

‘To communicate simply you must understand profoundly’: The Necessity of Theological Education for Deepening Ministerial Formation¹

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This paper explores the vital role that theology has played for those called to serve the people of God as ministers. It seeks to demonstrate that, from their beginnings in the early seventeenth century, Baptists have believed that a theologically educated ministry is a necessity. This belief led Baptists to pioneer the dissenting academies, which in time became colleges, and to be key figures in the development of education which has benefitted the whole Baptist tradition and church of God. Contrary to misconceptions among Baptists, and, we should add, those of other traditions, Baptists have always had men, and in time also women, who have been highly trained theologically, and who have made significant contributions to the churches they have served. Finally, it argues that theology and an educated ministry have major roles to play in the renewal of Christian life and witness for which so many Christians today are praying.

Keywords

Theology; education; ministry; pastor-theologians; Baptist colleges; biblical languages; mission; Bible translation

Introduction

I feel a sense of urgency about this subject, as the amount of time allotted to theological study within education for the Baptist ministry has lessened markedly in recent decades – some feel drastically – from full-time to part-time, and sometimes even less, and sometimes now not even at a Baptist college or recognised theological college. Much of present-day British Baptist life does not emphasise the necessity of theology for ministerial formation or for Christian discipleship in the way it has for over 400 years.² Contemporary British culture does not place a high premium on education, and this pattern is undoubtedly mirrored among the churches. This often results in the dangerously erroneous view that theology is unimportant for,

¹ This paper is a re-working of ‘The Place of Theological Education in the Preparation of Men and Women for the British Baptist Ministry Then and Now’, which appeared in *Perichoresis: The Theological Journal of Emanuel University* 16.1 (2018), 81-98. I am grateful to Dr Corneliu Simut for granting permission for the revising and publishing of it.

² Anthony R. Cross, *‘To communicate simply you must understand profoundly’: Preparation for Ministry among British Baptists* (Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society, 2016).

and even a distraction from, the real task not of ministry, but of what is increasingly seen as leadership, with its clear basis in managerial theory, and *not* biblical-theological study. It also often leads to believing in theology's irrelevance for mission. In recent years, then, many churches' attitude to the Baptist colleges has become one of indifference, and consequently they stop supporting them. This last observation raises the question of why they have stopped, and this itself is a theological question which involves ministry and the support of those called to pastoral and evangelistic ministries, for we must not forget Jesus' saying that 'workers deserve their wages' (Luke 10.7), and Paul's reiteration of this to Timothy (I Timothy 5.18), also stewardship (e.g., Luke 12.35-48), and discipleship, which always involves learning, for, as Jesus said, 'Take my yoke upon you and *learn from me ...*' (Matthew 11.29).

Theological Study in the Life of the Church

Contrary to misconceptions among Baptists and those of other traditions, Baptists have always had men, and in time also women, who have been highly trained theologically. The testimony of Baptist history has unequivocally been for the necessity of strong theological foundations for gospel preaching, the deepening of discipleship, and effective mission work. This is evidenced in the fact, for example, that the founding of both the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS World Mission) and Home Mission work at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries was driven by theological renewal. This was led by The Bristol Tradition of Bernard Foskett, Hugh and Caleb Evans; the tradition in the North of England championed by Alvery Jackson and John Fawcett; the theology of the Midland Baptist Robert Hall Sr; and the impact of the theology of the American Jonathan Edwards on the Northamptonshire Baptists, chiefly John Ryland, John Sutcliff, Andrew Fuller, and William Carey, and their Midland friend Samuel Pearce.³

Why are such pastor-theologians needed? The answer is simple: II Timothy 2.15, 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.' No one can rightly handle or use something they simply do not understand, for, as Peter Cotterell puts it, 'To communicate simply you must understand profoundly.'⁴ The pastor-theologian – and all ministers should be pastor-theologians – is there to help the church grow in its understanding and enable its better handling of God's word: II Timothy 3.16, 'All Scripture is

³ Anthony R. Cross, *Useful Learning: Neglected Means of Grace in the Reception of the Evangelical Revival among English Particular Baptists* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), *passim*.

⁴ Ian M. Randall, *Educating Evangelicalism* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), p. 243.

