

On Schools of Preaching

Matthew Emile Vaughan

This essay is intended to (re)introduce schools of preaching to the academic and ministerial communities within Churches of Christ (*a cappella*).¹ I am making a call for more rigorous and sustained engagement with these schools and their theologies. In doing so, I hope to shed light on a neglected topic and provide an extensive bibliography to lay the groundwork for future research and writing.² I will present these schools as educational institutions under three broad headings: locating the schools of preaching within a specific historical context (that of the United States in the mid-late 20th century); defining the schools and describing their status as educational institutions affiliated with Churches of Christ today; and providing a framework for their philosophies of education.³ The essay concludes with general observations and questions about these schools and the impact their witness continues to have on Churches of Christ. I am writing this essay from the perspective of both a religious educator (one interested in philosophies of education and the role of schools in shaping theology and ministry), and a lifelong member of Churches of Christ (one who is deeply concerned with the future of our fractured fellowship).

Schools of preaching have been powerfully influential in Churches of Christ in the past 50 years. Schools of preaching are small institutions that award certificates of completion to students after a period of roughly two years of study. These schools are typically part of a specific congregation; they are tuition-free; and their curricula center almost exclusively on the English-language Bible. They have produced thousands of graduates who have gone on to plant churches and work within established ministries all over the world.⁴

¹ I use the term "(re)introduce" intentionally: to my knowledge, there has been no mention of these schools within any of the scholarly literature of the Stone-Campbell Movement since David Fleer, "Schools of Preaching" in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnavant, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 672-673.

² These footnotes represent what is, to my knowledge, the most thorough bibliography on schools of preaching in print. Particularly in the sections on history, though, much of it is borrowed and supplemented from Jim Harris, *Schools of Preaching: An Evaluation of Ministry Preparation* (Fort Worth: Star Bible Publications, 1984), 118-125. Harris did a rather helpful job of presenting articles on the historical backgrounds and theological foundations of schools of preaching—mostly from the *Firm Foundation* and the *Gospel Advocate*. This volume is the result of his M.A. Thesis at Abilene Christian University. I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Harris (who now serves as the Dean of Graduate Studies at Sunset Bible Institute) for having read and responded to an early draft of this essay; his insights and clarifications made this a better piece.

³ See the appendix for a listing of some of the more prominent schools of preaching: their names, locations, and the length of their operation.

⁴ Jim Harris, *Schools of Preaching*, 36, noted over 5,000 graduates by the mid 1980s alone. That number has, to be sure, grown exponentially. Sunset claims that over 30,000 people are currently studying with their materials. See their "30,000? Really?" at http://www.sibi.cc/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=436&Itemid=259 (accessed 14 November 2012).

Although their influence is often not felt deeply in the academy, these schools have a powerful presence in many congregational and para-church settings—particularly in rural areas. These schools are not a phenomenon of the past. Schools of preaching are still beginning, and will continue to attract a considerable portion of the potential ministers, leaders, and donors within Churches of Christ. They serve a multifaceted function—offering a voice of concern and critique to what many members of Churches of Christ perceive to be troubling theological trends, while simultaneously providing a radical, homiletically-focused education model. These schools do tend to represent a polemic constituency, but they also provide new opportunities for the growth of the church.

Though schools of preaching are shaping Churches of Christ across the country (and represent an educational model unique to Churches of Christ), scholarly literature surrounding them is disturbingly scarce. There have been no major works published by university-affiliated historians dealing with these schools or their effect on the theology of our churches.⁵ There have only been small, lesser known, publications, such as Jim Harris's concise *Schools of Preaching: An Evaluation of Ministerial Preparation*, which is both outdated (having been published in 1984) and apologetic in nature.⁶ No formal appraisal or critique has been offered either from within or outside these schools in the past thirty years. While drafting a history of the preaching school movement may well be the responsibility of the schools themselves, it would be a beneficial undertaking. Such a project would perhaps provide both a historical sketch and a theological lens for better understanding Churches of Christ in the mid-late 20th century.

This is, however, not to imply that there is no literature surrounding these schools. To the contrary, these schools are mentioned and discussed within some of the more conservative, popular-level publication companies in Churches of Christ.⁷ A great deal of literature dealing with these school and

⁵ Mention of these institutions is even absent from many of the standard texts dealing with the SCM. Leroy Garrett's *The Stone-Campbell Movement: The Story of the American Restoration Movement* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981) only gave schools of preaching a brief excerpt, and that only in the context of their relationship with the established universities (447). Richard Hughes, in his *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) devoted only four pages to the schools of preaching (330-3).

⁶ Harris' book was the result of a survey that he sent to all of the schools of preaching and universities associated with the Churches of Christ. The book is more a quantitative compilation of graphs and statistics than a history or critique.

