

Missiological Education for Lay People

■ Who should receive mission training? Into whose hands shall we entrust the information and skills needed to establish "A Church for Every People"? This address, given at Fuller's School of World Mission conference on Missiological Education for the 21st Century, defines three "missiologies" vying for the attention of the Church and challenges basic assumptions for church and mission leadership education.

By Ralph D. Winter

In speaking on my assigned topic, I would like to propose the following ideas:

1. That *missiological education for the lay person* is the only hope of rescuing our generation from a "Great Commission-less" Christianity, a form of Christianity which is a deadly heresy within the Western churches and as such is a fatal disease striking at the very root of the global Christian mission.

2. That *missiological education for the lay person* therefore outranks the strategic importance of training of professional missionaries as such.

3. That *missiological education for the lay person* can only be achieved by off-campus education, and that, believe it or not, the off-campus education of "lay people" is also the only way that the best selections can be made for the pastors, evangelists without whom the Christian movement cannot continue.

4. Finally, that off-campus education is also the only way the average residential institution will survive in the "on the run" world in which we increasingly live.

Introduction

Along with the other speakers who have preceded me, I must at the outset give credit to Donald McGavran, with whom I worked for ten years and who then was a member of my board for most of his years beyond that. While he certainly believed in professional training for some, he was equally concerned about "the five kinds of leaders" essential to any vital church movement. Note that most of those five were lay people. His major reason for inviting me to help out in the early years at the School of World Mission was my involvement with the Theological Education by Extension movement, a growing phenomenon which brought theological studies to lay people at their own local level.

However, I am also indebted for a much longer period to another man who was also a founder of the Fuller School of World Mission. It was only when this man made his decision that

there should be such a school that someone like McGavran was sought out to head it up. I still recall the lengthy search process and the energy behind it long before McGavran was involved.

Who was this other founder? A *lay person* named Charles E. Fuller, who, like another lay person named Dwight L. Moody, did not get his theological training in what we consider the proper way. Charles Fuller earlier had founded Fuller Seminary itself, but he saw it as a temporary compromise of his original intentions. The School of World Mission was his attempt to make a course correction. A course correction to what?

Charles E. Fuller was a lay person who had been enabled to get a bit of Bible and mission education. If he had not gained missiological education as a lay person there never would have been a Fuller School of World Mission, much less a Fuller Seminary. Fuller was not only a lay person like Moody; but like Moody his passion was for the lay person. He launched the first religious radio program in this country. His radio audience at its height was larger than any other at that time. But he employed radio for the special purpose of reaching people in the out-of-the-way places in this country just as his father, Henry Fuller, had personally supported forty missionaries to the *out-of-the-way places* of the world. Drawing on family wealth, Charles Fuller at one time sent out a couple dozen full-time evangelists specifically to the "scattered populations" of this country—the mines, the lumber camps, the rural towns. Yes, his passion was for the forgotten, the overlooked, the little person, the lay person. Radio was merely his method of speaking to them.

Thus, both McGavran and Fuller would have been especially interested in the topic assigned to me.

Nevertheless, this is a curious topic. I don't believe I have ever thought about the training of lay people as a subject until this topic was handed to

me. For example, I have always thought that the extension network of classes across this country and around the world which I am involved with has been simply a case of trying to educate people who would become missionaries, mission pastors, mission mobilizers, etc.

As a matter of fact, however, most missionaries are and always have been lay people. I refer especially to the women missionaries. Indeed, the freedom and honor given them on the field was the primary force producing the early feminist movement in this country. Note that in the vast majority of the multitudinous house churches of China, the theological "anchor man" is actually a Bible-trained *woman*.

That curious and enormous reality on the field in China shows, I believe, how much more effective was the *non-seminary training* of lay women (even if conducted only by the women missionaries) than was the much more cumbersome *seminary training* of men—the totally different technique with which certain specialized male missionaries struggled.

Thus, I am going on the assumption that the rationale for assigning me the topic "Missiological Education for Lay People" is at least partly due to the fact that for the last 18 years, following the Urbana Student Missionary Conference of 1973, I have been involved as a sideline in an off-campus mission study program for lay people.

