

Needed: A Revolution in Pastoral Training

The Largest Stumbling Block to Leadership Development in the Global Church

by *Ralph D. Winter*

I'm a little embarrassed by the wording of this topic. It sounds pompous. There are, of course, other problems besides the one to which I refer, although none, I believe, more serious.

I'm not going to let you wonder until the very end of this talk just what I think that stumbling block is. I refer very simply to the far-reaching practice of selecting the wrong people for training. It is that simple, and it is as much a problem in the West as it is in the rest of the globe.

But, why would we—and I include myself as part of the theological education movement—why would we do such a thing as to select the wrong people for training? Why, all over the world, would we put enormous sums of money and manpower into training *the wrong people*?

Thus, you can see why my simple statement of the problem cries out for further comment. Just to state it seems baldly and hopelessly erroneous. How could it possibly be true?

Note carefully that if in fact you spend your energies training the wrong people, you also bypass the right people. You in effect suppress the training of the right people if you are using up your time and facilities and resources in training the wrong people.

Nevertheless the fact is that all over the world, especially in the United States, but also wherever the “long hand” of the Western church reaches, precisely the more gifted leaders of the Christian movement are being sidetracked and not being recruited into ministry. The growing edge of Biblical faith around the world has little to do with residential training of pastoral leaders.

Let's go to Africa. In Africa the majority of those who earnestly follow Christ, who seek the living God, and for whom the Bible is the most prominent feature of their movement, are not even what we would normally call Christians. They are part of a very wide spectrum of movements earlier called the *African independent churches*, and then the *African indigenous churches*, and now more recently I hear it is the *African-initiated churches*. The *World Christian Encyclopedia* claims there are more than 50 million Africans

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This article is updated from a presentation given as the opening address of the annual conference of the Association of Christian Continuing Education Schools and Seminaries known as ACCESS, which met on the campus of the U.S. Center for World Mission.

in this movement! These movements do not employ residential schools for church leadership.

Let's go to Brazil. Seven out of eight new churches—and there are about ten or fifteen new ones a week—are Pentecostal. They don't have seminaries. They don't believe in seminaries. That isn't quite true: the Assemblies of God now finally have a seminary in the United States—and will inherit all the problems that is going to create. In any event, Latin America is a very rapidly growing sphere of world Christianity, but some feel it is not growing “properly,” “respectably,” “normally.”

It is growing out of control. It isn't coming to our feet for training. It isn't coming to our institutions. Its people don't have time for that. And our institutions are not interested in reaching out to such people.

A little digression here. I was asked to go back to Brazil ten years after first preaching the gospel of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) at a Sao Paulo conference of 65 seminary leaders. I was there as the last Anglo executive director of the Association of Latin American Theological Schools, Northern Region (in Brazil I was asked to speak out of my territory). At the end of this four day conference they formed (right on the spot) an association for theological education by *extension*. I didn't propose that they do that; they just did it, and I was very pleased to see it happen.

Ten years later I was invited to speak again at their annual meeting. They said, “Come back to see what we've done.” So I went back and in ten years they had developed over a hundred specialized textbooks in Portuguese for their burgeoning extension movement!

Then, twenty years later (these visits were in 1965, 1975 and 1985), I was asked to go down again. This time I was for the first couple of days quite in the dark as to what was going on. But I found out at a lunch the second day that they had changed the name of their association. They dropped out the word “extension.” It was now just an association of theological schools. After 20 years of what the anthro-

pologists call “cultural levelling” most of the people at the meeting didn't really know much about extension. They wouldn't have ever come to an ACCESS meeting.

I was aghast, and so I shifted gears. In the last two days of the conference I preached the gospel of extension from scratch. As it says in the book of Acts, “and some believed.” However, although the seminaries are moving away from extension, the church movement is out of control, and “standard schools” have little relationship to the growing edge.

Let's go to India. In South India there may very well be more people outside the formal church movement seriously reading the Bible and following Jesus Christ than the number of equivalently serious believers who call themselves Christians (or who are called Christians by anybody else). This vast movement of believers does not employ residential schools to create leaders.

Or go to China. Here's the largest movement in human history that has grown as fast as it has. Out of practically nothing in thirty-five years to 50, 60, 80 million people. There are now also thousands of “regular” churches.

