

ACHIEVING ACCREDITATION

Education & Spirituality: A Rocky Relationship

I still am shocked by the fact that I was required to take 6 semesters of Biblical languages as part of my Master of Divinity, but only one semester of spiritual development! I suspect that the curriculum designers had *not* surveyed effective ministers to determine whether it was Greek & Hebrew or spiritual resources that are more important for effective ministry.



Occasionally we meet people from theological schools or Christian liberal arts colleges who are reluctant to pursue accreditation. They are afraid that accreditation drives schools toward feeble spirituality, liberal theology & an irrelevant, ivory-tower mentality that does not impart to its students the ability to minister effectively. Although such weaknesses are dangers faced by a school that may unthinkingly adopt a traditional academic model, this is not the fault of accrediting agencies. Actually, accrediting agencies will prod

schools to stay faithful to their own mission & to assure that graduates are effective in their field of study. With a Christian accrediting agency, there will even be help & encouragement for a school to maintain a spiritual emphasis. If a school's institutional research indicates that their entering students are closer to the institution's stated spiritual goals than their graduating students, the accrediting agency will expect the school to fix this problem! The poor spiritual results that often come from traditional academia are not the result of accreditation requirements. In fact, the current emphasis of accrediting agencies on outcomes assessment can facilitate the targeting of spiritual goals with innovative methods. Accreditation does not require spiritual compromise.

Note that the qualifications of an overseer that Paul wrote about to Timothy & Titus were not

primarily knowledge related, but were character qualities. The lack of resemblance between the traditional academic model & the scriptural examples should also be noticed. We must recognize the need to add a variety of training methods beyond lecture & reading if we are going to do more than fill heads with knowledge. Spirituality is not merely a result of enough knowledge of Greek, history, ministry skills or even the Bible & theology. Something must be added to lectures & books.

The Scandalous Divorce of Ed. & Spirituality

The secularizing impact of Western worldviews has influenced how we traditionally train students – even in Christian institutions. Knowledge-based training that is not well integrated with spiritual input is the norm. Charles Kraft, anthropology professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, teaches about three

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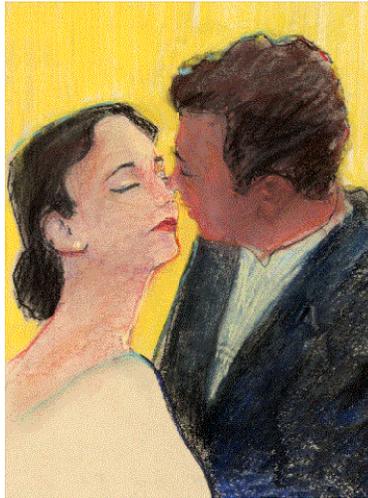
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types of encounters: truth encounters, power encounters & commitment encounters. In the West, we focus on the truth encounter. We Westerners solicit commitments based on a persuasive explanation of what is "true". College professors who teach introductory courses in social sciences may spend their first 3 lectures defending the position that their discipline "is a *science* too." They are appealing to the authority that has been granted in Western society to the type of "truth" that can be verified by empirical methods. While it is not totally false to say that "knowledge is power," this knowledge alone is not adequate power for ministry. Is it an idol?

A SECULAR TRAINING MODEL COMES W/ SECULAR VALUES

Because of their own training in academia, professors develop an intuitive understanding that a class should consist of lectures, reading, a term paper and a couple of exams. Paper exams may not be any more effective in measuring spirituality than are lectures and readings in imparting it. Rather, such academic classes excel at imparting knowledge (at the lower cognitive levels). Missionaries have even exported these traditional academic models of training ministers right along with the Gospel. However, more spiritually-oriented worldviews have spurred many Non-Western Churches to reassess possible training designs. Peter Wagner reported that in a particular Latin American denomination, a theological degree would disqualify a candidate from obtaining a position. They accept

apprenticeships as the only valid model. Although this may be an extreme reaction, weaknesses in the traditional training model need to be addressed in ministry training. We must do a better job of imparting spiritual resources.



Theological Education & Spirituality Belong Together

It is surprising that theological schools and Christian liberal arts colleges do not do more to integrate education with spirituality. Both the students and donors that Christian institutions recruit place a high value on developing spiritual resources as part of the training.

