

## **Equipping for ministry and mission**

**David Harley**

*The missionary task is as coherent, broad and deep as the need and exigencies of human life. . . .Mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions.<sup>1</sup> (D.Bosch)*

During the last thirty years, we have witnessed the rapid growth of the missionary movement in the non-Western world. The task of training men and women for ministry involves not just training candidates from the West and in the West. It involves training people who come from every corner of the globe and training them in every corner of the world.

We have witnessed the growth of opportunities for Christians to use their professional skills in the development of other nations, including those that are closed to traditional missionaries. We are also aware of the huge increase in the numbers of Christians offering for 'short-term service', going to work in another country for anything from two weeks to two years. Both 'tentmakers' and 'short-termers' present special challenges to those who organize training programmes.

A training programme seeks to build on the foundation that has been laid by the local church. A period of concentrated learning affords the opportunity for the candidate to study Scripture in more depth, to learn basic hermeneutical tools, to familiarize themselves with basic doctrines, the history of the Church, patterns of worship etc. It may further provide the context in which the gifts of the individual can be further enhanced and new skills acquired. The loving context of a community may provide the context in which they may grow in self-understanding and in their personal faith.

When the student leaves the training programme, there is still so much he or she has to learn. The process of learning and developing is a life-long process. The student must be encouraged to go on learning throughout their lives, to develop habits of reading and personal reflection. Those who direct their future ministry should encourage them to attend subsequent courses and consider further periods of study that may enhance their subsequent ministry. Denominations and mission agencies need to put in place comprehensive programmes of member development, so that throughout their period of service, each person is encouraged to grow in faith, in character, in knowledge and in ministerial competence.

There are so many issues that could be addressed under this topic of equipping for mission that one is almost at a loss to know where to begin. I have chosen ten areas of preparation or equipping that I consider to be critical. Of course they are

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<sup>1</sup> D.J.Bosch, *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (1980), p. 11.

not comprehensive but I trust that they will stimulate response and be an effective starting point for discussion.

## **1. Caring for the spiritual life**

Mission is no place for the faint hearted or the walking wounded. We must not send out people who are spiritual cripples. We need people who can survive on their own spiritually in a lonely and sometimes hostile environment. They cannot presume that there will be a lively church – even if there is they probably won't be able to understand the sermon or sing the hymns. They cannot presume that there will be a dynamic small group where they can be encouraged very week. They may have little fellowship or means of spiritual nourishment. The critical question is whether they will be able to cope.

In Mark 3:14, we read that Jesus called the twelve apostles to be with him. He wanted them to spend time with him, to learn from him, to observe his life and his example. Only after they had established their relationship with him did he send them out. In the same way the basis for involvement in ministry must be a personal relationship with the one in whose name we go, a relationship which is developing as we respond to all the means of grace that God has made available to us.

If the missionary candidate has no personal relationship with their Saviour, they will hardly be able to convince others to put their faith in Him. If they are not living in dependence on God and the power of his Holy Spirit, they will be severely limited in their attempts to serve the community to whom they go. If there is no dynamic personal faith, no evidence of a personal relationship with God, the words that they share will sound hollow and unconvincing. As one friend of mine, working in Bangladesh said: "If people do not see Jesus in me, I might as well go home."

E.R.Morgan, warden of the College of the Ascension, wrote in 1928 that the missionary must learn "to be alone with God." He believed that: "the essential inward purpose of the missionary training will be identical to that of a retreat."<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Developing the character**

Throughout the New Testament, there is a strong emphasis on the character of those who preach the gospel and minister within the church. The qualities of an elder or deacon, described in the pastoral epistles, focus not on academic ability or ministerial gifts (except that of the ability to teach). Rather they concentrate on character and the spiritual life. When seven deacons were appointed in Acts 6, they were chosen not because they had great administrative gifts or accounting

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<sup>2</sup> E.R.Morgan 'Missionary vocation and training,' in: *Essays catholic and missionary* (1928), p. 249

ability but because they were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. When the church at Antioch heard the voice of God telling them to send out Saul and Barnabas, the elders of the church knew from their own knowledge of these two men that they were indeed well suited for the task to which they were being called. Saul had proved his courage and zeal to preach the gospel. Barnabas was known as a good man who was full of the Holy Spirit. Since this is the emphasis of the New Testament, it should also be the priority in any programme that seeks to equip men and women for ministry.

