The Presbyterian Tradition of an Educated Clergy

25th Anniversary of Western Reformed Seminary 2008
An Educated Clergy

1. The Tradition of an Educated Clergy
2. The Requirement for an Educated Clergy
3. The Provision for an Educated Clergy
1. The Tradition

- In the Bible times
- During the Reformation
- In the Reformed churches
- In our own history
The “School of the Prophets”

- Existed when Saul became king
  - “You will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place . . . and they will be prophesying.” (1 Sam 10:5)
- Active in days of Elijah and Elisha
  - “Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, ‘The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.’ Then they said to him, ‘Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master.’” (2 Kgs 2:3, 15-18)
  - “And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, ‘See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. Please, let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell. So he answered, ‘Go.’ Then one said, ‘Please consent to go with your servants.’ And he answered, I will go.’ So he went with them.” (1 Kgs 6:1-4)
The Duty of the Priests

• “For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.” (Mal 2:7)
Clergy Education in NT Times

- **Jesus** is “the Teacher” (50 times in the Gospels)
- The apostles—three years training by Jesus (A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* [1894])
- Rabbinic training of **Paul**
  - “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel*, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law.” (Acts 22:3)

*Gamaliel I, disciple of Hillel*
Reformation Times

- Luther and Calvin – highly educated
  - Both started and maintained schools for ministers
- Calvin’s school – the greater impact
  - The Geneva Academy
    - Founded 1559
    - Modeled on Strasbourg school led by humanist scholar Johann Sturm
Geneva “College”

- Younger students
- Greek, Hebrew, Latin classics
- Theodore Beza the first rector
- Highly raised educational standards
- 1\textsuperscript{st} year: 162 pupils
- 10 years later: 1,600 pupils
Geneva “Academy”

• Later developed into University of Geneva
• Devoted “chiefly to the training of ministers”
• Law & medicine added after Calvin’s death
• Great impact, especially in France
  – French King Charles IX protested in letter to Geneva that school was “subversive”
  – Called “school of the martyrs” (Huguenots)
Clergy Education in Britain

• Long tradition with Oxford, Cambridge
  – Wycliffe, Tyndale
• During reign of Queen Elizabeth (1553-1603)
  – The Reformed churches sought an educated clergy and an informed laity. Pastors would meet often to interpret Scripture and engage in critical discussion. Queen Elizabeth suppressed the custom in England, for she believed that four sermons a year were quite enough and that gatherings of pastors might be subversive.
Westminster Assembly

- **Form of Presbyterial Church Government (1645)**
  - “Testimonial of his diligence and proficiency in his studies; what degrees he hath taken in the university”
  - “His learning and sufficiency, his skill in the original tongues, reading the Hebrew and Greek Testaments, and rendering some portion into Latin; other learning, logic and philosophy”
  - “Authors in divinity he hath read, and is best acquainted with; knowledge of the grounds of religion, ability to defend the orthodox doctrine against all unsound and erroneous opinions; the sense and meaning of such places of Scripture as shall be proposed unto him, in cases of conscience, and in the chronology of the scripture, and the ecclesiastical history”
  - “Frame a discourse in Latin upon a common-place or controversy in divinity, and exhibit to the presbytery such theses as express the sum thereof, and maintain a dispute upon them”
Learning in America

• Yale charter (1701)
  – A school “wherein Youth may be instructed in the Arts and Sciences and through the blessing of Almighty God may be fitted for Publick employment both in Church and Civil State.”
Log College

- First American Presbyterian seminary
- Neshaminy, Pennsylvania
- Founded by William Tennent & son Gilbert
- 1726-1745 (W. T. died)
- Predecessor of Princeton University (founded 1746)
Princeton Seminary

- Started by PCUSA in 1812
- A. Alexander, S. Miller, C. Hodge
- Curriculum to produce a qualified graduate:
  1. “A sound Biblical critic”
  2. “A defender of the Christian faith”
  3. “An able and sound divine”
  4. “A useful preacher and faithful pastor”
  5. A man “qualified to exercise discipline and to take part in the government of the Church in all its judicatories”
The Westward Movement


