

The Challenge of Leadership Formation

Ron E. M. Clouzet
Southern Adventist University

It took place about a month after graduation. I was a very young minister attending a youth ministry retreat in Northern California with Tim Hansel as the speaker. He told a story to highlight the challenge teachers and others in formation vocations have with our young collegiates. A college professor was lecturing to his class in a sizable amphitheater-type classroom. In the course of the lecture he wrote on the blackboard the word “apathy.” A young male on the last row, leaning so far back he was nearly horizontal, his legs up on the seat in front of him, attempted to read the word: “Ah—pay—thee. Ahpaythee.” Elbowing his slumbering seatmate to the left he asked; “Hey, what’s that?” His young friend, rubbing his eyes, looked at the board and read: “Ah—pay—thee.” After a long silence he finally declared: “Oh, who cares!”

For those charged with the frightful yet joyous responsibility of forming young men and women to become the spiritual leaders of the church, the question is this: Will what we have to offer them change anything in them? Or will they say of the things of God, “Who cares?”

I’m not speaking of knowledge or skills but of character. For if the change they experience under our watch is going from darkness to being conversant with Barth’s arguments, if the change is going from stiffness on the platform to glibness behind a pulpit, if the change is from saying “church” in English to saying “*ekklesia*” in Greek, we have not accomplished much that is worthwhile. If their lives have not conformed to the loving will of the Master, we have failed at our greatest task—that of character transformation.

But first, a bit of history and analysis.

Formation Lacking

The history of theological education in the Christian Church shows a variety of paradigms have been used for leadership formation. The *ascetic* paradigm, with its emphasis on mystical religion, gave way to the *scholastic* paradigm of

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

the 12th and 13th centuries. The 16th century Reformation brought about a focus on Scripture and preaching. Two tracks can be identified as a result of this focus. One, taking deepest root in North America, was a *mentoring* paradigm, emphasizing relational interchanges between a would-be pastor and his more experienced pastor-teacher. The other, rising up in the German universities and eventually influencing American seminaries of the late 1900s, was an *encyclopedic* paradigm: the fourfold and now traditional structure of systematic, biblical, historical, and practical theology. Today's paradigm is known in the literature of theological education as the *professional* paradigm, the dominant paradigm of the 20th century.¹

At every historical juncture, a goal never quite achieved was the spiritual or character formation of the future minister. The current paradigm reveals the same.

During the past century, four major studies were conducted on the state of theological education vis-a-vis the state of ministry.²

The first study, by Robert Kelly, looked at 161 theological schools in America and Canada. The report included many aspects of theological education, but it also provided the first hint that something was amiss in the training of the inner person of the would-be parson. It indicated that the growth of Bible schools with enrollments as high as the seminaries "is an indication that the seminaries have not occupied the field of 'theological' education. The churches are demanding new types of workers."³ What did Kelly mean by new types of workers? As Virginia Brereton so clearly pointed out in the definitive work on the rise of Bible colleges,⁴ the churches longed for ministers whose exposure to

¹For a further historical view of the different paradigms consult my own *A Biblical Paradigm for Ministerial Training* (D.Min. Diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), 192-227.

²The first study was by Robert L. Kelly, *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada* (New York: Doran, 1924). This study was commissioned by the Institute of Social and Religious Research.

The second was by Mark A. May, William Adams Brown, Frank K. Shuttleworth, et al., 4 vols. (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934). This study was co-sponsored by said institute and the Conference of Theological Seminaries in the United States and Canada.

The third study was reported in two distinct volumes by H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James M. Gustafson, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), and *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957). A third and historical volume was written in conjunction with the study, with H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams as editors: *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956). The study was co-sponsored by the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS) and the Carnegie Corporation.

The last study was by David S. Schuller, Merton P. Strommen and Milo L. Brekke, eds., *Ministry in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). Previous partial reports were published as *Readiness for Ministry*, 1973-75. The project was co-sponsored by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) and by Search Institute.

³Kelly, 229.

⁴Virginia Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).

CLOUZET: THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP FORMATION

the Word actually made a difference in them, resulting in greater piety and evangelistic conviction. The irony today is that most of those once unaccredited Bible colleges are now well-respected evangelical seminaries just as unable to transform their charges' inner life as the seminaries they once criticized!

