

Theological Education and Training and the Modern Rise of Distance Learning¹

Jack C. Whytock

The purpose of this paper is to present a philosophy of theological education and training through the use of distance learning. This will come at the conclusion of this paper. Before we come to this philosophy of theological education and distance learning we must explore three other areas by way of background. First, we must develop a common understanding of the language we will use; second, we must set forth the possible advantages and positive aspects of theological education by distance learning; and third, we must set forth the possible weaknesses of theological education by distance learning. This will lead us to our object – “towards” a philosophy of theological education and distance learning. I use here the word “towards”

¹ I would like to express my appreciation to several people who have interacted with me on this subject. In particular to the Faculty of Divinity, the Faculty of Education, and members of GUIDE (Glasgow University Initiative in Distance Education) of the University of Glasgow to whom I presented many of these ideas in December, 2001. Their questions and comments have been very helpful. Also to Clive Wright formerly of Farnham, England for an interview I conducted with him about his experiences in distance education through the Open University. The substance of this paper was given at a 2002 Haddington House Winter Lecture in Moncton, N.B. The questions which followed that lecture I have attempted to integrate into this paper. Last, a version of this paper was given at the Károlyi Gáspár Institute, Miskolc, Hungary in May, 2002. Each of these three venues has been very different – the first very much an academic setting; the second where “it” is actually practised; and the third, a context of trying to think through such matters for the future. I have appreciated comments which were generated following all three venues.

as I see within our own context we are still refining this, therefore, I want to leave the door open for ongoing discussion. Tonight I will set forth four areas in this lecture relating to the overall theme of theological education and the rise of distance learning.

I.) Setting Forth Some Terms

I begin by formulating definitions for key words used in this paper:

A) i) Theological Education: I define this term as those *formal studies* in theology or divinity conducted through disciplined pedagogical forms involving a systematic course of instruction. Thus, drawing out and developing mental or intellectual thought in the study of theology.

ii) Training: I define training as that *informal* development of the subject by way of application of the intellectual to the moral, spiritual, and pastoral life of the student.

B) The Modes Employed:

i) Formal Pedagogical Forms: Pedagogy is the science of how to teach/instruct and the modes employed. This varies immensely, eg. from the formal lecture, the seminar, the tutorial, written work, and examinations. All of these can be in a “classroom” or hall but also through distance education.

ii) Informal Training: will likewise vary immensely; eg. conducting meetings, attending meetings to observe, preaching critiques, debates, discipleship by mentoring, etc. Observation is often key here. In Presbyterian circles, a good example of this would be a student attending as an observer the courts of the church.

iii) Distance Education: is one pedagogical form employed in the science of education. By distance we

imply a certain remoteness, i.e., “Being at a distance” yet able to acquire a systematic course of instruction in a given field to develop mental or intellectual comprehension.

Technically speaking, in the world of theological education when we use this pedagogical form of distance learning it is distinct from a “correspondence programme”. There is some imprecision here but generally speaking “correspondence” implies virtually no interaction, other than mail only and it is more at a vocational level and is graded at a different level. Nevertheless, many individuals will continue to interchange the pedagogical terms. For our purposes and philosophically we will use the terms distance education and distance learning to describe that educational mode whereby a student learns “at a distance”. Thus correspondence implies what it says – correspondence only.²

II) The Advantages of Theological Education by Distance Learning

Some of these are obvious and others may be less obvious:

i) it allows for flexibility in that you can “study when and

² Toronto Baptist Seminary, Toronto, Ontario continues to use the term “correspondence courses” for its distance education courses. Most theological schools today would not use this terminology but restrict their language to distance learning or distance education. Some such as Potchefstroom use the terminology of “telematic” learning which certainly incorporates many ingredients of distance learning. Most schools use the words “distance learning”, for example, Reformed Theological Seminary, St. John’s College, Covenant Seminary, etc. Occasionally the term “open learning” is found. The conclusion is fairly clear for today: distance learning and distance education are the most preferred and precise words to use. Individual colleges then often adopt their own unique word or acronym to describe their distance education programme, for example virtual, access, or telematic.

