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A Model for Teaching Faithful Men

2 Timothy 2:2

IN SEPTEMBER OF LAST YEAR, I HAD THE opportunity to teach two courses at the Haiti Bible Institute. That ministry prompted TOTT #51 (Oct. 2009), “Teaching Faithful Men,” based upon 2 Timothy 2:2: **And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.** There we examined God’s “Chain of Teaching,” how God demands that pastors, among their many responsibilities, also be instrumental in training other men for ministry. (The reader might want to read that article before continuing here.)

Well, in September of this year, I was able to return to Haiti and teach again, which in part has prompted this second article. The first ended with the thought that while Bible colleges and seminaries certainly have their place, they should not be the sole locations of such training, that churches should, indeed, be doing this as well. This second article goes a step further to submit how such a ministry, whether in the church or separate from it, should really operate in its philosophy of education and even curriculum.

To give credit where it is due, the other part of the impetus to this follow-up was Ian Murray’s “Introduction” to Charles Spurgeon’s classic book, *An All-Round Ministry*.¹ The vast majority of Christians today (and I fear many pastors) are totally unaware that from 1855 to 1891 Spurgeon (along with others who aided him) trained 845 men for the Gospel ministry in his Pastor’s College, a ministry that was based firmly in the Local Church. Spurgeon was strong in his understanding of this principle, writing of our text:

The Church at Antioch had its foreign mission; for it sent forth Paul and Barnabas on a missionary tour

[Acts 13:3]. They had their Pastor’s College; for Paul says to Timothy, “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”²

So essential was the College that Spurgeon—who as the pastor was “also the president of the College”³—wrote that it had

become the most important of all the Institutions connected with the Church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The place which it once held in the heart of the pastor alone, it now holds in the hearts of the elders and deacons with him. It is indeed a part of the whole Church.⁴

Many of the men trained at the College went out to plant new churches, or serve in existing ones, not only in England but throughout the world, *including America!*⁵

What especially caught my attention in Murray’s Introduction, however, was that many people asked Spurgeon why he even started his College, since there were already several Nonconformist (Baptist being one) colleges in existence. He was even criticized for this. Many insisted that “the formation of a new college would excite jealousies and divisions in the denomination.”⁶

Spurgeon’s response was one we today should truly take to heart and use to analyze what we are doing (and *not* doing). In essence, Murray states, Spurgeon’s response was that “there were no colleges which met the needs as he saw them.” As Murray goes on to detail, Spurgeon differed in four essential respects. After reading that explanation and then doing further research, I would humbly offer the fol-

lowing using my own heading titles in place of Murray's and additional quotations. Did Spurgeon leave behind a *biblical model* for us today? I hope these principles will stir Christian leaders to reevaluate what our education philosophy and teaching emphasis should be in training men for ministry.

I. Definite Calling

As noted back in TOTT #18 ("Is There a So-Called 'Call' to Ministry?"), the popular notion is, "There's no such thing as God's 'inward call' to the ministry; that whole concept is nothing more than a person's subjective feeling. Anyone can be in the ministry simply if they choose to be." But as we then clearly demonstrated, both by biblical doctrine and precedent, God does, in fact, call men specifically and inwardly to ministry. Since Spurgeon's ministry is our focus here, we note again what he "hammered" into the minds of his students:

In order to [be] a true call to the ministry there must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling to others what God has done to our own souls. . . . "Do not enter the ministry *if you can help it,*" was the deeply sage advice of a divine to one who sought his judgment. If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or lawyer, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fulness, for a man so filled with God would utterly weary of any pursuit but that for which his inmost soul pants. . . .