⁷ I am referring specifically to publication companies such as Star Publications (Fort Worth, TX), Gospel Advocate (Nashville, TN), Sain Publications (Pulaski, TN), Apologetics Press (Montgomery, AL), and Publication Designs (Huntsville, AL). There have also been numerous journal articles published dealing with these schools of preaching—mostly from within periodicals such as *Gospel Advocate*, *Firm Foundation*, *Contending for the Faith*, and the *Spiritual Sword*. Most of these articles are apologetic in nature, with very little literature being published in critique of these schools. The fact that many of the reflective works written on these schools are substantially outdated further complicates this complex field. For an example of good (though outdated) work on this topic, see Ray Bohannon "The School of Preaching: A New Concept of

their theologies comes from either the schools themselves or their alumni. Most of the schools of preaching that are still in operation today publish a significant amount of print literature—mostly topical (from the Bible) in nature, but with a marked interest in the “current events” of Churches of Christ.⁸ In that sense, this literature is as theological as it is exegetical.

Section 1: Historical Context

Many prominent schools of preaching were founded within the decades of 1960-1980. The first such Sunset International Bible Institute, which began in 1962 as Latin American Bible School (see below for a brief history); Sunset served as a paradigm for many of the subsequent schools.⁹ These schools of preaching were founded in reaction to two historical phenomena: the perceived preacher shortage among Churches of Christ, and an anti-scholastic response to the cultural shifts in the 1960s in the post-war United States (and post-war Protestantism). While the shape of American Christianity was changing, nothing is as significant for schools of preaching as the perceived preacher shortage within Churches of Christ from the late 1950s until roughly the late 1980s. With prominent church leaders and journal editors bemoaning the vacant pulpits, a call for more preachers began to sound beginning in the late 1950s.¹⁰

These calls for more preachers also carried with them speculation as to the causes of the shortage. Individual writers tended to argue for different causes of the shortage of preachers; there were some who laid the blame on the Church of Christ as a whole,¹¹ while others laid the blame on specific conditions. The prominent such condition is financial. Ministers, it was thought, were not considering, or were leaving, the ministry because they could make more money in other professions. There are frequent references to the growing

Teaching in the Churches of Christ” (M.A. Thesis, San Diego State College, 1970), available in the libraries of Pepperdine University, Harding University (Searcy), and Lipscomb University.

⁸ The literature that is published through many of these schools takes the form of lectureship books (for example, MSOP publishes their lectureship books annually, and have done so since 1966) and articles published in journals such as *Contending for the Faith*. These sources enjoy a limited, but loyal, readership. Many of these schools publish monthly or quarterly publications, distributed to their constituents and donors.

⁹ Sunset has undergone several name changes in its history. I refer to it throughout this essay simply as “Sunset.”

¹⁰ The literature around the preacher shortage is considerably large. One of the first articles (and a good introduction to the conversation) was that of J.P. Sanders, “Our Need for Preachers,” *Gospel Advocate* 99 (January 3, 1957): 1, 11. See also Alan M. Bryan, “The Shortage of Preachers,” *Gospel Advocate* 101 (December 3, 1959): 772-3. I also refer the reader to Cline R. Paden, “An ‘Issue’ Facing the Church,” *Firm Foundation* 80 (May 21, 1963): 323.

¹¹ See the humble concession by O.J. Russell (then instructor at the Preston Road School of Preaching), “The Opportunity of Schools of Preaching,” *Abilene Christian College Annual Bible Lectures, 1967* (1967), 119: “The stubborn, sobering fact is: *we have not kept pace with the needs of the time, and our generation with its multiform aspects is not being reached with the gospel*” (emphasis his).

feeling among preachers that professional preaching carries with it a stigma of low incomes, poor housing, and fickle employers. B.C. Goodpasture offered a more coherent and nuanced approach. He wrote in 1957 that four problems had converged to create the scarcity of preachers in Churches of Christ: low financial opportunities for preachers, the population growth of the United States, lack of formal education for preachers, and discouragement among potential preachers.¹² Writing in 1962, Batsell Barrett Baxter articulated a similar thesis (albeit a short and presumptive one) in order to explain the shortage of preachers. In keeping with Goodpasture, Baxter also argued that the preaching shortage is a result of a combination of several changes taking place in the minds of the youth of Churches of Christ: while money was his first culprit, his second culprit was the negligence of Churches of Christ toward the formation of preachers. He argued that elders, established preachers, and parents of male¹³ children were to blame for not correcting these evils. He also vaguely conceded the need for more professional training for preachers.¹⁴ This was a need the preaching schools soon would meet.

It now seems obvious that both Thomas H. Olbricht¹⁵ and Richard Hughes¹⁶ are correct in asserting that the most pressing reason for the shortage of preachers was the population surge within the baby-boomer generation. With the missionary zeal of the 1950s, congregations affiliated with Churches of Christ were being planted across the country; there was a simple, and pervasive, presumption that there were not enough men willing and able to fill those pulpits. But there is certainly more to the preacher shortage than a growing American population—although the population growth exacerbated the image of the problem. To complicate the communal distress over the preacher shortage, beginning in 1962 Baxter attempted to count the number of preachers who were planning to enter into full-time pulpit ministry from the various educational institutions associated with Churches of Christ. His most important was the 1970 census in which he declared that the schools of preaching were producing roughly a third of the potential preachers in Churches of Christ.¹⁷ His findings were often quite subjective and unhelpful; he did not have any criteria for measuring retention, his definition of ministry was limited to the work of pulpit preaching, and he had no way of measuring people who began preaching

¹² B.C. Goodpasture, “Contributing Factors to the Scarcity of Preachers,” *Gospel Advocate* 99 (May 2, 1957): 275.

