

MANILA TOPIC '99 REPORT;

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD WITH THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TO REACH AT LEAST TWO MILLION UNTRAINED PASTORS IN ECONOMICALLY WEAKER AREAS OF THE WORLD ***Dr. Flip Buys***

A vast world-wide need revealed

From 22-25 March, 1999 I had the privilege to attend an international consultation in Manila, in the Philippines, on the training of pastors for churches in the economical weaker countries of the world. There were representatives of at least 80 training institutions from 50 countries around the world.

Reports were given of astonishing growth in numbers of Christian churches in Africa, Asia, South America and countries that were formerly behind the so-called iron curtain. This growth has occurred so rapidly that formal training institutions like universities and seminaries will never be able to train enough pastors to shepherd these churches. Studies have shown that there are at least two million preachers preaching on pulpits in these countries every Sunday who have never had any theological training whatsoever.

In many African countries churches have an average of only one trained pastor for every 20 churches. One pastor from Uganda, sitting next to me, told us that his denomination has 1000 congregations but only 8 trained pastors. Another one from the Evangelical Christian Church in Zambia told us that his denomination has got 675 churches with only 31 trained pastors. We were told that since 1973, 29 000 new Christian churches have been planted in the Philippines and they expect another 16 000 to be planted before the year 2001. All the formal seminaries and training institutions in their whole country can never train even 5% of the needed pastors for these churches.

One Chinese pastor from the People's Republic of China told us of the phenomenal growth of the "house" churches in their country in spite of ongoing persecution. In many of these churches the pastor will just throw his Bible to his congregation when he is arrested and the person who catches it automatically becomes the next pastor. In some places teenage girls are appointed as pastors because they are the only literate people with Bibles, who can also read it. This pastor told us that he is presently running a program of training 20 000 Chinese pastors for these house churches.

Some people say that in some of these countries the church is growing itself to death! The structures simply cannot cope. The structural growth lags behind and the provision of adequate leadership isn't keeping pace with the influx of people into the church. There is a vast lack of the most basic Bible knowledge as well as basic Christian doctrines amongst church members and even their untrained leaders.

Reports were given of pastors in African Churches who say that the commemoration of the ascension of Christ is a sad day, because on that day Christ left us behind alone. Other pastors did not even know that Christ will be returning for the final judgment. Millions of African Christians still have the idea that Christ needs the assistance of ancestral spirits to bring real reconciliation with God. It was said (jokingly) that in many African churches the less the pastor has been trained the more times he would shout "hallelujah" while he is preaching. The weaker his argument is, the louder is the "hallelujah!" The real result of this lack of basically trained pastors is nominality, heresies and syncretism. The difference between the church and the world just fades away. Instead of helping communities to find solutions for problems of poverty, aids, unemployment, political and ethnic strife and violence through relevant teaching and preaching of the Word of God, the church and the Christians just become part of the problem. More and more effort is required to backtrack and to try to correct wrong ideas of what it means to be Christians. Instead of the church being a power for the evangelization of continents, it has become just another drainage of energy and manpower in several countries.

World-wide there is a growing conviction that theological education should now be the highest priority in all mission work in fulfilment of the second part of the great commission of Matthew 28:19: ... go and make disciples of all nations, ... **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**

The whole consultation wrestled with one question: **How can training institutions world- wide, co-operate to accelerate both the number of pastoral leaders being trained as well as the rate of training** so that not only church growth, but also church health may be accomplished?

The greatest need in economically weaker countries

The greatest need for the training of more pastors exists in the countries with weaker economies like Africa, Asia and South America where people on average earn 14 times less in salaries than in Europe and North America. The same holds true for the former deprived communities in South Africa.

At the moment formal theological educational institutions like universities and seminaries provide in less than 10% of the need for trained pastors. The other 80 - 90% will only be reached through new innovative ways of distance education

The most important reason why formal theological education is not feasible for people from the weaker economical parts of the world is because they do not have the finances or meet the necessary entrance qualifications.

Another reason is that many traditional formal theological institutions do not have a real vision for missions and produce pastors who are just inward looking and therefore produce self-centered ingrown churches.

