



Recovering Our Heritage of Theological Education

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The Founders Journal



Contributors:

Dr. Thomas K. Ascol is Pastor of the Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida.

Dr. Mark Coppenger is President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler is President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Dr. Tom Nettles is Professor of Church History at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

Dr. Don Whitney is Professor of Spiritual Formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri.

Book Reviewer:

Russell Moore is a PhD candidate in Systematic Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Editor:

Thomas K. Ascol, PhD

Associate Editor:

Ernest C. Reisinger

Contributing Editors:

Bill Ascol, MDiv

Mark Dever, MDiv, ThM, PhD

Timothy George, ThD

Fred A. Malone, PhD

Joe Nesom, PhD

Tom Nettles, PhD

Roger Nicole, ThD, PhD, DD

Don Whitney, DMin

Hal Wynn, BD

Graphic Design Editor:

William D. Lollar

Webmaster:

Stan Reeves, PhD

The Founders Journal is a quarterly publication which takes as its theological framework the first recognized confession of faith that Southern Baptists produced, [*The Abstract of Principles*](#).

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Recovering Our Heritage of Theological Education

Tom Ascol

In the summer of 1996, Matt Forman, a student at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, was on a work detail for the Facilities Services Department. His assignment included the demolition of an old building on campus. When the task was nearly completed, an old memorial stone from another building, previously torn down, was discovered on the site. The inscription on the stone read, "Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1859-1877."

Forman knew that this stone was significant as a reminder of the formation and early existence of the first Southern Baptist seminary in Greenville. When, at the end of the summer he discovered the cornerstone in a scrap pile which was destined for the county dump, Forman gathered some friends to help him rescue it from the trash heap. Unbeknownst to them, the actions of these young men constitute a metaphor for what we are witnessing in the Southern Baptist Convention.

After years of being covered up and ignored, the doctrinal heritage of the Southern Baptist Convention is being discovered by a new generation of church members and leaders. Once cast on the scrap pile of pragmatism and doctrinal indifference, historic Southern Baptist theology is being rescued for the third millennium by those who are weary of shallow teaching which parades under the guise of biblical exposition. That which was commonly believed by our forebears is proving much more nourishing to modern hearts which are hungry for Scriptural truth.

Under the leadership of Professor James Boyce, Furman University helped establish The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859 in the city of Greenville. The seminary was founded on the Abstract of Principles (which is also the confessional basis of *The Founders Journal*) in order to insure the orthodoxy of every professor who would ever teach there. Boyce regarded this step as throwing "a safeguard, as to the future teachings of the professors, around the endowments" which were raised for the seminary.

When the question arose regarding which confession of faith should be adopted for the seminary, the Philadelphia Confession (which is essentially the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689) was naturally considered because of its vast influence upon and acceptance by Southern Baptists. "If the [Education] Convention had been acting only for its own members," Boyce stated, "I believe that that confession might have been adopted." Out of deference for some who took exception to certain points of that confession (especially, because of Landmarkism's influence, on ecclesiological issues), it was decided that a separate abstract should be developed.

Three principles guided the formation of this document. First, it had to be "a complete exhibition of the fundamental doctrines of grace, so that in no essential particular should they speak dubiously." Secondly, it must speak "clearly and distinctly" on those practices which universally prevailed among Southern Baptists. Thirdly, where the denomination was not in agreement, the document should not take a position. Through following these guidelines, Boyce said, "The doctrines of grace are therefore distinctly brought out in the abstract of principles."^[1]

Early Southern Baptists took for granted that Christianity is essentially doctrinal. To know Christ and follow Him faithfully demands we understand and believe the essential tenets of the faith. Must one, then, be a theologian in order to be a Christian? No. But every Christian ought to be as theologically informed from the Bible as possible. Such an attitude was once commonplace in Baptist churches. Doctrine was not regarded as dry, boring, or unimportant, and neither was it relegated to the domain of "professionals."

The recognition that right doctrine is important to a healthy Christian life led to a high degree of agreement among those who called themselves Southern Baptists in the last century. The Abstract of Principles represents a summary of the theological consensus which then prevailed.

Among its twenty articles this document asserts that "God from eternity, decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events; yet so as not in any wise to be the author or approver of sin nor to destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures" (article IV). It further states that "Election is God's eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life--not because of foreseen merit in them, but of his mere mercy in Christ--in consequence of which choice they are called, justified and glorified" (article V).

It is not surprising that these statements are less thorough and comprehensive than those found in the Second London Confession. After all, it is an *abstract*--not an exact explication--of commonly held Baptist principles which was devised for the seminary. What is quite clear is simply this: early Southern Baptists believed that God is sovereign and men are responsible in salvation. Further, they intended the future generations of their pastors to be taught these truths among the other salient points of doctrinal Christianity. Ministerial training was to be intensely concerned with sound doctrine.

Yet doctrinal soundness gets little more than a passing expression of concern in many Baptist churches today. It hardly ever gets mentioned in the recasting of their vision and purpose statements. This is glaringly apparent when it comes to the doctrine of God's sovereignty. How many Baptist churches have heard a sermon in the last five years which explains the biblical teaching on election the way that it is summarized in the Abstract of Principles? God's sovereign freedom, which is the very foundation of salvation by grace, has been all but lost to modern Baptist churches.

There is no shortage of material in the Bible on the subject. The first four inspired words of Holy Scripture set forth God's freedom. He was under no compulsion to create the world. The Apostle Paul appeals to this point when defending God's unconditional election of certain sinners to salvation. To the one who objects to God's actions, the apostle responds, "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?' Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" (Rom. 9:20-21).

Job learned to bow before God's sovereign freedom. After being humbled by divine interrogation, he confesses to the Lord, "I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You" (Job 42:2). Such understanding caused him to repent in sack cloth and ashes over his earlier little thoughts of God.

The mighty Babylonian conqueror learned this lesson, but not until he served time grazing like an ox in a field under the sovereign chastisement of God. At the end of his sentence he said, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan. 4:34-35). He caught a glimpse of the sovereignty of God and it led him to worship.

This God exalting, human pride crushing truth was known, believed, and loved in our churches during the nineteenth century. It is what gave impetus to the great missionary enterprise which marked the beginning of the Southern Baptist Convention. Because God is sovereign, our forebears felt that they must go, and go they did in great confidence that the God who rules the universe went with them.

God's absolute sovereignty in every area of life is a comforting truth for sincere believers. In the seventeenth century, English Baptist pastor, Hercules Collins, adapted the Heidelberg Catechism for Baptists and published it as The Orthodox Catechism. The first answer in these catechisms warmly summarizes the sure foundation which God's sovereignty provides to the Christian.

Q. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

A. That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior

Jesus Christ; who with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.

The comfort which is outlined in this wonderful statement arises from a proper appreciation of sound doctrine regarding sin, Christ, atonement, providence, the Holy Spirit and divine sovereignty. Where doctrine is neglected, experience suffers.

What is needed is a return to doctrinal Christianity in our churches. For this to happen, there must first be a recovery of the importance of doctrine in our pulpits. By God's grace, this is happening more and more frequently. Pastors are being awakened to the emphasis which the Bible gives to teaching sound doctrine in the pastoral ministry. A growing number of ministers are hearing, as if for the first time, Paul's admonitions to "take heed...to the doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:16) and to "speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). This reformation in the pulpit is encouraging to see, but it reveals a tragedy of our recent past and a need for our immediate future.

"Why wasn't I taught this in seminary?" Variations of this question have been asked hundreds if not thousands of times in recent years by pastors who have come to see the necessity of sound doctrine for a faithful ministry. As one minister expressed it, "I graduated from a prominent Baptist University and received two degrees from a Baptist seminary. But it wasn't until years later that I realized that my ministry was to be doctrinally based. I feel like I was misled."

The sad truth is that, until recent years, training ministers to be doctrinally sound and equipping them to develop a theological approach to ministry was overshadowed by other concerns in many Baptist seminaries. On the one hand, some of these institutions reflected the reign of pragmatism which characterized many Baptist churches over the last sixty years. Content was subordinated to method. Style took precedence over substance. Truth took a back seat to results. On the other hand, the seduction of academic prestige made others of these institutions embarrassed by the hard edges of propositional revelation. Relativism became magnanimous. Certainty was heresy. The idea that ministerial students should be encouraged to understand and teach sound doctrine was regarded as being contrary to an academic institution's purpose. "Education, not indoctrination" was the mantra of the day.

Tragically, two generations of Baptist pastors were trained in such educational environments. This is not to suggest that all of them came out having bought into the system in which they studied. Many were helped along the way to see things more clearly by some exceptional professors. Others, through the influence of pastors, churches, or books were challenged to recognize the importance of doctrine to ministry. But too many pastors were sent into their fields of labor woefully unprepared for battles they faced. As one prominent Southern Baptist leader publically stated years ago, "I went to seminary looking for bread and came away with a handful of stones."

By God's grace, the future of theological education for Baptists looks excessively brighter than does the recent past. The reformation which is taking place in pulpits across the land is also taking place in seminary classrooms. A reemphasis on biblical truth and doctrinal foundations is emerging on many seminary campuses. Though this renewal of theological education may be much more, it is certainly nothing less than a recovery of the original Southern Baptist burden for sound teaching in our churches.

As current and future generations of Baptist ministers are trained to think theologically and establish their ministries on the sound doctrine of the Bible, the reformation which is underway will not only continue, but increase. Our churches deserve doctrinally sound, spiritually enlivened pastors. May the Lord continue to supply them in ever increasing numbers.



¹ This information is found in Robert Baker, *A Baptist Sourcebook, with Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 139-40. See also W. W. Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1953* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), 125-134.



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Stewards of the Mysteries of God

R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

*Adapted from the Convocation Address delivered Tuesday, August 26, 1997,
in Alumni Memorial Chapel, Louisville, KY*

Introduction

Something troubles me about much of what I hear or read when theological education is discussed. I fear that many persons engage the issues of ministerial training and Christian scholarship without a proper sense of seriousness. There is so much talk about theological education, and so little weight to that talk. We speak as if so little is at stake.

This is, I believe, a problem generalized across the spectrum of theological education. So much of our conversation, deliberation, and thinking is addressed to matters of process, policy, facilities, finances, technology, and technique. These are important matters--and sometimes even urgent matters--but these are not ultimate issues.

I am very concerned that Southern Seminary be known as an institution, a school for ministers, that accepts its assigned mission with deadly seriousness, and is gladly dedicated to the unique and vital task of theological education. Under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the mission of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is to be totally committed to the Bible as the Word of God, and to serve the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention by training, educating, and preparing ministers of the Gospel for more faithful service.

