

Is Competency Based Theological Education an answer for the growing training needs of the church?

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate discussion about Competency Based Theological Education (CBTE) as a possible solution for meeting the desperate growing need for theological education.

The changed Evangelical World

The demographic spread of evangelical believers worldwide has changed dramatically in the last 50 years or so. Figure 1 below, is an attempt to show the approximate relationship between believers in the so-called Majority and Western Worlds. In 1960 for every 1 believer in the Majority World there were 2 in the Western World. In 1980 it was 1 to 1. In 1992 it changed to 2 in the Majority World for every 1 in the Western World. At present it is more than 4 for every 1 believer in the Western World. Evangelical Christianity has undergone a profound change from being Western to becoming Majority World and this trend is continuing.

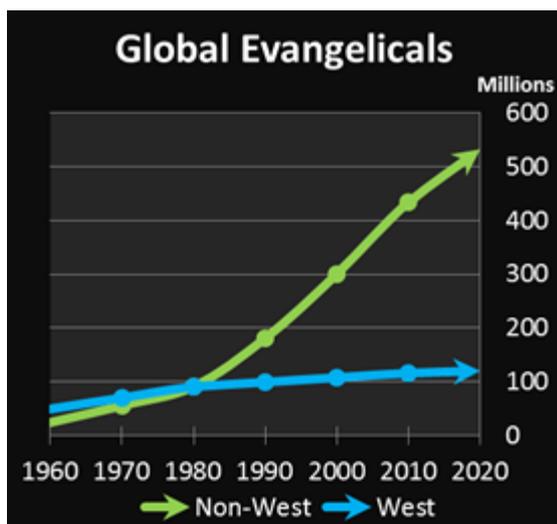


Figure 1¹

In most Western countries the make-up of Evangelicals is also changing. According to the Pew Research Centre, racial and ethnic minorities made up 24% of evangelical Protestants in the US in 2014 – up from 19% in 2007.² This is likely to grow further due to the changing demographics in the country, as shown in figure 2.

¹ This graph has been created by Veritas College International researchers, with data compiled from various sources.

² Pew Research (2015) *America's Changing Religious Landscape*.

