



F.A.C.S. REPORT

"A Monthly Newsletter on the Relevance of the Christian Faith"

PO Box 547, Ferny Hills QLD 4055 Australia

Vol. 17, No. 11

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November, 1998

Pastoral Training

Part 2: Seminary or Apprenticeship?

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IN PART ONE, we looked at the system currently used for pastoral training. Whilst this was not an in-depth look, it did serve to highlight several of the deficiencies encountered in modern seminary training. The task that lies before us now is to search the Scriptures for the prescriptions relevant to our topic.¹

Is a Formal Education Necessary?

AS WE SAW EARLIER, it is very difficult to gain entry to the ministry today, unless you have a recognised degree. This practice raises several questions. Is a formal education necessary? Is it desirable that all ministers have a degree? If so, why?

The basic need to question the current education standards for ministers flows directly out of the emphasis our society has placed upon education and letters after a name. In years gone by, people who were honest, practical, and who had common sense were regarded as important because they could be trained to undertake almost any task. Today, these qualities are passed over in favour of some type of higher education.

Many years ago my father worked with an American who, in summing up his own country, said that you needed a degree to clean toilets. Whilst we may say that this is a bit of an exaggeration, we can certainly see the truth embedded in this comment.² Lamentably, each year this statement is becoming less of an exaggeration and more of a reality for the everyday Australian—particularly in our seminaries.

Interestingly, when we look at Scripture we do not find any requirements that a particular degree or qualification be a prerequisite to ministry or the like.³ Some may wish to argue that this is because there were no standards of education or that education simply did not exist in biblical times. This, however, is to grasp at straws.

Biblically speaking, education was recognised as important; letters after one's name were not. If we look at the Apostle Paul, we will note that he spent some seventeen years in the background learning the Gospel.⁴ This is important, since Paul was, to put it colloquially, no dill. He had been educated to the highest standard; we might even say that as far as the Hebrew education system went, he had been trained in every way possible.⁵

Remember also, that Paul received his Gospel directly from the Lord (Gal. 1:12). If ever there was a man who should have gained an exemption from further learning, it was Paul, yet he did not. Rather, he spent seventeen years preaching and working in relative obscurity to make sure that what he did and said was correct (Gal. 2:2).

To Learn or Not to Learn?

IN ORDER TO CUT TO THE CORE of the Biblical teaching on this matter, we will observe one basic point that will create a clear distinction for us.

In Acts 4:13 we read: "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." (NASB)

Here Peter and John are described as *agrammatoi* (uneducated) and *idiotai* (unlearned). So, does this mean that these Apostles were a little on the dull side? Was Peter unable to count to ten without removing his sandals? Did John fail to grasp the basics of language, so much so that he was incoherent? No, not at all. The terms attributed

1. It is worth noting from the outset, that while Scripture's prescription will not be exhaustive, it will be sufficient. What we mean by this is that whilst Scripture will not explain every detail down to the last course number, it will give us a quantity of information with which to establish a firm foundation.
2. Note, that often people will put the letters of associations of which they are members after their name also. All this is to present themselves as an educated and authoritative person in a certain field. It is often the human equivalent of a peacock fanning his feathers.
3. How many of the prophets would have been ordained and inducted if they had been subjected to the current system? Before you answer, consider Amos 7:10-13 and Jeremiah 20:1-6.
4. See Galatians 1:18 and 2:1.
5. See Acts 22:3 and Philippians 3:5.

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to these men are those imposed by the "Council," and have no bearing upon the Apostles' intellectual capabilities.

If we look at the Greek words more carefully we will see this. In the first instance the Apostles are described as *agrammatoi*. Here, the privative is placed in front of *gramma*, the Greek word for letter. In doing this the "Council" are simply declaring these men to be 'unlettered.' In other words, they are (supposedly) untrained in the Law.

Vine gives further insight when he says that:

agrammatos ... [in] Acts 4:13, is explained by Grimm-Thayer as meaning "unversed in the learning of the Jewish schools;" in the papyri, however, it occurs very frequently in a formula used by one who signs for another who cannot write, which suggests that the rulers, elders and scribes regarded the Apostles as "unlettered".⁶

In the second instance, the Apostles are described as *idiotai*. Looking at this word the resemblance to our English word "idiot" is at once apparent. However, there is a vast difference in meaning. When we describe a person as an "idiot," we are casting a direct aspersion upon his or her intellectual and behavioural capabilities. In Greek, the term simply refers to a private citizen,

and is used to contrast differing stations in life. Walter Bauer notes that *idiotas* refers to a "layman, amateur in contrast to an expert or specialist of any kind (the uncrowned person as over against the king ...; the private soldier as over against the officer ..., the private citizen in contrast to the official)."⁷

Given these definitions, all that has really been said about the Apostles is that they are unlettered and non-professional. Put differently, the Council frowned upon these men because they were simple folk who were deemed unworthy to handle matters concerning the Law.