This is a calling higher than that served by any other educational institution. Our aspirations for scholarship must be higher than those of the university. The medical school must teach, knowing that lives will hang in the balance as their graduates serve. We know that eternity hangs in the balance as our graduates preach, teach, and minister.

Ministry as Stewardship

In 1 Cor. 4:1-2, the Apostle Paul reminds us of the gravity of the ministry--the calling to preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. (NASB)

The Corinthian church presented the Apostle Paul with some of his most frustrating challenges. In the course of this letter, Paul has already used several metaphors to describe his apostolic ministry. He has spoken in terms of planting and building, but now he turns to use a most interesting metaphor.

How should we think of ministers? Paul speaks plainly, in language his readers would immediately understand. We should think of ministers as servants of Christ, stewards of the mysteries of God.

That latter phrase has caught my attention for some time. It is arresting in its boldness, but simple in its accountability. We who are teachers and preachers of the Word are no less than *stewards of the mysteries of God*.

This is such a powerful image or picture of the ministry. *Stewards of the mysteries of God*. For us to claim this for ourselves would be audacity to the point of blasphemy. Who are we to claim such stewardship? Is this arrogance? Not at

all. Paul had previously told the Corinthians that he had come to them "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling," (1 Cor. 2:3) so that the Corinthian church would know the power of the Gospel rather than the power of Paul.

No, Paul is not over-reaching here. His intention is not to puff himself up, but to make his accountability clear. He is not merely a servant to the Corinthian congregation, a religious professional, or theological consultant. By grace, he is a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God.

I am captivated by this image, and certain that taking it seriously will revolutionize our understanding of the ministry and of our task in theological education.

Think with me this way: What would it mean for every pastor to have printed on his card, "Steward of the Mysteries of God." Or, what if every teacher in this seminary had as title, "Steward of the Mysteries of God?" What if our students thought of themselves, not just as learners and ministers-in-training, but as stewards of the mysteries of God?

This would confuse the world, we must acknowledge. This biblical description matches no list of vocational tracks available to school counselors. The Internal Revenue Service would certainly ask for clarification if we identify our occupation on our tax return as "Steward of the Mysteries of God." Kitty Carlisle and the entire cast of the old television program, "What's My Line?" would have been stumped on this one. And yet, that is precisely what Paul tells us we are: *Stewards of the Mysteries of God*.

As Gordon Fee indicates, Paul's point in employing this metaphor is almost certainly to indicate that the preacher or teacher of God's Word holds a delegated authority.^[1] A very real authority, but an authority not our own.

We need to be reminded that our role is that of a servant or a steward, not a ruler or owner. As C. K. Barrett reminds us, "The *servant* in any case has no significance of his own; the work done is not his but his master's; apostolic ministry is marked by the fact that it makes no claims for itself, but points from itself to Christ. This does not depreciate it."^[2]

Under the Lordship of Christ, as stewards we are charged with the faithful transmission of the mysteries of God--the truth of the Gospel. For Paul, the mysteries of God are clearly the revealed mysteries of the Gospel; once hidden but now revealed. He has used this image often, referring not to a gnostic secret to be held in confidence by co-conspirators, but to God's great open secret of the Gospel--hidden in the atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ and now the great message of salvation. These are not mysteries to be concealed, but mysteries to be proclaimed.

Thus, Paul draws our attention to the revealed truths of God's Word, the disclosure of God's purpose throughout the ages made manifest in the birth, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What had been hidden is now revealed. The mystery of the ages is now disclosed. We are now stewards of those mysteries.

What would it mean for all of us to take up our calling as stewards of the mysteries of God? What would it mean for Southern Seminary, for teachers, students, trustees, and administrators? How should we rethink our task in light of this powerful image?

Teachers as Stewards of the Mysteries of God

The teacher in a theological institution holds one of the most powerful posts in the world--and an office laden with responsibility. The theological professor molds the ministry, both by teaching and by example.

For this reason the election and appointment of new faculty members is the greatest challenge for any theological seminary which takes seriously the task of securing teachers who are stewards of the mysteries of God. Southern Seminary must settle for nothing less than the God-given combination of biblical conviction, consecrated scholarship, and teaching

excellence demanded by the mission of this institution.

The faculty serving this seminary represent the highest degree of spiritual commitment and scholarship. A theological faculty is known, not only for what it knows, how widely it is published, or how well it teaches, but by its conviction. Put simply, a theological faculty must be measured by what it believes. This sets a seminary faculty apart from the faculties of other institutions.

We are measured by a higher standard than the secular academy. As Paul instructed Timothy, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."[\[3\]](#)

This succession of faithful teaching--and faithful teachers--is absolutely necessary to the integrity of theological education. This was recognized by James Petigru Boyce, our founder. In his famous address which gave birth to the Seminary, entitled "Three Changes in Theological Institutions," Boyce put forth his argument. "Peculiar obligations rest, however, upon those to whom are entrusted the education of the rising ministry. God in His mercy preserve the instructors from the crime of teaching a single error, however unimportant, and grant unto all our boards the grace necessary for faithfulness to the trusts developed upon them, that false doctrine, however trifling, may receive no countenance."[\[4\]](#)

The ideals of value neutrality and scientific objectivity to which the secular academy aspires are foreign to the theological school. The current battles over political correctness and the ideological conformity of secular scholarship now threaten the very notion of a liberal education in the classic sense. The modern university is now more an arena for political and ideological warfare than an oasis of higher learning.

Southern Seminary is a confessional institution, which declares its convictions, by means of a formal *Abstract of Principles*. Our purpose is not the imposition of ideological conformity, but the assurance of theological integrity.

The formal induction of new members into the faculty of this seminary takes place in a public ceremony which remains basically unchanged from its origins in the founding of this institution. Professors place their names on the very manuscript penned by the founders and pledge to teach "in accordance with and not contrary to" the explicit truths contained therein. The public pledge made by these professors represents the teaching contract required of all who teach at Southern Seminary.

What would it mean for us to understand our teaching task in terms of stewardship of the mysteries of God? I believe the image of professors as stewards of the mysteries of God underlines the gravity and glory of the teaching office.

Some time ago I came across a citation from the diary of Samuel Miller, one of the greatest professors ever to teach on the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary. On the day of his inauguration into office, he wrote:

Today I could not help *trembling* under a sense of unspeakable solemnity! Yes, this is an office which an *Owen*, or an *Edwards* would undoubtedly undertake with trembling. How, then, ought I to feel, with all my want of the requisite qualifications! God of all grace!--Thou with whom is the residue of the Spirit--I cast myself on thy care! I implore light, and guidance, and strength from thee! Oh that my deficiencies may not be permitted to disgrace me, and, above all, to disgrace the *precious cause* in which I profess and hope that I am engaged! Oh that I may have grace given to me to be wise and faithful, and thus to be made a blessing to the youth whom I may be called to instruct.[\[5\]](#)

Charles Hodge, the teacher of Boyce and Manly, remarked concerning 1 Cor. 4:1-2 that Paul was distancing himself from secular teachers. Stewards of the mysteries of God "are not, like Aristotle or Plato, the originators of their own doctrines, or the teachers of the doctrines of other men, but simply the dispensers of the truths which God has revealed."[\[6\]](#)

As stewards, true ministers of the Word, and true teachers, we are to dispense "the truths which God has revealed, and which, as being undiscoverable by human reason, are called mysteries, into the knowledge of which men must be initiated."^[7] This is one true and vital measure of our stewardship. Have we faithfully passed on the truths revealed in God's Word? Not the latest fads of the academy, not the current rage of the theologians, but the faith once for all delivered to the saints?

Martin Luther explained Paul's point in these words: "We do not preach our own interests, nor teach our own doctrines. We do not seek to have you obey us, or give us allegiance and accept our doctrine. No, indeed. We are messengers of him who is your Master, your Lord and Leader. We preach his Word, enlist men to follow his commandments, and lead only into obedience. And in this light should you regard us, expecting of us nothing else than to bring the message."^[8]

What a precious mantle we bear as stewards of the mysteries of God. Such care is required of us that we be faithful to this charge. As Samuel Miller confessed on that day he entered the office, the charge is greater than we can bear alone.

Students as Stewards of the Mysteries of God

Those who teach are not alone in being stewards of the mysteries of God. A stewardship is also required of students. Ministerial education, when seen in this light, is not a matter of mere vocational training. You will not see late-night commercials advertising a new career in the ministry in just six easy lessons.

The ministry is not a career--not even a profession. The high calling of a steward of the mysteries of God demands a preparation and an accountability beyond that of any secular career or profession. This is measured, not so much in length as in depth. A minister of the Gospel must be matured in heart as well as in mind. Character and devotion are as important to the minister as learning and knowledge.

The learning, however, is vitally important. You cannot teach what you do not know. Looking to Paul's metaphor, you cannot dispense what you have not received.

The theological education provided for students at Southern is unprecedented in the history of the Christian Church. They have access to world-class theological professors and an invaluable theological library, and on a campus which is the envy of the seminary world. And yet, far too many students pass through seminary as if gaining a union card for ecclesiastical employment. This precious school is not a line on your resume--it is a matter of your stewardship.

To the students at Southern I ask this: What will you do with the learning available to you here? As ministers of the Gospel, you will be responsible for the preaching and teaching of God's Word, and for the cure of souls. No one is equal to these tasks, but God has placed you here that you might be a more faithful servant minister once you have departed this campus and graduated from this school.

As you take courses, read books, write papers, and ponder the truths of God's Word, do you think of yourselves as stewards of the mysteries of God? By your study here, are you seeking to grow in grace and in knowledge so that you will be a more faithful steward in ministry?

Recognize that theological education is not mere education. Genuine learning is always to be desired and admired, but the knowledge of divine truth is a different matter altogether. President Boyce stated this clearly:

The scriptural qualifications of the ministry do, indeed, involve the idea of knowledge, but that knowledge is not of the sciences nor of philosophy nor of the languages, but of God and His plan of salvation. He who has not this knowledge, though he be learned in all the learning of the schools, is incapable of preaching the Word of God. But he who knows it, not superficially, not merely in those plain and simple

declarations known to every believing reader, but in the power, as revealed in its precious and sanctifying doctrines, is fitted to bring forth out of his treasury things new and old, and is a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, although he may speak to his hearers in uncouth words or in manifest ignorance of all the sciences. The one belongs to the class of educated ministers, the other to the ministry of educated men, and the two things are essentially different.[\[9\]](#)

This is not an argument for an uneducated ministry--to the contrary, Boyce and the other founders of this sacred school literally gave their all for the sake of a truly educated ministry. Boyce was concerned, as we should be concerned, that students not leave this institution with the essential lessons unlearned--and those essentials are precisely what Paul identifies as the mysteries of God.

