

DIDACHE: “GENERATIONS
Mark Quanstrom, Ryan Quanstrom, and Dan Quanstrom

Question #1: What is your current role?

Mark Quanstrom

I am currently Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Olivet Nazarene University.

Ryan Quanstrom

Currently I am a student at Duke getting my M. Div. I like to think that my role is similar to the early years of Paul, Peter, Luther, or even Wesley. I have a heart designed for working in the church, but I am taking this time to be trained.

Dan Quanstrom

I am finishing up the last few weeks of my undergrad at ONU with a double major in history and philosophy/religion.

Question #2: Why did you choose this Discipline?

Mark Quanstrom

It was not my idea. I was called to preach and I knew that that particular vocation demanded continued study. After Seminary, I assumed the pastorate of Belleville First Church of the Nazarene and pursued a Masters Degree in Philosophy at SIUE (Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville) and then continued my study at St. Louis University, pursuing a Ph.D. in historical theology. I believed my vocation as pastor mandated this attention to the academic discipline. Study is worship. And so I did not pursue a Ph.D. in order to teach but in order to preach. In 2004, however, when the invitation to teach at ONU was offered, I discerned that this was what was next for me and I very reluctantly left the pastoral ministry.

Ryan Quanstrom

I do not know that many people choose this discipline... I think it chooses you. Ever since my first crisis experience at the age of 5, I have felt an urge to bring others to Christ. At that age I thought I was called to be a pastor. My dad was a pastor, my grandpa was a pastor, my uncles were pastors, my great-grandpa was a pastor. It was what my family did. As I grew, the calling to bring others to Christ changed shapes. After visiting Russia I became incredibly disillusioned with the American Protestant church. It seemed to me that American Christianity focused too greatly on intellectual conversions. Faith seemed to be “assent to belief” rather than “a sure and abiding trust.” Even among us holiness folk, we were only concerned with possessing sanctification or working until we are sanctified as if we sanctify ourselves. I had tried to sanctify myself and it did not work. I left the church, and I left God.

Fortunately God graciously brought me back to God through some classes. My struggle had been intellectual, however. Once I was freed from a major epistemological dilemma, God was able to break into my life and remind me that my salvation comes from God. I can only have a sure and abiding trust, which pushes me on toward sanctification. I think God has decided to sanctify me through the church. Though I am generally disillusioned with that institution, I have learned,

“The church is people, and people are sinners, therefore the church is messy.” I have decided to get my hands a bit dirty and see if God’s message of holiness cannot come through me, and I am terrified. In order to do that though, I believe it is fitting for me to study hard and learn all I can.

Dan Quanstrom

When I began my undergrad I “knew” I was going to be a high school history teacher. I loved history, and wanted to teach in the public school system. After my first semester I started feeling as if that might not be the case. I wrestled with God asking, “Why wouldn’t I be a history teacher? I know I’d be good at it, you could use me in so many ways, plus I’m secure knowing what my future would be. Why would I change that?” His response was simple, “Follow me.” This has become a common theme. After a few more “Follow me’s”, my degree changed. I spent a semester in Mukono, Uganda, and my degree changed again. I have come to a point where I am hearing, “Follow me.” Graduation is all too close and I have yet to make certain plans, but I must continue to follow. So, why did I choose this discipline? Maybe Ryan is right, maybe it chose me. Or maybe the Lord is my shepherd and I am just a sheep. I must continue to follow Him where He will take me.

Question #3: What key contributions does your discipline offer?

Mark Quanstrom

That question is a hard one as it asks me to articulate what seems to me to be obvious. While my work at NTS was valuable for pastoral preparation, and while I enjoyed the intellectual rigor of philosophy, it was when I began the study of historical theology that I discovered the relevance of my faith. I discovered that most of the “new” issues in theology are in fact, simply reiterations or variations of recurring themes. In particular, and to overstate it a bit, I discovered that the call to holiness was not discovered first by Wesley and that the holiness movement is not prescribed by the American continent in the 19th and 20th centuries. I think it is funny to hear people ask the question “Is the holiness movement dead?” The Roman Catholic Church has a pretty robust doctrine of holiness as does Eastern Orthodoxy. I re-discovered “holiness” when I read the church fathers and the medieval monastics. The key contribution my discipline has to offer is to ground contemporary theological understanding in the authoritative tradition of the church. As Wesley said, “But whatever doctrine is new must be wrong; for the old religion is the only true one; and no doctrine can be right, unless it is the very same “which was from the beginning.” (From Wesley’s sermon *On Sin in Believers*)