Ten years later, the Brown-May report found a proliferation of professional courses aimed at staying even with other professions, such as medicine and law.⁵ But it also recognized the paradigm's inability to directly affect the inner life of the candidate for ministry. For example, regarding students' spiritual development, the study admitted great concern:

These [students] are, for the most part at least, looking forward to the ministry, and the specialty of the minister is religion. Unless the seminary succeeds in keeping the religious [spiritual] life of its students unimpaired, it has failed at the place where failure is most disastrous . . . many of our seminaries do not seem to be taking this responsibility with due seriousness.⁶

The Niebuhr study, done in the post-war years' enrollment boom, saw the role of the modern spiritual leader as the "pastoral director" of the congregation. The study provided insightful evaluation and deft analysis, but was at a loss to know what could be done about the inner spiritual growth of the spiritual leader.

The most ambitious report to the present, the *Readiness for Ministry* study done in the 1970s,⁷ became the spark that ignited the current trend of self-examination in theological education. Glenn Miller noted with alarm that the research

. . . marked the beginning of a season of discontent in American theological education. No notable weakness in *Readiness* dissatisfied the critics. The worry was whether professionalism produced [spiritual] leaders. In and outside theological education, thoughtful people noted that the churches did not have effective people at their head.⁸

⁵"If the ministry is to hold its own with the leaders of the other professions, it is essential that the graduates of the best theological schools should be subjected to a discipline not less rigorous." Brown, "Ministerial Education in America: Summary and Interpretation," in *The Education of American Ministers*, 1:4-6.

⁶*Ibid.*, 155.

⁷The massive study involved 12,000 people, designed 444 descriptions of ministry generating 64 clusters of ministry items, which, in turn, resulted in 11 major factor areas of ministry organization. It conducted an in-depth survey of forty-seven denominations, divided into seventeen theological families, in the United States and Canada, including Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions. The survey results came from 4,995 lay people and clergy. Of these, 444 were theology professors, 441 senior seminary students, 1,917 seminary graduates who were active in ministry, 322 denominational administrators, and 1,871 randomly selected lay people from the forty-seven denominations (*Ministry in America*, 16-22).

⁸Glenn T. Miller, "The Virtuous Leader: Teaching Leadership in Theological Schools," in *Faith & Mission*, 9:1 (Fall 1991): 27.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The study showed that in spite of continued concentration on ministry skills, the preponderance of what was considered valuable for the pastor's effectiveness in ministry were *not*, in fact, ministry *skills*, but character values. For example, over half of the top twelve most valued ministry descriptions—out of 444—were character-based, such as “keeps his/her own word and fulfills promises,” “acknowledges his/her own need for continued growth in faith,” “serves others willingly with or without public acclaim,” and “maintains personal integrity despite pressures to compromise.” Although skills, compassion, and other factors are important in ministry, this watershed study clearly showed that the solidity of a pastoral candidate's Christian character is in the sight of God and people ranked above faith tradition, clerical training, or ecclesiastical priorities.⁹

In the wake of the report, a seminal work was published by Edward Farley, now of Vanderbilt, called *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, and the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) sponsored major works in the field of theological education. What had happened? Whereas until now, all discussion on theological education for spiritual leadership had mostly to do with pragmatic issues of curriculum, resourcing, governance, and development, now the entire center had shifted to *aims and purposes* of theological leadership training. This shift has caused a revolution in the field, producing hundreds of articles and a host of well-articulated, book-length proposals on what is *theological* about theological training.

But no proposal yet has a handle on how to bring about the spiritual formation of the leader. No one knows! They either take it for granted, consider it outside of educational boundaries, or view it as of such a personal nature that they leave it alone. And yet, all seem to realize this is key for leadership formation, and something ought to be done about it. Evangelical seminaries have acknowledged poor marks when it comes to the spiritual development of their students. One independent report said:

We generally agree that the spiritual development of the pastor is extremely important . . . But we have been unable or unwilling to give to the development of the character and spirituality of [our] students nearly the time and attention that we have given to the intellectual skills necessary for careful handling of the Scriptures.¹⁰

I remember interviewing the coordinator of the Spiritual Formation component at the S.D.A. Theological Seminary at Andrews University in 1996. He considered the seminary's efforts at spiritual formation a complete failure, noting that students were very resistant to accountability in spiritual direction. It

⁹Schuller, *Ministry*, 94-99, 160-165, 176-177, 196-205, 222-223.