God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.’ The apostle Peter exhorts all Christians to ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’, so that to him will be ‘the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen’ (II Peter 3.18).

To illustrate our argument, the learning of the biblical languages will be a major, though by no means exclusive, focus of attention of this paper. This brings us conveniently to the Bible, which, Baptists assert, is the word of God and the basis for their life and practice. Yet they can condemn those who search the scriptures academically, and especially those who arrive at different interpretations as a result of their studies – seen, for example, in the protracted and bitter controversies between Calvinistic/Particular and Arminian/General Baptists,⁵ over open or closed communion,⁶ and, more recently, sacramentalism or anti-sacramentalism.⁷ This state of affairs has been well summarised by Bill Leonard when he observes that British Baptist concern for education has been paradoxical, in that while many have promoted education others have ‘remained suspicious of its benefits’.⁸ Such people are not only in our churches, but also among the students training for ministry in its various forms, and also, it seems, may even include some teachers in our colleges.⁹

So, what about ‘theology’? What do we understand by this word, which so many Baptist Christians, and Christians of other traditions, dismiss, ridicule, fear, denigrate, and even treat as a hindrance to the life of the church and the work of God’s kingdom? According to John Colwell, ‘theology, throughout all its various sub-disciplines, remains theology; and *theology is simply the study of God*’.¹⁰ Bruce Milne expands this: ‘Theology literally means “the science of God”, or more fully, “thought and speech which issue

⁵ See, e.g., Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (A History of the English Baptists, 2; London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), *passim*; and John H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (A History of the English Baptists, 3; Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), pp. 96–157.

⁶ See, e.g., Michael J. Walker, *Baptists at the Table: The Theology of the Lord’s Supper amongst English Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1992); and Briggs, *English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 43–69.

⁷ Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (eds), *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 5; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), and *Baptist Sacramentalism 2* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 25; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008); Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 13; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003); and Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp. 311–38.

⁸ Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), p. 143.

⁹ Among them, e.g., Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), pp. 300–302, who criticises all theology done during the period that can be described as Christendom, implicitly including theology done by Baptists during the best part of 400 years, in spite of the fact that Baptists and their theology, like all the Free Churches and their theology, is a tradition that is antithetical to Christendom.

¹⁰ John E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 1 (italics added).

from a knowledge of God” (cf. I Corinthians 1.5).¹¹ As such theology is *not* to be identified with the *academic* discipline of theology, what used to be called divinity, though, of course, it often involves it, and certainly benefits from it.

In his widely used *Know the Truth*, Milne begins this popular handbook of Christian belief with the exclamation: ‘Of course, I’m no theologian.’ He then continues,

How often have I heard that comment over the years, *not infrequently from those who ought to know better*. It usually implies that serious thinking about Christian beliefs and the attempt to express them in an ordered form is altogether distinct from real Christianity, which is about practical concerns: our personal walk with the Lord, sharing the gospel, and so on. While the theologians may have their place, the serious study of doctrine is seen as something which need not bother ordinary Christians, and may even hinder their Christian life if they go into it too deeply.

This prevalent anti-doctrine spirit is a major departure from the Christian instincts of earlier ages and its roots go deep into contemporary Western culture. In face of the tremendous challenges and opportunities facing the church ... this dismissal of doctrine is, in my judgment, nothing short of a recipe for disaster.¹²

In short, and ‘as a matter of plain fact every Christian *is* a theologian!’ But Milne does not stop there. He asserts that, through being born again, all Christians have begun to know God, ‘that is, we all have a theology of sorts, whether or not we have ever sat down and pieced it together’. As a result, theology is ‘everybody’s business’, not just the domain of ‘a few religious eggheads with a flair for abstract debate’. Once this is grasped, ‘our duty is to become the best theologians we can to the glory of God, as our understanding of God and his ways is clarified and deepened through studying the book he has given for that very purpose, the Bible’. He then cites II Timothy 3.16.¹³

Have Baptists Really Been Anti-Educational?

In the 1923 first edition of his history of British Baptists, W.T. Whitley believed that in the latter half of the seventeenth century

The denomination was uncultured, and had no aspiration after culture. The fallacy gained ground that God set a premium on ignorance, that *piety and education were barely compatible*.¹⁴

¹¹ Bruce B. Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 11.