The local church makes an enormous contribution to the spiritual growth and development of the missionary candidate. This is the place where they are converted and grow in maturity. This is where they progress in their understanding of the faith. This is where they first enjoy fellowship with other Christians and begin to understand the nature of the church. This is where they take their first faltering steps in Christian ministry and service. The members of the local church not only help the individual to grow in their Christian faith and practice, they are also in a better position than anyone to assess the suitability of the candidate for future ministry or missionary work.

However, in most churches, especially those with large congregations, it is not always possible for the pastors or church leaders to know each individual in depth. They may observe them in certain contexts and be aware of their strengths and gifts, but they may not be aware of other facets of their personality or weaknesses in their character. A period of training in a residential setting may bring to light other aspects of a candidate's character and provide an appropriate context in which to develop in those areas where there is some weakness.

An early example of residential training can be seen in the Edinburgh Missionary College. Anne Hunter Small, the first principal, was one of the few women who gave a paper at the Edinburgh Conference on 1910. She laid great stress on the value of training through community. It was through the community that "students grew in living relationships with Christ, maturing through self-discovery, responsibility and challenging involvement, both inside and outside the walls of the college."<sup>3</sup> Within the novel experience of living in close proximity to others, students were prepared for the intimate relationships that might be forced upon them by the exigencies of the mission field. They also began to discover themselves, to learn what it meant to be a real person, an 'original' self rather than a clone of another.

There were few rules at the college. "The original intention was to create a natural, free and wholesome family life, governed only by the law of mutual loyalty and service."<sup>4</sup> This free life was deliberately adopted by Miss Small as the best way to develop missionaries for the actualities of missionary service. She writes, "Some

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<sup>3</sup> M. Stewart, *Training in mission: St Colm's College, Church of Scotland* (1972), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

have preferred to proceed by imposing a rule from without, under which, in process of time, habits and an instinct of obedience are established. But a missionary student has in view a position of great and new responsibility, where she will be removed from her natural advisers, and be sat down in a circle of men and women often too busy to give her much aid or counsel; what she needs, second only to her private life with God, is the power of judging for herself and acting upon her own judgment, and these things can only come by the enjoyment of considerable independence."<sup>5</sup>

This is the experience of one remarkable college, which in many ways, was far ahead of the educational norms of that day. Many other training institutions, both in the West and in other parts of the world, would testify to the enormous benefit of a period of residential training. Sadly, it is not always possible to provide such training, but every attempt must be made to foster and develop the character of those who seek to go out into the world in the name of Christ.

One of the most significant thinkers in the area of missionary training in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was David Morris, who served as principal of All Nations Christian College (as it became known) from 1962 to 1981. He was eventually awarded an honorary doctorate by the Open University for his contribution in the area of adult education.

At the heart of Morris' understanding of missionary training lay the role of the college tutors. As an undergraduate at Oxford, he had studied under the supervision of a personal tutor. He realised the potential value of such a system for the training of missionaries but wanted to extend the scope of the tutors' responsibility to include personal and practical matters as well as academic studies. He saw the tutor not just as an academic adviser but as a pastor, counsellor and friend.

He chose his tutorial staff as much for their proven pastoral ability and relational skills as for the academic qualifications and mission experience. Each was required to fulfill the role of tutor to a group of students.<sup>6</sup> They met with this group three times each week for a time of worship and at other times for informal coffee parties. They were encouraged to eat their lunch with the students and to schedule evening social gatherings once or twice each term so that they could get to know their students better.

Three or four times each term,<sup>7</sup> the tutors met with the students on an individual basis for an hour or so to discuss their academic work, their practical work in a local

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<sup>5</sup> A. H. Small, 'The Women's Missionary College, Edinburgh,' in World Missionary Conference, Report of commission V (1910), p. 251f.

<sup>6</sup> This number in each group was originally eighteen but this was reduced gradually as the staff/ student ratio improved. By 1981 the normative number for each group was twelve.

