

# Equipped, or Drilled?

## Pastoral Training in the Third World: Illustrations from Africa

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Christianity in Africa is faced by a fearsome obstacle. While on the one hand new believers are eager to spread the news of God's gift of salvation, at the same time the churches provide very little teaching for their people from the Word of God. Recent surveys demonstrate some of the needs, approaches and obstacles that need to be considered (see side bar).

The stated goal of pastoral trainers is to produce church leaders who will give a knowledge and understanding of the Word of God to their people. For in His Word God makes Himself known, reveals our need, and explains His provision for life and godliness. Yet perhaps the greatest problem in third world churches is an inadequate understanding of these foundations for the Christian life. In Africa it becomes apparent that people are hungry for good news, glad to exchange curse and fear for a hope and a future, but have little understanding

of the new mind God intends for His people (Romans 12:2).

These new believers come to God with a perspective on life that is not based on Biblical understanding—even more than most of us. Unless

the surface old ways of thinking and valuing were still intact. When I first became aware of this I described Christianity as a veneer. Someone else used a description that has become widely known — like a river which

is a mile wide but an inch deep. A survey of Christian educators throughout the third world in the 1970s reported this to be a common concern for new churches, not only in Africa (cf. chapter 30 by Roger Coon, pages 391-398 of *Introduction to Biblical Christian Education*: Moody Press, 1981.)

Bible Schools were established to train African pastors. The initial missionary teachers had a goal — and still do — to produce pastors who would be “shepherds and teachers” (Eph.4:11). But the common qualifications for a Bible School teacher is someone who has been through Bible School himself. He does not have to be a trained educator. It has been assumed that if a man is taught the Bible, he will pass that teaching on to his people. Generally the Bible School teacher sets out to repeat what he was taught in his own western Bible School.

This leaves a teacher open to regard the students as *empty slates*. We forget that the student has his own aspirations (culturally formed) in which status may mean more than service. Consequently observation, confirmed by field studies, indicates that transferring Bible content does not necessarily produce a pastor/



they themselves have a good enough education to be good readers with a hunger for reading and understanding the Bible, they generally will continue with inadequate concepts of God's view of society and family, biblical standards for relating and coping with problems, identification of right and wrong, God's holiness and our sinful condition, what is repentance and regeneration and why are they necessary, what does it mean to be a child of God in a fallen world. These are all often unasked but daily operative questions whose answers are assumed from pagan thought; not Christian thought. Old Testament foundations for New Testament teaching are often lacking.

As Africa began to emerge from its pre-literate age and put on western clothing and “went to school,” missionaries began to forget that beneath

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teacher. We may be drilling the recruits, like new soldiers marching in a platoon, but not putting the equipment in their hands needed to win the battle. Content is necessary, but steps of learning and application are essential to comprehension and utilization.

Bible School teachers may be theologians, but few are educators. As such, they can fail to consider learning styles. They are aware that the African primary school education system utilizes a rote memory process, but they may be unaware that the pupils have never learned to generalize and extract principles and see how they apply in a new context. (The latter of which has been found true of younger learners in every culture where it has been studied. Generally, ability to operate in an advanced stage of reasoning is 30 years old or higher.) In this context, the Christian heritage of a missionary's culture implants a viewpoint different from that of non-Christian heritage.

We found in the field study research that Bible School teachers

could describe the role they had in mind for their graduates, but they did not check their results against their training process. Not being trained educators, they seldom designed their curriculum with a functional end result in mind, working backward from desired end result to identification of components and process essential to achieving that result.

We found that 95% of the teenagers and adults in the churches served by eleven pastoral training institutions were not receiving systematic Bible teaching. This situation continues even though 78% of these churches have come under the care of a trained pastor. It is evident that the training did not equip the pastors for fulfilling the objective in their ministry context.



But we did find that one type of training scored much higher in end result. It was a training which did not assume principled thinking skills.

And it concretely demonstrated a new image of the role of a pastor. The training replicated the ministry context, giving content as it would be given in the churches, and alternating two weeks

of residence studies with six weeks of supervised internship ministry where the trainee applied in the home church what he had experienced in the school.

Such hands-on training is much closer to traditional African ways the people had for training their youth for adult living and responsibilities. 🌐

## Key Excerpts from Survey Report

Drawn from findings of a 1994 survey of eleven Bible Schools in East Africa. The survey was prompted by the realization that while an increasing number of churches are led by graduates of four-year Bible Schools, there seems to be little advance in providing adequate teaching of the Word of God to their churches.

How much understanding of God's teachings do most of the people have?

(Question asked to Bible Schools students with regard to their home churches.)

"They have very little, except catechism and they seem to lose that. When asked about simple things in the Bible, they don't know. They go to church and that is all."

"The people only know the (scattered) bits of the Bible that preaching deals with."

"They don't understand what the church is."

"Only a few who were deeply involved in Satanic things under-

stand some about salvation. Most only know 'believe' and 'leave some sins'."

"Children learn some verses and Bible stories. After catechism and baptism that is the end of it."

"Wrong behavior is widely allowed. They don't seem to know what to do."

### A Pastoral Training Model

*The survey discovered one major exception: In churches led by graduates of four-year Bible Schools 4% of the adult church attenders were involved in some kind of Bible teaching group. But in one area where many churches were led by lay elders who had attended special training at a training center for church leading elders, 20% of the people (youth & adults) are in Bible study.*

A stated goal of teachers in the four-year Bible Schools is to produce church leaders who will give a knowledge and understanding of the Word of God to their people. But they had not compared their program goals

with the performance of their graduates. A major purpose of the survey was to gather such information. The survey involved interviewing 643 current students in the Bible Schools and training centers about the ministries in their home churches. The answers were tabulated according to the training of the pastors of those churches. It was in this tabulation that the finding came to light.

A conclusion of the survey was to recommend that standard four-year Bible Schools consider adopting the Bible training center model for first-year Bible School curriculum. The remaining three years would provide in-depth training along more traditional lines to graduate pastors with advanced Bible knowledge and ministry skills. However *all* courses should be reviewed in the light of educational principles and additional factors related to functional implementation of the goals of the training. 🌐