III. Ralph A. Felton

New Training For Rural Missions

Yes, agricultural missionaries are increasing in number. They are also moving out of their institutions into extension work. They are working increasingly with the man on his own farm and the woman in her own home. Secretaries of mission boards, too, are increasingly aware of rural needs.

But nationalism is emerging. More than that, it is breaking out all over. Progressive missionaries are moving the so-called "Mission" back and putting the Church forward. They are forming the Church in what has been the mission field; but the Church, the young Church, must have trained rural leaders. Missionaries must be trained for rural work, if they are going to train nationals to become rural pastors.
It is comparatively easy for some to preach the Gospel; but when converts are won is when the real difficulties begin. The greatest weakness of the Younger Church is the lack of true community life in which the spirit of Christ really lives. The christianization of the rural family on the farm is our biggest immediate task. This is why a new type of training is needed for rural work.

American theological seminaries began long ago with a limited curriculum. They taught Hebrew and Greek and the tortuous history of the Church in Europe. In those early days libraries were limited, so the professors merely lectured and the students wrote down what they could and gave it back to the professor at examination time.

Many great seminaries in America are meeting well the problems of today's world. Over half of the accredited seminaries in America offer courses for the specialized training of rural pastors, and of these more than fifty per cent have professors who devote full time to this rural training.

Because of the fact that two-thirds or more of the people of the fifty under-developed countries of the world are rural, it is highly important that missionaries who go out to serve them should have the best possible training in theological institutions that train people for rural work. The seminaries which have strong rural departments would also be of help to rural missionaries while they are on furlough.

Some seminaries among the Younger Churches in under-developed countries are also adding specialized courses to train rural pastors. Such institutions are found in Japan, in the Philippines, in India, in the Belgian Congo, in Mexico, and in several other areas.

In order to make this change, they usually find it necessary to unite several small schools into one cooperative seminary. Thus, it is possible to provide an adequate faculty. Mission boards can contribute professors with specialized rural training or they can bring national teachers to this country for special training in rural work.

As we look to the future, we must try to train the rural pastors in the Younger Churches to relate the Old Gospel to the new needs. Then, when they go back as graduates to their rural communities, they will influence all of life and christianize the home, the village, and the countryside.