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The Ideal Model for Majority World Seminaries— Ft. Wayne 1846 or Ft. Wayne 2021?

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Abstract: As the church grows in the Majority World (Third World),¹ seminaries are formed to train more pastors. What is the ideal model for these seminaries—Ft. Wayne 1846 or Ft. Wayne 2021? While the doctrine of Ft. Wayne in 1846 and 2021 is very similar, they differ considerably in the requirements for ordination, language, minimum education requirements, costs, and church culture. The 1846 seminary offered training which was tuned to the minority German culture in which the pastors served, while the 2021 seminary is tuned to the global English culture in which most of its graduates serve. Majority World seminaries today favor one model or the other, which significantly affects recruitment, development, ministry, and number of pastors.

Ft. Wayne 1846 vs. Ft. Wayne 2021

When the Ft. Wayne seminary was established in 1846, it was not really an American seminary, but a German seminary which taught first-generation immigrants to pastor immigrant congregations. Theological training was in a dialect of Low German. Professors imported German textbooks, liturgy, hymnody, an authoritarian mode of pastoring, and a hierarchical, diocesan church government.

Most immigrants were not wealthy, so costs were kept very low. Professors were often experienced pastors rather than academics with graduate degrees. The “practical seminary” provided essential instruction for pastoral ministry, not including “academic” training which the St. Louis seminary insisted was needed (although St. Louis was also Germanic). Pastors, who did not receive academic degrees, could be trained and ordained in shorter periods of time, which reduced costs. Experience



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continued their development, and they were good pastors.

Ft. Wayne (for a long time in Springfield) produced pastors to serve the minority German culture and made little or no attempt to train pastors in and for the English culture. It took a century for the seminary to transition to English from German. Franz Pieper's classic theology text, *Christliche Dogmatik*, was published in 1924 and reprinted for use at the seminary in 1938.² It was not translated into English until 1950. Some classes were conducted in German as late as 1950.³ A full century after it was established, the seminary made the case that a program with reduced admission standards and lower academic demands was needed.⁴ Ft. Wayne (Springfield) long continued "practical" training, and pastors could be ordained with only an undergraduate bachelor's degree as late as 1972. For 126 years, there were two tracks to full-fledged ordination: one was more academic, and the other more practical with a lesser (or no) academic degree.

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Ft. Wayne eventually "upgraded" from a seminary designed to serve relatively poor, minority-language, ethnic people to a wealthy, majority-language, global culture, academically sophisticated, graduate-level academic institution. This suited most American Lutheran churches, which underwent the same cultural change. But the change produced obstacles for potential pastors who never went to college, or have learning disabilities, or have children to support, or who are immigrants.

From the American perspective, Ft. Wayne 1846 used a minority language, cross-cultural techniques, and ethnic culture to form pastors who could serve a minority people group. It was a German island in an American sea. If today's Ft. Wayne seminary was teleported into 1846 Indiana, the potential pastors could not qualify to enroll, could not afford it, and so could not be ordained.

Which Model Should the Majority World Use?

Majority World churches make choices regarding language, requirements for ordination, minimum levels of pastoral education, types of training, cost, and culture. Some implement the 1846 model, offering training more closely tuned to the minority cultures the pastors serve. Others favor the 2021 model, with training like that in global seminaries, even though it is culturally distant from their congregations. The North American church affects Majority World choices for better or worse—both directly, in what we advocate, praise, teach, and finance; and indirectly, by example. Here are some factors to consider in fine-tuning the type of training a Majority World seminary should offer.

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What Language?

The 1846 model uses minority languages which may have relatively few speakers, while the 2021 model uses global trade languages such as English. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

A global language, which may be a national language, provides a common language at a school which may include speakers of several minority languages. However, students vary in how fluent they are in a trade language, which may be their third or fourth language.

While more textbooks are available in global languages, they are influenced by wealthy, secular cultures which are removed in some ways from minority cultures. As a result, many do not reflect indigenous thinking or address topics important to minority peoples. For example, Western texts reflect their scientific and secular cultures. As a result, few texts address demonic oppression (possession) as a real, contemporary concern, or address animistic beliefs and practices (which they misinterpret as superstition). Most homiletics texts promote a sophisticated, literate style of preaching which may not engage minority people groups, which are commonly oral rather than literary cultures.⁵

When theological colleges require students to have advanced trade language comprehension, they indirectly exclude men who may be called by God as pastors but lack that ability. Learning Bible content and doctrine in global languages requires pastors to “translate” their learning into minority languages, which may result in some weak outcomes.