Paul was well educated, but he was not eloquent. He intentionally avoided the use of classical rhetoric, lest his point be lost in the presentation, or, more importantly, lest his rhetorical power impress his hearers, at the expense of the Gospel itself. This frustrated the Corinthian congregation, who rejected Paul's apostleship as too Word-centered. Paul answered with the cross of Jesus Christ--a gospel which confounds all worldly wisdom.

The theological curriculum has been transformed in the past several decades as the proficiencies of ministry have often eclipsed the knowledge of the message. In all too many pulpits, we see a demonstration of what Paul explicitly avoided. There is altogether too much attention to technique in so many ministries, and so little theology. Too many ministers are merely mechanics of modern ministry and not stewards of the mysteries of God.

I am not arguing that you should be unconcerned with developing every skill and area of knowledge in ministry. That would be a tragedy, and would be evident in the mediocrity of your ministry. Nevertheless, I am warning you that an even greater tragedy--a far greater tragedy--would be for you to leave this seminary without a deep knowledge and a burning passion to preach and teach the Word of God and the eternal truths of the Christian faith.

In other words, determine here and now to be a good steward of the mysteries of God while you are engaged in study at Southern Seminary, that you might be a good steward of the mysteries of God when you graduate and draw for a lifetime from what you have learned and invested here.

To this one further point must be added. The mysteries of God cannot be treated like any other arena of thought or knowledge. The medical student may go home at night and fall asleep, satisfied with the knowledge gained through the course of the day, but fundamentally unchanged. The student minister, however, as a steward-in-training, will be changed by what is learned in the seminary classroom, through reading and research and study.

We are to be continually transformed by the renewing of our minds, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word. In this sense, the good steward is transformed by the stewardship of God's truth.

Conclusion: It is Required of Stewards that One Be Found Faithful

Paul refused to be tested by the Corinthians. He bluntly told them that their estimation was of no consequence and of little interest to him. Paul recognized only one test of his ministry, and that was a test to be administered by God Himself "In this case, moreover," he asserted, "it is required of stewards that one be found faithful."

Found faithful. That is all that is required, but what an awesome test this is. All stewards are required to give an account. How can any of us be faithful to this charge? How will our faithfulness be measured?

Gordon Fee argues that, for Paul, faithfulness "means absolute fidelity to the gospel as he received it and preached it."[\[10\]](#) As a steward he had received what was not his own, but his Master's, and he passed it along intact, unadulterated,

undiluted to the Corinthians, and to all others.

As a steward, his only authority was a delegated authority. His only message was the cross. His only judge is God himself, the Master from whom he had received his stewardship.

My prayer is that all who are associated with Southern Seminary will look on this institution as a community of fellow stewards of the mysteries of God. Thinking this way, we must have an entirely new sense of the importance of our task, of the weightiness of our mission, and of the glory of our calling.

With this in mind--and in heart--we would teach differently, learn differently, lead differently, serve differently, live differently, than if we think of this school as a mere academic institution. We are that, and more--far, far more. And the test we will face is far greater and more demanding than that faced by any other academic institution. We will answer to God Himself for our stewardship of His mysteries.

I close with this exhortation offered by Charles Haddon Spurgeon at the opening of a new session of his Pastors' College:

Remember, if any of you are unfaithful, you win for yourselves a superfluity of condemnation. You were not forced to be ministers. You were not compelled to enter upon this sacred office. By your own choice you are here. In your youth, you aspired to this holy service, and thought yourselves happy in attaining your desire. Brethren, if we meant to be untrue to Jesus, there was no necessity to have climbed this sacred rock in order to multiply the horrors of our final fall. We could have perished quite sufficiently in the ordinary ways of sin. What need to qualify ourselves for a greater damnation? This will be a dreadful result if this is all that comes of our College studies, and our burning of midnight oil in acquiring knowledge. My heart and my flesh tremble while I contemplate the possibility that any one of us being found guilty of treachery to our charge ,and treason to our King. May the good Lord so abide with us that, at the last, we may be clear of the blood of all men! It will be seven heavens in one to hear our Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."[\[11\]](#)

So may it be said of us, to the everlasting glory of God's only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



¹Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, "New International Commentary on the New Testament" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 159.

² C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, "Harper's New Testament Commentaries" (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 99.

³2 Timothy 2:2.

⁴James P. Boyce, "Three Changes in Theological Institutions," in James Petigru Boyce: Selected Writings, ed. Timothy F. George (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989), p. 51.

⁵From Samuel Miller, Jr., *The Life of Samuel Miller* (Philadelphia: Claxon, Remsen, and Haffelfinger, 1869), as cited in David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Theological Seminary: Faith and Learning 1812-1868* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), p. 72. In this passage, *Owen* refers to John Owen, the great Puritan theologian and *Edwards* to Jonathan Edwards, the famous preacher who died as President of what was later known as Princeton University.

⁶Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980 [1857]), p. 65.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed., John Nicholas Lenker, trans. John Nicholas Lenker and others, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.), pp. 66-67.

⁹Boyce, p. 36.

¹⁰Fee, p. 160.

¹¹Charles Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994 [1900]), p. 281.



¹Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, "New International Commentary on the New Testament" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 159.

²C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, "Harper's New Testament Commentaries" (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 99.

³2 Timothy 2:2.

⁴James P. Boyce, "Three Changes in Theological Institutions," in James Petigru Boyce: Selected Writings, ed. Timothy F. George (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989), p. 51.

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¹⁰Fee, p. 160.

¹¹Charles Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994 [1900]), p. 281.



A Vision of Theological Education

Tom J. Nettles

Introduction

In his 1881 essay, "The Influence of the German University System on Theological Literature," Robert L. Dabney, the great Southern Presbyterian Theologian, described the unsettled condition deriving from the perpetual necessity of "doing new work." Its application to philosophy, but especially theology, works a deadly mischief. It almost invariably is an incentive to heretical innovation. Dabney says that "The *animus* which this trait of the German erudition has imported into theological study, is poisonous to orthodoxy."^[1] The data of theological study were given by divine revelation and made those who believed wise unto salvation just as surely in the first as in the twentieth century.

I share something of the spirit of Dabney in this essay. Nothing presented here will not come under the category of "new work." Rather, what follows is a reiteration of old ideas which is set forth with the conviction that the greatest challenge of seminary education is not to produce ecclesiastical innovators but ministers who are grounded theologically. Consequently, I see four basic elements in the theological task.

Scriptural

To say that the first is *Scriptural* may seem too obvious. Perhaps this should be such a given that we need not spend time developing its importance. A recent look, however, at seminary catalogues and at the description of the purpose of a newly endowed chair at another school has intensified my conviction that eternal vigilance in this matter of Bible-centered theological education is a peculiar stewardship of our generation.

It is incumbent on every evangelical seminary faculty to re-pioneer by cutting back through the forest removing "new growth" currently shadowing the path from the light of God's Word. Theological faculty members must not only give verbal assent to the unique power and authority of the Bible, but also must confide in it, delight in it, love it, meditate on it, conform to it, and teach and exhort others in light of its truth.

The curriculum should reflect this by offering as many courses as possible for each student to become "mighty in the Scriptures." This involves an unembarrassed emphasis on biblical languages, exegesis courses, and English Bible. Other parts of the curriculum itself should be justified by Scripture, either directly or by necessary consequence. A theological seminary cannot exempt itself from the protection and guidance of the regulative principle.

This principle creates a rich reservoir of directions, however, not just for the kinds of courses offered in the curriculum but the viewpoint from which they are taught. When I teach history, a biblical world view should guide the honesty and thoroughness with which I treat the sources and should constitute the reality through which I consciously express my viewpoints about the meaning of history. In addition to setting a table carefully arranged with names, events and dates, I should try to infect my students with a sense of the moral texture of history, a desire for careful discernment of the providence of God in its ebb and flow, a fascination with those moments in which the truth graces the experience of the church, and a love for the challenge of thinking biblically about history.

One of the most devastating issues confronting Christian intellectual life in general and Baptist life in particular is the failure to generate a world view approach to higher education. Many, though not all, Baptist colleges have proceeded on the assumption that they are Christian because they have a religion department, required chapel, and a so-called Christian environment. Often the only common presupposition which is actively protected is secular libertarianism, now post-modern relativism, under the guise of a Baptist commitment to liberty of conscience and academic freedom. That the

construction of a Christian world view embracing and informing all academic disciplines is possible, or even desirable, seems an absurdity.

It is not absurd, however, for even now moments of real Christian education occur under the influence of gifted and devoted individuals who have made a personal mission of functioning professionally within the framework of a rich, provocative, and energizing Christian world view. That which currently flourishes as an ornament of individual discipleship can be extended into the realm of corporate discipleship if a whole theological faculty views its task in this light.

Perhaps the Lord will lead one of our seminaries to develop a "World View Institute" aimed particularly at college teachers in non-biblical disciplines to help them develop skills in thinking biblically and theologically about the world in general and their expertise in particular. Many who currently teach faithfully and effectively in those contexts will have much to offer us in honing this skill.

Confessional

The second part of this vision is a particular kind of manifestation of the first. Theological education should be *confessional*. The founder of Southern Seminary, James Boyce, believed this strongly and sought to insure that the school would remain that way. Nor was he out of harmony with the flow of Baptist history when he criticized the creedless ideal of Alexander Campbell and warned Baptists against slipping into a false implication of the Bible-only principle. This is why Boyce and the other founders of Southern Seminary led in adoption of the *Abstract of Principles* as the institution's guiding confession.

If theological education is not confessional it will tend toward randomness and incoherence. A confessional commitment testifies to our confidence in the non-contradictory nature of Scripture.

In addition, commitment to the goal of unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God calls for an open statement of what we believe to be true. A confession states clearly: *To these teachings we are conscientiously committed*. No authentic attempt at unity in the faith is possible without serious confession of the faith.

The confession serves as a goal as well as a foundation. None need be deceived as to what students will be taught when they come to Southern Seminary. The witness and influence we desire to have is writ large. The confession not only defines who we are but serves as a summary of what we believe our students ought to be. *The Abstract of Principles* are a profile of how we intend to guide the students sent to us. As the unique gifts of each God-called individual develop in the context of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, these truths shape our sense of stewardship.

