

WHAT THE ACADEMY NEEDS FROM THE CHURCH

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Pentecostal churches have high expectations of their schools of higher education, and justifiably so. Intellectual and spiritual formation of the next generation of ministers and lay persons is imperative. So it is a hopeful sign that, while many churches have surrendered their schools to an increasingly secular education culture, for the most part Pentecostal churches have worked to keep the Pentecostal Academy vitally connected and institutionally responsible.

The Pentecostal Academy is, therefore, regularly reminded of what the church needs from the Academy in terms of authentic, pervasive, and effective Christian education. My purpose in this article is to now reverse the question. “What does the Academy need from the church in order to render the expected service?”

But first allow me briefly to describe my own pilgrimage and thereby be transparent as to my own philosophical baggage. I am an Assemblies of God minister who has served as a church planter and pastor, as a district officer, and as a college and seminary teacher and administrator. The observations that follow are born out of my own struggle and reflection from a number of perspectives over a lifetime of service. Along the way, I have found many of my interests and concerns to be common themes in conversations and writings of others who wrestle with the nature of theological education in a post-modern world. At the same time, I am sometimes surprised to note what is omitted from these venues.

For this paper I want to discuss the Academy's needs in terms of the affirmation, clarification, nurturing, and accountability of the teaching gift.

Affirmation of the Teaching Gift

Biblical faith has always stressed the need for teachers at many levels of education and expertise who will diligently and carefully pass along to each new generation God's progressive and cumulative revelation. He who has spoken "to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways" and "in these last days...to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2) has left a large and complex canon to guide each successive generation. The Old Testament emphasizes the importance of teaching from Moses' commands to the Israelites, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds...Teach them to your children..." (Deuteronomy 11:17-18) to Malachi's, "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction" (2:7).¹

Jesus, himself, came as a teacher as well as a preacher and his ministry unfolded around those functions, the difference between the two never explained. As Matthew puts it, "Jesus went throughout Galilee *teaching* in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (4:23). During this great Galilean ministry, Luke reported, "They were amazed at his *teaching*, because his message had authority" (4:32).

Aware of his impending departure, Jesus laid the groundwork, as it were, for the continuation of his teaching ministry. His words in the Gospel of John assure the disciples that "the Counselor, the Holy Spirit [and "Spirit of truth" (14:16; 15:26; 16:13)]" will come and "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I

have said to you” (14:26). Fruition of that promise is presupposed in the imperative of the Great Commission, “go and make disciples...baptizing...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Acts of the Apostles shows how quickly, and how surprisingly from an historical perspective, a relatively uneducated church picked up the teaching imperative. Given the enabling power and presence of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, immediately “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). Threats to their physical well being to the contrary, Luke reports “they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42). The very nature of Spirit-empowered faith nurtures and energizes teaching. Historically, the people of God are a teaching people.

If the Acts chronicles the teaching events, Paul’s letters help to explain the dynamism of Christian teaching. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul,² citing and reinterpreting Psalm 68:18, points out that when Christ “ascended on high,” he “gave gifts to men.” These gifts, placed in a powerful charismatic context by the terms *charis* (“grace,” 4:7), *dorea* (“gift,” 4:7), and *doma* (“gift,” 4:8), are the so-called “five-fold ministries” of the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (Ephesians 4:7-11). They are gifts of God’s grace working through church leaders “to prepare God’s people for works of service (*diakonia*, “ministry”).” Note that the teaching role is vitally joined to that of the pastor. The structure of the Greek sentence carefully separates the roles of “apostle,” “prophet,” and “evangelist,” but pairs “pastor” and

¹ All biblical quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

²I am assuming Paul to be the author of Ephesians. For a discussion of the relative merits of opposing arguments on authorship and recipients, see D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 305-309.

“teacher.” All of these “offices,”³ from the apostle to the pastor-teacher are charismatic in the sense that they are gifts sovereignly given by the Spirit of God and exercised by his energy. What is extraordinarily significant is the presence of the “teacher” in this august company, and the linkage of the teaching and pastoral functions!

To move the discussion along, teaching is found among the *charismata*⁴ specifically mentioned as such in Romans 12:6ff., “If a man’s gift...is teaching, let him teach.” It seems quite clear that the gift was to be recognized in the church, and those so gifted were to be about the task with alacrity. Following Paul’s exposition of *charismata/pneumatika* in 1 Corinthians 12, he notes pointedly that “in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third *teachers*...” Then among the edifying charismatic contributions anticipated in the Corinthian church—as hymns, revelations, tongues, and interpretations—was also “a word of instruction (*didache*)” (1 Corinthians 14:26). The gifted pastor-teachers also delivered their “lessons” under the impulse of the Spirit. It appears that first-century apostolic leaders had a far more dynamic view of the teaching ministry than we!