where it is most convenient”; Most institutions which employ distance education will state this as their first advantage. It allows the student the ability to study at their own pace in their own environment;

ii) it allows a larger or broader range of students to become involved in serious, formal theological studies, eg. homemakers in rural communities, fishermen, elders, deacons, etc... Thus it certainly promotes life-long theological education and provides systematic study programmes so that greater depth of biblical, theological, historical and pastoral subjects can be studied beyond the normal church-life situation. Local church leadership whether Sunday School teachers or “lay” officers can access this kind of teaching and benefit from such. This can have a very positive impact and maintain a strong relationship between the church and the theological college or seminary. It is a continual reminder that the theological institution exists for the church not as a research graduate centre;

iii) it can be integrated with existing or current work if finances prohibit relocation, etc...;

iv) it allows someone who is exploring their “call” to commence some formal theological studies and the result may be confirmation one way or the other;

v) it allows someone currently labouring in a “ministry” to carry on if they cannot re-locate or leave that “ministry”. I think here of those with very little or no theological education or training;

vi) it allows the full-time Christian worker an opportunity to continue to be guided in select courses or areas which will strengthen their maturity as workers in God’s kingdom. Thus their education is broadened and continues as a continuing education programme with

minimal disruption; and

vii) distance education has tremendous potential for the mission context. This last point could have great implications in a nation or with a people group where the establishment of a full traditional “campus” approach is not possible. This model can be adapted to the mission scene very quickly, for example, with an emerging denomination where perhaps there are only one or two students to educate and train in any given year. Distance learning properly employed could be the way forward in this situation.

III.) The Weaknesses of Theological Education by Distance Learning

i) The chief weakness is what is known as the “*missed factor*” in all distance education; namely, the diminished level of interaction between instructor/student and student/student and in theological studies this can be critical. It is held commonly by Evangelicals that the academic study of theology must be conducted in a setting where there are godly teachers modeling the way of our Lord.³ Also, the student must be so engaged as to be able to effectively communicate. Distance learning certainly undercuts these two points because of the “*missing factor*” of interaction. Many of the greatest educationalists all emphasized “the importance of the

³ Joseph Pipa wrote: “With respect to distance education, we need to keep two cautions in mind. First, private, non-social learning is not the best way to train men for the ministry. The classroom environment is essential for the development of well-balanced ministers. Second, we need to use the Internet with great caution. I trust we have learned our lessons from the television that the medium does shape the message. The Internet is probably not the best place for serious intellectual pursuits.”

teacher as an agency in education”.⁴ This is a significant challenge;

ii) too much flexibility for some students who cannot function with self-discipline outside of a pedagogical hall environment;

iii) it is a matter of debate, but possibly a higher “drop out” rate occurs than with a conventional classroom environment. This is particularly the case with language courses, but it can also go beyond this;

iv) many students feel they are not able to judge where they are at in a group; that is, for the competitive this is true. How important this is in theological education we will leave for the moment;

v) the student has an *isolated feeling* (this can be related to weakness No. i, but it can certainly articulate distinctly one aspect of the “*missed factor*”);

vi) expanding on the “*missed factor*” is the idea that “enthusiasm for knowledge and learning” for many students comes from good instructors. Distance education has to overcome this factor – namely, the infusion of enthusiasm for a subject by the instructor;

vii) another “*missed factor*” is the student living at a distance may not have access to a working theological library;

viii) many argue that applying distance education to theological education undermines a clear purpose for the seminary to centre upon the education and training of candidates for the ministry. This mode of education

⁴ Elmer H. Wilds, *The Foundations of Modern Education* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936), p. 343.

brings in too many other “kinds” of student. Some would argue that it undermines the office of minister of Word and sacrament.⁵

IV.) Towards A Philosophy of Theological Education by Distance Learning

Here I want to not only interact with the advantages and weaknesses of theological education by distance learning but also draw upon experience and include this in setting forth a philosophy of such an educational mode.

