

DIDACHE: "GENERATIONS"  
Dr. Henry W Spaulding and Hank Spaulding

**Question #1:** *What is your current role?*

*Hank Spaulding*

I am currently a student at Trevecca Nazarene University majoring in religion with a minor in philosophy and pastoral ministry.

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

I am currently Professor of Philosophical Theology and Christian Ethics at Nazarene Theological Seminary and in the fall I will assume the position of Vice President for Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer at Mount Vernon Nazarene University.

**Question #2:** *Why did you choose this Discipline?*

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

I am not sure if I chose this discipline or if it chose me. When I was in High School I read Nietzsche's *Gay Science* and I was enthralled it, shortly after, I read selections from Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. One day I noticed these books on the family book shelf. I have always found philosophy very intriguing. It asks some of the most fundamental questions. I ran across the theology of Paul Tillich while at TNU and his philosophical theology interested me from the beginning. So to put it as succinctly as possible this discipline has attracted me because of the questions it raises and the implications of those questions for people of faith.

*Hank Spaulding*

I guess the journey begins much later for me. I came to Trevecca majoring in music with the intention to dabble with a few religion courses. It was that dabbling, along with the confirmation of a call to ministry that I had received in 2003 in Houston, TX at the Nazarene Youth Congress that led me to become a full time religion major. Philosophy captured my attention between my freshman and sophomore year when I was introduced to radical orthodoxy. From this point, I began to read all the philosophy I could get my hands on. I started reading people like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Foucault, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Plato, Hegel, Kant, Aristotle, MacIntyre, and Plotinus. These philosophers helped me to more fully understand theology. I also began to read John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward who have defined a new theological school called radical orthodoxy. I started to see a philosophical thread in the struggles, pains, and thoughts of history and culture. I read philosophy and theology so that I will be better equipped to deal with the issues that confront our world.

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

You mentioned that radical orthodoxy offered a theological critique of philosophy, what exactly is that? And why do you feel it is important?

*Hank Spaulding*

I believe it to be important because it attacks the duality of secular/sacred space. Radical orthodoxy helped me to see the danger of autonomous reasoning that divorces Christian narrative

from secular narratives while privileging the secular. We see this in John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, especially when he shows that there came a point when the sciences (psychology, biology, social science, etc) were given the authority to speak with no reference to theology. Thus, sociology became a self-sustaining discourse. This suggests that truth is relative to the space in which it is spoken. It was here that theology, as John Milbank shows in his book, began to lose its place as the master discourse and develop a kind of false humility in response to it. Instead it should be that theology shows what truth is and what the truth ultimately will be.

Dad, you mentioned Paul Tillich, why do find him important?

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

Perhaps, the best place to begin is with a little semi-autobiographical book called *On the Boundary*. Tillich reflected upon his life in terms of many boundaries. For example, he was born in Germany yet lived in the United States. He also talked about being born in the nineteenth century but living most of his life in the twentieth century. He also talked about walking the boundary between theology and philosophy. While there are things that trouble me more now than when I was in college about Tillich and his theology, his theology has always seemed to wrestle with important philosophical questions. From the very beginning his theology expanded my theological horizon. Eventually, I did a doctoral dissertation on his theology. He is important because he deals with really basic questions.

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

*Hank Spaulding*

Being a student is a curious thing, especially in regards to this question. On one hand I am still learning about the discipline, but on the other hand I am called to put what I know to work. Perhaps, the best way for me to think about this concerns what theology and philosophy bring to the questions my peers and I are asking. September 11<sup>th</sup>, Columbine, the Nickel's Mine incident, the Oklahoma City Bombing, and Virginia Tech killings have raised serious questions for my generation [living in the United States].

I am also part of the television generation. When any event happens in the world we can experienced it "live." It is in this mindset that we bring our fears and hopes into the conversation.

I have often asked, "Does theology have anything to say in such a world"? We see this in the work of Rob Bell and Donald Miller. These people ask some of the same questions raised by Paul Tillich, John Milbank, and Karl Barth, even if their answers have a very different tone. Thus, a narrative arises in the tension of contemporary culture and the Christian tradition. I guess this is the way every generation has expressed the faith.

My discipline becomes a conversation with the past into the future while dramatically claiming the present as the plane where God's voice may be heard.

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

The chief contribution of theology and philosophy is that it offers the opportunity for a much broader conversation. It helps me avoid ‘Nazarene parochialism’. This is a problem for all denominations, including our own.

I believe that one of the great dangers of theological education in the Church of the Nazarene and the Holiness Movement is the temptation to become narrow. So the study of theology and philosophy (and for that matter Church History and the Bible) have allowed us to have broader conversations across the ages with great thinkers like Irenaeus, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. I believe that radical orthodoxy is a great example of how theology can be an all encompassing discourse. Radical orthodoxy is a bold theology in just this regard. It attempts to deal with aesthetics, language, music, economics, etc.