This desire should be one which *continues with us*, a passion which bears the test of trial, a longing from which it is quite impossible for us to escape, though we may have tried to do so; a desire, in fact, which grows more intense by the lapse of years, until it becomes a yearning, a pining, a famishing to proclaim the Word.⁷

While such teaching is shrugged off nowadays, it was at the very center of Spurgeon's thinking when it came not only to *training* men for ministry but even *admitting* them into the Pastor's College in the first place. This was, in fact, the first and foremost prerequisite:

His call to the ministry is the first thing inquired into, and if it be not thought clear, the applicant is declined. Mistakes are doubtless made, for we are very fallible, but these do not arise from want of intense desire to help forward the chosen men, and to reject the incompetent and uncalled.⁸

Is this the first step schools use nowadays to admit men into their programs? Has any school in recent days actually declined a candidate admittance as did Spurgeon? He wrote more on this critical principle:

It has often been a hard task for me to discourage a hopeful young brother who has applied for admission to the College. My heart has always leaned to the kindest side, but duty to the churches has compelled me to judge with severe discrimination. After hearing what the candidate has had to say, having read his testimonials and seen his replies to questions, when I have felt convinced that the Lord has not called him, I have been obliged to tell him so.⁹

Certain of our charitable neighbors accuse us of having "a parson manufactory" here, but the charge is not true at all. We never tried to make a minister, and should fail if we did; we receive none into the College but those who profess to be ministers already. It would be nearer the truth if they called me a parson killer, for a goodly number of beginners have received their quietus from me; and I have the fullest ease of conscience in reflecting upon what I have so done.¹⁰

He goes on in the pages that follow the second quotation above to cite several examples of men who were turned down for admission for one reason or another. Such an idea would be appalling to most today. It would be counted as judgmental and even unloving. But Spurgeon was more concerned about his duty to Christ than he was popular opinion. Thus, we humbly submit, the *call* must be at the *core* of our theological schools.

II. Doctrinal Curriculum

While one will nowadays see courses offered in "Sunday School Administration," "How to Do a Puppet Ministry," and others, such was not the emphasis in the Pastor's College. Consider this course of study:

The studies embrace the English language, Mathematics, Logic and Natural Philosophy, Intellectual and Moral Philosophy, Latin, Greek and Hebrew, Biblical Literature, Systematic Theology, which is always Calvinistic, and Homiletics. The studies on which special stress seem to be laid, are Mathematics, Logic, and Calvinistic Theology.¹¹

That list does, indeed, form a core curriculum. It is a balanced blend of the elements of Classical education and strong Theology with the latter being the predominant emphasis, for we read again:

Let theology, in a word, be the principal study of the professed teacher of theology, and all other sources of information and mental improvement as may become subservient to this, placed within their reach. . . . We have become daily more and more impressed with the conviction that theology should be the principal subject for instruction in a Theological College, and that a diversified course, of all other studies, prepares the young minister to enter upon his office in the full vigor of his mental powers, and with a capacity for

continuing his research into all subjects that may at any time contribute to his own principal design.¹²

Tragically, we see today a continuing decline in a strong theological foundation in many schools (not to mention the biblical languages). In others where it does exist, it is sometimes tainted by popular thinking. In Spurgeon's day, Latitudinarianism was still a concern. Arising in the Church of England in the latter part of the 17th-century, the Latitudinarians were steeped in Plato, sympathetic with Arminians, felt that matters of doctrine were of little importance, emphasized "an intuitive consciousness of God," and fostered liberalism and a social gospel. Does not all that sound familiar? Spurgeon, therefore told his students:

In the Pastors' College definite doctrines are held and taught. We hold by the doctrines of grace and the old orthodox faith, and have no sympathy with the countless theological novelties of the present day, which are novelties only in outward form: in substance they are repetitions of errors exploded long ago. Our standing in doctrinal matters is well known, and we make no profession of latitudinarian charity, yet we find no failure in the number of earnest spirits who rally to our standard, believing that in truth alone can true freedom be found.¹³

Those are powerful words in light of the atmosphere and tolerance of our day. Also unlike our day, Spurgeon had no problem "naming names," that is, pointing out false teachers by name:

