

My Soul, Be on Thy Guard

George Heath (1745–1822)

My soul, be on thy guard;
ten thousand foes arise;
the hosts of sin are pressing hard
to draw thee from the skies.

O watch, and fight, and pray;
the battle ne'er give o'er;
renew it boldly every day,
and help divine implore.

Ne'er think the vict'ry won,
nor once at ease sit down;
the arduous work will not be done
till thou hast got the crown.

Fight on, my soul, till death
shall bring thee to my God;
He'll take thee, at thy parting breath,
up to His rest above.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

It's Not a Cadillac! Part Two: What Are We Doing?

Kevin T. Bauder

The Religious News Service recently published a story stating that future pastors are turning away from the traditional M.Div. and toward the shorter M.A. for their ministry preparation. That story labeled the M.Div. as the “Cadillac” degree for pastoral preparation. It also noted that other seminaries are shrinking the M.Div. from the traditional 90 hours to 72 hours or even less. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing will depend entirely on what pastors are supposed to be prepared to do.

Different churches develop different visions of pastoral ministry. The churches of ecumenical liberalism, for instance, tend to want social justice warriors for their pastors. In keeping with that vision, a nearby liberal seminary offers an M.Div. that requires courses such as “Leadership and Strategies for Social Change,” “Leadership in Religious and Non-profit Contexts,” “Public Theology for Social Transformation,” “Social Analysis and Community Engagement,” “Social Enterprise,” and six semesters of “Social Transformation Practicum.” It has no biblical language requirement whatever. It does require eight hours of biblical studies, which may be chosen from among courses such as “Engaging Exodus in a Multi-cultural and Racialized World,” “Manna and Mammon in a World of Disparity,” and “Sex, Money, and Power in the Bible.” Another four hours of required theology might include courses such as “Theological Interpretation of the Arts,” “Comparative Religious Ethics,” “Theology of Paul Tillich,” and “What Is Religion?” This curriculum is admirably tailored to accomplish its purpose.

What vision of pastoral ministry dominates Baptist fundamentalism? The answer is problematic, mainly because there isn't one (though the social justice model is completely absent). Instead, Baptist fundamentalists have promoted several competing visions of ministry, each of which is deeply held by some constituency.

I learned this the hard way during my first senior pastorate. The church had experienced its growth under a pastor whose primary ministry was run-and-gun evangelism. Under another pastor it had focused on emotional healing, which meant providing comfort to both the grieving and the aggrieved, and helping the dysfunctional to feel that they were normal. A third pastor had brought in a strong emphasis upon biblical teaching. By the



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time I arrived, the congregation was divided about evenly among adherents of these three visions. Each was trying to tug the church in its own direction, and each was frustrated because its initiatives were blocked by the other two-thirds of the church.

A pastor who is committed to run-and-gun evangelism has little use for seminary of any sort. He needs to know the plan of salvation, and the only biblical texts that he needs are the ones that will help him preach it. He tends to rely upon his “anointing” rather than upon his preparation. He must master the arts of persuasion, producing a moral crisis within his listeners, then motivating them toward the right decisions. He may go to school to learn a bit of biblical content (though he may not). His real preparation will come through being exposed to older preachers and by imitating their methods.

Most other models either redefine seminary study or dispense with it altogether. A pastor who sees himself as an emotional healer may go to school for a few counseling courses, but he will find greater value in any training that enhances the warmth of his personality. A pastor who envisions himself primarily as a religious entrepreneur and CEO will be most interested in gaining leadership and administrative skills. A pastor who sees himself as a “church professor” may choose a seminary that offers the sort of academic rigor that will enable him to read tightly-woven pulpit lectures.

None of these is the New Testament model of pastoral ministry. That model is defined in Ephesians 4 as one of equipping the saints so they can do the work of the ministry, thus building up the body of Christ (11-12). Success in this kind of ministry is gauged by unity of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, by Christian maturity, and by the clarity with which the character of Christ is glimpsed in His followers (13). A church with effective pastoral ministry will become mature and stable. It will be immune to religious hucksters (14). As it grows up to look like Christ’s body, each part of the body will coordinate effectively with every other part so that the whole body is built up in love (15-16).

An Ephesians 4 ministry cannot be reduced to evangelism, emotional healing, effective administration, or even sound teaching, though each of those will have its role. Besides these, an Ephesians 4 pastor will manifest genuine wisdom in bringing the Scriptures to bear upon the issues of life. He will serve as a shepherd who guides souls through the process of conforming their lives to the Word of God. As an overseer he will feel the weight of having to answer for the welfare of these souls. He will invest himself in a profound understanding of the Scriptures, for without a word from God he has nothing to say. He will also invest himself in the lives of those to whom he ministers, for without their ears he has no one to whom to say it. He will not be interested in precipitating crises in the lives of his flock, not even for the sake of gaining decisions. He will, however, labor to feed the flock so

that it flourishes and grows toward maturity. He will also protect the flock from the wolves that prey upon it.

Ephesians 4 simply describes New Testament ministry. What it depicts is what every pastor ought to be and to do. There is nothing elite about it: this is not ministry for spiritual Green Berets but for normal pastors. Ephesians 4 is the ordinary pastor’s basic job description. This kind of ministry is not a luxury, but a barely minimal necessity.

Accordingly, whatever instruction is required to produce this kind of pastor is not a luxury. It, too, is a bottom-line obligation. Such instruction should never be referred to as the “Cadillac” of preparation—as if it were an extravagance—but should be recognized as a Chevy sub-compact that serves as basic transportation.

The question is what kind of preparation an Ephesians 4 pastor actually needs. Does he really have to go to school for an M.Div., or can he get by with a three-year standard Bible diploma? Could he perhaps just be mentored by his own pastor until he is ready to take the pastorate? The answer to these questions depends upon what an Ephesians 4 pastor needs to know and what he needs to be able to do. To that topic we shall turn next.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
