

## CHAPTER 6

### ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Because the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a radically different era than the one that existed only forty years ago in the United States, nearly every assumption we have about leading the church must be reexamined. It is impossible and even debilitating to cull every hindering presupposition or assumption that we act upon. The list is too large and often concealed by our biases. We can, however, trust the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth that is vital for our work. The question then is not what are the presuppositions that hinder us, but what are the hindrances the Holy Spirit is currently revealing to the body of Christ? Or borrowing an expression from the last chapter, what is the charisma expressing or signaling to us?

One signal comes from highly effective leaders of local churches. Increasingly, many of them are skipping seminary altogether; and even those, who have attended, find themselves retraining everyone returning from seminary.<sup>1</sup> The preparation of local church leaders is shifting before our very eyes from the educational campus to the effective local church.<sup>2</sup>

A second signal is coming from dissatisfied judicatory leaders and church growth observers, and it has caused a reassessment by many. In that reexamination has come the realization that seminary institutions were the products of the Modern era. They were an outgrowth of Enlightenment thinking in the Christian community. Schools, as a great agent of the Enlightenment, were critical to the liberation and advancement of humanity. Clayton Berg and Paul Pretiz write, “It is a token of the degree to which missionaries accepted the ideas of the time that they gave schools such an important place in their work.”<sup>3</sup> Seminaries

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<sup>1</sup> In *Discontinuity and Hope*, p. 106, Lyle Schaller notes that a large proportion of the founding pastors of large and rapidly growing churches never graduated from a seminary.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>3</sup> Berg and Pretiz, *Spontaneous Combustion*, 253.

exist today more as monuments to that past era than as practical instruments for leadership preparation.

### **Diffuse Focus**

Are seminaries outdated? At the least, they are increasingly irrelevant; and there is now ample evidence that they are actually a hindrance. One reason for such judgment is that they produce a leadership cadre with no focus, or more accurately “diffuse focus.” Part of the problem is that the orientation of seminaries themselves has shifted.

Lyle Schaller writes:

Most theological seminaries and university-related divinity schools have evolved from an earlier role as professional schools into academic institutions. A few even go so far as to identify themselves as graduate schools of theology. As academic institutions they become accountable, not to the churches nor to the regional judicatories served by their graduates, but rather to national and regional academic accrediting agencies. These accreditation agencies naturally use the traditional academic criteria of institutional inputs.... By contrast, the churches use a different set of criteria to evaluate candidates interested in becoming their pastor. Is this person of good moral character? Does this candidate display a clear call from God? Does this candidate truly believe Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior? Is this candidate a persuasive preacher? Is this candidate a lucid communicator? Does this candidate bring a high level of competency in the skills required to be an effective pastor? Does this candidate really love people? It is unrealistic to expect a community of scholars to instill those qualities in a candidate for the ministry! It is realistic to expect that community of scholars will always be on the alert to identify students who have the qualities required to eventually join that community of scholars.<sup>4</sup>

What develops in an academic community, according to Schaller’s observations, is not the skills, character, faith, experience or insight that is necessary to lead the people of God. Instead, academic communities develop scholars. They validate the adage: “we teach what we know but reproduce what we are.”<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, seminary graduates move into parish leadership as scholars. They accumulate enormous personal libraries and even assess their colleagues’ fitness by the depth and breadth of their reading. They are prepared as leaders to question, analyze, categorize and systematize. They excel at processing information. That posture, along with all the time it consumes, may be fine in the academy where all kinds of theologies freely propagate; but

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<sup>4</sup> Schaller, *Tattered Trust*, 56.

<sup>5</sup> John Maxwell of *Injoy, Inc.* fondly uses this expression frequently in his lectures.

in a community that needs a defining vision, it causes trouble. Scholars are prepared to dissect rather than motivate. They are equipped for independent inquiry and civil but invigorating argumentation. They, on the seminary campus, learned little of the essential skills for team building.