¹³ I will address issues of gender in greater depth below. Note that my gender-specific language, while admittedly off-putting, is intentional throughout this essay.

¹⁴ Baxter, “The Need for More Preachers,” *Firm Foundation* 79 (March 20, 1962): 179; “Preacher Shortage Comes Closer,” *Gospel Advocate* 105 (May 30, 1963): 338. For other similar arguments regarding the causes of the preacher shortage, see also Alan M. Bryan, “The Shortage of Preachers,” 772-3; and Owen Cosgrove, “Are We ‘Passing the Buck’ about the Preaching Shortage?” *Firm Foundation* 80 (January 1, 1963): 5.

¹⁵ Thomas H. Olbricht, “Religious Scholarship and the Restoration Movement,” *Restoration Quarterly* 25 (Fall 1982): 202.

¹⁶ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 330.

¹⁷ Baxter, “The Training of Preachers,” *Firm Foundation* 87 (June 23, 1970): 387, 389.

after not having been trained. Baxter's work was taken very seriously, though. He was frequently cited with regard to the need for (and timeliness of) the schools of preaching.¹⁸

Hughes aptly argues that there were actually two separate motivations for schools of preaching: one that responded to the need for preachers to evangelize in light of the preacher shortage, and one that responded to the need to produce preachers whose theology was in line with the more conservative members of the Churches of Christ.¹⁹ It was not simply the need to evangelize and preach, but the need to evangelize and preach in a "sound" manner, which is something many in Churches of Christ assumed (for reasons that remain nebulous even today) that the colleges associated with Churches of Christ were no longer doing. Neglecting to consider Hughes' second category of creating doctrinally sound preachers would distort the view of Churches of Christ in this time. By their very existence, the schools of preaching sent (and still do send) a message of discontent—not only with the lack of preachers in the Churches of Christ, but also with the Churches of Christ. The shift in morality and public conscience had engendered a reactionary effect on many of the more conservative members of established churches: these constituencies became more militant, defending that which had come to define them for so long as Americans and Christians.²⁰ Cognitive dissonance had created the environment that was prime for the rise of an extreme brand of fundamentalism within Churches of Christ. As we shall see, this had a considerable effect on theological education.

Related to (and expanding) upon Hughes's second criterion of sound doctrine, it bears mentioning that anti-scholasticism undergirded the formation of the schools of preaching. Disgusted by the perceived "liberalism" of the universities associated with Churches of Christ (especially Abilene Christian College), preaching schools offered both a political stance and a theological alternative. Perhaps the most inflammatory writer of the 1960s dealing with the anti-scholastic movement in Churches of Christ was Ira Y. Rice. He wrote a three volume series of books between 1966-1967 entitled *Axe on the Root*.²¹ His

¹⁸ F. Furman Kearley continued his surveys in 1975, with the same unhelpful results. See F. Furman Kearley, "Report on the Training of Preachers," *Gospel Advocate* 117 (February 13, 1975), 104-5.

¹⁹ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 330.

²⁰ A relevant side note would be lack of distinction drawn in many religious circles between the church and the state. This discussion touches the schools of preaching directly. Many of the faculty members at the preaching schools (most notably Dave Miller from Brown Trail School of Preaching and Apologetics Press in Montgomery, AL; see his *The Silencing of God* book and video series at www.apologeticspress.org) have spoken and written extensively on the issue of America's "moral decline." This decline is, at least partially, the aftermath of the cultural shift to which the preaching schools' beginnings were reaction. So in a very real sense, the schools of preaching would not exist without the cultural shift into redefined morality and the questioning of the role of the Christian religion in America.

²¹ (Dallas: Author's Private Publication, 1966-7). In these books he describes his experience with some of the Churches of Christ around New Haven, CT and associated loosely with the Yale Divinity School. He argues that exposure to higher level academic study of theology (especially at a university not directly affiliated with Churches of Christ) was crippling the Churches of Christ as he knew them. These books are no longer in

anti-scholastic ideology is also common in the journal *Contending for the Faith* (founded in 1970), to which he frequently contributed articles. But Rice was certainly not alone in his discontent with university education in Churches of Christ. There was even an attack on scholasticism from within the universities. In the 1970 Freed-Hardeman Lectures (that year themed "The Church Faces Liberalism") there were a number of anti-scholastic comments with regard to members of Churches of Christ who hold advanced degrees in theological studies and reflect this education in their ministries. John M. Adams, then an instructor at David Lipscomb High School in Nashville, TN, gave a lecture entitled "The Bible as Authority," which is one of the more vitriolic anti-scholastic pieces published during this period. Adams argued that intellectuals were leading a liberal movement among Churches of Christ that did not take the Bible seriously.²² He lays blame on the influence of Bultmann, Tillich, Barth, and Brunner (why he referenced these men specifically is unclear²³), arguing that, "for all practical purposes they are infidels."²⁴ His thesis had to do with refuting what he perceived to be their rejection of the authority of the Bible. He read the scholarly climate of his day as a challenge to the epistemic primacy of the Bible, and he saw this as synonymous with theological scholarship as a whole—praising Freed-Hardeman (the college which, at the time, most resembled a school of preaching) for its rejection of this type of scholasticism.

