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FEATURE

**Spiritual Leadership Formation in Adventist Seminaries
in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division**

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***Abstract:** Pastoral education in Southeast Asian Adventist colleges varies widely from one country to another. This variation needs to be minimized, perhaps by sharing ideas and developing a common curricular base. Since spiritual leaders need certain characteristics in order to lead the church, the curriculum for theological training should be carefully assessed and revised in order to better meet the needs of the church as a whole. Knowing, being, and doing are three areas that should be considered. The current programs are strongest on knowing, less clear on doing, and weakest on being. Transfer of learning from classes to the field needs to be improved. Multiple perspectives on needs should be considered in order to prepare pastors who are best qualified to serve God and His church.*

Introduction

God is the true leader of the Christian church; but a dynamic spiritual leadership of chosen men and women is essential for a living, responsive, and vibrant church. There is no doubt that God, in His omnipotence, uses people to move the church toward spiritual growth. To be used more effectively, such men and women must undergo a thorough preparation, most especially in their spiritual lives. Those in the ordained ministry, particularly the pastors, enter into special schooling for this purpose.

But how do pastors become spiritual leaders of the church? Does schooling in the seminary guarantee anyone to become a spiritual leader? What makes a pastor a spiritual leader? Spiritual leadership cannot be imposed by anyone who wants to lead. It is something that the church imputes to somebody whom they see possesses the character of a spiritual leader (Stowell, 1997). A spiritual leader is somebody who can move the church toward spiritual growth. It is he who can bring the church closer to God (Blackaby, 2001; Keely, 2003). In other

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words, a pastor becomes a spiritual leader depending on how the expectations of a body of believers whom he will serve are met.

In an attempt to guide the preparation of pastors for the ministry, several theologians and denominational groups have issued their version of qualifications and/or competencies that make a pastor a successful spiritual leader. Careful examination of such lists reveals three aspects of pastoral preparation. Blackaby (2001) emphasizes the “being” and “doing” of pastoral ministry. The *being* aspect refers to personal spirituality of the pastor, his closeness to God and his commitment to God’s message and mission. The *doing* aspect refers to the skills a pastor must possess in the conduct of church ministry. The third aspect refers to the Biblical understanding a pastor must have in order to be considered an authority who can explain Bible truths. This is the *knowing* aspect and is mostly accomplished through training in seminaries and personal Bible study. Dr. Williford, president of Denver Seminary, calls pastoral training the integration of “character formation, in-depth understanding of God’s truth and leadership competencies” (Williford, 2006, par. 5). Thus, in evaluating pastors, we need to look at (1) who they are (being), (2) what they know (knowing), and (3) what they can do (doing).

There is no universally accepted formula as to how the three aspects of pastoral preparation may be combined. Renewal movements in theological education, however, show preference on the *being* aspect (Baloyo, 2004; Blackaby, 2001; Ferris, 1990; Keely, 2003; Tasker, 2002). Denominational leaders have found that “the questions a congregation raises about a potential minister do not concern the number of courses completed but revolve about such areas as wisdom and knowledge, pastoral skills, psychological maturity, and the strength of faith” (Freeman, 1986, p. 21).

Seminaries have a big role to play in the preparation of pastors. Character formation is an essential part of seminary life. Through deeper study, pastors become grounded in all the Truth that is found in the Bible. They are trained and equipped with the skills needed in church leadership and in handling the changing culture of the church membership.

At a deeper level, the seminary must strive to “assist each student with spiritual formation, toward the realization of her/his (and the neighbor’s) true self, God’s image individualized” (Freeman, 1986, p. 19). It is true that “no one can program, mandate, nor control spiritual formation in others” (Smith, as cited in Tasker, 2002, p. 12) because it is a work of God. Yet, seminaries can foster spiritual formation in its students through example, encouragement, and guidance (Smith, as cited in Tasker, 2002).

The Seventh-day Adventist church recognizes the importance of a pastor’s preparatory experiences in the seminary. This is because the church believes that “the primary way by which the church fosters a common understanding of its

message is through the work of its spiritual leaders—pastors, theologians, Bible/religion teachers, chaplains, and administrators” (Adventist Today, 2005, par. 1). Through its teaching ministry, the church “needs to continue to preserve its message and mission within this diversity” (Adventist Today, 2005, par. 1).

