

Chapter 1

A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Rick Yount

Then **we will no longer be little children**, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But **speaking the truth in love**, let us **grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ**.

From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.
[Eph 4:14–16]

Teaching into the Unknown

I stood at the front of the room and stared into what I can only describe as a deep, dark pit of unknown. As I looked into the eyes of my students, I felt isolated, completely alone. A Kazakh wind blew across the building, rattling the windows, making the sub-zero temperature outside seem all the more cold.

Of the 17 students sitting before me, eight had made a treacherous journey over ice-covered mountains from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. They had driven all night, 300 miles, 10 hours, in order to arrive in time for the class. This class, *my class*. What were they thinking? What did they expect? What did they already know? Would the

materials I prepared actually help them, their teaching ministries, their churches?

What I needed was a compass to steer me in the right direction until we—these students and I, *together*—could discover common landmarks that would unite us in a common cause, a common journey. And lead us to a common outcome of growth in the Lord.

Fortunately, I had such a compass. What I lacked at this particular moment was any evidence that my compass was relevant to these Russian Baptists who lived and worked 11 time zones east of Fort Worth. There was only one way, one terrifying way, to find out. I silently voiced a prayer for help and stepped into the darkness. I could only hope my words would find fertile soil.

A Theology

Literally, the word *theology*, a combination of *theos* (God) and *logos* (study, discourse), means “the study of God.” His nature and attributes. A. H. Strong extends this definition to include “the whole range of Christian doctrine . . . of those relations between God and the universe in view of which we speak of Creation, Providence and Redemption.”¹ Klaus Issler echoed this classic sentiment in his contemporary definition: theology is “the study of God—who God is and what he has provided for his creation, both now and forever.”²

Theology is both science and philosophy. It is science in that it discovers the facts and relations that exist between God and the finite universe, that in turn are based on God’s works and activities. Just as physical science discovers facts about gravity and aerodynamics and orders those facts into their natural and proper relationship to produce the rational basis for flight, so, in the same way theology discovers facts about God’s creative, sustaining, and fulfilling work in the universe, including mankind, and produces the rational basis for God-ordered life, purpose, and destiny. Theology is *philosophy* in that it “exhibits these facts in their rational unity, as connected parts

¹ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1907; 32nd printing, 1979), 1.

² K. Issler, “Theological Foundations of Christian Education,” in Michael Anthony, *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 35. Issler’s chapter is highly recommended for anyone desiring a thorough treatise on the theological foundations of Christian education.

A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

of a formulated and organic system of truth” that is brought into contact with the human mind through revelation.³

Theology is our beginning point. Here is the foundation of our text: God exists, and in His very nature, He is Teacher. Further, the Church is, at its heart, a teaching institution, drawing the lost to faith and spiritual regeneration, prompting believers to transformation and sanctification, and equipping the saints for works of service in the real world.

Education

The term *education* has become an increasingly loaded term for the Church, especially in theological circles. A theologian friend of mine recently remarked that my continued use of the term “tainted me.” He could not tell me why, exactly, but the term had taken on a “liberal” connotation. It would be far better, he said, to use words like *discipleship* or *equipping*, or even the term popularized by our Catholic brethren: *spiritual formation*.

Even educational experts differ on both the meaning and methods of education. Dr. Jack Terry introduced me to the debate in 1974 in my first philosophy of education class. He noted that there are two different Latin roots of the English word *education*. They are *educare*, which means “to train or to mold,” and *educere*, meaning “to lead out.”

Forty years later the debate continues. Bass and Goode contrast these two perspectives of education and raise the question whether balance between the two camps can ever be achieved. *Educare* emphasizes the preservation of knowledge and the shaping of the next generation in the image of their parents. *Educere* emphasizes the preparation of a new generation for the changes that are to come, equipping them for the solving of problems yet unknown. *Educare* calls for direct instruction, subject mastery, and becoming good, reliable workers. *Educere* calls for questioning the givens, thinking “outside the box,” and creating new ways of seeing the world.⁴ Unfortunately, the recommendations forwarded in the article—

³ Strong, 2.

⁴ See V. R. Bass and J. W. Good, “Educare and Educere: Is a Balance Possible in the Educational System?” *Educational Forum* (Winter 2004), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qd4013/is_200401/a1_n9389288.

balancing old (*educare*) and new (*educere*), involving "stakeholders" in decision-making and increasing resources, leave us with little more than rehearsed word magic. The system itself is confused, and no one, it seems, is able to speak to the confusion.