<sup>7</sup> The academic year was divided into three ten week terms.

church, their own personal development and spiritual growth, and any other area that they wished to raise (e.g. guidance for the future, personal relationships etc.).

Dr Bob Ferris of Columbia International University, who made a study of innovative programmes in ten seminaries and Bible colleges around the world, made the following observation about the tutorial system at ANCC:

The tutor is responsible to weave the various aspects of the college program into an integrated - and individualised - curriculum for the student's personal and professional development.<sup>8</sup>

The ethos of the tutorial system was one of mutual friendship and trust. The tutors were respected for their experience and maturity, but they regarded themselves as fellow disciples of recognised that they had much to learn from their students. They tried not to intrude into the students' lives by asking insensitive questions, but sought to earn the students' trust. When a student shared something of a confidential nature, the tutors respected that confidentiality.

The faculty members were expected to devote a large amount of their time to this interaction with the students. It was an attempt to model the training on the pattern which Jesus used with his disciples. It was very costly in terms of time and emotional energy, and several minutes of ANCC council meetings contain references to the pastoral demands that were made on the staff.<sup>9</sup> It also meant that staff had less time for the pursuit of private study or the writing of articles for learned journals. In essence, it is a reflection of Morris' commitment to wholistic training that the tutorial system was given such high priority.

### **3. Increasing self-awareness**

Many of those who offer for ministry carry emotional baggage from the past, e.g. dysfunctional backgrounds, experience of abuse, problems with guilt or bitterness. Unless they receive help in these issues, there may be problems later with serious consequences for the individual and their ministry.

Leaving one's own cultural milieu and moving into a totally different cultural context involves both loss and the challenge of considerable change. A critical question for any training programme is how will candidates react to these challenges and how can they be prepared to handle them.

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<sup>8</sup> R. W. Ferris, *Renewal in theological education* (1990), p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> The minutes of ANCC Council, January 24th 1974, minute 74/7 and January 23rd 1975, minute 75/8.

Some missionary candidates have an exalted picture of themselves and what they are going to achieve. They may have quite unrealistic ideas about their gifts and abilities. They have some important lessons to learn. They have to realize, as Gwenyth Hubble, former principal of Carey Hall, said "that they will not be the inestimable and highly important asset and gift to the church to which they go that they and their congregation had fondly imagined."<sup>10</sup> They need to follow the Pauline injunction not to think of themselves more highly than they ought. They need to see themselves from God's perspective rather than from their own. That may be the difference between "the image of a successful, highly qualified activist and that of a sinful man saved by, and utterly dependent on, the mercy and grace of God."<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Fostering cultural sensitivity

There was a tendency among some Western missionaries in the past ( we hope that it is less prevalent today) to feel a sense of superiority. The report of the Commission on Missionary Training from the Edinburgh (1910) conference stated: "The white man so instinctively feels that he is lord of creation, that it is hard for him, no matter how Christian he may be, to get over the idea that men of a different colour are his inferiors. He is apt to be brusque and peremptory. He is always in a hurry and impatient of delays."<sup>12</sup>

An African pastor said to a group of Western missionary candidates "If you come to Africa, do not come as if you were the fourth member of the Trinity." But white people are not the only ones who can feel a sense of racial superiority. Even if it is not expressed, ethnocentricity may come out in things we say and attitudes we adopt.

In the great mission conferences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the need for partnership in the missionary endeavour was expressed repeatedly. Edinburgh (1910) declared: "The missionary should be encouraged constantly to seek counsel from the officers and leaders of the national church."<sup>13</sup> At the conference of the International Missionary Council held in Tambaram (1938), it was stated: "Missionaries had to be willing to work under the direction of national leaders. They had to be free from any sense of racial, cultural, spiritual superiority and denominational narrowness."<sup>14</sup>

Still today in much missionary work, there is the desire to be in control, to want to introduce our programmes, to tell the local people what they need and what they ought to do, to impose on them our ways of doing things, our pattern of worship,

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<sup>10</sup> G,Hubble, 'Reasons for missionary training', in: *IRM* 52 (1963), p. 263.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> World Missionary Conference, *Report on Commission V* (1910), p.103.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>14</sup> IMC, *The world mission of the Church* (1938), pp. 83ff.

our styles of church leadership. This is just another form of imperialism, which militates against the growth of a healthy mature national church.

