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# MODELS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION YESTERDAY AND TODAY

*Henry Griffith*

Theological colleges and Bible schools abound in Africa. These institutions have grown to be the accepted model for the training of pastors and evangelists on the African continent. The purpose of this article is to trace briefly the history of leadership training, look at some contemporary models of theological education, and make some practical suggestions to help us improve what we are presently doing in our pastoral training schools in Africa.

**Leadership Training in the New Testament Era**

In the New Testament period there were no theological schools. The discipleship method was the primary means of training leaders. The disciples of Jesus learned by being with Him. Paul encouraged and taught Timothy as a father would his son. Ralph Covell and Peter Wagner describe this method as follows:

> Paul followed the apprentice method of Jesus in training a company of men who traveled with him. Carefully selected by him during his missionary journeys, these men were trained "on the job" in the truths of Scripture, and in the skills necessary for their ministry. [1]

**Models of Pastoral Training Down Through the History of the Church**

During the post-apostolic period catechetical schools were founded for training new converts. In Alexandria around 230 A.D. Origen upgraded one of these institutions founded by Clement to an advanced theological school. The curriculum of this institution included Bible, natural sciences, geometry, astronomy, philosophy, and ethics. This type of school was founded because the church was being attacked by philosophers and needed an educated clergy to provide a strong apologetic. [2]

Many of the clergy of the fourth to sixth centuries received their basic education in the ancient imperial schools of rhetoric where the main emphasis was on rhetoric and philosophy. In North Africa candidates for ordination were examined both in respect to their orthodoxy and their learning. [3] Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of the rural priests received nothing more than a very short and informal kind of training. This continued in many churches during the entire Middle Ages. [4]

During the Middle Ages there were at least three different means of training the clergy: (1) in monasteries, (2) under the supervision of a bishop ("the episcopal system"), and (3) informally in the home of priests. [5]

The monastery arose originally in response to invasions by the Goths, Franks, Visgoths, and Lombards who threatened to destroy the very fabric of classical civilisation. Priests took young boys into the monastery and trained them to be monks. The curriculum included reading, writing, Bible memorization, doctrine, and liturgy, with an emphasis on meditation, prayer, and manual labour. It was felt that this type of training was a means of escaping the pollution of the world and establishing a Christian culture. [6]

The second type of training during the Middle Ages was the episcopal system, also called "cathedral schools" in which a group of students gathered around a bishop to receive training in church dogma, liturgy, and common law. At an earlier time general education was received through the ordinary Roman schools of the day. When the Roman system of education was destroyed by the barbarian invasions, the cathedral schools, along with the monastaries, assumed the responsibility of providing this kind of general education. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries these schools became the first universities of Europe. Their primary purpose was the teaching of theology. [7]

At the time of the Reformation, Luther was a professor of theology in one of these universities though not one of the earliest ones. The Reformation brought with it a change in the training of the clergy with more emphasis on preaching and the study of Scriptures as can be seen in the academy founded by Calvin in Geneva. [8]

Protestant pastors in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries received one of two types of education – either a university education with a strong emphasis on Hebrew and Greek, or an informal training which in England included study of the Bible and a book of sermons entitled Bullinger's Decades.

In 18th century England we see the emergence of a noteworthy form of informal training – that of John Wesley. His circuit riders were extremely busy in their itinerant ministry so Wesley prepared a collection of Christian literature to be studied and sold by these preachers. They were expected to give eight hours to sleeping, eight hours to study, prayer, and meditation, and eight hours to preaching, visitation, and social work. [9]

In colonial America Harvard and other colleges were originally begun primarily as a means of pastoral training. Ministerial candidates would get their basic general education at college and then do an apprenticeship with an established clergyman to learn the role of a pastor. [10]

A church log from a small New England parish reveals that two pastors who served that church for a span of a hundred years continually had students living with them studying Greek and Hebrew to catch a vision of the work of a pastor. The pay of these colonial pastor/supervisors was by the General Court of Massachusetts and included twelve pounds of sterling, two barrels of cider, and ten cords of wood. [11]

The Great Awakening in America during the 1730's and 40's produced the emergence of "log colleges" or academies beginning with William Tennet's Log College in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, around 1735. Two or three ministers were trained per year. [12] Sixty–five Presbyterian academies were founded between 1735 and the end of the century. [13]

The alternative to college study was especially important in the sparsely settled regions of western Virginia, the Carolinas, and what would become Tennessee. This system of training Presbyterian pastors was a carefully organized program of "reading divinity", administered by the presbyteries which would eventually examine the candidate for ordination. The curriculum was heavy on the academic subjects – with reading in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, ontology, pneumatics, astronomy, and the various branches of theology. [14]