The International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) is a body commissioned by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to maintain theological unity and focus on mission among the spiritual leaders of the church. To guide the curriculum of the seminaries, it has identified the essential qualities, commitments, and skills of a Seventh-day Adventist minister. They are as follows (IBMTE, 2001, p. 40):

1. A SDA minister is a Christian characterized by:
 - a. A sense of divine personal call
 - b. A daily, growing walk with God
 - c. Acceptance of and love for people
 - d. Just and compassionate relationships and service
 - e. Personal integrity and high professional ethics
 - f. Balanced judgment and emotional stability
2. A SDA minister is a Christian committed to:
 - a. God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - b. The Bible as the authoritative word of God
 - c. The mission of proclaiming the saving gospel of Jesus Christ

This commitment is further reflected in:

- d. The affirmation of all other SDA fundamental beliefs
 - e. The support of the organized SDA Church, worldwide
 - f. A growing appreciation and understanding of the writings of Ellen G. White
 - g. The development of the gifts of the Spirit, personally and in the community of faith
 - h. The empowering and equipping of church members for the work of ministry
 - i. Sustained personal development—spiritual, mental, physical, social, and professional
 - j. Modeling the SDA lifestyle
3. The SDA minister is a Christian servant leader skilled in:
 - a. Proclaiming—evangelizing, preaching, teaching
 - b. Discipling—training, motivating, equipping, counseling, mentoring, retaining

- c. Establishing redemptive relationships with members, nonmembers, and all gender, age, and cultural groups
- d. Cultivating a balanced family life
- e. Visioning, planning and managing human, environmental, time, and financial resources
- f. Planning and conducting public worship
- g. Dealing with conflict and discipline.

To ensure that these characteristics are attained by SDA pastors as they prepare for the ministry, the curriculum of the seminaries ought to be examined thoroughly. If the church aims to achieve unity in its membership, it should strengthen the worldwide unity and mission focus of its seminary programs.

This study is an attempt to examine the curriculum of the seminaries owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist church within the Southern Asia Pacific Division (SSD). What constitutes the portfolio of a would-be pastor in these seminaries? What strengths and weaknesses can be expected, given the preparation they receive? Is there unity in the curriculum of theological programs being offered? Do the curricular programs address the expectations of the church as outlined by the IBMTE?

Method

A survey of undergraduate ministerial education was conducted in the 12 tertiary educational institutions in the SSD territory. Six of these 12 schools are located in the Philippines. Indonesia has three. Southeast Asia Union Mission, Myanmar Union Mission, and Bangladesh Union Mission have one each. These institutions offer one or both of the two undergraduate ministerial degrees, namely: Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Religion and Bachelor of Theology (BTh) programs. The focus of the survey was to study the curriculum of these undergraduate programs. The data for each participating institution were supplied either through their academic deans or heads of the religion department.

Results

Curriculum

Required religion courses are typically divided into three areas: Mission/Ministry, Biblical Studies (NT/OT), and Theological/Historical. The seminaries vary widely in terms of how these three are combined. In the Mission/Ministry area, the number of required credits ranges from a low of 24 credits to a high of 53 credits. In Biblical studies, the range is from 10 credits to 46 credits. In the Theological/Historical area, the lowest is 21 credits and the highest is 48 credits.

Religion and general study requirements among the schools vary significantly. For the BA in Religion, the number of religion credits required ranges from a low of 81 credits to a high of 120 credits. The Bachelor of Theology (BTh) program requires more religion courses but still varies from 116 to 149 credits among the schools. (Note: The bars in Figure 1 and Figure 2 represent the courses offered by respondent schools A to L. Only school E offers both BA and BTh. The others offer one of the two programs).