- Best positioned: Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists
- Reasons Presbyterians outstripped:
  - Did not innovate polity for frontier conditions
  - Presbyterian preaching often more theoretical than practical
  - Did not reach out much to non-Presbyterians (sought mainly Scottish and Scotch-Irish people)
  - Congregation had to call & support minister first
  - Many Presbyterians on frontier busy teaching in schools, tied down
  - Preachers not as available
    - Methodists—preacher sent, circuit rider
    - Baptists—traveled with people, one of them (the “farmer-preacher”)
  - NOTE: Not over-educated, too much time training
  - BUT RATHER: Lack of sufficient candidates willing to go
2. The Requirement for an Educated Clergy

- Required by Scripture
- Required by the nature of the office
- Required by the times
Required by Scripture

- Eighteen times in Pastoral Epistles Paul encourages and commands the pastor to study God’s word and theology, so as to preach truth to the people. For example:
  - “do not neglect the spiritual gift that is in you”
  - “take pains with these things”
  - “be in these things”
  - “give attention to yourself and to the teaching”
  - “remain in them”
  - “guard what has been committed to you”
  - “have the pattern of sound words”
  - “guard the good thing entrusted to you”
  - “be diligent to present yourself”
  - “remain in the things you learned”
  - “be ready in season, out of season”
  - “fulfill your ministry.”

- The preaching in the pulpit must be founded on the labor in the study. An effective pastor must first be a sound theologian.
Required by the Pastoral Office

• “A low view of the functions of the ministry will naturally carry with it a low conception of the training necessary for it. And a high view of the functions of the ministry on evangelical lines inevitably produces a high conception of the training which is needed to prepare men for the exercise of these high functions.”

B. B. Warfield
More from Warfield

• “Nothing will suffice for it but to know; to know the Book; to know it at first hand; and to know it through and through. And what is required first of all for training men for such a ministry is that the Book should be given them in its very words as it has come from God's hand and in the fullness of its meaning, as that meaning has been ascertained by the labors of generations of men of God who have brought to bear upon it all the resources of sanctified scholarship and consecrated thought.”

• “And that means nothing less than that our theological curriculum should provide for the serious mastery of the several branches of theological science. A comprehensive and thorough theological training is the condition of a really qualified ministry. When we satisfy ourselves with a less comprehensive and thorough theological training, we are only condemning ourselves to a less qualified ministry.”
“God forbid we should ever be afflicted by so great an evil as an unlearned ministry”

“All other things being equal, he is likely to be the most useful preacher, who is the most learned one”

“A minister can never have too much knowledge”

“They are fond of preaching, but not of reading and study. Such young ministers may be well-meaning; but they are under the influence of a miserable mistake. Itinerants they may be, and useful ones: but efficient pastors they can never be. They may preach the simple elements of the gospel, from place to place; but for the constant regular instruction of the same flock they are utterly unfit.”

(For those without reading and study) “Barrenness, tameness, sameness, triteness, irksome and unprofitable repetition, must be the almost invariable result of such presumption”
Required by the Times

- Higher educational level of populace
- Yet less background knowledge of Bible
- Respect no longer taken for granted
- Age of specialization
- Greater need for apologetic knowledge
3. The Provision for an Educated Clergy

Bible Presbyterian *Form of Government*:

- **Formal schooling**: Bachelor degree & two years seminary required for licensure
- **Written essays**: exegesis, theology
- **Oral examinations for licensure**: languages of Scripture, English Bible, theology, church history
- **Oral examinations for ordination**: philosophy, history and government of the Bible Presbyterian Church
- **No exception** to any educational requirement except by ¾ vote, that “such exception is warranted by the exceptional qualifications of the candidate in question.”
Provision for Ministerial Training

• “Every denomination needs two things: a seminary and a newspaper.” (Machen)

• Western Reformed Seminary
  – Designed to provide ministerial education for the Bible Presbyterian Church
  – 25 years of God’s faithfulness
  – Pray and work to maintain this education for our ministers