

**Risen Lord, Thou Hast Received***Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892)*

Risen Lord, Thou hast received  
 Gifts to bless the sons of men,  
 That with souls who have believed,  
 God might dwell on earth again.

Now these gifts be pleased to send us,  
 Elders, deacons, still supply,  
 Men whom Thou art pleased to lend us,  
 All the saints to edify.

Guide us while we here select them,  
 Let the Holy Ghost be nigh,  
 Do Thou, Lord, Thyself elect them,  
 And ordain them from on high.

[Pause while election is made.]

Lord, Thy church invokes Thy blessing  
 On her chosen elders' head,  
 Here we stand, our need confessing,  
 Waiting till Thy grace be shed.

Pour on them Thy rich anointing,  
 Fill Thy servants with Thy power,  
 Prove them of Thine own appointing,  
 Bless them from this very hour.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **Theological Education in a Complex World**

*Matt Shrader*

Debates over theological education are nothing new. Why do we have seminary theological education? What are seminaries meant to do? What about theological education for the non-pastor? Fortunately, we do not stand alone in trying to answer these questions. Mining the wealth of those who have come before us is a worthwhile exercise. In two short essays I propose that we take some time to learn from one of our Baptist forebearers about the nature and place of theological education.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the name Alvah Hovey signaled knowledge, wisdom, and respect among all Baptists. Very few Baptists in his day held as much deserved authority to speak on issues of theology and education. Hovey taught at Newton Theological Institute in the Boston area from 1849 until his death in 1903, serving as its president from 1868–1898. Hovey was known for his published theology textbooks, his many articles, his reviews, and his editing of the American Commentary on the New and Old Testaments. (If you own John Broadus's commentary on Matthew, then not only did Hovey edit that volume but he also contributed the forty-page introduction to the New Testament in Broadus's volume). In addition to theology and commentary, Hovey wrote much on practical matters, including theological education. Hovey repeatedly shared three pieces of the theological education puzzle that help us understand why we have theological education at any level and what theological education at its very base level must accomplish.

The first piece of advice is the simple truth that ministry is multi-faceted because the Christian life is multi-faceted. Hovey pointed to the Apostle Paul's counsel to Titus and Timothy (Titus 1:9; 2 Tim 2:2) as an example. These are some of the later letters of Paul and, like many of Paul's later letters, they provide instruction for the early church as well as answers to the growing opposition to genuine Christianity. Paul recognized the complex world that Timothy and Titus were facing, and Paul understood that the end of his own life was drawing near. What then could he exhort these young men to do? The charge that Paul laid on these young men was to take their theological education and put it to use for the sake of the church. Hovey understood these two verses to argue the simple truth that theological education was



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“eminently desirable.” With the passage of the centuries Christian ministry has not grown any less complex. Ministry is multi-faceted in that Christian leaders have various character qualifications they must meet. They must be mature as a person, as a leader, and as a teacher. Character qualifications reach to the entire person. More than this is the simple understanding that Christian ministry is complex because it has to be able to speak to and meet the many (rational, moral, spiritual, etc.) needs of the people around them.

Since ministry is multi-faceted, Hovey then asserted the coordinating truth that theological training also needs to be multi-faceted. This second piece of advice was a reference not only to the idea that there are multiple departments of a theological seminary but that there are multiple skills one needs to learn. Traditionally, students who have completed the standard seminary curriculum should be able to take their developed understanding of the Bible and theology along with their acquired skills for understanding contemporary theological issues and then speak and lead their people wisely toward faithful Christian living. Theology helps the pastors, it helps their people, it helps in evangelization, it helps in edification, it helps guard against error, and it generally promotes usefulness.

Beyond these two simple ideas that undergird why theological education exists and what it must accomplish is Hovey’s third piece of advice and what I think is his chief contribution: we must let theology master us. More to the point, theology will master us whether we let it or not. Hovey did not desire to get students into seminary merely so that they could be churned out quickly. Theological education did not work that way because theological maturation does not work that way. He argued that “time and culture are requisite, and the work of the spiritual husbandman is but just begun when the seed of divine truth first takes root in the regenerated heart; it must be watched and watered and kept in the sun; the weeds of error must not be suffered to take its life, nor the cares of the world to choke it.”<sup>1</sup> Maturity, specifically theological maturity, is neither quickly nor easily attained. This was why sitting under seasoned (and somewhat specialized) professors at a seminary was important. But the time and difficulty of attaining spiritual maturity was also a significant reason why seminary, for Hovey, could not on its own make a minister. He felt that the local church and the Spirit of God were essential, even more so than seminary. Hovey stated: “Let no man suppose that by any system, new or old, education can do the work of the Holy Spirit, or of the Christian churches in preparing our youth for the

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<sup>1</sup>Alvah Hovey, “Value of Systematic Theology to Pastors,” in *Studies in Ethics and Religion: Or, Discourses, Essays, and Reviews Pertaining to Theism, Inspiration, Christian Ethics, and Education for the Ministry* (Boston: Silver, Burdett, 1892), 494.

pulpit.”<sup>2</sup> A diploma hanging on a wall is not an indication of spiritual maturity. That is measured differently.

This third piece of the puzzle is a significant assertion that is often forgotten. For Hovey, it was the central idea behind all theological education, and it pointed to how theological education ought to reach beyond just the seminary and the seminarian. When asked what he thought was the most important need for theological students, Hovey had little hesitation asserting that “there is one thing that would do more for theological students than any change in their studies, namely, a deeper consecration to the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> Theological students need to grow in their walk with God in order to grow in their understanding of God and their skill in leading the people of God. And it is not simply pastors who need to be mastered by theology. Theological education is for all. It is a central piece in the Christian life. Hovey had much more to say on being mastered by theology. How he unpacked this is fundamental to the theological education conversation, and it will be the subject of the following essay.



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This essay is by Matt Shrader, Director of Recruitment and Retention and Assistant Professor of Church History 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.

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<sup>2</sup>Alvah Hovey et al., “Reforms in Theological Education,” *Baptist Quarterly Review* 7 (1885): 410.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 415.