



Innovation and Tradition: *The Recent History of Pastoral Education*¹

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Lecture 1. Innovation And Tradition: The Recent History Of Pastoral Education

In these lectures the term “pastoral education” refers to the development of pastoral ministers for parish-level responsibilities, especially preaching and teaching. In most institutions of education for Christian ministry, pastoral education is the major purpose. Other purposes include development of expertise for academic careers and the teaching of narrower competencies such as church music and business management of church affairs.

Many of the presuppositions and the observations upon which the lectures are based are from North American experiences. The situations are somewhat different in various parts of South America. In general, however, the world is becoming more similar because of improving communication technologies and the growing interdependence of international relationships and economic structure.

Biblical education and theological education are not differentiated in these lectures. The underlying presumption is that first the learner needs to acquire information from the Bible and then later uses it to engage in theological discourse. This continuum cannot be reconciled with the requirement that all Christian education must be explicitly biblical and at least implicitly theological.

A Time of Change

Formal education is undergoing rapid change. The concern for effectiveness has resulted in more emphasis on assessment of the specific outcomes of education. A widespread concern has arisen that educational institutions should be more accountable for the quality of their products.

The concern for efficiency is pushing away from more classical models of education. The pressure is toward increased emphasis on practical competencies. Reductions of time and attention on historical, philosophical, and theoretical issues result in complaints and warnings from those who see greater value in the established forms and traditional ways of education.

No institution is easy to change. Even the simplest educational program in the hands of two or three people takes on a rigidity and inflexibility that goes far beyond the ordinary tendencies of the particular individuals who control it. This quality of inflexibility becomes readily embedded in those who participate—the students as well. The alumni of an educational institution thus commonly become the ardent supporters of the status quo, even those alumni who complained and resisted during their time as students.

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Major Challenges and Threats to Theological Education

Following is a list of the major forces and factors which are pushing from several directions. Pastoral education, and especially institutional forms of theological education, is confronting pressures and dealing with issues that are extremely threatening. No educational program can assume a guaranteed future.

- Lower confidence in schools.
- Costs rising faster than cost-of-living in general.
- Shrinking enrollments, especially in the three-year Master of Divinity program.

Changing demographic characteristics of the students in theological education:

- Older students,
- Part-time students,
- Second-career students,
- Increasing proportion of women students.
- Remoteness from the churches.
- Changing needs in the churches.
- Dissatisfaction with the balance between academic and spiritual values within institutional pastoral education.
- Increasing demands on the limited supply of leader-educators
- Possibilities created by newer educational technologies.

Important Forms of Innovation

Distance Learning (the new term for off-campus education):

- Extension centers (auxiliary affiliated sub-campus),
- Study guides and workbooks (used individually),
- Packaged instruction (combinations of materials, used individually),
- Media-based instruction (for individuals or groups, extensively utilizing recorded imagery, especially video cassettes).

Mobile Institutes (Short courses or learning workshops):

- Cycles of field-site instructional experience (offered as a scheduled sequence in designated locations),
- Teams of traveling teachers, arranging learning experiences in response to requests in the field),
- Extension centers (minimal base staff, providing on-site management and resources for itinerant teachers)

Cable and Satellite Extension Stations (Providing interactive instruction simultaneous with the base campus):

- Duplication of the instructional experiences, especially lectures available on the main campus).
- Specialized instructional assistance in more spontaneous and quick-response form.

Church-based Theological Education:

- Local churches as pastoral training institutions,

- Local churches as the major instructional sites for an affiliated educational institution.
- Deliberate combining of pastors and professors as educators.

Probable Outcomes of Current Transitions

- Increased emphasis on spiritual development.
- Increased acceptance of 1-year and 2-year programs.
- Discontinuation of most, if not all, 3-year programs.
- Accommodation of part-time students.
- Maturing of the instructional styles.
- Continuing expansion of extension education.
- Closer relationship of academic and experiential learning.
- More direct participation of churches in providing, managing, and assessing the educational process.