Regardless of the endless theoretical and political debates, the result has been high school graduates by the tens of thousands who cannot make change, spell, or speak standard English. Fortunately, the term *education* in "Christian education" has a very different meaning.

Christian Education

Issler reached back to Nevin Harner's 1939 definition as the basis for his discussion of the theological foundations of Christian education: "Christian education is a reverent attempt to discover the divinely ordained process by which individuals grow in Christ-likeness, and to work with that process."⁵ There is much here to embrace. It is a *reverent* attempt, a journey, made in humility, of a truth-seeker. This truth is revealed to, not discovered by, the one who humbles himself under the mighty hand of God.⁶ The attempt focuses on the divinely ordained *process* of growth. Growth is not instantaneous but sequential. Not immediate but progressive. The attempt focuses on the *divinely ordained* process of growth. Just how does *God intend* a learner to move from lost rebel to found child? From "babe in Christ" to "well-equipped saint"?

This divinely ordained process of growth moves in a specific direction: *Christlikeness*. I like this focus on Christ and the goal to grow to be like Him. Strong does not hesitate to place Christ at the center of theology:

That Christ is the one and only Revealer of God, in nature, in humanity, in history, in science, in Scripture, is in my judgment the key to theology. . . . What think ye of Christ? is still the critical question, and none are entitled to the name of Christian who, in the face of evidence he has furnished us, cannot answer the question aright.⁷

A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The work of Christian education is to analyze that divinely ordained process of supernatural transformation as it intersects relevant life changes in preschoolers, children, youth, and adults who live in a natural world. This interaction of supernatural and natural processes of change carries the theological issues of conversion, regeneration, sanctification, and transformation into the realm of the social sciences—particularly educational psychology—as we deal honestly with changes in the cognitive (knowledge and understanding), affective (values and preferences), and behavioral (skills and habits) areas of life. The work of Christian education carries us into the Church and out into the world through ministry.

Issler states "the essential question" that Christian education must answer: How do we educate Christians?⁸ Dallas Willard goes a step further, detailing what the process looks like: "[Our goal is] transforming disciples inwardly, in such a way that doing the words and deeds of Christ is not the focus but the natural outcome or side effect."⁹ That is, becoming like Christ inwardly so that we naturally behave like Christ outwardly. None of us, of course, will become like Christ since He is God. But in moving toward Him, in "growing up into" Him (Eph 4:15 KJV), we become better than we were and more like what He created us to be.

Dennis Williams goes farther still, summarizing several evangelical definitions for Christian education this way: "Bible-based, theologically sound, Holy Spirit-empowered, the elements of teaching/learning/growth/equipping, change, the church, evangelism, and service. Christian education, then, is more than merely teaching Christians."¹⁰

A Theology of Christian Education

Williams's words carry me back to my fervent, fearful prayers in the early 1970s, as I struggled to find ways to teach deaf college students in my Bible class. "Lord, how should I teach so that these learners will grow up into You?" I struggled with teaching into the

⁵ Issler, 35.

⁶ 1 Pet 5:6.

⁷ Strong, vii, ix.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ D. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 240.

¹⁰ D. Williams, "Christian Education," *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Michael Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

unknown. What did these deaf college students know? What had been their experiences with the Lord, with Church, with Scripture? What did they need to grow toward the Lord, and after conversion, to grow up in the Lord? How should I prepare my “lessons”? What should be the focus of my teaching?

Over the next three years of teaching these college students, the Lord brought experiences into the classroom that answered all these questions. Over five years of masters’ and doctoral studies in Foundations of Education at Southwestern Seminary, the Lord laid strong theological, philosophical, and psychological foundations under my experiences and produced, in the end, a concise theology of Christian education. Those of you familiar with 30 years of the *Disciplers’ Handbook*, or the first chapter of *Created to Learn* (1996), or the framework of *Called to Reach* (2007) will recognize it immediately. I ask for your patient indulgence as I lay it out once again for new readers.

A Theology of Christian Education: The Disciplers’ Model

No single model can encompass the whole of Christian growth. Like Piaget’s table of three cones,¹¹ the “truth” of the cones remains the same even as their appearance changes as one moves around the table. So the truth of God’s plan for the spiritual formation of disciples—justification (conversion, regeneration), sanctification (discipleship, being equipped), and final glorification—does not change; but we can see His plan from many different perspectives. There are many helpful models, which is why I am using the indefinite article—“a” theology of Christian education.