A healthy church works toward a clearly defined, passionate purpose that rallies people to its cause. A leader, dripping with passion and unwavering focus, continually articulates and calls people to that vision.<sup>6</sup> Most effective church leaders are not worried about the inadequacies of their reading list; they are too focused on the mission that has captured their soul. With all their ability, they are organizing an advance. Seminary graduates, on the other hand, have learned nothing of that. They have been taught to believe that knowledge is power; and so they are on a scholarly quest. They are suspicious of persons who emit too much conviction or zeal. They fear that interferes with reasonable discourse and discovery.

Is not it interesting that none of the twelve disciples were rabbis? The only rabbi, for certain, among the many apostles was Paul, and he was hated rather than respected by his colleagues. (He probably should have footnoted some of them in his letters.) The very absence of the rabbis may have been one of the reasons Paul asked the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:20), “Where is the scholar?” They probably nodded agreement as they read his letter and said, “Yup, there ain’t none of them here!” In contrast, we members of denominational churches must answer, “They fill our pulpits and lead our churches.”

Tony Campolo, a pastor and sociologist from Eastern College, believes the requirement of a seminary education for leadership of a local church is nothing more than academic elitism. He suggests that a seminary education not only offers no advantage to local church leaders, it sidetracks them with a misleading epistemology. He writes:

It’s time to ask ourselves whether or not we believe what the Bible itself tells us about who is capable of interpreting and preaching its message. I argue that we have become worshipers of academia and that we have more confidence in how a background in theology and biblical languages prepares preachers to interpret Scripture than we have in the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that truth from God does not come from the top down, but rather, from the bottom up. I believe that God chooses to reveal messages to us not through an elite group of specialists, but rather through the body of Christ. While I appreciate hermeneutical scholarship, I do not believe that

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<sup>6</sup> Frank Damazio in *The Vanguard Leader*, 54-55, adeptly explains the leadership process that fuels healthy churches and evolves into movements rather than monuments. He notes how critical persistence and a sense of divine calling is.

God's truth is primarily discerned through an academic process. I believe that God's truth becomes known through the collective understanding of seemingly ordinary people who bind themselves together in a common commitment to Christ's lordship.<sup>7</sup>

For Campolo, divorcing the process of biblical interpretation from one's relationship with the living, breathing, serving Christian community is a fatal flaw. Modeling it and teaching it to Christian leaders is even worse. It is propagating estrangement and spiritual death, for the Holy Spirit and human reason are not one. This is not a matter of conservative or liberal theology. It is a question about how truth is unveiled and the inherent limitations of the academy.

That is Wimber's concern as well. Aiming his criticism at the evangelical community, he writes:

Scripture study needs to proceed in the spirit of faith, hope, and love. By its nature, the historical-critical method is a rigorous intellectual task. The student easily falls into reliance on study rather than reliance on the Holy Spirit. Christ based his training on Scripture, and the goal of his training was piety, learning to hear God's voice and do his bidding.<sup>8</sup>

Without rigorous spiritual interaction in the process, our biblical interpretation is impoverished, even pointless. It is pointless because the focus of all Scripture is the encouragement of our current relationship with God. The Bible is a spiritual medium. If we fail then to relate to God in our handling of Scripture, we miss the point. For Jesus, Scripture's value was not in what it said to the Hebrew people of previous generations, but what God was saying to Him in His contemporary situation. His current relationship with God was relevant to the insight and understanding He acquired from the texts and is well illustrated by what He gleaned from biblical texts when the devil and the religious leaders tested Him. Moreover, only as James listened to *what the Spirit was doing* among the Gentiles through the testimonies of Peter, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15), was he able to understand *what God was saying* in the Hebrew Scriptures through the prophet Amos. The "Sitz im Leben" or life situation that Scriptures address may be relevant, but the historical setting does not define what God is saying through a prophet to the Christian community in any

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<sup>7</sup> Campolo, *Can Mainline Denominations Make a Comeback?*, 167.

<sup>8</sup> Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 108.

passage of Scripture. The charisma does. The gift from the Father (Acts 1:4), the Holy Spirit is the believers' guide.