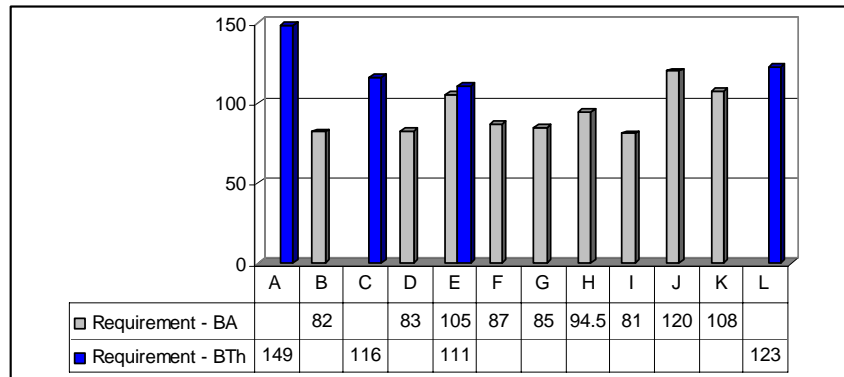


Figure 1. Religion requirements (semester credits).

General education requirements show a wider discrepancy. They vary from 29 credits to 102 credits for the BA in Religion and from 26 to 93 credits for the BTh.

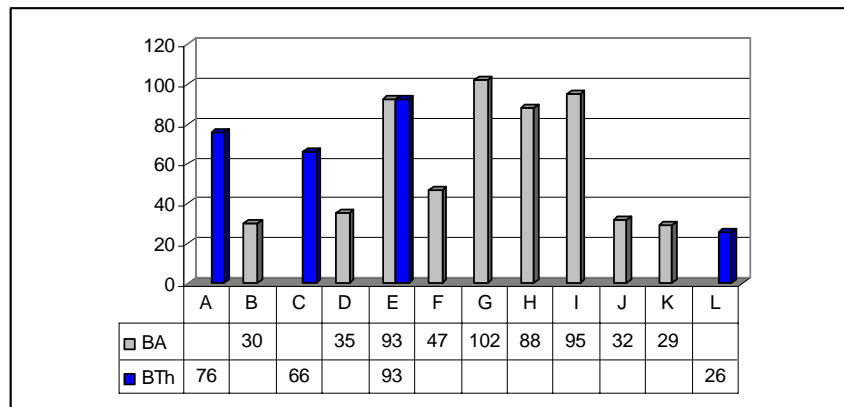


Figure 2. General education requirements (semester credits).

In sum, the total number of credits required for graduation from the BA in Religion (see Figure 3) ranges from 133 to 198 credits, showing a variation of 49%. For the BTh, the schools differed by 53% as they ranged from 149 to 228 total credits required for the degree.

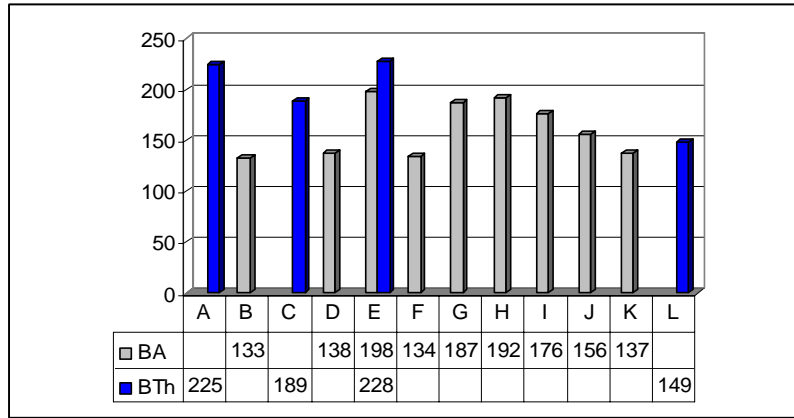


Figure 3. Total requirements (semester credits).

Practicum

The same characteristic of disproportion in curriculum is reflected in the practicum requirement (see Figure 4). The requirement of practicum or field work ranges from 2 credits to 12 credits among the schools.