This then leads us to consider the second part of the text, namely, that *these men had been with Jesus*.

In the eyes of the Council, Peter and John were ignorant because they did not meet the Council's standard of education. In other words, these Apostles had not enjoyed a formal education. They had not received a B.D. and so were despised in the eyes of these Council members. However, Peter and John had something far better. They, along with the other disciples, had spent three years walking, talking, living, eating, breathing, being taught and rebuked by Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Peter and John did not have a formal education, at least not in the eyes of those sitting in judgment. Nevertheless, as far as the Son of God was concerned, these men had been educated at a far better school and in a far better way.

Having viewed this passage, we can see that Scripture's line of demarcation has to do with the content, rather than the curriculum or institution. What is meant by this, is that Scripture is first and foremost interested with truth. As this truth emanates from God Himself, an education that does not begin and end with God is going to miss the mark. By human standards, graduates of the most prominent universities are a highly sought after commodity. In God's eyes, however, most are completely bankrupt.

This too, applies to the educators themselves. At times, individuals claim

extra points because they attended a certain college/university where professor x was teaching. Look at our example of Paul. He claimed an extra feather in his cap because he had been taught by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). In the end, we must still ask, where did this lead and what did it achieve?

Paul may well have been trained by the great Gamaliel, but in so far as Gamaliel neglected the Gospel, so he failed to educate Paul in a worthwhile manner. Paul had the formal education that was sought by the academes of his day, but upon his surrender to Christ it proved to be of little value.⁸ Paul was in need of being reeducated. He needed to learn the Gospel. He needed to learn it, not just as data, but as a system of belief. He needed to learn this Gospel as a way of life; word, thought and deed. Nothing was to go untouched by this new Gospel. Nothing! Thus the question is not whether learning is appropriate, but which method of learning is the most profitable.

Education: Seminary or Apprenticeship?

INVESTIGATING OUR TOPIC further, we must of necessity ask, what type of education system best equips a man in this way?

In surveying Peter and John's encounter with the Council we have hinted at the answer. In this skirmish, we may say seminary and apprenticeship came face to face. Noticeably, in terms of the Gospel, it was the Masters' Apprentices that won the day.

In essence then, our thesis is that apprenticeship-type training is what Scripture prescribes and that this type of training is superior to that conducted by seminaries.

In establishing this thesis, let us look at three key areas.

1. Examples

In examining the Biblical evidence we will see that the apprenticeship model comes to the fore often. Please keep in mind that we will not make any commentary on these examples. They are here simply to stimulate the thought process.

Moses and Joshua; Eli and Samuel; Elijah and Elisha; John the Baptist and

6. W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1981).
7. Walter Bauer, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
8. Paul's education as a Pharisee was valuable in so far as it taught him the raw data of the Old Testament. However, upon his conversion he had to be reeducated so as to know how the Old Testament pointed to Christ, and how Christ fulfilled the Old Testament. Furthermore, he had to learn a new way of life wherein his theology was played out each and every day in his life.

his disciples; Jesus and His disciples; Barnabas and Paul; Paul and Timothy.⁶

2. The Whole Man

The most significant aspect of apprenticeship type training is that it educates the whole man. This is in direct contrast to the seminary situation which has as its priority the impartation of knowledge. To the seminary, knowledge is the key factor, and only after this knowledge has been imparted do they, if at all, really look at training other parts of the man.

One of the Australian colloquial expressions often heard refers to an education gained 'at the school of hard knocks.' The basis of this statement is that one has been trained by life's experiences, rather than by a formal education. This 'school of hard knocks' is important for it breeds character. It tests a person's mettle. It makes one decide upon what is really important. It asks, 'have you any convictions, and if so, do you have the courage to carry them through?' Furthermore, it challenges one to listen to the wisdom of others. It forces people to sit at the foot of the master and learn from the one who has been down the path before them.⁷

There is no equal to this schooling, and this is why the apprenticeship model is superior to the seminary.

In essence, the apprenticeship imparts knowledge by guiding the student through life. The seminary imparts knowledge, but, by its very nature, requires the removal of the student from life. Hence, we arrive at the current situation where many ministers are lost in the real world. These men are not practical because they have never been taught to apply theory to situation in any concrete way.

