

## **Training leaders for the majority world church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

by  
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The church in the majority world today is in desperate need of trained, biblical leadership. Explosive church growth in the majority world has left many churches without trained pastors. For instance, in some areas of Andean Ecuador, Highland Quichua pastors are pastoring ten and twelve churches. This growth has outstripped the ability of current programs to produce sufficient numbers of trained leaders. In the Ecuadorian context, the Highland Quichua believers have twenty-five hundred churches with only five hundred pastors to serve them (Sills 2001, 171).

The church growth that has left similar cultures without sufficient numbers of leaders is like a church outgrowing its facility; it's a good problem to have. The leadership shortage may have several causative factors. One factor may be the people movements which have been reported in various countries. Another possible contributing cause for this leadership crisis could be the effort to reach the unreached people groups of the world by the year 2000. This push by many mission agencies and denominations has left myriads of new believers congregated into churches that need leaders. This push and these people movements are cause for praise, of course, even if churches remain in great need of trained leadership. The praise is for the many new believers and the advance of Christ's kingdom.

While the growing pains concomitant with an expanding church are certainly not something to complain about, they do serve to point out a number of weaknesses in some of our training programs. For instance, the students in many of our programs have been selected by the missionaries and may not be the kind of men that the cultures recognize as pastors (Hogarth,

Gatimu, and Barret, 1983, Johnstone 1993, Klem 1982). In such cases, they receive some training but are still not placed in pastoral positions by their churches (Welty 1998).

Additionally, most training programs are operated in the language of the country's dominant culture which has excluded many potential pastors from marginalized cultures.

Another problem that has been noted by missionary educators is the fact that many programs use a Western educational model to train leaders from aural<sup>1</sup> cultures (Klem 1982).

There is an old adage, "if it's not broken, don't fix it." For years we sought to meet the need for more leaders by redoubling our efforts; we didn't see a broken system. The need for leadership has now reached crisis level in many countries.

Leadership development, tragically, has been almost entirely absent in the world missions strategies of this century. This, of course, is yet another damaging extension of the great omission of spiritual formation in prevailing concepts of the Great Commission. The shepherds have not been trained to disciple and equip the flock. We are convinced that leadership development is today's *greatest* priority, and we will have more to say on this subject in the remaining chapters. (Engel and Dyrness 2000, 105; emphasis in the original)

The silver lining of that cloud is a renewed examination of how we train leaders in aural cultures.

### **How are leaders being trained among these groups?**

Theological Education by Extension (TEE) is normally seen as the answer in contexts where students cannot easily uproot and move to the cities such as those who are subsistence farmers whose families depend upon their presence. Many times these men are already serving

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<sup>1</sup>Aural cultures are cultures that have an oral tradition for perpetuating legends, histories, family lineage, and knowledge. These cultures are not printed-word oriented and are often marginalized in those societies that emphasize literacy.

as pastors and need to be trained in their current ministry context. TEE offers great hope in many respects and the classical arguments for TEE seem promising.

TEE was developed by godly missionaries in Guatemala who noticed the need for a system for training pastors that would also have greater success than traditional residential seminary programs (Rowen 1969, Winter 1969, Kinsler 1977, Anderson 2000). The list of men who developed and honed to precision this ingenious method of training leaders in the majority world reads like a “who’s who” of missionary greats: Ralph Winter, F. Ross Kinsler, Ted Ward, Sam Rowen, George Patterson, Sam Burton, Fred Holland, and Herbert Klem just to name a few (Winter 1969). They argued persuasively, and rightly, that TEE would provide a method of training pastors in the majority world that would allow them to continue in their ministries pastoring their churches, be less expensive than traditional seminary education, and that would also allow for varying academic levels among the students without holding back the more gifted and prepared students. Their writings argue brilliantly and their arguments do not need to be repeated here. Virtually all missionary educators have become aware of their variations on the TEE theme and many have learned its value from personal ministry experience.