The classical Pentecostal tradition usually has valued the spontaneous and miraculous gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12:8ff. Countless lessons and sermons have been devoted to their exposition and nurture. However, we often have failed to understand and nurture the giftedness that energizes all the ministries of the church,

³ Or “functions.” See Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 707-708.

⁴ Gordon Fee challenges the understanding of *charismata* in Romans 12:6ff., as “spiritual gifts” but, significantly, concedes they are “*gifts of God* which are *effectively brought into the life of the community by the Spirit*.” Ibid., 607. More fruitful is James D. G. Dunn’s recognition of all the named *charismata* as “spiritual gifts” with an insistence upon their “event character” in the charismatic community. See *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 552-561.

including the teaching gift. A clear exposition of the nature and power of the teaching gift, it seems to me, is essential to the work of the Academy.

Clarification of the Teaching Gift

Teaching is the central function of the Academy. Whatever else may be done there, the Academy purports to be about educating men and women to serve in church and society. To meet the demands of our unique “market place” and of the accrediting bodies which attest our quality to society at large, extraordinarily well qualified teachers are required. Given the paucity of credible Christian doctoral-level institutions, there is no alternative but for them to seek specialized education in the great universities and seminaries of the world.

Instruction in the Pentecostal Academy is therefore inevitably influenced by the institutions that educate their faculties. Our philosophy of teaching, the cognitive content of our teaching, and the methodologies we employ in teaching and learning, are formed in both conscious and unconscious ways by our mentors. This is certainly not to negate all influence from the larger academic world nor to deride it as evil. Nor is it to say that teachers during their student pilgrimages are mindless, uncritical sponges. It is to say that few have been exposed to a transforming vision of Christian education that in turn informs and directs their classroom ministries. Far more than we realize, our philosophies of education reflect certain secular values imbibed along the way. In a legitimate concern for academic legitimacy, for example, we may well surrender important ground to the professional guilds to the detriment of our Christian calling.

In the current context of unremitting secular influence, the Church must clarify for the Pentecostal Academy that teaching, insofar as it relates to the Church and

Christian institutions, is to be pervasively Christian and, as such, carefully differentiated from secular education.⁵ The substance of what is taught must be founded squarely and confidently on God's revelation in Scripture and the natural order, understanding that all truth is indeed "God's truth." The goal of instruction is certainly the discovery and communication of knowledge and, subsequently, the development of professional skills, all with academic excellence. But it is more than that. Christian instruction has much to do with modeling the faith and nurturing an authentically Pentecostal spiritual (and ministerial in the case of ministry programs) formation in the life of students. The true Christian teacher is a person who has been gifted by the Holy Spirit with the *charisma* of teaching and who is, in a very significant way, wisely guided and energized by the same Spirit.

New Testament teachers were never mere scholars, seeking truth for truth's sake. They were never mere purveyors of ideas. They were themselves transformed and gifted persons who accepted the Great Commission imperative to teach their charges to obey everything Christ commanded and who were supernaturally aided in the process.

Nurturing of the Teaching Gift

One cannot read the New Testament letters without realizing how much the early church invested in the preparation of teachers. Of all that Jesus might have done, who would have expected him to invest himself in twelve insignificant men whom he commissioned to be teachers? These men, true to their commission and anointed by the Spirit, structured the early church and their personal ministries to prioritize teaching (Acts 5:42; 6:4). Moreover, they quickly discovered and nurtured the emerging leaders

⁵ For Paul's rejection of classical education, see E. A. Judge, "The Reaction Against Classical Education in the New Testament," in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and*

around them whom God was gifting to teach the waves of converts who otherwise would have overwhelmed the emerging Church.

Paul, his care of the churches notwithstanding, usually took with him younger men who could be mentored in Christian ministry and developed as teachers and leaders. John Mark, at first a failure, comes to mind (Acts 13:5; 15:37-39). Paul found Timothy, his “true son in the faith” in Lystra (Acts 16:3, 1 Timothy 1:2) and began a long and profitable mentoring relationship warmly displayed in the Pastoral Letters.⁶ The shaping of Timothy’s message was paramount as Paul urged him to “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives tales” (1 Timothy 4:7), and “Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge (1 Timothy 6:20). Timothy was to move quickly against false doctrine and any preoccupation with “myths and endless genealogies” (1 Timothy 1:3). Those who opposed sound instruction were to be regarded as conceited (1 Timothy 6:3). Positively, he was to “keep...the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13) and “guard the good deposit” that had been entrusted to Him “with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Timothy 1:14). Finally, Paul commanded Timothy to “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). Not only was Timothy to be a good teacher himself, he was to prepare yet another generation of “reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul’s disciple must now educate and train his own disciples.

Christian Education (Leominster/Grand Rapids: Gracewing/Eerdmans, 1996), 80-87.