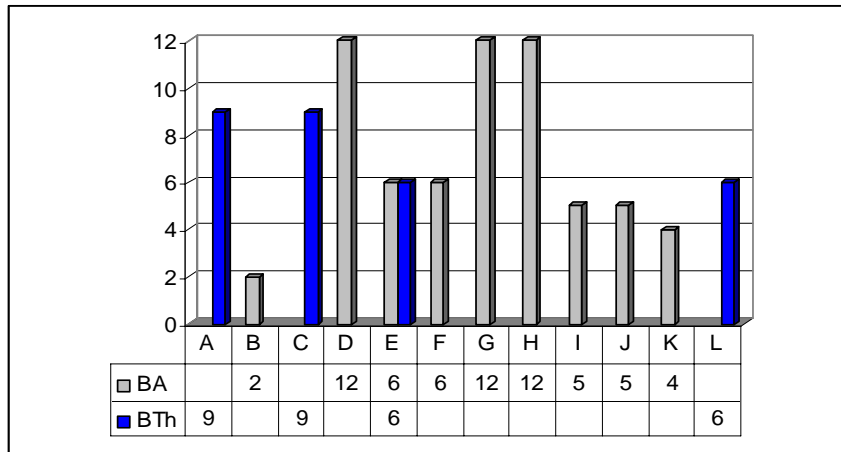


Figure 4. Practicum (hours by schools).

Teacher-Student Ratio

The ratio of teachers to students is generally low, ranging from 1:3.9 to 1:25.6 in all the participating institutions. In education, this is an acceptable ratio as it allows more interaction between the teacher and student. The total number of faculty, however, varies broadly from 1 to 10 per school depending on the size of religion program and student enrollment. Most schools take advantage of part-time faculty as members of the teaching staff.

Student Load

The maximum number of credits for which each student is allowed to enroll every semester can affect meaningful engagement in any subject matter. The students who are loaded with courses may not be able to meet the task demands of every lesson (Fox, 2005). The rule of thumb for the maximum load per semester is 16-18 credits. The survey shows that only 25% of the colleges and universities fall within the suggested norm and the rest permit a significantly heavier load of up to 26 semester credits.

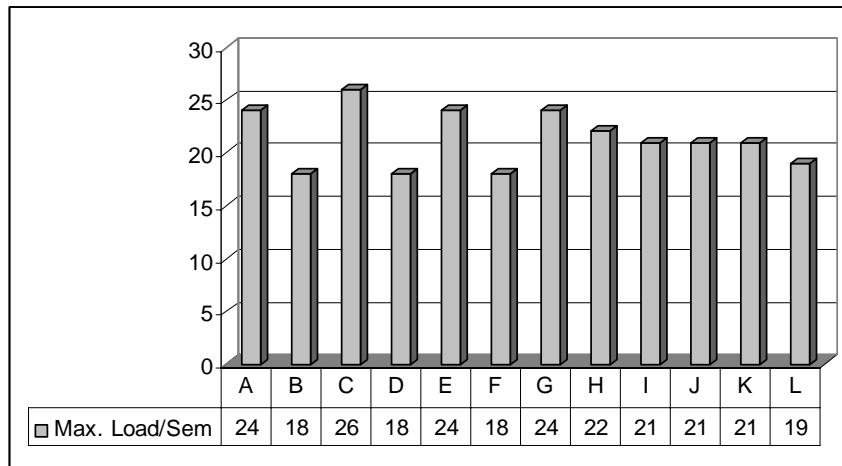


Figure 5. Maximum load per semester.

Instructional Materials

The main instructional materials in seminaries are usually books, either in the form of textbooks or library holdings. The survey does not poll the kind of textbooks used or even whether textbooks are used at all; but observations reveal that some schools are still using Jemison’s (1955) *A Prophet Among You* as a text, and there is concern that many of the other textbooks might be outdated as well. In terms of library holdings, the schools differed widely; the smallest

having 2,610 volumes and the largest having 92,358 volumes. There are no grounds for comparison because the schools differ in size and offerings. But the rule of thumb for a general college library in SSD is 15,000 volumes plus 2,000 more to be added for every major offered.

Discussion

The seminaries under study appear to vary widely in terms of preparing the pastor for the ministry. There are some similarities in basic requirements, yet there seem to be differences in what each perceives as the “right” portfolio for a spiritual leader.