But I'm mainly talking about the fifty thousand “house churches.” It bears mention that the saving grace of the Chinese church is the fact that in most of the house churches the “theological anchor man” is a woman, trained as the result of the work of women missionaries years earlier.

The irony is that the male missionaries were expected to carry the load of conveying the Biblical inheritance. They were expected, naturally, to teach in “proper” schools. They did. But note, for every man taught by a man in a “proper” school, women missionaries taught dozens of women (who really learned and loved the Bible) by “extension” methods. What a providence. That unplanned extension phenomenon is the principal reason there is a husky church in China with the degree of Biblical knowledge it does in fact possess. Korea is similar. The vast majority of the 50,000 house

churches under the umbrella of the Full Gospel Church on Yoido Island are, for example, essentially pastored and taught by women *who have learned the Bible by non-formal methods*.

Granted that not all of these movements have their theology as straight as we do! But I remember McGavran used to say, “Look, it doesn't matter what these people believe. The main thing is, are they reading the Bible? If they are serious about the Bible, they'll turn out okay.” That brief comment of McGavran's shouldn't be taken as his complete wisdom on these movements. But in any event, it doesn't really matter; according to McGavran, what they believe will balance out if they are pursuing the living God in the pages of His Word. And it is up to us to get that Word into their hands.

In India illiteracy isn't the same problem. You've got a lot of very highly literate, highly educated, very wealthy people in India who can buy anything that's in the bookstore. In Africa, it is quite different. Many of the leaders of this 50-million block aren't literate. It isn't that these people are heretical due to rebelling against God. It is because—here's the key word—*access* was not there.

So we've now covered a very large proportion of the earth's surface. Let's return to the United States. Here I quote Wagner to the effect that most of the last 25,000 new churches in this country are devoid of seminary-trained leaders. Maybe five percent have seminary-trained leaders. Wagner is not saying this is a good thing. He's just describing what is true.

But, when you come to the United States there is a different dynamic to some extent. It is not that the people don't have the money to go to school, or that they don't live near enough to go to school, or that they can't leave their families or jobs to go to school. In this country those problems are much more rarely the case. It is many cases trivial factors.

Thus, in this country the rapidly growing edge of the Christian movement employs what could be called

“non-professional leaders.” The same thing is true in England, with five thousand new churches over there. There’s practically no connection between these new churches and the standard, traditional, orthodox theological training which we all rightly value so highly. And the reason is mostly a *practical* lack of *access*.

I remember a man in Costa Rica, the year I was there studying Spanish, way back in ’57. This man was a CPA, very bright, earnest, a lay believer. He wanted to go to seminary. He lived right *next door* to the seminary, one of the best in Latin America. I said, “Well, you don’t have any problem.” He said, “Well, you know, I have to work during the day, and they only teach during the day.” So he couldn’t go to seminary. Now, there was a case of a potential leader being sidetracked by what I call a trivial factor.

We are not training the right people, not just because the right people don’t want to study, but because usually we’re not making what we have *accessible* to the right people.

My own personal pilgrimage, you might call it, has put me into contact with a lot of evidence for this. When I first got to Guatemala, I had no idea of what I’m now saying here. However, a friend of mine from seminary days had been there before me for five years, Jim Emery. He had already figured out that the key leaders the church really depended upon weren’t able to go off to the capital for years to seminary and then come back to their families and their jobs.

I have calculated that if you wanted to finance all the real local leaders around the world with “proper” (residential) theological seminary training, it would run about \$15 billion per year.

You say, “Wow, there must be a huge number of these people.” That’s right. There are about two million functional pastors who can’t formally qualify for ordination, or who are mostly not ordained simply because they cannot practically penetrate the formal mechanism of theological education even if it might be theoretically accessible to them.

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Billy Graham in 1983 brought ten thousand of these local leaders to Amsterdam. He thought he was bringing all the itinerant evangelists of the world. Actually, not one out of ten was an itinerant evangelist in the specialized sense. These were all itinerant evangelists in the ordinary pastoral sense. In Guatemala, every single church is in the business of starting new churches. The average number of new congregations being started would be three per congregation. One church I know down the mountain from us had the beginnings of twenty-five new churches going at one point.

