

Psalm 1*Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

That one is ever blest
 who shuns the sinners' ways,
 among their councils never stands,
 nor takes a scorner's place:

but makes the law of God
 a study and delight
 amid the labors of the day
 and watches of the night;

who, like a tree, shall thrive,
 with waters near its root.
 Fresh as new leaves, that name shall live
 in works of heavenly fruit.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***The Future of Fundamentalist Education: Curriculum***Kevin T. Bauder*

Whether American churches are really facing a new Dark Age is debatable. What cannot be doubted is that ministry has become more complicated. We live in an increasingly secular culture that confronts Christians with new challenges. Christianity will not be conserved in its integrity without pastors to provide conservative leadership. Consequently, schools that prepare pastors need to think hard about the kind of leaders that the churches will need. Of course, the colleges and seminaries will not be able to provide everything: personal and ministry skills will have to be fostered within the local church. The schools, however, will need to assist the churches in the intellectual and academic preparation of pastors.

At base, the preservation of Christianity in its integrity requires commitment to full-bodied literacy and the life of the mind. This commitment is necessary for two reasons. The first is that Christianity is a religion of text. Given the centrality of the written Word, Christianity can be understood and conserved only by literate people, i.e., people who are skilled in digesting texts. Second, the present challenges to Christianity stem primarily from anti-Christian intellectual systems. It is up to Christian leaders to overthrow these false systems of thought and to bring them captive for obedience to Christ (2 Cor 10:3-6). Consequently, Christianity in general and fundamentalism in particular will need a generation of pastors who are both literate and thoughtful.

A literate pastor is one who can read difficult materials, understand them, digest them, and respond to their ideas. If he is living the life of the mind, then his response will reflect both his knowledge of Scripture and his grasp of the intellectual and social influences that have produced the ideas. We need pastors who are thinkers as well as doers, sharp-witted shepherds who are prepared to guard Christ's sheep and who can spot the dens in which the wolves are hiding. To get pastors of this sort, we need schools to provide full education for the next generation of ministry.

At the baccalaureate level, pastoral education must lay a foundation in the liberal arts. Too often the graduates of fundamentalist (and other!) colleges and universities cannot write a coherent subject-verb-object sentence, follow a simple argument, interpret a difficult text, or guide a listener or reader



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through a persuasive presentation of their ideas. At minimum, by the time a future pastor reaches seminary he ought to have mastered grammar, rhetoric, and logic.

Specifically, pastors must be able to handle the Scriptures ably and confidently. The foundation of that confidence is mastery of the biblical languages. To that mastery they must add expertise in interpreting texts, especially the text of Scripture. After all, the authority of their ministries is grounded in God's Word.

Besides being able to exegete Scripture, future pastors must also possess advanced knowledge of biblical and systematic theology. It is not enough for them simply to repeat the correct answers to theological questions. They have to think theologically, which means that they perceive the system of faith as an integrated whole. They understand how their conclusions in one area will affect their conclusions throughout the system and, indeed, throughout their lives and the lives of those to whom they minister.

Furthermore, these future pastors must have a competent grasp of Christian history. History is identity. No one really understands the importance of his beliefs until he understands the conflicts and perplexities to which those beliefs are the responses. Knowing history tells you not only who you are, but why you are who you are.

Pastors of the future must also have a firm grasp of the distinctive teachings of the traditions within which they minister. For example, fundamentalist pastors should grasp the dynamics of Christian fellowship and its correlative: separation. These are not incidental matters. They are related to the gospel, and they entail a complete ecclesiology.

Other traditions are also important. Baptist pastors must grasp the importance of Baptist distinctives. Dispensationalist pastors must be able to think well about their dispensationalism. Cessationism and creationism will be no less important for the next generation than they are now; pastors should be able to articulate and defend these positions.

We have lived through decades when rigorous academic discipline was not considered essential for pastors—and in some senses, it was not. During the first two-thirds of the Twentieth Century a pastor with limited learning could draw upon a kind of stored reserve of understanding that was widely shared among Christians. By making withdrawals from that deposit, he could lead effectively even when he received inferior preparation. Indeed, during the years that fundamentalists were rebuilding their educational institutions, most pastors had to get by with minimal education. That many of these men succeeded is testimony to their devotion and even heroism. They are to be honored.

Others, however, inflicted much damage in their ignorance. Among other things, they squandered the Christian heritage upon which they drew. The result is that most of that heritage has now been spent, even within fundamentalism, and it has virtually vanished from many corners of the evangelical world. Thus, pastors of the future will operate at a disadvantage, for they will have little patrimony upon which to draw. Another generation of unskilled and unlearned pastors will be the death of our churches, many of which are dying as it is.

Nothing that I have suggested so far is a new departure in fundamentalist education. For more than half a century the better sort of fundamentalist seminaries have actually been providing it. In the future, however, they must add one other element: preparation related to the context in which their graduates will minister. Future pastors will have to understand secularism, not to rail against it, but to challenge the secular mind. They will have to understand critical theory, for no present-day trend has a more pernicious influence upon the churches. They will have to be able to bring genuinely Christian principles to bear upon economics, creation care, and technology. These issues are only the least part of what the next generation of pastors will face. They will be asked to guide God's people through issues that simply were not discussed a generation ago.

Seminaries around the country are lowering their academic standards. If fundamentalists are serious about preparing effective pastors for the future, then they will maintain and even strengthen theirs. The churches should demand that their pastors be fully equipped. We will need pastors like that in the near future. The next few years may give us our final opportunity to prepare them for the Dark Age.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of 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.