The genius of TEE is seen in how generalizable its precepts are throughout the majority world. TEE has prepared pastors and trained leaders throughout the world who would never have been able to attend a traditional seminary for a three or four year period. Additionally, TEE trains the right leaders (Winter 1969). One of the failures of many missionary educators through the years has resulted from training the wrong people.

Often the young men who were intelligent, good-looking, had a great speaking voice and seemed ambitious were singled out by missionaries to attend seminary. Many times these missionaries sacrificed much personally in order to help these young men through school. There

are two main problems with this scenario. One is that these young men are largely unproven. The other is that the men the missionary choose to be trained may not be the ones whom the culture would recognize as a leaders. For instance, churches in some cultures only recognize older men who have a track record as natural leaders in the community. The problem that has been repeated throughout the world for years is that many of the traditional, less-powerful, and usually marginalized cultures in the majority world do not choose leaders using the same criteria employed by the Western missionary.

### **The challenge of marginalized cultures**

Many of the groups of new Christians in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are preliterate and often monolingual in their native tongue. These new Christians are often from aural cultures and are not “printed-word” based cultures. They do not use, or value, the written word as do those of us from the more developed world. Some have estimated that roughly 70% of the world’s population is made up of primary oral learners (Willis 2002). In fact, Herbert Klem has found in Africa that oftentimes our Western models of education have been found to alienate traditional cultures and present the Gospel as the foreigners’ religion (Klem 1982). This is especially so when their training requires competency in the Westerner’s culture in order to worship, pray, and lead the gathering of God’s people. In sum, the Western model of education, even TEE, often creates a barrier to the Gospel and enables paternalism among the young churches. Yusuf O. Kassam is quoted in *Theological Education in Context: 100 Extension Programmes in Contemporary Africa*.

First, formal education is basically elitist in nature catering for the needs and interests of a very small proportion of those who manage to enter the hierarchical pyramid of formal schooling. Secondly, the nature of the subject matter that is taught in formal schooling alienates its participants from the society for which they are supposed to be prepared. Thirdly, the formal system of education breeds the notion that education is synonymous

with formal schooling and people are judged on the basis of their paper qualifications alone. (Hogarth, Gatimu, and Barrett 1983, 5)

The reason why many of these groups were heretofore “unreached” or “lesser-reached” is because they do not traffic in the dominant culture. They were “hidden” from the mainstream and were usually on the untouchable bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder. The only ministry that they usually received often came to them in the same way it came to the dominant culture (Sills 1997, 2001). For instance, in Ecuador many missionaries have reached out to and ministered to the Highland Quichua Indian believers in Spanish and according to the mestizo culture.

In many cases the dominant culture is prejudiced against these marginal groups and this has resulted in animosity and segregation. This situation is not conducive to a high rate of success when ministering to them in the cultural norms of their oppressors. Their high rate of preliteracy, functional illiteracy, and linguistic limitation renders traditional TEE ineffective and a poor choice for training leaders among such people groups. The problem is, the church is growing rapidly among such cultures resulting in a great need for more trained leaders and pastors.

### **TEE is not our panacea**

The need to train leaders is great and obvious. However, many of these new believers who feel called to service are challenged by the fact that they are marginalized from the dominant culture of the countries where they live. Whether barred by linguistic differences, a history of culture clashes, geographic isolation, ethnic prejudice, or socioeconomic factors, these barriers are precisely why many of them have remained unreached or lesser-reached for decades

or centuries (Dilworth 1967, Klassen 1974). Accordingly, these barriers often preclude the option of training these marginalized cultures in the TEE system that the missionaries might present (Welty 1998, Sills 2001).

In addition, in some areas, virtually entire people groups have shifted to Evangelical Protestant Christianity which has resulted in numerous churches without trained pastors (Dilworth 1967, Klassen 1974, Berg and Pretiz 1996, Sills 1997, 2001). TEE educators state that it takes about ten years on average for a student to complete a TEE program. Therefore, some system that can multiply training efforts must be identified and employed to provide the needed numbers of pastors for the church in the majority world.