Seminary education today hinders church leaders by diversion, dispersion and confusion. It diverts leaders into scholars. It disperses the vision from disciple making to surveying, analyzing, innovating and articulating theologies. It confuses the work of leaders with that of professors. As a result, scholastic method replaces spiritual formation, and seminary-trained leaders produce in their congregations a society of Christian scholars rather than a mobilized team of Christ's ambassadors.

Month after month, in churches where seminary-trained individuals lead, parishioners intellectualize and process old and new theologies (conservative, liberal or both) in women circles, Bible studies, Sunday school classes, seminars, workshops and sermons. Many church members may enjoy it. However, spiritual fellowship eludes them. They feel alone spiritually, even insecure. Moreover, as a people, they do not and cannot march long together; for their focus, like their leaders, is diffused.

### **Rabbinic Careerism**

A second effect of seminary education is what Margaret Poloma calls the "professionalization" of the clergy.<sup>9</sup> This process creates a leadership with mixed motives. Mixed motivation is one of five institutional dilemmas that cause deterioration of a religious movement according to Thomas O'Dea.<sup>10</sup> Elaborating on his work, Poloma writes:

The first dilemma is that of *mixed motivation*, in which the single-mindedness of purpose characteristic of the earliest devotees is gradually replaced by more self-interested motivations of the following generations. One of the "signs" of mixed motivation is that the religious body becomes marked by careerism... The original motivation for the movement may be lost as other kinds of motivation develop, especially the gratification of "needs of prestige and needs to direct and manage fellow men, the satisfaction of drives for power and control, or the more prosaic wish for the security of a respectable and established position in the ongoing professional and occupational structure of society."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, 119.

<sup>10</sup> The five institutional dilemmas are mixed motivation (careerism), administrative order (bureaucratization), power (maintaining social respect), delimitation (regulation) and symbolic (ritual substitution for charisma). For further discussion see Thomas O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas of the Institutionalization of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (October 1961), 30-41 and "Sociological Dilemmas: Five Paradoxes of Institutionalization," Edward A. Teryakian, ed., *Sociological Theory, Values, and Socio-cultural Change* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1963), 71-89. Also, Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, pp. 88-98, offers a short explanation of the dilemmas.

<sup>11</sup> Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, 95-96.

No longer are leaders in Christian communities exclusively because of mission. They are there in part, if not fully, because of their careers. Their education approximates that of other professions. Their debt-load approximates that of other professionals. Their experience approximates that of other professionals. Their peers come from other professions. They inevitably compare themselves with other professionals. No longer is it “deny yourself and take up your cross.” It is now “enhance yourself and move up your connection.” It is no longer, “Give all for the cause;” it is now, “How has the church treated you?”

Our professionalism does not imply that we have no sense of mission, or that we are out to fleece the body of Christ. Lawyers, doctors and educators generally have a sense of mission that is genuinely embraced and not measured in dollars. However, few of them are willing to suffer scandal and rejection for their mission. Few are willing to lose their possessions and have their families turn on them for their mission. Few, if any, are willing to surrender their body to premature and painful death in order to advance that mission. They are professionals. This is their career. They plan to work hard, contribute as they can to the welfare of society, retire some day and enjoy some of the fruit of their hard labors.

In the same way, clergy with a professional mindset treat the work of God in such a manner; but sadder still, they reproduce in their communities people with no greater commitment than that of a professional. The parishioners they develop treat Christianity as part of their contribution to the welfare of society. It is not their all, not their breath, not their dreams, and not their life mission. As a result, personal sacrifices are made cautiously and sparingly.

In assessing the presence of this dynamic in The United Methodist Church, Bishop Wilkie declared:

I believe in competence. I believe in the skills of preaching, counseling, and administration. I believe in going to school. But the heartbeat of evangelical fire is elsewhere. Somehow the very word *clergy* smacks of smugness. Too much energy is expended for status. Too much attention is given to tenure, guaranteed appointments, and advancement to the level of one’s peers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Wilkie, *And Are We Yet Alive*, 105.

