

## **Session 2**

### **Theologians Network**

#### **Transforming ministry**

‘Where is there any likeness between the disciples of the academy and the disciples of heaven?’ Tertullian

#### **I. Spiritual regression: creating Christian ‘tadpoles’**

Contemporary seminary training by Evangelicals has never been conducted at such a sophisticated information level as today. Nor have the teachers of the future teachers of God’s Word been more academically qualified to convey information.

Yet the experience of many who have passed through seminary training is that both the institution and the pedagogical method seemed to militate against growing the head and the heart together and the latter often suffers.

Is the trend towards ‘spiritual formation’ as a distinct subject in the syllabus of many colleges a sign that there is an evangelical institutional endorsement of the dichotomy between the head and heart? Or should all teaching aim transform?

Some students experience spiritual regression, like a frog somehow regressing to a tadpole, and they emerge from their training all head and little else. Can this be avoided?

#### **II. Hindrances to transforming ministries**

##### **A. The secularization of the Christian Institution:**

The setting in which we work has a profound effect not only on the teachers but also the students whom we teach.

Is there an overall objective for your ‘institution’ and how does that influence the ethos of the classroom?

- (i) If all of us are ‘brothers and sisters’, i.e. siblings in the family of God and
- (ii) if the early church met in homes rather than hired halls which was the normal meeting place of gatherings, and did so to re-enforce the fact that they were all family members of the household of God,

then how should we perceive those whom we teach and is that a sufficient the model that influences how approach our task?

The ‘institution’ v. ‘The family’ model? If the former wins then the answer to Tertullian’s question will be that there is every ‘likeness’.

##### **Collegial competition:**

Competition between teachers soon comes to the attention of the student body. You cannot fake Christian unity among the faculty, as students are not spiritually unaware.

Paul comments on the stupidity of those who engage in competition and comparison with other Christian colleagues (2 Cor. 10:11-12).

Competition between colleagues endorses competition between ‘brothers and sisters’ who are students but that sibling rivalry deprives the students of the fellowship, support and encouragement that God intends for all His family.

### **Cloning in the classroom:**

The hallmark of the first-century secular academy was not only competition between teachers, but the demand for exclusive loyalty from the students (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12)—the term for the latter was ‘disciple’. They had to imitate their teacher and all this created strife and jealousy with the students of others (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3).

Paul has strong things to say about the first-century cult of secular leadership and its intrusion into the Christian community, denouncing it as idolatrous (1 Cor. 1:13).

### **III. Agents for transformational ministry**

How to pastor the future pastors of God’s people will be explored. There will be a short examination of transformation from Romans 12 –15 to help build the model.

Other ingredients for a Biblical model to be set before the brothers and sisters will be discussed.

Is it just information that students need or transformation?

See my *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), chs. 8 and 9 for the first-century background to 1 and 2 Corinthians relevant to our discussion.

See my ‘Secular Discipleship and Christian Competitiveness (1 Corinthians 1-4) *After Paul left Corinth: the Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), ch. 2.