

# Does TEE Solve our Pastoral Training Problems?

*by Ernst H. Wendland*

[World Seminary Conference, Mequon, Wisconsin, June 23, 1976]

## A Tale to Ponder

Once upon a time there were some missionaries who were concerned about establishing a national church. They wanted this church to be a real part of the foreign country to which they were sent.

The missionaries said to themselves, "We are foreigners here. Our work in this place will one day come to an end. We must, therefore, train a national ministry. Then the church will become truly indigenous."

The missionaries, therefore, put forth their best efforts to establish a school for the training of a national ministry. They appealed for funds from the sending church. They built a fine training school. They got more missionaries to come and serve as teachers. They set up a course of instruction similar to that which they were familiar with from at home. All things were now ready to begin.

It was not difficult to get students to come. Many nationals were looking for an education as well as a job. Their country as yet had few secondary schools. A school which offered this opportunity and also board and lodging was like a gift from heaven. It wasn't long before the training school appeared to be a successful operation, and many young graduates were being made ready to go out into the field to serve as evangelists.

For a time things seemed to go along quite well. But then the troubles arose. Many of the graduates were as yet immature. They were happy to receive an education, but they lacked the seasoning and the dedication to face up to the problems of a parish. It was also very hard for these young men to live out in the bush. The ways of the villagers, it seemed after a taste of student life, were still so "primitive." The salary, most of which was still supplied by the mission, was low. After all, hadn't these young men by virtue of their education acquired a higher status in society?

Both evangelists as well as congregations were not happy with the situation. Many evangelists were frustrated. Some got into trouble over money matters. Others had problems with drinking, and immoral practices. Some even sought to put their education to use in jobs where they could earn more pay. As a result the work in the congregations, of course, failed to prosper.

The missionaries began to have second thoughts about their ministerial training programs. "What's happening?" they asked themselves. "Are we training the right kind of men? Are we doing this in the best way? Why is our program failing?"

Especially the missionaries who came to the field in later years were not very happy with the methods of the pioneers. They said: "Let's change our entire program around. Let's choose only men to be trained as evangelists who are mature, and recognized as leaders among their own people. Since money seems to be the cause of some of the problems, let these men keep on earning their own living. Let them stay at their own homes. We'll bring the school to them and train them where they are. They can learn by doing. They can learn in their spare time. Then we'll have mature leaders who will be able to fit in better with the culture of their own people."

This was the beginning of TEE (Theological Education by Extension). The news of this new kind of program spread like a fire. Missionaries in other areas, who were having similar problems with their worker-training schools, were anxious to try something new. Many of the old training schools were closed. Frantic efforts were made to organize this new program. Many called it "the most revolutionary idea to hit the mission fields since the development of the indigenous church policy."

As it happened, TEE also found support for its ideas from recognized educational experts. These were men of a modern school of thought. They claimed that institutional education had already long been outmoded. They referred to traditional schools as "ghettos." Education, they asserted, was "where the action is." They pointed to the clinical methods already adopted by the field of medicine. They spoke of "the seminar approach," used by modern industry for refresher courses. They proposed programmed lesson materials as an ideal system

for such on-the-job training. Their educational theories were made to order, it seemed, for TEE, and everyone awaited the "new era" in theological training in a mission field.

Sad to say, the new era didn't come. Missionaries who had been disillusioned by experiences with the traditional training methods of the past -- brought on to some extent by their own ineptness -- took to the new approach called TEE as a drowning man grabs for a piece of flotsam. Many were ill-prepared for this revolutionary change. They lacked lesson materials. They were without the necessary expertise to implement a program of this kind. They ran into all sorts of opposition from the nationals, who could not possibly understand what this revolutionary change was about. In a frantic quest for statistics to show success, they organized a lot of glorified Bible Classes, claiming that they had many more seminary students than before. The result was that the last state of theological education in a mission field was possibly worse than the first. Many fields ended up with their theological training programs in a state of utter confusion.

This is the story of TEE -- or part of it, at least. It's a rather sad story, isn't it? The moral of it is, to quote a statement which we heard used a number of times by the sainted President John Brenner: "Don't throw out the baby with the bath water!"

### **Some Possible Trouble Spots**

One tries to understand why the above story has been repeated any number of times in mission fields. The work of training nationals to become leaders of their churches is a task fraught with many problems and difficulties. Those of us who are directly engaged in this business will know what some of these are. They are cultural, linguistic, personal, practical, and involving just about every other kind of area one can possibly think of. We needn't even go into detail!

Theological education in mission fields isn't a matter of reproducing a reasonable facsimile of what we have at home. With all good intentions this is what many of the pioneer educators in mission fields tried to do. But where did this effort go wrong?

Our system of theological training in America, contrary to what many possibly think, begins with the cradle. It presupposes, in other words, a Christian home. It carries on with a Christ-centered training program through childhood and youth. Ideally we take the best which comes out of this system of rearing and develop these gifts for the Lord through specialized training in college and seminary. The result is our seminary graduate, institutionally trained to a great extent, but actually brought up into this work as a part of life from early childhood.