So, when Billy Graham brought all these local leaders to Amsterdam, he no doubt thought the lectures and inspirational talks he offered them were going to be a great blessing. And I am sure they were. But, I thought to myself, ten thousand of them—that’s a teaspoonful. Then in 1986 he brought another group to Amsterdam, a larger number. I was at that second meeting. It was a wonderful meeting. I met a lot of the two hundred fifty from Guatemala alone. I knew many of them myself. Again, Billy may have thought, “Now I’ve done my job. I’ve gotten all these people some good Bible teaching.” I could have suggested, “If you really want all such people to come, you have to expand your attendance from ten thousand to 2 million.

That’s how many functional pastors there are, who are literally operating as pastors but do not have a scrap of formal, theological education—and never will—the way things are going. *Access* is the problem.

When I was in Guatemala, then, for ten years, James Emery and I worked together very closely and developed what was later referred to as “the Presbyterian experiment,” which we called *theological education by extension*. I edited a book by that title of some six hundred pages. (The current

phrase for all this is “distance education, although distance is not the key problem. Access is. Remember the CPA who lived next door to the seminary in Costa Rica.)

There are also what could be called “political” problems. We didn’t foresee running into political problems within the church. All these new local leaders coming into the training program, who were being recruited by the new extension program of the seminary, would show up at the Presbyterian meetings. While almost all were ordained elders, many of these people were also business people, or lawyers, or attorneys.

One of the older pastors, trained as a young person in the former seminary, told me, “The missionaries are trying to dethrone the pastors.” He ended up running a bookstore. There were people in his church who were more gifted than he was.

He’d gotten into seminary as a young person needing something to eat and a place to sleep, no doubt wanting to learn, and he became a pastor, a faithful person, but he was better at running a bookstore than a church. The man who took his place came right out of lay work as an adult and was trained in the seminary by an extension method. It wasn’t very long before the number of people that had theological education made accessible to them by extension were able to out-vote all the existing pastors.

If that political fact had not been true, our experiment would have been voted out of business, you can be sure of that—a deadly reaction from the cultural momentum of our traditional system of residential schools. That momentum has erased progress in this area all over the world.

Thus, there is a great deal of resistance to change along these lines. Not just resistance from existing pastors who studied in traditional fashion.

Most of our theological schools around the world don't have any professors who got their theological degree in an extension mode. Count them on your fingers; I don't think you need any fingers at all.

Here is an example. I was visiting Gordon-Conwell. This was before the founding of the Ockenga Institute which reaches off campus. I had for years been in touch with Harold Ockenga, and while I wasn't one of his closest friends, he was one of the most respected people in my life; and I many times over thirty years—from the time I was a teenager even—would write him a letter and send him a self-addressed postcard and he would give me an answer to a tough question. I really appreciated that. So we sat in the refectory—the good old Catholic name for the cafeteria—and as we sat across the table he said, “Ralph, tell me what you mean by extension theological education. What would it look like if we were to go that route?”

You can imagine the exhilaration that flowed through my veins in that moment. I said, “Well, look, over the years, Gordon-Conwell has pumped hundreds of wonderful, Evangelical pastors into the veins of the Presbyterian USA denomination.” I said, “Over a period of time you are going to have an influence on the whole denomination. But notice how slowly that is going. Suppose you put out 100 new ministers into a denomination of 18,000 ordained pastors each year. After ten years you've replaced only 1,000 of the 18,000.

But,” I said, “look at it from my experience back in Guatemala. The real leaders, the gifted people that God could readily utilize in a pastoral capacity, are right there in those churches. You go to the 12,000 congregations, you'll find at least an average of three people in each of those congregations who, with the proper theological training, could be ordained and could do a better job than the person who is in the pulpit.” And I said, “Stop and think: within four or five years, you could flood the denomination with your people. There would be no way to stop this

influence. You could enroll, in one year, 10,000 students to start with.” Well, good old Ockenga, brilliant, competent, faithful servant that he was, he could not digest that.

A similar event took place at my brother's home here in Pasadena. He was very close to David Hubbard, President of Fuller, and to some of the others in the development dimension at Fuller. He invited Dave Hubbard and me and four or five others down to the house one evening shortly after I came to Fuller from Guatemala. And (now, this is years earlier than my conversation with Ockenga) David Hubbard asked the same question: “After all this talk about principles and theory and distant places, what would Fuller actually look like if we were to go that route?” Probably I wasn't as cautious and careful and thoughtful and wise as I tried to be when I talked later to Ockenga. I said, “Well, Dave, it wouldn't be any problem to explain this. First of all you would shut the campus down and you would establish maybe 28 extension centers in Southern California alone, and enroll probably 8,000 people,” and so on.

