

Four Dimensions of Leadership Training

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A veteran missionary to Kenya, Vance Kirkpatrick, begins a chapter on "Theological Education and Missions: An African Case Study," with these words: "The Lord will have returned before the experts agree on the exact nature and approved methods of theological education."¹ Anyone familiar with discussions about theological education, theological training schools, and methods of theological training can identify with Kirkpatrick's statement. The debates regarding theological training run from the extreme of seeking theological excellence to the opposite extreme of skill training in ministry without adequate classical foundation.

It has been my observation that most training programs tend toward the first of these overstatements. Over time, the programs commit to higher and higher levels of theological training. Their goals become preparing people for graduate programs rather than parish ministry. As Missionary Kirkpatrick again says, "Theologians tend to reproduce themselves."²

In theological schools, those teachers dedicated to the classical studies normally outnumber those committed to the skills for ministry approaches. The outcome of this imbalance often results in an overdeveloped emphasis on the classical studies. It is a major error in theological education to overemphasize either the ministry area or the classical area. There is, however, a third area that often goes virtually unnoticed and therefore untended. This area relates to the whole person of the theologian/leader.

The personal and spiritual life of the theological student demands first place in the theological training programs. The ultimate goal of theological training should be to "produce" men and women of spiritual depth and theological understanding who will, while living with integrity and piety, express the Faith honestly, purely, and effectively in the context of the culture or cultures to which they minister.

It has been my observation that most theological training programs in the West and in the Two-thirds World will of necessity have to undergo a transformation if they hope to attain the goal above. I would speak of four dimensions of theological training that must be addressed in order for training programs to overcome the classical-skills difference and center on the whole person of the church leader in training.

The first of these dimensions, becoming User-friendly, demands that the program exist for the trainee and the churches they will serve rather than the trainers. Directors of training programs tend to build monuments to themselves and reproduce the programs from which they came. Classes are developed around the interests and the conveniences of the teachers. User-friendly programs will be decentralized, major on the contextualized expressions of Christianity, and prepare leaders for the churches and ministry in which they will engage. User-friendly approaches will take the needs of the trainees and their families into consideration. These decentralized programs will take the training to the trainees rather than bringing the trainees to the "school."

A second dimension of the training approach most needed today relates to involving lay persons in the training. Most training programs center on producing full time, professional type workers for the churches. The proper approach involves the lay persons. Train the whole body to render the needed ministries. The Apostle Paul indicates that the church leaders, "apostles, prophets,

evangelists, pastors, and teachers," exist to prepare God's people for works of service so the body may be built up (Eph. 4:11-13).

The training program does not seek to equip persons to "do" the work of ministry but to "prepare" the entire body to do the work of Christ. A large portion of the training program will center on teaching leaders to be equippers. Even if a church could hire enough staff to do all the witnessing, praying, comforting, and ministering, this would not be the biblical way of doing church ministry.

A third dimension of the training program for today calls for an emphasis on apprenticeship, mentoring, and personal relationship in training. In this intimate training relationship, the "whole person" of the trainee can be addressed. Attitudes and relationships become paramount. The personal relationship is often lost in classroom situations. The classroom may be a good method for sharing knowledge but the personal relationship is a better method for building character.

Interestingly, when Jesus called and commissioned his disciples, he appointed twelve, designated them to be apostles, "that they might be with him." (Mark 3:13-14). The important aspect of the training of the twelve was their personal association with the Master. Leadership training today must recapture the Mentorship relation.

A fourth dimension for leadership training demands learning by doing. This dimension closely relates to the Mentorship method above. Rather than studying books about how to witness or preach, the trainees actually attempt the task and are guided to improvement by their mentors. Many testify that they had to learn on the job after their formal training. Perhaps there exists a way to do both at the same time.

Church growth and leadership training are closely linked. We have erred, I think, in placing so much emphasis on the training for the "clergy" and failed to see to the training of the entire body. In "clergy" training, a lion's share of the effort should be in the area of becoming an equipper.

Another error, I fear, is training that looks more on the knowledge given than on the character developed and the skills acquired. Let the training program center on the skills needed to serve in the church. Another channel can be developed to produce the scholars the Church needs.

Leadership training today retains its important position. It rests in need, however, of a vast transformation. Leadership training needs to become user-friendly, lay persons centralized, skill-development and apprentice devoted, and learn by doing committed.

Footnotes

¹ Vance Kirkpatrick, "Theological Education and Missions: An African Case Study", *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. Mike Barnett, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Pub., 1988), 526.

² *Ibid.*, 528.