Ryan Quanstrom

It reminds us Christians who we are and where we came from. Sometimes we like to think of ourselves as unique. This often adds to our ego and keeps us from humbly submitting our opinions to the tradition or history of our church mothers and fathers. My take on historical theology is simple. God has been working in the world throughout history. I do not believe that there has been a time when God has stopped working. I also have this “hunch” that God is consistent and God’s message is consistent. If God has been consistently bringing God’s message through God’s disciples, then it seems as though we might be able to discover what that message is. In the midst of conflicting biblical scholarship, and contradictory theologies (Calvin vs. Arminius) I hope to find a consistent message that is worth rearticulating for our time.

Dan Quanstrom

I'm tempted to say, "duh..." But, maybe I have some tact, and will restrain myself. Maybe... I find obvious value in the study of history. Not simply to learn how we can change the future, but it places philosophy, theology, and biblical studies in context. One cannot fully understand theology or philosophy without the historical context. These two disciplines complement one another and cannot be separated.

Question #4: *What is the future of your discipline?*

Mark Quanstrom

I am not much of a prophet and I am always skeptical of those who predict the advent of or need for revolution. With that said, I believe that theological education is hindered when it is seen as primarily an academic exercise or best done within the academy. Christian theology needs to be done by those who are in a covenantal relationship with a community of believers. It requires a life of prayer. It demands corporate worship. It requires sacrificial service. It feeds on the Lord's Supper as well as on theology textbooks. If I could institute constructive change for theological education, I would insist on students committing themselves to a local church and submitting themselves to the authority of a spiritual mentor.

Ryan Quanstrom

I do not know of any changes that will be made, but I could comment on changes that I would like to see. Since I am graduate school I have become a bit disillusioned with graduate school. Often times the classes are divorced from what Susanna Wesley called "practical divinity." While the university is a great place for instruction, sometimes it fails to adequately train. Perhaps protestant seminaries could learn from the Catholic Church and the education of their clergy and scholars. Forced communal living could give students and professors the possibility to teach outside of the classroom. This of course would require complete devotion to the respective fields.

A second change would be the eradication of the lecture. While at times Christ taught the masses, he educated the first priests and deacons by living with them. The disciples committed at least three years of their life following Christ. They did not just go sit and listen to him for a period of time, instead they ate their meals with him. They developed intimate relationships. They knew Jesus as a person like you or me. We do not like to think of it, but I am sure there were times when walking to a new town they had to wait for Jesus to come out from behind the rock zipping up his pants. Who knows, they might have even heard Jesus pass gas. It is not pretty, but it is life. Matthew shows that the gospel is not contingent on the Jesus' teachings alone, but upon Jesus' person. This includes the beautiful and the ugly. I wonder what theological education would look like if we adopted a mentoring style instead of lectures and classes graded upon knowledge of books.

Dan Quanstrom

At the end of J.D. Salinger's "Franny and Zooey," Zooey is reprimanding his younger sister Franny for her naïve intellectual pursuit of religion. Franny is having a rough time, but Zooey just gives it to her. They're discussing their childhood as contestants on a child radio show when Zooey says, "Seymour'd told me to shine my shoes just as I was going out the door with Waker. I was furious... I just . . . wasn't going to shine my shoes for them, I told Seymour... He said to shine them for the Fat Lady. I didn't know what . . . he was talking about, but he had a very Seymour look on his face, and so I did it." Zooey relates this recollection to his sister's intellectual meltdown, "But I'll tell you a terrible secret—Are you listening to me? *There isn't anyone out there who isn't Seymour's Fat Lady...* Don't you know that? ...And don't you—listen to me, now—*don't you know who that Fat Lady really is?* . . . Ah, buddy. Ah, buddy. It's Christ Himself. Christ Himself, buddy."