Moreover, that the "faith once delivered to the saints" consists of *revealed* truth and therefore is both clear and compelling is a desired message of confessional education. A minister to the people of God should not exit the place of his most intense personal academic preparation for his task with confused ideas, inconsistent and contradictory notions, or lack of confidence in the authority of the Scripture as the very Word of God. In the hour of preaching, the Bible study time, the preparation and execution of music for worship, the counseling room, or strategizing for missions, our graduates must be filled up with that confidence.

Pastoral

This leads to the third element of the vision. Seminary education must be *pastoral*. This word implies something about our main focus, that is, to train men for shepherding the flock of God. No other aspect of what we do--missions, education, music, counseling, evangelism--can thrive within its legitimate sphere apart from its relation to the training of godly pastor-teachers. Whatever else may be a desired and legitimate part of the task, foremost is enhancing the gifts, developing the tools, teaching the minds, and training the hearts of those who will have oversight of the churches. Whatever else may be

desirable for the defense and confirmation of the gospel in our culture--Christian politicians, better TV, Christian University professors, an ethically-informed medical profession, more G-rated movies--none will do lasting good without reformation in the pulpit. Until churches have a clear, biblically-informed, earnest voice from the pulpit, until the brethren know that like Paul their ministers are "set for the defense of the gospel," reformation will escape us, and with it the gospel honoring, God glorifying revival for which we pray.

At the core, therefore, of this task, is the concern for evangelism. "Do the work of an evangelist," Paul told Timothy, and he would tell each seminary student today the same. Every discipline we teach and every conversation we have should generate skills and sensitize affections for pastors to be curers of souls. Being content with plaster for wounds that call for radical measures will be no option for them. The skill to search out the soul's windings and open before the senses of the people all the putrefaction of the heart in rebellion against God can't be graded but should be the desired outcome of each class. If a student can learn to search out the desperate wickedness of the sinful heart, unmask its deceitfulness, and finally live and minister in the confidence that the Word of God lays bare the soul before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do and reveals Christ as infinitely and uniquely adequate as the only Savior of such sinners, no greater learning can be desired. I have a dream, and a large part of it is a seminary in love with pastoral theology.

Christ-centered

Finally, because the nature of this task calls for an all-surpassing power and wisdom, seminary education must be *Christ-centered*. "No man has seen God at any time, but the only begotten dwelling in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed Him." Our God-ward emphasis proclaims, "In Him dwells the fullness of the godhead in bodily form;" our man-ward emphasis says, "Ye are complete in Him." The grand privilege we have is to listen for the voice of God in the text of Scripture and to expect that in the preaching of the gospel message some will see the glory of God in the face of Christ when He shines in their hearts. How grand is this calling--the knowledge of God is in Christ, forgiveness before God is in Christ, righteousness before God is in Christ, wisdom from God is in Christ--and this calling is to teach and encourage God's ministers how to preach Christ and Him crucified in all the richness and fullness of that task.

We are called to arm our students with everything that is divinely mandated, that is consistent with worship in Spirit and truth, that they might be able to pull down everything that raises itself against the knowledge of God and be able to take every thought and make it captive to Christ. The understanding of Christ as couched within the Chalcedonian formula should inform the scope and promise of our task. In Him, time and eternity, infinite and finite, mortal and immortal, Creator and creature, God and man meet in one indivisible person--in His humanity, elect and precious; in His deity eternally begotten and beloved; in His person the one who saves and the one who judges.

Could we learn to see Christ as the paradigm for teaching? If so, we would work in the confidence that our varied gifts and personalities, properly disciplined, will all work toward the manifestation of the glory of that One Face. We could work toward a unity in our views of the content and purpose of the curriculum. We would with one voice affirm both the certainty and mystery in our confession. We would agree on the transcendently magnificent calling of preacher-of-the-gospel without diminishing in any sense the importance of the multiplicity of other gifts and callings. We would have a corresponding sense of the awfulness of training such, and a single-minded intensity about glorifying Christ in His person and work as we strive together for the defense and confirmation of the gospel.



¹*Discussions*, Vol. 1, *Theological and Evangelical* (reprint ed. Harrisonberg, VA: Sprinkle, 1982), p. 459.



¹*Discussions*, Vol. 1, *Theological and Evangelical* (reprint ed. Harrisonberg, VA: Sprinkle, 1982), p. 459.



I Never Got Over Sunday School

Mark Coppenger

In my first chapel address at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, I spoke of "the splendor of childlike faith," saying, in part, that I'd never gotten over Sunday School and R.A. Camp. The expression, "I never got over Sunday School," has gotten around, and the editor mentioned it when he asked me to contribute to this issue. Following up on that, I've decided to work with that "I-never-got-over-it" theme for this article.

Of course, lasting memories and deeply impressive experiences are a woefully insufficient base for building a Christian life or school. But if they are not free floating experiences, but experiences which illustrate the truth of Scripture, then they are gifts of God. Titus 2:9-10 teaches that our Christian behavior can "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" (KJV) or "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (NIV). Such behavior does not make it true, but the one who sees it can gain a lasting, veritable impression by it. Similarly, we Christians can gain unforgettable impressions from the world, impressions which quicken our understanding of the Bible's teaching and which serve as benchmarks in our Christian travels.

These experiences can, in turn, inform our own ministries. We want our students to study this, hear that, or journey here and there. We lead them as we have been led, when that leading led to life in accordance with Scripture. And so these impressions have shaped my Seminary leadership. It's my desire that the students at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary will, in the best possible sense, never get over Midwestern, and that their churches will, in the best sense, never get over them.

I never got over Sunday School

About 10 years ago, a reporter from Baptist Press asked me how I became an inerrantist. I thought of a number of things, including my going to Wheaton to teach. As a faculty member, each year I affirmed the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. I also thought of the time in Seminary when I read Jack Rogers and Donald McKim's specious attack on inerrancy and John Woodbridge's excellent rebuttal. I recalled my exposure to the theological follies of Vanderbilt's errantist divinity school. But I couldn't recall a time when I moved from errancy to inerrancy. So I concluded that I simply never got over Sunday School.

In Sunday School, they told the Bible story plainly--Daniel and the lions' den; Jesus' replacing the servant's ear; the ax head which floated at the prophet's prompting; the reality and sin of Adam; Paul's deliverance on Malta. I also heard the instruction of Scripture given without irony--Don't steal; Don't hate; Don't forsake the assembly of Christians; Be filled with the Holy Spirit; Be perfect. Not only did I hear these things; I was compelled to hear them. Whenever I feigned a headache to miss church, my parents wouldn't buy it. So I learned early on that the Word of God was not only true; it was important. And I just never got over that.

Sure, along the way I read some Bultmann, some Gide, some Heidegger, some less-than-respectful passages in the Interpreter's Bible. I also studied with a variety of skeptics and patronizing folks. But I saw nothing in their lives or words that could match or discredit the truth and power of God which I had learned as a child.

When I recounted this at Midwestern, a trustee said that I had no idea how revolutionary my statement about not getting over Sunday School was. For, in his student days at Midwestern, one professor in particular made sure to

debunk Sunday School, saying it was high time that students moved beyond that childish orientation. And so this professor did his best to liberate them from their childlike faith in the veracity of Scripture.

Those days are virtually over at Midwestern. A few persist in teaching their doubts about the clear reading of this or that aspect of Scripture. But these are vestiges of an earlier day, a day which prompted the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. By God's astonishing grace, the vast majority of our professors affirm the inerrancy of Scripture. They, along with their President, cling to their childlike faith; or rather their childlike faith clings to them by God's power. Our desire at Midwestern is to see students strengthened in their faith, not robbed of it.

I never got over that conversation outside the auditorium

My father was a preacher and Baptist college professor. My mother was a Woman's Missionary Union president. It seemed that the Coppengers were at the church every time the door was open. I remember thinking, accordingly, that if we were killed in a car wreck, we'd all go to heaven on the family plan. After all, we always went to church things together.

I also remember when the shell of such confidence began to crack. Sitting on the right, near the front, one Sunday, I began to realize that one must personally decide to follow Christ, that association with a Christian family was not enough. I knew I had to do something, but I wasn't quite sure what, so I asked my mother on the way into church a Sunday or two later.

I had just come from Sunday School and was hurrying with her to join the others in church as the singing began. I'll never forget what happened next. When I brought up the topic of my salvation, she pulled me aside to some chairs outside the auditorium and began to talk to me in earnest. I knew that skipping church was not allowed, so this had to be a momentous occasion. I listened intently as my mother explained the way of salvation and I knew that I needed to be saved immediately. I can't remember the details--whether she or I prayed, or both; whether I framed my own confession or simply followed her lead. I do remember that, as we finished, we slipped into a back pew and joined in the closing minutes of the sermon.

My father had preached in another church that morning, and he arrived home soon after we did. As mother prepared lunch, he and I sat in the front porch swing, talking about what had happened to me that morning. The glad choice was made, and I looked forward to coming before the church to say so that night.

As we drove east to church that evening, I leaned on the back ledge of the car and looked out the back window at a sunset. I'm reminded of Dwight Moody's testimony that the birds never sounded so sweet as they did when he was just saved. That sunset was a scene of heavenly splendor in my eyes, an occasion for great peace and joy. The warm reception by my church family and subsequent baptism were sweet celebrations of my new life in Christ.

Was I born again? With confidence, I say yes, for immediately a change came over me. Regeneration is a mysterious thing. I'd been exposed to the gospel for years, but, as British philosophers sometimes say, the penny'd never dropped. When it happened, it was not a matter of cold calculation and prudence. I knew calculation; I could break in a ball glove, trade for particularly handsome commemorative stamps, and scan the Sears catalogue for Christmas possibilities. But this wasn't calculation. It was painful compulsion. A new kind of caring and fearing came over me, and I responded. When that happened to my own children, I didn't praise them for their acumen. I thanked God for his grace. The same grace He showed me.

At Midwestern Seminary, we train our students to preach the Word, share the gospel, and expect God to work His miracle of regeneration. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). We can't produce conversions, but we can faithfully present the Word in dependence on the Spirit to do His work. And so we send our graduates out, expecting more little boys on the right front pew to have the same soul conviction and anxious questions which I had that day in the 1950's.

I never got over Royal Ambassador Camp

In my childhood days, Arkansas Baptists sent their boys to a camp somewhere back in the woods southwest of Little Rock. The quarters were humble, the tabernacle was an open-sided shed, and the ball field was so rough that we had instructions to pick up ten rocks each time we crossed it to swim in the spring-fed pond. The setting was crude, but the Great Commission teaching was spiritually compelling.