The Methodist system of pastoral training on the frontier was less academic and patterned after Wesley's system of in–service training. The Methodist preachers were expected to read assigned books five hours a day. [15] Baptists, especially in the American South, ordained the most gifted person in the congregation who then continued in his secular vocation (i.e. tent–making). [16] It should be noted that partially because of these flexible ministerial patterns the Southern Baptists and Methodists, not the Congregationalists or the Presbyterians, became the largest denominations in the United States of America. [17]

We have seen that early pastors in America were usually trained either in a combination college–apprenticeship program or an informal system of on the job training. How then did today's system of three year seminaries arise in the United States? George I. Hunter explains it as follows:

> A desire of independance from the old world, a change in the focus and constituencies of colonial colleges, a growing need for ministers, and the emergence of theological divisions and conflicts led to the establishment of theological seminaries, a development which occured largely during the 19th century, although the first theological seminary was founded in 1784 ( a Dutch Reformed seminary at Flatbush, Long Island, New York). [18]

Although in Europe many pastors still receive their theological education in the university, today in America four years of humanities and three years of seminary has become the norm of excellence for ministerial preparation. Some pastors in America receive their training in a three or four year Bible institute or Bible college. This movement became popular in America especially in the early 20th century because of liberalism in the seminaries.

Protestant missionaries from America have taken the two recent models of pastoral training in America, the seminary and the Bible college as the norm of excellence for pastoral training often without trying to fit them to the situation in the foreign country. At the Tambaram Council in 1938 theological education was seen as the weakest area of the missionary enterprise. After World War II several studies were carried out on theological education in the third world, and in 1957–58 the Theological Education Fund was established to correct some of the weaknesses seen in the exported models. [19] This program was carried out in three mandates. The First Mandate (1958–1964) had as its goal to strengthen the academic quality of theological education in the third world. The Second Mandate was a search for a relevant theology, and the Third Mandate emphasized the need for a contextualized theological education. [20]

**Indigenous Models of Pastoral Training in the Third World Today**

Among the most notable forms of Christianity that exist to a large extent apart from missionary direction and influence are the independent churches of Africa and the Pentecostals of Latin America. Let us look at how some of these groups train their pastors.

The South African Zionist churches began in 1921. Most of the founders never had formal training. Today leaders are developed by the following means. As soon as a person joins the church, he is regarded as a trainee. He is taught the doctrine of his church and expected to watch and imitate the lives of others in the group. Real training takes place in the evening services. Here younger Christians preach first and older ones follow during which they point out the mistakes made by the younger Christians as well as suggest good methods of preaching. "It is only after the leadership is satisfied with one's ability, conduct, and loyalty to the church that he is assigned to a specific task like being in charge of a congregation." [21]

Many Pentecostals in Latin America have a form of in–service training that is even more intensive than that of the African Zionists. The training of pastors among Chilean Pentecostals, studied by Christian Lalive D'Epinay, is most interesting. The potential pastor is not trained in a seminary but "in the streets". He must climb the rungs of the hierarchical ladder one by one. Lalive D'Epinay names the following stages: preacher in the streets, Sunday School teacher, preacher, church planter, pastor–deacon (first real pastoral grade), and fulltime pastor. [22]

Roger Greenway describes a similar system in Mexico in which six competencies" are required before a man can be ordained and become a full time

salaried pastor. The competencies are: (1) street evangelism (2) jail ministries (3) church planting (4) assistantship to an older pastor during which time he is tutored in doctrine, Bible interpretation, and preaching (5) Scripture and doctrine – the candidate must pass a two–day examination before a group of pastors and preach acceptably on several texts (6) trial pastorate – he is assigned to a small church for a year. After a year the church is asked if they want him as their pastor. Only after this is affirmed can he be ordained. [23]

Greenway sees this to be a good model because pastors are "trained from the ground up" in evangelism and because the system is "pedagogically sound". Greenway points out the strong points of this model: (1) Cognitive imput – there is an exam on Bible doctrine and Biblical interpretation. There is also a week long pastoral refresher retreat every six months. (2) Observation of the mentor's action and discussion of his personal performance, – apprenticeship, and feedback. (3) Practice by the intern with the mentor observing. (4) Discussion of the intern's performance – his work is continually reviewed and evaluated. (5) The intern carries on with the mentor absent at the church planting stage and trial pastorate stage. (6) Discussion of the intern's performance – the whole congregation must decide whether it wants to call and support the trial pastor after a twelve month period.