I begin by dispelling a “*myth*” which may be in some of our minds; namely, distance education or learning is a new or recent educational pedagogical approach. Generally, most people will attribute it to a post-World War II phenomena and more pointedly to after the 1960's and 70's. In essence, I see this as a myth. *Prior to the mid-nineteenth century there were various pedagogical modes in operation for the theological education and training of Presbyterian students.* I will now briefly cite some.

In eighteenth century Scotland there were two main approaches used to educate theological students. All students followed an arts course in one of the universities *afterwhich they then entered one of the Divinity Halls within the universities or in one of the Dissenting Presbyterian Halls.* The length of session each year varied *from six weeks to up to six months.* Thus, we notice that the length of a session was not as long as we might think. Second, the fact is that even at these lengths of session, attendance was not always universal or consistent. Third, there was an incredible prescribed list of topics to present discourses on by the students and many of these were never done *within the Halls of Divinity.* Rather many of these were done before the Presbytery – on average 10 to 13 such assignments. The

⁵ See, D. G. Hart, “Overcoming the Schizophrenic Character of Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition” in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times* ed. Michael S. Horton (Wheaton, Il: Crossway, 2000), pp.111-130.

Presbytery would assign these at one meeting and expect the student to work “*on their own*” and prepare their discourse. Also, at the end of one session in the Hall the Professor would make assignments for what discourses the student would present the following session. Again, after six or eight weeks they would leave and work on their assignments, “*on their own*”, then come back and present them. During these times away from the Hall they did their assignments with Presbytery and taught school or served as a family tutor. This method has several of the marks of learning at a distance – working on your own, engaging in work to support yourself, and flexibility of schedule to a certain extent. Since neither University or Dissenting Hall awarded degrees or diplomas, the system placed final authority clearly in the hands of the Presbytery to say that the individual was now ready for licensure. It was not a “correspondence” course of studies, however, one cannot call it a full residential programme either. In conclusion, it was residency together with what we now call distance learning. This leads me to see that a modified distance learning has been used in theological education historically.⁶

My assertion is that distance learning is not incompatible with formal theological education and informal training. However, several requirements must be maintained alongside the use of distance education in theological education, and I offer four ingredients to a successful use of distance learning in theological education.

a) The “*missed factor*” of interaction in part can *be overcome* by mandatory residential periods. In the Dissenting Hall these were about six weeks in length. Shorter periods can be offered with the same effect since language requirements will be done also in residential programmes and other means of interaction are available today; for example, e-mail, telephone, plus efforts

⁶ See my thesis, J.C. Whytock, “The History and Development of Scottish Theological Education and Training, Kirk and Secession (c.1560-c.1850)” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2001).

should be made to provide other formal opportunities for interaction, such as these winter seminars or debates. Our *2003 Handbook* reads as follows:

For example mandatory Summer Schools are in place for the degree programmes and in the divinity degrees an overall percentage of courses taken must be in class. There are philosophical reasons for this such as: the need for students to interact, pray, work and fellowship together; opportunity for oral student assignments in class; homiletic critique sessions with Tutors, Professors and students; and observation of students.⁷

The “*missed factor*” with students is also overcome through these residential opportunities. Also, students are to be encouraged outside of these to interact with one another. I envisage the mandatory residential periods such as summer or winter schools to have daily devotional elements, extended opportunity for fellowship and conversation – to build a theological community – and to expose the student to solid lecturing through knowledgeable instructors walking with the Lord. From this must then follow fellow student interaction outside of the mandatory residential periods. These residential schools must include oral presentations in the classroom by the students and time to respond to peer questions. In homiletic workshops at such residential periods students must preach before their fellow students and before the whole faculty. Loving constructive critique must follow. This cannot be done by video, email or telephone – all must be together.