<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

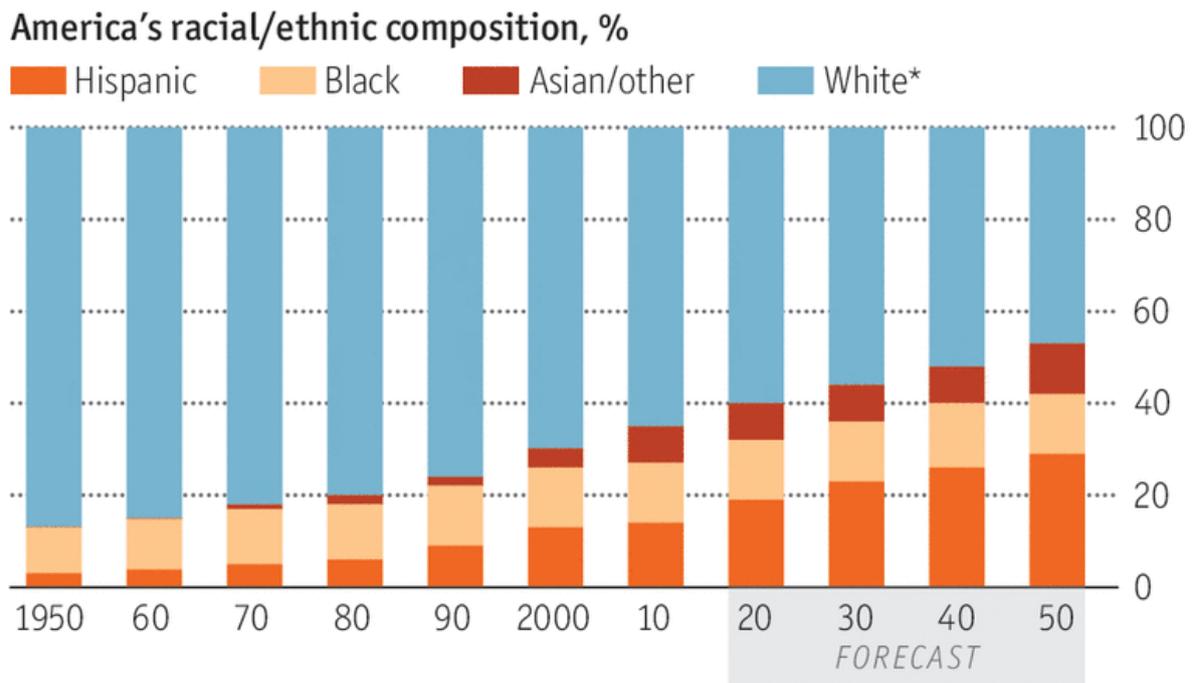


Figure 2³

Increasing need for Theological Training

With the dramatic growth in the number of evangelical Christians and the demographic changes in their make-up, the need for the training of church leaders is enormous. Worldwide it is estimated that “about 2 million pastoral leaders are lacking in some aspect of essential pastoral training. Currently, approximately 4,000 new churches are born each week. It is projected to reach 12,000 per week, within three years. The number is growing exponentially and on a daily basis!”⁴

Twenty years ago Ralph Winter stated that the entire Christian church in Africa, Asia and Latin America is dependent on the labour of at least a million unofficial pastors. These “keen, humble, godly men running two million of the churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America CAN'T be educated by setting up schools which they cannot attend.”⁵ David Livermore reckoned that if all the existing theological training institutes in the world would operate at 120% capacity, less than 10% of the unequipped leaders would be trained.⁶ We have already seen that since Ralph Winter's statement some 20 years ago, the one million pastors needing training have increased to two million.

³ The Economist (2015) *Tu casa es mi casa*.

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2015/03/daily-chart-5>

⁴ TOPIC (Nd). *2 Million Pastors*. Trainers of Pastors International Coalition.

<http://topic.us/topics-formation>

⁵ Winter, R.D. (1996). *The Most Important Problem in Missions*. Mission Frontiers.

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-comment67>

⁶ Livermore, D.A. (2006). *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, p. 41.

If the exceptional growth of the church in the Majority World has created a tremendous need for the training of pastors, it has certainly also created a great need for the training of the growing number of cross-cultural missionaries from the Majority World.

There is a growing understanding that formal methods of education are just not able to meet the demand of the growing evangelical church and that other means of theological education are desperately needed. Without a proper biblical basis, there is a risk that false theological teaching will increase. This can for example be seen in parts of Africa in the popularity of the prosperity gospel where some pastors are becoming wealthy at the expense of their poverty stricken church members.

I would like to suggest that Competency Based Theological Education can make a significant contribution to meet the growing need for training.

How does Competency Based Theological Education work?

Competency Based Theological Education (CBTE) should be approached from the context of the church. What should a mature church look like?

Once this is well defined, it should be established what competencies are needed to minister effectively in the particular church context in order to plant, build and expand a church that is growing in maturity. These competencies should be acquired by the student in such a way that spiritual maturity, knowledge, skills and character all function in an integrated manner.

In the case of missionary training the process is similar as the competencies that are required to plant or minister to churches in a particular cultural setting, need to be defined.

Once the competencies have been defined, assessment tools need to be developed which can establish whether a trained person is competent. Only then should the development of the curriculum follow. This curriculum is thus designed and constantly reviewed in order to ensure that the student will be able to acquire the competencies to minister in the context of the church.

What does a Competency Unit look like?

A competency unit addresses a particular competency, like for example "Doing Biblical Evangelism". An example is given below for this competency on the Certificate IV level as it has been nationally accredited in Australia for Veritas College International (VCI) that is registered there. The competency is defined in terms of its different components or elements. For students to be assessed as competent to do evangelism, they have to demonstrate that they can do all the activities of each one of the three elements of competency: Explain the Biblical

message of salvation; Plan and do evangelism; Develop interpersonal communication skills.

VCI Cert IV competency unit: Doing Biblical Evangelism

Elements of competency	Performance criteria
1. Explain the Biblical message of salvation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do exegesis of a key passage that deals with salvation and find the absolutes 2. Consider the main objections and questions re salvation in a specific cultural context 3. Determine how you would explain the message of salvation within a specific cultural context
2. Plan and do evangelism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plan how you would share the message of salvation with others 2. Share the message of salvation as part of evangelism 3. Evaluate the success of your evangelism
3. Develop interpersonal communication skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respect the privacy of people 2. Respect the personal space of people 3. Communicate in a friendly and culturally acceptable manner 4. Avoid conflict

Each element of competency in turn is defined in terms of performance criteria. These are the standards against which each element of competency is measured to establish whether the person is competent.