Case One: The "Perspectives" Network

In the United States alone, more than 20,000 people have taken our 150-hour, 3-semester-unit course entitled "Perspectives on the World Christian Movement," which is essentially an introduction to missiology. Students who wish can get transcripts from cooperating seminaries and colleges, and often transfer that credit into a state university or other college as a humanities elective. This possibility of transfer of credit to a secular school is one reason we do not call the course an "Introduction

course title, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, is more likely to allow secular schools to accept transfer credit for the course.

At this early date we have already accepted plans for 58 locations in the United States where the official course will be taught this coming spring. It will be taught again later on in some of the same or additional places. For example, it will be taught six times in the Spanish language in Los Angeles. In other countries we are not in charge, so we are less aware of the details. But we hear that in New Zealand they project 30 locations in 1993. It is likely that the combination of overseas programs in Spanish and Portuguese as well as in English would amount to at least as many as we are reaching in this country.

So much for that particular course. Having awakened a sleeping giant, we are now virtually forced into offering further studies. In order to do that, we are in the process of asking the help of a consortium of about a dozen seminaries and graduate schools which have shown a willingness to offer some of the constituent elements of an additional program ten times as large as the "Perspectives" course, namely, a 32-semester-unit M.A. in Mission Studies. We are guessing that about one out of 20 of those who take the introductory *Perspectives* course will also want to go on with an additional 32 units toward a degree—if we can deliver the goods to them in an off-campus location.

Let's take a closer look at the nature of off-campus education. In launching this additional program in 1993, it isn't new for us to draw on the help of other schools. Even now, in order to operate in 58 places at the same time, we have had to build up over the years a pool of more than 500 teachers who typically take on a single week-night, 3-hour class, one of a series of 15 lessons spread over 15 weeks. Thus, we need 15 different professors for each 15-week course. Note that 15 weeks times 58 places is 870 evening programs right there—just for the spring session. But since we only draw on 500 different professors, and it is very rare for anyone to teach more than one of the 15 lessons in a given location, it is obvious that some of the many friendly people who teach for us must teach in more than one place.

Three professors in one of the accredited Christian colleges which gives transcripts to people in these classes cornered me recently when I happened to visit their campus. They told me again and again how elated they were to be teaching off-campus in this program. Why? Because of the

astonishingly high motivation and interest of the students in these off-campus classes. One said, "Never in twelve years here at this college have I had a group of students like that."

The incredibly high spirit of the students in these off-campus classes explains why we do not need to pay professors astronomical honoraria, although what we pay is substantial. The tuition paid by these students covers the air travel and honoraria of the professors as well as other class overhead, credit transcription costs, etc. Even so, the program has been entirely self-funding from the beginning. No one has become rich, but cooperating schools do benefit from the thousands of dollars that flow through this operation. What I have described is purely the off-campus program which we ourselves happen to supervise. In addition to all this, 100 residential schools also employ the same text materials. I am sure many of you are familiar with our 900-page *Reader* and the accompanying 300-page *Study Guide*, both of which have undergone major revisions this year.

Let me move on now to an earlier experience with lay people which might also be expected of me under this topic—an experience which provided the basis for McGavran's invitation to me to join the faculty of the School of World Mission in 1966.

Case Two—Theological Education by Extension

I remember an incident which happened shortly after I first arrived on the field in the highlands of Guatemala. My wife and I had been assigned to work with a tribal group numbering a third of a million, one of thirty-three language groups in the Mayan family. While there were many congregations of believers in this group already, no one from this tribe had ever gone to the Presbyterian Seminary for training, and it was not very likely that the seminary (located far away in the capital city) would be able to contribute anything very soon to the well-being of the far flung network of mountain Indian churches.

A good friend of mine, Jim Emery, had arrived five years earlier and had worked a good bit down on the coast with Spanish-speaking congregations. It was apparent that very few of the leaders in these coastal congregations would likely ever make it to the seminary in the capital city either.

He and I were talking about the problem of theological education one day and he observed that most of the congregations without "properly trained pastors" nevertheless had at least one person within the

congregation who did a creditable job of leading the churches. The curious fact was that the absence of *ordained* pastors in these many, tiny rural and mountain congregations was more an ecclesiastical inconvenience than a serious deficiency in local congregational dynamics.