On the other hand, many examples were given of how a totally new and different approach to theological education in some parts of the world has eventually changed churches and denominations from dying churches into dynamic evangelizing churches that are growing in numbers as well as in spiritual depth.

Solutions that are already providing good results in several places in the world

The overriding insight which came through in many of the discussions at this consultation is that **non-formal decentralized theological education** is the most important answer to the problem of the vast world wide need for the training of more pastors in our time.

Non formal theological education involves that a basic core curriculum is put together and taught as in service or on the job training programs by existing pastors to small groups of students in church buildings or homes. Some fast growing churches in Asia even say that every local church should be a training institution where new pastors are trained. The benefits of this kind of non-formal training of pastors are the following:

- It costs about 20 times less than formal theological training. There are no costs on expensive buildings, high salaries of highly academically trained professors, boarding and lodging of students (and their families) and travelling costs of theological students.
- Students can do much needed ministry in local churches while they are busy with training. In this way they also learn a lot from the practical example of their lecturer / mentor, while they are involved in the work of ministry and evangelism with him.
- The problem of pastors, who have completed high academical qualifications and are now just too expensive for churches, is also solved.
- Non formal training reaches those leaders who are already accepted and acknowledged as leaders in a community and have a real sense of calling to minister the gospel to their own communities. Pastors who have had a full-time formal theological education at a far away university or seminary often encounter the problem that they enter a community in which they are not accepted (at least initially but sometimes permanently) as real leaders. High academic qualifications that have been obtained through full time theological education as such, are no guarantees that the leadership "status", which a leader needs to function well, is a given in a

less developed community. Precisely because of this factor, world-wide research of the functioning of leaders in economically weaker communities has proved a tragic fact that academically highly trained pastors quite often become failures in practical ministry and backslide into immoral and corrupt practices. The majority of highly trained pastors often do not really want to serve their own churches or communities but do everything in their power to find "higher" jobs with better salaries. This seldom happens with leaders who have been trained through non-formal in service training programs. They are generally more committed to practical ministry and church growth and have a deeper sense of calling.

- Because of the educational fact that the best learning takes place when a person is teaching as well, existing pastors who are involved in non-formal theological training of other pastors, are actually involved in a program of continuous training themselves, which keeps their own ministry fresh and dynamic.
- Non-formal in service training of pastors provides unique opportunities for the personal guidance (mentoring) of students by their "lecturer". In this way the spirituality and forming of the character of the student receives much more attention than it usually does at formal theological institutions.
- Non-formal in service theological training tremendously increases the number of lecturers and training opportunities.
- Students are not torn away from their cultural context as it so often happens in formal theological training. In formal theological training, students - after several years of adapting to a completely different cultural context - often become so detached from their own people that they cannot communicate on a real deep level with their own people any more.
- This model of training comes much closer to the churches, because the student usually in his ministry applies the things he has learnt. Several of the training courses which have already been designed for this kind of training of pastors have been designed in such a way that the student should immediately (sometimes as part of his exams) go and teach it to the people to whom he is ministering.
- With this training model, churches are much more directly involved in the training of pastors than with formal theological training at a seminary.
- This model of training resembles much closely the model which Jesus himself used in the training of the disciples and is also more in line with 2 Timothy 2:2 *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

Both Formal and non-Formal training is needed and should strengthen and enhance each other

In the discussions a clear consensus grew that formal and non-formal theological training of pastors should never be seen as opposing each other. Both models are still needed and should rather be seen as two sides of a coin. These models should rather be seen as ways to mutually assist, strengthen, extend and amplify in the following ways:

- Non-formal training can make the results of formal academic training and research available to people and communities who would otherwise never have had access to these.
- Formal theological education can provide more training to lecturers of non-formal training programs.
- Non-formal theological training comes closer to the needs at grassroots level and in such a way makes a much needed contribution to the contextualization of formal theological education to assure that formal theological training programs do not become sterile and irrelevant.
- Non-formal training programs can be of great value to broaden the perspectives of formal theological training programs.
- Non-formal training programs may provide a good "sifting" mechanism to identify students with gifts and talents who can be assisted to enrol for graduate and postgraduate studies.