They taught it with power, in the services and in the study course book reading assignments--God calls, you go. Wherever. Whenever. However. If you live and prosper--fine. If you die--fine. It doesn't matter. The crucial thing is obedience, joyful obedience. Your job is to "send the light, the blessed gospel light," and to "let it shine from shore to shore."

I had the strong sense that it would be the highest privilege to be called to be a foreign missionary. They were the best. Next came preachers, then Baptist college teachers followed by deacons, Sunday School teachers, and so on. I now cringe when I remember how I devalued the role of the godly layman, but I cherish the sense that God's best involved danger, a willingness to face poverty, isolation, and other troubles.

Few things make me sadder than a preacher's personal ambition, his insistence on this package or that, his geographic parameters, and his grumpiness and lassitude when God does not satisfy his grand timetable. It is hard to imagine Paul responding to the Macedonian call with, "But have you got a good dental plan?"

One of the happiest moments of my first year at Midwestern came late in the Spring. A senior came to my office with something to confess. He stammered as he tried to come out with it. I was afraid he'd fallen into some sort of ruinous, secret sin. Finally, in embarrassment, he confided that he was responding to a church's call in Alabama. He'd heard so much of our mission to reach the "pioneer areas" of the Midwest that he felt he was spiritually suspect to go to one of the multi-staff churches in Dixie. After all, real men went to Fargo. I told him that God would forgive him, but not to do it again.

Paul and Barnabas were described as men "who risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26). And when Paul was faced with the prospect of severe persecution, he said, "None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). The next generation of gospel ministers must be trained in this same spirit to risk everything and go anywhere in order to make Jesus Christ known to a lost and dying world.

I never got over the Bill Glass crusade

Each year, our church held fall and spring revival meetings. We met before school in the early morning, and we gathered at night. The week was full of special meetings and activities.

The one that stands out most vividly involved Bill Glass. This defensive end for the Cleveland Browns was a giant of a man, well spoken, unapologetic in his faith, and infectious in his enthusiasm for the Word of God and the Christian walk. Our little town, with its relatively little colleges, was stood on its ear. If any rough cut football player thought that he was superior to the things of God, then that week stopped that conceit. I remember some of the cooler elements from the campus coming to church like sheep, ready to listen to anything Bill might say.

A number of impressions came from that experience. First, no matter what they tell you, Christians can stand toe to toe with anyone on earth. Second, it's a wonderful thing to schedule, organize, publicize, pray for, and attend special meetings with special preachers for special purposes.

With regard to the first impression, I've had my Bill Glass moments in philosophy, my original teaching field, through the years. I've seen George Mavrodes of the University of Michigan hold skeptics in the Vanderbilt graduate philosophy department at bay as he spoke of the faith. I've seen Alvin Plantinga and William Alston bring a revolution of respect for Christianity in the formerly hostile American Philosophical Association. I've had scores of accountability group breakfasts with Dal Shealy of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and heard his updates on the courageous walk of such star athletes in the realm of professional football, basketball and baseball.

Obviously, our faith does not depend on the success of such brothers. It would stand if all of us were unimpressive in the world's eyes. But it is heartening to see that the world has nothing to intimidate or dazzle the believer. At Midwestern we train our students in that spirit. We resonate with Southeastern Seminary president Paige Patterson's desire to produce invasion troops rather than mere occupation troops.

Regarding the second impression (that planning for special meetings is a good thing), I know that God honors those who earnestly and collectively seek him, and does so often in the course of planned "revival" meetings. Of course, calling it a revival doesn't make it a revival, and God is the Lord of true revival. Any number of "revivals" amount to little more than the use of a visiting preacher and the taking of a love offering. They are prayerless, planless, painless, perfunctory exercises in program drill. But this does not have to be the case.

When I was a pastor in El Dorado, Arkansas, we planned a special "revival meeting" for the church. Careful efforts to plan and pray weeks in advance involved nearly half of the church membership. In and through our concentrated focus, revival broke out in our church three weeks before the scheduled appearance of the guest preacher. Nearly three dozen public professions of faith were made. Another 200 professions were registered during the week of meetings (which we, out of spiritual compulsion, extended for a few days).

Was this manipulative Finneyism? I don't think so. Rather, it was a case of the whole church getting on the same sheet of music, forgetting petty differences in the interest of Kingdom come, clearing out the hindering brush of laziness, inattention, and bashfulness. We knew that our prayer, planning, and effort would not oblige the Lord to send true revival, but we thought it presumptuous to ask the Lord for revival in the midst of apathy.

At Midwestern Seminary, we speak often of the "prairie fire" of Awakening. We regularly bring speakers to campus to address this theme under the direction of the Midwestern Center for Biblical Revival. We understand that we cannot manufacture what is only a sovereign work of God. But we also understand that if we do not discipline our hearts and minds to that end, if we do not do all that we can do, then we scarcely have standing to ask for God's special touch.

I never got over the Mike Makosholo vote

It was the only day our church had to set up chairs in the aisles. The crowd was enormous, for that day we would vote on membership for a black man. Mike Makosholo, a Nigerian, had elected to attend Ouachita Baptist College, our local Southern Baptist school. He was the product of our foreign mission effort, the sort of man whose appearance in a missionary slide show brought gladness to the hearts of our people. But now he wanted to come to our utterly white school, and worse, join our utterly white church. The year was 1961. The place was south Arkansas.

My mother was a Michigander. She'd gone to high school with blacks in Detroit. My father, a native of east Tennessee and Georgia, had served as a naval chaplain with broad ministry among the races. Whatever the sources of their conviction, my parents were not only open to racial integration. They were for it, and so were we children.

We understood that Arkansas's Governor Faubus was a staunch segregationist, as were the nearby governors of Mississippi and Alabama. But surely the good folks at First Baptist Church, Arkadelphia, Arkansas, were open to black members. After all, we sang, "Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight." Well, precious or not, a good many of our members didn't want one on our roll, even one who spoke with a British accent.

Counseled at a distance and wanting to avoid embarrassment on the scene, Mike sent his request for membership in advance of his arrival in the United States. The day of decision was announced, and the membership braced for confrontation. Ralph Phelps, the president of Ouachita spoke in the affirmative. Mr. Seymour of the men's Bible class spoke against. Fascinated by the spectacle, I was hoping for a show of hands, but someone successfully moved a ballot vote.

Before the morning service, my Sunday School teacher spoke to the issue. He observed that there were some perfectly good black churches on the west end of town and that Mike would naturally be happier with his own people. He expressed concern at the divisive nature of Mike's request. Try as he might, my vote for Mike was fixed.

You could cut the tension in the service with a knife, and you couldn't help but feel some disdain for those who never attended except to reject a black man. But it was over before we knew it. Ballots were cast and we went on with the service.

That night, the vote was announced--two to one in favor of his joining. But that still meant that hundreds of people were against it, when they'd never opposed anyone's membership before. Who knows the folks we accepted en masse, as many as 100 on a single Sunday when the college students came back to school. The passing years proved a few of these students to be utterly lost. I remember two who later joined Herbert W. Armstrong's group, the Worldwide Church of God. Some proved to be sexually promiscuous. One went to prison for fraud. Never mind that. They were white, and we asked no questions. But when a black man appeared, and we got squeamish.

My self-righteousness at this point is palpable, and I should say that, had I not had such parentage, I would have likely absorbed the fears and perspectives which saturated the region. But I'm not a cultural relativist, and right was right, wrong was wrong. Mike had a proper place in our fellowship. The richest lady in the church, the one who'd just bought us a set of choir robes, left the church. I'm sure that there were other repercussions from which my thirteen year old ears were well shielded.

I learned that day that a good many church members can be wrong, that congregations are susceptible to grave moral and doctrinal confusion, that shame escapes folks deeply stained with sub-Christian values, and that church business meetings can mean unholy or holy war, as you please.

Church is hard work. There is no way around it. I learned that lesson well when I was eight. And seminarians must

learn it at Midwestern. The right road is not always the one with the fewest potholes. Paul admonished his young pastor friend to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). Gospel ministry demands nothing less. The work is hard, indeed. But it is not impossible. Mike Makosholo became a cherished member of First Baptist Church, Arkadelphia, Arkansas, because godly men and women refused to be intimidated or cajoled into denying the clear teachings of God's Word on brotherly love and fellowship.

I never got over *Twelve Angry Men*

No, I'm not talking about a deacons meeting. I mean the play, one of dozens I saw in the Ouachita Little Theater when I was a faculty kid. The theater was cobbled out of a wood frame, World War II era building on the edge of the campus. It had a cavelike feel, and the productions were, to my pre-teen mind, utter magic. I remember Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and one play where stranded submariners had to choose one member to go to his death through the torpedo tube in order to alert those above to their plight. Then there were the children's theater productions. I hated to miss a one.

Twelve Angry Men concerns the passionate deliberations of jurors on a sweaty day. They've made up their minds except for one man who has his doubts. They fume and rail against him, but the tide turns, and, one by one, they come to his side. It's a wonderful demonstration of courage under fire and the reasoned pursuit of important truth despite tremendous opposition. It was both fruit of and rationale for the liberal arts tradition. And, as Allan Bloom has argued in *The Closing of the American Mind*, it's a tradition whose very foundation is crumbling. In our relativistic age, we no longer believe in truth, so why waste our energy in pursuing it? It's your thing and my thing, not *the* thing. But for those men around the jury room table, it was finally a question of *the* truth.

One thinks of the tradition of the prophets. They didn't work by surveys and polls. Noah didn't rely on focus groups. Paul didn't test the waters before bringing forth the word in Macedonia. They spoke the truth and then let the chips fall where they may. We like to think we're cut from the same cloth, but we often love peace more than agreement in truth. The latter takes a lot more work than the former.

Earlier this year, I spent some time with Jim Sibley of our North American Mission Board's Interfaith Witness department. In the course of our conversation, he observed that Southern Baptists were more a relational people than a doctrinal people. That is to say, they cherish amiability and peace more than orthodoxy. One advantage is that we can overlook a host of petty differences for the larger cause. As people who serve the God of peace it is certainly fitting that we should pursue peace as far as we can.

On the other hand, one great disadvantage to this temperament is the tendency to tolerate grave error and dismiss prophets, all in the interest of peace. Someone who is perceived to be a "troubler of Israel" is too easily dismissed, no matter how right he may be. By this standard, a "good" meeting is a peaceful meeting, even if, in peace, dreadful doctrinal cracks in the wall are lightly papered over.