Students need to understand their own culture and its influence on them. They need to be warned against making the assumption that their cultural way of doing things is normative and superior to other patterns of behaviour. They need to be prepared for culture shock and be encouraged to become bicultural people, capable of appreciating another culture as much as their own.

It is equally important that students begin to grapple with issues of contextualization and learn to discern how Christian truth can be expressed within a given context. How far can ideas, illustrations or religious practices be adapted from the recipient culture without running the risk of syncretism? The writings of people like S.B.Bevans and Paul Hiebert provide useful guidelines to different approaches that are followed in contextualization.<sup>15</sup>

## **5. Encouraging theological reflection**

According to Dr Tai Woong Lee, Director of Global Ministries Study Center, a leading missionary training institute in Korea, a high priority in any missionary training programme is to encourage the trainees to develop their own theology of mission.

Initially students may study the biblical basis of mission, tracing the biblical vision for the nations of the world from the early chapters of Genesis to the eschatological climax in Revelation. A possible approach might include topics like the universality of the Abrahamic covenant, the role of Israel as a light to the nations and the distinctive missiological perspectives of the different New Testament writers. Students could also be required to read classic missionary texts like Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods, St Paul's or ours?*

Later, students need to explore major areas of debate in the modern missiological scene and examined how Christians from differing traditions have developed their understanding of mission. They need to address issues like the nature of mission; its motives and aim; general revelation; the theology of religion; salvation and its socio-political implications; dialogue and proclamation; witness and proselytism; syncretism and accommodation. In addition it may be of great value for some student to familiarise themselves with key Roman Catholic, Ecumenical and Evangelical statements on mission that have been produced in recent years. This will enable them to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of the respective traditions and to give them a greater understanding of those they might meet in the course of their ministry.

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<sup>15</sup> S.B.Bevans, *Models of contextual theology* (1998).

P.G.Hiebert, *Anthropological reflections on missiological issues* (1994).

Those who feel called to minister within cross-cultural contexts should certainly be encouraged to read books by non-Western theologians. This will depend of course on where they intend to serve but examples that might be given would include: Kitamori with his emphasis on the pain of God; Koyama and his teaching on the wrath of God; Mbiti and his view of the African concept of time; Gutierrez, Boff and Miranda on the theology of liberation. By studying these writers, students will begin to observe how each of these theologians sought to address the pressing sociological, emotional and spiritual needs of their context.

## **6. Introducing cross-cultural hermeneutics**

The more I travel the more I become aware that Christians in other countries read the Bible differently from the way that I do. They notice things that I don't notice. They become excited about things that I consider irrelevant. They understand things that are a complete mystery to me.

I was once preaching on the call of Abraham in a chapel in Tanzania. I spoke about God's call, God's demands, God's promise and Abraham's response. I thought I had been reasonably faithful to the text, but afterwards the Anglican bishop rebuked me for leaving out one of the most important parts of the passage. "What was that?" I asked. The bishop replied: "You said nothing about the curse. God promised to curse everyone who cursed Abraham. In Africa curses are very important." Of course, he was right. In many cultures curses are treated very seriously and the Bible talks a great deal about curses. In fact there are over 200 references to curses in Scripture but I have never heard a sermon on the curses of the Bible! Yet here is an important facet of biblical teaching. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). Jesus also delivers us from all those who would harm us with their curses, for he has triumphed over all the forces of evil (Colossians 2:15).

In many parts of the world, people continue to pursue a lifestyle much closer to that of the Ancient Near East than that which is found in modern Western societies. The way of life of Falashas in Ethiopia, among whom we worked for five years, was remarkably similar to the agrarian society in first century Palestine. People from such backgrounds find it much easier to understand and relate to many of the stories and customs found in the Bible, but which the Westerner finds strange or incomprehensible. Sacrifice is widely practised among many traditional societies. Ideas of kingship and covenant are common in Africa. Genealogies have a greater significance in nomadic societies than they do in the West for your genealogy determines your identity and role in society. Dreams are also treated seriously in many cultures and are often assumed to be messages from the spirit world.