The Disciplers’ Model is the answer to that simple yet profound question I prayed for during those early years. While it may sound sanctimonious—perhaps a bit self-serving—to claim that this model of mine is “the Lord’s answer,” I know of no other way to say it. I cannot claim any right of creation or discovery. My intent is to honor the Lord who answered my prayers and who gave me the means to teach into the Deaf unknown with confidence and into many unknowns since. The Disciplers’ Model became, and remains, my

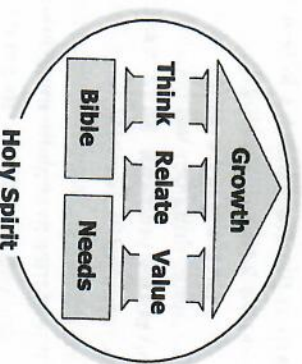
¹¹ Picture a table with three cones, a larger one behind, and two smaller ones in front. As one moves around the table, the two-dimensional perception of the cones changes, while the three-dimensional reality remains constant.

A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

teaching compass. And now, after 30 years, I can say that this simple model represents a divinely ordained process that has never failed to move my students or me in the direction of spiritual growth and Christlikeness.¹²

The surrounding circle of the model represents the Holy Spirit as Teacher, the One who holds all the other elements together in a balanced synergism. In our text we will look closely at “God as Teacher,” with chapters 3, 4, and 5 detailing Father, Son, and Spirit as Teacher. God is, in His very nature, a Teacher. The more we imitate His methods and manners, and the more we allow Him to teach through us, the more effective we will be in facilitating spiritual growth.¹³

The two foundation stones of the model are the Bible (eternal truth) and needs of learners (present needs). In every teaching encounter of Jesus, we see Him conveying eternal truths to learners in the context of their immediate (though not always well-perceived) needs. Chapter 6, “The Bible as Curriculum,” provides a theological analysis of Scripture as the central focus of Christian teaching, whatever other curricular helps we choose. Chapter 12, “How to Study the Bible,” provides practical helps in “rightly dividing the Word of Truth” in preparation for teaching. Chapter 7, “The Disciple,” focuses on the general needs of all learners and the process of discipling, while chapters 15, 16, 17, and 18 detail specific needs of preschoolers, children,



The Disciplers’ Model

¹² Am I, after these 30 years, like Christ? No. Am I more like Christ today than I was 30 years ago? By all means, I still frustrate my wife and embarrass my children. I still anger (or disappoint) my students. My (lack of) warm social skills call for gracious patience on the part of dear colleagues. But I am better today than I was before. Because of Him.

¹³ For those unfamiliar with the Disciplers’ Model, and wanting to learn more, you can find much more extensive discussions in *The Disciplers’ Handbook: From Transmitting Lessons to Transforming Lives* (1979; 9th ed., 2006), which can be downloaded as PDF files free of charge from the North American Professors of Christian Education Web site (<http://www.NAPCE.org>).

youth, and adults, as well as suggested methods for helping learners in these age groupings grow spiritually.

Three pillars define the process of spiritual growth. The left pillar focuses on helping learners think. It stands on the left foundation stone, the Bible, and emphasizes the need to understand the meaning of Scripture for daily living. Here we help learners contrast their own personal perceptions of subjective truth with the eternal truth of God. The right pillar focuses on helping learners integrate the values of Scripture into personal priority systems. It stands on the right foundation stone, learner needs, and emphasizes the personal relevance of God's Word for "my needs." Here we help learners contrast their own emotional turmoil with emotional maturity that comes from God. Chapter 11, "The Goal of Christian Education: Christlikeness," analyzes these two processes in detail.

The central pillar focuses on helping learners establish relationships. Churches are communities of faith in which we pray, "Our Father in heaven." Part of the process of growing spiritually is connecting with other believers in meaningful ways, and this happens best in small, interactive classes and even smaller groupings within classes. We cannot grow alone, no matter how independent or self-reliant we may choose to be. These relational aspects are covered in chapter 8, "The Church's Role in Teaching," and Chapter 9, "The Family's Role in Teaching."

The capstone of the model is our goal, growth in Christ. We lead learners to think beyond personal perceptions by asking questions and posing problems. More than engaging them in an academic pursuit of truth, we help them consider their perceptions in light of God's message. We move them beyond a simple acquaintance with Bible stories to actually *living biblically*. This is rational growth.

We lead learners to remove emotional "smiley face" masks and become more real by sharing ourselves and listening, to move toward emotional maturity by "putting off" negative attitudes in the discipling group, to overcome personal hurts through mutual support in the love of Christ. This is emotional growth.

We lead learners to relate meaningfully with others, *receiving from them freely* when in need, and *giving freely to them* when they are in need, to move them into ministry with others in the name of the One

who feed them from self-centeredness and its resulting stagnation. This is relational growth.