The primary problem with traditional TEE is the requirement that the student be able to read, reflect, and write during the instructors absence. As stated many aural cultures remain preliterate and monolingual in a language which obviously has no written materials. Indeed, Ted Ward's split-rail fence model and Fred Holland's two-track analogy both include cognitive input as essential in the TEE program. Cognitive input is the self-study material that students master between seminars with professors; it is basic to the continuing TEE education of the student.

### **The Biblical mandate to train the shepherds of the flock**

That the Holy Spirit is calling out leaders among these cultures is undeniable. The Bible charges God's people to train those who come behind us in places like Deuteronomy 6 and throughout the training-saturated New Testament. To train those who are being called out for service is essential; it is both biblical and practical<sup>2</sup>.

Jesus and Paul both prepared pastors, trained trainers, and taught teachers. Jesus prepared His followers to prepare others as He walked with them and taught in their gatherings.

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<sup>2</sup>Colossians 1:28, 2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:14-17

He sent out His disciples on ministry trips<sup>3</sup> (on-the-job training) and He held a debriefing with them after the experience<sup>4</sup>. He referred constantly to Scripture and helped them to rightly understand its teachings.

Paul took younger men under his wing and tutored them in the ministry. He taught them God's Word and he commanded Timothy to make sure that others were trained to carry on the work as well<sup>5</sup>. Paul planted churches but also saw the importance of making sure that godly leaders were in place to continue the work in accordance with sound teaching<sup>6</sup>. The pattern of training up leaders to come behind us is undeniably biblical, but it is also practical.

Many missionaries have learned, and continue to learn the hard way that we cannot withdraw from fields of service without preparing others to take over. Sometimes the missionaries' withdrawal is unforeseen and forced but the result is still the same: ill-prepared leaders leading Christ's flock. There are numerous examples in missions history of untrained leaders having to take over the ministries of godly men and women following their departure. Oftentimes, the result has been aberrant doctrine in formerly sound churches. Many have cited China as a situation where missionaries were forced to leave before adequately training trainers for the future. For all the blessings of the burgeoning Chinese church, some have found the doctrinal health of the churches to be suspect. The following excerpt from a prayer request reveals this concern.

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<sup>3</sup>Luke 9:1-6

<sup>4</sup>Luke 9:10

<sup>5</sup>2 Timothy 2:2

<sup>6</sup>Titus 1:5-9; 2:1

In conversations with church leaders from Hong Kong in the south to port cities along China's eastern edge, the greatest need in China today is for leaders; more specifically, trained leaders. The government sanctioned "Christian Church" (3-Self Church) is riddled with false doctrine, the most recent of which states that the "Bible is not the inspired Word of God." (Clark 2004, 1)

This sad result can be averted by practicing the apostolic wisdom of 2 Timothy 2:2 and train faithful leaders who can and will train others. The lessons and witness of missions history emphasize the practical importance and wisdom of the biblical imperative to train others.

While some denominations that are going in new directions and emphasizing church planting and evangelism are to be commended for their zeal, in many instances their zeal has led them to walk away from established ministries without properly preparing national leaders to take over the work. In some countries untrained nationals are holding the keys to seminaries, bookstores, clinics, relief centers, and vocational training programs without the skills and knowledge to continue them. In other cases, these new church planting/evangelism directions have resulted in groups of new believers, but then their missionaries moved on and left them without biblical training. How then can these new leaders from aural cultures and preliterate societies be trained to lead the flock of Christ in their local context?

### **Training leaders in aural cultures and preliterate societies**

The critical need has been the focus of extensive research among the Highland Quichua Indians of Andean Ecuador (Dilworth 1967, Klassen 1974, Welty 1986, Sills 1997, Sills 2001). The findings reveal that the traditional seminary education models and traditional TEE models often create more barriers than they hurdle. What is needed is a modified TEE approach that incorporates a thorough understanding of the limitations of traditional cultures; that is, linguistic barriers, geographic isolation, and traditional teaching models.