Since the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ is most directly affected, and especially since God has shown in the past his willingness to use various forms of education, surely all is in the hand of God. As needed for the strengthening of the church God will raise up new modes of education appropriate for the circumstances of this era.

Lecture 2. Honoring The God Who Created Change

God's taste for change and development is demonstrated in almost every attribute of the creation. God has revealed his nature in a changing universe. Not even the greatest masses and spaces of the outer universe remain the same. From moment to moment they undergo continuous processes of transformation. In the most minute detail the smallest components of creation, electrons, protons and other sub-atomic particles of energy whirl in incomprehensible patterns of creative motion. The creative God made things move and change with dramatic unfolding of the master craftsmanship behind it all.

Yet human beings, even while calling upon his name persist in trying to hold things still. People seem more comfortable with the predictability and conformity that comes with tradition and conservative reasoning. They content themselves with stubborn rigidity and inflexibility. Change is especially difficult for educational institutions that serve the church. All human instincts seem dedicated to preservation of the status quo. Much of the resistance to change is understandable; although it tends to make improvement very difficult.

A Tree Broken in the Wind

Rigidity and stability should not be confused. "The house upon the rock" must respond appropriately to the winds of change. The nature of its foundation and its relationship to the bedrock, as important as these factors are, cannot alone determine its survivability. Wind has the potential for snapping a rigid tree while merely bending and shaking another. The matter of optimal flexibility is always important. Although the passage illustrates God's judgment upon the unfaithfulness of his people, the metaphor of a tree made stiff and vulnerable by fire is worth reflecting upon: "The Lord called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm he will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken" (Jeremiah 11:16).

A healthy tree is a flexible tree. It accommodates the wind without being changed in any substantial way. Fire can destroy the liveliness of the tree and leaves it brittle and vulnerable to the storm's wind. Such is the comparison suggested in the words of Jeremiah: from productivity and fruitfulness to brokenness and death because of fire.

What, then, is the fire that transforms the once-thriving tree in such a tragic way? Is arrogance and self-satisfaction part of it? To what extent is the discrepancy between goals *intended* and goals *achieved* part of this fire? The biblical metaphor suggests flexibility and balance as the nature of the thriving olive tree. The vigor and creativity of institutional newness and, under the right conditions, institutional renewal seem to represent "beautiful form." Why do institutions become rigid and misshapen? What is this destructive force that creates brittleness that increases the vulnerability to the action of the wind?

The Paradox of Accreditation

Anything that assures quality in education should be welcome within pastoral education. But accreditation is both good news and bad news. Accreditation in many different forms is becoming more widely used across the world. The following contrasts of values must be carefully considered:

The Positive Values

- Requires institutional self-assessment.
- Encourages inter-institutional cooperation and recognition.
- Encourages fulfillment of advertised claims.
- Partially assures comparability across institutions.
- Gives recognition to common issues and concerns, even if certain member institutions have failed to see them.

The Negative Values

- Standards of accreditation are almost always created by consensus among the member institutions, and thus the protection of institutional status quo tends to become formalized.
- Change, especially experimental efforts to seek improvement, tends to become more difficult.
- Bureaucracy in the management of regulations and compliance tend to become burdensome to institutions, especially to the smaller and less well financed institutions.
- Compliance is usually easier for the older and more thoroughly established institutions.

Accreditation appears to be a promising way to solve certain problems. Nevertheless, it brings new problems into the situation. Whatever is done should take into account these negative concerns. Indeed, the enthusiasm for accreditation is occurring under a heavy cloud of uncertainty. What is now in the place is not satisfactory in many ways. Will accreditation bring about something more appropriate and valuable to the church?

A question must be asked about this new enthusiasm for accreditation: What motivations drive it? The assumption that it will lead to standardization across the various institutions? A greater convenience for registrars and admissions officers faced with the task of evaluating credits transferred from one institution to another. The effort to slow down the proliferation of new educational programs, and thus to preserve the market for the established institutions? A joining of

ranks to defend the status quo? Since the increased popularity of accreditation is clearly parallel to the emergence of important new forms of pastoral education, it is most assuredly a post 1968 phenomenon. Could it reflect a conscious or unconscious discomfort with change itself?