We asked: Why were there not more *ordained* pastors? Well, in our Presbyterian system "proper training" (defined by an approximation to U.S. standards) was essential for ordination. But, of course, if anyone working down on the coast ever got "proper training," the cultural shift involved would leave him feeling very much out of place within either the coastal Spanish culture or the highland Indian culture. Therefore, we decided to try to figure out how the seminary could go to the people who were already the leaders but not "formally" trained.

Seven years later we were running a nationwide extension program that enabled any rural adult studying part time to gain a government diploma for the first six grades of general education. We wrote the textbooks, drawing on the collaboration of the various missions in different parts of the country. We received government recognition for this process, and in a short time over a thousand rural adults gained the highly esteemed sixth grade diploma—quite an achievement since very few of the rural schools went beyond the third grade. It was something like a Ph.D. except that a sixth-grade diploma was much rarer in that rural world than a Ph.D. is in ours. Meanwhile, the government was astonished at the high grades many of these rural adults received. (They were equally astonished by our willingness to flunk those who did not make it.) At first they assumed the whole thing was phony because they wondered how in the world people could learn outside of school.

This sixth grade level then provided the basis for enrollment in the lowest of four levels of training offered by an extension seminary program we had simultaneously devised—which was our real goal. No, the real goal was not a seminary program accessible to rural people; our goal was to give rural church leaders the "silly" academic credentials without which they could not be duly ordained and function as fully ordained leaders. I'm not saying that what they learned was silly; I'm saying that the missionary-imported delivery system was silly. We were teaching the same courses they taught at the seminary. So what our people learned in our off-campus extension pattern was very valuable.

What we did could have been done

earlier. It never would have been necessary to go to the capital for a period of years for such studies. Tragically, *once the seminary, a relatively recent invention, had been established as the way to go, the earlier apprenticeship pattern that had worked for centuries was condemned.* However, with the new approach the paper barrier was broken. Now 200 rural churches could look forward to real pastors. But there was a problem we had not anticipated.

After four years of this new off-campus program, 140 rural leaders were enrolled. Then, the opposition arose. At the annual meeting of our denomination that took place in the capital city—we called it an annual synod—a strong challenge was voiced against this new program that now enrolled seven times as many students as any previous total in the residential seminary in the capital. One reason was that *pastors in the capital city were feeling threatened by the impressive leaders that had been netted in this new program.*

The telling accusation was made on the floor of Synod, "Those 140 students are mere lay people; you are letting lay people into the pastorate." In other words, the whole operation was merely for lay people—meaning they should *not* be ordained on the basis of this off-campus training. True, the students in this extension program were lay people with jobs and families and located out in the Spanish and Indian worlds of rural Guatemala.

At this point in the meeting my good friend, Jim Emery, stood up. He was at that time probably the only person who could stand up in a synod meeting and be listened to with respect by both missionaries and Guatemalans. What he said I'll never forget: "When I went to seminary I was a lay person." Then, directing his comments to the city pastors who had gone through the capital-city seminary, he said, "When you went to seminary you were lay people, were you not? So what is the problem? Why is it so strange that our students are lay people?"

When the vote was taken, the simple fact was that most of those 140 students were present! They tended to be, for the most part, ordained elders and had a vote in synod. So they out-voted the city pastors, and the experiment survived and continued. It was rather like a palace revolt. One city pastor later told me, "You missionaries are trying to dethrone the pastors with all these lay persons."

He was right. He himself later left the ministry and ran a Christian bookstore, a job for which he was much better qualified. However, since very few of the 200 congregations had "properly trained pastors," not very many "properly trained" pastors lost their jobs.

Thus, a whole new kind of leadership soon flooded the church. We

We have come a long way from the classical missionary activity of the apostle Paul, where believers from one nation or people reached out to begin a work within a different nation or people. Paul himself distinguished his major ministry from that of Peter in Galatians 2:7, when he said, "I had been entrusted with the Gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews." I may add that Paul did not simply plant Gentile churches and then stay around. He constantly had the passion to go "to the regions beyond...where Jesus Christ is not named." (Romans 15:20ff.)

had dramatically forestalled the professionalization of the movement. By means of this extension trick, so to speak, our church movement had now gained almost the growth and nurture capability of the Pentecostal churches, which were at that stage, at least, still untrammelled by a seminary tradition.

