

STEWARDS BIBLE COLLEGE **AND ITS ROLE AS TRAINER**

(Paper prepared by Koshy Zacharias of Gospel fellowship Trust, India, for the International Brethren Training Consultation at Emmaus Bible College, Iowa, USA. June 2005.)

1. Introduction:

In His great Commission, the Lord Jesus Christ said unto His disciples, **“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature”** (Mk. 16:15). In obedience to that great command one of the twelve disciples of our Lord namely Apostle Thomas landed in India and ignited the movement of evangelization in the first century itself. But even after 20 centuries of missionary work the Christianity could not make any headway in India and numerically the picture portrays a poor 3% in the overall population of the nation (for details see Annexure-1). However, the influence and impact of Christianity have touched another 15% of the population through the educational, medical and social service institutions.

India is a vast country with a population of over one billion people belonging to different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Some of the major religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were born in India and may be due to the deeply rooted influence of these religious tenets in the minds of Indian people the Christianity could not grow much as desired and expected. When we analyze thread bare the various causes for the very slow pace of progress in the evangelization over the centuries we can come across various reasons attributable to socio, economic, linguistic and cultural factors.

But a closer study may reveal that it was Christians and their coldness mainly responsible for the poor performance of Christianity in India today. When we look at II Chron.16:9, it reads as **“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.”** It is time to ponder upon these words and act.

2. Need of Training:

The Brethren Movement started spreading in Europe in the middle of nineteenth century and by the same time it moved to India particularly in Kerala, some parts of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. But even after few decades of its presence the movement was in its infant stage till middle of 20th century. Local churches were planted here and there. They were independent and autonomous. Though a good number of these independent churches were located in the region of Kerala they were scattered in other states. Due to this there was:

- i) No systematic teaching of the Word among the assemblies through learned brethren.
- ii) Linguistic barrier as there were many states and many languages. Fellowship among these churches were rare
- iii) Illiteracy rate was high in those days and this restricted their learning through books and other literature. Further many could not have access to good Christian theological books.
- iv) Other denominational Clergy were sound in matters relating to Christian theology; whereas our brethren evangelists were ignorant about many fundamental doctrines where we differ from them and due to this they could not encounter them to ascertain the correctness of brethren doctrine.

3. Need of Trainer:

Though there were strong grounds for establishing a training institution there was difference of opinion as to the Scriptural backing of such institution. Some thought starting a Bible school is not Biblical; and others felt that it was not so. However nothing was done as no one could take bold decision without moral and material support from others. Years rolled by and eventually some men of God like Gordon Ritchie, Justus Samuel, T.G. Samuel, waited upon the Lord and decided to start a Training Institution. After all the Lord Himself trained His disciples keeping them with Him for 3.5 years with good exposure to His teaching and practical training through His living.

Training is defined as “planned process to modify attitude, knowledge or skill behaviour through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. Its purpose in the

work situation is to develop the abilities of the individual and to satisfy the current and future manpower needs of the organization.”

The Advantages of Training are numerous. They are: increase in ability, increase in quality, better management of time, man power and money, better use of personnel, reduction in supervision, improved morale etc.

4. Origin of Assembly Bible and Training Institute

The founders namely Gordon Ritchie, Justus Samuel, T.G. Samuel and M.S. Liddle started in a humble way, the Assembly Bible and Training Institute in the year 1974 in Pune under the aegis of the Gospel Fellowship Trust of India. After two years the institution was shifted to Madras in 1977. Later the Assembly Bible and Training Institute were upgraded as Steward Bible College in the year 1986 and from then onwards it is functioning under a separate registered trust.

5. Objectives of the Ministry

This ministry was formed not to award any big theological degree with Greek and Latin, but to make the trainees fit to **present the Gospel in an effective way, plant the local churches in New Testament pattern and prepare the congregation with sound knowledge of doctrine.** It would be appropriate to remember the words of Apostle Paul written to young Timothy that **the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**

Hence the objective of this Bible School ministry is not to impart simply the academic knowledge of the Scripture, as done in other Episcopal Bible schools of other denominations. But the main aim of this institution is to train the students with fundamental Biblical doctrines and practical guidance to be a useful vessel in the Master's hands.

Originally the duration of the course was for only six months. Later the duration was increased to one year and two years expanding the curriculum suitably. Moreover the Bible Training Institute made its course content and duration focusing three categories of believers.

i) Training young believers with a call for full time ministry for courses of one year and two years duration to serve the Lord in His vineyard

ii) Training young believers who desire to study the Word not with the commitment of full time ministry but to be useful in their local churches along with their secular work.

iii) Conducting short-term crash/capsule course for one month or two months to the servants of God of a particular state who are already in the vineyard and who cannot stay away from their mission field and family for longer duration. This short term courses were conducted mostly with translation into their vernacular.

6. Curriculum and Methods of Training:

The subjects taught and covered for one year and two year courses are given separately in Annexure-II. All basic and important subjects taught in other denominational Bible Schools are included in the curriculum of this institution. The training is given to the students in English by using conventional methods of lecturing with the supply of study materials prepared by the lecturers themselves. Students are properly advised as regards reference books for further advance study. Subject wise tests are conducted for students periodically and the papers are valued and marks given. In addition the students are given topics on important subjects for preparing assignments on their own during the library hours. Their conduct and behaviour in the campus are watched meticulously and appropriate counseling is given by the elderly and learned teachers for proper conduct of their public and private life. When other denominational Episcopal Bible Schools give importance to the learning of knowledge of the Scripture we give importance to the practical side of training them to the mission field. In addition we also train them in basic English Grammar and personal hygiene etc. The students are also taken to the mission field for practical training in fellowship with the local Assembly in the respective area.