Another contribution for theology and philosophy is its ability to provide discipline for the way in which we think about the faith. One possible way to put this is that theology and philosophy can give us a “rule governed discourse” (to borrow a Wittgensteinian phrase) or a “cultural linguistic discourse” (to borrow a phrase from Lindbeck). This simply means that theology and philosophy help us to discipline our speech in appropriate ways.

I often hear that “everyone is a philosopher” or “everyone is a theologian”. Would we argue that everyone is a painter, or a mechanic, or a musician? Probably not, because we tend to link specific skills with these vocations. Likewise, theology and philosophy require discipline and learning particular skills. Theology and philosophy requires time to learn how to read difficult texts, to raise uncomfortable questions, and engage in debate. I think that this is what mature Christianity requires.

Another contribution is that this discourse gives us courage, or to use a phrase from Paul Tillich: “the courage to be.” This is to say that it gives us the courage to trust our instincts, to risk being wrong as others have been wrong before, to appreciate the contributions of the heretics, and to ask questions that would make most [people] uncomfortable. The discipline of theology and philosophy makes our faith stronger. The Church needs its theologians and its theologians need the Church.

*Hank Spaulding*

I would like to return to the topic of holiness. According to David Bentley Hart, God ventures into the ugliness of life and still he exists there as peace, love, and absolute beauty. This sounds a lot like Wesley, so it appears to me that holiness is vital to this conversation. Perhaps, part of the impetus for my discipline is the all embracing interest of holiness. It seems to me that this is the kind of conversation we can and should have as theologians and philosophers. Holiness should create action. When faith is embodied the message of holiness lives into the existence of the Church.

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

You are correct - Christian faith has never been far from the Christian virtues. Theology can never be satisfied with a mere metaphysical orientation or a narrative that structures cosmology or ontology, but rather the Christian faith has always sought to embody itself in particular

virtues. This becomes evident in the New Testament and in the earliest writings of the church. For example, the *Didache* for which this journal takes its very name, is about how faith becomes faithfulness.

John Wesley's movement was a corrective to remind us that behavior is important to Christian faith. Yet, when behavior becomes an end unto itself God moves out of our theology. Holiness seeks to combine moral behavior and transformation. To be honest the holiness movement sometimes argues about less and less significant things over time. Wesley in his day was having a far larger and more significant discussion. We do not have these conversations when we fight about nothing. Perhaps, some of the disenchantment and restlessness of the next generation arises at this point.

*Hank Spaulding*

I agree with what you said about my generation becoming disenchanted with holiness. I think it goes back to the Emergent Church conversation. How can the Church be vital, relevant and engaged while maintaining a dialogue with its own tradition?

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

Transformation is a very important term in both biblical studies and the doctrines of the church of the Nazarene in terms of regeneration. And this aspect of holiness does not grow out of style.

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

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

Philosophy and theology are moving away from the rationalistic categories that define liberalism and much of protestant religion. Theology and philosophy will probably begin to ask more of the questions that you find in Kierkegaard or in Wittgenstein and will begin to understand the pointlessness of trying to find a universal language of faith to converse with. Philosophy and theology is tied up with particular forms of life and a particular appropriation and extension of skills. I would argue that John Milbank and Stanley Hauerwas represent the kind of theology and the kind of direction that will flourish. I would echo Stephen Long's thesis that late into the nineteenth century and on in to the twentieth century that theology has, in one form or another, taken on the form of ethics. Therefore, the discipline of theology and philosophy must seek to link the metaphysical and the moral.

*Hank Spaulding*

My generation has to take these things more seriously. The disenchantment taking place among the younger members of society relates directly to theology. Some are able to separate the profession of faith and holy obedience. The Emergent Church movement addresses this, but perhaps too often as a deconstruction of essential elements of the historic Church. People like Brian McLaren are clear examples of this attitude. We need to look at Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein because they show that there is meaning. So my generation must begin to take seriously the fact that the gospel fills life with meaning.

God and theology are about peace, and this is a message that can be spoken in the face of violence that only the gospel can out narrate. This is most fully seen, I think, in the "death of

God” ideology that arose out of World War II and the holocaust, which is basically the question, “what can God possibly have to say in wake of the Holocaust?” I remember reading the work of Ellie Wiesel who says that we should remember that God has something to say because he too experienced the gas, hung from the gallows, and still exists there as beauty in that he can weave goodness in the midst of evil. God has something to say about every moment. This story must be embodied at all times because transformation is about real change in one’s life.

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

I think you are right because theology, philosophy, and the search for coherence that describes people of all times always runs the risk of allowing the form of the question (be it cultural or otherwise) to be determinative. This is a lot of what you see in Brian McLaren and seeker sensitive Christianity, at the same time those who stand solely on tradition fail to see that it arises out of some cultural issues and questions altogether. So, for example we may feel uncomfortable about how the God question arose out the modern atheist movement but that issue has informed all people who attempt to espouse a coherent form of faith. This goes back to theology must always be aware of the larger horizon. It is these harder questions that confront us.