Thinking, feeling and valuing, and relating are aspects of spiritual growth in Christ. Chapter 10, "The Pastor as Teacher," provides guidance as we engage believers and encourage them to become pastor-teachers in their own right. Chapter 11, "The Goal of Christian Education," provides the capstone for the theological section of the text and defines a means to lead believers to develop toward Christlikeness.

A Theology of Christian Education Organization

For theology to take root in a local congregation, it needs a framework, an anchor. The Disciples' Model itself is organized, but to engage a given congregation, there must be organizational connections between theory and practice. Our text is more than a teaching text. It is designed to help leaders and congregations develop a plan for growth. Chapter 2, "A Theology of Organization," provides the biblical basis for such an organizational structure. Chapter 13, "Planning to Teach," and Chapter 14, "Creating an Unforgettable Lesson," provide specific details for organizing learning experiences. Chapter 19, "How to Select Curriculum," provides practical helps for choosing the right materials from a wide variety of sources. Chapter 20, "Teacher Training," provides practical guidance in setting up, maintaining, and conducting ongoing teacher training efforts. Chapter 21, "Administering Educational Programs," provides specific guidelines for coordinating the many avenues for spiritual growth within the congregation. Chapter 22, "Ministering Alongside Volunteers," provides guidance in enlisting, organizing, training, and supporting the many volunteers needed for a multifaceted Christian education program. Chapter 23, "Evaluating the Teaching Ministry," provides practical guidelines for analyzing present strengths and weaknesses in a congregation's Christian education enterprise.

These administrative guidelines and suggestions provide "the cup," the container, which delivers Living Water to the thirsty and Living Bread to the hungry. The Disciples' Model provides a picture of the process by which Water and Bread are assimilated into the

system, individually and collectively, that we might "grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph 4:15).

Teaching into the Unknown—Revisited

I was teaching into the unknown, using my educational compass, but not knowing whether it could guide me in this unknown land. During a session on that first, frigid day in Kazakhstan, I asked a question. A student in the back of the room raised his hand and answered. It was a good answer, and it led me to elaborate. When I paused, the student raised his hand and said, "I wish to apologize to the professor for the inadequacy of my answer. I will endeavor to do better in the future." Apparently, my additional comment made him think I considered his answer incomplete. "Your answer was fine. You answered the question well. My additional comment was not a criticism of your answer but merely a way to extend the thought. I call that teaching. No apology is needed." During the next break he moved his things from the back of the room to the front and joined the discussions.

Later in the week I decided to use small groups to integrate my presentation with what they experienced in their own churches. I gave a brief overview of a portion of the material and then divided the students into six groups. I asked them to consider ways they were already using the material in their churches. They looked perplexed. I explained again, and all but one group set about doing their best. The one group called me over and, through my translator, asked what I wanted exactly. I explained the assignment again.

My translator turned to me and said, "They do not understand what you want. *They cannot do what you are asking.*" It made me a little angry, quite frankly. It reminded me of all the hearing folks I met years ago who claimed that Deaf people could not "discuss Bible passages"—that they needed simple teaching, "on their level." What I discovered was that it was usually the sign language limitations of the hearing leaders that was at fault, not the mental or social or language limitations of the Deaf. Experiences with groups of Deaf youth and adults demonstrated that they did well with question-and-answer approaches, with discussion, and with problem-solving activities once they were given the opportunity. No, these Russian

Baptist leaders could do exactly what I was asking. They just needed a little prompting.

I turned to the interpreter and said, "They can do what I am asking, and they will do what I am asking, and *you* will be amazed!" The words surprised me, so I prayed, hoping that the Lord had prompted them! I told her to tell the group to do the best they could. She rolled her eyes and did as I asked. They rolled their eyes and turned to the task.

A few minutes later I asked for reports. No one moved. I asked again, "Who will come and share your group's conclusions?" One of the members of a group elbowed another and told him to report. He obediently walked to the front and began, timidly, to report. His statements were tentative and rather simple, but they were correct. With each point he made, I responded with some of the affirming words I'd learned in Russian: "good," "yes," "I agree," "correct," "excellent." With each affirmation his confidence grew, and he shared more. It took little encouragement to get the second and third and fourth reporters to the front.

We moved to the second section of material, and during the process of their group work, the time for tea break arrived, which Russians take quite seriously. Discussion on the material continued as they walked to the dining hall, and during the 20-minute teatime, and on their way back. Once back in the classroom, they quickly reassembled in their groups. Discussion was more lively now, practical applications deepened, diagrams were created and redrawn to explain points. Students made more discoveries and raised deeper questions about church practices and how they fit into the material. The darkness of the unknown was receding. They were behaving like students the world over.