One can see, perhaps, that this excellent system of training is made-to-order for what we have in America. But it can hardly be duplicated in a mission field. Not at the present time, at least. Rarely does one have the same material to begin with. Neither does one have the same culture and congregational structure to accept the young seminary graduate as a pastoral leader. The obvious conclusion is the need to train people of greater maturity, who have demonstrated in some way to the satisfaction of their fellow Christians a desire to serve the Lord.

We come back, therefore, to the situation in the early church, and begin to see more clearly why Paul stressed these spiritual qualifications so greatly in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Paul, too, was working in the earlier stages of foreign fields. Where we on a mission field trustingly accept as students young men who say that they want to become pastors, without very much proof that this is so, and then hope by a process of religious training to "make preachers out of them" in two or three years, we are going to run into all sorts of difficulties. We're going to have people entering a profession which calls for the highest type of dedication, but who themselves don't measure up to this requirement. We're going to have congregations which quickly sense this lack in those who are to serve as spiritual leaders, and who therefore are not going to accept them as anything more than paid hirelings; paid, in fact, by an outside agency.

But this is precisely what happened with many overseas training programs. It was mistakenly thought that one could make acceptable preachers out of young converts by simply giving them a few years of institutionalized schooling in the basic theological disciplines. After such schooling they were sent out to be

leaders of young churches which were still largely in a process of formulation. It just didn't work as well as it was planned. Many frustrating problems arose, to such an extent, in fact, that some people had serious second thoughts about the whole system.

On the other hand, however, the answer did not lie in the ideas of extremists who advocated the shutting down of all institutional training and imagining that a total theological training program could be successfully carried out on a part-time basis. And this is unfortunately what some of TEE's avant garde recommended.

TEE, if relied upon exclusively at the expense of a resident, institutional type of program, attempts the impossible. It presupposes an ideal type of student, who will be willing to support himself and continue on in his occupation -- whatever it is -- while at the same time devoting himself to a daily study program and also in many cases taking on the leadership of a local congregation. Perhaps such people are to be found in Latin America. We haven't found very many of this type in Central Africa.

Moreover, one can readily see that TEE, if carried on according to the above presuppositions, demands an inordinate amount of self-discipline on the part of the student. Let's be realistic about this. A man might for a time be able to support himself at his job, take care of his family, devote a good part of his day to concentrated study, spend at least one day a week at a seminar session with his instructor, and also be expected to teach or preach on a Sunday and help watch over the needs of a congregation during the week. But if his study program is going to amount to anything at all, this sort of effort is going to have to go on over a period of many years in order to accomplish very much in depth.

We once figured out that if a man were able to take the study material of two courses a year on a part-time basis, it would take him at least three years to complete the material normally expected of a student who would be one year in residence at a Bible Institute. How long do we imagine it would take such a person to complete the equivalent of two years of resident Bible Institute work, and then three or more years of Seminary study? And do we imagine that he would have the self-discipline to carry this on through? We rather think not.

Another idealistic fallacy of TEE's most avid supporters lies in its self-comparisons with methods which have proved successful in modern training programs in other fields, imagining that these can be implemented without having recourse to same kind of resident program. TEE makes much of the seminar approach, whereby teacher and student consult on a personal basis once a week. We are all for seminars. But there has to be what educators refer to as "cognitive input" of a considerable amount of fundamentals before a seminar is going to be at all successful. One can't conduct seminars in a vacuum! They do presuppose quite a bit of advance learning on the part of the participants.

TEE's emphasis upon in-service training, stressing the advantages of a field-based education over against a campus-based education, has much in its favor. The newer methods of training for the medical profession, with increased stress placed upon clinical experience while in training, is cited by some of TEE's leading protagonists as an example of the trend toward "learning by doing." We maintain, however, that a lot of facts must be learned the hard way by the budding young medical practitioner before he is ready for his in-service training or internship.

What we are trying to point out here is not that some or all of the basic concepts of TEE are necessarily faulty. We do feel very strongly, however, that those proponents of TEE are wrong who think that a campus-based or institutional type of training program can be discarded. Fortunately many of TEE's apologists today are ready to go along with this opinion. The first wave of enthusiasm has passed. In its place some more sober kind of reflection has set in, an evaluating process which readily grants that the answer undoubtedly lies to some form of adaptation. The institutional approach and the field-based concept are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they can work together very nicely.

### **TEE's Basic Principles**

For those who have not been able to study some of the basic principles of the TEE program, it may be well to summarize them briefly. (We base our summary on the material presented at the 1972 TEE Workshop at Wheaton College, led by Ted Ward and Sam Rowen, the two recognized leaders in this field.)

