



Training for the Holy Ministry in the Four Gospels

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This transcript is taken from a broadcast of Issues, Etc. on February 6, 2012 (used with permission). In this broadcast, Dr. Peter Scaer, Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, discusses the training of men for the Holy Ministry, with an eye toward the Holy Apostles' own training at the hand of our Lord as we find it in the four Gospels. This work will be extremely valuable for anyone considering attending seminary to study for the Holy Ministry. In this short conversation, Dr. Scaer explores the contours of ministerial training from a thoroughly scriptural point of view. The questions in italics are those of Issues, Etc. moderator, Rev. Todd Wilken.

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When we look into the Scriptures to find out how we should prepare ourselves for the ministry, we come to the Holy Apostles. They didn't have any formal seminary training, did they?

At Pentecost, when Peter stands in the middle of the crowd and begins preaching [Acts 2:14-41], there are those who complain by saying, “Well, this man is unlettered! He didn't go to the proper schools! And now he is preaching—what happened here?” Certainly Peter didn't go to school in Jerusalem or have the right rabbi teaching him. This drew the curiosity of those who had proper instruction in the Jewish faith. On the other hand, we can say that Peter spent three years with our Lord Jesus Christ. And what is striking about the Gospels is how they describe pastoral education. That is to say, we see that our Lord calls and draws men unto Himself and He begins to teach them. This is how our Lord trains pastors. And this teaching is intensive; it includes a formal aspect, that is, there are lectures. We know that the apostles watched as Jesus taught the crowds, but Jesus also spends time teaching them. He opens for them the Old Testament and shows them into the way of the New [Luke 24]. He teaches them to preach by His own preaching and gives them opportunity to preach. Finally there is hands-on experience as well [Matthew 10; Luke 10].

Let us remember that the first relationship that Jesus had with the Twelve was that of a rabbi with his students. The number one phrase in Mark attributed to Jesus is teacher. The apostles were trained and educated by Jesus as a teacher and the apostles were disciples. This confuses people because we can use the word disciple in a couple of different ways. We can speak generally and say that all Christians are disciples, in that we are called to take up our cross each day and follow our Lord [Luke 9:23] and be led by Jesus on whatever path He has led us on. But there is a more specific use of the word disciple and that is one who studies under the teacher. This disciple is one who is being trained and educated to take on the role of the teacher. When you look at all four Gospels, after the short story of Jesus' birth, you get His ministry. At the beginning of His ministry, right away, He is calling others who will also be teachers of the church, those who will take His words and bring them to the world. That process is one that takes time and effort.

With the apostles, what we have is a picture of Jesus assembling a seminary. So that, when all is said and done, the Twelve can take up the Great Commission “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded

you” [Matthew 28:20]. And that is the command for every pastor: “to teach all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Pastors can’t get away with only knowing Jesus somewhat. Pastors have to know the material in the Gospels in order to preach and teach the Gospels to others.

The Gospels give the impression that when the apostles receive their calls, their primary vocations cease and their new primary vocation becomes that of a student, a disciple of the rabbi.

In Matthew, we read “I will make you fishers of men” [Matthew 4:19]. In the Gospel of Mark, there is a great picture of the disciples leaving what they are doing. It says they immediately leave and begin to follow their Lord [Mark 1:18]. Again, this confuses some people because our Lord calls all of us to follow Him. However, this calling of the apostles is a calling of a different order. For instance, when Paul is talking to the Christians in Rome, he says, “I Paul, called an apostle, am addressing you, who are called of Christ” [Romans 1:1]. We find two different callings there. On the one hand, we all receive the baptismal call to follow Christ, but on the other hand, as we see at the very beginning of the Gospels, our Lord chooses Peter, James, John and Andrew and others to follow Him as His disciples to learn His teachings. All of us are called to say Jesus died for the sins of the world. But unless there were people who were able to know the death and resurrection of Christ as fact, unless they were able to proclaim it, preach it and teach it, the Jesus’ movement at its inception would have become nothing.

We always want to microwave everything. We want to get to the end result. We understand this concept in other areas of our life. If we want the best medical care, we’re going to spend a lot of time making sure our doctors go to medical school so that they learn everything there is to know about anatomy, science, biology, the appropriate math, etc. so that when one of us gets sick, we have the greatest physicians possible. If you want to think long term, you’re going to make sure your medical schools are among the best possible medical schools in the land.