Next I would say we need to re-emphasize something past generations knew well – the art of debate and argumentation. I recommend special debating events with assigned teams and topics given out in advance. These need good direction. We are preparing students to lead churches, to evangelize and confront our culture. Seminary must give them tools to that end. I am not

⁷ *Haddington House Handbook, 2003, p.2.*

advocating a return to medieval disputations, I envisage something different.

I also believe the “*missed factor*” must be honestly met by the traditional seminary too. With the trend to “maturer” students commuting to class has not the older interactive model changed? At the risk of being subjective I must still ask – do all professors have a real passion to enrich their students with intense interaction? I went to seminary and well remember both positive and negative encounters in this regard. The so-called “traditional” model today does have need for certain methodological “overhalls”. Criticisms must not only be levelled against the employment of distance learning. Criticisms must be fair, given the vast changes we have seen in theological education over the last 150 years.

b) Distance education must by its very nature set forth exact common definitions and expectations for all student work. The student does not always have the luxury of *discussing assignments with a Professor in-depth*. Thus the use of a printed *STANDARDS* for all students, tutors and visiting professors is very important. While doing research into Protestant Scottish theological education I increasingly became aware that there were many affinities to distance learning as we now call it. Also the assignments were given and the assumption was that the student knew exactly what each assignment implied. My problem was to reconstruct the definitions for each of those assignments. Only rarely in the Scottish tradition would I find “hints” as to the exact nature of each assignment. This all forced me to conclude that working today with students from various ethnic, cultural, educational and ecclesiastical backgrounds forces the distance instructor to become very explicit in defining himself when it comes to assignments, etc. Thus, one remedy is to provide the distance student an extensive handbook or standards book covering all the terminology of the assignments. At Haddington House we issue this annually to all our students. I quote here now some of the terminology and definitions we employ:

BOOK SUMMARY: To make a summary presentation of the main themes and arguments of the book. The stress is not so much your opinion or reaction but to demonstrate that you have mastered the flow of argumentation of the book.

BOOK REVIEW: It highlights important parts or themes of the book without giving all details. It also expresses your personal opinion about a book's value or worth. Comparisons are sometimes made to other works. The information should be presented in an interesting and creative way. Opinions must be supported with thoughtful explanations and specific references.

ESSAY OR RESEARCH PAPER: This is the basic form of writing in academic areas. It is a piece of writing in which ideas on a single topic are presented, explained, argued or described in an interesting way. It will result from gathering, investigating, and organizing facts and thoughts on a topic.

ORAL AUDIO CASSETTE: not "winged;" prepare first, organize your thoughts, then make a cassette in a quiet room to ensure good listening quality. This could be in the form of a summary, a review or a teaching session.

EXEGESIS: This word comes from the Greek, meaning, "interpret". It is to draw forth the explanation or interpretation of the text of Scripture. It should be viewed in the light of a sacred undertaking.

SERMON CRITIQUE: Closely related to what is said above on the seminar. This will focus particularly on student sermons. Haddington House has developed a 10 point sermon critique sheet which the Professor will use during the sermon critique session. Students will freely participate in the discussion but will

conduct themselves in a manner which is in keeping with righteous discussion and edification.

EVALUATION of ESSAYS: In assessing student essays the marker will use the following as criteria: good analytical ability, knowledge of pertinent literature, evidence of independent critical thought (not repeating information from the lectures) and well crafted with clear logical argument and a good grasp of concepts.

EXAMINATION ASSESSMENTS: In assessing student examinations the marker will use the following criteria: good analytical ability, confident knowledge of the topic, good grasp of concepts, well-structured answers demonstrating clear and logical argument supported by evidence, clear knowledge of pertinent literature and not inaccurate or irrelevant to the questions and not displaying errors or omissions, and shows ability to organize thoughts.⁸

There must also be a certain fluidity here, for example, perhaps in the next volume there may be new terms added. Also, since essay writing is a major component of student work and the distance learner may come from a background where this was not common, the student may need guidance in this. Therefore, we must help the student ask and answer “Why Write An Essay?”, “How to Write an Essay” and with the actual “Writing” of the essay. In distance learning the student handbook thus takes upon an added dimension and this must be impressed upon student and tutor alike. The same can be said for documentation.