Even for those who are beginning their training for cross-cultural ministry it will be helpful to point out to them that people from other backgrounds may read the

Bible quite differently from the way that they do. They need to be encouraged to read books and commentaries by non-Western pastors and scholars, especially from the area where they are preparing to serve.

## 7. Creating global perspectives

Specialist missionary training was necessary, in Hubble's<sup>16</sup> view, because missionary candidates had a great deal to learn, "for there is much they do not know when they become missionary candidates."<sup>17</sup> First, "the average candidate does not know enough about the world of today, and about that part of the world in which he is to serve."<sup>18</sup> Hubble did not blame them for their ignorance. She understood that they may have had few opportunities to meet people of other races and cultures, and had little incentive to read about the history, politics or economies of other countries.

Things have changed a great deal in the past forty years. Ease of international travel and the rapid development of communications technology has made a huge difference to our understanding of the world. Yet often, those who feel called to go and serve in another country have only a superficial understanding of the changes taking place in our world and even less awareness of the religious, social, political and economic trends within the society where they are expecting to work.

Questions need to be addressed about the impact of globalization. Who has benefited from the global market? Who has become more wealthy? Who has suffered through the process of globalization? What social and ethical issues does this raise for the church? Is the church addressing those issues? What new job opportunities does the global market afford to Christian Professionals or English teachers?

What has been the impact of the rapid development of information technology? What new challenges and opportunities does it bring to the Christian Church? What temptations does it bring also? How does IT impact missionary endeavour, the spread of the gospel, the place for religious dialogue and Christian apologetic?

A further consequence of the process of globalisation is seen in what Thomas Friedman described as the homogenising of culture.<sup>19</sup> This is most clearly evidenced in the younger generation. They dance to the same music, wear the same clothes, watch the same movies, play the same video games, admire the same heroes. Friedman points out that globalisation has its own dominant culture

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<sup>16</sup> Principal of Carey Hall, Selly Oak from 1945 to 1960.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>19</sup> T. L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the olive tree* (New York, Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 1999), p. 8.

which is essentially western. “Culturally speaking,” says Friedman, “ globalization is largely, though not entirely, the spread of Americanization . . . on a global scale.”<sup>20</sup> We need to ask what issues this raises for the church. It begs the question how far is the church caught up in this process of globalization.

Os Guinness observes that nothing has weakened the church in the West more than modernity. It was the Christian church that contributed to the rise of the modern world but the modern world, in its turn, has undermined the Christian church. The challenge that is coming to the church in other parts of the world as it has come in the West is how to contextualize the gospel in the modern world. It is worth quoting what Guinness says:

“For if modernity represents the most powerful, the most all-embracing, and the most seductive setting in human history, then ‘contextualization’ in the setting of modernity is both amplified promise and amplified threat. The desire to witness and the danger of worldliness are enhanced simultaneously and exponentially.’<sup>21</sup>

These are the kinds of questions that must be addressed by those who would engage in Christian ministry, especially if that ministry is to be in another part of the world or among a people of another culture.

## **8. Equipping for life and work**

What constitutes effective ministerial training? In spite of much soul-searching and at least a century of debate, the Western Churches still struggle to produce patterns of training that are seen to meet the needs of the church in the twenty first century. One of the tensions is that between academic excellence and ministerial formation. One of the factors that tend to lend weight to the former is the desire for academic recognition and accreditation.

In the case of missionary training programmes, there may be less need to be restricted to the demands of an accrediting agency or university. In consequence many contemporary training programmes, especially in the non-Western world, have sought to develop curricula based on the needs of the individual trainee and the observed needs of the people whom they will serve. They have given great importance to training that is practical, relevant and wholistic. Three examples are given from the Nigerian Evangelical Missionary Institute in Jos, the Africa Inland Church Missionary College in Kenya and the Indian Evangelical.

“Our purpose is to provide practical training in cross-cultural ministry skills to people called of God and committed to cross-cultural missionary work.

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<sup>20</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Os Guinness, ‘Mission modernity,’ in Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (eds.) *Mission as transformation: a theology of the whole gospel*, Carlisle, Regnum, 1999, p.293.