The Bishop not only sees a crippling careerism, he observes that the Spirit's fire is not flaming in the seminary. If seminaries are actually imparting truth, how can the flame not be roaring on their campuses? Must not the essential truth be missing?

When Jesus confronted the religious rabbis of his day, he did not accuse them of knowing no truth. He charged them with missing the essential truth (John 5:39-40). Furthermore, he exposed the mixed motives of these career leaders (Matt. 6:1-6, 23:15, Mark 7:5-13). Indeed, the closest biblical parallel we have to today's seminary-educated clergy are not the disciples, who forsook all to follow Christ, and not the elders who with character and passion led the Christian movement in the face of unrelenting opposition. The closest parallels we have are the career rabbis, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, who riddled Christ with perplexing questions and reveled as professionals in the respect others gave them for their command of religious truth.

Such an observation makes one ask, "Can seminary-trained leaders actually guide an authentic, Spirit-led Christian community without abandoning both the ethos of their seminary preparation and much of its content? Even if the parallel to 1<sup>st</sup> century rabbis proves to be unfair and faulty (and as a seminary graduate, I do not believe it is), is not the danger of careerism and the large disparity between the core dispositions—the outlook, excitement, zeal and commitment—of New Testament leaders and that of today's leaders suggest a radically different approach to leadership development?"

### **The Experience Gap**

Most seminaries recognized long ago that field experience is essential in preparing new leaders for parish ministry. Some denominations require a year of internship. Some encourage student pastorates. In most cases, a seminary education involves some form of supervised ministry.

These programs, however, fall short on two accounts. They are unable to provide the variety of experiences that adequately prepare leaders, and they do not offer a continuing relationship that supports and encourages graduates in their parish settings. Furthermore, these programs rarely place students for a meaningful length of time in settings where they are mentored and developed by innovative and effective leaders who spearhead Christianity's expansion. Yet, that is exactly the field experience needed.

An average of \$90,000 has been invested in each of our seminary graduates' post-high school preparation,<sup>13</sup> and they enter the parish scraping up more money to attend seminars and conferences because they do not know how to cultivate and propagate intimate Christian community, how to lead congregations through critical change and have never experienced the teamwork or the mentoring that characterize highly effective local church ministries. This is probably the reason Lyle Schaller and others see parish preparation being relocated.

Schaller reports the existence now of over 300 teaching churches. These churches, as a rule, have earned a high degree of credibility because of their performance in several aspects of parish ministry. Schaller notes that they typically offer two-to-five day conferences and are led by both paid staff and volunteers from the teaching congregation. The participants come to see, experience, and hear the effective model of ministry that has brought notoriety to the host church. As new ideas are introduced, conferees can question those who are actually doing the ministry. Moreover, attendees are encouraged to come as teams of five to twenty leaders and adapt what they have learned when they return to their setting. Schaller believes that this may be the most effective way to resource local churches in 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

Seminaries have several strikes against them in bridging the experience gap that teaching churches are rising to fill. First, they are academic institutions not ministry schools. Academic achievement is what is measured carefully and celebrated heartily. Ministerial performance of graduates is not even evaluated. Second, seminary faculty cannot mentor students in congregational leadership because they are not qualified. The faculty was not recruited on the basis of their performance in local congregations. Most have never led a congregation, and even less have mastered skills that are mobilizing effective congregations today. Complicating matters is the fact that mentoring ministry occurs most effectively in the parish not the classroom. Third, faculty tenure creates an inflexible environment resistant to change. Seminary presidents may want change, but faculty need not comply. Fourth, seminaries are accountable to academic not ministerial accrediting agencies. Therefore, their focus will likely remain academic. Fifth, institutional tradition and heavy capital investments make seminaries facility-driven rather than relationship-driven ministries.

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<sup>13</sup> Campolo, *Can Mainline Denominations Make a Comeback?*, 164.