In the midst of the third session of "rowdy" discussions, my translator looked at me with an amazed expression on her face and said, "I've never seen anything like this." Praise the Lord!

In the last session, while discussing the Holy Spirit as Teacher, one student, an academic vice president from Bishkek, stepped to the marker board and drew what looked like a tongue hanging down from the surrounding circle of the model. He explained that it was a handle, making the circle into a magnifying glass. "The Holy Spirit is

a magnifying glass. Only He can show us truly"—and at this point, he began pointing to the various parts of the model—"what the Bible says, what our needs are, how we need to think and value, how to teach so our people can grow in Christ." I was so impressed that I violated the old Soviet code of educational practice ["Teachers must never allow students to know they've learned from them"]. I told him I had never thought of that before but that I would certainly use it from now on. This experienced academic dean simply beamed with delight. There were scores of such "moments" during the week. The final exam came, and all the students passed.

As we met for the last time, one of the students, the president of the Russian Baptist Union in Central Asia, stood and spoke for the class. "Thank you for this class. You have not only taught us how to teach, but more importantly you have shown us how to teach. We will never teach our classes the same way again. Please come again."

The Bishkek contingent made their way to their vans for the long trek back over the mountains. I went to get my bags. I was so thankful to the Lord for the good response. Thirty minutes later, the building secure, I got into the car and noticed that all the students were standing next to their vans. It was well below freezing outside, but there they stood, hats removed, waiting. Waiting for what? As we drove past them, they turned to face the car as we made our way out the drive, waving good-bye. I am not a weeper, but I wept at that sight. As we turned the corner, they tumbled into the vans, and headed home. The Holy Spirit had brought us together, built relational bridges, and shined the Lord's resurrection light into the darkness of the unknown.

I feel strange sharing the story, as if it is something I should simply treasure in my heart. But the words illustrate the point. The Compass can lead us even as we teach into the unknown. Life and Light had grown in the darkness that week, and it was Christ. The Compass is a theology of Christian education—Bible based, Christ centered, learner oriented—that led me through the early unknowns of that week, that led us all to a level above both our cultures, and that opened the door for further teaching opportunities.

It is this same theology of Christian education that we offer you through the pages of this text. To this end—growth in Christ—we

all have labored over these months. To this end we have prayed and studied and written. May Christ be lifted up, and may the Church be strengthened, as you give yourself first to the Lord and then to the heartfelt words written in these pages. Lord Jesus, make it so!

A THEOLOGY OF ORGANIZATION: WORKING TOGETHER

Bob Welch

Since God is not a God of disorder but of peace . . .
everything must be done decently and in order.

(1 Cor 14:33, 40)

As a professor of church administration, I am frequently asked to advise pastors and other ministers about the organization of their churches. I analyze various structuring documents like organizational charts, the constitution and bylaws, and policy manuals. I ask questions like, "How many individuals do you directly supervise?" and "How is the laity of the church organized to exercise their spiritual gifts?"

From these observations I can quickly determine the underlying philosophy and theology for conducting the affairs of the church. Research clearly demonstrates that the *minister who does not have a proper grasp of the biblical role of leadership is destined for a weak and often unsatisfactory ministry.*¹

A Pastor in Distress

I recently recognized this very fact in my own pastor. The press of administrative details of the church was driving him from effective pastoral ministry. The harder he worked, the less he was able to accomplish the work God called him to do in our church. I strongly

¹ For a summary of research conducted in staff mortality, see the preface to Robert Welch, *Church Administration: Crediting Efficiency for Effective Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2003).

encouraged him to call an associate pastor for administration who could assist him in these details. While I fully understood his need to do so, and the benefits he would gain, I wondered whether he saw the need and would carry through.

Organization Is Natural

I stand in awe of the beauty and wonder of nature. I love to look into the evening sky and view hundreds of stars that shine down from their places millions of miles away. As I study the heavens through my telescope, this grandeur is magnified a thousand times over. With each morning's sunrise, the splendor of our own planet reveals itself in a burst of color, movement, and power.

Having been trained as a scientist, I am spellbound at the intricate design of the creation of our heavenly Father. From the one-celled amoeba, whose exact organization is mirrored millions of times over in a laboratory beaker, to the complex creature called human, whose essence is made up of millions upon billions of single cells, one sees the handiwork of the remarkable Creator.

