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REVIVING APPRENTICESHIP

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Several years ago, I visited the apartment of Swami Kriyananda (Donald Walters), the author of *The Path: Autobiography of a Western Yogi*. He is a follower of Paramahansa Yogananda, the founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship, an organization devoted to bringing Eastern and Western thought together. Mr. Walters subscribed at the time to the *Ruff Times*, and he was very interested in survivalist — a 3-G's program of God, gold, and groceries (but no guns). I spoke at his Ananda Center in the Grass Valley area of California, a communal community, but without shared wives or compulsory socialism. Several members are successful small businessmen, and their businesses seem to be respected in the nearby community. I gave my speech on the four stages of price controls, and the response was as enthusiastic as any I have received on the "hard money" lecture circuit.

One of the features of most communes which is almost universal is the presence of some sort of apprenticeship program. The Ananda Fellowship has a very sophisticated print shop that enables them to produce paperback books by the tens of thousands. These communes are convinced that basic skills must be imparted from experienced workers to the inexperienced, not in the classroom, but on the job.

Walters showed me the most remarkable table and chair set that I have ever seen. It was carved by an aging craftsman in India who sold it to him for, as I remember, about \$2,000. The carvings were so intricate that it was like looking at a medieval cathedral or some other major work of art. You simply cannot buy a piece of furniture like this any longer.

The craftsman knew it would be the last representative of a very special art form. Walters told me what the old man had told him: "I cannot get apprentices any longer to carry on the tradition. Anyone with half the skills needed to produce this would be highly employable at far more money in a conventional furniture business. In fact, to get the carvings just right, the muscle and bone structure of the arm and wrist must be developed before the boy is 12 years old; if he has not begun his apprenticeship much earlier, he will never develop the skill. I am the last of those who can produce such works."

The old man may have been exaggerating, but when a master craftsman tells me that such and such is basic to his craft, I am not in a position to argue. Perhaps a physiologist might object. Certainly, the manipulation skills — the "feel" for the use of the tools — must have been limited to those who had experienced long years of training.

During my speech, I discussed my theory that it is mandatory on a person who possesses certain skills to reach back and pull along another person who is farther behind; this is how improvements in everyone's productivity and income are increased. I mentioned an old recommendation I read in a book on management, that no one should be promoted in a

company until he had trained two men who can replace him. Afterwards, one of the members told me that Walters' philosophy is that each man needs to train seven others.

Why Apprenticeship?

It is odd that two men, operating with such different theological and philosophical presuppositions as Walters and I hold, should be in such agreement about the educational process. The impersonalism of bureaucracy, especially educational bureaucracy, repels us both. We are convinced that the best managers are trained by successful managers, and that personal contact with craftsmen, on the job, provides more insight into the actual workings of the world than a detailed textbook explanation.

The "personal touch" is a real phenomenon. If we had to explain verbally every decision, meaning every factor involved in a decision, we would forever be explaining, never producing. There are aspects of any production process that cannot be put into words effectively. The worker has to get a "feel" for the overall process. Thus, the kind of training imparted by formal education has definite limits.

Another factor which cannot be comprehensively described or put into predictable formulas is entrepreneurship. The nature of entrepreneurship is essentially non-rational, if by "rational" we mean abstract and calculable. Entrepreneurs must forecast future market conditions and then organize the production process to meet the needs of that future market. If a computer could do it, there would be neither profit nor loss in an economy. Teaching entrepreneurship by means of a textbook is not possible; what a textbook can teach is that which is not entrepreneurship — mathematically calculable risks, measurement techniques, cause-and-effect events, data processing. This reduces the range of the unknown, thereby transferring the responsibility of dealing with these issues from entrepreneurship to management. Entrepreneurs then use new, "hard" data to make judgments concerning the economic future. But these techniques are not the heart of entrepreneurship, any more than knowledge of a batter's hitting percentage is the heart of being a major league baseball pitcher. (Can you imagine a baseball team that would hire its pitchers on the basis of their scores on computerized examinations on physiology, aerodynamics, and players' statistics?)

There is a tendency for educated men to discount the knowledge possessed by skilled illiterates. Economist Thomas Sowell has stated it well: "Although the phrase 'Ignorant savage' may be virtually self-contradictory, it is a common conception, and one with a certain basis. The savage is wholly lacking in a narrowly specific kind of knowledge: abstract, systematized, knowledge of the sort generally taught

in schools. Considering the enormous range of human knowledge, from intimate personal knowledge of specific individuals to the complexities of organizations and the subtleties of feelings, it is remarkable that one speck in this firmament should be the sole determinant of whether someone is considered knowledgeable or ignorant *in general*. Yet it is a fact of life that an unlettered peasant is considered ignorant, however much he may know about nature and man, and a Ph.D. is never considered ignorant, however barren his mind might be outside his narrow specialty and however little he grasps about human feelings or social complexities," (*Knowledge and Decisions* [New York: Basic Books, 1980], p.8.)