- Formal theological training programs usually have more time and facilities available and are in a better position to do in-depth research on issues which are relevant for the church and the kingdom of God at large.
- Formal theological training programs may fulfil a much-needed monitoring need in the continuous evaluation of the academic standards and theological foundations of non-formal training programs

How should all this be implemented in order that the two million pastors are eventually trained?

When can a pastor be considered trained?

In order to establish good programs of formal and non-formal training programs in such a way that various programs and models compliment and enhance each other a burning question must first be answered: When is a pastoral leader sufficiently trained?

At the consultation consensus was reached that a pastoral leader is basically trained when he has competence in the following four areas:

1. Concerning the Bible he should:
 - Know, understand and apply it in a valid way;
 - Know basic biblical doctrines;
 - Be able to communicate it (teach, preach and counsel);
 - Have a biblical worldview.
2. Concerning conformity to Jesus Christ he should have:
 - Christian character and conduct;
 - A servant attitude
 - A deep sense of continuing dependence on the Triune God.
3. Concerning competence in basic ministry skills he should be:
 - Able to prepare and deliver sermons effectively;
 - Able to evangelise and plant new churches;
 - Able to pastor believers with a view to disciple them towards spiritual maturity
 - Able to teach;
 - Able to lead believers in such a way that their own vision for the growth of God's kingdom is stirred up.
4. Concerning leadership, he must have a vision and be able to reproduce
 - Himself as pastoral leader;
 - His church.

A Core Curriculum?

One possible way of assisting non-formal training institutions and paving ways for co-operation is to design a core curriculum which could establish broad parameters of a program that may achieve the outcomes of a basically well trained pastoral leader. This core curriculum should be flexible enough to allow for additions and issues of local applications according to the needs of a specific area.

Such a curriculum should meet the following criteria. It should:

- Be comprehensive - complete at basic level;
- Culturally adaptable - generic and transferable. (Principles, concepts should be presented as transferable truths).
- Compact - teachable within a reasonable time frame (2-4 years)
- Conformable - Adjustable to different educational levels, perhaps grades 6 to 12
- Compatible Theologically - It should be Biblical, Evangelical, trans-denominational to the extent that the specific teachings of denominations (e.g. mode of baptism) should not be a

hindrance for students who are evangelical Christians but have different views on peripheral issues.

- Competent and measurable educationally - evaluation of progress, feedback and assessment loops should be given with the core curriculum.
- Consistent with Biblical perspective. - The Bible should be the main textbook.
- Conducive to practical ministry and personal spiritual growth and multiplication. - Students must be able to use and apply the content in their ministry immediately.
- Be available in key languages - English Spanish Chinese, Russian, French, Swahili, Zulu etc.
- Commonly available at low cost

Unfortunately there was not enough time available to prepare and evaluate proposals for such a core curriculum. There were several training institutions present that had copies of their curricula of a wide variety of TEE and other models of curricula available for insight. The consultation has now appointed a committee to work on such a core curriculum and send it to interested institutions for evaluation and possible field testing.

The whole idea with such a core curriculum is to offer it to training institutions involved in the non-formal training of pastors. Those institutions that want to use it, may then strengthen their own credibility by advertising that their training courses are in line with internationally recognised standards and are using the T.O.P.I.C. core curriculum.

EVALUATION REMARKS

At such a large International Consultation one usually sees things that leave a real deep impression. At the same time you observe things which are cause for some concern. The most important lesson learned on the other hand is to consider how your own ministry and the institution and churches in your own area which you want to serve, may be enriched.

Things which cause my concern are the following:

- Superficial training programs focussing more on pragmatic outcomes than on outcomes based on biblical principles. In such curricula (of which I have seen some) there is a minimum of focus on Bible and doctrinal knowledge and a maximum focus on certain practical skills;
- One-sided focus in certain programs on prayer and spirituality and emotional worship styles, without biblical and theological foundations which lead to invalid ways of interpretation and application of Scriptures (bad Hermeneutics).
- Training programmes that do not address real life and death issues in communities like poverty, aids and vast political strife. (A good example on the other hand of how programs for the training of pastors could address such issues was given by a pastor from Rwanda (where millions of people have recently died in ethnic conflicts). He gave a moving report on how they have now started to include modules of in depth training on the solving of conflicts biblically and how pastors should be instruments of reconciliation and real peacemakers as children of God (Mt 5:9) He also warned that the training of pastors should not be clouded by viewing it through lenses of bitterness caused by racial and ethnic conflicts of the past. In order to serve communities that are still bleeding from many wounds, leaders who are making decisions about models and content of training programs should first rid themselves before God from all roots of bitterness about the past and then earnestly and honestly look at the present needs of the churches and the community.)