Just think of it! When you plant an apple seed, you always get an apple tree. Further, that tree produces apples, and those apples produce seeds that will produce more apple trees. Ever wonder why the apple seed does not produce a pear tree? Or a lemon tree? All three are fruit trees and serve the same general purpose—to provide fruit to eat. Why did God, in His creation, bring order and organization to the various elements of our world? Why do fungus and mold differ from the grass? Why does grass differ from the rosebush? And why does the rosebush differ from the oak tree? Even among trees, why does the oak tree, with all its strength and usefulness, differ significantly from the giant sequoia tree of coastal California? To the Christian the answer is simple: because God in His creative act ordered it so.

Since the beginning of time mankind has accepted the concept that creation, so intricate in design, required a Creator, a Designer. Scientists over the past hundred years or so have postulated theories that our universe, including the earth and mankind, evolved by happenstance. Foremost in this change of view was the work of Charles Darwin in the middle part of the nineteenth century. His theory of evolution (often called Darwinism) concluded that, through a random combination of

chemicals and environments, the organisms and life forms we see today evolved. Darwin provided an intellectually acceptable alternative to the ordered design of God.

You might think my primary objection to Darwin's theory, being a Creationist, is its obvious religious significance. But far more troubling for me, as a scientist, is its weakness from a scientific perspective. Every scientific venue—chemistry, biology, mathematics, geology, physics—has refuted the theory. Darwinism cannot be demonstrated as an acceptable theory because it cannot be duplicated in the laboratory, which is the standard proof a theory requires.

Specifically, when a mutation occurs in nature—an event required to produce a different species—its modification cannot be sustained to the next generation. Generally, both the laws of probability, which stand against mutational changes in the first place, and the second law of thermodynamics, which demands atrophy (decline) in those changes which spontaneously occur, determine that modifications must grow worse, not better, unless acted on from an Outside Force. And science declines to consider the Outside Force.²

This rejection of the supernatural, as part of the natural order of things, places some Darwinists in a bind. They are abandoning their support of evolution theory, because the theory cannot be verified empirically. Yet they continue to seek a "natural explanation" for life as we know it.

The Bible directly speaks to the natural order of the universe in its opening verse: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). As I look at the story of creation in the first chapters of Genesis, I am captured by the progression—the sequence—of the creation events. First light from darkness, then separation of waters; vegetation and the biological creatures appear after land, water, and food are available. God's ultimate creation was man, who was placed in charge (dominion) over it all. There was order, and it was good.

² For a comprehensive defense of the biblical account of the creation and a discussion of the questions surrounding the evolutionist from a contemporary scientist's view see: Phillip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993; the perspective of a lawyer); Luther Sutherland, *Darwin's Enigma: Ebbing the Tide of Naturalism* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1997); J.C. Sanford, *Genetic Entropy & the Mystery of the Genome* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Michael Behe *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); and John Ashton, *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2000). Each of these authors takes the tenets of Darwin's evolution and discredits the theory from a variety of scientific disciplines.

A THEOLOGY OF ORGANIZATION: WORKING TOGETHER

19

I am a young earth scientist who views the earth as being thousands, not millions, of years old. Even secular historians have difficulty dating "civilizations" much older than several thousands of years. Therefore, when the Bible speaks of civilizations like the Egyptian and Sumerian, with sophisticated political, military, and religious systems, it describes a humankind created with a sense of order and organization from the very beginning of man.

Organization Is Biblical

Joseph's Example

In the earliest parts of the Bible, we find evidence of innate human organizational philosophy. Much of the early part of Genesis details the family structure of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (later called Israel) lived by family and community rules.

As we move into the later part of Genesis, we find the son of Jacob prominently engaged in organization. Joseph's story is told from Genesis 37 onward. Joseph was the favored son of Jacob and was sold into Egyptian slavery at age 17 by his jealous brothers. He first served in the household of Potiphar, captain of the guard and an officer to the pharaoh. Because of his excellent service, he was put in charge of the entire household. The context of the biblical story develops around his wrongful placement in prison and his ultimate release because of his God-given ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. In Genesis 41, Joseph suggests practical ways to deliver Egypt from a future famine.

The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone like this, a man who has the spirit of God in him?" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as intelligent and wise as you. You will be over my house, and all my people will obey your commands. Only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." (Gen 41:37-40)

Organization in the court of the pharaoh not only saved Egypt from starvation but also provided an escape for Jacob's family and the movement of the nation of Israel into Egypt. This movement of

the covenant people from the promised land would set the stage for a second example of God's use of organization during the time of the exodus.