My own doctoral training and college teaching came in philosophy at Vanderbilt and Wheaton. Philosophers are trained to ride to the sound of the guns. But when the Lord called me to be a pastor it seemed as if I had joined the fraternity of those who are more inclined to ride from the sound of the guns. I experienced a real culture shock in seminary.

We were in the heart of the SBC controversy in those days and professors were less inclined than usual to mix it up in the classroom. (As an aside, let me say that you cannot both call yourself a "school of the prophets" and whine about how you have to be careful what you say because people are so critical in these days.) But what I witnessed

was not simply a result of the controversy. Many of the men who were my teachers and classmates were fearful of argument *per se*.

I couldn't understand why this was so. I'd come from a Christian liberal arts background where the debate raged more or less good-naturedly on everything from the Carter-Reagan campaign to Francis Schaeffer's take on Kierkegaard. Seminary presented an equally rich set of issues, including the viability of dispensationalism, the meaning of inerrancy, and the temporality or atemporality of God. But few relished discussion.

Then it hit me. These teachers and students were pastors, former pastors, or future pastors. And conflict, like fire on an airplane to a pilot, is the pastor's worst nightmare. When the pastor's natural love of peace is mixed with the Southern Baptist's natural love of peace then careful, thoughtful, persistent, classy pursuit of truth can take a back seat. Doctrine suffers. Sermons turn insipid. Church discipline disappears.

In this atmosphere, we lose our ability to argue well. We turn petty. We fall into whining, backbiting, sloganeering, careless labeling, shabby research, demagoguery, and, yes, slander. We cheapen discourse, and our cheap discourse further undermines respect for discourse. It's a vicious cycle.

In the place of thoughtful discourse, we preoccupy ourselves with feelings, each others' pain, wounded spirits, and such. The church and seminary become a puddling masses of flesh and blood and viscera, like a cow without a skeleton. Sure, the skeleton of doctrine can be a repellent sight without the soft tissue of human passion and compassion to clothe it. But remove the skeleton of doctrinal commitments hard won and all that is left is Bossie without bones. Not a pretty sight.

Compounding the difficulty is what I call "the new teetotalism." When I was a kid, a teetotaler was one who didn't drink alcoholic beverages. Now, we have folks who have a host of don'ts--no television; no credit cards; no movies; no Halloween; no public school. Granting that our culture is vastly corrupt, we still need to recognize that Christ has called us to live *in* the world while calling us not to be *of* it.

We can become so isolated that we'll never see *Twelve Angry Men* because neither the writer nor the play are distinctly Christian. Somehow, we have to steer a course between the Amish and the Unitarians when it comes to cultural engagement. If we don't, we'll either become so worldly we'll lose our saltiness, or we'll stop using the word Thursday because it honors Thor. We'll just call it Fifthday (I hope I haven't started anything here!).

Working against the forces of peace at any cost on one hand and cultural disengagement on the other, the seminary needs to foster the sort of thoughtful conversation that honors God and secures truth, even if it irritates. Someone once asked George Will what difference his regular *Newsweek* column made. He said that he didn't expect people to remember his particular arguments or to change their minds in light of what they'd read. He said rather that he hoped he could model a certain quality of discourse and that the use of reason, clear language and pointed citation would encourage a higher level of communication. Similarly, I hope that seminary will engage the hearts and minds of the students, and that they will learn to remain firm in the pursuit of truth, come what may. Further, I hope that they will learn that all truth is God's truth, wherever it appears, and that they will have the wisdom and even courage to admit it once found.

I never got over Blessed Assurance

I once had a Nazarene secretary. One day, I found her highly disturbed at her desk. Pale with anxiety, she had me worried. When I asked her if everything was okay, she said she feared she's lost her salvation. Earlier that morning,

she'd joined in some joking with the staff and had been flip about sacred things. She counted this a case of blasphemy and was sure she would be in hell should she suddenly die. While I appreciated her spiritual sensitivity, I hated to see her torn up by faulty theology. The fact of her genuine sorrow was, of course, one sign of her salvation. I worked with her as best I could, and in time she seemed to gain a better grasp on assurance.

Such spiritual terror in a believer is foreign to me. From the beginning of my Christian walk, and even before it, I have understood that Christians are forever. God holds them. Ours is a faith of peace, of confidence. Some of our hymns say it quite well.

I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day.

Fanny Crosby's great hymn, *Blessed Assurance*, which I learned as a child, accurately describes God's work in my own life.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

...Angels descending bring from above,
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Savior am happy and blest:
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in love.

I can see in my mind's eye the very locations in my childhood church where I sang these words with unbridled joy, knowing that the Lord had secured heaven for me by His blood shed on the cross. The Holy Spirit testified with my spirit that the words I sang were true.

There is a difference between assurance and presumption. I've just come out of conversations with Mormons about their own spiritual assurance. The problem is, their spirit is not the Holy Spirit, their gospel is another gospel and that which they believe is a lie. Assurance of salvation is more than a feeling, a "burning in the chest." But it can scarcely be devoid of feeling, the feeling which Fanny Crosby has so richly captured in *Blessed Assurance*.

Peter tells us to be diligent to "make our calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10) by abounding in Christian grace and discipline. In doing so, the Scripture promises that we will "never stumble." Gospel ministry in the next century will require sure-footed soldiers to stand against the onslaught of the world, the flesh and the devil. At Midwestern we want our students to have a settled assurance of their relationship to the Savior--an assurance born not merely of subjective feelings, but grounded solidly on the firm foundation of God's Word. We want them to learn not only to stand themselves, but also how to teach others to stand firm in their faith in Jesus Christ. Confident, humble, secure Gospel ministers are what we are bent on seeing come out of our seminary.

Robert Fulghum I'm Not

You remember Robert Fulghum, the lapsed Baptist who wrote *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Well, I learned some dumb things as a child, and some wonderfully smart things as an adult. In this article, however, I stuck with the theme. And I think it is a profitable one. For it underscores Bible truths essential to the Seminary enterprise. We do not try to be too sophisticated at Midwestern. We believe that the Bible is inerrant, that salvation is a thrilling, lasting work of God, that you needn't be intimidated by the culture, that church folks can be wrongheaded, that truth is worth pursuing and defending, hard as that might be, that we do well to pray and plan for revival, and that you go wherever God calls you, whatever the cost. Nothing fancy. Just the basics. Not childish, but childlike.



"We are frequently told, indeed, that the great danger of the theological student lies precisely in his constant contact with divine things.... Do you know what this danger is? Or, rather, let us turn the question-are you alive to what your privileges are? Are you making full use of them? Are you, by this constant contact with divine things, growing in holiness, becoming every day more and more men of God? If not, you are hardening!... You will never prosper in your religious life in the Theological Seminary until your work in the Theological Seminary becomes itself to you a religious exercise out of which you draw every day enlargement of heart, elevation of spirit, and adoring delight in your Maker and your Saviour."

-Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Religious Life of Theological Students."



The Importance Of Spiritual Formation In The Training Of Ministers

Don Whitney

An African pastor-friend told me the tragic story of an influential friend/scholar/minister in his homeland. After losing his ministry to an adulterous scandal, the man openly confessed that the beginning of his downfall was becoming "so busy in the Lord's work" that he "simply neglected to read the Scriptures and pray." The long-term effects of this spiritual decline, the dishonored minister believes, led to his immorality.

When my friend related this story to a well-known British minister, the Englishman said, "I almost interrupted you before you told me [about the neglect of the Scriptures and prayer contributing to the adultery] because I wanted to say that I knew exactly what [the reason was] in the light of discovering this to be true of every known case of ministerial adultery in the UK!"^[1]

It's no secret that scandal in the ministry is as common in the American church as anywhere. Research done in 1991 by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth indicates that 37 percent of ministers confess to "having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church."^[2] A year later *Leadership* magazine reported that 9 percent of the pastors they surveyed said "yes" to the question, "While married, have you had sexual intercourse with someone besides your spouse?"^[3]

For all those who would disqualify themselves from vocational ministry for reasons of immorality, there are many more who leave--or seriously consider leaving--the ministry due to stress. Always on call, always giving of their spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical resources, always expected to meet needs, and always just 72 hours or less away from having to deliver another fresh, insightful, and life-changing message to the same group of people, armies of ministers labor on dutifully, but dispirited.

A Connection?

As with the stories from Africa and the UK, is there a connection between the moral failures or moribund feelings of the American ministers just mentioned and a chronic spiritual marasmus? To put it another way, is moral weakness a sign of spiritual weakness? Is ministerial burnout ever a symptom of spiritual coolness?

The predecessor to Henry Blackaby, Glenn Shepherd was the first director of the Office of Prayer and Spiritual Awakening at the Home (now North American) Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He told me of an informal survey he took of two thousand pastors and wives who attended seminars on prayer which he conducted during the mid-1980s. When asked how long these spiritual leaders prayed every day, the average answer was a mere "seven minutes." If prayer is as vital to Christian living as we say it is, how can such anemic prayer habits *not* have negative consequences in many areas of personal life and public ministry?

I am an assistant professor of spiritual formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO. I am here because our president, Dr. Mark Coppenger, believes that vigorous spiritual formation is both the antidote *and* the preventative for many rampant ministerial problems. He believes this so strongly that the creation and filling of the chair of spiritual formation was the first change in the faculty he made upon arriving at Midwestern in 1995. Since that time, as each of us has traveled to local churches, local and state associational meetings, pastors' conferences, and national denominational settings, we have repeatedly heard comments about the spiritual formation position such as, "This is exactly what I needed at seminary," and "Seminaries should have been doing this all along."

Should the Position Exist?

Despite the overwhelmingly positive response to the school's new emphasis, some may still wonder if such a position has a legitimate place in an academic institution. "Shouldn't ministerial students have developed a strong devotional life *before* they are admitted to seminary?" someone may ask. "Shouldn't they be able to testify of a consistent 'quiet time' as a prerequisite to their church's recommendation or the seminary's approval of their application?" The essence of this argument is that spiritual formation classes in a theological seminary are the spiritual equivalent of literacy classes in a Ph.D. program.

For starters, there's more to spiritual formation than guiding a student into the path of an enriching devotional life. The goal of spiritual formation in the seminary curriculum is the same as it is in the Christian life--godliness. I want to urge my students in the same way the Apostle Paul instructed his pastoral protégé, Timothy: "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7). We want our seminarians to grow in godliness, i.e., Christlikeness, and to do so both as ministers and as individual Christians. This is a bigger task than simply establishing an habitual "quiet time" (though this is part of our strategy).