I couldn't even get into the second paragraph. What I said was perfectly possible. What I was saying was perfectly uninteresting. Fuller was intent on being conventional. What was good for church leadership had become a question of what was good for the establishment of a conventional school.

Well, they did finally make some moves when Robert Munger came on the faculty two or three years later. He also had similar interests. He was very much a man of the church, and he was very eager for the seminary to make a contribution to the church. He probably more than any other person, certainly not I, helped Fuller into an extension mode, but after ten years in that mode they still would not give a degree to somebody who studied in Seattle.

Even after they finally got into extension, one of the students in Seattle (which was one of Fuller's extension sites) took all the right courses and

without the registrar noting it qualified for an MA in Theology.

I myself went up to Seattle to teach. Nobody but a *kosher* Fuller professor was sent to teach. All the same textbooks, everything; you couldn't possibly say that it was a deficient process.

But when a person up there, inadvertently to the school's expectations, took all the courses she needed and then asked for the appropriate degree, there was great consternation back home.

I was in the faculty senate at the time, just eight people: two from each of the three schools, the registrar, and the president. The registrar said, “This is ridiculous. We can't give degrees to people who studied someplace else.” I remember the great New Testament expositor, George Eldon Ladd (he was one of the two representatives from the school of theology), I remember him pounding the table and saying, “No one will ever get a degree from Fuller who doesn't come and study here in Pasadena on this campus!” He would exclude even the people who would come right to the campus in the evening program to study, *because they were not the proper kind of people*. They were older people, not recognizably the right age. They were more intelligent, they were more experienced, stable Christians. I mean, you can't expect *those* people to be ministers, can you? You don't want *them* to get a degree, do you? You've got to keep them out of ordination. That's conventional wisdom.

Now, by the way, 30 years later, you can get an MDiv degree from Fuller without ever leaving Seattle. But why have we been so slow to come to this? There was no reason they couldn't, except, well—this is a pervasive problem in human society—when the means to an end becomes the end, you are in big trouble.

Remember, all of us here represent “means”: schools, schools that are set up to provide a certain service. Princeton Seminary's catalog says, “We exist to serve the church.” I think that's an honest statement, but it is not accurate. Princeton Seminary has other goals that it has to deal with. Intermediate goals, sure, *but interme-*

diate goals are the worst enemy of the real goals if you can't see beyond those intermediate goals. They have the intermediate goal of paying all those professors. That means they have the intermediate goal of getting enough money in, not only in tuition but in donations. They have a lot of things to do to keep alive and to keep going and to keep their building program in mind and their Speer library and all that vital stuff. *They've got enough to think about without thinking about the church.*

Now, they probably do think about the church some of the time, but this recent book (*Being There*), which highlights one of the mainstream seminaries, gives you one of the most dismal views you can imagine. I just blanch at the thought. I can't imagine *Christian Century* even publishing their review (of *Being There*) of what actually goes on in such schools for whom apparently *the means has become the end*. The real end is out of sight.

Years ago, long after I got to Guatemala, Jim and I had worked on our TEE program and we sold the idea to other missions in Guatemala, then to other countries. Then, an association of theological schools was formed in the northern region, which means seventeen out of twenty-one Latin American countries were in this association called ALET. I was the second executive director of that association. Our perspectives about extension were woven right into the structure of that association (not like the ATS). That took me all over the place, to different countries.

In those days there was very little resistance in the mission field to ideas that would nourish the church. I think missionaries, most of whom do not spend their full time in schools, are very much more alive to the possibilities of theological extension. That's why our ACCESS conference theme this year, "Global Access," is so important. We are talking about the global reality. Now that may shake us up just a little, because all these reviews, all these books are slavishly confined to the USA.

In any case, as I and others went around to different countries, visiting

these different schools, a great deal boomed into action. Eventually we were going around the world under the sponsorship of the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association (EFMA—now called the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies). Wagner went around the world with Ralph Covell. Covell and I went around the world the next year sowing the seeds of TEE.