This idea, basically, was merely the idea of setting up an educational delivery system which did not implicitly exclude the more mature leaders of the congregations. It became an approach that was employed in other parts of Guatemala, and Central America, and later in South America. An extension seminary association was formed in Brazil. I recall being invited ten years later, in 1977, to its annual meeting where they were eager to show off all of the marvelous progress they had made with special study materials for off-campus students for the ministry.

A joint committee of the EFMA/IFMA sent people around the world introducing the concept of training lay people where they are. At one point it was estimated that over 100,000 people in over 500 programs around the world, mostly in humble congregations (but also doctors and attorneys in capital cities), were taking studies that would, or at least could, allow them to be *ordained*.

But I recall even more vividly the time when I was invited again to Brazil,

this time for the 20th anniversary of the Extension Seminary Association, which had begun on my first visit in 1967. This time, unknown to me during the first two days, I was lecturing to a group which had changed its name. The Brazil Extension Seminary Association had decided *to be respectable*, and had dropped the word *extension* out of its title! A good number of the seminary leaders present were not even acquainted with the concept of training lay people. A massive reversion had taken place. "Respectable" seminary residential training had regained its culturally approved position of power. With the exception of some evening schools in the big cities, former extension schools trying to live up to the U.S. pattern were back to training young people who were footloose and free with no families or day-time jobs, and could attend a residential school—*young folks who no doubt in many cases have appreciated the subsidized care and feeding of the institution.* Those young

people were not bad people; just not as good a bet for church leadership as the real leaders out in the congregations.

I am afraid this same sort of reversion has taken place in most of the world. The U.S. model of residential education is just too strong. The desire of leaders for a tangible basis of superiority, a professional status, is too strong.

It was an interesting experiment. The initial actions in Guatemala were in 1961. The Latin American and global movement gained strength in about 1967. By 1987 the whole idea of extension education had come and mainly gone as the untried and untrue residential seminary pattern from the U.S. regained even greater strength in more and more places across the world, and the irresistible pressure of an established American tradition continued to be carried out across the world like a disease germ by missionaries who had not themselves been trained in an off-campus pattern. What else can we expect from missionaries trained in the traditional pattern?

Well, maybe we don't need to worry. In Latin America, at least, the Pentecostal pattern has picked up the slack. That movement has thus far not erected artificial barriers to lay people with leadership gifts who are found in the real world of the local church. However, in the United States the older

Pentecostal denominations are, in fact, slowing down as they adopt "professional training" models for their leaders. And as this happens, the growing edge becomes still newer movements like the Costa Mesa Calvary Chapel movement, the Vineyard movement, and the thousands of independent Christian centers, such as those found in England. The well-known Pentecostal characteristics may blind us to the simple fact that around the world their leadership selection pattern is not hobbled by the requirements of certain kinds of required, but largely inaccessible institutional training.

So, who cares if the so-called "mainline" churches commit slow suicide by Rube Goldberg complexities in their ministerial delivery system? Who cares? Well, the newer, untrammelled movements need to care, simply because they seem likely to head in the same direction, like sheep being led to the slaughter.

The key word in this discussion is *access*. Ken Mulholland used it in his presentation. It is one of the main secrets of the Pentecostals, although in itself it is not uniquely Pentecostal. Moody's Bible Institute in the early days gave access in evening classes to all kinds of leaders who could not go to day-classes. This was the secret of the surprising new power injected into the evangelical tradition through the Bible Institute movement. But like Samson, who knew not from whence his strength had come, the Bible Institute movement had no sooner come into existence for the benefit of *giving access to lay people*, including leaders who could not go to daytime classes, than it turned away from that secret strength in order to become "respectable," in order to support its professors, perhaps, but more likely in order to ape the other daytime schools and gain legitimacy.