¹² Milne, *Know the Truth*, p. 11.

¹³ Milne, *Know the Truth*, p. 11 (italics added).

¹⁴ W.T. Whitley, *A History of British Baptists* (London: Charles Griffin, 1st edn, 1923), p. 184 (italics added).

However, the writings of Baptists, along with accounts of what Baptists have actually done, shows that Whitley, like so many today, was mistaken, and that Baptists have usually sought to be as well-educated as they can. In fact, when deprived of the opportunity to study at an academy, seminary, college, or university, many Baptist ministers educated themselves, many most successfully, and to the great benefit of the churches and kingdom of God. Self-education is still education, even if it is through the reading of the Bible and books, and through the practice of ministry. The Particular Baptists' most accomplished self-educated ministers include John Fawcett, Robert Robinson, William Carey, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and Andrew Fuller.¹⁵

For instance, it was reported that after Thomas Grantham had finished his tailor's apprenticeship he 'gave himself to study' becoming 'a great Proficient in Learning'.¹⁶ This is borne out by the large number and significance of the works Grantham published.¹⁷ Though the General Baptist Richard Allen 'had not the advantages of a learned education', like Grantham he rectified this 'by his own industry, after he was called to the work of the ministry', attaining 'to such an acquaintance with the oriental languages, and other parts of useful learning, as to exceed many who enjoyed the benefits of a learned education in the schools'.¹⁸ The Seventh Day Baptist, Joseph Stennett, was educated at Wallingford grammar school and also by his father, Edward, a physician, and his brother, Jehudah, who himself published a Hebrew grammar in 1685.¹⁹ Joseph Stennett knew a variety of ancient and modern languages, including Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, and Italian.²⁰ Over time, Baptists became almost synonymous with knowledge of the biblical languages, such that Bishop A.C. Headlam once remarked that 'only Baptist ministers and regius professors know Hebrew and both are slightly mad'.²¹

The origins of the Bristol Academy (founded 1720)²² lie in Edward Terrill's deed of gift dated 3 June 1679. Terrill was an elder in the

¹⁵ Cross, 'To communicate simply', p. 15.

¹⁶ Giles Firmin, *Scripture-Warrant sufficient proof for Infant-Baptism* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1688), p. A2^v.

¹⁷ Clint C. Bass, *Thomas Grantham (1633–1692) and General Baptist Theology* (Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies, 10; Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2013), pp. 24–34 and *passim*; J.I. Essick, *Thomas Grantham: God's Messenger from Lincolnshire* (The James N. Griffith Series in Baptist Studies; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013), pp. 34–54 and *passim*.

¹⁸ Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (4 vols; London: For the Editor, 1738–40), IV, p. 346 (italics removed).

¹⁹ Jehudah Stennett, *Dikduk mikhlol, or, A Comprehensive Grammar* (London: S. Roycroft for the Author, 1685).

²⁰ Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*: IV, p. 320.

²¹ W.M.S. West, *To Be a Pilgrim: A Memoir of Ernest A. Payne* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1983), p. 200.

²² See S.A. Swaine, *Faithful Men: Or, Memorials of Bristol Baptist College, and Some of its Most Distinguished Alumni* (London: Alexander & Shephard, 1884) and Norman S. Moon, *Education for*

Broadmead church, Bristol, and passionately convinced of the need for ministers to be theologically educated and theologically competent, which entailed their skill in the biblical languages, so that they would be enabled to preach the gospel and also train the next generation of ministers. His will made the following provision:

For the use and subsistence of a holy learned man, well skilled in the tongues, to wit, Greek and Hebrew, and should profess and practice the truth of believers' baptism, as a pastor or teacher to the congregation aforesaid, and so to another after his death, successively, for ever; ...²³

The Seminary's 'plan of instruction' included 'the learned languages, so as to enable them to examine any passage of scripture in the original',²⁴ and in so doing they would realise Hugh Evans' aim which he bequeathed to The Bristol Tradition,

not merely to form substantial scholars but as far as in him lay he was desirous of being made an instrument in God's hands of forming them, *able, evangelical, lively, zealous Ministers of the gospel*.²⁵