Just like in any standard Adventist theological seminary, the curriculum in all the seminaries in this study is divided into three areas: Biblical Studies, Theological/Historical Studies, and Mission/Ministry. It is evident that most of the seminaries give importance to the area of applied theology as shown by the number of units required for Mission/Ministry courses compared to each of the other two areas. Applied theology deals with the various skills that are needed in the conduct of pastoral work in the church. Biblical and Theological studies equip the pastors with basic knowledge about the Bible and the doctrines of the church.

Considering the three aspects of pastoral preparation, it appears that practically all of the courses offered by the seminaries are focused mainly on the *knowing* and *doing* aspects. As Tasker (2002) and Baloyo (2004) observed, there were no courses that were directed mainly to the spiritual formation of the seminary student. This does not mean that the *being* aspect is left out in the educational process. Personal spiritual development is perhaps presumed to happen in the church, in relationships in the classrooms, and during other seminary activities. This area may well merit further consideration, both by curriculum design committees and by individual pastors as they consider the needs of their congregation.

Looking at the seminaries as a whole, it is clear that the course preparation of pastors in the SSD territory differs widely as shown by the number of religion and general study credits required by schools for graduation. Basic courses required by the seminaries show some similarities in many aspects, but they vary in the number of options given to the students and possibly the availability of such courses during enrollment. Availability of courses may be affected by the availability of teachers since many schools rely heavily on the services of part-time teachers.

The high percentage use of part-time faculty can be looked upon as both a positive and negative characteristic of the seminaries. It can be positive if the teachers hired are those who have first-hand experiences in the field so that they are able to integrate both theory and practice in their teaching. It can be negative

in the sense that such teachers may not have the focus or commitment to the overall mission of the seminary.

Another notable observation in the curriculum is the number of graduate-level courses that are taught at the undergraduate level. It is not uncommon for colleges and universities to offer graduate level courses to undergraduate students. Fresh from their graduate studies, some teachers tend to teach courses they have enjoyed, deemed important, or those which fall within their area of specialty. However, the criterion for course selection should not be what teachers prefer to teach but what students need to know in order to equip them for pastoral ministry. The selection of courses is critical in ministerial education. The selection process should not be done by individual teachers alone, but collectively by a committee including representatives from the field. Consumers have the prerogative to suggest the kind of product they wish to have.

It is surprising to note that despite the seminaries' seeming emphasis on applied theology, as shown by the number of credits required in the Mission/Ministry area, the number of hours required for practicum is low and highly differentiated. This finding on the disparity of the practicum requirements implies that the practical aspects of theological education may be perceived with varying degrees of importance among schools. Some schools value direct experiences of pastors in the ministry prior to full time work more than others.

In terms of teacher-student ratio, ministerial classes are praiseworthy. Given the low teacher-student ratio in these classes, ministerial students appear to receive greater attention from their teachers than other college students, and they may have better chances for participation in class activities. Whether this is intentional or incidental due to the size of the schools, this characteristic still works for better learning among students. Educational researchers have found that more effective learning takes place when teachers exhibit high awareness of students and know how they think and learn (Cohen & Seaman, as cited in Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000).

One critical issue that came out of the survey is the maximum student load per semester. In a 16-credits per semester system, the assumption is that students should spend one third of their time attending classes and two-thirds fulfilling course requirements. In the SSD context, 66% of the schools allow maximum student loads in excess of 20 credits per semester. What does that mean? Most likely, this means students spend more time attending classes and less time reading, studying, and doing projects. What are the implications of this? For one thing, the quality of learning under the 20 credits or more per term appears to be considerably less than that of the 16 maximum credits.

Finally, while there is a fair supply of instructional materials like reference books in some libraries, others are obviously lacking this kind of support. The lack of instructional materials can be a serious threat to the quality of learning

even though the Bible, which is the main source of instruction, is readily available. Spiritual leadership does not come by meditation alone; it should be complemented by continual reading, interacting, thinking, and training in the practical aspects of the ministry (White, 1948).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main challenge of ministerial preparation in the 12 colleges and universities appears to be one of convergence. Since they all serve the same church—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—what could be the reason for the amount of variation found? What could be the implications of such variation? Does this mean better spiritual leadership in some areas and a lack of skills in others?