<sup>14</sup> Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope*, 65.

The temptation is to focus on how they can continue their tradition, how they can fill their classrooms and campuses rather than how they can best prepare leaders for local congregations. Sixth, seminaries have already priced themselves out of the market of leadership preparation. Protestantism is being profoundly reshaped in North America as innovative and rapidly growing Christian communities, who see the price tag and time commitment of seminaries as needless, replace traditional churches.

It is difficult to envision any existing seminary making the transition necessary.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Don Miller suggests it. He writes:

Seminaries need to be radically restructured, allowing more theological education to be done in the local churches. Let clergy who want a graduate education go to a major university and study philosophy, church history, or theology. Seminaries, in contrast, should be professional schools where people are mentored and taught while they serve within a local congregation. Learning disconnected from day-to-day practice may be appropriate for those pursuing a Ph.D. and doing graduate-level research, but I am not certain that it is appropriate for those responding to a pastoral calling. Indeed, I would favor downsizing the physical plant of most seminaries and instead creating “lay institutes” on the campuses of the larger mainline churches.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Mission Gap**

What the previous discussions of this chapter suggest is that seminary education as a means of ministerial preparation is creating a gaping deficiency in our leaders and thus in our mission as the church. While the church has never invested more in leadership development than now, its return has probably not been this meager since the Protestant Reformation. Despite believers pouring millions of dollars into their education, clergy have rarely been so unprepared and “misprepared” for their responsibility. Nor have they been so disheartened! A survey by the Fuller Institute found that 90 percent of the clergy feel they were inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands, 50 percent feel unable to meet the needs of the job, 70 percent say they have a lower self image of themselves, 33 percent say their ministry is an outright hazard to the family while 80 percent believe it has a negative impact, and finally, 70 percent do not even have someone they consider a close friend.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In *Churchquake*, 225-234, Wagner discusses the largest part of these observations in a chapter entitled, “Seven Tombstone Markers for Seminaries.”

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 188.

<sup>17</sup> John Maxwell, *Partners in Prayer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 80.

At the root of so much of that pain is our separation from the charisma and consequently the lack of fruit. Like an apple tree that glories in its apples and an orange tree that revels in its oranges, there is something about our nature that has to see results. “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last,” said Jesus (John 15:16). Christ experienced joy in doing His Father’s work. After watching the Spirit transform a tormented Samaritan woman, Jesus told His disciples, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about” (John 4:32); and He went on to explain that His food was doing and completing His Father’s work (John 4:34). They were partners making it happen, and that brought such satisfaction. When 72 followers returned from a mission and exclaimed, “Even demons submit to us in Your Name,” the whole lot were giddy, and Jesus was, too (Luke 10:17-24). God had written their names in heaven and was fulfilling the hopes, dreams and heart-felt cries of prophets and believers over the centuries through their simple acts of faith. There is a joy, a buoyancy of spirit that comes from seeing and tasting God’s love at work through the Spirit; and Christ makes it clear that we are to experience it (John 15:11). If others have, why cannot we? A defeated army does not enjoy good morale, but a victorious team cannot help but celebrate.

David Wang of Asian Outreach visited a house church in a Chinese city of 6.5 million people. He discovered that there were 4,200 churches of that variety with believers now numbering 1.2 million or 20 percent of the city’s population. The house church leader that he interviewed had never attended a Bible school and his wife was illiterate. His congregation numbered 20,000. That single congregation had just commissioned and sent six missionary teams to plant churches in Tibet, Malaysia, Thailand, Burma and Vietnam. Wang asked whether these missionaries had passports, visas or traveler’s checks and discovered they had none. He then asked, “What do they have?” The leader answered, “They have their feet, and they just walk across the borders. They know how to take care of themselves.”<sup>18</sup>

It is hard to imagine such faith and commitment exercised within denominational churches. Interestingly, the average annual cost for each United Methodist missionary was \$31,541 in 1993;<sup>19</sup> and none of these denominational missionaries were sent until after a battery of psychological tests, interviews and training seminars. Few, if any third world

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<sup>18</sup> Wagner shares this story in *Churchquake*, 203.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

churches, could ever muster such resources. Yet, who is producing the fruit? More importantly, what is the key to effectiveness? Our preparation of leaders must be founded on the answer to that last question.

