

[some first thoughts on models of discipleship](#)

I am enjoying the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (PGDipLATHE) designed for Tutors in Oxford University involved in teaching adults.

One train of thought has begun to percolate in my mind which relates to current educational trends and NT models of disciple-making.

Much education literature emphasises the shift away from teacher-centred education to student centred learning. The old joke about a lecture being “the transference of the notes of the lecturer to the notes of the student without passing through the mind of either”, coupled with a suspicion of power and authority in the hands of the teacher, has precipitated a pendulum swing in the opposite direction.

Consequently a Learner (rather than Teacher) focussed education concentrates on empowering and enabling students to focus their learning in a pragmatic and applied way. It emphasises problem solving and integrated thinking. Good education means that the teacher is not so much one “in authority” but rather “an authority”; facilitating learners by helping them access useful and applied knowledge.

Like pendulum swings, staying at one end of the axis is unlikely to be balanced. I like the oft quoted comment of Cambridge preacher, Charles Simeon, “the truth is not in one extreme or the other extreme, nor in the middle, but rather holding both extremes at the same time”.

My preliminary thoughts about teaching and discipleship, with one eye on the Scriptures and the other on modern education, are as follows:-

1. The Bible believes that there is an authoritative word from the King, communicated through his messengers. The common NT word for preacher is best translated “Herald”. His job, rather like that of the town crier, was to issue a summons from the king which was not up for negotiation, but rather expected the dutiful submission of his subjects. Such preaching recognises that there is a top down, authoritative word which needs to be humbly heeded. Hence, preaching is still needed in today’s pulpits, but it will only be effective when it is the king’s summons which is heard, and the congregation is not stung by all the bees flying from the preacher’s bonnet!

2. At the other end of the pendulum, we would do well to recall that the Jesus’ final charge to his disciples was “to go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18-20). Discipleship language is all about relationship. The learning experience of the disciple is like that of an apprentice, in relationship with the teacher, allowing the agenda to be shaped by a shared life in which teaching is applied. It requires time-investment from the teacher and patient teasing out of God’s agenda in the details of the disciple’s life.

Both the ministry approaches to teaching and learning (Preaching and Disciple making) it seems to me, are essential in Church life and require us to be active at both ends of the pendulum swing. We need to diligently announce and apply the summons of the King to his hearers; we also need to invest our lives in the intimate relationships implied by disciple making.

There is plenty more thinking to be done on this matter, but I have been stimulated by noting the timeless wisdom of the varied ways in which the Bible encourages teaching and learning, and which find some resonance with modern educational trends.