I would include here the fact that a distance student has to be made aware of finding adequate library resources at the beginning of their studies. This should be discussed with each student at the outset. Ideas here include helping the student

⁸ *Haddington House Handbook, 2003*, pp.36, 37.

uncover theological libraries near them; the use of the internet for searches and collections; attending Summer School to use the resources there; and, purchasing the books which are required for each course which are all designed to create a good working library in theology for a home library.

Here I would state that just handing things to all students to read is not enough. First, we today assume too much. Not all students come to study theology with the pre-requisites in place as in time past.⁹ Now we cannot turn a divinity programme into something which will try to overcome all such deficiencies. However, we can make one or two critically crafted lectures delivered at the right time to overcome many problems: for example, Spurgeon's lectures to his students on how to approach and use commentaries or Smith's chats to students on reading commentaries. Students do not always know how to read from the gems and may need help. This comment goes for seminaries employing distance learning just as it does for traditional residential seminaries/colleges. I would envisage about every three years doing two lectures on the topic of biblical interpreters, reading, and knowing how to build and use effectively a ministerial library. If this were done every three years it would reach all students passing through most of our programmes of study. I would not do it in week one – no, it should be mid-way during a year so that the students have had some initial exposure. I disagree with seminaries that believe such things can all be done the week before classes start! Students (most that is) are not ready at that point.¹⁰

⁹ Sharon Roberts and David Muir, *The Distance Learner: A Travel Guide for Christians Studying Theology* (Nottingham: St. John's Extension Studies, 2001), pp.24-34. Some students may need to be given help in reading. I have noticed this on more than one occasion. This is not just a distance learning issue!

¹⁰ I enjoy this quotation from Sire: "In its primary thrust reading directs thinking... When the text of a great work fully engages the mind, when the reader is so completely occupied with what is being read, the world of the text becomes the world of the reader."

Distance education must by necessity place great value in the textbooks employed. Comenius believed “in the value of the textbook as an agency of instruction”.¹¹ In distance education especially, utmost attention must be given to the proper selection and assigned usage of textbooks. If this is maintained there can be great blessing to the student.

If the educational institution works with a well formulated set of common definitions of assignments understood by all instructors and students this will greatly help the process. If the matter of pre-requisites has been properly addressed this will also aid the distance learner. Teaching on resources to use and how to approach them will also be important. Last, the selection of the correct textbooks must be given added attention. This will go “hand-in-hand” with well formulated syllabi that clearly give requirements in an orderly fashion, etc. Without an administrative control watching this whole process I believe the results could be disastrous. However, all of the above could equally be said for the non-distance delivered courses so we must practice fairness and not level this as really a fundamental weakness of this teaching mode. A properly balanced use of theological education and training which employs as one mode of its delivery distance learning could be a wonderful option for the small mission denomination. A well run “centre” with all the syllabi and course tapes, etc. could direct the operation employing suitable tutors for these distance education courses. Then combining this with the annual, bi-annual, or tri-annual “schools” has great potential for good. One key person employed

James W. Sire, *Habits of the Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), p.148. We should see such development from year one to year three or four in a student’s reading, writing, and argumentation. And to that end pedagogical forms should change accordingly.

Saul Bellow: “People can lose their lives in libraries. They ought to be warned.”

