

Are we on the right track following the ministerial training pattern set in the United States?

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When I hear the question, "Are we on the right track in following the ministerial training pattern set in the United States?" my first reaction is also a question, "what is the pattern for ministerial training set in the United States?" I can think of three patterns which are followed. 1) A boy decides to go into the ministry early in life and begins his training in high school and follows through Northwestern and the Seminary in Mequon. 2) There are those who do not decide to go into the ministry until after high school. They start at Northwestern and then go to the Seminary. 3) There are those who do not decide on the ministry until they are out of college or have worked for a number of years. These men go to a special course at Bethany and then receive their final training at Mequon. The common patterns which I see is that there is some pre-seminary training, followed by the prescribed curriculum at the Seminary. The curriculum at the Seminary with its various disciplines is well-known to all of us.

Perhaps it is being prejudiced to recommend that this is the pattern which we should follow in our ministerial training programs. But what is the alternative to this pattern? We could set up a course of study such as many churches have in their Bible Colleges. The Bible is studied in translation. Very basic doctrines are learned and the rest of the courses are strictly practical and related to day-to-day running of a congregation. Men may and do have such training and do carry on a ministry. I do not see how a mission church could ever become independent and carry on a self-sustaining program without leaders who are firmly grounded in the theological disciplines.

Another alternative may be having theological Education by Extension. The same disciplines could be taught with this method, but it would be difficult to develop programmed materials to teach all of them adequately. The time required to train men with this pattern of ministerial training would be very long. In some fields it is difficult to have punctual and regular attendance at those classes, and this makes the time needed for training even longer.

Trying to find another pattern of ministerial training may be very helpful because we can discover other methods which will help us teach the Word of God. But to depart from a pattern of ministerial training which has proven itself over the years and try to establish some new pattern would be treading on very shaky ground.

At the same time, I feel that there is no way in which our ministerial training in a foreign mission field can be a carbon copy of what we have in the United States. There are going to be big differences. We may set our goal to be the same as in the United States, but I doubt very much if that goal can ever be reached, nor is it necessarily desirable to be the same as in the United States. The circumstances vary greatly. Our ministerial training courses have to be set to meet the circumstances and needs of the national church. The maturity of our churches, the environment in which they are located, the position which our graduates will occupy in the foreign society all have to be taken into consideration.

If we can compare our foreign ministerial training program to a building, I would say that our United States pattern of training is like the concept of a building in the mind of the architect. We are drawing the plans, though, as the building is going on. The final shape remains to be seen in most cases. Changes will have to be made to adapt the concept to the circumstances, as we learn what the circumstances are.

Briefly, on our training pattern in Africa: We have some pre-seminary training in the Bible Institute and we have added a year of pre-seminary training to give our students some Greek, more English, and other background material for seminary study. Our seminary training follows the same disciplines as the United States, but our depth of study in each area is not nearly as great. We give our students a much greater amount of practical work than is done in the United States. At the present time, more postgraduate work seems desirable.

We have seen some of our graduates losing the ability to carry out a ministry which we had hoped for. On the other hand we have seen a graduate who works closely with us reach a maturity which is very satisfying. Changes will still have to be made. We do not have all the answers to the problems. However, the starting point or pattern established in the United States seems to be the correct pattern to follow in our World Seminaries.