¹⁰Quoted in David W. Kling, “New Divinity Schools of the Prophets,” in D.G. Hart and R. Albert Mohler, Jr., eds., *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 147.

CLOUZET: THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP FORMATION

was not working. Dean Alan Jones has said it well: “In some ways seminary training is too practical. Students are forced to acquire too many ‘skills for ministry’ without ‘the one thing needful,’ a maturing sense of self and a hunger for God.”¹¹

The lack of power in spiritual leadership, the inability to influence a world careening to self-destruction, is even perceived by those whose interest in religion is minimal at best. Two years ago, John Piper, at an ETS meeting, quoted Charles Meissner on Albert Einstein’s view of preachers and their relevance. Einstein had profound respect and awe for the design of the universe. Meissner considered Einstein more truly religious than many preachers, certainly than shallow, thoughtless, and powerless ones. Meissner said: “He must have looked at what preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined. They [the preachers] were just not talking about the real thing.”¹²

Elisha: The Real Thing

The real thing. Do you think students would want to see “the real thing”? Do you think they would like to learn at the feet of someone who has bowed so low before God as to have touched the heavens? You know they would because you and I would! Few lives can have more impact on would-be spiritual leaders than a teacher’s well-lived life, soaked with the living Spirit of the loving God of the universe.

I’ll never forget the first time I really read the summary of the impact made by a great teacher in Israel, Elisha of Abel-meholah.

And Elisha died, and they buried him. Now the bands of the Moabites would invade the land in the spring of the year. And as they were burying a man, behold, they saw a marauding band; and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha. And when the man touched the bones of Elisha he revived and stood up on his feet. 2 Kings 13:20-21

This is a unique incident in Scripture, paralleled only by the Jerusalem resurrections at the death of our Lord (Matt 27:52).

Elisha’s life was a well-lived life. For years before he led the “sons of the prophets,” he served a great prophet. He was known as the one “who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah” (2 Kgs 3:11). Even this hints at his character. Ellen White says of Elisha that he had the “characteristics of a ruler” but “the meekness of one who would serve” (2BC 1035). That he had energy and was steadfast (Ed 58), but was mild (5T 44) and had integrity (PK 218). She repeats time and again his chief characteristic: Elisha was meek and had a gentle spirit

¹¹Dean Alan Jones, “Are We Lovers Anymore: Spiritual Formation in the Seminaries,” in *Theological Education*, 24:1 (1987): 11.

¹²Quoted by John Piper, “Training the Next Generation of Evangelical Pastors and Missionaries,” paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society conference in Orlando, November 19-21, 1998.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

(Ed 58), he was meek and had a quiet spirit (SD 93), he was mild and had a kindly spirit (PK 235), he had a quiet and gentle spirit (PK 218). He had what we could term a “heart impressed by the Spirit” (PK 220). Does this remind you of the Master whose only self-description, found in Matthew 11:29, tells us that He is “gentle and humble in heart”? Do you think students could profit from mentors who have a humble spirit and whose hearts are “impressed by the Spirit”?

It is interesting to note that at the time of Samuel the schools of the prophets were known as the “band” or “company” of the prophets, but at the time of Elisha they were known as the “sons” of the prophets. The “bands” became the “sons.” The Semitic idiom “son of” carries a much deeper sense of imitation than the English expression, which mainly deals with identification.¹³ The sons of the prophets functioned in a spirit of close community with their mentors, especially in the time of Elisha. When the school at Jericho needed bigger quarters, Elisha felled trees for construction alongside the students (2 Kgs 6:1-4). When he was at the Gilgal campus he shared instruction and meals with them (2 Kgs 4:38). This is even demonstrated linguistically. R. Payne Smith had noted that when the sons of the prophets are found “sitting before” Elisha (2 Kgs 4:38) and “living before” him (2 Kgs 6:1), the verb and preposition are the same. The verb *yashad* is translated in its more literal sense in the first passage and denotes an academic activity. In the second text it denotes a domestic activity, a daily routine.¹⁴ Michael Wilkins points out that this was “a master-disciple relationship in mutual commitment to service of God.”¹⁵ That relationship was so valuable that when a financial crisis arose on the part of a student’s wife, she was led to seek Elisha’s help (2 Kgs 4:1). Why would she do that when at the time such requests were normally made of the next of kin? For the same reason God had those “sons” be so close to their teacher: so they could see that God was alive and well in Israel.

