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PASTORAL EDUCATION

by Gary North

From time to time, I receive letters from young pastors or men thinking of going into the ministry. They say something like this: "I have read your books and the books and newsletters published by people in the 'Christian reconstruction' movement. I want to further my education in this area. Where do you recommend that I go to school, and what subjects should I study?"

This sort of letter is heartening and disheartening. It is heartening because those of us who do a lot of writing always like to know that there are people out there who are reading our materials. Even more important, they are absorbing what we say, and are now thinking about devoting years of study to rethinking a particular academic discipline or other area of dominion. This is the sort of response that shows us that what we are saying is getting through.

Yet such a letter is disheartening. It points out to us in all clarity just how few institutional structures are ready to impart the kind of message we are presenting. Young men who run across our materials have stumbled into "the hard corps." They may not yet grasp the implications of just how early they have arrived at the "party."

I haven't ever read that Marx and Engels received letters from enthusiastic new converts asking to be directed in their graduate studies. I never read anything about Marx and Engels setting up some sort of training program. The same holds true of Charles Darwin, as far as I'm aware. But if such letters had come, what could the founders of those enormously successful ideological movements have said in the year, say, 1882?

First, the movements were new. They were essentially arm-chair revolutions. Marx and Engels wrote books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, endless letters, and monographs. They wrote, between them, from the early 1840's until the 1890's. The quantity of their materials is huge. Much of the correspondence is still untranslated. Between them, they reshaped the thinking of several generations of revolutionaries and socialists. But they never started a university. They never even published a newsletter. (Inconceivable!)

Darwin is known for his two major works on evolution, *Origins of Species* (note: no "the") and *Descent of Man*. He wrote many other books on flowers, animals, and other detailed and long-forgotten topics. He carried on a voluminous correspondence. But as a semi-invalid, he never organized a meeting or staffed a graduate school program. He sat on his couch and watched the plants move. (Literally, that's what he did, months on end.) Then he wrote up his observations. He changed the world.

Early Phases

When a new ideological or religious movement appears, it generally is marked by several features: little money, few followers, lots of opposition, little if any cooperation from existing institutions, young followers, experimentation, dead ends, and an emphasis on communications. Sometimes the communications system is verbal, meaning face to face. Some-

times it is written: pamphlets, books, newsletters, etc. But the message is the key for long-term results; no "charismatic" prophet can supervise the movement after he is dead. For the movement to survive, it requires a body of written material (unless it is strictly "hermetic," meaning initiatory, occult, and elitist).

The problem which faces the adherents to a new movement — religious, scientific, ideological, political — is that its unique perspective condemns it in the eyes of those who have established the existing institutions. Worse: those who work within the "nearest" institutions to the new one — "nearest" ideologically or philosophically — are those who are most likely to resist the spread of the "new doctrine." The proponents of the "new doctrine" (or new applications of the older, established doctrine) are saying, in effect: "Those who have gone before did not see the full implications. Their successors have clung for too long to outmoded views, repeating the words of the Founders. It is time to examine and apply the implications of the older view."

In short, the newcomers are calling into question the vision, or integrity, or competence of their "ideological first cousins." They are telling the world (meaning a handful of people who will listen) that the people who are defenders of the "received faith" are no longer able to apply the underlying implications of the received faith to modern conditions. Thus, the directors of the existing institutions will do what is necessary to see to it that proponents of the new version are kept faraway from the seats of institutional power. The newcomers are regarded as a greater intellectual threat than the "unbelievers outside the camp."

The younger men, or newly converted believers from "outside the camp," who respond favorably to the explanations of the new perspective will be interested in furthering their education. But they almost invariably make a fundamental mistake. They assume that educational techniques are essentially the same everywhere: old movement, new movement, and partially accepted movement. Not so. Educational techniques vary considerably, depending on which phase of the movement we are dealing with.

In the early phase, there are many loose ends. A comprehensive system has not yet been developed. The strength of the newer version is not found in its comprehensive system; it is found in its vision, its ability to provide better answers for old questions that were never answered very well, and answers for new questions that the establishment has refused to answer at all. But the new movement possessed no "bricks and mortar" to speak of. It has no university. It offers no certification.

Certification comes after conquest. Then the victors begin to certify the recruits. But this is long after the older "establishment" scholars have retired, died or in rare instances, converted over to the newer viewpoint. Education then becomes far more institutionalized and ritualized. The teachers become more conventional, less innovative, more patient diggers in the garden. They synthesize, popularize, summarize, and make

acceptable the ideas that were anathema a decade or millennium earlier. "The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk," Marx used today — the final synthesis of a culture's underpinnings comes only at the end of that culture.

So in the early phase of a movement, the students must be educated "in the field" or "on the job." They must learn to read voluminously, widely, and even wildly. They have to start asking themselves such questions as: "How are these questions answered by today's establishment representatives?" "What is the more likely way to approach this question, given the perspective of the new view?" "Where can I find out the sources of information I need to begin to create new answers?" "What questions simply cannot be dealt with successfully by today's conventional approaches?" By looking at the established body of opinion from a new perspective, the newcomer discovers better ways to answer perplexing questions.

