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Welcome in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

I have in theory fifteen minutes, but the problem is I would need fifteen minutes for just bringing all the greetings I got coming here, and to say a little bit about my own relation to Increase and to theological education.

But I have to skip most of it!

Let me say very shortly it’s two things that bring me here:

Number one, I’ve been involved with TEE since its start in Latin America.

We started our version in Germany and my special topic all the time has been that we need to assure that the method we use, the tools we use are not mixed with the idea of quality.

Or otherwise I always criticized that certain very expensive ways of doing theological education then also were seen as much more qualified [of much higher quality]. You know if you buy a painting and its very, very expensive you start to find out why it’s such an important painting, but in reality, it’s just so important because it is so expensive. You know what I mean!

I’ve been involved in this TEE, but I have also been involved since 1983 when we started out ‘Train Asians in Asia’, and I’ve been a champion of the assuring that we train people where they live, where they are.

So we did a study to take my own background in Austria and Germany, Austria mainly a Catholic country, and the country did send Evangelical leaders over to theological institutions in Germany, which more or less all did not return. They sent double as many as the numbers of German missionaries sent to Austria to work there. And with our TEE programme we were able to change this. Keep the pastors in the churches, train them in Austria. And I recall when I came to Austria for the first time, this was in 2000, I asked, ‘How many of the leaders here were born in Austria?’ and we had 150 Evangelical leaders in the room and two showed up – because they were born in the country. And I’m very proud the last time I did this it was the other way around.

So, ‘Train Asians in Asia’ was just one version of this – its’ needed everywhere, and it’s very, very imrportant that we don’t’ take our best hopes, best leaders in the local leaders out of the churches. Wherever we sent them – they rarely will get back to the same place and can go on.

So, ‘Train Asians in Asia’ is a very, very old thing, and today, Asian Evangelical Theological Education is seen as much better than German Evangelical Theological Education.

Now as the Secretary General I’m obliged to start with the Bible Verse, otherwise I’m kicked out!

So I would like to look at Acts 6.1-7.

And because of the time I of course will not read the whole text – I hope you know the story from your own Bible devotions and because you have used it in teaching.

You know the situation. There was a problem to resolve!

It was a problem that had to do with ethnicity, with racism. The widows of a specific ethnic group did not get something to eat. And I want to compare this with the challenge that you have.

The specific thing the church has to do, the interesting thing is that the apostles managed to do two things at the same time. They institutionally guaranteed that this problem would be solved for ever. They did not go for a solution for tomorrow or for next week. They did not hand those widows something to eat, and say, ‘Okay, but please don’t’ disturb us next week!’

Institutionally, they organized: they asked for leaders filled with the Holy Spirit to once for all solve the problem, and this is what the church always does.

And I like to quote when I speak about TEE and many other things, I like to use a quote from Jesus – misusing it a little bit because he spoke about the Sabbath when he said, ‘Man has not been created for Sabbath, but Sabbath has been created for man.’ I use this for theological education: man has not been created for theological education, but theological education for man, that it’s not our task to take a person and squeeze him in a kind of theological education that we invented 500 years ago and don’t want to give up. It is us as the church to assure that everybody who wants to learn has a chance to learn in his environment.

And for some 18 years or 19 years old boys and girls a seminary is the best place to do this.

But if you are a drug addict and you become a Christian and you are 19 a seminary is not a good place, because you need a communion to live with to put this into practice.

So what is the result? I’m not going into the details. They assure, number one, the unity of the church. They cannot accept that a certain ethnic group in the church is not dealt the same way as everybody else. And with this, they assure that love (and love not in words but in deeds) stands at the centre of the church. The church never can look away if love is missing. And love is never a nice theory – love is not what politicians state in their speeches, what they want to do next – but it’s reality, it’s what we do. And they showed respect to people who otherwise were not respected.

Just by chance, when Increase chose for their golden thread, this is part of it – Unity, love and respect! And I read a little bit how long it took them. They should have just read the Bible and you would have had this in a minute!

No, no I’m joking of course. We have to go through it, we have to be aware of it. Unity, love and respect: the apostles were willing to invest a whole machinery, let me say it this way, of elected people, of having an election, looking for people filled with the Holy Spirit, called by the Holy Spirit to do this, but at the same time accepted by the church.

But the interesting thing is, why did the apostles not feed those widows themselves?

Because as you and I they only have 24 hours in a day, and no one can do everything!

They thought there is something that is – I hesitate to say, ‘more important’ but there is something that makes this unity, this love, this respect, the serving those widows that gives it the DNA. The apostles say, ‘We are very, very sorry, we believe that has to be done by the church, we are very sorry we cannot do it ourselves. Because we have to assure that we stay in prayer and the word of God.