But in one sense, yes, it is right to expect a student who enters ministerial training to have certain capabilities, not the least of which are related to the Bible and personal holiness. *This is the job of the local church more than it is the role of the seminary.* The local church should be training its members (especially ministerial candidates) in the practical aspects of a daily devotional life. It is also the place of the local church to teach the basics of Bible knowledge.

Yet I can testify from my professorial experience that most students come to the seminary struggling for consistency and depth devotionally. For example, after a class on how to pray through a passage of Scripture, the next day's class involves thirty minutes or more where the students get alone and practice what they've been taught. Several of these present and/or future ministers and missionaries admit afterwards that they've never prayed this long before. From exams that I've given I would estimate that fewer than one in ten from each entering class could name the Ten Commandments and list the books of the Bible in order and correctly spelled. (Could you?) Such facts as these ought to be learned by our children in Sunday School before they are teenagers.

So from this perspective, the necessary presence of a chair of spiritual formation in a seminary represents a failure on the part of the local church.

In another sense, however, a chair of spiritual formation can justify its "remedial" role on the fact that the seminaries generally have little choice but to work with the students sent to them by the churches, regardless of how well the churches prepare them. To lament the spiritual foundation of incoming students is one thing, to leave them in that condition is another.

Furthermore, many seminarians enroll without the blessing of growing up in a family that went to church. Unlike a number of their classmates, they've never had years in Sunday School or under Biblical preaching to learn the rudiments of a religious education. If they are converted as college students, and within a couple of years show up in seminary classes, we must begin with where they are in their spiritual maturity. The alternative is to reject everyone who wants formal ministerial training or a theological education until they can pass a Biblical/spiritual proficiency exam. In my opinion, the disadvantages of this approach outweigh the benefits in most situations.

In any case, even where the new student comes to the seminary from ideal circumstances and is well-prepared both in piety and knowledge, the seminary should provide *advanced* training in the disciplines that lead to godliness. Yes, the local church should provide training in godliness. But the local church should also give the student a knowledge of the Old Testament, the New Testament, ethics, evangelism and practical ministry, etc. If the seminary should provide advanced training in these disciplines (and it should), it should also provide advanced training in spirituality.

While it's true that ministers grow in godliness in the same way as all other Christians, i.e., through the spiritual disciplines, nevertheless, ministers need specialized training in spiritual formation. The spirituality of a preacher, according to Paul's first Pastoral Epistle, has a direct bearing on his hearers: "*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers*" (1 Tim. 4:16, NIV, emphasis added). There are many other occupations in which one may succeed regardless of spiritual condition. People can be successful merchants, farmers, and professionals even if they are dishonest or immoral. But an unspiritual minister is a contradiction to his own calling. He is more of a denial to his office than a blind ophthalmologist or a toothless dentist.

Beyond that, those in seminary will soon be (if not already) directly responsible for training many others in godliness. Shouldn't we develop these students in the art of the spiritual formation of others just as we train them in ways of preaching to others and counseling others?

The Increasing Need

The New Testament emphasizes a minister's role as one of devotion "to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). As just mentioned, the minister is also exhorted, "Watch your life and doctrine closely." Conversely, contemporary trends tempt pastors down different paths. The conferences he attends and journals he reads lead him to believe that he could be more "productive" if he saw himself primarily as an executive and majored on leadership skills. Examples from Christian radio, as well as religious and secular best-selling books imply that he could be more "effective" if he followed a therapeutic model of ministry.

Additionally, people's expectations pressure him to devote himself to everything but his biblical priorities. "Running the church" to meet these ever-growing demands is itself more than a full-time job. Above all else he is expected to "grow the church," and if the church isn't "exciting" and expanding numerically he will soon hear grumbles about his abilities. Regardless of his spiritual depth or grasp of Scripture, what seems to matter most is whether he can produce "results." If he can't, people will either fire him and shop around for a new pastor, or shop around for a new church. To watch his life and doctrine closely doesn't sound like a very pragmatic way to help solve such a problem. So when, in the spirit of the age, church members become religious consumers, pastors often adapt by becoming more adept at marketing.

Now a professor of spiritual theology, Eugene Peterson made this observation after pastoring for several decades:

North American religion is basically a consumer religion. Americans see God as a product that will help them to live well, or to live better. Having seen that, they do what consumers do, shop for the best deal. Pastors, hardly realizing what we are doing, start making deals, packaging the God-product so that people will be attracted to it and then presenting it in ways that will beat out the competition. Religion has never been so taken up with public relations, image building, salesmanship, marketing techniques, and the competitive spirit.[\[4\]](#). . . I found that gathering a religious crowd was pretty easy, provided I didn't get too involved with God. . . . Religious consumers are like all other consumers, easily attracted by packaging and bargains. But I also knew that to follow this route I would have to abandon the very thing that gave the life of a pastor its worth: a passion for God.[\[5\]](#)

Would so many ministers be so willing to "abandon the very thing that [gives] the life of a pastor its worth" if their preparation for ministry had included an intentional cultivation of the passion for God they had when they first followed His call? Without the appropriate spiritual influences, the seminary itself can be the breeding ground for misdirected zeal. In the process of training a man, the seminary can inadvertently get him more focused on fulfilling his call than following the One who called him. Once a pastor's passion for God is sublimated into a passion for success, church growth, power to change others, excellence, or anything else, it should not surprise us when he falls. Since only God is infinitely interesting, unceasingly satisfying, and unfathomable in His beauty and glory, anything else is eventually disappointing and unfulfilling. As a result, anyone who replaces a supreme passion for God for anything in the service of God makes himself much more susceptible to emotional burnout, moral fallout, mental rustout, or becoming a ministerial dropout.

Applications/Implications for the 21st Century

1. *The first priority of a man of God is to be a godly man.*

Those who are the most visible and public representatives of the Holy One must be above all holy men. People are often longsuffering regarding many shortcomings in a minister's skills, but if he is ungodly it is a scandal. A lack of holiness is much worse than a lack of ability. If a man does not make Christlikeness his highest pursuit, he should not be in vocational ministry, regardless of how great his gifts or talents. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a godly Scottish pastor in the 1800s said, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus."[\[6\]](#)

When a church is considering a pastoral prospect, they should not call him unless his first priority is to be a godly man. How can a church find out this information? Contact his references and ask them about his personal holiness. Ask several specific questions of the man himself. Inquire about his devotional habits. Don't just listen to his preaching, listen to him pray.

2. *If seminary education is to provide a well-rounded preparation for ministry, it must include spiritual formation, i.e., it must help in the "first priority" of godliness.*

If the first priority of a minister is godliness, and if seminaries exist to provide training for ministers, it follows that seminaries should intentionally cultivate the spiritual life and growth of ministerial students. Otherwise they are abdicating their responsibility for one of the most significant parts of ministerial training.

In his article, "Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary," Princeton seminary professor B.B. Warfield asked a century ago, "But does it not, even on first sight, commend itself to you with clear convincingness, that any proper preparation for the ministry must include these three chief parts--a *training of the heart*, a training of the hand, a training of the head--a *devotional*, a practical, and an intellectual training?"[\[7\]](#) (emphasis added).

Before moving on, prospective students should observe Warfield's reminder that even with the proper spiritual formation emphasis, the seminary is still an academic institution. Eugene Peterson knows, "The most frequently voiced disappointment by the men and women who enter seminary has to do with *spirituality*."[\[8\]](#) Many enroll with the expectation that their time on campus will be like an ongoing Bible conference, each class having the fervor and feel of an exhilarating worship service. I myself went from law school to seminary and, despite the many delightful differences, I found several surprising similarities. To recognize the seminary's academic orientation is no license for administrators to ignore the need to strengthen spiritual formation in the seminary. But it does serve as a warning for those students who would think that all they have to do is show up for class and automatic spirituality will result. As they must before and after seminary, during their time there they will have to engage in the classical spiritual disciplines if they are going to grow in godliness (cf. 1 Tim. 4:7, "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness").

3. *Seminaries need both faculty and courses devoted exclusively to spiritual formation, while recognizing that not all spiritual formation will come from such faculty and courses.*

Spirituality looms so large in New Testament ministry that it should not be relegated to a part-time job for a professor whose specialty is in another field. Seminaries should find a place in the faculty offices for a Chair of Spiritual Formation, preferably with its own department (although some, depending upon how the school is organized, would appropriately place it under Practical Theology). Moreover, sufficient spiritual formation cannot take place in a few days' worth of classes hidden away in some obliging course. At least one entire course (preferably more) in spiritual formation should be mandatory for all students, with several electives regularly made available.

Just as not all the theology learned by seminarians is learned in theology classes, so not all their spiritual formation will

come through the spiritual formation professor(s). All class content should affect the student spiritually. We should recognize, for example, that a lecture on the *solas* is spiritual formation, as is an exegetical study of the Sermon on the Mount. Truth transforms. A Canadian seminary dean, posing his suggestions on the means of spiritual formation in the seminary, writes: "First, character formation is ultimately the fruit of the truth. It is truth that transforms; it is by the truth that minds are renewed and it is by the truth that we know wisdom. Central in this is the role of scripture....The question really becomes: Do we believe in the transforming power of scripture? Do we really believe that the Spirit changes lives through the medium of the truth?"^[9] Warfield concurs: "If such contact as we in the seminary have the privilege of enjoying with divine truth does not sanctify our souls, should we not infer either that it is a mistake to pray in Christ's own words, 'sanctify us in the truth; thy word is truth,' or else that our hearts are so indurated as no longer to be capable of reaction even to so powerful a reagent as the very truth of God?"^[10]

Therefore seminaries must do more than hire a professor of spiritual formation and add to the curriculum. They must insure that the Bible and Bible-based content saturates all courses, not just the ones on spirituality. Furthermore, . . .

4. Seminaries should put a premium on godliness when hiring any faculty member.

Since spiritual formation should occur to some degree in every seminary class, no one should teach those who are supposed to be godly (i.e., ministers) unless they themselves manifest a close walk with the Lord. Jesus said, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). If seminaries do not want to produce graduates who are mere academics, they should not train them under professors who are.

5. Seminaries will most naturally turn to spiritually-seasoned pastors and missionaries to fill positions in spiritual formation.

One of the issues in the seminary hiring process is how much ministry experience is necessary for those who will be teaching future ministers. Proponents of experience argue that you can't train someone to do what you haven't done, regardless of your academic credentials. This is unquestioned by all regarding some professorships, such as pastoral ministry. Others will contend that certain positions--teaching the languages, for example--can be filled by those fresh out of their Ph.D. programs and with little or no pastoral background. Indeed, schools that have strong Ph.D. programs of their own are often reluctant to hire faculty from the front lines of ministry out of concern that they will be hopelessly out of date with scholarly developments within their field and thus be unable to produce "cutting edge" scholars.