Jesus had this same idea when it came to sending out His ministers. He knew there would be falsehood and that false teachers would arrive [1 Timothy 4]. Jesus warns about this at the end of His Gospels, that there would be false teachers who would try to deceive you. In the midst of false shepherds,

through hard work and teaching, He is going to ensure there are true and good shepherds who are able to teach true doctrine and explain it, and also to refute false doctrine. There's no way to read a medical book in six weeks and become a doctor. This takes time. So it is with the Holy Ministry. Jesus is very intentional about it. To do that the people have to be focused. If you're going to become a Marine, you'll have to leave home and go to basic training. You will have to go away from what you're doing and devote yourself. How much more must our men today leave their vocations as Peter, James and John did, leaving their fishing boats, in order to follow Jesus exclusively to spend time on studying His Word [Mark 1:16-20].

The very first thing our Lord does is start a seminary. Not only did our Lord choose Twelve at the beginning of His ministry, but He is choosing more toward the end of His ministry. The first year class might have been the Twelve, but Jesus' seminary continues to expand so that it's not simply one voice but many voices preaching in His stead.

Education is not simply what happens at seminary, but formation is taking place. We see Jesus forming men for the public ministry. Please speak to the formational aspect of seminary training.

When you get to Matthew 28, it wouldn't be enough for the disciples to take a final exam, as if they were to pass the exam they would be ready to be pastors. Pastoral training is more than the downloading of information. Those who are set apart for the Office of the Holy Ministry must learn to think of themselves in a different way. They are to be among the people, serving the people, but they also have to learn to be set apart. This is difficult to come to think of yourself in this way. To use again the military analogy, for instance, what happens when you send your sons or daughters to basic training? What happens is that parents will tell you they sent a boy, and they received back home a man. That is to say, they receive somebody who not only learns the knowledge of a soldier, but also someone who has come to embody the military tradition and all that comes with it. Seminary is really a formation or a transformation of the individual. That is not to say the apostles become holier, or that they stop sinning, but they assume and embody and understand the responsibilities they have. They are given the task of speaking the Word of the Lord in season and out of season. They become servants of the church, but in

the end they are answerable to our Lord Jesus Christ alone. To whom much is given, much is expected [Luke 12:48]. Our Lord says this to the apostles: “If you confess Me before men, so also will I confess you before My Father in heaven” [Matthew 10:32]. That’s no easy thing. Another element in all of this is that no one is worthy to stand up in the pulpit. None of us is worthy to stand there in and of ourselves. However, at seminary we learn the importance of the Word and the necessity of that office of preaching. We learn to bear that Office for the sake of the people. It’s an Office which requires a transformation of the mind and heart.

Not only do we find the training up of men in the Gospels. We can look into the Old Testament to see this happening. Jesus follows the tradition of our Lord throughout the Scriptures. Elijah casts the mantle on Elisha [2 Kings 2:9-14]. The boy Samuel goes to the temple at a very early age to learn what the Words of the Lord have given [1 Samuel 2:11].

None of the apostles was alone in his training; this training happened corporately. Please speak to the corporate aspect of formation.

The call first comes from Jesus. Pastors are called to serve the whole church, the body of Christ. For instance, when Jesus calls Peter, James and John, the apostles have no idea where they are going to go. Nobody is specifically chosen for a specific spot. We are called to serve Christ wherever He might send us. Understanding that we are called to serve the whole church is important and having the attitude, “I shall go where the Lord sends me.” We need to revive this churchly, collegiate sense among ministers. When Jesus calls disciples, they do start as students, but they do become His brothers, and brothers to themselves. So that when Jesus rises from the grave, and Mary Magdalene starts clinging to Him, Jesus says, “Stop clinging to Me, Mary, go and tell my brothers” [John 20:17]. By brothers He means specifically those He has chosen for the Office of the Ministry. And they are brothers because, to use another military analogy, they have become like a band of brothers. They form a cohesive unit where they learn together, work together, make mistakes together. Iron sharpens iron [Proverbs 27:17]. What happens in this seminary environment is that students come away from the world which they knew, tax collectors leave their booths, fishermen drop their nets to come here for a time set apart. And during that time they learn under rabbis or teachers, and

then they ask questions of each other. Before class, during class, after class they engage with one another. When you look at the Gospels, Jesus will be with His disciples but at times, the disciples will be on their own, discussing the things Jesus has said, working through these problems together. This is an integral aspect of seminary training. What happens in residential campuses where the seminary tradition is continued is that the pastoral students can come together over coffee every morning and talk about the things of God. That is where the best education takes place.

Should training for the Holy Ministry be easy or demanding?

Well, our Lord doesn't grovel when it comes to calling. He gives an authoritative call. He says, "Come, follow Me," and Peter follows immediately [Mark 1:17]. Peter gives up his business as do James and John. James and John say goodbye to their father Zebedee in the boat [Mark 1:20]. Don't forget that Zebedee is a great Christian, and we see him actually helping to support the ministry of James and John. By no means does everyone need to go to the seminary. But some men do need to go. On the other hand, this is not a call made easy by our Lord. He demands sacrifice.