Some Majority World church leaders may promote trade languages because they think the socioeconomic development of their homeland depends on this. Does a global seminary experience prompt pastors to become agents of cultural and social (not just religious) change, and weaken their ability to serve their people as they are?

What Education?

The 1846 model is low cost, while the 2021 model requires much higher costs. How much education is “enough”? This question has plenty of room for debate, and no definite answer. The practical 1846 model takes a more bare-bones approach, and gets more trained church workers into the field, more quickly. The 2021 model always favors *more training*: certificate, then BDiv, then MDiv, and certainly a STM and ThD would make “better” pastors. Both models agree that pastors learn more by experience than by academics. Is more education always better?

Who is the best teacher? Is an experienced pastor with above-average teaching ability “good enough”? Do advanced degrees make a professor more competent? An emphasis on degrees favors importing Western faculty who have more academic experience, more training in the global world, foreign traditions, less pastoral

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experience, and less cross-cultural experience. Their students often aspire to be like them, creating cultural distance between newly minted pastors and their people. Some Majority World pastors become professors after taking advanced degrees from global seminaries (after receiving pastoral training in their home countries), where they absorb global thinking, practices, and culture. Does this create distance between them and the minority people groups in their homelands?

Many church leaders push not just for more education, but for accredited degrees. This necessitates academic programs which are approved by secular governments and global seminaries. These add requirements and programs to the seminaries, thereby increasing costs and dependence on global partners. A feedback loop may develop. Global seminaries influence and fund Majority World seminary programs, which become more global in culture. Seminaries become Western islands in an African (or Asian or South American) sea.

While it is fashionable to criticize this relationship as “neocolonial,” this loaded term can be misleading. Most people understand “colonialism” as being imposed by global powers in order to control and drain the Majority World of resources. While this is partly true, many Majority World church leaders actively desire and solicit funds, institutional development, cultural change and accolades from global partners. Modern “neocolonialism” is often a symbiotic partnership.⁶

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What Cost?

When more education is required for ordination, costs rise accordingly, reducing the number of those who enroll and become ordained. Potential pastors must finish high school, which often requires fees. They must be away from their farms or occupations for years, which makes them unable to provide a living for their families. Residential facilities necessitate travel costs, and higher education fees, for longer periods of time. Professors with graduate degrees may desire a higher standard of living. Academic requirements demand more equipment, such as computers, office machines, and library services. All these compel higher tuition fees.

When I preached at a service in Kenya, I watched people place offerings in the plate at the front of the church. The smallest unit of paper money was a 100-shilling note, worth about \$1.25 USD. None of the 200-some people placed any paper money in the plate. They were not stingy, but were subsistence farmers, in an area in which

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everyone grew the same two or three crops. As a result, they had very little cash, and raised money for church buildings by donating rice or chickens. It was no surprise that many seminary students were not able to pay their tuition. When the American churches fund scholarships, they increase dependency in Majority World churches. Foreign funding plagues other aspects of church life also.

Articles about seminary graduations often report small numbers of graduates. This suggests that 2021 model seminaries are not able to maintain, much less increase, the number of pastors. It may be helpful for institutions to evaluate this by tracking the numbers over ten to twenty years.⁷ Higher seminary tuition is an obstacle to potential pastors who do not have the money to attend and cannot provide a living for their families during years of residential academics. Seminaries have little grasp of who *would have* attended if there had been fewer obstacles in terms of qualifications, costs, and time.

The Overlooked Majority of Unordained Shepherds

When we hear of a dramatic shortage of pastors in the Majority World, we imagine huge numbers of churches without anyone to preach and provide pastoral care. Actually, most of the congregations are served by unordained shepherds who are called evangelists, lay preachers, or a similar title. We know little about them because we do not associate the term “evangelist” with pastoral work, and websites seldom feature them. Also, visitors to the Majority World seldom see and are unable to talk to them directly because of the language barrier.

“Evangelists,” not “pastors,” are the majority of the pastors in many countries. These statistics are representative: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK): 520 congregations, 121 pastors, and 200 evangelists. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea: 2,000 congregations, 800 pastors, and 2,000 evangelists. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sudan: 79 congregations, 26 pastors, and 80 evangelists. See note for more examples.⁸ Evangelists are similar to licensed deacons who pastor congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS).