While there is no clear means of determining the level of spiritual preparedness of pastors, the seminary can play a big role in providing a nurturing environment during a pastor's growth years. Theologians and academic administrators must address the *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* of the future spiritual leaders if genuine church growth is desired. If we wish for balance in our church leaders' abilities, commitment, and in their dealings with the church, we must also provide a balanced diet for their development during the college years.

From time to time, church administrators in missions and conferences lament about the lack of practical skills ministerial graduates demonstrate. They believe ministerial students are not adequately prepared for the rough and tumble reality of ministry. After all, they argue, the job of the schools is to churn out ministerial practitioners, not theologians. One may be well versed in Greek and Hebrew which is important, but if the pastor doesn't know how to train the laity, conduct funerals, or deliver a coherent sermon with reasonable clarity and earnestness, the schools have failed.

The tension between the theoretical (*knowing*) and the practical (*doing*) has been around for centuries. This traditional rivalry between advocates of academic emphasis and that of professional emphasis can be a thorny problem. The academic camp believes biblical and theological courses should have precedence over courses in practical training, whereas proponents of applied theology regard scholarly biblical and theological studies as peripheral and marginal. Probably both camps are right; the challenge is how to achieve a happy medium between the two. Pastors need book knowledge, but they need practical abilities as well.

Schools have often been accused of turning out students who can get the right answers in class, but are useless in the real world. Transfer of learning has become a new educational focus, and must continue to be a goal we strive for, and not just in theological training. "There has been a growing recognition that

professional education has fallen short of the demands of the workplace” (Bridges & Hallinger, 1995, p. 164). Pastors must be able to solve real world problems. For that reason, we need to be very careful not only what we teach them, but how we prepare them for real life.

Many times as well, pastors discover only some time after they graduate that ministerial work is not for them. They easily get discouraged when problems arise simply because of the lack of personal preparation for the ministry. When such a discovery takes place in the middle of their careers—when they already have families to support and no opportunity for a new vocation—they become mere *pastors-for-pay*, to the detriment of the church. In other cases, power and salary become the primary motivating factors for serving the church such that some individuals engage in “politicking” activities just to have greater power and higher pay. These scenarios underscore the importance of the *being* aspect of ministerial preparation. Yet, this type of preparation is not readily visible in the curricula of most seminaries.

Since seminaries are led by Bible experts who are not necessarily well grounded in sound teaching and learning principles, it is also common to find incidents of unhealthy teaching-learning situations. Compounding this are national realities in various contexts and budgetary limitations in depressed areas. While it is difficult to change external constraints, collaboration and coordination among the seminaries can be achieved to lessen the disparity among them. Qualifying standards could also be created for ministerial educators.

Given the diversity in curricula in the seminaries surveyed, there is a need to coordinate and synchronize ministerial training. In Asia-Pacific, the basic degree for pastoral ministry is a BTh. Yet, only four of the 12 seminaries surveyed offer this degree. The rest only offer the BA in Religion, which requires fewer religion courses and more general education courses. While it is necessary to allow flexibility, it is equally desirable to move in concert. Some semblance of standardization within the SSD could be most profitable in curriculum planning and development. The prescriptive portion of this survey, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. Recommendations for change should come from the constituents involved in ministerial training—including pastors, lay members, administrators, theology professors, and theology students themselves.

Future Research

Several issues from this study are worthy of attention. The following should be explored further in future research:

1. Study how the characteristics of an SDA pastor as outlined by the IBMTE are being met by the curriculum in the seminaries.

2. Make a longitudinal study of pastors covering their preparation years until they have served the church for at least five years. A qualitative study can be done to determine why they succeed or fail in the ministry.
3. Identify the ministerial challenges and needs in various contexts in the SSD territory and see how these are being addressed by the seminaries in the region.
4. Collaboration in the preparation of a standard curriculum document that addresses the needs and challenges of spiritual leadership in the SSD territory while providing some flexibility for local needs.

There is, indeed, no end in understanding God's will for His church. God has given the seminaries the task of preparing spiritual leaders who closely reflect Christ's character so that His church may be sanctified and His name glorified. They are "laborers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). What should they know so they can best equip themselves to labor in God's service?

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