The church is involved, and the World Evangelical Alliance and all its ministries, is involved in thousands of different ministries. But the DNA of it has to be to prove we depend totally on God. We are not just an NGO as many others serving widows. We are the church of Jesus Christ and this means we are in prayer, day and night. And some people forget that the top leaders in Christianity get their salary for prayer.

Yes. And if they do not pray any longer, you should cut their salary by half.

And the Word of God. It’s the Word of God that gives the authority to the Church here to serve the widows. Which gives you the authority to look where are the leaders that are in the churches that show the signs, that are the leaders already, or they will be the leaders in the future, and deserve a solid biblical training. But what sense does a sold biblical training make if at the same time we lose the Word of God as the thing? Then by definition it is no longer a Biblical training. It might be good management training, fundraising, there a lot of things that can be quite good.

So I like your golden thread, the three ones, – unity love and respect, prayerfulness and

focus on, faithfulness to God’s Word.

Now you all know that this is the wrong order, and yet it is the order of reality. This is what happened in Acts 6, and and this is what happens to you. The challenge is there, we get into the challenge, and then we have to remind ourselves why we produce love, unity and respect. Then we again have to remind ourselves how important prayer and the Word of God is, and without prayer and without the word of God we lose everything!

If you give me seven times 15 minutes I would be very happy to go through your seven pearl areas! [*These are indicated in italics below*]

I like them really!

I like them very much, and they are the practical outcome, they are now this ‘serving the widows’. What does love, unity and respect, prayerfulness and Word of God –mean in a specific ministry?

And of course it means *Building Good Relations*. The World Evangelical Alliance in 1836 started because of this very reason, that at that time hundreds and hundreds of Mission Agencies were duplicating things – Bible translation into one language by six different groups at the same time!

We need building relations, we need networking, we need to know what others are doing, we need to steal from others. the best ideas others have can help us in our situation.

And this is *Sharing Fruitful Practices* that can be extremely helpful, and by the way save you a lot of time. Because sometimes you listen to someone, you say, ‘Man! Why did I not have this idea? If I would have known this idea 5 years ago, I could have done much more!’

*Providing Resources and Training* – that is the widows again – it needs to be organised. Nothing in this world works that is not organised. As the World Evangelical Alliance, we have, we are, a huge family and family loves each other because it’s the family. But I can tell you, if this family does a wedding and it’s not well organised, people will not be there at the same time, everybody comes a different day and thinks today is the wedding and will find nothing!

[*Serving the diaspora*] We serve the church wherever it is.

We do not serve the church where we wish it to be, but where it is. I just come from Nepal where I got reports from seminaries in the remotest areas of this world, where you can for months of the year, you cannot do anything because everything is white.

And the same is true that we follow the church that is kicked out of many countries by persecution and we follow it to other countries. I want to assure that someone leaving his country and having to flee to the next one, everywhere, meets the church, for counselling but also for training. And TEE is avital instrument for it.

And *Build Partnership and Connections with other means of Theological Education*. Be reminded, no system of theological education in itself can reach all the people that need training. We have to follow them: young people old people in different ways, people that live totally in the digital world need different ways of training and I hope you get into this much more this is one of the seven pearls you have. [*Digital design and delivery*]

But we still have all other cultures, in which it is not only not digital, but you don’t have something in writing.

We follow the reality, wherever the church is we go and that often is the diaspora.

And please keep the whole world in view. [*Supporting new TEE initiatives*]. We easily can be so very busy that we miss sometimes very, very huge areas.

So I feel the note about India. We say India, I mean India is a continent in itself. India has more people, has three times as many people as Europe has, it has twenty times as many large ethnic groups and it has seven hundred times as many languages as Europe. An immense task and often it falls aside as we see it as one country, similar to China. We say, oh yes, one billion Han Chinese – one billion – incredible!

And we already mentioned the digital design.

So the seven pearls are the ‘widows’ so to speak. This is how to put into practice a specific challenge of the church.

And I deeply thankful to you on behalf of the World Evangelical Alliance that you take this specific challenge under prayer, under the Word of God, going for unity, love and respect.

But then this has to be organised, and the ‘Seven Pearls’ are about how to assure that this is not just a nice tradition, and we then have a conference where we praise what was 30 years ago, but there stays a living body because the problems of the widows change every day. You have solved the problems with the widows and the next one comes up!

I am deeply thankful that Increase and everybody involved in theological education is taking up this challenge. Even so, it’s not easy if you have solid experience with doing something for decades and you have to change it just because someone invented the cell phone or whatever!

But again, this is helping the widows, these are the practical steps that are needed. But they only make sense if they lead to unity, love and respect of the church, the global family of believers, and if prayerfulness and the Word of God stays as the governing thing above everything. If we no longer pray and if we no longer follow the Word of God, the WEA and all its ministries including Increase are just nice NGOs - and I bet that there are NGOs that can do things better.

They don’t have to say something, but they can sell it much better than we can.

Prayer and the Word of God make the difference.

Thank you very much.