I know of a situation where an elderly lady wished that her minister would be placed in a real life crisis. This sounds like a terrible wish. However, her point must be understood. She had a young minister who had grown up with the "silver spoon." He had a good education and had worked in a professional field.⁸ In every way

you could say that his life had been smooth and incident free. Now, all this lady was really wishing for, was an incident that would bring this young man down from his ivory tower into the world in which the rest of us live. In short, she was desirous that this minister would gain some life experience.

If some of the readers feel that this is a bit harsh, please consider the following. Most ministerial candidates will be inducted into their own parishes having never conducted a wedding, a funeral, a baptism, or the Lord's supper. Most will have never attended a session meeting, board meeting or been involved in marriage (or other) counselling.

Hence, the training of the whole man must become a priority again.

3. The Covenant

In this last instance it is important to see that our relationship with God is based on the apprenticeship model. Those who despise the covenant claim that a child must undergo a crisis conversion and thereby understand God's grace. Those who trust in the covenant would reply, 'what better way to understand God's grace, than to be raised as a member of the household of faith and have His mercies pointed out at every turn.'

In Genesis 18:19 we read:

"For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." (NASB)

Here we see that the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham is contingent upon his faithfulness in training up his children and his household in the way of the Lord. Importantly, Abraham was not to fulfill this obligation by sending his children and household to the best boarding school in downtown Sinai. No! He was to teach them in life. He was to teach them by living a life of obedience before God and demanding that those under his authority followed suit. He was to teach them by binding his only son, placing him on an

altar, and standing above him ready to wield the knife, all because God had commanded him to do so.

This theme comes through once more in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. "And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead." And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (NASB)

Again, the emphasis falls upon education in every sphere of life. The community is here directed to instruct their children diligently in the *whole Law*. This in itself mitigates against any restrictive interpretation that would see the child instructed in a seminary type situation. As the Law encompassed theory and practice, so the education process was to address every one of these aspects. Hence, the all encompassing nature of this text, whereby the child is taught the Law through instruction and application, is brought to the fore.⁹

Conclusion

In looking at the prescriptions given in Scripture we can see that they are clearly in favour of apprenticeship type training. Now it is important to reiterate, that Scripture take this stance, not because it despises learning, but because it emphasises the training of the whole man.¹⁰

In the context of our thesis, it means that if the Church is to move forward, the training of pastoral candidates must be brought back into line with the prescriptions of Scripture. For too long, these standards have been ignored and replaced by false standards that have debilitated the Church.

6. In a similar, yet different way, mention could be made of Moses and Aaron; Saul and David; Peter and Mark; Paul and various other associates (Titus, Mark, Luke).
7. We do not have sufficient space to dig into this area. Suffice to say, that when we talk about the "whole man" being educated, we have in mind also the fact that a young man can learn much from an older man. In these relationships not only knowledge, but wisdom can be imparted. This wisdom can be invaluable. Why reinvent the wheel, when an older and more experienced person can give you tips and hints that can save years of heartache?
8. Do not infer from what is said that "professional" jobs are bad or in some way soul destroying. My point is more to do with the degree to which these professions can cause people to become insular and detached from the 'real world.'
9. For example a child would be instructed about the laws on gleaning and then should see that law at work in the fields of Israel. Every time the child asks, 'why do we not glean to the edges?' the father would be ready with the correct Biblical answer. Hence, in a practical way God's standards would be reinforced time and again.
10. It should be noted that this is Scripture's emphasis whether it be in educating children or ministerial candidates.

Ministerial candidates must be educated, but it must be in the appropriate way. Scripture's emphasis is upon the whole man being equipped for the whole of life (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and not with filling heads full of facts.

The purpose of seminary is not to build a troupe of unbeatable Bible quiz contestants. It is to raise up shepherds who will guide the sheep through good

and bad until they reach the Master's fold. Therefore, they need the training appropriate to their calling. They need to be trained as guards; to fight, to plan; to act; to lead; to be compassionate; to be strong; to love; et cetera et cetera. What they do not need is more humanist theories on how they think the war should be fought and won; more teaching on how to compromise;

and more teaching on how to be irrelevant.

The time has come for change, or more correctly, for reformation. It is time for the Church to heed the Spirit's call and submit to the very Word she claims to uphold. It is time for the Church to follow Scripture's prescription and to cease groping in the dark, especially when the way is clearly lit.