From our past experience over the years we feel that in a country like India the subjects and the methods we follow is sufficient to meet our requirements and yield the expected results. Even if we want to change over to hi- tech training methods with computers and networking there are some problems like the requirement of finance for initial infrastructure development, higher cost of engaging IT-trained Bible teachers

and qualified IT-learned students. In the present scenario the present method of training appears to be viable and feasible.

7. Constraints

Though the Bible School ministry is an effective ministry to train people to reach people there are many constraints involved in attaining the objective.

i) There is no enthusiasm among the believers as it was in the earlier years to study the Word of God due to various reasons. Interest in the things of God is gradually waning mainly due to modernism and materialism.

ii) Some of the students come half-heartedly to while away the time during their unemployment period and this defeat the very purpose of training.

iii) Properly trained teaching faculty is not easily available in the Brethren circle and engaging denominational teachers may result in erosion of Scriptural principles.

iv) In Indian context Bible schools are facing financial problems for the very survival. Here in India boarding, lodge, study materials and other incidentals are to be provided freely to the students. Neither the students nor the recommending assemblies contribute anything towards the cost of maintenance of the students. In these circumstances running a Bible school without proper financial support is highly difficult.

8. Measures to Improve:

1. News letters as regards their activities and need can be circulated among the Bible Schools to generate prayer support for one another.

2. Instead of each Bible School preparing study materials for all the subjects in the syllabus, they may be prepared on those subjects where they are strong and the same can be exchanged with other schools.

3. Once in a while a faculty member may be deputed from one School to another School so as to develop better co-ordination and interaction among the Bible Schools for improvement in their system of functioning.

4. Modern method of training through networking can be considered depending upon the facility and the feasibility.

9. Conclusion:

The pioneer of Brethren Movement namely, Antony Norris Groves said, "*Talk of loving me while I agree with them! Give me men that will love me when I differ from them and contradict them: Those will be the men to build up a true church.*" Yes, we need such men today. God is the Master Trainer. He trains His people through different circumstances. It required 100 years for Abraham, 40 years for Moses and so on and so forth for others. He trains and prepares us here to inherit the place He prepares for us in heaven. May His Name be glorified.

Annexure-I
A comparative study of the data relating to 1991 and 2001 census of India
regarding percentage of Christians in the states:
Decline in Percentage

State	1991-	2001
Andhra Pradesh	1.83	01.6
Goa	29.86	26.7
Kerala	19.32	19.0
Uttar Pradesh	0.14	0.1
Anadamans	23.95	21.7
Lakshadeep	1.16	1.0
Pondicherry	7.23	6.9
Bihar	0.90	0.1
Madhya Pradesh	0.65	0.3

Stagnant in percentage

Haryana	0.1	0.1
Karnataka	1.9	1.9
Maharashtra	1.1	1.1
Manipur	34.0	34.0
Rajasthan	0.1	0.1

Increase in Percentage

Arunachal Pradesh.	10.29	18.7
Assam	3.32	3.7
Gujarat	0.44	0.6
Himachal Pradesh	0.09	0.1
West Bengal	0.56	0.6
Chandigarh	0.78	0.8
Punjab	1.10	1.20
Orissa	2.10	2.40
Delhi	0.88	0.9
Haveli	1.51	2.7
Daman &Diu	1.51	2.1
Mizoram	85.73	87
Nagaland	87.40	90
Sikkim	3.30	6.7
Tamil Nadu	5.69	6.1
Tripura	1.68	3.2

New States Percentage

Jammu & Kashmir	-	-0.2
Uttaranjal	-	-0.3
Jharkhand	-	-4.1
Chattisgarh	-	-1.9

Annexure-II
Subjects taught and number of hours allotted:

First Year	No. of Hrs.	Second Year	No.of Hrs.
Bible Georgraphy	15	Parables of the Bible	15
Customs & Manners	15	Ethics	15
Evangelism	15	Pastoral Care & Counselling	15
Cults & Isams	15	Introdcution to Bible Prophecy	15
Christian Education	15	Elements of N.T. Greek	15
Major Religion	15	Homelitics	15
II Corinthinas	15		
Missionary Heroes	50	Major Prophets (Isa, Jer, Ezek.)	75
Discipleship	30	Pentateuch	75
Minor Prophets	75	Linguistics	25
English	100	Job	20
Character Studies(OT/NT)	80	Prison Epistles (Eph,Phil, Colos)	50
General Epistles	30	Acts of the Apostles	40
Surveys:OT & NT	150	Romans	50
Synoptic Gospels	50	ICorinthians	30
Bible Doctrines (Theology)	100		
Poetical Books (Psalms)	30	Hebrews	30
Messianic Psalms	30	Life of Christ	25
Church History upto 1600	30	Historical Books:Ezra/Neh/Esther	30
		Daniel & Revelation	30
		Tabernacle, High Priests	30
		Garments, Lev.Offerings.	30
		Practical Christian Life (Proverbs)	30
		John's Gospel	30
		Reformation & Brethren Movement	30
		Hermaneutics & Apologetics	30
		Pastoral Epistles	30
		Israel & Current events	30
		Eschatology	30
		Bibliology, & Ecclesiology	30