We endeavor to teach the Scriptures, but, as everybody else claims to do the same, and we wish to be known and read of all men, we say distinctly that the theology of the Pastors' College is Puritanic. We know nothing of the new *ologies*; we stand by the old ways. The improvements brought forth by what is called "modern thought" we regard with suspicion, and believe them to be, at best, dilutions of the truth, and most of them old, rusted heresies, tinkered up again, and sent abroad with a new face put upon them, to repeat the mischief which they wrought in ages past. We are old-fashioned enough to prefer Manton to Maurice, Charnock to Robertson, and Owen to Voysey. both our experience and our reading of the Scriptures confirm us in the belief of the unfashionable doctrines of grace.¹⁴

In contrast to the great Puritans Thomas Manton, Steven Charnock, and John Owen, the church of Spurgeon's day was plagued with more popular voices. Anglican F. D. Maurice (1805–1872) was a "Christian Socialist." F. W. Robertson (1816–1853), while an evangelical, "great thinker, and a prompter of thought in other men," Spurgeon wrote, had to be "read with discretion" because his "doctrinal vagaries [were] well known."¹⁵ Worse was Charles Voysey (1828–1912), who was condemned for heresy—

such as denying the doctrine of eternal punishment—and went on to found the Theist Church of London.

Do we not, indeed, have our own versions of such men in today's church? And it was precisely because of the existence of such men that Spurgeon made the historic doctrines of the faith the core of the curriculum of his school. Is that what we are doing? Let us remember, as Spurgeon reminds us:

Believing the grand doctrines of grace to be the natural accompaniments of the fundamental evangelical truth of redemption by the blood of Jesus, we hold and teach them, not only in our ministry to the masses, but in the more select instruction of the class room. . . . Our Lord has given us no permission to be liberal with what is none of ours. We are to give an account of every truth with which we are put in trust.¹⁶

III. Dogmatic Credo

The typical approach to teaching in our day addresses students using phrases such as: "What do you think this verse says?" Or, "Let's compare the various viewpoints and find common ground." Or, "Let's break up into groups and discuss the Scripture writer's intent and message and look for a consensus." Or, "Each of you must ultimately choose for yourself what this text means or is saying to you." While such disastrous drivel is the norm in our post-modern culture, this was the polar opposite of Spurgeon's teaching philosophy at the College:

The College started with a definite doctrinal basis. I never affected to leave great questions as moot points to be discussed in the Hall, and believed or not believed, as might be the fashion of the hour. The creed of the College is well known, and we invite none to enter who do not accept it. The doctrines of grace, coupled with a firm belief in human responsibility, are held with intense conviction, and those who do not receive them would not find themselves at home within our walls. The Lord has sent us tutors who are lovers of sound doctrine, and zealous for the truth. No uncertain sound has been given forth at any time, and we would sooner close the house than have it so. Heresy in colleges means false doctrine throughout the churches: to defile the fountain is to pollute the streams. Hesitancy which might be tolerated in an ordinary minister would utterly disqualify a teacher of teachers. The experiment of Doddridge ought to satisfy all godly men, that colleges without dogmatic evangelical teaching are more likely to be seminaries of Socinianism than schools of the prophets. Old Puritanic theology has been heartily accepted by those received into our College, and on leaving it they have almost with one consent remained faithful to that which they have received. The men are before the public in every part of the country, and their testimony is

well known.¹⁷

The “experiment” Spurgeon refers to is that of Nonconformist Philip Doddridge (1702–1751), who headed the famous Daventry Academy. While having many great qualities and authoring such classics as *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, he had a fatal flaw in his teaching philosophy. Spurgeon explains:

We remember the experiment of Daventry, under that eminently godly man, Dr. Doddridge, and we are not inclined to try the like under any circumstances. That worthy man did not dogmatize to the “dear young men” who came to his college, but adopted the plan of letting them hear the argument upon each side that they might select for themselves. The result was as disastrous as if error had been taught, for nothing is worse than lukewarmness as to truth. Dissent became enervated with a fainthearted liberalism, and we had a generation of Socinians, under whom Nonconformity almost expired. Both General and Particular Baptists have had enough of this evil leaven, and we are not inclined to put it again into the people’s bread.¹⁸

