

Lamb of God, Thou Now Art Seated

James George Deck (1802–1884)

Lamb of God, Thou now art seated
high beside Thy Father's throne;
all Thy gracious work completed,
all Thy mighty vict'ry won:
ev'ry knee in heav'n is bending
to the Lamb for sinners slain;
ev'ry voice and harp is swelling -
Worthy is the Lamb to reign!

Lord, in all Thy pow'r and glory,
still Thy thoughts and eyes are here;
watching o'er Thy ransomed people,
to Thy gracious heart so dear;
Thou for them art interceding;
everlasting is Thy love -
and a blessed rest preparing
in our Father's house above.

Lamb of God, Thy faithful promise
says, "Behold, I quickly come;"
and our hearts, to Thine responsive,
cry, "Come, Lord, and take us home."
Oh, the rapture that awaits us,
when we meet Thee in the air,
and with Thee ascend in triumph,
all Thy deepest joys to share.

Lamb of God, when Thou in glory
shalt to this sad earth return,
all Thy foes shall quake before Thee,
all who now despise Thee mourn;
then shall we at Thine appearing,
with Thee in Thy kingdom reign;
Thine the praise, and Thine the glory,
Lamb of God for sinners slain.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

It's Not a Cadillac! Part Four: Where Should We Learn?

Kevin T. Bauder

What training do pastors need? It depends entirely upon the ministry that they intend to pursue. Becoming a social justice warrior takes one kind of training. Becoming an ecclesiastical impresario takes another. Learning to work a crowd for high-pressure evangelism takes yet another.

New Testament pastors must engage in a particular kind of ministry. They preach the Word. They teach all the counsel of God. They reprove, rebuke, and exhort. They shepherd the flock of God and protect Christ's lambs. They labor in the Word and doctrine. They mature the saints to do the work of ministry so that the body of Christ is built up. If they do their work well, then their assemblies will be marked by the unity of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. Their congregations will exhibit mature spiritual adulthood. The stature of their churches will be measured, not by the size of their crowds or even the number of conversions, but by the clarity with which the fullness of Christ can be seen in them.

That kind of ministry takes specific tools, and the men who are preparing for it must receive training that gives them those tools. Future pastors need to become at least moderately functional in the biblical languages. They need to possess sufficient hermeneutical skill to be competent interpreters of the Bible. They must have a good grasp of the contents of the Bible, book by book and section by section. They need to master at least the outline of biblical theology and the substance of systematic theology. They need to know the history of Christian ideas and institutions. They must be able to defend the faith, preach the Scriptures, apply doctrine to life, and administer the work of the church. Beyond all these things, they must be men of God who are committed to knowing and loving Him.

Where can a would-be pastor find this training? The first answer is found in 1 Timothy 3, where Paul discusses church offices. Having listed the qualifications for a bishop and deacons, he states that he is writing so that Timothy will know how to order the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. That last description—"pillar and ground of the truth"—means that the defense and propagation of biblical truth are ultimately the responsibility of local churches. If a man wishes to



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become a pastor, the place where he must seek training is first and most importantly his local church.

Every New Testament congregation must take seriously its responsibility to instruct future generations of leadership. The church is so important as a center of biblical and doctrinal nurture that it cannot be replaced. No other institution can take over this responsibility. None should try.

The problem, however, is that few churches have people who are qualified to teach biblical languages, hermeneutics, biblical and systematic theology, apologetics, or church history to future pastors. Here or there an assembly has a pastor who could teach one or perhaps two of these areas, but even those congregations are the rare exception. While pastors must be trained by local churches, the churches themselves need help. Where can they find it?

The only real alternative is for the churches to create institutions to answer this need. That is exactly what churches have done for hundreds of years. A large church may organize a school of pastoral instruction for smaller churches. Alternatively, several churches may cooperate in operating such a school. To be useful, the school must be seen as a service organization, created only to assist the churches. It must remain answerable to the churches, either directly or indirectly. Its teachers must be individuals who have mastered their disciplines (languages, theology, etc.). They must also be men with serious experience in the real world of pastoral ministry.

Such institutions are called *seminaries*. The better seminaries would never dream of doing what only churches can do. Rather, they see themselves as service organizations, supplementing and helping the work of local congregations. They insist that the ultimate responsibility for preparing pastors remains with those congregations. They maintain close relationships with local churches, where they expect their students to serve and to be mentored. They also hold themselves accountable to local churches through their governance.

The better seminaries employ professors with established credibility in their disciplines. They also insist that these professors be men who have proven their mettle in ministry. A man who has faced the challenges of real-world pastoring is one who begins to understand how exegesis and theology connect to life. He is one who can draw out those connections for his students in the classroom. His teaching has weight because he has been in the trenches and fought the battles of ministry. Without that kind of experience, his teaching, even though true, is likely to remain flaccid.

Furthermore, the program that a future pastor needs is reflected exactly in the curriculum of the traditional M.Div. degree. Not that the degree matters by itself. If a man is simply interested in putting letters after his name, he can buy them from a diploma mill (as too many ministers actually do). The

point is not to be able to say, “I have a master’s degree.” Big deal. Pride of intellect is only marginally less contemptible than pride of ignorance.

The point is that nothing within the traditional M.Div. is really dispensable—not for genuinely New Testament pastoral ministry. The required learning simply cannot be put into fewer than the traditional ninety-odd semester hours. Any reduction of that number comes at the cost of future effectiveness in ministry—not because the hours matter, but because the necessary instruction cannot be offered in less time.

Some schools think that they can grant an M.Div. after around 72 hours. Some grant it with even less. One school even advertises that a student who attends both its college and seminary can receive both degrees—B.A. and M.Div.—in five years. I challenge those schools: state clearly and publicly which aspects of the traditional M.Div. you think are superfluous luxuries for future pastors. What do we get rid of? Biblical languages? Hermeneutics? Scriptural content? Biblical or systematic theology? Christian history? Apologetics? Practical theology? Exactly what part of the M.Div. is so over-the-top that you think pastors no longer need it?

The traditional M.Div. is not a luxury. In fact, it does not even provide everything that a future pastor needs. Some of his preparation must be gained in and through his local church. Rather, the traditional M.Div. is a barely adequate standard to provide minimal competence for New Testament ministry. Please do not compare it to the Army’s Ranger School or the Navy’s BUDS (SEALS training). Instead, think of it as Basic Training—just enough to keep you alive and to keep you from wrecking the ministry while you continue to practice your skills.



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.