This anti-scholasticism is most acute when seen through the lens of the relationship of the schools of preaching with the established universities of the Churches of Christ. Many writers even blamed the universities for the preacher shortage, claiming that the universities encouraged too many students to enter the "secular" work force, and that advanced theological training would render university graduates unable (and unwilling) to minister to local congregations. Also uncertain was whether or not the graduates of the universities who did eventually preach would remain in the ministry after a short time out of school,²⁵ or if they would be able to preach truth at all.²⁶ There were other

print, and were never picked up even by one of the smaller, established publishers affiliated with Churches of Christ, thus implying that his views represented an extremist (minority) position.

²² John Adams, "The Bible as Authority," *Freed-Hardeman College Lectures of 1970* (1970), 108-9.

²³ With the exception of Bultmann. I attribute reference to Bultmann to J.E. Choate, "Rudolph Bultmann: The Demythologizer," *Gospel Advocate* 111 (October 2, 1969), 635. He drew widespread negative attention to Bultmann with this frequently cited article. Ironically, the article appeared decades after much of Bultmann's work was published: It is unclear why Choate singled out the imminent German scholar; he vaguely mentions a conversation he had with another member of Churches of Christ that left him with the impression that this person thought Bultmann on par with the apostles. Regardless, Choate's article encouraged uninformed disdain for Bultmann. See also Malcolm Hill, "What Breeds Liberalism?" *Gospel Advocate* 112 (March 12, 1970), 170, for anti-Barth sentiment.

²⁴ Adams, "The Bible as Authority," 109.

²⁵ Wallace, "That Preacher Shortage," *Firm Foundation* 80 (July 2, 1963), 421. See also Harris, *Schools of Preaching*, 38-43.

²⁶ See Russell, "The Opportunity of Schools of Preaching," 323: "As long as we have dedicated men who can give book, chapter and verse, instead of paraphrase, who will use the language of the scriptures rather than

references to the danger of graduate education—the presupposition being that it will alter the student into an unbeliever.²⁷ There is frequent mention of Harvard in the anti-scholastic literature²⁸—even going so far as to accuse some of the professors at our universities of simply being “Harvard specialists,” instead of “preachers,” or “Bible teachers.” (This is certainly due to the number of men from Churches of Christ who attended Harvard during the 1950s and 1960s: Everett Ferguson, Leroy Garrett, LeMoine Lewis, etc.) In an oft-cited quote in *Firm Foundation*, Glenn Wallace argued that these “Harvard specialists...speak—not in a relevant message—but intellectual nothingness or just plain denominational terms.”²⁹

The early responses to the challenges that schools of preaching posed to the universities were mixed. Initially, there were actually a number of complimentary remarks made about the schools of preaching from some of the university presidents and deans.³⁰ But in time the schools of preaching became more antagonistic toward the universities; as such, the compliments exchanged between the two types of institutions have become less and less frequent. To be fair, there were a number of voices that argued not against education *per se*, but against the abuse of education both in the formation of the minister and in the messages of “intellectual snobbery” he might bring before a congregation.³¹ It seems fitting now to reiterate the simple (though now absent) fact that, at one point, there was a conversation between the various constituencies among Churches of Christ regarding the issue of theological education—albeit one marked by critique more than praise.

Before I move on, let me engage in a moment of historical speculation on two related items. First, perhaps in instituting these schools of preaching, many from within Churches of Christ were clinging to homiletics as a symbol of legitimacy. Preaching had become a concrete symbol of the legitimacy of traditional views. Graduates from universities threatened this legitimacy by introducing theological paradigms that had the potential—as they saw it—to engender cognitive dissonance in congregational settings. Second, perhaps an underlying idea to the literature on the preacher shortage was an abandonment of one of their foundational beliefs: that of the priesthood of all believers. I make this observation from the fact that Churches of Christ used worldwide evangelism in order to market preacher training schools—thus insinuating that

that of psychology and philosophy, and who will quote Paul and Peter instead of Barth and Bultmann, the church will be safe.”

²⁷ Hill, “What Breeds Liberalism?,” 170.

²⁸ Wallace, “That Preacher Shortage,” 421.

²⁹ See Wallace, “A Voice of Concern,” *Firm Foundation* 85 (March 26, 1968), 198.

³⁰ See Russell’s treatment of Don Morris (then ACC president), in his “The Opportunity of Schools of Preaching,” 332-3.

³¹ Ross W. Dye, “Waybill for Decline,” *Gospel Advocate* 110 (May 30, 1968), 337. Here Dye goes to great pains to articulate that the schools of preaching are not anti-intellectual—they simply want their own brand of intellectualism. See also the articles by Glenn L. Wallace, specifically “A Voice of Concern,” 198.

the solution to the lack of committed followers of Christ worldwide would be more formally trained preachers. There is almost no reference in the literature to vocational ministry, and there is very little recognition and validation of non-pulpit ministerial roles.