(7) The mentor occasionally attends the intern's church and critiques the intern as he begins to teach another person to carry on after he leaves. [24]

**Theological Education by Extension**

Probably the most well known alternative model of pastoral training is theological education by extension (TEE) first used in Guatemala in the 1960s. TEE is described by Kenneth Mulholland as a field based approach which does not interrupt the leader's involvement in the ministry. Instead of the student coming to the seminary, the seminary goes to the student. This style of pastoral training reaches the real leaders of the local congregations, thus enabling them to develop their gifts and ministries without leaving their place of service. [25]

Walter Gammage sees the TEE system to be good in that it can:

(1) reach large numbers, (2) can reach mature family men who cannot attend a resident school, (3) be adaptable to different educational levels and cultural groups, (4) be suitable for part time, tent making ministers, (5) provide for greater mobility in student enrollment, (6) cost less per student, (7) be well adapted to provide in–service theological education, and (8) use better educational methods such as programmed instruction and group discussion rather than lecture. [26]

Gammage also points out some of the weaknesses in this model of pastoral training. Theological Education by Extension (1) requires a much longer period than a resident school; though pedagogically sound, this fact is sometimes inconvenient for students; (2) is not well suited to research because of the lack of a library; (3) lacks suitable texts; (4) is difficult to teach homiletics and other practical courses that call for the evaluation of behavioral skills because of the

limited class hours; (5) reduces opportunity for spiritual formation because of lack of community; (6) is sometimes the object of prejudice, especially on the part of certain pastors who have completed a resident school and believe that form of education to be superior. [27]

**Other Current Models of Theological Education**

We will now look briefly at other models of theological education. In the communal model the emphasis is placed on living together as part of a family. L'Abri in Switzerland, with its emphasis on living and learning together, is an example of this model. In this model study is largely individualized which allows for students to come and go at different times. Great emphasis is placed on life modeling between the teacher and the student. [28]

Another model is the evangelistic model which places emphasis on the strategic location of the centers and is usually directed to the university student. The setting encourages the student to drop in at his own convenience. The curriculum is designed for the free flow of ideas. The faculty is highly mobile and comes from established educational institutions for short courses. This permits the program to be accredited rather easily. [29]

The apprentice model focuses on the pastoral role. The church becomes the context in which theological understanding and pastoral practice occurs. The purpose is to keep these two aspects in a dialectical relationship to each other. There is also close supervision of the study by the elders of the church throughout this program. [30]

In Africa other models of leadership training have been tried. A common type of pastoral training has been short term institutes, which run from one week to three months. These are especially popular for training rural church membership and leadership. A short term institute has a number of advantages over a resident school. The students can stay at home during this program, or at least they are not away from home very long. The students are usually leaders in their congregations. The local churches assume clearly defined responsibility. The students are not forced to obtain more in that short time than they can put to practice. The short term institute has, however, the disadvantage of not being workable for urban tent making pastors who cannot leave their jobs. [31] In addition this system is usually more suitable as a means of continuing education than as a means of pastoral training.

Paul Long describes a modification of this system which is used to prepare mature leaders for pastoral ministry. This program sponsored by the Campinas Seminary in Brazil consists of one month in seminary, eleven months of guided studies at home, and one more month of resident studies. It is a shorter program than the regular seminary, and it requires no Greek nor Hebrew. Most of the graduates of this program, according to Long, are now serving as missionaries in the interior of Brazil. [32]

Correspondence courses have also been used for some time as a means of

leadership training. They are inexpensive to the user and are sometimes the only method of training available to those who are isolated. Correspondence courses help students develop good study habits and are an effective means of continuing education. There is no danger of students in a correspondence program becoming isolated from the church nor the world. [33] Several weaknesses in a correspondence program include no face to face contact with the teacher, and a high attrition rate especially where there is poor reading ability, [34] delayed feedback, and the extremely high motivation needed for a correspondence course to be successful. Immediate relevancy is difficult to obtain, and the courses are usually not contextualized. [35]

Interestingly a number of seminaries in the United States have developed in recent years correspondence programs or "individualized study programs" often using cassette tapes so that a student can progress at a speed commensurate with his or her background, ability, and maturity. Resources available to the student are personal counseling by his faculty advisor, a syllabus of courses, projects, seminars, specimens of the qualifying examinations, and a clear statement of the faculty expectations for student achievement. No student follows exactly the same route in reaching his goal. After completing his qualifying examinations the student is aided in structuring an individualized program of studies at a more advanced level. Here again his work is personal in terms of achievement, his interests, and his needs in present and future ministry. The content of the curriculum and the form of his study program are highly functional. [36]

In cities another popular form of leadership training is the night Bible school. According to Mulholland, there are three hundred evening Bible schools in Latin America alone. These schools allow tent making pastors and other church leaders who work during the day to take advantage of Biblical training. They are generally characterized, writes Mulholland, by conservative theology, an emphasis on practical courses, and an atmosphere of sacrificial dedication. They are more often independent of foreign funds and control than seminaries. Though they sometimes lack well qualified teachers and materials, they are meeting real needs especially in the cities of Latin America. [37]

