

Building Academic Depth in our Movement

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**EARLY BRETHREN AND
THEOLOGICAL TRAINING**

- Most of the early Brethren leaders, were men of great academic learning.
- They however found “no reason to pursue formal theological training beyond that which might be available in the local Assembly” (Botton, 5).
- “There never was any seminary for training missionaries... What I judge to be essential to brethren is the possession of the Holy Ghost on earth” (JN Darby, Letters 1:516)
- “Better far to set aside the systems of theology and schools of divinity, and come like a little child to the eternal fountain of Holy Scripture, and there drink in the living teachings of God's Spirit” (*The Mackintosh Treasury*, p. 605)

**BRETHREN TRAINING INSTITUTIONS:
EMMAUS BIBLE SCHOOL**

- Emmaus Bible School (Yearbook 1947). A Bible school is non-scriptural, but not unscriptural. E.g. Sunday School, Daily Vacation Bible School or Summer Bible Camps for children... dispensaries, hospitals and orphanages... Sunday School manuals, Christian magazines... (63)
- ““You didn’t come here to be made a preacher” (Lol, 1952:15)
- “We do not believe that the training at Emmaus qualifies a person for the work of the Lord. Nothing but a distinct commission from the glorified Lord will suffice in this connection” (MacDonald 1961)

**CENTER FOR THEOLOGICAL
TRAINING IN VANCOUVER (1965)**

- John Cochrane: “the emergence of a more academic church congregation... a great number of people who occupy our church pews will possess trained minds and some familiarity with world thought.. our theology will have to be related to the world around us, and our preachers will have to possess qualifications sufficient to command the respect of their audiences” (9)... “the training of laymen rather than the development of clergymen” (10).
- Arthur Hill: a “possible center of post-graduate theological training in fellowship with Christian Brethren” (15)

- August Van Ryn: the Scripture says “nothing whatever, about special advanced training in theology or the knowledge of the Bible... Moses went to the dessert to unlearn (probably) much that he had accumulated in Egypt’s court; and Paul went into Arabia and then to his home in Tarsus (not to college) for training in God’s thoughts and ways ” (16)
- J. M. Davis: it possessed the great danger of centralization, in that the school may become ‘a denominational center’ and the history of corruption among such institutions indicated that they were not worth pursuing (20)

- Neil M. Fraser: “The diligent student at home with these works could obtain the same education, but he would not have the prestige that goes with his degree from a theological college. The unlettered man as a rule has no access to the colleges to reach students for Christ” (13)
- Brian Sutherland: The real question should be: “What do the Scriptures say about Christian leaders receiving and using advanced training in the Bible?” The Lord was a Rabbi, selected a group of Twelve who received teaching from Him before His death, and a sort of post-graduate course after the resurrection. The early church leaders gave training.

MICHAEL BROWNE VERSUS DAVID MACLEOD

- 1) Browne argued that there is “No scriptural support for theological institutions”. Macleod responded: “I would add that neither is there Scriptural support for Sunday Schools, Christian schools in Hong Kong, Bible Camps, Christian Magazines, missions’ agencies, orphan homes, homes for the aged, nor he kind of Christian publishing house that printed Browne’s book” (119);
- 2) Browne stated: “Early brethren commenced no bible teaching institutes”. Macleod replied: “This argument grants an authority to Brethren tradition that it should not have. The early Brethren were not always right” (119);

- 3) Browne’s third argument was that these institutes will diminish “the status of the local Assembly”, even though he admit that some benefits can be derived from them. Macleod responded: “Here I can only say that where I have firsthand knowledge, the assemblies that have had men trained in such institutions have been strengthened” (121);
- 4) Browne’s next argument was “the danger of creating a professional ruling ministerial body”. According to Macleod, “the important question is whether or not the local assembly is committed to the New Testament’s teaching on church polity, specifically the government of the individual assembly” (122);

- 5) According to Browne's what Assemblies need was the Holy Spirit's teaching and not academic qualifications. Macleod argued that "Browne is creating a false dichotomy. There can be spiritual teaching in an academic setting" (123).
- 6) Browne's sixth point was that "God's sovereignty uses humble instruments". To this Macleod said five things. He concluded by saying: "All genuine students of the Word will acknowledge the help they received from the lexicons, language tools, church histories, systematic theologies, and commentaries in their libraries. The best of these study aids were written, we all know, by men with academic training in their respective disciplines" (124);

- 7) Browne argued that the "apostolic pattern", which was training in a local assembly, "was more effective". Macleod responded by saying that "the Lord Jesus took a band of twelve men to be with Him for three and a half years to focus on the preparation of 'the select few' that the might better serve 'all the saints'" (125);
- 8) Browne's noted that it was a "serious matter to deviate from the divine pattern". Macleod agreed with this, but added that "the pattern is a lot more flexible that Mr. Browne would allow" (125);