Lecture 3—The Return of a Vital Paradigm: Church-Based Leadership Education

Since 1968, when the world of theological education and the church began to hear about the Guatemalan manifestation of “Theological Education by Extension,” many innovations have been encouraged. Considering the characteristics of theological education, a highly traditional and habituated field, much has happened. TEE began as one specific program, copied in many places by leaders in church and mission who were motivated by the urgent need for more leaders and better education for leaders in place.

As the church has expanded in numbers and in regional distribution, the need for leadership education has been urgent. TEE has added substantially to the competencies of handling the Scripture and leading the church in many places. Differences in the needs and the situations from place to place has resulted in many permutations and variations of the original Guatemalan form of TEE. There is no standard form today. The term TEE has no more precise definition than the word “school.”

No innovation has greater promise than the direct involvement of churches in the development of leadership persons within the church and for the replication of churches. Historically, large individual churches and denominational combinations of churches have been the initiators, builders, and supporters of much that appears today as independent and self-standing academic institutions.

Thus it is not truly innovative that churches are once again entering actively into the picture. What is different this time is that many of the churches are not attempting to copy the formal education models of education. Instead, they are putting major efforts on the development of functional learning with a greater emphasis on *praxis* than ordinary theological education and ministry preparation has seen during much of the 20th century.

In recent years the churches have given voice to their increasing uneasiness over the pastors sent to them by the academic institutions. A major complaint has focused on the issue of readiness for ministry. The graduates are usually well-schooled in the content of theology, but their capability for relating effectively to the people among whom they must serve and lead has been seriously called into question.

To make a significant change in this situation, it is not enough that local churches start to do educational tasks the same way that schools have been doing them. Change is needed, not just new ownership! Following are two lists: The first list describes some of the complaints about the quality of pastoral education that are most likely to be remedied by appropriate church-based pastoral education. The second list identifies some of the problems within the churches that will handicap these efforts unless they are remedied.

Major complaints which are motivating church-based pastoral education

1. Seminaries are no longer producing pastors who are able to deal effectively with the real tasks of ministry.

2. Seminary graduates are full of information, but often lack spiritual maturity.
3. Education of the pastor cannot be considered complete with the sort of pre-service education that prepares people for ministry; it must be a lifelong learning process.
4. Academic degrees and the accreditation of the institution that does the training are no longer adequate guarantees of the effectiveness of the educational project.

Marks of lack of readiness of the church to enter into pastoral education:

1. Congregational passivity
2. Top-down leadership style
3. Narrow participation in volunteer activity (involving less than half of the congregation)
4. Inability to define qualities of biblical leadership
5. Tendency to give money to reduce the level of local responsibility, especially for ministerial education
6. Visualizing the pastor as the hired staff to do jobs that the congregation does not wish to do.

Leaders for the church

No place in the Bible are the rigorous standards for godly leadership more eloquently stated than in Matthew 23. In the words of Jesus Christ, warnings are given against control and prestige-seeking, the key leadership faults of humankind. This section of Scripture shows human appetites to be in sharp contrast with the standards of community that Christ expects for his church.

Consider these five problems again: (1) passivity of the laity; (2) hierarchical organization; (3) domination by intellectual meritocracy; (4) proud and self-serving valuing of leadership; and (5) manipulative leadership style. The problems all can be traced to the first: passivity of the laity. It is both cause and result. So long as any of the other four persist it will produce passivity; and so long as passivity persists, the others cannot be effectively solved.

How do the people of God get out of their lethargy and into action? There are two ways to view the problems: (1) there is something wrong with the people or (2) there is something wrong with the leadership. We are much more likely to see the gifts of the Spirit develop in God's people if the latter view is taken. The question to be posed is what is wrong with leadership that results in passivity among laity.