Section 2: Describing the School of Preaching

Roy Hearn argued for what he saw to be the four most prominent objectives of the preaching school. His four theses clearly articulate the most pervasive theologies of the schools of preaching, and they remain no less true today than they did during the time of his writing in 1968.³² I will, therefore, use his objectives as the outline by which I describe these schools of preaching. Hearn argues that the first objective of the school of preaching is to create a high view of Scripture in the mind of the student. This objective has less to do with the study of the text itself, and more to do with the establishment of the text as the sole epistemic authority over all matters even loosely connected to Christianity. This first objective solidifies an approach to the text that is also less hermeneutical than it is authoritarian. It will be this objective that leads to the disciplinary isolation (studying the Bible in exclusion of other disciplines) for which I argue below. Hearn’s second thesis is that the school of preaching must teach the Bible itself. Hearn’s third objective for the school of preaching is encouraging adherence to the principles that undergirded a simplistic version of the American Restoration Movement in the 19th century.³³ Ironically, there is very little attention given to the major historical figures of the Restoration Movement in the curricula. Rarely do schools of preaching offer seminars dealing with the American Restoration Movement, and even less-represented are the movement’s European roots. Hearn’s final objective for the school of preaching is the production of faithful men who will carry out the tasks learned at the school in their ministries. This is the spiritual formation aspect of the education. If the preacher will not be formed by the school’s message, Hearn thought, his preaching will be meaningless.

Each school of preaching is completely autonomous—thus implying a good deal of diversity in administration and policies among the schools. Each school of preaching adheres to a greater or lesser extent to Hearn’s objectives as part of their philosophies of education, and each school emphasizes some objectives over others. There are a few general similarities, though. Schools of preaching are typically two-year programs held on the campus of a specific

³² Hearn lists these four items in his “Getwell Road School of Preaching,” *Gospel Advocate* 110 (February 1, 1968), 68-9.

³³ Russell, “The Opportunity of Schools of Preaching,” 323, also used this as a premise for his understanding of the purpose of the schools of preaching. He made the case that the preaching shortage must not be solved by just anyone: instead, men are needed to preach as the Restoration Movement leaders of the 19th century.

congregation, after which they are often named. Admission is often a subjective process. Any man (and in a few highly-regulated contexts, woman) who wishes to attend has the opportunity to do so. The programs are tuition free. The only cost to the student is his living expenses and those of his family (most of the men who attend these schools are married with children). Potential students fill out an application that is received and evaluated by an admissions office much like in a university. In these cases, though, the academic background of the applicant is of little consideration in the admission process. Much more often the perceived maturity of the applicant is more important (the purpose of such standards is retention in ministry).³⁴ It is, therefore, no surprise that these schools tend to attract a number of second-career applicants. Most of these schools have a rather strict code of conduct: no outside employment, abstinence from all forms of controlled substances (tobacco, alcohol, drugs), and a dress code that restricts the student to wearing a shirt and tie at all times.

Each school of preaching structures academic and campus life differently, though there are a few general commonalities. First, chapel attendance and regular participation in communal devotional practices are nearly ubiquitous. Students preach on a regular basis throughout the entirety of their academic programs. Second, classroom time dominates the academic experience; students often devote less time to individual (outside) work than they do to communal reflection.³⁵ Third, these schools are often residential, with students living on-campus and worshipping with the overseeing congregation. One might speculate that this type of communal learning engenders less deviation among participants.

While at one point the number of schools of preaching was quite high—approaching forty institutions at its peak in the late 1970s and early 1980s—the number of these schools has decreased sharply, with the number of schools currently hovering around fifteen.³⁶ Given the lack of current quantitative research, a definite number is hard to establish. This decrease is an empirical fact, but left without caveat it is misleading. While the number of schools has decreased, their influence in many church circles has not. And these schools continue to offer an attractive option for theological education for a considerable number of churches. This is particularly true of two key demographic groups: first, (in keeping with the above reflections) these schools continue to be real options for those members of the Church of Christ who feel

³⁴ Stevens, "Schools of Preaching," 521: "Generally these programs...accept only mature, serious, full-time students. Younger men and recent high school graduates are encouraged to get a more general education in a Christian college."

³⁵ Fleer, "Schools of Preaching," 672.

³⁶ Fleer, "Schools of Preaching," 672, argued that there were, in the late 1970s, approximately 100 schools of preaching within Churches of Christ. This number seems exaggerated. Harris (27-31) listed approximately 31 in 1984. Those listed in the appendix are some of the more influential schools of preaching in Churches of Christ—most of which are still in operation today.

that the fellowship is moving in an unfaithful theological direction. But these schools also represent a genuine option for those applicants without the means and opportunity to attend one of our universities. This is most visible in foreign contexts. There are a number of schools of preaching associated with Churches of Christ abroad. Take, for example, the Baxter Institute in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, a school of preaching with a total alumni population of over 500. These schools are producing dozens of graduates each year that will serve to shape Churches of Christ across the world.

