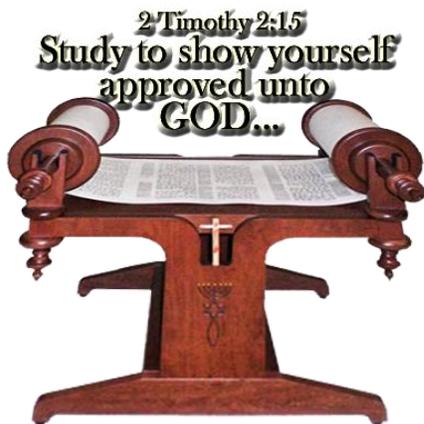


Should Training for Ministry Be Optional?

Leonard Lovett. Ph.D



When I received my calling to preach as a teen-ager, Evangelist Alonzo T. Turner from Bridgeport, Connecticut wrote me a letter and admonished me to read Paul's letter to Timothy in I Timothy 4: and II Timothy 2:. There it was like a gem almost out of sight, **(II Timothy 2:15 MLV)** *"Do your utmost to present yourself to God, approved, a workman who has no cause*

to be ashamed, correctly interpreting the message of the truth." **(15v. KJV)** *"Study to Shew thyself")* I literally memorized both chapters and held them as a sacred gift from my God-father in ministry. He was the annual guest revivalist at my step-father's church, Thomas Temple COGIC, Pompano Beach, Florida, named in his honor, [Pastor Charles Thomas] I received Christ as Lord with the Baptism of the Sprit. It is unlikely that the Evangelist had a clue that he was transmitting a sacred trust to a little stringy teen-ager who would later become the pioneer dean of the first fully accredited Pentecostal Seminary in North America, the C.H. Mason Seminary, an affiliate of the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia. I was so thirsty for truth; I saved enough to purchase a Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, edited by Henry Snyder Gehman, Princeton Theological Seminary. My training began as I read the Bible intensely and became a fierce defender of doctrine, as I understood it.

Mother Annie M. Ridley, Delray Beach Florida, a District Missionary saw my sincerity and raised funds every fifth Sunday afternoon to make sure I entered College. My father had deceased six years earlier and my mother's financial resources were completely depleted. They made an investment in me which I view to this day as an act of grace and love. I went to Mississippi to Saints Jr College, the Church of God in Christ's only school that was accredited by the State. I transferred to Morehouse where I struggled academically, but through faith and perseverance graduated. My acceptance at Crozer Theological Seminary represented a shift in my theological terrain because of its reputation for theological liberalism. My field work assignment in ministry was performed at Memorial Church of God in Christ in Haverford, Pennsylvania at the request of the late Bishop OT Jones, Jr. pastor, who became my primary mentor in ministry.

Recently I asked my ophthalmologist surgeon how long was my surgery, and what was his level of skill and training. He remarked that the surgery was between eleven and seventeen minutes. That beyond his graduate training it would take around 1,000 surgeries to achieve his level of competence with this particular surgical procedure with all the advances in technology. I observed that it took three (3) years of graduate training in law

for my youngest son to receive a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree. It takes an average of seven years to qualify as a general practitioner of medicine. How is it that a hardened criminal can come out of prison, join our church, confess a call to ministry within twelve months, receive ordination, get assigned to a church, pay a jurisdictional report and qualify to become a Bishop with less than a High School diploma?

We have an unlearned contingency within the church who would defend such a person with the reasoning, that if the Lord called them to preach, who are we to judge? There are people among us who believe that God will anoint ignorance and curse intelligence. Dr. Martin Luther King once spoke about ministers who generate *"more heat than light"* and more *"perspiration"* than *"inspiration."* There are still jealous leaders among us who speak of a Seminary as a "cemetery" in order to generate a laugh. Such persons even contend that *"if you open your mouth, the Lord will fill it."* To that reasoning I say *"God will fill your mouth with air."* Does it make common sense that you will not trust an untrained teacher with your children, an untrained doctor with your body, an untrained lawyer with your legal issues, but no training is required with your soul and spiritual life? Lazy people should stay away from ministry. A minister who has never read one book in his life should not be preaching. Tuning in your favorite key saying *"more and more"* about *"less and less"* is not preaching. Gravy alone as a full diet will kill you. It is criminal to preach in a local church or conference with no revelatory knowledge or good biblical content as a result of mining the text and praying through a message so God can anoint it. It would help you get rid of all these *"touch your neighbor"* crutches and gimmicks that is out of control in our preaching. *"High five three people and tell them..."* The pulpit is not a playpen and the church is not a stadium. The knowledge of God gets lost in such a context. We are called to preach the word, not a group of fads and phrases.

Proverbs 1: 7 *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but Fools despise wisdom and instruction."*

1. Seek quality training for ministry from some legitimate source. Seminary training is highly specialized and will require a bachelor's degree to begin. There is a middle ground for people who are seeking basic training for ministry. Ideally, it would be worthwhile to find a basic Bible College in your region that will give you basic primer survey classes. Be cautious with online classes. They require that you have computer skills. Many are money schemes designed to lure government grants. Insure that they have some kind of accreditation or certification.
2. Find a trained mentor in ministry and submit to that person. For every Timothy there is a Paul to give you the proper guidance in ministry. You must be able to trust their education, wisdom and experience. I am a debtor to the many mentors who have poured into my ministry over a period of time. Without them my ministry would have ended long time ago.

3. Give training for ministry priority. The C.H. Mason Theological Seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta should never be placed last on the bucket list of denominational priorities. I am puzzled as to how we can attempt to manage a fully accredited Theological Seminary for less than \$500,000 annually. Can this cover basic student scholarships? It is time for leadership to view scholarships for theological training as an investment in the future.

Commencement Day 2015 at the Interdenominational Theological Center brought back memories of the sacrifices made to initiate our first Seminary. I left a promising suburban parish with my wife and son to pioneer our first Seminary during the seventies. Dr. Arenia C. Mallory also made the sacrifice of leaving her comfort zone in Jacksonville, Illinois at the behest of our founding Chief Apostle Bishop CH Mason to develop Saints Industrial and Literary School in Lexington Mississippi during times of adversity against the odds. She informed me that her first hurdle was false accusation. We survived challenges against massive opposition from within by leaders who listened to bad information and rumors. Church leaders beware of bad information based on pathological gossipers who hate progress and live off conflict. The reward came from students who had next to nothing but a desire to acquire theological training and returned to make a difference in the life of the church. C.H. Mason Theological Seminary is the one institution that we must never think of closing. The late General Omar Bradley once stated that *"It is time we steered by the stars, not by the lights of each passing ship."*

Dr. Leonard Lovett, **Chief Editor The Agora** from the Public Square

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