Wayne Weld, later a professor at North Park Seminary in Chicago, did his doctoral dissertation at Fuller on the development of the movement, and produced a hefty book entitled *The World Directory of TEE*. At the time his book was produced 100,000 people were studying for the ministry



under what might have been 400 to 500 schools around the world.

But then, while that early TEE movement to some extent is still there, I have often referred to it as collapsing. What our ACCESS society will do or can do about that collapse I'm not sure.

I'm sure of what it *could* do. *The major impediment which withdrew those schools from helping people into the ministry by extension was the fact that this pattern was not being followed in the United States.* Why? To a great extent what's done in this country tyrannizes what can or can't be done in the mission field either near or far.

So what can ACCESS do? Hold its head up and continue to expand into schools who reach out to real leaders and don't just wait for younger, immature students to come to them. We must make that pattern respectable in the United States.

Now, the other mission field I talked about, these burgeoning churches in Africa, Latin America, India and China,—they don't even know how you spell "seminary." They are not influenced by what seminaries will or won't do in this country. But in any event, the reason for the decline in TEE was simply that gradually the residential schools of the nonwestern world—about 4,000 now—realized they weren't doing what was conventional in the USA, and gave up TEE in order to be "proper."

Then, of course, the "degree-completion" movement came into being. Again, it is not a movement that was the result of people getting down on their knees and praying, "Now, Lord, are we really serving the church?" It was a movement that was pressured financially. The anticipated decline of the 12 million 18 to 22 year-old "baby boomers" in college was predicted to drop in half. Schools, to survive, had to go off campus to replace that tuition.

So many schools were scared to death they were going to go broke that the accrediting associations didn't say anything when they did finally begin to teach away from the campus.

Now I understand from Dr. Oosting that the accrediting associations are beginning to take a bead and to shoot at these degree completion programs to make sure they increase the quality and time and all that up to the norm, and so forth. But, it is very, crucial what the pattern is now well-established in this country. In fact, we fight not against flesh and blood. We fight against mammoth cultural forces: the degree-mania of our time, especially in Asia, the inflation of units, the redefinition of all kinds of things; but probably *the worst of all is what I would call institutionalization, which replaces the end with the means.* Whenever an institution of any kind becomes first concerned about its own existence that is the beginning of decline right there.

I think, for example, of the welfare workers in Wisconsin. I was reading an article in the *Los Angeles Times* the other day which said that Wisconsin is making remarkable

progress in getting people into jobs and getting them off welfare. Their biggest problem is not the people on welfare, but the people in the welfare offices who are not as interested in welfare people getting off welfare as they are keeping enough people on welfare so as to protect their jobs in the welfare office!

Now, translate that into the seminaries. The biggest problem with the seminaries is that they don't want what is needed most. The welfare workers can only stay in business if there are lots of people on welfare. They don't want people to go off welfare. They are the biggest single problem in the state of Wisconsin. The seminaries think they can stay in business only if they have residential students. And staying in business comes first.

There are other ways that people can measure progress. The post office, for instance. There is some link between how much mail comes in and what the local postal workers are paid. I know that to be true, because they are so eager to get the business away from the other post office down the street! That could only be true if there is something in that for them. So the post office measures its success in part by how much the volume is. All kinds of institutions measure themselves by different things. But when an institution comes to the point when its leaders measure themselves by how many students are there or what their enrollment is, that defines a problem since that's only a means to the end. The real question is, who's there? Or more precisely, *who is it that isn't there?*

Now, take John Wimber, a local boy here in Southern California, I knew him before he was famous in the Vineyard movement. He never went to seminary *to study*; he went to seminary *to teach*. And his movement has 200, 300, 500 churches, I don't know. Those people don't go to seminary. They should. I'm the first one to say that what seminary has to offer would be very significant to his people. But somehow the *access* isn't there. On and on. We could say the same for many, many leaders in America today. *The growing edge of the American church has*

had to learn to do without the seminaries. Not because the seminaries don't have something crucial to offer. Not even because they don't know how to offer it. It is because they have not decided to offer it to the right people.

I'll give you a case in point. Not long ago the seminaries balked and screamed at the thought of offering a two-year degree. True or false? It is true. That was a tremendous, traumatic thing for them to offer a two-year degree, because they didn't want it to cut into their three-year degree.