Because of their institutional independence, there is quite little that officially links these schools of preaching. Other than their commitment to Churches of Christ (*a cappella*) as a fellowship, these schools are quite diverse. But, much like the (in)formal networking that occurs between the universities of the Churches of Christ, the schools of preaching have their own professional and ecclesial networks. Almost all of them offer lectureships geared toward a similar constituency, and they advertise with and for one another. There are also a number of large-scale conferences for the constituents of the schools of preaching. Polishing the Pulpit, for example, which meets in late summer in Sevierville, TN, is a large conference that awards certificates and encourages the participation of the schools of preaching.

The lines between the schools of preaching and the universities affiliated with Churches of Christ are hard to establish. In addition to the certificates they offer, many of the schools of preaching offer academic degrees (bachelor's and master's). Several universities accept a substantial number of preaching school credits as transferrable undergraduate hours: for example, MSOP offers a third year program which will grant the student credit toward an undergraduate degree in Bible from Ambridge University (formerly Southern Christian University and Regions University in Montgomery, AL). Also, many of the teachers at these schools hold degrees from the established universities—some of which are advanced (though rarely terminal) degrees. While the majority of the men who teach in these institutions have a master's degree (mostly from Ambridge University, Freed-Hardeman University, or Harding School of Theology), many who teach in the schools of preaching do not have advanced academic training.

Section 3: Philosophy of Education

I would like to shift our focus by highlighting four prominent elements of a philosophy of education within these schools: limiting the scope of training to Bible (which I term "disciplinary isolation"); connection and training with a local congregation; reading the Bible solely through the lens of preaching (which I term "homiletical exegesis"); and male-centered education.

The first aspect of a philosophy of education is that schools of preaching have one goal: to teach the Bible. They do this in a spirit of disciplinary isolation, focusing only on two items: Bible and rhetoric. In keeping with Hearn's second objective for schools of preaching, the academic life of these schools centers almost exclusively on Bible study. There is little attention to secondary literature, and almost none to perspectives from outside Churches of Christ.³⁷ While these schools do offer courses in introductory koiné Greek (some more than others), the focus is on the English text of the Bible (mostly KJV). In fact, most of the schools of preaching cover the entire English Bible several times during the course of their programs. This produces graduates who often have an enviable knowledge of the English-language text itself, with a good deal of effort made toward memorization. Rhetoric, which I use in the sense of reflecting on the process of sermon preparation and delivery, is the second part of their curricula. There is, however, almost no mention of the academic study of homiletics. The substantial changes that have taken place (post-Craddock) in the field of have largely gone unnoticed by these schools. This is, of course, a stark contrast to the university model. Fred Barton, then dean of the graduate school at Abilene Christian College, in conversation with many of the anti-scholastic commentators of his time, argued in 1965 that the more holistic a preacher's education, the more equipped that person will be for communicating the gospel.³⁸ Alexander Campbell founded Bethany College as a liberal arts school in which students received instruction in all disciplines—not just Bible.³⁹

A second aspect to the philosophies of education in schools of preaching has to do with the role of popular theology and congregational life. Schools of preaching represent a deep pragmatism, and a position that holds that the responsibility for the training of ministers belongs to the local church, and not to an independent body (such as a university).⁴⁰ Rather than training ministers to guide churches to a greater spiritual and theological maturity (which, to my mind, is the call of the seminary and university), the schools of preaching attempt to help future ministers approach church members where they are. Each school of preaching is overseen by an eldership, and is deeply involved in the life of a particular congregation.⁴¹ As these schools were beginning, many thought that the preaching school offered a distinct solution to the common disconnect between ministry training and congregational life—

³⁷ For an example, see the reading list in the *Memphis School of Preaching General Catalog, 2010-2013* (Memphis: MSOP, 2010), 29-32, available at <http://www.msop.org/catalog.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2012).

³⁸ Fred Barton, "The Education of Preachers" *Firm Foundation* 82 (October 19, 1965): 661, 665.

³⁹ Olbricht, "Religious Scholarship and the Restoration Movement," 201.

⁴⁰ D. J. Whitten, "We Can Cure the Preacher Shortage," *Firm Foundation* 80 (November 5, 1963): 709. See also Russell, 27. See also David Fleer, "Schools of Preaching," 672

⁴¹ See Eldred Stevens, "Schools of Preaching," *Firm Foundation* 84 (August 15, 1967): 521.

which is often one of the weaknesses to seminary education as a whole.⁴² On a related note, throughout the literature surrounding schools of preaching there are also frequent references to the role that parents, church community, and other preachers have in the training of preachers.⁴³

A third element (one that is admittedly more theological) in this philosophy of education is the ubiquity of what I call "homiletical exegesis." I mean here not only that preaching is a discipline that involves only the two related components of biblical exegesis and rhetoric (as I described above dealing with curricula); also implicit is the idea that exegesis and rhetoric must serve the cause of preaching. The hermeneutical methods are solely homiletical. There is, therefore, no attention to critical, constructive, or theological readings of the Bible; any other hermeneutical method—or concern—is often held as suspect.