All Christians are called to sacrifice, to "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness that all these things might be added unto us" [Matthew 6:33]. Those who are called to be His ministers need to take an attitude of, "I will go Lord where You send me." They say goodbye to their hometowns, they don't know if they will get back to their hometowns. But they go with a willingness to wherever the Lord will lead them. Matthew was a tax collector and very educated. He was the scribe and main writer of the apostles' group. He had to leave behind his money and career. All the other tax collectors did not leave, they continued on tax collecting, and they continued on as Christians seeing the example of Matthew and hearing the preaching of Jesus.

There is a great set of stories in Luke 9 in which Jesus is going along, and there are various people saying "I will follow wherever You go" [Luke 9:57]. What they're doing is making applications to join Jesus' seminary. Now you do not have to follow along with Jesus on the road in order to be a Christian. But these guys want to. Jesus says, "Foxes have holes and birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head" [Luke 9:58]. It could be a difficult road. Paul says there are good times and bad times. Mark, on his first

missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, couldn't handle it [Acts 13:13]. It was too difficult. So it is for our seminarians. When you come to seminary, there is no guarantee of an easy job or that the world will open up to be your oyster. To another man Jesus said, "follow Me" and the man asks if he can first go and bury his father [Matthew 8:21-22], and, for a normal person, this is a perfectly reasonable suggestion. But not for our Lord. He says, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" [Luke 9:62]. This points us to the absolute commitment needed to be a servant of Christ.

In the Old Testament, when Elijah called Elisha, Elisha has all these oxen, for he has a farm. When he decides to follow Elijah and become a son of the prophet, he takes those oxen and offers them up as a sacrifice, he has a big barbecue with all his friends and his friends eat the animals [1 Kings 19:19-21]. It's his way of saying that he is not going to look back. Whoever put his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God [Luke 9:62]. There is something incumbent and natural to the Office which says when you follow this route, there is no looking back. In a sense it's a little like marriage in that you pledge your troth, you say this is whom I shall be with for the rest of your life. It's a lifelong commitment that these disciples are making, and they aren't going to look back. It's a leap of faith. It's important psychologically for these seminarians to make this leap of faith and say, "this is who I am." Because, this is what the church needs. There's no such thing as a part-time pastor. As a pastor you might need to get a part-time job to support yourself like when Paul became a tentmaker [Acts 18:3], but when you come to be a pastor, you are a pastor. Having been called to the Office you are to embody that identity for the people. Jesus has high standards by which He expects the disciples to learn and also high standards in terms of their commitment.

If we want to bring the Gospel to the world, our first commitment must be to the Office of the Ministry. Because it is from the Office of the Ministry that the Word is preached and the Gospel is spread. If you get that wrong, you reap just what you sow. If you do not have good seeds to sow, you will not have a good crop. You have to make sure the sowers are given the seed, that is, you have to make sure those who proclaim the Word of God actually know the Word of God. In this age of deception where Mormonism is on the rise, also Islam and secularism, with our decaying Christian values, we need men out there who know what our Lord has taught so that they can teach the world today, too.

How do I understand the call? Is it internal or external?

When you come to the seminary, the inner call is put to the test. The entire seminary process is part of the call process. When Jesus calls the apostles, that is the call into the ministry. At the end, let's say in John 20, where He breathes on the apostles, giving them the Holy Spirit, and then giving to the apostles the Office of the Keys in order to forgive [John 20: 22-23], is their ordination. It might be helpful to think about the entire seminary experience as if it's one wedding ceremony, and the ceremony has begun when students come to the seminary and answer our Lord's call. That's when the disciples leave their fishing nets and tax collectors' booths. During that time, they can discern whether it will go all the way through to the end. As with marriage, the call will be consummated at the ordination of the candidate, and that is where the call is made firm.

St. Paul tells Timothy that the ministry is a noble task. Speak to the noble aspect of the ministry.