While I cannot address this dilemma here, I use it as background to say that spiritual formation is one of those areas where all would acknowledge experience as essential. No degree can confer what years of walking with Jesus can do. Oaks of spirituality are not fully grown in the seminary seedbed (the word "seminary" means "seedbed.") When seminaries need professors of spiritual formation, the most likely place to look for them will be the pastorate and the mission field.

In the real world of academia, though, there are unyielding standards. Accreditation requirements mean that any candidates for spiritual formation professorships must meet certain academic qualifications. Most faculty positions require a Ph.D. or Th.D. If you have an interest in teaching spiritual formation in a seminary, and can manage timewise and financially to acquire such a degree, by all means go for it. Some institutions will accept nothing less. However, in many schools a Doctor of Ministry is sufficient for teaching in the "practical" fields, such as pastoral ministry or spiritual formation. Administrators also look for publications written by the candidate, or other marks of proficiency.

In conclusion, it's one thing to learn patterns of spiritual formation in the seminary, it's another to maintain them for a lifetime. Unlike some things learned in seminary, if the disciplines of spirituality are not maintained, there will be tragic consequences. But it's possible that some of those who have lost their ministries might not have fallen if, in their ministerial training, they had been better trained in the ways of godliness.



¹ From personal correspondence with the author of this article.

² Quoted in H.B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors At Risk* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993), p. 22.

³ David Goetz, "Is the Pastor's Family Safe at Home?", *Leadership*, Fall Quarter, 1992, p. 41.

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 35-36.

⁵ Peterson, p. 57.

⁶ Andrew Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (1844; enlarged ed., 1892; reprint ed., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), p. 282.

⁷ B.B. Warfield, "Spiritual Culture in the Seminary," *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield--II* (Netley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), p. 471.

⁸ Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 54.

⁹ Gordon T. Smith, "Spiritual Formation in the Academy: A Unifying Model," *Theological Education*, Volume 33, Number 1 (1996), p. 90.

¹⁰ Warfield, p. 478.



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¹⁰ Warfield, p. 478.



News

"A Call to a New Reformation"

This was the theme for the dedication week of the new facilities of First Baptist Church of Sweetwater, Florida, May 3-10, 1998. Speakers included R.C. Sproul, John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Timothy George, Al Mohler, J.I. Packer, Mark Dever, Alistair Begg, and the church's pastor, Bill Haynes. The new seven million dollar campus includes a 1300 seat worship center, educational and office building, prayer chapel, and preschool and children's building. The congregation moved into the facilities debt free. Tapes of the conference messages are available from the church. For more information call 407/862-3893 or write FBC Sweetwater, 3800 Wekiva Springs Road, Longwood, FL 32779.

Former Ethics Prof makes amazing confession

Henlee Barnette, professor emeritus of Christian ethics at Southern Seminary, admitted in the December 16, 1997 edition of the *Western Recorder* that he signed the Abstract of Principles in order to teach at Southern Seminary, even though he did not believe all of the articles which it contains. He states, "Before I joined the faculty in 1951, I informed the administration that I could not accept some of the theological statements in the Abstract. For example, I could not in good conscience accept the article on election." This crisis of conscience did not, however, keep him from signing the document in order to secure a faculty position.

Barnette takes exception to those who find fault with seminary professors who sign documents which they do not believe. He declares, "Some have implied that those of us who signed [the Abstract] before the seminary was taken over by the fundamentalists but did not accept all the principles in toto were hypocritical. This is a false charge."

The charter of the seminary requires that every professor will teach "in accordance with and not contrary to" the Abstract. Every professor in the history of the school has signed his or her name to that statement. Citing examples of other teachers whom he claims also signed the Abstract without believing it (including that late champion of final apostasy, Dale Moody), Barnette tries to justify his duplicity by revealing that former seminary administrations encouraged such practice.

"The acting president of the seminary assured me," Barnette states, "That the Abstract of Principles was: 1. an abstract and not a complete theological statement; 2. a statement of principles and not a set of rules; and 3. the result of a compromise by those who put it together." As an example of such compromise, he contends that some founders of the seminary insisted that the term "authoritative" be used instead of "infallible" as a description of Scripture.

Evidently, this assurance was taken as a license by Barnette and some of his colleagues to sign a document which they did not fully believe. The ethics professor sees no moral dilemma in his actions. On the contrary, he proudly declares that the result of his actions was "a fruitful teaching ministry for more than a quarter of a century."

The current administration of Southern Seminary grants no such indulgences. Faculty members are now required to sign the Abstract of Principles and mean it.

Baptist Rinnak Phuannak 1689

This is the title of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith translated into the Falan dialect of the Chin tribes in

Myanmar (formerly Burma). Michael Zahau, pastor of a Baptist church in Yangon, completed this recently published translation last year. When Adoniram Judson arrived in Burma in 1813, his missionary zeal was fueled by his understanding of the sovereignty of God in salvation, as outlined in the 1689 Confession. May the Lord be pleased to own this new translation and the work of His people to recover the gospel in that land.

Regional Founders Conferences

The first annual Ark-La-Tex Regional Founders Conference met at Heritage Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana February 6-7. The theme was "Holiness" and Erroll Hulse, editor of *Reformation Today*, was the keynote speaker. Cassette tapes of the messages and information about next year's meeting may be obtained by contacting Bill Ascol at 318/798-7088.

The third annual Midwest Regional Founders Conference convened once again at the First Baptist Church of Harvester near St. Louis, Missouri. Four speakers addressed the theme, "The Church and the Cross," in eight sessions, including helpful biographical presentations on J. Gresham Machen and William Screven by Terry Chrisope, History Professor at Missouri Baptist College. Audio and video tapes, as well as information about next year's meeting, are available from Curtis McClain at 314/428-4079.



Book Reviews

Electronic Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, by Wayne Grudem, Whitefish: MT: Bits & Bytes Computer Resources, \$39.95. System Requirements: Windows 95 or Windows 3.1, video card and 4 meg of disk space.

Reviewed by [Russell D. Moore](#)

"There was a time earlier in the Christian era when the evangelist's best ally was the theologian, whose forceful statements of the Christian revelation served to clarify the urgency of the task," evangelical statesman Carl F. H. Henry observed nearly thirty years ago. "But today many theologians themselves need to be evangelized."^[1]

Henry could hardly have foreseen an information age in which, at the click of a mouse, one can access religious materials ranging from Greek New Testament software to the Benny Hinn Internet site. This technological frontier has already proven itself to be both a vast mission field for historic Christianity and a seemingly limitless platform for the theology of the unevangelized.

Bits and Bytes Computer Resources has added to the expanding galaxy of computerized theological programs a disk version of Wayne Grudem's defining work, first published by Zondervan in 1994. Grudem, professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a member of a Southern Baptist congregation, tackles headlong pivotal doctrinal questions facing an increasingly incoherent evangelical subculture.

Refreshingly unhesitating in his defense of the inerrancy of scripture, Grudem sweeps away the cliché-heavy objections of the evangelical left to affirm that biblical inerrancy, far from a politically motivated contemporary innovation, is the consistent testimony of the Bible itself. This unwavering commitment to the authority of scripture serves as a steady underpinning for the entirety of Grudem's theological methodology and investigation.

Almost immediately upon scrolling through the text, the reader will find that not only does Grudem affirm a biblical view of a sovereign and infinitely holy God, he self-consciously rejoices in the doctrines of grace. In affirming God's unconditional election of individual sinners for salvation, Grudem follows the Apostle Paul's tactic in Romans 9 of anticipating the objections of scandalized humanity and dismantling their protests with the Word. His treatment of the cross leaves no room for the vague, uncertain achievement pictured in Arminian and revivalist theology. Instead he points to the work of Christ as a particular atonement which, through Jesus' bearing of the Father's wrath, invincibly rescues His elect from their just damnation. He articulates a biblical view of humans as hopelessly tethered to their own wicked desires, apart from a heart-transforming act of regeneration, which is inevitably followed by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. In an era when salvation is too often proclaimed as merely a mystical act of inviting Jesus into the heart, Grudem maps out the vital truth of God's justification received by His grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Grudem's approach to the basic message of the gospel is so clear and penetrating, selected chapters could easily be used in one-on-one or church based evangelism.

Unlike some systematic theology texts, Grudem does not overlook ecclesiological concerns. He holds to historic Baptist distinctives such as a regenerate church membership and believers' baptism by immersion, although he equivocates somewhat on the latter as an absolute prerequisite for church fellowship. Grudem probes the variety of church organizational structures and calls for an autonomous body governed by a plurality of elders as the most biblical option. With the presuppositions of the feminist world view creeping from the protest march to the parish pew, Grudem, president of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, heralds a traditional complementarian model for the roles of men and women in the church and home.

Grudem's position on the gifts of the Spirit, particularly his view of the continuing presence of prophetic revelations, may be the most problematic portion of this text for most Reformed Southern Baptists. As Grudem's starched Genevan gown

begins to sway with the Vineyard praise choruses, many will find themselves perplexed by the inconsistency of one who so doggedly asserted the sufficiency of scripture from the outset of this work. Despite Grudem's careful qualifications and clarifications, questions remain as to the biblical foundations for such a view and the doctrinal implications of new messages received (and often fallibly recounted) from a God who has spoken inerrantly and sufficiently in the biblical canon. Nonetheless, a survey of Grudem's position will equip one to formulate one's own response to a controversy which shows little sign of evaporating, especially in light of the current happenings in Toronto and Pensacola.

With its non-technical wording and concise organization, this program is ideally constructed for pastoral ministry. This reviewer found the material to be an exceptional curriculum for a youth Discipleship Training class on the doctrines of the faith. A suggested hymn and questions for application at the close of each chapter make it even more adaptable to congregational worship, Sunday School, membership classes, and even pastoral counseling. A helpful appendix contains confessional statements ranging from the Nicene Creed to the Baptist Faith and Message. A search engine allows the reader to instantaneously retrieve all passages relevant to a particular scripture verse, theologian, or concept cited. The text is crafted to link with Zondervan's NIV Bible Library program, enabling the user to click on highlighted scripture references to display the passage in context.

With a growing awareness of God-centered theology in our churches, this contribution is an invaluable resource for the ongoing work of reformation. Southern Baptist book shelves and computer screens can only benefit from the labors of Wayne Grudem, a workman graciously unashamed and a theologian thoroughly evangelized.



¹Carl F.H. Henry, *Faith At The Frontiers*, (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 47.



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