*Hank Spaulding*

I think Ellie Wiesel in his work *Night*, which I saw in Jurgen Moltmann first was most helpful. Wiesel shows that it is essential to talk about God as one who hung from the gallows too. The broader horizon, especially the death of God question, is one that we must answer with God hanging on the gallows. This is essential because it makes the Trinity a living, breathing event within time that demonstrates the life of God as one who is free, free to love, and be holy. This event opens up the possibility of personal holiness. It is important that in every facet God is there as holy, even as he hangs from the gallows.

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

*Hank Spaulding*

Wesleyan Higher Education has the challenge to develop a student in totality. John Wesley did not just write books about theology and the Bible. Wesley wrote about medicine and was actively involved in issue of social justice. We must reclaim the conception that holiness is about a people who are transformed and are then in turn be willing to do something about it. We must learn how to linger on the cross and develop practices that connect living and the faith.

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

We have to make the distinction that Wesleyanism is a broad theological movement that in some ways grows out of Anglicanism and in some expressions becomes almost Catholic and trickles down to the point of becoming almost charismatic.

When we talk about the challenges of Wesleyanism it is appropriate to say that a chief challenge is to understand the definition and the employment of particular ideas that can serve as criteria by which we can make theological judgments. Leaving aside the larger Wesleyan question, it seems that the question of Wesleyan-Holiness theology (which might be the focus of this question) is that we must leave behind a sense of inferiority that characterizes our life in the church and

schools that associate with us, which leads to this narrowing of the theological horizon that we keep talking about.

So the challenge of Wesleyan theology, in higher education, and the way it is approached in our tradition is to broaden the horizon sufficiently so that the big questions are embraced yet at the same time not lose the Christian faith and its attachment to the kinds of piety and its personal spiritual development that are crucial, so that it defines a particular intellectual faith so that people are serious about embodying the virtues that they proclaim.

*Hank Spaulding*

I would like to add that we must come to see that Wesleyan-Holiness theology is more than just being nice. It is about going to church, tithing, practicing the ministry of the church, supporting global missions, taking communion, and seeking social justice. That the Christian faith is, yet again, broader than we think...

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

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

I am most hopeful when I reflect upon my years of teaching. It is easy to be hopeful when I reflect upon the quality of life and intellect of my former and current students. I am hopeful because the coherence of the faith is not just being discussed, but it is being embodied in pastoral ministry, scholarship, and faithful lay service. I am also hopeful because Wesleyan higher education is beginning to develop an identity and in that identity develop rules that govern the discourse.

*Hank Spaulding*

I am most hopeful because people are willing to bear the questions and willing to serve in these times of violence, confusion, and devaluation. I am hopeful that there are people who still wish to do the good work of theology and to appreciate the gifts of God as such. I am hopeful because with all the challenges that face my generation, God is not done yet ...

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

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

My final words might be framed in the mindset of what I would say to you as my son. I would encourage you to pick up the task in your own way in that you are conversant with what the church has been and in that study of history and the history of the faith and find a way to be hopeful in the context of expressing the faith for the next generation. It seems that every generation reaches a point that they must, as the Israelites had to, cross the river Jordan themselves. We have often thought of that in the twentieth century as the existential door we must cross (i.e. “the parable before law” Franz Kafka), but I think a much more apt metaphor is the understanding of the exodus where we walk together. So my words to you are: to know your history and to trust the God of an optimistic grace, to define your embrace of the next day, the new day.

*Hank Spaulding*

I think you touched on something very important, the image of the River Jordan. It is interesting that we brought this up in a discussion about generations, because once they walk across the river together, the Israelites stack stones so as to commemorate the occasion in which God acts. They stacked these stones so that they may remember how God was faithful and expect how he will be faithful again in the future.

For future generations and my generation it is important to remember and appreciate those who came before us. In some ways this is our plight: that the two sides, both yours and mine, work together in the Church of the Nazarene. Both sides must see that we wish for the same things and the same ends, and we must remember the stones we stacked together. In the story of the Israelites crossing the River Jordan, the young and the old walked together and stacked stones so they could remember what they had done. So maybe it is that today in our time we must learn how to stack stones together once more. I think in doing this we will understand what it means to be Wesleyan and to have a Wesleyan higher education.

*Dr. Henry W. Spaulding*

And I think that the phrase we can most apply to this is anamnesis, the pledge not to forget. This raises the importance of what Robert Bellah wrote years ago in his widely popular and misunderstood book *The Habits of the Heart*, which are dependent on our ability to form the kind of habits of association such as father-son, mother-daughter, elder-younger, [so that] people within the church learn to appreciate that which is important and walk away from that which is not. In this way we become a living tradition, not a dying traditionalism.