It is obvious that the training considered basic for the pastorate is the training of the seminary classroom, which is essentially bureaucratic and rationalistic. The Bible, in contrast, describes the criteria of the eldership as being essentially personal and familistic (1 Tim.3:1-7). The same is true of the office of deacon (1 Tim.3:8-13). Protestants, especially the more "magisterial" Protestants — Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Lutherans — have stressed academic performance over apprenticeship. The result has been the capture of the denominations by liberals, who first captured the classrooms which the prospective pastors have been required to attend. The most conservative churches are usually those whose pastors have not been required to submit themselves to the gauntlet of higher formal education,

Market Performance

Every organization has criteria of performance. Bureaucracies have formal rules and regulations that must be adhered to. Profit management firms have the criterion of profit. The formal rules and regulations are means to an end: profit. There is an independent standard of performance. Bureaucratic management has no comparable independent performance standard.

Colleges and universities tend to produce people who are trained to perform bureaucratically: tests, term papers, and other formal criteria. Graduates tend to want to pursue life formally, since they have demonstrated their capacity to take examinations. As one very successful taker of computerized tests once told me, "I would like to find a job where I would be required only to take tests, since that is the one skill I have picked up in college." Problem: no private, profit-seeking firm rewards employees primarily for passing exams, once they have actually been hired. Performance on the job is far more crucial. Buyers care nothing about the formal structure of the corporation; what they are buying is a final product.

To maintain profits in a shifting market, firms must maintain flexibility. Unlike subsidized bureaucracies, profit-seeking firms must deal with the shifting demands of customers. The same is true of churches: they cannot be operated as if they were seminaries. If they are managed in this way, they will perish.

Church Apprenticeship Training

Every church should begin a program that will bring together skilled older working men and younger men who need guidance and training. When men with craft skills or business skills are not training apprentices, their talents are not being put to maximum use. Churches need a balanced membership. A church of nothing but dentists or lawyers would be dismal. A church composed primarily of college graduates is also handicapped. There will be a tendency to push young people into college. This increases the number of those who are subjected to bureaucratic thinking and training. It narrows the church's membership base,

The Puritans of New England used to send their children

to apprentices at young ages: under 10 years old. They wanted to secure for their children on-the-job training by independent judges of their skills. Modern parents have few similar options. The church today is in a position to encourage successful older members to take on apprentices from the church. If they receive no salary, they are not subject to minimum wage laws. It is illegal to work for a dollar an hour or a penny an hour; it is not illegal to work for free.

Modern minimum wage laws are designed to keep young people out of the work force. This is a subsidy to trade union members, who now face less competition from price-competitive younger workers who are being partially subsidized by their parents (room and board, etc.), and who can therefore work for less. By establishing apprenticeship programs, churches could escape this restriction on the development of talent,

Another possible area of church service would be the recruiting of minority youths from local minority group churches. Minimum wage laws are especially oppressive to minority youths. Teenagers are effectively locked out of the legal job markets. They do not develop the necessary psychological and technical skills to become effective employees. The public schools ruin them academically, while minimum wage laws ruin them entrepreneurially. They can deal in drugs, steal cars, or go into petty crime, for older entrepreneurs in these fields are happy to provide them with training and minimal capital. They can receive on-the-job training from criminals who care nothing about minimum wage laws; law-abiding youths find themselves unable to attach themselves to entrepreneurs. They cannot legally receive training from profit-seeking local businessmen.

The result of minimum wage laws has been the increasing reliance of minority populations on the welfare State and its endless bureaucratic rules and regulations. Their brightest students go into the professions (monopolies protected from price competition), the government, teaching, bureaucratic corporations seeking to comply with "equal employment" rules, and crime. No tradition of small business can develop, as it has in oriental and Jewish neighborhoods that have family businesses that are exempt from minimum wage restrictions regarding young family members.

The "generation gap" is made wider by separating potential apprentices from potential masters. The needs of each group for the talents of the other cannot be fulfilled legally through employment contracts. The public schools, with their bureaucratic regimentation, their poorly paid humanist faculties, their lack of on-the-job training, and their confiscated tax revenues, are not turning out dedicated, skilled entrepreneurs. They reproduce their own kind: bureaucrats. What else should we expect? Do medical schools produce lawyers? Do law schools produce physicists? Why should we expect bureaucratic institutions to produce entrepreneurs and craftsmen?

Conclusion

The diaconates have a remarkable opportunity. They can help bring together masters and apprentices. They can establish programs that will enable families to obtain the specialized training for children which is almost unavailable through conventional educational institutions. Masters can see their skills and respect for craftsmanship passed along to another generation — a motive shared by masters throughout history. The public schools have nearly destroyed the independent crafts, in their quest for ever-greater bureaucratic power over society. The church can help to restore the crafts to their former position.