Things are not all bad in the west, nor are they all good in the third world. Suppose we compared leadership preparation to automobile manufacturing. In the third world, a motor is being slapped on a chassis with wheels. That is about it. The V-8 engine really moves the leader around; however, most these drivers are getting beat up by the ride. They, along with their engines, are exposed to the rain, the rocks, the bugs, and they are sitting on nothing to cushion the bumps. Furthermore, with no lights, they keep running into things, and things keep running into them. All this open exposure is hard on them and their vehicles. They frequently are laid up; and on average they end up in heaven much faster than we do. Frequently, their engines cut out, but generally they are able to get them started again; and then they go. They really move. They really, really move compared to us. But it is obvious that they could sure use some help. In the west, we are turning out vintage automobiles. Every model offers a passenger compartment with climate controlled air-conditioning, leather seats, cruise control, a digital sound system, digital instrumentation, electronic locks and windows, passive restraints and air bags. The body is sleek and flawless with a finish that impresses even the least interested. Our clergy appreciate all the tools. They are grateful for all the comfort as well. They do not mind looking good in that car, and they enjoy the admiration they receive as a result. They are even grateful for all the manuals that fill the trunk. They just wish when they pushed the gas pedal the car would move. They are tired of looking good, but getting nowhere. They wish they understood what was under the hood. They are a little weary of pushing the car around and of avoiding all neighborhoods where there is a noticeable incline. Some are wondering if the sunshine and rain are not harmful to the finish, if they should spend more time in the garage, and if they should push just a little more carefully to avoid problems with bugs. Some are scratching their heads and wondering how a motorless corvette will do off-road. They do like the color. Some leaders, though, are outright mad. They think they got cheated. They ask, "What good is all this when drivers with nothing but a motor and a chassis pass me up like I'm standing still?" A few leaders are looking under the hood and asking, "What do we need here?" Some are finding no engines. Some are finding motors but no drive train. Some find all of that but are missing a transmission or a gas pump. In each case, they are

wondering: “Isn’t this important? How come this isn’t getting any attention? How come it is not inspected before we go?” The amounts of time and money invested in these vehicles seem like such a waste.

John Wimber thought so. He testified that the critical turning point in his effectiveness was when he learned to recognize the charisma. The power, the fruit come from the charisma. They come from seeing what the Father is doing (John 5:19-20) and cooperating as a partner. Wimber wrote, “It is the Holy Spirit, the ‘go-between-God,’ who holds the key... Our openness and availability to its direction and enabling, anointing, and power is the catalyst for fulfilling the great commission.”<sup>20</sup>

If the Holy Spirit was the key that the early church awaited in its ministry (Acts 1:4, 8), if the Spirit was the director in their ministry (Acts 8:29, 10:19, 11:12, 13:2-4, 15:28, 16:6-7, 20:22-23, 21:4 and 11), if the Spirit was the very one who took what Christ knew and then conveyed it to His followers (John 15:26, 16:12-15), is not it critical preparation for leaders to learn how the Spirit worked in individuals and teams biblically and historically, and to learn how the Spirit is working globally today? Is not cultivating a leader’s communication with the Spirit and helping him or her identify the activity of the Holy Spirit essential? Spirituality is the engine, drive train, transmission and gasoline that so many are missing. It is not just a matter of teaching, modeling and experimenting with classical spiritual disciplines; it is also a matter of identifying and partnering with the Holy Spirit in ministry. That is very difficult to accomplish in a classroom. Yet, leadership preparation, which fails to impart evangelical fervor, produces clergy that can lead only a cosmetic advance in our mission; and the gap between investment and accomplishment only widens.

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<sup>20</sup> Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 31.