I remember sitting at dinner in the home of a professor at a certain seminary. I was praising the school for its downtown MA program in Missiology in the heart of a major city. I no sooner got half way into the sentence than he said, "Yeah, but you can't get an MDiv on the basis of that program. You have to come back to this campus and start from scratch if you are going to get an MDiv." He was protecting a certain program. I don't think his main concern was what could happen to those natural leaders down town. He was really primarily *thinking about the means rather than the end*. And on and on. You could find hundreds of examples of this.

The University of Wisconsin during the Second World War was asked by the Navy to repackage all of their college courses for extension use, and the Navy would pay the bill. The University of Wisconsin is a very high level, high class, respectable school, but they didn't have any trouble doing that. Just like that, an entire college curriculum was now available to anyone in the Navy, anywhere. They just did it!

But they drove a hard bargain. They demanded, in effect, "When the war's over, every single book you still have in your hands will be burned, because we want to go back to our cloistered, hallowed on campus school system. We don't want to continue to be a benefit two and a half million students."

How do you like that? Simply because they were paid to do it, they could do it. There's nothing mysterious about extension technique. Technology and all that kind of stuff is great, but

helping people that are out there, it is pretty obvious how to do it. You don't have to be a brain! It is the question of whether we want to do it, not whether we are able to do it. *And what we do in this country has overwhelming impact upon schools around the world.* Right now most of the schools around the world are going in the wrong direction—following us!

Question Period

Question: How do you evaluate the view of some denominations about the professionalization of the pastorate as a requirement, for instance with an MDiv? What kind of effect does that have?

Winter: It is like shooting yourself in the foot. Really. That's the historical fact. Every single denomination in this country that has evolved a required formal, extensive graduate professional training for ordination is now going downhill. There are no exceptions in the whole world. In fact people have gotten the wrong impression about seminaries, joking about cemeteries, and so on.

The schools assume that whoever the students are, a good curriculum and pastorally experienced faculty will graduate good pastors. Rather, even a poor curriculum and pure scholars for faculty would graduate good pastors *if highly gifted, mature Christians were the students!* Seminaries have no policy of turning such people away; they simply don't make sure to give *access* to them—which is something which ought to be their highest priority.

Question: You have identified the problem. What's your prognosis for the future? Are you optimistic or pessimistic?

Winter: In this country it is a little different from what it would be in the rest of the world. I've already described the fact that most of the growing Christianity of the world does not even know what a seminary is, so in a certain sense, don't worry about Christianity. It is going to take care of itself. This is the outrageous phenomenon! Most people think that we've got to send more missionaries and send more money just to

keep Christianity from collapsing. It is almost the other way around! We could double our missionary force, and we could only slow down those church movements that would buy into our method of preventing real leaders from ordination. I'm very optimistic about the church if we can refrain from preventing its real leaders from leading. However, I don't think there's much hope for these 4,000 schools in the so-called mission lands unless they can see beyond their intermediate goals.

Question: Do you want to comment on the curricula being designed around the Great Commission as well as the Great Commitment?

Winter: Since the average evangelical seminary is mainly talking about the Old Testament or the New Testament or church history at any given time—remember, that's their three-fold core emphasis—it is not very hard for that material to be interpreted in terms of global mission. This is what we've done in our 320 lessons that run all the way through seminary content. For example, we've been overjoyed to discover, right in the book of Genesis, 36 missiological issues. Normally, you know, people study Genesis in one school and missiology in another school, and when they study Genesis, they don't study the missiological issues of that narrative. When they study missiology, they don't study Genesis. The two things are separated out. But the missiological issues in the book of Genesis can well be integrated into standard curricula. I don't think it is very *difficult*.

But, on the other hand, it is very *unlikely* to be integrated in most schools for the simple reason that those who handle the Bible don't normally think in terms of global mission.

I would just say, also, that in terms of optimism or pessimism, it is sort of like the New Testament situation where the Jews could be pessimistic about the expansion of their faith and wouldn't recognize the Greeks as being of the same faith. So they were pessimistic when they could have been optimistic. Later on, the Catholics were very pessimistic when they saw the breakaway of what was later called

Protestantism. They were pessimistic when they should have been optimistic. We are in a similar situation today. We can cross the world, and we say, "What's going on?" And some people are very pessimistic about the heresies and the abounding diversities and the confusion of the informal unbounded global Christian movement when maybe they should be very optimistic. So it is partly a question of what you are looking for, from what perspective. Like Jesus said about John the Baptist's question—What did you go out to see?