Still, if he is beguiled by the educational techniques of the older, established instructors, he becomes confused. He wants the new, improved version from an old, established institution. But this is possible only by seeking out a few "closet revolutionary" scholars who hold to the new views, men who will be oddballs within their own niche of the education system. The student is faced with being the oddball's boy. His only alternative is to become a closet revolutionary student until the degree is in hand and the academic exercises are over. The student doesn't reveal the details of his faith while he is running the academic gauntlet.

Self-Education

The best way to get educated in the early phases of a movement is to sit down and read every book, document, and pamphlet produced by members of the movement. The reader has to think through the new material, integrate it with what he has believed in the past, and sort it out for himself. Few people are ever trained to work this way, but it must be done. Only a few people will follow through, which is why new ideological movements are made up of a remnant initially.

The typical approach to education is to have a reading list assigned to a person (not too long), which is then followed by a series of boiled-down lectures, interspersed with exercises known as examinations. The material is "packaged" in a format which would be familiar to someone who went to school half a millennium ago. Such an educational program is suited for the middle and final stages of a world-and-life view. It is not suitable for the early phases of a so-called "paradigm shift." (The phrase appears in the important book by Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 2nd edition, 1970.)

The textbook is familiar to every student. Generally conventional, unmemorable, carefully organized, and frequently revised, the textbook is a compilation of the accepted interpretations of an era. Textbooks are written for comparatively large audiences of complacent students, who are cramming their heads full of new (to them) information in preparation for an exam. Textbooks are seldom written to offer a totally new world and life view. Such a book would necessarily have a limited audience, since few if any educational institutions would adopt it for use in the classroom.

Textbooks are written in order to restructure facts in terms of a perspective. It takes time to recruit and train people who can write textbooks. Innovators are seldom skilled popularizers. Furthermore, they are too busy rethinking bits and pieces of the known world in terms of their new perspective. Big chunks of the "accepted wisdom" remain untouched by the innovation for decades. Thus, textbooks produced by representatives of a new view tend to be uneven: revolutionary in some sections, conventional in others. It takes years of

rethinking and recruiting to develop textbook writers.

The desire of students to have a packaged educational program dropped into their laps, with a conventionally structured program of lectures, exams, and certification, cannot be fulfilled in the early phases of a movement. Students who are attracted to some new perspective may resent having to learn everything twice — once in a conventional classroom and again on their own — but they have no option. They cannot get what they want, namely, a spoon-fed education of the revolutionary material within the standard educational framework.

Self-education is the necessary approach. Material learned in the classroom must be unlearned in the library. The institutional bases of the two movements are different. The establishment has bricks and mortar, conventional instruction, uninspired teaching, scholarship money, certification, and continual intellectual reinforcement. The revolutionaries have a compelling vision, innovative books, little money for scholarships, no certification, and a willingness to probe "banned topics of discussion."

Conclusion

Probably the best way for a student to get a revolutionary education in a conventional world is to attend a school where students are presumed to be competent and independently motivated. Such schools allow far more freedom to students to select topics and educational programs on their own. Better a British or Scottish university than an American state university; better a graduate school program than an undergraduate one.

The other approach is to locate a closet revolutionary instructor at some university and go to study with him, and (if possible) with him alone. Become an apprentice. Forget about graduating, unless it takes little extra time and work. Just learn the material.

A reading list designed by a representative of the new perspective is the best way to achieve the education that will pay off. Reading 50 relevant books and thinking about them beats almost any spoon-feeding program a conventional school can provide.

The fact is, unconventional people must pioneer unconventional perspectives. The search for a conventional academic program to attain unconventional material is close to self-defeating. It expects too much from established institutions. The person who thinks he needs a conventional academic setting in order to achieve full status as a revolutionary had better wait for 30 or 50 years, until the new perspective has demonstrated its power by picking off one or two conventional institutions. By then the new perspective will have become sufficiently conventional and watered down to make it acceptable.

My advice: save your tuition money, Get a job, Read in your spare time. If you are determined to continue your formal education, sign up for the introductory correspondence course in theology from Geneva Divinity School, 708 Hamvasy, Tyler, Texas 75701. Complete the course and take another. If you are not sufficiently self-disciplined to get your education this way, you probably are not ready to become a full-fledged "theological revolutionary" at this stage of your career.

If you want a conventional program, think about St. Andrews University in Scotland, or the University of Manchester, or some other British university. Go in, write your thesis, take your orals, and graduate. Get finished as fast as possible. If you think you need to go to seminary, think again; anyone who needs a conventional seminary education probably shouldn't be contemplating the ministry anyway. Better to apprentice with a master church-builder or Christian counselor, and learn direct.