Dr. Charles Fuller was one of those lay people whose great gifts became evident only after some years as a lay person, and who gained enough from the Bible Institute of Los Angeles to get him going on the level of national and worldwide influence. He tried to figure out how to further contribute to the movement that had given him *access*, and in the final analysis was persuaded to create a conventional seminary that seemed designed to deny lay people access.

Some of you may be thinking, "You have been talking about theological education for lay people, but what does all this have to do with missiology and specifically missiological education of lay people?" To answer this question, I will focus on the three key terms in the

topic assigned to me.

I. Missiology?

Let us go from the general to the specific. All I have said thus far has been intentionally an extended illustration involving the concept of *laity* versus the defensive survival of institutional school patterns promoting a professional ministry. What does this have to do with missiology?

Three Kinds of Missiology

Our introductory "Perspectives" course, talks about the whole world. It employs the word *mission* here and there. Does that make it *missiology*? Let's look more closely at what we mean by *missiology*.

My topic, "Missiological Education for Lay People" falls to the ground if what we are teaching in these lay programs is not missiology of some kind. But words do gain expanded meanings. We have come a long way from the classical missionary activity of the apostle Paul, where believers from one nation or people reached out to begin a work within a different nation or people. Paul himself distinguished his major ministry from that of Peter in Galatians 2:7 when he said, "I had been entrusted with the Gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews." I may add that Paul did not simply plant Gentile churches and then stay around. He constantly had the passion to go "to the regions beyond...where Jesus Christ is not named." (Romans 15:20ff.)

The Pauline type of mission activity has been going on a long time now. But today, I believe, three concepts of missiology exist side by side, causing considerable confusion to the church. A candid look at the budgets of the mainline denominations reveals that millions of dollars that once were committed to one kind of mission are now literally hurtling in other directions, and the awareness of this transformation in definition has virtually paralyzed and decimated the national offices of such denominations.

1. *Intracultural missiology*. I realize that no one owns the word *mission*, and no one owns the word *missiology*, either. Note that the purposeful element in the word *mission* allows us to describe any purposeful activity as *mission*. When pastors *purposefully* expand their congregational membership out into the same cultural stratum, it can logically be called *mission* (and thus *missiological* when we stop to think about it). There is thus the *missiology of church growth*, whether that growth be growth in internal quality, in expanding congregations, or

in planting new churches within the same people group. This is what Gnanakan in his presentation called "intracultural missiology." That is one kind of missiology talked about today.

2. *Interchurch missiology*. There is then, logically, the additional, more exotic, cross-cultural kind of missiology where the study is of the purposeful (e.g., *mission*) activities of believers in one part of the world who are dealing with other believers at a distance, across significant cultural barriers, perhaps in other countries. This is preeminently the missiology of the global Christian fellowship. Call it "interchurch missiology." It is ethno-theology, the staggeringly fascinating wonderland in which we can compare notes with other believers in other cultures. In this arena it is easy to suppose that we can and should beat our pioneer mission swords into the plowshares of the concerns of the church wherever in the world it has become domestic. Or we may turn our remaining pioneer mission courage into doing battle with the domestic problems that may plague the new churches our mission labors have planted. That is, we may ponder the need to fight alongside the overseas believers in their battles with their own social and political problems—that is, in their own *intracultural* missiology. *Interchurch* missiology is then cross-cultural, *intracultural* missiology. It is fascinating for two church movements in two different parts of the world to compare notes on their own *intracultural* challenges.

You might have thought that the Western mission forces would have been aware that we had "worked ourselves out of a job." But Parkinson's law comes into effect: "Work expands to fit the time available." If we have completed the pioneer stage, there is no reason to go elsewhere. Why not stay where we have planted churches and revise the Great Commission to read, "Go ye into all the world and meddle in the national churches?" Indeed, after the 2nd World War, a whole new variety of mission agencies jumped into being. These new "service missions" did not go out to plant the church, much less go to new places, but went out across the world where the church was already planted to service the new churches—carrying to them our back-home Sunday School materials, church computer programs, airplanes, radio stations, evangelistic techniques, and, yes, seminaries. Some newer missions—in view of the existence of the national churches—are proposing that missionaries are not needed at all but that the money we send to them ought to go rather to pay the much lower stipends

of national evangelists who can "do a better job for less money." This is not entirely unreasonable if there are no untouched fields.