When leadership is disciplined to the Lordship of Christ, there are some different conclusions. For example, a leader is one who ministers; a leader *serves* through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not in terms of prowess, not in terms of accomplishments or acquired knowledge, but in terms of what God is doing through his or her life. Leadership in the church is servanthood.

One of the most valuable outcomes of the TEE movement is the question it has raised about how broadly distributed the benefits of theological education ought to be. This is an important question. It leads us in the direction of broadening access to theological education. It is unwise for any pastoral education center, whether church-based or school-based to focus exclusively on a narrow sector of the people of God. First, pastoral education especially in the church, ought to include as teachers and learners both clergy and laity.

Seminaries, as they are now known, could be converted into resource centers to help the teaching churches accomplish these purposes. They can make their expertise broadly available to the people

of God. Second, with reference to the people who are being trained in a seminary, the emphasis should be on those who *are* in church leadership more than those who think they *might* be. In Third World situations, especially in theological education by extension, one sees how much more vital educational ministries have become when they are focused on people who are already in leadership roles in the church. In other words, the theological education models that have been most effective are those that have focused on leaders who are already leading and pastors who are already functioning in ministry, not on pre-pastors. Similarly, the educating church should not be in the business of *creating* preachers, ministers, church leadership people, but instead it should be engaged in *equipping* leadership people. To serve the church, education should be broadly committed to equipping the saints in the roles, tasks, and ministries to which they are called. Where is a better place to carry out these educational tasks than within the ministry activities and services of the local church?

Lecture 4—Developing Christ-Like Leadership

“Teaching them to obey all that I have taught” is the second part of the church’s task (Matthew 28:10). This command to teach must be pursued through theologically grounded concerns for holistic personal development, family development, the development of children, and development of the community, including leadership development.

The task implied in “all things that I have taught” includes far more than words and facts; it includes values and behavior. The study of the behavior of Jesus is neglected, perhaps because Jesus is seen as being divine and thus completely beyond comparison with ordinary humans. A proper understanding of the theology of the incarnation accepts Jesus as fully divine and at the same time fully human. Thus the full humanity of Jesus suggests that without a deliberate inclusion of the behavior, attitude, interpersonal skills, and communication style of Jesus, pastoral education, indeed any Christian education, is incomplete.

Jesus, “The Great Teacher”

The general impressions that even unbelievers hold of Jesus Christ is that he was a great teacher. Surely he is recognizable as one of the great religious teachers of all time; but that generalization seems not be taken seriously, even by his followers. If Jesus is to be respected as a great teacher, it would be important to give careful attention to the ways in which he taught as well as to the substance and content of his teaching.

In today’s understanding of educational procedure, it is widely understood that the methods and activities of teaching carry an actual content; how a teacher teaches is part of the information that is taught. People who teach in kindly, gentle, personally involving ways are more likely to teach kindness, gentleness, and personal concern as part of their learning outcomes. In contrast, if a learner is taught a particular subject in a hostile, angry, highly competitive environment, the facts may be learned but will either be quickly forgotten, or ignored, or they will ever after be used or taught to others with the heavy imprint of the negative feelings with which they are associated.

For these and many other reasons, Christians should observe carefully the ways in which Jesus taught. A few specific observations follow:

Jesus invited people to walk with him. Far more than just speaking to groups and individuals, Jesus brought people into a sharing of his life.

Jesus invited people to do something and become something. It is more than a figure of speech when Jesus invited with these words: “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” Jesus walked with his learners into a changed lifestyle. He reminded them that his was a life of simplicity and freedom from earthly encumbrances. The disciples walked with him across the countryside, slept in the outdoors, carrying nothing more than provisions for their immediate needs.

Jesus felt compassion and showed his depth of feeling to his disciples. He cut through formality and social distance to establish an intimate emotional bond with his learners.

Jesus responded with care and respect to the questions that people asked him. Even when he was weary and engaged in more private moments of reflection, those who came to him were never turned away. He responded after listening carefully; the Bible never showed him turning the subject of a conversation away from the original inquiry and purpose of the person who has come to him.