Church bodies rely on these unordained shepherds to preach, lead worship, and shepherd the churches every day, but in effect exclude them from ordination. In many countries, only graduates of residential seminaries may be ordained, and only they are allowed to consecrate the Lord’s Supper and baptize. Trade language fluency,

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residential requirements, and fees, in effect, block many evangelists and laypeople from attending seminaries, and becoming ordained pastors.

As a result, congregations who are served by evangelists often go without the Lord's Supper for many months or years. For example, a church in Kenya which was served by evangelists went without communion for five years.⁹ It is ironic that many theologians who advocate the Lord's Supper at every service also support 2021 model restrictions, which indirectly prohibit the majority of congregations from celebrating the Sacrament frequently. There may be tension between the evangelist and congregation on one hand, and the mostly absent, multi-parish pastor of record, on the other, because the evangelist shepherds the people daily, while the pastor of record is an infrequent visitor.

Training for evangelists may be available. But church bodies often emphasize and fund seminary training at the expense of evangelist training, and do not offer training which is an alternate path to ordination.

When extended residential seminary training in a global language is required, the result is that men who God calls as pastors are not allowed to be ordained, and their congregations are not allowed to have frequent communion. When churches declare an alarming shortage of pastors, it may be due to denominational restrictions that reduce the number who qualify for seminary training, rather than to a shortage of willing servants.

An alternative is to provide evangelists with training which leads to ordination and removes hindrances. This may entail the following: (1) training in minority languages (including recorded oral material), (2) little residential requirement, (3) dispersed training places rather than a central location, (4) low fees, (5) little time away from their occupations and families, and (6) resources from the global church invested here as much as in residential seminaries.

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What Church Culture?

The 1846 model trained pastors using the church culture their minority peoples were familiar with, including language, hymnody, liturgy, pastoral practice, church government, and level of lay participation in ministry. To what degree should Majority World schools of theology teach practices suited to the minority peoples they serve?

When I taught briefly at a seminary in Africa, I visited about ten congregations. In eight of these congregations, the only musical instrument was a drum; there were no hymnals and no printed service materials. At the seminary, no one could play piano, and the guitar player was missing three of his six strings. The myriad of (wonderful!) choirs all featured choreography with their songs. It is very difficult to effectively use Western hymns, music, and liturgy, which require high levels of literacy, music education, publishing technology, and wealth which are rare in much of the Majority World.

In America, we see written words everywhere, every moment of the day. The International Orality Network estimates that 5.7 billion people (80 percent of the world's population) today are oral learners, either because they lack literacy skills or prefer orality.¹⁰ They can't, won't, or don't absorb the Word of God well when it is written. Many people in the Majority World have weak literary skills, little access to literature, no religious materials available in their heart language, and little money to invest in the few books that are available.

While there is little access to written materials in many languages and areas, oral recordings in 6,400 languages from organizations like Global Recordings Network¹¹ are easily downloaded by cell phones, which are common even in remote areas. Providing more pastoral training in oral recordings rather than written form (particularly in their home languages) may be useful with trainees who are not used to reading, or who can listen during long periods of travel in rural areas. Seminary students can translate texts into minority languages and produce oral learning material more quickly and easily than print. Cell phones, travel routers, mobile hotspots, portable digital recorders, free editing software, duplicating equipment, and solar MP3 players all are relatively inexpensive and easy to use.

The drum is needed to keep the people singing in time with one another, especially in large groups. The most effective songs are like Negro Spirituals, which use call-and-response, refrains, and repetition, so people can learn and participate easily without printed materials. Songs are written by minority peoples in their native tongues and styles.

Are pastors prompted to translate Western hymns, or do they encourage their people to develop minority language songs? Do minority people groups get the message that minority language and hymnody is inferior, that to be Christian means to be global, or that only highly literate people can properly worship and learn?

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It is useful to see African and European worship modes side by side. One may view excerpts of a literacy-heavy Divine Service (based on Latin) in the video *Ibada Takatifu* (skip the introduction)¹²; then view songs from village churches, *Two Worship Songs from Kenya and Malawi*.¹³ What academic level must worshipers reach to fully participate in each? How well does a scholastic style of preaching connect with villagers? Is either mode by nature more God-pleasing?

To what degree should seminaries promote hymnody, music, and liturgy in forms which are foreign to the minority people groups, hard to use when not printed, or require literacy?