A final aspect to their philosophies of education is the idea that this education for ministry should be limited largely to men. The role of women in schools of preaching remains low even today (although they make up the majority of the membership of most Churches of Christ). Most of these schools offer some form of a track (or courses) for training women, but the focus has mainly to do with their role as preachers' wives. There is little recognition of the function that women, much less single women, may have in the life of the church independently from men. There is often marked male preference in the historical literature related to the schools of preaching.⁴⁴ There is talk of women, but often only in reference to them marrying—and thus being defined by—male preachers.⁴⁵ I find that an unavoidable outcome of this stance is solidifying the Bible as a man's document in the spirituality of our fellowship.

Let me briefly exemplify these philosophies of education by introducing two prominent schools of preaching: Sunset and MSOP. Sunset represents the pragmatic (and congregationally-focused) ministry model I describe above.⁴⁶ It is under the leadership of the Sunset Church of Christ in

⁴² Everett Ferguson himself admitted as much—even during the height of this school movement. But he also offers a corrective to the idea of simply teaching the Bible without spending time questioning the nature and function of Scripture. See his "Higher Education in Religious Studies among Members of Churches of Christ, 1957-1982," *Restoration Quarterly* 25 (1982): 211-2. See also Olbricht, "Religious Scholarship," 202.

⁴³ Albert C. Bass, "Solving the Preacher Shortage," *Firm Foundation* 75 (June 10, 1958): 355.

⁴⁴ Among others, see Stevens, "Schools of Preaching," 521. Baxter says, in his "Preacher Shortage Comes Closer" (338) that "Until parents really want their sons to be gospel preachers, and their daughters to marry preachers, the problem [the preacher shortage] is sure to become worse rather than better." For some of the most sexist language, see A.R. Holton, "We Are Losing Too Many Ministerial Students," *Firm Foundation* 75 (May 13, 1958): 296.

⁴⁵ See Batsell Barrett Baxter, "Preacher Shortage Comes Closer," 338.

⁴⁶ Cline Paden founded the school as the Latin American Bible School in 1962 after a return to the United States from foreign missions. His intention was to prepare men to preach in missionary contexts. Under his direction the school graduated thousands of students (Paden continued to direct the school until 1993). Given that the classes were taught in English, within a few years the student body had shifted from the Latin/Hispanic majority to a student body comprised of mostly English-speaking Americans; Paden changed its name to Sunset School of Preaching in 1966. The school changed its name yet again in 1995 to the Sunset International Bible Institute. For more on Sunset, see Cline R. Paden, "The Serendipitous History of Sunset

Lubbock, TX and many of its students, faculty, and staff are members of that church. In attempt to meet the needs of congregations, Sunset currently serves a wider function than any of the other schools of preaching—leaving the idea behind that preaching is the only effective form of ministry. The school has been encouragingly integrated from its beginning—accepting Hispanics and African Americans much earlier than many of the universities associated with Churches of Christ. It is also important to note that Sunset has been a lone exception to this gender bias. They offer more classes and opportunities for women than any of the other schools.

MSOP is perhaps the most important school of preaching east of the Mississippi River, due to its size and influence.⁴⁷ It best exemplifies the first and third aspects of the philosophy of education I described above: disciplinary isolation of the Bible and homiletical exegesis. Some of N.B. Hardeman's former students⁴⁸ founded MSOP based upon Hardeman's stated regret—after his career at what is now Freed-Hardeman University—that he had not begun a school the sole goal of which was the training of preachers. (Note the assumption that considers preaching alone as ministry; notions of vocational ministry are largely absent from MSOP's literature.) MSOP's curriculum is solely centered on the Bible and Bible-related topics, and their literature bespeaks a homiletically-oriented approach to the Bible. MSOP, like Sunset, is connected to a local church: Forest Hill Church of Christ in Memphis, TN oversees this school, and MSOP is located on its property. It now employs a campus that rivals many private high schools in its size, and its 35,000+ volume library has a full-time staff. MSOP is now a multi-million dollar organization whose influence is felt all over the world.

Concluding Reflections

As I intimated at the beginning of this essay, my goals were to (re)introduce these schools to the scholarly community of Churches of Christ in the 21st century. Due to the real influence these schools have in the lives of so many congregations, the lack of attention that these schools and their constituencies receive in many circles represents a daunting theological problem. As the fragmentation of Churches of Christ grows more pronounced, perhaps engaging

School of Preaching" *Firm Foundation* 84 (October 3, 1967): 629; see also, "Sunset International Bible Institute: Our History," http://www.sibi.cc/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=38 (accessed November 13, 2012).

⁴⁷ The information presented in this essay will come entirely from literature surrounding these schools of preaching. MSOP refused to cooperate with the research for this project; as such, information is limited to that which appears in public documents and published material. For more information on MSOP, see "Memphis School of Preaching: History," in the *Memphis School of Preaching General Catalog, 2010-13*, 9.

⁴⁸ Roy J. Hearn, whom I referenced above, founded MSOP and served as director and instructor for 17 years. Bobby Liddell and Curtis A. Cates have also served as directors. B.J. Clarke is the current director. Together they have graduated over 1,000 men.

in discussions of theological education and ministry training could be a concrete context for renewed dialogue.