Noble is a beautiful word. It is the same word that is given to Jesus, who is called the Good or Noble Shepherd. When we think of the word noble, we think of something we need to aspire to [1 Timothy 3:1]. It's an Office for which we are not worthy. When we prepare ourselves for this task, we know we are not up to it, so we need to take it seriously. The Office is noble because of the good that can come from it. To the minister is given the stewardship of the mysteries of God [1 Corinthians 4:1]. Paul talks about his ministry in that way, "In the end, how will we be judged? Be sure that when you're preaching, preach gold." There were false teachers or, to put it more accurately, teachers who didn't know any better. They mixed with their gold, silver, copper, wood, hay, straw, stubble [1 Corinthians 3:12-15]. What he means to say is that when we are preaching, we are actually putting material in the building of God. The problem with that is, if we don't know that which is pure gold, we end up putting the straw and the hay in, and the structure, the church, becomes unsound, and the salvation of souls is at risk. We have been given a precious gift but with that gift comes an incredible responsibility. And on the Day of Judgment, with this noble task, we will be called to task by our Lord. "How did you care for My sheep? Did you build the house on a good foundation? Were you mindful of the responsibility that I have given you?" The

best way to prepare for that is like with any other grand endeavor. You would prepare yourself in mind, body, soul and spirit. You would make the sacrifices needed. If you were to run an Olympic race, you would train daily. You would leave your house, you would go to the high elevation if that is where you needed to go, follow the words of the coaches and you would join the community of runners in order to win the gold medal. The ministry is of that same nature [1 Corinthians 9:24].

What we need to do is not make things easier for men, but to inspire them to be all that they can be in Christ. We need to inspire them to use the talents given them by God and then to develop them for what is the most important task given to us on this earth.

What's this about needing to learn Greek?

It's to our shame if we don't learn the biblical languages. In the Psalms, we learn that the man of God takes delight in the Torah, the Scriptures [Psalm 1:2]. The best preachers are those who are themselves inspired by God's Word. When I look at a Gospel reading in the original language, I become excited by that, because there I see things I have not seen. Unless I have been moved by that Word, and am in that Word, and that Word has really become a part of me, then I am really of no use to the congregation. First, it's talked about in the Scriptures this way, the prophet must devour the scroll, eat the scroll, inwardly digest the scroll [Ezekiel 3:1-3], so that it becomes so much a part of him that the pastor is not like a mere Mormon who reads a pamphlet to the people, he is not there as a propagandist, but that he is speaking from a heart that is informed by the Word of God. Our Lord's words are recorded in Greek. Our Bibles are translations. You are always one step removed from the original. The church needs to have people who can read the Word and explain the Word and the nuance from the original texts. Jesus says, "Are you going to leave Me now because I have given you these hard sayings?" Peter says, "No Jesus, You have the words of eternal life" [Luke 6:68]. If we believe this is true that they are the words of eternal life, how much more is it incumbent upon us to be able to read those words as they were given by the Holy Spirit.

How would you answer someone who asks, “Do I really need to commit to four years of seminary education?”

I would say, you don't know enough yet. You haven't been brought into the mysteries. You need to go through this. I will guarantee that should that person come to the seminary, he will never regret a single day. If he doesn't come to the seminary, spending time in God's Word, he will never know what he missed. However, the church itself will be impoverished. It's not simply about what he desires but what the church needs. I would ask him to go back into the Scriptures, to look into the way our Lord Himself has trained men, look into the qualifications, but also to the passages which speak to the glory and nobility of the Office.

I would also say this. Don't talk to me. Talk to a fourth year seminarian, or a new pastor or a pastor who has been working for 20 years. They will tell you, “when I came to the seminary, I thought I knew it all. But when I left seminary, humbled by the Word, what I desired was actually not less formation, but more.” Trust in the Lord. Don't be afraid and don't take the easy way out. This is a difficult route but the more rewarding route. In life this is true: if you put the work in at the beginning, you will be rewarded greatly at the end; and if you come to the seminary, you will leave a better and more useful servant of the Lord throughout your ministry.

Cover Artwork Information

The New Testament Evangelist Shields that are pictured on the cover can be found in the hallways of Wyneken Hall on the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

St. Matthew's Gospel (*Lower Level of Wyneken Hall*)

The principal focus of St. Matthew's Gospel is upon our Lord's humility and humanity. Therefore, this symbol depicts a man. The wings and nimbus testify to the exaltation of the human nature in the Lord (Ezekiel 1:10, Revelation 4:7, Matthew 1:1-17).

St. Mark's Gospel (*Lower Level of Wyneken Hall*)

Since his Gospel emphasizes the power and miracles of the Lord, St. Mark's symbol is the winged lion (Ezekiel 1:10, Revelation 4:7, Mark 1:3).

St. Luke's Gospel (*Upper Level of Wyneken Hall*)

Due to his detailed account of the Lord's sacrificial work, St. Luke's Gospel is portrayed by the winged ox, the symbol of highest sacrifice (Ezekiel 41:10, Revelation 4:7).

St. John's Gospel (*Upper Level of Wyneken Hall*)

The eagle is the symbol of St. John the Evangelist because he rises to the greatest and most sublime heights of spirituality in his Gospel (Ezekiel 1:10, Revelation 4:7).