This vision was implemented by the Academy's first four Principals: Bernard Foskett, Hugh Evans, Dr Caleb Evans,²⁶ and Dr John Ryland, and was passed on to their students, and through them the churches they served were built up. When combined with the theological work of those like Fawcett in the North, Robert Hall Sr and Samuel Pearce in the Midlands, and John Sutcliff and Andrew Fuller in Northamptonshire, the vision resulted in the renewal of Baptist life and witness in Britain, exemplified in Baptist foreign *and* home mission work.²⁷

When the Bristol Education Society was formed in 1770,²⁸ its twofold purpose was 'the education of pious candidates for the ministry', and 'the encouragement of missionaries to preach the gospel wherever providence opens the door for it'.²⁹ Caleb Evans, the driving force behind the Society, and himself an able linguist,³⁰ exhorted students 'to the vigorous pursuit of your other studies in general', because

Ministry: Bristol Baptist College 1679–1979 (Bristol: Bristol Baptist College, 1979). A tercentenary history of the College is being written by Anthony R. Cross and Ruth Gouldbourne for publication in 2020.

²³ 'Edward Terrell's Charity n.d.', in T.J. Manchee (ed.), *The Bristol Charities* (Bristol: T.J. Manchee, 1831), I, p. 281.

²⁴ *An Account of the Bristol Education Society: Began Anno 1770* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1770), p. x.

²⁵ Caleb Evans, *Elisha's Exclamation!* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1781), p. 31 (italics added).

²⁶ On the first three Principals and the Bristol Baptist Academy, as it was then known, see Roger Hayden, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism among Eighteenth-Century Baptist Ministers Trained at Bristol Academy, 1690–1791* (Chipping Norton: Roger Hayden and The Baptist Historical Society, 2006).

²⁷ This is the argument of Cross, *Useful Learning*.

²⁸ *An Account of the Bristol Education Society*, pp. 1–7.

²⁹ Caleb Evans, *The Kingdom of God* (Bristol: W. Pine, T. Cadell, M. Ward/London: G. Keith, J. Buckland, and W. Harris, 1775), p. 24.

³⁰ Caleb Evans, *The Law Established by the Gospel* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1779), *passim*.

Whatever hath a tendency to enlarge our ideas of the divine perfections, *to give us a clearer view of the meaning of Scripture* and the evidences of its authenticity, or *to enable us to speak and write our thoughts with propriety, perspicuity, and energy*, is certainly well worth the attention of every candidate for the ministry.³¹

A key figure in the revival of the eighteenth-century Baptists, Dr John Ryland moulded the thinking of many of the early Baptist missionaries.³² A highly gifted scholar, and linguist, Ryland's work was motivated by the conviction that

though we readily allow it to be unnecessary for every minister to possess much of what is commonly called learning, yet, in the present day, when the advantages of education are more common among our hearers, we think it at least highly expedient that every large body of Christians should possess some learned ministers; *and the greater their number and attainments the better*.³³

Speaking in 1822, William Staughton, the founder of the Philadelphia Education Society in 1812, and one of Ryland's students at Bristol, identified another reason why education is so important:

In the present age, when missionaries are passing into almost every region of the earth, it is evident that, to enable them with greater facility to acquire new languages, and to translate the scriptures from the original text, *a sound and extensive education is not only desirable but necessary*.³⁴

Half a century earlier, Dr John Gill expressed matters in a wonderfully frank way:

Here I cannot but observe the amazing ignorance and stupidity of some persons, who take it into their heads to decry learning and learned men; for what would they have done for a Bible, had it not been for them as instruments? ... Bless God, therefore, and be thankful that God has, in his providence, raised up such men as to translate the Bible into the mother tongue of every nation, and particularly into ours; and that he still continues to raise up such who are able to defend the translation made, against erroneous persons, and enemies of the truth; and to correct and amend it in lesser matters, in which it may have failed, and clear and illustrate it by their learned notes upon it.³⁵

This connection between education, mission, and Bible translation is nowhere better illustrated than in the life and ministry of William Carey and his colleagues. After coming to Baptist convictions, Carey continued his work as a cobbler, preaching in the surrounding area, while furthering his

³¹ Caleb Evans, 'An Address to the Students in the Academy at Bristol, April 12, 1770', in John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register* (4 vols; s.l.: s.n., 1790–1802), I, p. 346 (italics added).