Question: Would you like to comment on the point that overseas the theological vacuum is being filled particularly by the Bible college movement and extensions of that movement?

Winter: I wish it were true. It is true that there are 4,000 schools. We have a book produced by the World Evangelical Fellowship's Theological Commission, listing 4,000 schools, at least 3,000 of these being in the non-Western world. And these schools have students, many young people. But, and here is the crucial point, many of them are more concerned to keep their enrollment up than they are to find and educate—by whatever means necessary—the actual, real, mature, gifted leaders in their associated church movements. It is not a question of whether we think of humble Bible schools or well-endowed seminaries, the key question is whether or not they are offering access to the real leaders of their movement.

However, even if they had nothing but proven, gifted leaders in their schools (which is highly unlikely if they are running daytime classes), even so their entire number of students is still only a drop in the bucket compared to the massive number of functional pastors running the churches, who can't make it to school because they are busy planting new churches, holding down bi-vocational jobs and families as well. For example, all the overseas schools together enroll less than 100,000. But there are 2,000,000 functional pastors with no formal theological education.

Thus, I'm saying that the theological education one receives is not just valid

if it is like what we do in this country. What we do in this country just won't fit in most situations overseas. Note that I have no problem at all with the so-called "scurrilous" Bible schools.

In fact, I feel a little bit funny that this association, after 20 years, has sort of accidentally demoted a lot of schools because they didn't fit a particular monocultural pattern. We say you can't be an institutional member of this association unless you do certain things a certain way, which for the most part has very little relevance to the real world, much less the non-Western world. In that momentary—and I would think erroneous—conclusion our association did, I feel, wound itself in terms of recognizing the validity of Bible training of many other sorts.

But even if you take all of that into account, the ordaining force in most mission-related churches (which is a very substantial part of what we would call recognizable Christianity around the world), the *ordaining* requirements are such as to rule out people for ordination if they merely have the so-called "scurrilous" training. There's always going to be one person who went off overseas to Columbia Bible College, say, came back with a "proper" degree, and from then on, all other education is no longer considered worthy, is demoted to secondary status.

Probably the most remarkable use of Bible schools that I know of would be in Latin America by the Assemblies of God in their so-called "night Bible schools." These night Bible schools, first of all, were, note, in the evening. That means they were *accessible*. As far as I'm concerned, a night school is an extension operation. Distance, frankly, has nothing to do with it. Remember the CPA who lived next door to the seminary? "Distance" education would have solved his problem, but the distance in his case was not geographical.

In any case, those night Bible schools fueled the church with an amazing amount of biblical knowledge and stature in the Word that enabled the people who had gone through those Bible schools to be elevated into the

ministry over a long period of very careful selection. Thus, in the so-called Pentecostal movement very rarely is a man ordained who is the wrong man. In our movement once “formal” schooling, whatever you call it, gets a hammerlock on who gets ordained in the church, then the church may say, “Okay, we won’t ordain anybody unless he or she goes to our formal school—we like higher standards.”

Once they make that fatal step, they’ve ruled out most of the gifted people who could be leaders in the church. And that’s what the Assemblies of God in Latin America *did not do*. And their movement is now so strong you practically have to be a Pentecostal if you are going to go to Latin America. Talk about pessimism and optimism, the mainstream churches that we think of as respectable churches in this country are not only half dead in Latin America, they are almost completely invisible—they are overwhelmingly outnumbered! They’re zany rare objects by comparison to the new mainstream of Latin America. The same would be true in slightly different form in most other parts of the world.

Further Comment on the Actual Track Record of Evangelical Educational Structures

ACCESS is a society of schools which have sought to educate at a “distance.” Our experience over the last 26 years has proven for any perceptive person that real education does not have to take place through classroom incarceration. We in ACCESS hold the key to an educating lifestyle that allows people both to learn and at the same time attend to the meaningful duties and challenges of real life instead of succumbing to the by-now culturally approved years-upon-years spent in an artificial school world that is numbing and perverting.

When, without blinking, we measure education by the number of years in school, when we say someone is more highly educated than someone else just because he has lost more years in the school world, we are very nearly totally confusing *the means* with *the end*.

But all this is merely basic to the specific application of our topic. Several examples may illuminate this background in order for the foreground of the needs of church to be seen more clearly.