3. *Classical or Frontier Missiology.* Beyond "Interchurch missiology," however, there should continue to be the Pauline kind of missiology—where believers reach out from their own culture to begin work in new people groups in which Christ is not yet named, or at least where there is not yet "a viable, indigenous, evangelizing church movement." This kind of pioneer work is now being attempted by some of the Western missions and also by some of the vast new category of so-called "two-thirds-world missions."

Thus, we have at least three kinds of missiology to talk about: (1) the missiology of the church in relation to its own society (*intracultural missiology*), (2) the missiology of interchurch relationships on the global level (*interchurch missiology*) and (3) the missiology of pioneer efforts within unreached people groups (*classical or frontier missiology*).

My primary concern in the last 15 years has been with the third kind. Probably less than 10 percent of missiological literature today focuses on classical missiology. It is clear that both interchurch and classical missiology are cross-cultural studies of great value to the world church.

Theology or Missiology?

This clarification, however, still leaves unanswered the question, "Why take interchurch or classical missiology to *lay people*? Why not give lay people standard theology?" There are at least two reasons:

1. *Remissilogizing the Bible.* One reason has to do with the survival of our own authenticity as true followers of Jesus Christ. Missionaries go not only to give but to receive. But missionaries generally carry a cultural mix of Christianity to their overseas posts. The indigenous church movements that result must eventually free themselves from the lingering elements—or at least the undesirable elements of the foreign culture—in what we call the contextualizing process. In that process, the missionary may hopefully learn some important things he can take back to his own people. Eventually the new leaders in the overseas churches will be able to take the lead in this process, comparing notes with the missionary's own theological tradition. The result can

be a precious refinement of the missionary's theological thinking and even his understanding of the Bible. This is the first reason why classical missiology is inevitably of high interest and value to lay people in our own culture. Hopefully, it will assist them in refining their understanding of the treasure we have in the earthen vessels of our own culture. Every church

As a result, no matter how high the *quality* of the education seminaries offer lay people, that *quality* may not be able to transform them into the right kind of *gifted* people. It is thus not a matter of what seminaries do to their students—for example, how much field work is required, or whether the seminary professors have had, or continue to have, pastoral experience. It is rather a matter of whether or not the particular lay people who find their way into seminary classes (in a daytime residential program) are those within the church who have the strongest pastoral gifts.

movement in the world deserves this kind of cross-cultural critique of its own cultural mix of Christianity.

Briefly, it is very easy for the Bible to become within any one nation the means simply of that nation's own salvation. Much of conventional theology contributes to ethnocentric soteriology. The Westminster Confession (and every other theological statement clear back to the Nicene Creed) falls desperately short of allowing the central thrust of Biblical revelation to shine through. I refer here simply to the impartial concern of God for all the nations.

Thus, lay people deserve to receive an input from missiology so they can see the Bible with the eyes of a different culture. This process can rescue them from what Samuel Escobar calls "culture Christianity" and allow them a much better grasp of the Bible as well as a deeper understanding of the *central meaning of the subject matter of theology*.

2. *Re-missilogizing theology Itself.* We are already talking about the second reason for sharing missiological insights with lay people. In a much more specific sense, missiology (whether interchurch or classical) can help to restore central meaning to theology and to balance out a hundred specific and very crucial areas in the theological diet which lay people inevitably receive within the cultural cocoons of their own mainly

monocultural world at the hand of monocultural pastors, monocultural Bible scholars and monocultural theologians.

II. The Lay Person?

The phrase *lay people* is the most shocking element in the topic assigned to me. I think its use implies that the people who go fulltime to residence schools for seminary knowledge are no longer lay people the moment they decide to go to seminary—an assumption we have already questioned. On the other hand, if my topic does not rest on that assumption, it would appear that I should talk about what goes on in seminaries, not merely what goes on off-campus. But, isn't it true that I was handed a topic that was probably meant to steer clear of the role of the traditional seminary—that is, training people for the ordained ministry, not just to be better lay people? That perspective implies that once a person sets out to be a professional minister, he or she should no

longer be considered a lay person. To underscore this, some church traditions apply the special term "ordinand" to a lay person at that special point where the decision is made to seek professional training for ministry.