³² E.F. Clipsham, 'Ryland, John (1753–1825), Baptist minister and theologian', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24412>>

³³ John Ryland, *Advice to Young Ministers, respecting their preparatory Studies* (Bristol: E. Bryan, 1812), pp. 18–19 (italics added).

³⁴ William Staughton, *Address delivered at the Opening of the Columbian College in the District of Columbia, January 9, 1822* (Washington City [DC]: Anderson and Meehan, 1822), pp. 25–26 (italics added).

³⁵ John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (2 vols; London: For the Author, 1769), I, p. 45, also quoted approvingly in *An Account of the Bristol Education Society*, pp. v–vi.

own education. He was taught Latin by John Sutcliff, but he also learnt the two biblical languages, studying Hebrew with the help of John Ryland. In 1792 he completed his *An Enquiry*,³⁶ and the year after that he and his family went to Bengal, where he learned Bengali and Hindi, and began to preach in the vernacular. In 1794, Carey set up a school in Madnabati, North Bengal, a pattern he and other missionaries followed in India on a number of occasions, and when, six years later, he moved to Serampore, he joined Joshua Marshman and William Ward in the work there, and in 1818 they together founded Serampore College.³⁷

‘Human Learning under God’: Examples from Baptist History

Because the only two universities in the country, Cambridge and Oxford, were closed to Baptists until the nineteenth century, many ministers took the initiative and opened their own schools and, in time, academies and colleges. Academies were run, for varying lengths of time, in the homes of ministers. Among those who ran such academies were John Fawcett at Hebden Bridge, then Brearley Hall, and finally Ewood Hall,³⁸ and he trained, among others, John Sutcliff, who is best known for issuing the Prayer Call in 1784 which eventually led to the founding of the BMS. He also taught William Ward, who went on to become one of the Serampore Trio. Sutcliff himself opened an academy, and he trained William Carey as an out-pupil.

In 1856, Spurgeon opened the Pastor’s College,³⁹ as it was originally known. From the beginning, the aim of the College was

to help *preachers*, and not to produce *scholars*. There are plenty of institutions for the promotion of learning for its own sake; ours is a part of the work of the church at the Tabernacle, and church-work is gospel-work, and nothing else. Let the world educate men for its own purposes, and let the church instruct men for its special service. We aim at helping men to set forth the truth of God, expound the Scriptures, win sinners, and edify saints. Hence it is important that men should be

³⁶ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens. In which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicality of Further Undertakings, are Considered* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, J. Johnson, T. Knott, R. Dilly, and Smith, 1792).

³⁷ George Howells and A.C. Underwood, *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore and Calcutta: The Faculty of Serampore College, 1918); George Howells and Members of the College Faculty, *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore: s.n., 1927); and W.S. Stewart (ed.), *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 1961).

³⁸ On Fawcett, see Peter Shepherd, *The Making of a Northern Baptist College* (s.l.: Northern Baptist College, 2004), pp. 8-33; and Cross, *Useful Learning*, pp. 182-267.

³⁹ See Ian M. Randall, *A School of the Prophets: 150 Years of Spurgeon’s College* (London: Spurgeon’s College, 2005); and also Mike Nicholls, *Lights to the World: A History of Spurgeon’s College 1856–1992* (Harpending: Nuprint, 1994).

prayerful as that they should be studious, and as needful that they should be gracious in soul as healthy in body.⁴⁰

His priority was, ‘Let them become scholars if they can, but preachers first of all, and scholars only to become preachers’.⁴¹ It is important that we note that Spurgeon did not equate scholars with theologians. As Ian Randall points out, Spurgeon was deeply committed to theological education, exclaiming, ‘Be well instructed in theology, and do not regard the sneers of those who rail at it because they are ignorant of it. Many preachers are not theologians, and hence the mistakes which they make.’ Implicitly, then, for Spurgeon the ideal minister was a theologian, because *theology serves mission*. He continued, ‘It cannot do any hurt to the most lively evangelist to be also a sound theologian, and it may often be the means of saving him from gross blunders.’⁴² Spurgeon’s goal and that of his College was, therefore, very simple: ‘the glory of God by the preaching of the gospel’.⁴³