- 9) Browne continued to argue that “to build other than God’s assembly is to endanger the reward”. Macleod responded by saying that this is a “sectarian viewpoint that calls into question any evangelical work that is not a Brethren assembly”. Paul lectured in the school of Tyranus (125).
- 10) Browne recommended finally that the apostolic example should be followed. Macleod concluded his review by listing nine of the values of a Bible college or seminary education.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND PRE- PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

- *Who are we? (A movement? Denomination?)*
- *Within what framework of thought are we operating? ('Biblical' = Holy Scripture?)*
- *"Readings, translations or expositions, which are quite distinct from divine revelation..., belong solely to man's responsible use of revelation" (W Kelly)*
- *What is the worldview behind our 'being' and/or frame of thought?*

What is academic?

- *"The development of the mind" without regards for the notion of revelation. Webster: "theoretical or speculative without a practical purpose or intention" (5).*
- 'neutral' inquiring?
- Response: anti-intellectual, knee-ology (learning on our knees) and not theology

An Evangelical view

- The Great Commandments in Matthew 22:37-38 should be the driving force behind our academic activities.
- We are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind and our neighbor as our self.
- We should not be afraid to love God with our mind, through an academic training that brings glory to his name, but also demonstrate love to our fellow human beings.

- I therefore suggest that our view of academic depth should be holistic in that it develop the whole person and not just his mind.
- This view on the academic is grounded in something that is far more than our ability to reason. It is rooted in faith, our deepest inner conviction, which is to bring glory to God and to serve our fellow human being. This inner conviction is above reason (it is mandated by God) and yet not against reason.

Thinking practitioner

Missionaries who are able to conduct independent missiological research

Preachers who are able to do an independent exegesis of Scripture
Etc.

WHY MUST WE BUILD ACADEMIC DEPTH INTO OUR MOVEMENT?

- Our world needs that
 - More people in our world today have access to higher education
 - The ‘Google it’ generation
 - Church next door opportunity
- It was practiced by God’s people throughout history
 - E.g William Kelly
- There is a lack of depth in our movement today
 - Extreme allegorizing

Why: Luke did that (Luk 1:1-4)

1. He acknowledged the existence of and consulted narratives that were compiled by many before him (vs. 1).
2. He worked only with the reports that were built on the account of eyewitnesses and ministers of the word (v. 2).
3. He studied all these things closely for some time (v. 3). Friberg *“following a course of action with the mind: investigate, pursue”*. Holy Spirit led academic research must therefore include the use of the mind and reason.
4. He investigated everything “from the beginning” (v. 3).
5. He wrote “an orderly account” (v. 3).
6. The purpose was to give his reader certainty concerning the things in which he was taught (v. 4).

How must we build academic depth into our Movement?

- Model godly, Christocentric, Holy Spirit led academic leadership in churches
- Offering multiple academic opportunities
- Develop a Curriculum in conversation with: students, churches and society

**THE TALE TOLD BY THE AFRICAN
THEOLOGIAN JOHN MBITI**

- A young man went to Germany to be trained for ministry: He learned German, Greek, French, Latin, Hebrew, in addition to English, church history, systematics, homiletics, exegesis, and pastoralia, as one part of the requirements for his degree. The other part, the dissertation, he wrote on some obscure theologian of the Middle Ages. Finally, he got what he wanted: a Doctorate in Theology.
- It took him nine and a half years altogether, from the time he left his home until he passed his orals and set off to return.

- He was anxious to reach home as soon as possible, so he flew, and he was glad to pay for his excess baggage, which after all, consisted only of the Bible in the various languages he had learned, plus Bultman, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, Buber, Cone, Küng, Moltman, Niebuhr, Tillich etc...
- At home, relatives, neighbors, old friends, dancers, musicians, drums, dogs, cats, all gather to welcome him back. The fatted calf are killed; meat roasted; girls giggle as they survey him surrounded by his excess baggage; young children have their imagination rewarded...

- Suddenly there is a shriek. Someone has fallen to the ground. It is his older sister, now a married woman with six children... He rushes to her. People make room for him, and watch him. "Let's take her to the hospital," he calls urgently. They are stunned. He becomes quiet. They all look at him bending over her. .. Finally a schoolboy says, "Sir, the nearest hospital is 50 miles away, and there are few busses that go there."
- Someone else says, "She is possessed. Hospitals will not cure her!"

- The chief says to him, "You have been studying theology overseas for 10 years. Now help your sister. She is troubled by the spirit of her great aunt." Slowly he goes to get Bultman, looks at the index, finds what he wants, reads again about spirit possession in the New Testament.
- Of course he gets an answer: Bultman has demythologised it. He insists that his sister is not possessed. The people shout, "Help your sister; she is possessed!" He shouts back, "But Bultman has demythologised demon possession."