But I ask you, is there, on the one hand, a significant difference between the kind of lay people which our nationwide off-campus program has been teaching and, on the other hand, the kind of lay people who attend seminary? Is there a significant difference between the 100 M.Div. students enrolled in the Conservative Baptist Seminary of the East (who are in Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia and everywhere between), and those who pull up stakes, "give up a secular career" and move to a residential seminary program? The fact is that in many residential seminaries far less than half of those who do actually attend are there due to a special decision to give up a secular calling.

However, it is probably not good enough simply to maintain that most seminary students are still, in fact, lay people. The point is they are getting a professional education which will allow them to become something other than lay people—that is, professionals. Some decide while in seminary to do so. In most cases seminaries solicit funding from donors on the basis that they are providing ministers to the church. Even so, in *only* the last 50 years (notice, *only* in the last 50 years) many

denominations have settled on a seminary education as the *only* channel into the ministry. In such spheres the seminary has gained a monopoly.

It would thus be understandable if seminaries were unenthusiastic about moving off-campus, especially if what is taught off-campus were to allow just anyone into the ministry while stripping the gears of full, formal on-campus ministerial education, thus watering down the quality of ministerial training and, in the process, undermining the financial base of the seminary movement.

Recently a seminary leader remarked in my hearing that if it were not for the incredible influx of relatively affluent Korean students, at least six evangelical seminaries would be bankrupt. This should alarm us about the inherent financial fragility of the seminaries since it *must not become a marginal concern to the church that the seminaries continue to exist*, especially in their crucial role as the guardians of the Christian historical and intellectual heritage. The problem is that in order to carry out that central function, seminaries have from the beginning depended on what I regard as a pragmatic, secondary function, namely the training of young people for ministry. This kind of linkage between theological centers and the training of new ministers is very beneficial to the survival of the seminaries, but we need to ask: Is it harmful to the churches?

In seminaries, scholars guard and treasure the Biblical manuscripts, the historical records and theological truth, constantly updating our understanding of the present day meaning of our faith. Of course, the linkage involved in the passing on of that heritage to future ministers is quite natural. Also it provides, at the same time, for the sustaining of the seminaries themselves.

Meanwhile, however, that linkage may be seen as unfortunate for the welfare of the church movement since by settling on an institutional experience that is not available to the average lay person, a nearly fatal complication is introduced to the normal selection process whereby lay people may rise to church leadership.

That is, insisting on the institutional experience of the traditional seminary for all ordained leaders actually skews the selection process. Gone are the possibilities of lay people becoming "farmer-preachers" as in the Baptist tradition—which grew so large and fast before it adopted the seminary experience as essential for ministry. Gone is the lay preacher of the Methodist tradition—which grew so

large and so fast as long as it employed an extension form of theological education, a method which for a hundred crucial years of growth did not put any artificial limitations on the church leadership selection process. We now have worldwide experience—shall I say, *missiological* experience?—confirming the drastic interference in church growth resulting from a mandatory residential seminary experience.

In the global world, to which we are introduced by missiology, we see a vast laboratory of very different experiences from our own distant past. It is safe to say that virtually the only church movements in the history of the world that are growing, or once grew mightily, are those that enable lay people to become leaders in the church without the disruptive extraction of a residential seminary program leading to a professionalized ministry. Those movements that adopt a pattern requiring all future ministers to take the seminary detour find that their growing days are over. From the village churches to the super churches, the real leadership resources of a church movement do not consist of professionally trained people.

In a word, then, as with mayors, governors, congressmen, and presidents in the civil sphere, living, growing church movements around the world draw their leaders directly from the laity. They would not think of drawing upon untested young men out of the graduating classes of seminaries—even if that kind of institutional process were prolific enough to keep up with the rate of growth of an expanding church. In Latin America, specifically, the "night Bible schools" throughout the hemisphere, which give access to the whole of the laity, have fueled a movement that has passed up the other groups employing seminaries for pastoral training as if those movements were standing still.