Let’s look first at Moody Bible Institute. It started out as a continuing education school in the evening for the thousands of adults who had been caught up in an immense revival of faith that swept this country and England in which Moody was a principal force. This vast revival produced the school, not the reverse. For various reasons, however, the Moody Bible Institute soon transitioned into schooling young people during the day. It did not give up its continuing education component because its extension activities are substantial. It is just that the day-school activities are what people now think of when they think of Moody Bible Institute. I think that the transition was not unreasonable at the time. The older students at night wanted their children to be exposed to vital Bible teaching. And the teachers could not make a living just teaching in the evening. Furthermore, as a faculty was gathered subjects arose for discussion that may have been tangential. For example, for some years Moody’s faculty was known for its mastery of a detailed countdown of eschatology. It is not that Moody has not performed a great service to the church. The fact that 157 Bible Institutes jumped into existence confirms the existence of the market which they served. But in many respects this vast Bible institute phenomenon became one huge mistake.

Let’s behold something similar: the costly transition of A. B. Simpson’s even earlier school in New York City to today’s Nyack College up the Hudson River. That occurred during a nearly full century in which the 157 similar Bible Institutes came into existence and then one by one marched out of existence—as Bible Institutes.

In addition to the shift away from training adult leaders, I am convinced that a major mistake made by this entire Spiritually vital tradition took place when they turned attention to young people—for whom the secular

world has a prescribed pattern for growing up. This second mistake was the assumption that the cultural norms of the secular culture could be ignored. Instead of adding Bible to what people had already learned or were learning in the public schools (as was and is the case of the evening adult students) the Bible Institute movement soon became a generally irretrievable *replacement* for a number of significant years—three or four—of secular school experience.

It ought not to be a surprise, now 100 years later, that this grand experiment died, an experiment that once flowered and was first replaced by Bible Colleges, and then more and more by what are called Christian colleges, which do now finally adhere to the secular norms.

But think of all that happened and did not happen during the hundred years of transition: the tens of thousands, yea hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Evangelical youth who were given diplomas that would not admit them to further education or to the professions, Congress, whatever! The Evangelical Movement has only recently begun to integrate Christian knowledge with secular standards and become a substantial force in the secular sphere of our society.

A similar thing continues to happen in the realm of the seminaries. They, too, continue to pump out degrees that in the secular world are unintelligible or irrelevant or both. Pity the seminary graduate who would like to think that his three or four years of seminary will be as respected in the secular world as is a PhD from, say, Seattle Pacific University, which is one of only a handful of Evangelical schools yet offering a PhD.

But this adds an important note. Seattle Pacific, and the Holiness tradition in general—add in the Christian Church—Churches of Christ tradition, and yes, the Roman Catholic tradition—they did not go headlong into the offbeat pattern, the Bible Institute pattern. Seattle Pacific, Abilene, Pepperdine offered PhD degrees long before the Calvinistic Bible Institute pattern yielded to that. Moody, for example, was one of the

first institutes to exist but one of the last to offer a regionally accredited BA degree. How long will it be for Moody to offer a PhD? The irony is that Wheaton College avoided the institute detour partly because of its early holiness influence, but has only recently decided to offer a PhD.

Marvelously, and also recently, some major Evangelical seminaries themselves have begun to move toward the university pattern and offer a PhD, although most of them are still loath to give up their questionable MDiv detour.

Now, all of this is an historical perspective on the shifting pressures of society and of the needs of society in regard to the structure and program of the schools. We do well not to underestimate the power of cultural traditions. If it took the entire Calvinistic Evangelical tradition a hundred years to make up its mind about the wrapping paper of its educational product, what will it take to analyze afresh the essential problems which it came into existence to address?

The reason ACCESS is so potentially cogent is that although day-time schooling may be appropriate as a child-care mechanism for small children, or perhaps even for slightly older children, however the same kind of incarceration for young people and adults in day-time schooling massively replaces the possibility of significant participation in the real world. Years ago I defined extension education for myself very simply as “that form of education which does not disrupt the student’s productive relation to society.” Whether by night classes, weekend classes, vacation classes, part-time classes, internet activities, or whatever, if it is possible for a student to get on with life, to gradually support his existence by giving back to society something for his own support, then the ACCESS ideal has been achieved—as a procedural goal, at least. **IJFM**

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