1. TEE places great stress upon training the right kind of people. It definitely frowns upon the idea that one can make a preacher out of immature men by giving them the intellectual experience of an institutional training. This is particularly true in a mission field, it is felt, where the motives of those seeking this training are often suspect. It aims at training dedicated Christians who have already demonstrated spiritual gifts to their fellow believers. As the Wheaton course states: "It is a training OF the ministry rather than FOR the ministry, an enlargement of the spiritual priesthood of all believers."
2. TEE, therefore, reaches out to the student who has reached an age of maturity averaging around 30 years, preferably married and established as far as family life is concerned. This is referred to as a "qualitative approach" in finding "Spirit-motivated students" rather than gaining students "as a response to a demographic (quantitative) need."
3. TEE strives to find the relationship between "knowing" and "doing" and "being" in establishing its educational goals. The method of instruction and the materials used for this instruction must relate to specific objectives. The learning process, in other words, is more than an intellectual exercise. The student knows what he is to do so that he can be what the Lord requires of him. The goals or objectives of courses must be clearly spelled out in advance and followed through.
4. TEE goes to the student where he is, instructing him by means of carefully worked out lesson materials which he can study at home. These are discussed in weekly seminars, whereby the student's "cognitive input" and "field experience" are integrated by the instructor. Contrary to many misconceptions, TEE is a correspondence-course method of training. The weekly seminars are vital to the program, so that "the learning experience can be shared." Very often the student is engaged in some kind of ministry while he studies (teaching Sunday School, preaching at weekly services, etc.), so that his training can be considered as "in-service" or of the "clinical" type.
5. TEE recommends, but does not insist upon, the use of programmed lesson materials. Whatever lesson materials which are used should have an explicit goal for each lesson, should proceed from the known to the unknown, and it should contain some type of exercises whereby the newly acquired information is put to use.

### **Our Own Attempts at Adaptation**

A survey of existing worker-training institutions in Central Africa before we ever started our own, made us aware of some of the early problems which TEE has subsequently tried to meet. We heard about these problems and tried to avoid them, in other words, before we ever heard about TEE,

From the very beginning we were warned against the young, immature "school-leaver," who suddenly becomes interested in the church so that he can further his education, and also possibly get a job in the process. We have, therefore, geared our program toward the mature type of student, preferably married. While this involves a lot more trouble and expense in arranging for student housing and rations, the principle itself is sound enough to warrant this.

Rigid admission standards for applicants, requiring recommendations from congregation, evangelist, and pastor as well as voluntary service to the church as part of the screening process, are also helpful in getting the right kind of student. Even with all these safeguards we manage to acquire some misfits now and then, but no system is infallible, we suppose. Nothing is more destructive in trying to build up congregations in a mission field than to have them served by hirelings rather than shepherds.

The principle of "learning by doing" is one which we have also attempted to carry out from the beginning. Every student is expected to go out on weekends in some kind of fieldwork service, assigned to preach or teach in an area congregation. At times the advisability of serving places with relatively inexperienced help has been questioned. The alternative, however, to using students in these places is not to be able to offer any kind of service at all. The great advantage to this method, of course, is to send out graduates later on who have a good idea what the work is all about. The teacher finds that his course in practical theology elicits an increased interest and serves as a good "seminar" to correlate "cognitive input" with "field experience."

Thus we see that some of the basic principles of TEE can be carried out in a resident program as well as off-campus.

As far as the off-campus part of it is concerned, we have made use of TEE to several ways:

1. In several congregations at present we have lay leaders serving as evangelists. In addition to providing these men with prepared sermon and Sunday School lesson materials, we try to carry out an ongoing study program with them. Several of our basic courses at the Bible Institute (Doctrine, Bible Study, Preaching, and Teaching) have been put into programmed form to assist in this work.
2. From time to time we find consecrated members in our congregations who show an interest in more intensive study as an aid to voluntary church work, while continuing on in their occupations. The above-mentioned study materials are used to satisfy this need as well. Several men who have taken these courses have later on decided to enter our Bible Institute. In these cases there has been no question about the kind of students we were admitting. In fact, we wish we could do the same with all student applicants.
3. We also see the need of preparing more courses so that they can be used in resident as well as in extension work. Whether or not this means that they be done in programmed form is open to question. Our first efforts in programming have been rather "unprofessional." Whatever is done, however, ought to be arranged in the form of specific goals for each lesson, written in language easy enough for the student to follow on a self-study basis, and with specific exercises at the end of each lesson to serve as work assignments.

These prepared courses can help as follows:

- a. As refresher courses for evangelists already out in the work.
- b. As an aid to nationals in taking on teaching assignments at our Bible Institute and Seminary.
- c. In a resident program where we experience staff shortages and must rely more on the students to keep themselves gainfully occupied part of the time.

Our field became interested in TEE in late 1972. Ever since that time we have sought ways of resetting our manpower priorities so that some of our men might be able to give more time to producing suitable materials to order to intensify this program. So far this has not happened.

While TEE does not necessarily "solve" our pastoral training problems -- to get back once again to the words of our topic -- it can be used as a valuable aid. But it is not something which can be used without good judgment, haphazardly, or without realizing that a lot of hard work will have to go into it. Whether or not we'll ever fully see it in that light still remains to be seen.