



# Faith Pulpit

## **Is There a Future for Our Kind of School?**

Let's face it. Traditional Bible colleges and theological seminaries are seeing difficult times as a result of declining enrollments and diminished financial resources. Whereas in earlier times terms such as "recruitment" and "retention" were unheard of as enrollments swelled, today they assume great importance as schools compete for students.

While there are, no doubt, several reasons for this decline, a major factor is the dwindling number of people who sense the call of God into vocational Christian service. In fact, many leaders of Christian organizations actually deny that there is such a thing as a call from God into His service. Our youth are growing up in affluent homes and in churches where evangelism, a burden for the lost, church planting, church growth, and a world-wide vision of the need to reach the unsaved may all be talked about but are seldom a reality in their experience. Nor are we challenging young people to surrender to the Lord for vocational Christian service. Our youth are being encouraged to pursue careers which will give them all of the comforts and security of the good life. The call to service, dedication, and sacrifice are all too often absent. And we have forgotten the mighty things which the Spirit of God has accomplished in times past through people who were sold out to Him.

There has also been a drift within evangelicalism and fundamentalism away from former lifestyle standards and away from strong doctrinal and expository preaching so that our church experiences make us feel good about ourselves; hence there is less and less difference between us and our unsaved neighbors. (Note, for example, what we watch on our TVs or our VCRs and the kinds of music we listen to on our cassettes, CDs, and radios.)

All of this has led some to ask if there is a future for our kind of school—one which maintains high standards, teaches the whole counsel of God and which has as its purpose preparing people to serve the Lord effectively in Christian ministry. Some have suggested that we need to make peace with the

pagan culture around us (which already is impacting to a large degree our churches and people), broaden our mission statement and program offerings, and offer a model for ministry which is long on methodology, programs, and gimmicks and short on the importance of character, developed convictions and a thorough knowledge of God's Word and the issues facing the Christian worker today. Many formerly traditional Bible colleges and seminaries have, in fact, done this very thing. And their message to us is "move in this direction or go out of business! It is a question of institutional survival!"

### **How should we respond to all of this?**

First, we need to make certain that our priorities are right. Our goal is not to preserve an institution. If our major goal is to survive, then we have missed the whole point of our reasons for existence. We exist to train people with the Word so that they can minister with that Word in effective Christian service.

Second, we need to ask God to send forth laborers into His harvest. I do not believe, however, that our day is past; as long as God is in the business of fulfilling the Great Commission and sending forth laborers into the harvest field, there will be a need to train these workers! The problems we face as an institution only reflect the problems being faced by many other evangelical and fundamentalist groups. We are losing ground in the number of churches being started, and our existing churches are losing the battle to hang onto the numbers they already have. And even sadder, many of our young people have never experienced the power of God at work personally in their own lives and do not know what it means to walk by faith, have a personal devotional time each day, and see direct answers to specific prayers. We need revival in our circles desperately! And when that happens, once again a host of people will be desirous of training for the Lord's service. May I suggest that we not merely sit back and wait for this to happen! We need to be begging God to revive His work, to start it in our lives and in our own churches.

Third, we need to be faithful to God's will and walk by faith, believing that God will take care of us. If our reason for existence is right, then God expects us to remain faithful! This means that we will not allow the temptation to broaden our base or modify our purpose move us from our educational commitment of training Christian workers. What will guide us in remaining faithful to our task is the walk of faith. Were Miss H. Nell Malen and Dr. John L. Patten mistaken or correct in the spring of 1947 when they alone believed our school should continue? And upon their insistence the Board went along with the conviction that the Midwest area needed a training school that would teach fundamental, Biblical Christianity and complete separation from and no compromise with unbelief in any form. Was it because Miss Malen and Dr. Patten saw the recruitment projections or the projection of financial backing which would endow the school? No! On that basis they would have closed the school!

And when our Board over twenty years ago voted to move the School from Omaha to Ankeny, was it not a step of faith, trusting God for advancement because the cause was right? If the Board had looked only at the financial ledger books, we would not be here today, and we would not have our present facilities. The walk of faith sees the future through the eyes of God! It is not primarily a question of “do we know where the money will come from?” but, rather, “is it right?” “Is this the plan of God?” It is not a foolish leap into the dark; it is obedience to the God-given vision of His plan for our School which those who acted in the past were convinced was correct. Are we ready to stand by that commitment? For those who may be hesitant we would pray to God as Elisha did for his servant when surrounded by the enemy and frightened at its prospects: “open his eyes so that he may see!” And just as the servant then saw the hosts of God moving to protect them and to carry out His plan, so may we see our mighty God’s hand upon our School and may we reaffirm its direction.

Four, we need to ask God to move in the hearts of His people for our support. Earnest prayer needs to be made before God. As has been quoted by others, “God is not poor, and His people are not broke!” We need to ask God to move upon the hearts of His people so that they will catch a vision of what the Lord is doing on our campus and move them to give substantially to this work. Faithful regular gifts are not accidents. They point up the confidence and support of God’s people in what is happening here, and they also point up the hand of God upon us to reassure us that this is His work! Let us come earnestly and boldly before God and ask Him to work on our behalf.

Ultimately, however, the answer to the question, “Is there a future for our kind of school?” is one of faith, confidence, and trust that this is God’s work, that He desires it to prosper, and that He asks us to be faithful to its purpose. We are, after all, FAITH Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary.

## **Dr. George Houghton**

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