

# Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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## THE PROBLEM WITH SEMINARIES

by Gary North

*So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him (1 Kings 19:19-21).*

So, you want to become a minister. First, however, you need training. You think you should go to seminary. A word of warning: seminaries are staffed by people who learned to write term papers in their teens or early twenties, and who then decided to parlay that peculiar skill into lifetime employment. Seminaries are not staffed by successful expastors; successful pastors remain in the ministry. Seminaries are staffed by baptized college professors who chose to specialize in a field so obscure that no college has a sufficient number of students to make hiring them come close to paying off.

### A Makeshift Institution

The seminary was invented in the early nineteenth century by a small group of Presbyterians who correctly concluded that the colleges of America had gone sour theologically and could therefore no longer be entrusted with the task of training ministers. This was Princeton Theological Seminary. They began this project in 1811, just before the War of 1812. (Princeton Seminary was always separate from Princeton College.)

The seminary was a makeshift addition to American higher education because the established colleges, one by one and without exception, by the nineteenth century were becoming humanistic, i.e., Unitarian. They went Greek, in other words. I don't mean Greek letter fraternities and sororities, a later development; I mean they went **Greek**. They became consistent with their classical presuppositions. They abandoned trinitarian theology as an unnecessary hypothesis. Then, in the years after the Civil War, they went Darwinist. They abandoned even the Unitarian god.

The scholars who taught theology were themselves graduates of colleges, and their methodology had been learned in college. The college curriculum of the West had always been tied to classical literature. Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Tacitus, always had a place in the classrooms at least as prominent as Moses and Jeremiah, a fact that can be seen in the debates over the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. The pamphleteers adopted names like "Brutus" and "Publius," not "Joshua" and "Lazarus." From the invention of the university in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the

dominant methodology had been a form of baptized Aristotelianism.

The seminaries did not make a clean break with Greece. The log college Presbyterians were evangelists, leaders in the second Great Awakening. Their successors were less enthusiastic about revivalism. They were more interested in scholarship. So were their many imitators. The seminary was set up to give men the courses that the colleges were no longer equipped to give: biblical languages (especially Hebrew), systematic theology, preaching skills, Bible exposition, and similar training. The problem was, these skills were highly specialized, and the professors who were equipped to impart them were even more highly specialized. Professors of Hebrew tended to know a dozen other ancient languages, and they preferred learning additional languages to teaching Hebrew to students whom they knew would never remember any of it three years after graduation (or three months). Thus, there was an inherent tendency to go in the direction of **antiquarianism**: knowledge for its own sake.

Similarly, professors of systematic theology tended in those days to be specialists in the technicalities of philosophy, meaning humanism, and they mixed their theological expositions with the arcane insights of dead pagan philosophers. A good example is Charles Hodge's three-volume *Systematic Theology*, which sometimes seems to be as much a debate with Sir William Hamilton as an exposition of Scripture. This makes for intolerable reading. The book is still being assigned. (Can you think of any other contemporary academic discipline that relies on an 1873 textbook?)

Another problem of the seminary has been that it is regarded as a place only for previously certified scholars. Seminaries required young men to go through the gauntlet of college before enrolling. After all, one supposedly needs educated ministers, i.e., men trained and then officially certified by God's enemies. The pastor of 1830 was supposed to be a liberally educated person, meaning a man skilled in Attic Greek, Latin, mathematics (especially geometry), and classical history, and then—and only then—an expert in systematic theology. Even here, the dominant theological framework was that of Protestant scholasticism: a system based on the six loci of seventeenth-century theology, the Protestant response to the Aristotelianism of the scholasticism of the Counter-Reformation. And so it is today: theology proper, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. A lot of "ologies," but not much on evangelism. Not much on ethics, either. And what ever happened to creationism, biblical chronology, the covenant, and creeds?

To make sure the seminary faculties had to suffer their fair share of gauntlet-running, they strongly advised prospective faculty members to attend German universities where the full-time God-haters, the "higher critics" of the Bible, were holding forth.

And then, one by one, the seminaries also went liberal. Surprise, surprise!

### The Humanist's Target

The institutional strategy of Satan is always collectivist. He must imitate God, and God is omniscient. Satan is not. Thus, he needs information. He needs a chain of command, with his subordinates – not morally impeccable sources – supplying him with data. Also, he is not omnipotent, so he needs a top-down hierarchy through which he can issue commands.