Before attending seminary, I assumed that theological schools would typically include significant emphasis on such things as: Bible study, intercession, worship, fasting, spiritual warfare, spiritual gifts, personal holiness, dying to self, missionary biographies, guidance, faith & God's faithfulness. My own lack of experience may have led me to picture a school that was part

university, part monastery & part ministry center. What I actually found was a school that used secular methods to (hopefully) achieve spiritual goals. Perhaps spiritual goals are better addressed through practice (i.e. apprenticeships & experiential learning models) or strategies useful for developing character qualities (i.e. mentoring, promoting a value, role play, directed discussion, case studies). Traditional academic institutions tend to place more emphasis on goals attainable through lecture & reading. For such reasons, some have expressed doubts about the ability of academic institutions to effectively equip ministers.

Eventually, scholars get around to discovering what everyone else already knows. ;-). This editor's own Ph.D. research on how to more effectively train missionaries showed the high value that those working in mission agencies & mission training programs place on spiritual development. WEF-inspired competency charts show the same thing. Terrill Nelson's 1985 NYU Ph. D. dissertation, "Critical Cross-Cultural Adjustment Skills Needed by Overseas Missionary Personnel: A Preliminary Study of Missionary Preservice Training Programs," explored what adjustment skills mission administrators believed were crucial to intercultural effectiveness of new missionaries. The skills receiving the highest ranking were: (1) *personal spiritual resources*, (2) language learning, (3) interpersonal conflict management, (4) working with others & (5) developing relationships.

Traditional theological programs may justify neglect of spiritual

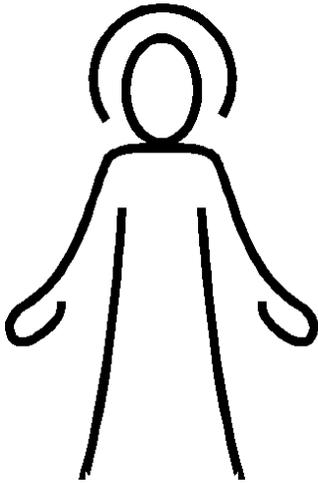
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development & empowerment as a planned part of the curriculum because they assume students have firm spiritual foundations before entering seminary (or that students will get this input from their churches). These schools may further assume that requiring a spiritual life essay & a couple of Christian references is an accurate method of assuring an applicant is a deep, mature & committed Christian.



Even when these assumption are true, neglecting a spiritual emphasis in training unwittingly teaches students to rely on our “bag of tricks” instead of God's holy power. The medium (i.e. lecture) becomes the message (i.e. your job is to deliver this knowledge) & then the training model (i.e. lecture) becomes the ministry model. Our modeling a lack of spiritual emphasis & dependence sets up the students we love & serve for the failure & pain that comes from relying on their own resources.

“Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their

chariots & in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD” (Isaiah 31:1).

Furthermore, we educators need to realize that WE must rely on spiritual resources to *train* as much as these future *ministers* will need to rely on spiritual resources in order to *preach* or *evangelize*. Otherwise we risk building with wood, hay & stubble.

Matchmaking: How to Use Spiritual Training Methods for Spiritual Goals

The recognition that we must better integrate spirituality with training is causing some to innovate. Innovation is further facilitated by the emergence of major mission forces from new sending nations. A recurring theme at the Manila Consultation on Two-Thirds World Training was spirituality. “Activistic missionary trainers from the West have much to learn from their Two-Thirds World counterparts about spiritual formation” (McKenney 1991:242). A mission training center in Brazil includes prayer vigils, fasts, & similar activities in their schedule. “A dynamic Christian life-style is taught, including the necessity to understand spiritual warfare & power encounter (one of the Brazilian contributions to Christian world missions is their common experience in dealing with demonized people)” (Burns & Silva 1991:255).

Ministry training programs must grapple with how to use spiritual

resources to shape the character of people who will be so dependent on such spiritual resources in their own ministries. There are many possibilities. First & foremost, the trainers should *be* people with highly-developed spiritual lives. Such people will find or make opportunities to become the fragrance of Christ to their trainees. Of course, the Bible is an appropriate tool. It can be helpful to schedule “deeper spiritual life” retreats somewhere in the curriculum. Many excellent materials (i.e. books, audio & video tapes) are available, as well as time-tested spiritual disciplines (i.e., scripture memorization, fasting, times of worship or confession). These can be scheduled into a program’s curriculum.

The enclosed table shows that prayer could be integrated into a curriculum in numerous ways. (This table is an update of one by David Agron that was published in the May 2000 issue of the World Evangelical Fellowship’s Missions Commission newsletter: *Training for Cross-Cultural Ministries*).

Art Donations: Did You Get One?

Since our last issue (Oct. 2000), we have helped distribute art donations to a number of L.A. area schools. These donations have a value of \$35,550. Did your school get theirs?

CONTACT US IF YOU STILL NEED AN APPLICATION!

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