How serious is such a teaching method? It led to “a generation of Socinians.” Socinianism was total apostasy; it rejected the pre-existence of Christ, the propitiatory view of atonement, and put a limitation on God’s omniscience, all of which are still with us today. Worse, as we continue to entertain the same teaching philosophy, error is further propagated. We need the same authoritative teaching style that Spurgeon proved to be the only true method:

Calvinistic theology is dogmatically taught. We mean not dogmatic in the offensive sense of that term; but as the undoubted teaching of the Word of God. . . . The cross is the center of our system. “To this I hold, and by this I am upheld.” is our motto. This is our stand-point from which we judge all things. We have no sympathy with any modern concealment or perversion of great gospel truths. We prefer the Puritan to modern divinity. From our inmost souls we loathe all mystic and rationalistic obstructions of the plain and full-orbed doctrines of grace, and foremost of all of justification by the righteousness of Christ and atonement by his blood.¹⁹

IV. Dynamic Communication

The final way Spurgeon’s College differed from the status quo was the priority of producing *preachers*:

It has appeared to us that the chief aim should be to train preachers and pastors rather than scholars and masters of arts. Let them be scholars if they can, but preachers first of all, and scholars only in order to be-

come preachers.²⁰

Most of the schools in Spurgeon’s day, in fact, simply did not prepare men for preaching. They were plagued with “the curse of the idolatry of intellect” and were more concerned about “the fear of losing intellectual respectability”²¹ than they were of falling short of biblical standards for building expositors. If I may be so bold, we have fallen into the same trap today with our obsession with so-called “accreditation” and other compromises with a humanistic world system. Many schools teach the same marketing, psychology, sociology, and other courses that secular schools teach so that we might all be “socially relevant.” But that is not what God wants from the leaders He calls. He wants preachers of the Truth.

Let us not be swayed by the nay-sayers who insist, “Ah, such an approach can’t work.” There were such in Spurgeon’s day. Perhaps Spurgeon himself had a doubt or two when he wrote during the fourteenth year of the College, “When it was commenced I had not even a remote idea of whereunto it would grow.”²²

Is it not high time that we step back and take a close look at *what* our schools are teaching and *why* they are teaching it? Is there a truly biblical model?

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NOTES

- ¹ Banner of Truth Trust, 1960, 1986. This work is a compilation of the 12 best of the 27 total addresses Spurgeon delivered at the Pastor’s College annual Conference from 1865 to 1891.
- ² *The Sword and the Trowel* (electronic edition, Ages Software), Vol. 1, April 1865, 66.
- ³ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 1, March 1886, 251.
- ⁴ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 1, May 1865, 76.
- ⁵ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 3, April 1873, 330.
- ⁶ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 1, January 1866, 213.
- ⁷ *Lectures To My Students* (Zondervan, 1974), 26–28.
- ⁸ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 3, April 1873, 325.
- ⁹ *Autobiography* (electronic ed., Ages Software), Vol. 3, Ch. 69, 114.
- ¹⁰ *Lectures to My Students*, 35.
- ¹¹ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 2, July 1869, 317.
- ¹² *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 1, March 1886, 248–49.
- ¹³ *Lectures to My Students* (electronic ed., Ages Software), Vol. 1, 7–8.
- ¹⁴ *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, Ch. 46, 163.
- ¹⁵ *Lectures to My Students* (electronic ed.), Vol. 4, 318.
- ¹⁶ *Lectures to My Students* (electronic ed.), Vol. 2, 6–7.
- ¹⁷ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 6, May 1881, 423.
- ¹⁸ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 5, May 1877, 96.
- ¹⁹ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 1, March 1886, 249.
- ²⁰ *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 3, April 1871, 317.
- ²¹ Murray’s “Introduction” to *An All-round Ministry*, xv.
- ²² *The Sword and the Trowel*, Vol. 2, April 1870, 435.

Recommended Blogs: John Calvin for Today (<http://johncalvinfortoday.blogspot.com/>); Grace to You (<http://www.gty.org/blog>); I Love Theology (<http://ilovetheology.blogspot.com/>); 9 Marks (<http://www.9marks.org/blog>).

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