Our training is not geared towards giving paper qualifications to students, but towards making them effective field missionaries.”<sup>22</sup>

“The key objective of our college is to provide relevant, practical cross-cultural training for men and women who feel called of God to go to other tribes and nations to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ so as to establish growing, indigenous, Christ-like churches among unreached people groups. Graduates should not just know about missions but rather be able to do missionary ministry.”<sup>23</sup>

“The Outreach Training Institute is not a regular Theological Seminary or a Bible School. The Training imparted is an integration of academic excellence, spiritual growth and practical ministry. The emphasis of the training is to prepare people for cross-cultural ministry.”<sup>24</sup>

A study of these and similar training institutions in the non-Western World together with a discussion of how they sought to provide the kind of training they describe is found in my book “*Preparing to Serve*.” Time does not allow for a detailed discussion of the various components in those programmes, but they include: coping with culture shock; training both partners together; preparing the children; developing communication skills (including cross-cultural communication); learning how to use modern technology; learning practical skills relevant to the context (e.g. raising goats or maintaining motorbikes!)

## **9. Preparing for opposition and persecution**

The recent events in Middle School 1 in Beslan together with the car bomb attack outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta have reminded us of the ever present and universal threat of terrorism.

In the last few years we have seen a significant increase in attacks against Christians in Sri Lanka. Pastors in Vietnam and Laos have been imprisoned. Christian communities in Myanmar, Nigeria and Pakistan have been subject to attack. Hundreds of churches in Indonesia have been destroyed. Books like *The Heavenly Man* describe the experience of some of the house church leaders in China. We are gradually learning more about the suffering of Christians in North Korea. The list goes on.

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<sup>22</sup> *Nigeria Evangelical Missionary Institute* (1990), p. 3

<sup>23</sup> *Africa Inland Church Missionary College Prospectus* (1991), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *The Philosophy and Ethos of OTI Training* (c. 1974), p. 2.

This is part of the reality of today's world and those who are being sent out in ministry need to be ready to suffer for the gospel and be able to help those who may face persecution.

In the latter part of the 1980s large numbers of Brazilian men and women went out as missionaries to other parts of the world. They were encouraged by the response to the gospel within their own country. They had seen many come to faith in Christ. They had witnessed miracles in response to their ministry. They were full of expectation of quick results, spurred on perhaps by a spirit of triumphalism that pervades some evangelical theologies.

In the event they found that the response to the gospel in other parts of the world, particularly in Europe, was not the same as it was in their own country. As a result many of them became disillusioned and went back to Brazil with a feeling of failure.

Margaretha Adiwardana, a missionary training in Brazil, sought to research this phenomenon of missionary attrition in a thesis she wrote for the Discipleship Training Centre in Singapore. (Her thesis has since been published as a book both in Portuguese and in English).

She observes that the prevalent culture in Brazil that has shaped the lives of these young missionaries tends to discourage an attitude of perseverance. Rather, it teaches them to avoid suffering and to expect quick results. They are not prepared for discouragement and are therefore are unable to understand or handle disappointment or set backs as they occur. What is needed, Adiwardana argues, is a pattern of training that will enable them to persevere. That is the title of her thesis, with a subtitle, "Wholistic preparation for situations of adversity."<sup>25</sup>

David Cummings, president of Wycliffe Bible Translators, makes similar observations about accepted values in the United States. He lists societal traits like independence, a desire for efficiency, obsession with time-keeping, expectation of instant results, fascination with success. He comments that all these traits militate against dependence on God and a willingness to persevere in adversity.<sup>26</sup>

## **10. Providing a model to follow**

"Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." So runs the well known saying. It can be easier to talk about how a job should be done than to do it. This is certainly true in the area of mission. It is possible to read books about the history of mission, or write papers on the theology of mission, without knowing anything about being a missionary. Those who are most qualified in the academic discipline of missiology

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<sup>25</sup> M.Adiwardana, *Training missionaries to persevere: wholistic preparation for situations of adversity* (1999).

<sup>26</sup> D.Cummings, 'Programmed for failure – mission candidates at risk', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28 (April 1992): pp.176-179.

are not necessarily the most suitable people to train missionaries. So who are the best missionary trainers and what qualifications do they need?