J.D. Salinger is no theologian, but makes a very important point in these pages. One cannot separate their relationship with Christ from their relationship with their neighbors. I cannot say what the future of my discipline looks like, but I anticipate it recognizing that our vertical relationship with Christ and horizontal relationship with our neighbors cannot be separated. (Matthew 25, James 1:27)

Question #5: What do you see proves a challenge to Wesleyan Higher Education?

Mark Quanstrom

I am coming to a greater appreciation for the American-holiness movement. In my continuing research of the Wesleyan and American-holiness traditions, I am discovering greater affinity between Wesley and the early Nazarenes than I had previously understood. During my time at Seminary, I uncritically accepted the idea that the later 20th century American-holiness writers were more faithful to the 18th century Wesley than the early 20th century holiness writers. And in my research for my dissertation, I was very critical of the early formulations. But I believe that I can make a strong argument that the American-holiness movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries is divergent from Wesley on more critical matters than was the American-holiness movement at the turn of the 20th century. I believe the challenge for Wesleyan Higher Education is recognizing the value of our own tradition. We are learning from Eastern Orthodoxy. I believe we can learn more than we have from the Roman Catholic tradition. We can obviously learn from Wesley. And I believe that we can still learn from the 20th century American-holiness tradition. The challenge for higher education in the Wesleyan tradition is learning to appreciate all we have received while discerning the best in all of them.

Ryan Quanstrom

The methods of higher education conflict with the message or the intentions of higher education. Most often students are taught as individuals divorced from a community, yet they are supposed to view themselves and their teaching as within the community. Theological education in general ought to be connected to the life of the church.

On another note, some churches do not provide enough support for its students/educators to give them the luxury to commit their lives to study. Most students must work an unrelated job in order to provide for themselves. This prevents them from being the scholars that they ought to be.

Spener's program for reform of the protestant churches was a reform of the clergy. If we want this reform to take place, we ought to give them the liberty to pray, to study, and to worship.

Dan Quanstrom

The “future of my discipline” answer was left incomplete on purpose because it is directly tied with the challenges of Wesleyan higher education. We must break our Enlightenment individualistic concept of Christianity. In order to graduate I must write a Senior Thesis and mine is discussing this challenge. The individualism enjoyed during modernity allowed for compartmentalization and laziness. We created two separate relationships, one private with Christ (vertical), and one with our neighbors (horizontal). We became lazy in our care for our sisters and brothers, and as Ryan emphasized, became wrapped up in private personal holiness.

We recognized that the needs for the community needed to be met, but felt it was not our responsibility. Our vertical and horizontal were separated. This allowed for the political takeover of ecclesial matters. The challenge for Wesleyan higher education thus lies in teaching that the church is the Church. It is an authoritative institution and the bride of Christ. We must teach that our allegiance is pledged to and our hope found in God’s elect, his people, his Church.

Question #6: Where are you hopeful concerning Wesleyan Higher Education?

Mark Quanstrom

I am hopeful because God is faithful and because there is the recognition in Wesleyan circles generally, of the primary authority of scripture, the normative authority of tradition, the clarifying authority of reason, and the affirming authority of experience.

Ryan Quanstrom

I am not as hopeful. The structures are too broken and our culture produces students that are depressed, anxious, sleep-deprived, and psychologically ill. If education continues on this path, we will probably continue to misinterpret the message of Christian perfection and distort it with perfection of works. Many thinkers have departed from the oppression of modernity in thought, but that has not yet translated into redemption of methods. If only we were willing to model the “holy club” in our many schools. Perhaps then theological education might combine the intellect with praxis.

Dan Quanstrom

As my father said, “study is worship.” I find hope in the Church, and education is completely Kingdom building. The Church is the one institution that will not fail. We can rest knowing that God is our Shepherd leading us to green pastures and still waters.

Question #7: Final words for future “generations?”

Mark Quanstrom

Love the local church as much as you love your theological education.

Ryan Quanstrom

The world was not made in a day, it is not done being made, and it is not yet petrified. While God controls history, God uses people to control that history. We have an opportunity to shape the world if we are only brave enough to live the lives that Christ has taught us. If Christian perfection, perfection in love, is at all possible, it must manifest itself in a historical church bringing to earth a foretaste of heaven. We must not give up on the church, we must not give up on study, we must not give up on God.

Dan Quanstrom

Do it for the Fat Lady!