Jesus warned against competitive behavior. On the several occasions when the subject came up within his group of disciples, Jesus was very explicit on the subject of competitive behavior and the quest for power. In Matthew chapters 20 and 23, there are powerful warnings about the human desire for authority and honor. As in the value system of the Kingdom of God taught in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus consistently took a stand against the personal pride that so easily becomes arrogance and self-importance and against the self-advancement and competitive climbing that hurts others.

Jesus put his disciples to work in active learning projects. Far more than just cognitive information dumped as deposits into ready brains, Jesus saw teaching and learning in terms of doing things. In John’s recounting of the events and meaning of the Gospel, among the startling surprises heaped together in the great “chapter of surprises,” John 4, he says that the Pharisees were surprised to observe that Jesus was not doing the baptizing that had come to signify his fame; but that he had assigned the disciples to do it! Jesus was using an apprenticeship approach in which his disciples were put to work learning by experience to do for themselves the things that they had seen Jesus do and the things that they were hearing Jesus say.

Jesus reoriented his disciples in their cultural relationships. A continuous theme throughout the teaching ministry of Jesus was his concern for intercultural reconciliation. One of the greatest barriers that stood in the way of God’s redemptive plan was the cultural narrowness and relative isolation of his chosen people, the Jews. This isolation had grown out of the original mandate to keep themselves separate and as a holy people dedicated to the God above all gods, Jehovah. This part of their responsibility the Jews accepted, off and on. But the other major part of the mandate, to be God’s witness to all nations, was thoroughly ignored. Thus Jesus found it necessary to help the Jews discover that God’s love and compassion extended far beyond themselves. The Samaritans were the cultural frontier for Jesus’ disciples.

On many occasions, whenever circumstantially possible, and at least twice on deliberately chosen paths, Jesus put his disciples in contact with their despised neighbors, the Samaritans. He persistently showed that he valued the Samaritans. They were important; he even chose to make the hero of one of his teaching stories a Samaritan—what a surprise to the legalistic, separatistic

Pharisees! When only one of the healed group of lepers returned to thank him, Jesus pointed out to the disciples that once again the evidence shows that Jews are no better than Samaritans. Clearly, Jesus was teaching about cultural differences and the importance of his disciples' recognizing the cross-cultural scope of ministry in his name. (Luke adds the details of "to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" [Acts 1:8], thus underlining that the scope of the Gospel and the mission of the church cannot be limited to one's own ethnic and cultural group.)

Jesus demonstrated the holism of godliness. The Gospels show that Jesus often participated in social events, including at least one wedding and many dinner parties. He saw no conflict between being an ordinary, well-balanced human—as a friend, a traveling companion, a dinner guest, a frequent visitor in an ordinary household, and all things spiritual. He wrapped all of life together, and he shared this perspective most explicitly by including his disciples in every event. He did not set himself apart as a mystic whose every word and every breath was separated from tangible, objective, practical realities of life. His life and actions showed that God wants to be a fundamental part of everything about life. To be a true disciple of Jesus is to walk, to live every moment of life within the spirituality that is made possible by personal and family relationship to God.

Educational Implications

To properly reflect Jesus, the Great Teacher and the Lord of all of life, education that is called by his name must reflect the lifestyle and relational qualities of the Lord himself. Much of the competitive and mean-spirited tone of ordinary education must come under the judgment of the Gospel. Much of the self-serving, survivalistic, personal-achievement orientation of common educational motives must be subordinated to the community-building service orientations of the value system of the kingdom of God. Intentions for educational outcomes, curriculum structures, and the instructional procedures themselves must all be made consistent with and subservient to the purposes of the church in God's redemptive plan.

Add to this concern for godly values the issue of qualities needed in leadership for the church, and the criteria for Christian education become radically different from ordinary education. In fact, the criteria for the development of leadership persons in the church will be seen as substantially different from pastoral education as it has been known and practiced in recent years.