⁶ For a discussion of the much debated questions about authorship of the Pastorals, see Carson, *Ibid.*, 359-385.

His apparently retiring personality notwithstanding, Timothy was not a teacher whose effectiveness was insured solely by his rational capacities. He clearly was a charismatic teacher, uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit. Paul reminded him several times in the Pastorals about the prophetic and charismatic nature of his ministry. He appealed to “prophecies once made about you” (1 Timothy 1:18) as formative and directional for his ministry. On other occasions, he specifically referenced the prophetic message and the gift (*charismatos*) that came at Timothy’s “ordination” when Paul and the presbytery laid hands on him (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Timothy’s giftedness is consistent with the nature of the pastor-teacher identified in Ephesians 4:11.

By way of contrast to Paul’s mentoring of Timothy, one of the things we have not done as well as we ought in the Pentecostal academy is educating and mentoring the teachers who control our destinies. We have largely left them on their own to go to whatever university or seminary would give them the best scholarships, or be most accessible to their geographic locations. Local churches and judicatories have only rarely maintained a nurturing relationship with theological students on the campuses in their states or with their own students studying elsewhere. As a rule, few church leaders have seriously engaged them in dialogue to help them wrestle with contemporary challenges to faith in general and to the doctrines and mission of our church in particular. Paul could say of Timothy, “I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare” (Philippians 2:20). Only a constant engagement with the younger minister on the part of the “old pro” could produce such a model of servant leadership.

Nurturing also has to do with financial support. Pastors of even middle-sized churches in our fellowship can usually expect to be well paid. The finest teachers, who

have invested seven to 10, or more, years and thousands of dollars in their doctorates, can never expect to equal the salaries of their pastor colleagues. Nor can those pastors, many of whom would themselves be great teachers in the tradition of an earlier generation of pastor-scholars, easily be enticed to the Academy. The financial sacrifice is considered too great. Paul admonished that “elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and *teaching*” (1 Timothy 5:17). “Double honor” is usually understood to include financial remuneration. Local churches “honor” their pastors; colleges are too financially strapped to “honor” their professors. In the Pentecostal Academy at large, professors have little hope that their pay is going to get better!

One obvious need is for the Pentecostal churches to assume responsibility for their schools. While there are hopeful signs in a number of decisive acts on the part of current Pentecostal leaders, for too long the Academy has been expected to provide high caliber men and women for ministry at home and abroad while being given little with which to do the job. Academic leaders both make bricks and gather straw! Adequate support originating from local churches and concerned individual believers must go hand in hand with the Church’s expectations of academic and spiritual excellence.

Accountability of the Teaching Gift

The modern professoriate cherishes above all else the notions of “academic freedom” and “tenure.” These are also concerns of professors in the Pentecostal Academy. They are noble ideals. Freedom of conscience and inquiry are essential to a democratic society and to a vital Church. The intent of academic freedom and tenure is

to insure that teachers in the Academy are free to pursue truth wherever it leads without fear of intimidation or reprisal from college administrators or government officials.

These important ideals call for a response. First, the Academy needs support for a truly godly and responsible freedom of inquiry within the historic Christian tradition and the confession of its particular fellowship. Each teacher must explore the full sweep of historic Christianity and biblical revelation to find for himself or herself what Scripture truly teaches. Each generation raises its own peculiar and compelling questions within the circumstances of its immediate historical milieu. Some of the answers of the past, while usually instructive, do not quite fit the different questions of the present. A forum is needed where responsible scholars can raise difficult questions with their peers and be assured of honest, informed, and loving critique while being relieved of the anxiety of misrepresentation and calumny.

In this connection, the church is responsible to safeguard the reputations of sincere and godly teachers, avoiding any “rush to judgment” on the basis of hearsay and innuendo. As Paul put it, “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses” (1 Timothy 5:19). Teachers, like pastors, are “works in process” to be shepherded by wise and gracious administrators. They ought to have the opportunity to be confronted with legitimate questions about their theological opinions and thus mature in their ministries .

Second, the Academy must be held accountable for the content of instruction as well as for the skills and accomplishments of its graduates. When a professor comes to a theological position that is not consistent with the confession of faith he or she has signed as a condition of appointment, and these theological affirmations are vital to the church,

then in all good conscience, he or she should resign from the Pentecostal Academy to work among those who hold similar views. If such a professor does not have the grace or ethical conviction to voluntarily resign, then the church has an obligation to see that the Academy enforces its contractual policies, due process always assured.

The Academy needs nothing less than the highest expectations and the most diligent oversight from the Church it is called to serve. At the same time, the Church must provide the intellectual and spiritual charter for the Academy's functions and thus insure that it defines the educational task and specifies the nature and qualities of a gifted professoriate. Finally, to that must be added the physical resources required for the task so the Academy may fulfill its mission with distinction.