The humanists in the U.S. spotted what was obvious by the eighteenth century: the key institution to capture was the college. This institution trained the nation's professionals, especially ministers. Thus, they began a program of infiltration and subversion. The Unitarians captured Harvard in 1805. The rest of the colleges followed. Humanists could certify everyone else by making Harvard, Yale, and finally Princeton University (after Woodrow Wilson's *coup* in 1902) the prestige universities, i.e., the certifying universities. They also imported the graduate school and the Ph.D degree from Prussia, which had been the German-speaking model for capturing the academic certification system. It was all a top-down operation. They screened all those who hoped to become certified and to certify, and they also persuaded all the professions that certification was mandatory.

Their operating model had always been the Roman Catholic church, the most successful bureaucracy in the history of the West. Later, their model became the Jesuit order. (Calvin and Loyola had studied at the University of Paris at the same time.) The humanists realized by 1870 that they would have to capture the seminaries to capture the prestige denominations. The seminary was the ultimate sitting duck: the Christians' version of the professional certification system. The prestige churches had bought the devil's line: no undergraduate gauntlet, no seminary training; no seminary degree, no ordination.

By the grace of God, only the stagnant Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Lutherans believed such institutional nonsense. (Can you imagine Calvin or Martin Luther requiring each candidate for the ministry to graduate from an accredited university, when all of them were Roman Catholic? That would have made more sense than requiring seminary candidates to graduate from the Darwinian swamps of today.) By the end of the second Great Awakening (1850's), the Baptists and Methodists had become dominant in the U.S., as they have remained, and for many decades, they paid little or no attention to seminary education.

The Presbyterians and Episcopalians got their educated ministry, and the majority of them by 1935 were liberals. The Lutherans took a bit longer. By means of the seminary, Satan had captured the prestige (hierarchical) churches in a little more than a century.

### Ministry Through Ministering

"Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him." Here is the mark of the minister: he ministers. He ministers initially to another minister. This is the diaconal model. He finds a representative of God who is busy ministering to God's people, and he attaches himself to that representative. He becomes an apprentice.

**The apprenticeship system is God's model.** This is why the modern world is so hostile to apprenticeship. The devil's system is certification by committee, not the student's imitation of individually skilled performance. His organizational system is top-down and as impersonal as possible; God's is bottom-up and as personal as possible. Satan's

system is based on the assumption of cosmic impersonalism (especially after Darwinism); God's is based on the assumption of cosmic personalism: the absolute sovereignty of a trinitarian personal God.

The economist and social philosopher F. A. Hayek has for over four decades argued that the knowledge imparted by the free market is vastly more accurate and comprehensive than knowledge imparted by a central planning committee. Hayek devoted his later career to opposing top-down bureaucracy as a method of organizing economic production. Hayek's point is that real-world knowledge is more complex than anything that can be written down in a manual or tested at the end of the term.

You can test his thesis by writing down the steps you must go through to tie a shoelace. Then give your instructions to someone else. See how fast he can tie his shoelace by following your detailed instructions. To make things interesting, if you're right-handed, describe the proper approach for someone who is left-handed.

If learning how to tie a shoelace requires apprenticeship, what about learning how to start and run a church?

Physicians are forced to go through internship programs. This makes sense. (It is also a subsidy to hospitals, which is why they have consented to the narrowing of the market supply of physicians which the medical school certification system produces.) Bureaucratically trained newcomers receive on-the-job training. There is also at least a loose relationship between what physicians study in the classroom and what they face daily in the hospital.

Not so with seminary students. What they face in the seminary classroom is at least as far removed from the day-to-day problems of the gospel ministry as what the M.B.A. faces in the business world. It may be even farther removed.

Example: the seminary student is asked to prepare a sermon. He takes 20 hours to do this a few times during his seminary career. No one tells him that he had better not take over two hours per sermon in his pastorate, and that he needs at least 50 sermons in hand when he walks into his first pastorate. No one tells him what a church budget is. No one tells him that if he marries a girl from the congregation, he has to leave, since there are a dozen mothers in that congregation saying to themselves, "So he thinks **she** is better than my Debbie? Well, we'll see about that!"

What he learns at seminary is that Schleiermacher was dead wrong.

### Conclusion

Denominations really do not think a graduate school of theology is worth the money. They are wrong. They do think a seminary is worth the money. They are wrong again. So they try to kill two birds with one stone. They set up a school of theology to train ministers. Both birds then die. The denominations either shrink (if they somehow keep their theology professors orthodox) or go liberal and then shrink three generations later.

What churches have done is preposterous. They have hired theologians to train future ministers. Theologians should train theologians; ministers should train ministers. This is so obvious that only a theologian could fail to grasp it.

The church in Jerusalem grew by 3,000 in one day (Acts 2:41). Where did their ministers attend seminary?

Five billion people need to hear the gospel and join God's church today. Want to make sure that 99 percent of them go to hell in the next 70 years? Easy! Just require a seminary degree for all pastors. Just ignore apprenticeships.