There are still a number of unanswered questions on the subject of schools of preaching—some of which are simply due to a lack of current quantitative research and historical/theological writing. For example, there are many uncertainties surrounding the issue of retention in ministry of graduates of these schools.⁴⁹ But this discussion also raises more fundamental questions than statistics; specifically, it begs the question as to the nature and context of theological education. Should theological education be limited to the university sphere? In other words, is the assumption that theological education should be limited largely to university and seminary settings (often implicit in academic circles) a plausible position for the future—particularly as Churches of Christ face dwindling numbers and an increasingly secularized context in the United States? Lastly, and of crucial concern here, I would pose two interrelated questions: what is the relationship between theological education and ministry training, and what is the role of the Bible in that relationship? There is a real need for a more systematic history of these schools of preaching, one that considers their impact on Churches of Christ both in the United States and abroad. But there is also a need for more reflection on the witness of these schools on issues of theology and philosophy of education.

I want to conclude with a few words of hope. It is my hope that this essay has opened an avenue for genuine conversation on a number of items (historical, educational, and theological). Implicit throughout this project is the presumption that more dialogue (dare I say disagreement?) between the fractured constituencies of Churches of Christ is a necessary and healthy component to fellowship. I hope that there is much to be learned on all sides of these issues. The task of theological reflection and education is a profound endeavor, and it has far-reaching repercussions for the future of our churches. I also hope these conversations take place in a spirit of love, generosity, and hospitality. And lastly, I hope that we continue to preach the Word, in season and out of season.

Matthew Emile Vaughan is a fellow in the Office of the Academic Dean and a doctoral student (Religion and Education) at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

⁴⁹ Jim Harris argued in 1984 that only about 50% of the graduates of these institutions remain in full-time pulpit ministry after their first employment (which tends to last only a few years). But these statistics are outdated. See his *Schools of Preaching*, 37-9.

Appendix:

A Listing of Prominent Schools of Preaching

* indicates a school which now offers academic credit and/or full degrees

| Name | Location | Dates |
|--|------------------|-----------|
| Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver | Denver, CO | 1965- |
| Brown Trail School of Preaching | Bedford, TX | 1965- |
| The Center for Christian Education (Preston Road School of Preaching) | Dallas, TX | 1965-2005 |
| Central Carolina School of Preaching | Sumter, SC | 1995- |
| Florida School of Preaching | Lakeland, FL | 1969- |
| Georgia School of Preaching and Biblical Studies | Three GA Sites | 1999- |
| Memphis School of Preaching* | Memphis, TN | 1966- |
| Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies | Nashville, TN | 1965- |
| Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies | Knoxville, TN | 1971- |
| Southwest School of Bible Studies* | Austin, TX | 1978- |
| Sunset International Bible Institute* | Lubbock, TX | 1962- |
| Tri-Cities SoP and Christian Development | Elizabethton, TN | 2001- |
| West Virginia School of Preaching | Moundsville, WV | 1994- |
| White's Ferry Road School of Preaching | West Monroe, LA | 1970-92 |

Good News to the Poor? Mission, Justice, Development, and Transformation¹

Monty L. Lynn

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
to bestow on them...
the oil of joy instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

– Isaiah 61:1a, 3b

The call for justice and mercy is a strong motif in Christian and Hebrew scripture. Nevertheless, for many Christians doing justice and loving kindness globally is a challenging call.² What, for example, does scripture teach about wealth, poverty, natural resources, and human development? What roles should individuals, churches, para-church organizations, and governments play in addressing poverty and how do these various collectivities interface? Can we lessen hunger, disease, poverty, war, and environmental degradation, and if so, how?³ Do the goals of economic and humanitarian development fit the church's mission?

In the global context, development often refers to efforts to enhance the provision of freedom, basic needs, and the well-being of humans, but the paths to these are varied and complex.⁴ No less diverse are writings over the centuries on the purpose and function of the Christian church.⁵ At the nexus of Christian mission and development, we would expect to find a variety of expressions, and

¹ A version of this paper was presented at: "Money, Morals, and Missions." Faith and the Academy Conference, Faulkner University, February 6, 2012.

² Fowler labels the most advanced stage of faith as active: "Beyond paradox and polarities...their visions and commitments free them for a passionate yet detached spending of the self in love, devoted to overcoming division, oppression, and violence...." James W. Fowler, "Stages in Faith Consciousness." *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 52 (1991): 27-45.

³ Richard A. Yoder, "From Ambulance-Driving to Public Policy." In: Richard A. Yoder, Calvin W. Redekop, and Vernon E. Jantzi (eds.). *Development to a Different Drummer: Anabaptist/Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), 183-197.

⁴ The UN Monterrey Consensus provides an example of the diverse goals of global economic and humanitarian development: "Our goal is to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth and promote sustainable development as we advance to a fully inclusive and equitable global economic." "Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development." *Financing for Development*, New York: United Nations (2003): 5.

⁵ For our purposes, we will use Fagbemi's view of mission as applicable to all Christians and defined as "a command to go and live for Christ in the world in such a way that the glory of the living God will be made known." Stephen Ayodeji A. Fagbemi, "Transformation, Proclamation and Mission in the New Testament: Examining the Case of 1 Peter." *Transformation* 27 (2010): 209-223.