Note what Ellen White writes about these schools:

In these ‘schools of the prophets’ young men were educated by those who were not only [1] well versed in divine truth, but [and this is her point] who themselves [2] maintained close communion with God and [3] **had received the special endowment of His Spirit.** These educators enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people both for learning and piety. **The power of the Holy Spirit was often strikingly manifest in their assemblies, and the exercise of the prophetic gift was not infrequent.**¹⁶

¹³Joseph Grassi, *The Teacher in the Primitive Church and the Teacher Today* (Santa Clara, CA: U of Santa Clara P, 1973), 27.

¹⁴R. Payne Smith, “The Schools of the Prophets After the Time of Samuel,” in *The Expositor* 3/6 (June 1876): 409.

¹⁵Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 64.

¹⁶*Signs of the Times*, July 20, 1882; emphasis added.

CLOUZET: THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP FORMATION

This is the real thing, a Christlike character yielding Christlike power. The times of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha were dark, and apostasy was omnipresent in Israel. How else could God stay the final decline of His people in the hands of the uncircumcised except by nurturing a group of youth, leading them to be so close to those who knew Him best that absolute trust in the mighty hand of Jehovah was not for them an academic exercise but a living reality, seen day after day after day?¹⁷ Those teachers “had received the endowment of His Spirit.” The servant of God noted that “the power of the Holy Spirit was often strikingly manifest in their assemblies.”

Can they see God in you?

Seeing God

The challenge of leadership formation for this new millennium and for always has never been about the knowledge we have to impart to our students, or the skills we have to do the job of imparting, as fundamental as these things may remain to be. The challenge of leadership formation has to do with whether our students can see God in us, in you. The infinite, loving, powerful, wise, and transforming God of the heavens in mere us, in you. Can they see it? Can they see this in the way you conduct your classes? Can they hear it in your tone of voice? Can they see the passion you have for souls in darkness? Can they see the absolute, awesome respect you have in the handling of His Word? Can they see God when you walk in the hallway? Can they hear God when you pray in the classroom? Can they see God when you parse? When you defend the grade you’ve given a wearisome student? When they see you shopping in the Mall and playing with your children? Can they see that the Lord God is without a doubt the most important Person in your life, even more important than you? In other words, can they see that you see God? Students long to climb a mountain conquered by a mentor who, already at the top, can see the wonders of the living God from such a vantage point. They want to join him or her at the summit.

Take an eighteen-year-old who has just graduated from academy. When she takes your Bible class, what do you think she is after? Oh, some are after the almighty “A” and some after the easy “religion A.” But deep down, there is in many the secret longing to be stunned by God in the classroom. They may appear nonchalant, they may pretend not to care, they may look like all that matters in their world is money and fun. But they too, in the words of C. S. Lewis, want to be surprised by joy. They want to believe what they have heard and not

¹⁷Note the statement made by Ellen White regarding Jezebel’s plans and how God used the schools of the prophets to withstand them: “With her seductive arts, Jezebel made Jehoshaphat her friend. She arranged a marriage between her daughter Athalia and Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat. She knew that her daughter, brought up under her guidance and as unscrupulous as herself, would carry out her designs. But did she? No; *the sons of the prophets, who had been educated in the schools which Samuel established, were steadfast for truth and righteousness*” (MS 116, 1899, emphasis supplied).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

seen: that God is alive in regular people. That what the Bible says is actually true, not only because it is merely written there but because it is lived by regular folks.

Take a twenty-year-old junior, a sixth-generation Adventist, in your Theology, your Homiletics, or your New Testament class. What do you think he is after? He is more anxious than the freshmen. He has logged two plus years already, and time is running out. He is more conscious of his character flaws, his weak points triggered by an incessant enemy. He has seen things and tasted things that originate in the throne room of heaven. But *consistency* in these matters has been elusive. He longs to know if there are any Elishas left in the land. He would like to witness a miracle-working life, but he'll happily settle for knowing a genuinely Christlike soul in whom God lives unrivaled.

Take a thirty-year-old senior, a second-career man with a wife and two children, a man who decided to embrace the three-angels' messages only a few years ago. He has accepted a conference's call to pastor and is taking your Church Ministry course or your seminary's Church Administration course. What do you think he is after? Oh, yes, he is after every single bit of pragmatic wisdom you can give him—after all, ministry now has context. But what does he really want? He wants the assurance that with Christ all things are possible. All things, indeed! And he wants to know if you, of all people, have found that truth to be *yours* experientially.