¹¹ Wilds, *Foundations of Modern Education*, p.342.

at the centre with perhaps a capable support assistant would be sufficient. Some would call this key person the Director of Distance Education, others may call him the Dean of Distance Studies. The title will vary, but without such a position it will become a “nightmare”. At the centre the library would be housed, rooms for sleeping provided, etc. I believe this may not be all that far removed from what our forefathers often did only we are combining some modern methods and tools which were unavailable to them.

c) As with the systematic study of subjects over a three or four year interval in a class setting there will be progress in student development to allow for changes in assignment patterns, etc., so this also is the case with doing theological education by distance learning. Foundational courses will require more direction and input and well produced audio or visual materials. The “voice” is a critical dimension. By year three, there will be a noticeable change. Perhaps all audio or visual materials will be gone, assignments will be different – gone will be book summaries, grading of lecture notes – now students have honed their abilities to be more reflective in their reading. Students will grow in independence through the years.

d) Distance learning and theological education continually bring together three Christian virtues; namely, self-discipline or the discipline of self, discernment and the glory of God (in our secular world we hear it more along the lines of self-motivation). The Christian pastorate is intimately linked to these three Christian virtues and visions. In essence, the world of the distance learner is not in methodology very far removed from that of a Christian pastor. (Please note I said in methodology not in function.) Discipline has in English the root word disciple and is also related to learning, studying, and being under tutelage. For growth to be made the disciple must also be self-disciplined. Students must develop scheduling within their studies undertaken at a distance. For example, students need to maintain contact with their course tutor. This is all too common a problem – the student who fails to maintain contact with their tutor. Also,

lateness by the student is the second major problem. In reviewing several distance learning educational providers I see that many have tried to address this. For example, Erskine Theological Seminary's, E.D.E.N. (Erskine's Distance Education Network) programme includes in their student literature a section "Steps to Course Completion" plus "Technical and Procedural Matters".¹² Distance learning must cultivate this. Certain things can be done to aid this such as developing reasonable schedules and by keeping the aims, purposes and goals in view: the glory of God, the serving of His people, the entering into "the call", and the development of one's own spiritual growth. Discernment is intimately related to these other two Christian virtues. Tutors must help the student to grow in discernment.

Before leaving this point on "Towards a Philosophy of Theological Education by Distance Learning" I want to make this recommendation to all administrators, instructors and trustees involved in the process. We need to be serious in studying this mode of education and availing ourselves of the opportunities and resources which are available on this mode of learning. However at this time it will mean stepping outside of our theological discipline. I say this because if we will only talk or read within this sphere we will find a small venue of people and publications. There are some there but not as large as it could be. I am not advocating membership in some of what follows but to read and study some of this to relate it in educational principle to what we might be doing. I list here four organized bodies that are worth our investigation:

- Open and Distance Learning Quality Council, U.K.;
- The Commonwealth of Learning;
- The European Association for Distance Learning; and
- The Center for Research in Distance Education (ASF) at the Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg.

I mention two or three things which have been helpful to me. In 1998 the Open and Distance Learning Quality Council adopted

¹² Erskine Theological Seminary, E.D.E.N., Fall, 2002 "Welcome to E.D.E.N."

standards in open and distance learning. Perhaps we could do our own self-study to see where we could improve as Christians striving for excellence in all ways by considering their standards with our practice? I have benefited from reading on occasion the newsletters of the European Association for Distance Learning. It was through this Association that I became acquainted with Börje Holmberg, described as the “dean of researchers” for distance learning. Holmberg’s latest book *Distance Education in Essence: An Overview of Theory and Practice in the early 21st Century* comes to us under the auspices of The Centre for Distance Education at the northern German, Oldenburg University.¹³ If we would seriously discuss the use of distance learning in theological education and training then we too will be “educated” in this mode of education. We too must be learners of the “craft”, if we want to move towards a philosophy of this subject. I maintain that this is a fundamental point.

