust the courses are designed for men and women in the ministry and for lay persons to learn what is needed to help local churches and local communities participate fully in the life of the ecumenical movement for Black Church union.

ITC can show that the whole of theological education must be penetrated by the ecumenical vision. Courses are necessary but I like to maintain that the teaching of every theological subject in this Seminary be in an ecumenical perspective.

The ecumenical dimension that is the most important one today is the case of putting Black consciousness in our ecumenical perspective. The justification for Black theology is based upon this need. The Black revolution with its emphasis on self awareness, the affirmation of our Blackness as a given fact of daily life, makes this demand urgent. We must discover the meaning which our Black experience can provide the ecumenical advance. This is the deep question of our existence as Black people.

The "Black Causus" movement and Black churches have created Black ecumenism and we must seek to arrive at self-identification and liberation through the ecumenical movement.