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Systematic Theology I

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Introduction and Summary

In the journal article, “Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century”, Markham takes a critical look at the culture and technology involved in a seminary education in the 21st century and its effects. The author’s arguments examine how a biblical, theological education relates to a postmodern congregation, and the changes that are being made in the study of biblical theology caused by a post-modern culture. Although Markham wrote with an obvious bias towards the Anglican point of view, his conclusions have a broad application across most protestant denominations in existence today. This paper will show how Markham’s views on theological study relate to the post-modern 21st century church, and how formal theological training is not translating to a larger number of mature disciples in today’s church.

Markham methodically goes through his analysis of a post-modern seminary education with three topic sections and a conclusion starting with a brief summary entitled “Theological Underpinning”. (p. 158) The first section deals with the importance of foundational classic theology and biblical study, including the likes of Augustine, and a liturgical background, based in the Creeds. Markham’s second major section entitled “Congregational Studies, Globalization, and Technology” addresses the lack of non-biblical training for clergy and the technology needs of the church, and thus the need for clergy to be global minded in their vision. The final section addresses the curriculum needs for the 21st century theologian with the title “An Imaginative Curriculum.” (p. 164)

In examining the importance, or lack thereof, a strong theological study in a formal seminary education, “learning from the orthodox methods” found engrained in Augustine and Aquinas, Markham shows that theology and education do not always

translate to growth in churches. (p. 161) In some cases, Markham points out, it has been shown that a heavy emphasis on biblical theology can even have a direct impact on a decline in church growth in certain denominations. (p. 157)

Critique and Conclusion

Markham achieves his goal of educating those who favor a more formal seminary education, one based on a more strict biblical theology and other related studies, by emphasizing a more updated approach that includes a balanced background in theology mixed with culture, globalization, and current technological trends. While he agrees that tradition and orthodoxy are important, he maintains that an education based only on orthodoxy and theology will ultimately not meet the needs of today's congregation. (p. 164) This is perhaps his strongest argument for changing how a theological based education is created, since churches that do not maintain or grow will eventually not exist. While a few modern surveys, like the FACT Survey (Faith Communities Today) were notated in the article, Markham himself used "traditional" methods, some limited in scope, to back up his conclusions. It is hard to draw conclusions based only upon his footnoted sources, which could have included more culturally relevant sources. (p. 163)

Unfortunately, a lot of time was spent dealing with classical theological issues and less time on how to apply a traditional theological approach to modern day culture and technology. Ultimately, Markham left questions unanswered like practical ways to engage today's culture while maintaining proper separation, and ways to bring faculty into the culture curve when they lag behind their students. Markham is correct overall; if the church intends to reach people of the 21st century, its seminaries must not continue to live only in the theology of the early church and continue to expect their congregation to do the same.

Works Cited

Markham, Ian. 2010. Theological Education in the Twenty-first Century. *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1, (January 1): 157-165.
<http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed May 27, 2010)