Conclusion

I want to briefly comment on one of the charges leveled against distance learning and its use in theological education. The charge that distance education undermines the theological education and training of candidates for the ministry is a very serious charge. Yes, it can, but so can dead academia which has all the marks of conservative Reformed orthodoxy. We must live in our century and not emulate everything from the past. Where will we send elders or deacons or deaconesses (women who want to serve overseas doing nursing or TESL, etc.) to study? Should

¹³ Börje Holmberg, *Distance Education in Essence: An Overview of Theory and Practice in the early 21st Century* (Oldenburg University, 2001). I find the following quotation by Holmberg very helpful: “On the basis of my many years of experience... the most favourable factor paving the way for motivated students’ success and preventing dropout is empathy between the learning and teaching parties, availability of immediate support and advice when difficulties crop up, ease in consulting tutors and other subject specialists and general feelings of rapport.”, p.74. Another book which I have found very helpful is by Otto Peters, *Distance Education in Transition: New Trends and Challenges* (Oldenburg University, 2002).

we establish separate schools for them if they want to pursue good theological education and training? Is it wrong for a school of theology to provide education to teachers wanting a solid Christian foundation to teach at a Christian Day School? Also could we not help young Christians with a transition year between home and university providing an overview of theological studies and a Reformed worldview? I believe the answer for today is that the “seminary” can allow other students a place to study. We must not fall prey to the temptation to lower the Divinity student standards but just because a temptation exists does not mean we throw everything out. The internet has many temptations yet it can still be used well. The household of the faithful can be blessed through the use of distance learning and theological education. If anything the theological institution will become more the hand maiden of the local church or of mission work. I suspect the way homiletics is conducted through our Haddington House could be viewed as a very intimidating experience by many in the “traditional” seminaries. Therefore I challenge these charges.

We can move now from “towards a philosophy of distance learning and theological education” to developing actual models. I have included some specifics of our model at Haddington House School of Theology but each situation will have to develop its own model worked out from this common philosophy. I can see models on the mission field where there is a “common centre” with an able administrator and leader and tutor.¹⁴ Annual or bi-annual courses could be held here enabling the students to remain in these locations the remainder of the year. Between residential sessions these students can work at a distance through the co-ordinator of the centre. Now a whole host of modes of pedagogy will have to be explored. For example, will it include audio or video lectures, beyond printed syllabi, will e-mail of paper and examinations be used, will a

¹⁴ I think two models which could incorporate some of what I have just said: International Theological Education Ministries, Inc. (Training the shepherds in the countries of the former Soviet Block – www.christforrussia.org) or Carey School of Theology (Romania, South America, Asia – www.sentex.net/carey).

pool of qualified tutors be raised up specializing in particular courses, etc? Such models I believe are now being explored and implemented and will allow us to advance the historic Evangelical and Reformed faith to the world.

Throughout my fourth section “Towards A Philosophy of Theological Education by Distance Learning” I have attempted to interact with some of the possible weaknesses of employing distance learning in theological education. I believe many of these weaknesses can be overcome and are also a challenge to what many call the “traditional” residential theological seminary model. Yes, distance learning can be employed in theological education if the following five ingredients are met:

- (1) the “missed factor” must be overcome – critical to the world of theology;
- (2) clarity must be set-forth to tutor and student;
- (3) that all those involved in the process must be “students” of this pedagogy and understand the character, theory, and practice of distance learning;
- (4) as Comenius saw for children, so in theology, there must be natural developmental stages of learning, so the same in distance education when employed in theological education; and
- (5) the Christian virtues and vision of self-discipline, discernment, and the glory of God must be cultivated.

With a proper philosophy of distance learning and theological education the student may grow in the theological disciplines and, I believe, have their hearts and lives affected. I also believe that with a proper philosophy we do not need to diminish our standard that we want a well-trained ministry. The Scriptures certainly set before us the great importance of solid standards in this regard and I believe if much of the fourth point of this paper is followed the standard will not be just maintained but can aid this calling. The Reformers “all placed a great emphasis on education” in part because they were university men who had been blessed by the revival of learning in the Renaissance.¹⁵ So matters of education should also very much

¹⁵ Pipa, “Seminary Education”, p. 13.

concern us. Ministerial education and training is not a matter of indifference but of vital importance and we need to seriously study, discuss and pray about how we will engage in such.