Things that made a deep impression on me and which churches and mission boards should take note of are the following:

- The vast world-wide movement of the Holy Spirit which can be seen in the phenomenal growth of the Christian church especially in Asia, Africa and South America;
- The vast need of basically well trained pastors in these continents;
- The over-abundance of well trained pastors and training opportunities and facilities for the training of pastors in the "white" main line churches in South Africa;

- That the greatest stress in mission and outreach should now fall on the training of pastors and the provision of training opportunities and facilities;
- That ecumenical co-operation between evangelical (Bible believing) Christian churches is in great demand to form coalitions in the vast task of catching up on the backlog of at least two million pastors that needs to be trained.
- The wide variety of new, innovative models and materials that are already available for non-formal and distance educational training of pastors. (At the consultation mind boggling information was also given on new technology that is rapidly becoming available, like satellite connection with Internet through small notebook computers driven with solar power energy, CD's that will have the capacity of containing millions of megabyte information (vast libraries) and DVD technology which will have sound tracks of several languages which make it possible to change the language in which a person is giving multimedia training by the mere pressing of a button. This kind of technology will make it possible for people to sit in the middle of nowhere and have at a relatively low cost the possibility of being trained through a growing amount of telematic programs.)
- That formal theological training institutions that are neglecting the real need of churches in economically weaker communities - which are experiencing the most rapid growth - and are not opening more doors for non-formal distance education are in fact providing stumblingblocks in the growth of the church of Christ. Such institutions will become more and more irrelevant and eventually die. In this regard an interesting quote of Toffler was given: *In times of change LEARNERS inherit the earth, while the LEARNED find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with the world that no longer exists.*
- That the Faculty of Theology of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education has absolutely done the right thing at the right time by extending its training programs through coalition with other training institutions all over Southern and Central Africa and by providing telematic training programs. In this way the faculty is really serving the growth of the Church of Christ far outside the borders of the denomination that founded the faculty.
- That it is a pity (perhaps even short-sightedness) that the same models of training are not used much more by the Reformed Churches in South Africa to accelerate the training of many needed pastors for Reformed Churches working in poorer economical areas and formerly deprived communities.
- Within the region of the Synod Midlands of the Reformed Churches in South Africa there are presently 104 churches. Most of these churches have many preaching stations (actually small new churches). There are also signs of rapid numerical growth in these churches. On the whole they actually need about 300 trained pastors. At the moment there are only 40 pastors working in these churches. At the official seminary of the denomination in Potchefstroom there are just a few students from these churches busy with training. Enquiries have revealed the same international problem found in economically weaker communities: The threshold (academically as well as financially) for students to enrol for this formal theological training is just too high for the majority of the potential candidates. If this problem is not addressed very seriously, the backlog of trained pastors in this denomination will also become totally insurmountable and problems like superficial Christian religion nominality and syncretism (which are already rampant in many of these churches) will just increase.
- The rapid growth of the African Independent Churches in Southern Africa also calls for "coalitions" between evangelical Bible believing training institutions. Timothy Training Institute, for example also attended T.O.P.I.C. at Manila. They have eighteen years of experience with decentralised training of pastors and church leaders, mostly of the African Independent Churches in South Africa alone. Up to 1997, 4 700 church leaders completed the first level of their training. In 1997 they had 1 100 enrolled students. They now also have students in Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. They are also offering courses in literacy and English as a second language. When we spoke about the need for more coalitions and co-operation in Southern Africa, they approached me to inquire about possible co-operation with Mukhanyo. They mentioned the possibility of assisting us with infrastructure and organisational skills, personnel and facilities with our lower level programs. They want Mukhanyo to take over their

advanced students and provide training courses for their lecturers and serve them with theological guidance and assistance.

Dr. Flip Buys, Principal
Mukhanyo Theological College
P. O. Box 594, KwaMhlanga,
1022 South Africa

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