Like so many before him, Spurgeon was seeking to walk the tightrope between too great an emphasis on learning and deprecating it. He admitted,

Time was when an educated ministry was looked upon by certain of our brethren as a questionable blessing, indeed it was thought that the less a minister knew the better, for there was then the more room for him to be taught of God. From the fact that God does not need man’s wisdom it was inferred that he does need man’s ignorance ...⁴⁴

From 1856 to 1878, forty-eight new churches were planted by Spurgeon’s students,⁴⁵ and even though Spurgeon understood pastors also to be evangelists he nevertheless called his College the Pastor’s/Pastors’ College, *not* the Evangelists’ College.⁴⁶

Spurgeon was also convinced that the study of the biblical languages was of paramount importance in his students’ education and for their continuing ministry:

Every academy for helping students to the ministry must largely cultivate THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES. I need not plead for the sacred tongues, since *no one*

⁴⁰ C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Report of Pastors’ College, 1888–9’, *The Sword and the Trowel* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1889), p. 311 (italics original).

⁴¹ *Annual Paper concerning the Lord’s Work ... 1870* (1870), quoted by D.W. Bebbington, ‘Spurgeon and British Evangelical Theological Education’, D.G. Hart and R.A. Mohler (eds), *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), p. 7.

⁴² C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Being the Address delivered by C.H. Spurgeon, at the College Conference, on Tuesday Morning, April 14, 1874’, quoted by Ian M. Randall, ‘A Mode of Training: A Baptist Seminary’s Missional Vision’, *Transformation* 24.1 (2007), p. 4.

⁴³ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: The Early Years 1834–1859* (2 vols; London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), I, p. 386.

⁴⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Report of the Pastors’ College, 1881–82,’ in C.H. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Sword and the Trowel* April 1882, <<http://gracebooks.com/library/index.php?dir=Charles%20Spurgeon/>> [accessed 8 August 2013]

⁴⁵ E. Stetzer and D. Im, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, Kindle edn, 2016), chapter 5.

⁴⁶ I am grateful to Dr Brian Haymes for this observation.

*will question the immense importance of reading the Scriptures in their original form. Sufficient Hebrew and Greek to be able to read the Old and New Testaments every man ought to acquire.*⁴⁷

According to Hugh Evans, 'the importance and desireableness of human learning, may be further argued from the happy effects produced by it, when sanctified, and humbly devoted to the service of God'. This he illustrated with the English Bible, the result of '*human learning*, under God', as well as

'for those valuable commentaries, and expositions of the scriptures, which have been so eminently useful to the people of God in every age. – The excellent apologies which have been published in defence of Christianity, the elaborate treatises which have been wrote [sic.] upon the various doctrines of the gospel, and other branches of our holy religion' which are 'to be ascribed, under God' to learning.⁴⁸

But there were two other reasons why Spurgeon believed in 'the acquisition of a language'. First, the learning of, in particular Latin, was 'not so much for the sake of the books which you will read, as for the sake of the language itself'. For him, Latin was needed in order to 'know the meaning of English' because 'what anatomy is to surgery, ... the classical languages are to oratory', or,

what the tools in the shop are to the worker in wood or metal, that words are to the preacher, and in the apprenticeship of learning a language he discovers the use and value of those tools. *Is not this a matter of prime importance?*⁴⁹

His aim was to develop preachers of the gospel for which 'the medium of conveying the truth ... is language, and therefore we ought to know the nature, and rule, and form, and composition of language in general, and of our mother-tongue in particular'. The acquisition of languages not only aided the unlocking of foreign languages, 'but that we may know the fabric of language itself'. Second, Spurgeon rejected those who sneered at and questioned the good of learning Latin and Greek, and added their importance for missionaries as they would make them more capable of acquiring foreign languages 'because he knows the way of the human tongue'.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, 'What we aim at in the Pastors' College', *Annual Paper concerning the Lord's Work in connection with the Pastors' College Newington, London. 1886–87* ([London]: Alabaster, Passmore, and Sons, 1887), p. 7 (upper case emphasis original, italics added).