Many missionaries have employed new models for training in culturally appropriate ways with success. The mentoring model for training Highland Quichua leaders developed by Jacob Klassen and Michael Welty demonstrates that using the teaching methods that exist in the culture are more effective than the Western model normally utilized (Klassen 1974, Welty 1986). Herbert Klem argues from similar experience in African cultures that removing the classroom requirements of literacy and the printed word results in greater effectiveness in training pastoral leadership (Klem 1982). Recent research indicates that these models that have been so helpful would be even more effective if they were combined and expanded using each culture's traditional patterns for leadership selection and training (Welty 1986, Sills 2001).

In the traditional aural cultures of preliterate societies, these teaching methods are often apprenticeship, on-the-job training, and "watching and doing" (Welty 1986, Steffan 2000, Sills 2001). In fact, in many of the passages where Jesus and Paul are teaching their disciples, these are the very models being employed. Each missionary may observe and interview leaders in their own contexts to see how that culture selects leaders. What criteria are important to the culture when considering a new leader? Each missionary can also observe and interview cultural informants to discern how leaders in a particular people group have traditionally been trained through the centuries.

This is important for several reasons. The foreign appearance of the Gospel will be lessened, thus diminishing the danger of rejecting the teaching method and the Gospel along with it. Another benefit of teaching in culturally appropriate ways is that the training will move much more quickly due to fewer barriers to learning.

No more powerful teaching or research tool exists than that of storytelling. Whether in cultural, psychological, or organizational analysis, preaching or teaching theology, and more recently evangelism and follow-up, this communication mode is trans-historical, trans-generational, trans-gender, trans-cultural, and trans-disciplinary. Stories move the world. (Steffan 2000, 909)

Additionally, the leaders will be able to remain in their communities and churches while learning how to serve them better.

### **A biblical solution**

In the same way that Jesus often said, “It is written,” a culturally appropriate teaching model for preliterate aural cultures can also say, “it is written.” It should constantly refer to the Scriptures, teach from them, use them for examples and illustrations, and memorize them.

Chronological storytelling through the Bible is not only a useful tool for evangelism, it is also a practical way to disciple and train preliterate leaders from aural cultures (Steffan 2000, Sills 2001, Willis 2002). This method of biblical teaching provides a “mental Bible” useful for teaching, counseling, and shepherding their flock. However, the ultimate goal of every TEE ministry to these people should be literacy and perhaps even bilingualism in the language of the dominant culture. This would enhance their learning experience, enable communication with other Christians, broaden their horizons, and in most cases contribute hundreds of Christian books to their educational options.

Literacy and bilingualism should always be a future goal. These skills would greatly enhance the ministry of these men. Caleb Lucien states in a Th.M. thesis his belief that without literacy in a major language the church in the majority world will never be able to grow to its full potential (Lucien 1989). However, using culturally appropriate teaching models for pastoral training programs among aural cultures allows training to begin without demanding literacy skills as a prerequisite. Some cultures are aural-oriented but open to change, while other groups

see any attempt at literacy training as invasive and threatening (Hiebert and Meneses 1995).

This biblical and cultural training avoids delaying the essential training of men who are leading Christ's church.

A culturally appropriate method of selecting and training pastors takes the best of traditional TEE, mentoring programs, and advanced discipleship courses and fits them into an approach that is tailored to the aural, preliterate cultures of the majority world. The glad result of this practice is the provision of pastors who continue to receive ongoing training. When this is coupled with Paul's admonition in 2 Timothy 2:2 to teach faithful men who will also be able to teach others, the resulting multiplication will provide the needed pastors to fill the empty pulpits and shepherd Christ's flock that has been scattered without shepherds.

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