Their counterpart in Africa is day Bible schools. In Africa Bible schools are often located in village areas and thus do not dislocate the students from their village culture and economic level. They stress evangelistic and spiritual concerns and the content of the Bible. They are more indigenous than seminaries and perhaps more accepted by the churches. Although their academic level is low, Bible schools are meeting a vital need in the third world church. [38]

**Suggestions for improving our pastoral training schools in Africa**

Certainly many theological institutions here in Africa need strengthening by improving the faculty, the curriculum, the library, and the facilities. Let us not forget, however, that our goal in theological education is to equip our students for ministry. Qualifications for ministry lie in three basic areas: (1) character, (2) skills, and (3) knowledge. A Christian leader must possess Godly character; he must have certain skills to tend the flock, teach, and counsel; and he must know

God and His Word. How can we improve our schools by helping students grow in the first two areas -- character and skills? I believe that we need to build into our programs more one to one discipling situations between the teachers and students. This can best be done during evangelism trips away from the campus, but times set aside for prayer and discussion can also be important. So often theological education is simply imparting content rather than training men and women of God that they may grow in grace and develop their spiritual gifts for ministry within the Body of Christ.

I also see the need to have *supervised* field education for students in every level of theological schools. In addition there needs to be more continuing education for graduates of these schools. In stressing pastoral training let us not forget the importance of lay training in Africa. We need to be working to reduce not widen the gap between clergy and laity.

Quality theological colleges for training men and women at a high level are of vital importance to the growth, maturity, and theological purity of the Church in Africa. We should not forget, however, that throughout the history of the Christian Church there have been many other legitimate models of theological education. We should not place undue importance on a theological college degree as the ideal qualification for Christian ministry. Rather we should respect and work together with our brethren who have not had the opportunity of theological education at this level. Over the years God has used mightily His servants trained in many different ways.

**Notes**

[1] Ralph R. Covell and C. Peter Wagner, *An Extension Seminary* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1971), p. 53.

[2] *Ibid*

[3] F.W.B. Bullock, *A History of Training of the Church of England in England and Wales from 1598 to 1799* (St. Leonards–on–the–Sea, England: Budd and Gillatt, 1969), p. 1.

[4] James H. Emery, "Preparation of Leadership for the Pastoral Ministry, "*Extension Seminary*, 1976, no. 4, p. 4.

[5] Bullock, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[6] Covell and Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

[9] F. Ross Kinsler, *The Extension Movement in Theological Education: A Call to the Renewal of the Ministry* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1978), p. 9.

[10] Covell and Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[11] George I. Hunter, *Theological Field Education* (Newton Centre, MA: the Boston Theological Institute, 1977), p. 1.

[12] James W. Fraser, "The Great Awakening and New Patterns of Presbyterian Theological Education." *Journal of Presbyterian History*, Fall, 1982, vol. 60, no. 3, pp. 189–191.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[15] Kenneth Mulholland, *Adventures in Training the Ministry* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), p. 7.

[16] *Ibid.*,p. 193.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[18] Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[19] Harvie M. Conn, "Theological Education and the Search for Excellence." *Westminster Theological Journal,* 1979, vol. LXI, no. 2, p. 311.

[20] Christine Linenemann-Perrin, *Training for a Relevant Ministry: A Study of the Theological Fund* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1981), p. 230.

[21] Peter M. Makamba, "African Independent Churches and TEE." *International Review of Missions,* April 1982, vol. 61, p. 282.

[22] Christian Lalive D'Epinay, "The Training of Pastors and Theological Education: The Case of Chile." *International Review of Missions,* April 1967, vol. 56, pp. 188-189.

[23] Roger Greenway, "Don't Be an Urban Missionary Unless ... ." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly,* April 1983, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 89-90.

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 90.

[25] Mulholland, *op. cit.,* p. 66.

[26] Albert Walter Gammage, *Principles Related to Theological Education in a Foreign Missions Context,* unpublished Th.D. dissertation (Fort Worth, TX: Southwester Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972), pp. 100-105.

[27] *Ibid.,* pp. 96-100.

[28] Samuel F. Rowen, *Curriculum Foundations, Experiences, and Outcomes: A Participatory Case Study in Theological Education,* unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1981), p. 99.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] p. 100.

[31] Mulholland, *op. cit.,* pp. 58-59.

[32] Paul Brown Long, *Disciple the Nations: Training Brazilians for Inter-Cultural Mission,* unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1981), p. 300.

[33] Gammage, *op. cit., pp. 106-107.*

[34] *Ibid.,* pp. 105-106.

[35] Mulholland, *op. cit.,* pp. 55-57.

[36] Covell and Wagner, *op. cit.,* p. 59.

[37] Mulholland, *op. cit.,* pp. 59-61.

[88] Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 84.