⁴⁸ Hugh Evans, *The Able Minister* (Bristol: W. Pine, T. Cadell, M. Ward, S. Edwards/London: G. Keith and J. Buckland, 1773), pp. 18–20 (italics original).

⁴⁹ Spurgeon, 'What we aim at in the Pastors' College', p. 7 (italics added).

⁵⁰ Spurgeon, 'What we aim at in the Pastors' College', pp. 7–8.

Ministerial Education to be Passed On

Theological education, however, is not just of benefit to ministers themselves. In an ordination charge, Ryland made plain that ministerial education is not an end in itself but is to be passed on to the church. He stated that guiding souls to heaven requires of the minister both knowledge and judgment, which includes acquaintance with the true character of God, and a knowledge of his holy laws. A pastor must also be able to instruct, for, he said, ‘We must cultivate an extensive acquaintance with the whole revelation God has made of his will; and be able to direct the redeemed of the Lord, in all the ways of holiness and righteousness, in which they should walk before him ...’ He prayed ‘that we may teach our dear people the good knowledge of the Lord ...’⁵¹ At the same ordination and in a sermon on Ephesians 4.11 (‘He gave some – pastors and teachers’) Samuel Pearce declared to the church, ‘you, my brethren, are put in possession of one to-day – a pastor, to feed you with knowledge and understanding’,⁵² all for the purpose of perfecting the saints for the work of ministry, edifying Christ’s body. He continued, ‘if he be a teacher, you must be learners; if he have a building to erect, you must be fellow labourers’.⁵³

In his history of the English Baptists, Roger Hayden⁵⁴ approvingly quoted part of Richard Baxter’s saying, which, in full, reads:

If God would but reform the Ministry, and set them on their Duties zealously and faithfully, the People would certainly be reformed: *All Churches either rise or fall as the Ministry doth rise or fall, (not in Riches and worldly Grandure) but in Knowledge, Zeal and Ability for their Work.*⁵⁵

Writing a few years after the end of World War II, Robert L. Child lamented ‘the absence in many of our people of any real conviction concerning the *necessity* of a regular trained Ministry’. Infinite pains, he noted, were expended on the equipping of engineers, doctors, and bomber pilots, ‘but we seem indifferent to the Church’s *need* of trained leaders’, without whom ‘how can we expect to prosper?’⁵⁶ This indifference is reflected, for example, in what I think is an appalling part of the present National Settlement Team’s latest ‘Draft updated guidelines for ministers profiles 2.’ Discussing the expectations of search teams, and under the heading ‘Theological Principles, Values and Priorities’, it states that ‘an

⁵¹ John Ryland and Samuel Pearce, *The Duty of Ministers to be nursing Fathers to the Church; and the Duty of Churches to regard Ministers as the Gift of Christ* (s.l.: s.n., 1796), p. 25.

⁵² Ryland and Pearce, *Duty of Ministers*, p. 41 (italics original).

⁵³ Ryland and Pearce, *Duty of Ministers*, p. 47.

⁵⁴ Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (Didcot: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2nd edn, 2005), p. 165.

⁵⁵ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London: T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, J. Lawrence, and J. Dunton, 1696), Part 1, p. 115 (italics added).

⁵⁶ Robert L. Child, *The Church’s Commission To-Day* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1954), p. 21 (italics added).

Accredited Baptist minister' should 'have a *basic grasp* of Christian faith and discipleship ...' How low is the bar to be set?⁵⁷

Following his quotation of the original form of Baxter's dictum, Hugh Martin contended that Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor* 'should be read ... for its statement of the fundamental motives and spirit of the ministerial calling', its two main themes being the minister's oversight of themselves, and their oversight of their congregation, based on Acts 20.28 ('Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood').⁵⁸

Key, according to Martin, is what Baxter says about preaching. God cannot use the self-seeker, the preacher of unserious mind, or the one who is unfaithful to the call of duty. People will pay no attention to the teaching of one who does not live as they teach, 'for all that a minister does is a kind of preaching'.