As John Piper intimated, the problem we face in our schools is a problem of our own hearts. As we have become expert professionals in our fields, as we have rubbed shoulders with the best and the brightest, as we have read some of the most amazing body of literature humans can produce, we have, many of us, become *false* teachers. Is my statement scandalous, or is the scandal to be found in our condition? We have not abandoned the faith, certainly not in public, but some of us have grown cold and distant ourselves from the God who gave so much joy in private and produced such Christlike results in public. David Watson used to quote Dr. Carl Bates' sad, yet accurate comment: "If God were to take the Holy Spirit out of our midst today, about 95 per cent of what we are doing . . . would go on, and we would not know the difference."¹⁸ Even Karl Barth, in his farewell lecture in Basel nearly forty years ago, recognized the poverty of the spirit found in the teachers and shapers of spiritual leaders:

Everything is in order, but everything is also in the greatest disorder. The mill is turning, but it is empty as it turns. All the sails are hoisted, but no wind fills them to drive the ship. The fountain adorned with many spouts is there, but no water comes [out] . . . There is no doubt piety, but not the faith which, kindled by God, catches fire. What appears to take place there does not really take place. For what happens is that God, who is supposedly involved in all theological work, maintains silence about what is thought and said in theology *about*

¹⁸Quoted in David Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 166.

CLOUZET: THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP FORMATION

him (rather than *of* him as its source and basis). It does happen that the real relation of God to theology and theologians must be described by a variation of the famous passage in Amos 5: ‘I hate, I despise your lectures and seminars, your sermons, addresses, and Bible studies, and I take no delight in your discussions, meetings and conventions. For when you display your hermeneutic, dogmatic, ethical, and pastoral bits of wisdom before one another and before me, I have no pleasure in them: I disdain these offerings of your fatted calves. Take away from me the hue and cry that you old men raise with your thick books and you young men with your dissertations! I will not listen to the melody of your reviews that you compose in your theological magazines, monthlies, and quarterlies.’¹⁹

This from a man who spent his life studying and influencing, one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century. And this is his conclusion at the end of his career. Can the same be said of leader shapers like you and me? In true Pauline fashion: May it never be!

Conclusion

The challenge of leadership formation in the new millennium has little to do with adequate knowledge or consummate skill, it has nothing to do with finances or resources, but it has all to do with whether you and me, their mentors and teachers, have a mere proper acquaintance with the Almighty or are ravished by the presence of the Lover of our souls. If, in fact, the latter is true, like Elisha, our bones will make others live. And just as Elisha cried on the shores of the Jordan, “Where is the God of Elijah?” before parting the waters that would give way to the beginning of his ministry in full view of his students, our students cry out, “Where is the God of Elisha?” They cry out in a time not only of dark worldliness and demonic enslaving to lesser things, but also of theological flaccidity, of powerless belief, and of relative certainties. They ask the same question the Israelites, buffeted by Moabite raiders in a post-Elisha period, asked: “Where is the God of Elisha?” Where is the God who can make axe heads swim, poisoned waters give life, and little boys rise again from death? And God, in His great mercy, will answer. Through the lifeless bones of His servant came life to answer the anguished cry, as if to say, “Elisha, my servant, is dead, but I, the Lord, am not. Believe in the God of Elisha and you too will be saved.”

May those given us in trust to be formed and shaped understand the same message when they engage with us: Believe in your teachers’ God and you too will be delivered. Believe in the Master they represent and you too will see your enemies defeated. For the challenge of spiritual leadership formation is not in what we know, nor in what we do, but in what we have become in Christ our Lord and Savior. May God help us to always be His only so our students will be His truly.

¹⁹Quoted in H. G. D. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 267-268.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Ron E. M. Clouzet is an award-winning educator who has been Professor of Ministry and Evangelism at Southern Adventist University since 1993. He is currently Dean of the School of Religion. Before he became a teacher, he pastored for thirteen years in California. He holds a D.Min. degree from Fuller Theological Seminary, where his doctoral work was on theological education. He has written on evangelism, the Christian life, and ministerial training, but is best known in North America as a speaker at ministry conventions, campmeetings and workers' meetings, spiritual retreats, and local and regional revivals. clouzet@southern.edu