Jethro's Advice

The story of Moses and his leadership in the exodus of Israel from Egypt 400 years later teaches an important organizational axiom: *no matter how good we are, we cannot do it alone.* For 40 years Moses lived in the household of the Egyptian pharaoh. He was groomed as a member of the ruling family, which included military training, as well as education in the history and politics of the cultures of his day. His career as an Egyptian leader came to an end when he killed a taskmaster who was abusing a Jewish slave. As a result, Moses spent 40 years as an exile in the Midianite Desert in the household of Jethro, a Midianite priest.

Moses was called by God to free Israel from slavery and to return her to the promised land. In Exodus 18, we find Jethro bringing Moses' family to him in the wilderness. Jethro notices that things are not going well for Moses. In fact, we might say that the term "disorganization" would be kind. In verse 14, Jethro asks Moses,

"What is this thing you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?"

Moses replied to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach [them] God's statutes and laws." (Exod 18:14-16)

One would think Jethro would be proud of his son-in-law's devotion to God's call for leadership. But such is not the case. Jethro declares, "What you're doing is not good." Notice Jethro's explanation to Moses. He faults Moses for poor leadership: "You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can't do it alone" (Exod 18:18). Then Jethro gives sage advice that many in ministry miss even to this day. Jethro told Moses that his leadership role was to represent the people to God. He was to be the principal teacher, to teach them God's stat-

utes and laws as well as to teach them the way to live and what they must do. That was Moses' role, his responsibility.

Jethro then advises Moses to delegate other leadership responsibilities to selected men who were able, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hated bribes. Leaders would be assigned to various sized groups of people based on their ability. A principle to be learned from this structure is that, from the lowest to the highest leader, each person was subordinate to someone, with ultimate authority vested in Moses.

"Now listen to me; I will give you some advice, and God be with you. You be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to Him. Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place [them] over the people as officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every important case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear [it] with you." (Exod 18:19-22)

Jethro describes the expected result of sharing responsibility, while at the same time retaining authority.

"If you do this, and God [so] directs you, you will be able to endure, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied."

Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. (Exod 18:23-24)

Here are some key elements to this lesson from Exodus 18:

- God calls out individuals to provide leadership.
- Some tasks can be accomplished alone; others require the help of others.
- There may be dire consequences if a leader does not delegate responsibilities to others in the group.
- By assigning portions of a task to a subordinate, leaders are able to focus on the principal elements of their God-assigned task.

- Persons who are given jobs by leaders should meet certain limiting qualifications for the assignment.
- The wise leader will assign responsibilities based on the ability of the person to perform the task.³

The First Deacons

Let's visit this lesson of organization as it is played out in a situation recorded by Dr. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. In chapter 6 we find a racial dispute in the first-century church. In this situation the widows of some Hellenistic Jews, that is, Jews of Greek language and culture, were not being cared for equally with the widows from the Hebraic Jewish community. The Hebraic Jews were responding to the teachings of Moses (Exod 22:22; Deut 10:18; 24:17-22) that required caring for widows and orphans. The Hellenistic Jews felt that the church should provide care equally to all widows.

How did the apostles, the leaders of the church, respond to this problem? They called the whole congregation to a meeting. Listen to their words in Acts 6:2-4:

Then the Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to wait on tables. Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry."

Note the similarity of the response to that of Exodus 18:

- The apostles stated their leadership role—prayer and ministry of the Word.
- The persons to be placed in charge of waiting on tables were to be selected from among their number.
- There were specific qualifications of those to be selected—"men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom."
- The apostles would delegate these selected workers their task.
- The word "select" indicates an election process, and those chosen were keenly interested in the service of ministry.

³ Robert Welch, *Church Administration*. In the first four chapters of the text, the author provides practical application of the biblical principles noted here.

- The apostles would lay hands on the selected men in commissioning them to this task.

Verse 7 provides the results of this organized ministry: "So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith."

The sharing of responsibility and leadership, seen in Jethro's advice and the commissioning of deacons, underscores the general wisdom expressed in Eccles 4:9-12.

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? And if somebody overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

We see this wisdom displayed in the life of Jesus Himself, as He chose 12 "to be with Him" (Mark 3:14).

The Twelve Apostles

While God often calls and empowers individuals to ministry tasks, He also assigns responsibilities to groups. The 12 apostles provide the obvious example. Dr. Luke records the appointment of the Twelve in Luke 6:12-16.