The sophistication of competencies varies according to the level of the specific qualification. For example, see below the competency unit for evangelism for the MA in Biblical Ministry (first professional degree) that is offered by the Veritas College International (VCI) Graduate School based in the US. The elements of competency are exactly the same as for the Cert IV, but the performance criteria are very different as the person has to motivate, equip and lead others to do evangelism.

VCI Graduate School MA competency unit: Doing Biblical Evangelism

Elements of competency	Performance criteria
1. Explain the Biblical message of salvation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the biblical principles of salvation from Ephesians 2. Consider the main objections and questions on salvation in a specific cultural context 3. Compare the view of church members to the biblical view of salvation 4. Determine how you would explain the message of salvation within a specific cultural context
2. Plan and do evangelism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plan how you would equip a group of believers to share the message of salvation with others 2. Train the group to share the message of salvation 3. Guide the group to share the message of salvation 4. Evaluate the success of your training and the evangelism of the group
3. Develop interpersonal communication skills	<p>Train the group of believers to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respect the privacy of people 2. Respect the personal space of people 3. Communicate in a friendly and culturally acceptable manner 4. Avoid conflict

Competency Based Theological Education and self-theologising

CBTE is much more than equipping people in the ministry skills of preaching and pastoral care. The well-recognised missiologist, the late David Bosch rightly pointed to the importance of what he calls “self-theologising”. He sees this as the fourth “self” that characterises a mature church. In addition to being self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing, churches should also be able to do theology themselves.⁷

I would define self-theologising as being competent:

- to do proper exegesis;
- to analyse the local needs and situation in which ministry takes place;

⁷ Bosch, D.J. (1991). *Transforming mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York: Orbis Books, p. 452.

- to apply the biblical message to the local situation; and
- to minister the applied message effectively in the local context.

This means the emphasis shifts from working with a body of transferred knowledge to a process of discovering the answers oneself. This is in line with the educational principle that people learn much better by discovering something themselves than by being taught that same thing. It is not about teaching content, but about teaching how to think.

Furthermore, the issues to be addressed vary so much from culture to culture, from sub-culture to sub-culture and from generation to generation, that relevant biblical answers have to be found and formulated all the time. The skills to do so are essential for the church in order to be biblical and relevant at the same time.

Levelling the playing field

If the main elements of theological education are to read and analyse the views of other academics, the Western World has a major advantage by having authored by far the majority of academic theological books, by having the largest libraries and by having the financial resources for many academics to devote themselves to academic research and excellence.

In general the evangelical churches and institutions in the Majority World do not have these privileges, or shall we say luxuries? However, they have growing and multiplying churches! If theological education is redefined as competency based, these multiplying and growing churches will be able to provide numerous theologians who serve the local church and are international specialists in analysing their local context, in providing biblical answers, in applying them to their context and in ministering relevantly.

Competency Based Theological Education to catch on in the West

In a recent blog, Dr Ralph Enlow, President of the Association of Biblical Higher Education asks how the world of accredited theological education should respond to the “emerging Competency Based Education (CBE) phenomenon that is gaining momentum in North American higher education”⁸:

How should we respond to this phenomenon? In my opinion, we should thoughtfully welcome this development, seeking both to get ahead of the curve and to shape its trajectory. Why? First, because the concerns driving this trend are legitimate and long standing. Second, because infusion of CBE into the higher education landscape is inevitable. And third, because CBE

⁸ Enlow, R. (2016). *Competency-based higher education: hop on the bandwagon?* The Association for Biblical Higher Education. www.abhe.org/competency-based-higher-education-hop-bandwagon-41016/

offers great opportunity to collaborate and innovate in ministry formation and leadership development.

If competency based theological education can catch on in Majority World churches and institutions as well as in Western ones, it can lead to wonderful two way communication of equal partners. Although not equal in numbers, certainly equal in the value of the theological contribution that each one makes.

References

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