European missionaries imported a hierarchical and episcopal government, and American missionaries brought congregational or presbyterian structure. All these polities find support in the New Testament. Local church government, with different views on pastoral and lay authority, also varies. Should seminaries teach church government inherited from European church bodies, or advocate models familiar to minority people groups?

Ten Questions to Ask to Fine-tune a Church Worker Training Program

Picture a continuum with a pure 1846 model as a one on the scale, and a pure 2021 model as ten. Then consider these questions.

Where would you place your training program?

Has the net number of ordained pastors increased in recent years?

Should the program move more toward the 1846 model by reducing the qualifications to enter seminary, the number of residential years required, and costs, in order to increase the number of graduates?

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Would it be useful to use the 1846 model, and schedule continuing education after ordination (making training and costs less “front loaded”)?

Who has been unable to attend seminary, and why?

If current training follows an 1846 model, but is considered inadequate, would it be more useful to follow a 2021 model, or to create another model which demands less funding and time away from home? (Perhaps by using experienced pastors as deployed trainers?)

If training seems to be biased toward global culture, how could more minority culture be included (making it more “African,” etc.)?

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Does seminary encourage or discourage indigenous songs and culture in worship and ministry, and how does this affect congregations?

Would students learn more readily if more classes and materials were provided in minority languages?

What minority language oral recordings could be found or created for use in congregations and pastoral training?

Endnotes

¹ This article uses the term “Majority World” because many people frown on the terms “Third” and “Developing” World. “Third” was originally used in the Cold War for nations which were not aligned with either the “First” (American allies) or “Second” (USSR), but came to imply poverty and inferiority. “Majority” and “Two-Thirds” highlight the fact that most of the world’s population is in those regions. We also use the term “minority” to refer to localized people groups, cultures, and languages which make up the “Majority World.” It is a bit confusing to read “Majority” and “minority” side by side, referring to the same people. To help overcome this, the word “minority” is always small case, used with a noun like “language,” and “Majority World” is capitalized. We do not use the other fashionable term, “Minority World,” because that would be even more baffling. We sometimes use the disfavored terms “Western” and “global,” because it is hard to find alternate terms which do not add the awkwardness that “Majority” brings. None of the terms are ideal, and all are disliked in some circles.

² Charles P. Schaum, “The Highest and Ultimate Gift of God: A Brief History of Concordia Publishing House in the German-Era LCMS,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (Jan-April 2019): 21, 24, 25.

³ Arlo Janssen, *Humor from the Classroom* (WestBow Press, 2016), 87.

⁴ Cameron MacKenzie, “The Seminary They Couldn’t Close,” *For the Life of the World* (Spring 2021): 4–6.

⁵ Some authors from minority cultures include ethnic insights. However, some of their books are as global and removed from minority cultures as tomes by Americans.

⁶ “Partnership” is an African euphemism for obtaining money from America and Europe.

⁷ Matongo Lutheran Theological College graduated four men with certificates in theology in March 2019. Matongo primarily serves Kenya (520 churches) and Uganda (240 churches), so there is a large disparity between the number of graduates and number of churches. “LCMS Sponsored Students Graduate from Matongo,” Sept. 18, 2019, <https://international.lcms.org/lcms-sponsored-students-graduate-from-matongo/>. The ELCK (Kenya) reported 109 pastors in 2002 (Rune Imberg, *A Door Opened by the Lord* [Göteborg: Församlingsförlaget, 2008], 168) and 121 pastors now, showing very little net gain in twenty years of investing in a 2021 model seminary.

⁸ Lutheran Church of Uganda: 130 congregations, 22 pastors, evangelists (unknown). Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sierra Leone: 22 congregations, 13 pastors, 22 evangelists (now 135 congregations). Lutheran Church Mission in Uganda: 110 congregations, “at least 20” pastors, “many” evangelists. Statistics were collected from websites and Facebook pages published by these church bodies, the LCMS, and the International Lutheran Council. It is hard to tell how current they are.

⁹ <https://international.lcms.org/mission-field-update-from-kenya-june-2018/>

¹⁰ International Orality Network, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://orality.net/about/who-are-oral-communicators/>.

¹¹ Global Recordings Network USA, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://www.globalrecordingsusa.org/>.

¹² *Ibada Takatifu*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXEZ74-cT2o&app=desktop>

¹³ *Two Worship Songs from Kenya*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t13HYSs0Iq4>,

illustrates common characteristics: call and response, refrain, and choreography.

Choreography illustrates the lyrics. This structure enables all to join in without printed lyrics, and to sing while walking or working.