During those days He went out to the mountain to pray and spent all night in prayer to God. When daylight came, He summoned His disciples, and He chose 12 of them—He also named them apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Jesus' ministry was well underway at this time, and He had many followers. Why would He choose to invest time and energy in the lives of a select dozen? Perhaps the term *apostle* itself provides a key. The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* gives the meaning of the word derived from the Greek *apostolos* as "one who is sent." In its

primary meaning, the term refers to these 12 whom Jesus chose to train for the task of carrying His message to the world. These men had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry and were witnesses to His resurrection. He commissioned them for this very task following His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus knew that His short time on earth would be insufficient for Him to spread the good news of His saving grace throughout the world. Jesus empowered others to carry out that task in His place. After pouring His life into these chosen apostles through teaching and example, Jesus accomplished on the cross what He alone could accomplish—our salvation. But then Jesus delegated an assignment to them (Matt 28:16-20):

The 11 disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted.

Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

They had been called, trained, organized, and now commissioned. Jesus reminds them that He will always be with them as their supervisor, reemphasizing a promise He made earlier in the upper room: "I will not leave you as orphans, I am coming to you" (John 14:12), meaning, of course, His presence with them in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Church

No sense of biblical organization appears more vividly than the organization of the church itself, as described by Paul. The church became the quintessential manifestation of God's divine organization to spread the good news of His Son to the whole world. Read how Paul described the church to the believers in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 12:

Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are

A THEOLOGY OF ORGANIZATION: WORKING TOGETHER

different activities, but the same God is active in every one and everything. A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial. (vv. 4-7)

... For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. (v. 12)

... Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. (vv. 24b-25)

... Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it. And God has placed these in the church:

first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, next, miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, managing, various kinds of languages. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all do miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in languages? Do all interpret?

[No, is the obvious answer. We need each other!]

But desire the greater gifts.

And I will show you an even better way. (vv. 27-31; leading into the "love chapter," chapter 13)

To the church at Rome Paul wrote in Romans 12:4-5: "Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another."

And finally to the church at Ephesus, Paul described the leadership role responsibilities in the church and the objective of their guidance:

And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, [growing] into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we

will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part. (Eph 4:11–16)⁴

Leaders

In his later years Paul wrote Timothy, his “son in the faith,” and described for him the leadership he expected in the church. He calls the leaders (1) “elders,” a term of maturity and wisdom; (2) “bishops,” a term of spiritual authority; (3) “presbyters,” a term of leadership authority; and (4) “pastors,” a term of shepherding care. In these verses Paul gave specific criteria in selection and qualification of these men whom the Holy Spirit would call out for the direction and work of the church. They were to be individuals who

must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an able teacher, not addicted to wine, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy—one who manages his own household competently, having his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?). He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and fall into the condemnation of the Devil. Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the Devil’s trap. (1 Tim 3:2–7)

While many other texts from Scripture could be included in this introduction to the biblical role of organization, these few included here make clear that God is a God of order (1 Cor 14:40). God’s creation, from atom to galaxy, displays for all to see God’s eye for design and detail. The progression of recorded history is stamped clearly with the footprint of a resolute, ordered plan that from the beginning

⁴ See chapter 11, “The Goal of Christian Education,” for a full exegesis of this seminal passage.

had as its goal the redemption of God’s creation back unto Himself. In the Church we find the creation of an organism and organization to proclaim the gospel of good news of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. Even the admonition passages of Christ’s last instructions define a progression. We are to make disciples worldwide by (1) baptizing them, that is, evangelism, and (2) teaching them, that is, discipleship (Matt 28:19–20). And we are to do this from our hometown to our local Judea, our adjacent Samaria, and to the whole world. Wherever there are disunity and disorder, we find human activity without God’s design and direction.

A Pastor’s Distress Relieved

Is organization biblical? My pastor believes in organization. Our church called an administrator, an “ad-minister,” who is now responsible for the everyday operational elements of the church. The pastor, as well as every minister on our staff, now has greater freedom, like the apostles of old, to give themselves fully to the ministry they were called to fulfill by the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

As you read the chapters that follow, keep in mind the biblical admonition for being “fully trained.” The writers of our text have given themselves to the Lord in order to fulfill what He expects: to provide adequate instruction so that you will be able to perform the ministry the Holy Spirit has placed on you. Jesus said: “Can the blind guide the blind? Won’t they both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:39–40). An old Latin proverb says the same thing a different way: “By learning you will teach, by teaching you will learn.” The one called to be a student of Christ is compelled not to learn simply for the sake of learning (or to get a degree), but to learn for the sake of teaching others. May God bless your learning now, that you may become effective teachers of others, who will, in turn, bless those they teach.