Ideally trainers should be people who have had cross-cultural missionary experience. They should have experienced the shock of living in a foreign culture; they should have struggled with the problems of learning a new language. Some will have heard the cries of beggars in the streets; some will have smelt the stench of open sewers. They must not be armchair missionaries, who only theorise about missions. They should have had first-hand experience.

Those who train missionaries are expected to demonstrate the qualities of a spiritual leader. They should be examples in faith, in prayer, in commitment to Christ and concern for evangelism. They should be willing to live simply and sacrificially, requiring no less of themselves than they do of their students. Whether they like it or not, they will be seen as models by those they train. Those who study under them will tend to repeat their views, reflect their lifestyles and may even copy their mannerisms! They will take their mentors as models. Consciously or unconsciously they will pattern their own spiritual lives, their family life and their ministry on their observations of their trainers.

Training centres differ considerably over the academic requirements they ask of their staff. Some look for teachers with "practical skill and a basic knowledge of the subject." Others require at least a diploma or a first degree. Some prefer their staff to hold a master's degree in missiology, but they do not view paper qualifications as their most important prerequisite. The principal of one centre remarked that although an MA was a great qualification for his faculty to have, good field experience, cross-cultural sensitivity and communication skills were more important. Another Asian centre, where many students have theological degrees, prefers staff to have an MA, or even a doctorate, in missiology, but would still "opt for a sensitive, mature Christian with a gift for training."

The trainers need a good grasp of their subject at a level appropriate to their context and the academic ability of the students. They may be teaching those who have only received a basic education. In some parts of Tanzania, for example, the church is expanding so rapidly that there is a constant demand for new evangelists and church workers. Many are sent to work among people whose language and culture is different from their own. They are, in effect, cross-cultural missionaries. Their initial three month training needs to include Bible teaching and basic instruction on language learning and cross-cultural communication. Some of these evangelists have received little formal education, yet they are proving to be extremely effective in church-planting. They do not need certificates, diplomas or degrees for their ministry; nor do they need highly qualified teachers, but they do need those who can help them to evangelise, give biblical teaching, acquire new languages and understand other cultures.

Missionary trainers need to be good communicators. It is an asset if they are qualified teachers, but if not, they must have the ability to teach. It cannot be assumed that all those who have a theological degree, or have trained to be pastors, know how to teach. It is good to hear a prospective member of staff preach or teach, to assess whether he or she has the ability to communicate effectively. Missionaries may have ten or twenty years experience, but if they cannot interpret their experiences of success and failure in order to teach others, they will not make good trainers. If former missionaries are inept and boring communicators, they will fail to stimulate the students' interest.

Effective trainers need to be familiar with the process of adult learning. They will use a variety of tools and methods of communication to catch the interest of those they teach and to stimulate their minds. They will involve them actively in the learning process, building on their previous experience and knowledge, and constantly challenging them to see the implications of what they are learning to their future ministry. Their aim is not to pass on everything they know and impress everyone with their scholarship, but to facilitate the development of their students' learning skills and ministerial gifts.

A further essential quality for a missionary trainer is the ability to work well with others! Those who lead and teach in any Christian community need to work harmoniously with their colleagues. Students will observe how the staff relate together. They will notice disagreement among their teachers. They will pick up on explicit or implicit criticism by one faculty member of another

Consciously, or subconsciously, the students look to their teachers for a model of how Christian leaders work together. The students themselves, when they go out in ministry, face the prospect of working with a great variety of people. Some will be older than they are, some younger. Some will come from other countries or tribes. Some will speak other languages. Some will belong to different denominations. The students know they will not find it easy to work with such a wide spectrum of colleagues. They may also have heard horror stories of missionaries failing to get on with each other. In their own churches they may have witnessed bitter rivalry among the elders.

When such students come to a missionary training centre where cultural diversity can lead to misunderstanding and tension, it is particularly important that the staff work well as a team and provide a good model. In this way the trainees will learn how Christians from different backgrounds or denominations can show sensitivity and consideration to one another and work effectively in a team.

It is a solemn responsibility to assume the role of training another person for Christian ministry. No wonder that James warns us: "Not many of you should presume to become teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly!" (James 3:1)

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