It is no small matter ... to stand up in the face of the congregation and deliver a message as from the living God, in the name of our Redeemer. It is no easy matter to speak so plainly that the ignorant may understand us; and so seriously that the dearest heart may understand us; and so convincingly that contradictory cavillers may be silenced ... The great truths are those that men must live upon, and are the instruments of destroying men's sins and raising the heart to God. If we can but teach Christ to our people; we shall teach them all. And all our teaching must be plain and simple, suited to the capacity of our hearers. If you would not teach men, what do you in the pulpit? If you would, why do you not speak so as to be understood?⁵⁹

The founders of the Bristol Education Society appealed to history and God's normal means of working in and through his church.

Consult the history of the church, and you will uniformly find through every period of it, with *very few* exceptions, that those ministers who have been the most laborious and successful in their work, have been as eminent for sound learning, as for substantial piety. Nor is it to be doubted but that, whenever there is a revival of religion amongst us, men will be raised up, not only eminent for spiritual gifts, but who will endeavour zealously to improve those gifts, for the attainment of all that knowledge, which, with the blessing of God, may render them able ministers of the new testament. For though we have no sort of doubt but that the great Head of the church could, if he pleased, carry on his work, not only without *learned* ministers but without *any* ministers at all; yet as he sees fit, for the most part, to fulfil his designs in the use of means, it is in this way we are to expect his presence and blessing.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ 'Draft updated guidelines for ministers profiles 2 _2016' (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2016), p. 3 (original italics removed, italics added).

⁵⁸ Hugh Martin, *Puritanism and Richard Baxter* (London: SCM Press, 1954), pp. 153-57.

⁵⁹ Martin, *Puritanism and Richard Baxter*, p. 153.

⁶⁰ *An Account of the Bristol Education Society*, p. ix (italics original).

My own minister at New Road Baptist Church, Bromsgrove, Keith Blades, said, ‘Few things are more precious and persuasive than an intelligent mind, fired by the Holy Spirit and fuelled from the reservoir of the wisdom of God.’⁶¹

Dr Leonard Champion was convinced that there could be no renewal of the church without serious biblical and theological renewal. In the late eighteenth century, this was evidenced in the emphasis placed on learning combined with use of the biblical languages, the study of theology, church history, philosophy, and the other arts and sciences. It was not about intellectual achievement, but about learning more of God, his word, and his ways in the world, for the purpose of making the gospel known within the churches and on the mission field – domestic and foreign. While this was the duty of all believers, it was especially so of the ministers who led the way as those entrusted with the preaching of the word, and pastoral care of the people. Times of revival have always involved new ways of theological thinking, the combination of heart and mind, right belief and faithful action.⁶²

The centre of all Baptist life has *always* been theology. Faith precedes practice: it always has, it always should.⁶³ This is so for all believers, for we are all disciples of Christ, but it is especially so for ministers, those whom God calls and equips as ministers of the gospel, pastors of his flock. ‘From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded’ (Luke 12.24, nrsv). Sidlow Baxter’s opening statements in the ‘Introduction’ to his survey of the Bible states,

No man’s education is complete if he does not know the Bible. No Christian minister is really qualified for the ministry of the Christian Church without a thorough study of the Bible. No Christian worker can be fully effective without a ready knowledge of the Bible. No Christian believer can live the Christian life to the full without an adequate grasp of the Bible.⁶⁴

In Conclusion

Theology, then, needs to return to its central role in the preparation of men and women for ministry, and various works of service (Ephesians 4.12) in the church and the world today. No further justification, I believe, should be needed than the New Testament exhortations of those to whom has been entrusted the Christian tradition ‘through many witnesses’ which they are to

⁶¹ Anthony R. Cross, *Commonplace Book*, MS in author’s possession, 1980s.

⁶² L.G. Champion, ‘Evangelical Calvinism and the Structures of Baptist Church Life’, *Baptist Quarterly* 28.5 (January 1980); cf. Cross, *Useful Learning*.

⁶³ ‘The Baptist Doctrine of the Church (1948)’, *Baptist Quarterly* 12.12 (October 1948), p. 442.

⁶⁴ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book: A Survey and Study of each book from Genesis through Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), p. 9.

'entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well' (II Timothy 2.2). Part of this is that we are to do our best to present ourselves to God as those approved by him, workers who have no need to be ashamed, 'rightly handling the word of truth' (II Timothy 2.15). No one can rightly handle or use something they simply do not understand. It is absolutely correct, therefore, to state that 'to communicate simply you must understand profoundly'.

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