Is it not somewhat similar in the United States today? What proportion of the 50,000 most recent new churches have started out with standard seminary trained pastors? Would it be higher than 5%? The Calvary Chapels, the Vineyards, the Christian Centers of our time generally display surprisingly capable leadership. It is becoming clear that congregational leadership is something other than what you acquire in school or through a course on leadership. Do we have to choose between 1) untrained but gifted leadership and, 2) less gifted but academically qualified people?

I don't believe the key point here is

whether lay people are being given the Bible or not, or seminary training or not, since, in fact, most seminary students really are *lay people*. The key point is which lay people are able to get the necessary training to be effective pastors and Christian leaders. Our seminaries are not teaching the wrong things; they may be teaching the *wrong people*. The awesome reality is that the *right* people are, for the most part, *unable to gain access to the traditional institutional structure of the seminaries*.

The kind of leaders the Bible defines for the church are not easily discernible at the time people in their early twenties register in a seminary. Granted that the gradually increasing age of the average seminary student has brought a lot of more mature people into seminary. So, also, has the increasing tendency for seminary students to be married (a change from 2 percent in 1945 to perhaps two-thirds today). Yet, not all the older students who find their way into seminary are especially gifted.

As a result, no matter how high the *quality* of the education that seminaries offer such people, that *quality* may not be able to transform them into the right kind of *gifted* people. It is thus not a matter of what seminaries do to their students—how much field work is required, or whether the seminary professors have had, or continue to have, pastoral experience—but it is a matter of whether or not the *particular lay people* who find their way into seminary classes in a daytime residential program are those within the church *who have the strongest pastoral gifts*. I think it is becoming clear that unless seminaries make what they teach *accessible to the full spectrum* of believers, the greatest leadership potential of the church cannot be harvested—nor can the seminaries survive (without counting on Korean students)!

This leads us to the final main word of the topic assigned to me: *education*.

III. Education?

Education is thus not merely a matter of the right curriculum, but the right students. It is as much a matter of *whom we are training as what we are teaching*. It is not merely a matter of the quality of the classroom or the library but the quality of selection of those who benefit from the education that is being offered.

Some years ago David Hubbard and I happened to be speakers at the same meeting held at the Denver Seminary. He was introduced by a man who talked effusively about the many illustrious pulpits held by Fuller graduates. Dave began by courteously declining the

praise offered for these well-known examples of outstanding leadership, going on to note that if he did not decline these honors, he might with equal logic be blamed for those many Fuller students who had not turned out so well. I feel he showed great insight!

There is only so much a seminary can do for its students. No amount of field training can guarantee to produce the kind of gifts surely possessed by those who have already distinguished themselves in lay leadership. At any given time, the vast majority of the saints who have the gifts of ministry are to be found out in the churches and will never darken the door of a seminary.

The healthiest church movements across the world are not limited for their leadership selection to those relatively few who do somehow make it through seminary. No, they draw their leadership right out of their congregations. This is true especially in the super churches, where the crucial cell groups are all led by lay people. For the growing movements of the world today it is better for the seminaries to figure out how to add high quality training to those who have manifested giftedness than to hope that an indiscriminate slice of a relatively small handful of young people given professional training will someday manifest the necessary giftedness on which the church desperately depends.

I am convinced that (1) the seminaries must survive in order to perform crucial functions other than the training of the ministry, but (2) that they can readily survive only if they are willing to bend sufficiently to make their riches accessible to lay people, and that, meanwhile, (3) this happens also to be a matter of life and death for the church, which cannot forever digest professional pastors. Professional administrators perhaps, professional organists and choir directors perhaps, even professional missionaries perhaps but not professional pastors.

Missiological education, also, must extend to lay people. Most missionaries—whether intracultural, interchurch, or frontier—like most pastors must continue to be lay people. It is equally a matter of life or death for the Christian world mission that we give lay people access to missiological education whether they become part-time or fulltime workers or whether they become home-front mobilizers, cross-cultural workers, or front line pioneers.

Ralph D. Winter is the President of William Carey International University. He and his wife Roberta live in Pasadena, California. Their four children, all daughters, are missionaries and parents of 12 grandchildren.

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