

THE PARENTAL PARADIGM: A Pauline Model for Pentecostal Theological Education

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“Come! Join my school and learn from me. I will so shape you that you can help others to follow me.”¹ (Jesus, the Christ)

“To educate is to inform, but even more than this it is *to form men and women* prepared to collaborate with God in his work of transformation in the world so that it may reflect his glory.”² (René Padilla)

Introduction

As Pentecostal theological educators we are privileged to be involved in the pastoral-teaching ministries of our churches, especially through our theological institutions. With the apostle Paul we too could declare: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service.” (1 Tim 1:12).

Our chief work lies within two key interconnected areas of Christian ministry—that of theological education and pastoral/spiritual formation. We are all agreed on the need to produce persons of Christian character and integrity who possess an adequate theological grasp of the Christian faith and have acquired some of the skills required for effective Christian ministry. The focus of this paper is on the pastoral/spiritual formation of students in our theological institutions. Even though we affirm the centrality of the pastoral formation of our students, we often struggle with the important question: *How does one go about*

¹ My paraphrase based on Mark 1:17 and Matt 11:29–30.

² C. René Padilla, ed. *New Alternatives in Theological Education* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1988), 158.

developing an openness and spaciousness in the curricula of our institutions so as to foster and enhance this spiritual formation?

My goal is to show how *Paul's primary image for ministry is the parental metaphor and that this parental paradigm holds abundant promise for insights and creative application to our overall ministry of theological education.* Accordingly, the major tasks in this paper are:

- (1) to show how metaphors are crucial to picturing our mission as theological educators;
 - (2) to provide a brief survey of the ministerial metaphors in Paul;
 - (3) to observe the parental metaphor in the Old Testament and other Jewish literature;
 - (4) to study the parental paradigm in Paul's writings, with a brief exposition of key texts;
- and
- (5) to examine the role of the teacher, within the parental paradigm, vis-à-vis the chief goal of theological education.³

1. Metaphors and the Task of Theological Education

The key role of imagery and the intricate nature of the metaphorical world have also received welcome attention among biblical scholars.⁴ Since words are not complete semantic units by themselves, having various meanings in differing contexts, a whole array of semantic devices—ranging from simile and metaphor to typology and allegory—is both essential and integral to expressing theological truth as well as the shape of our ministerial tasks.

³ Much of this paper is based on my previous study "The Significance, Function and Implications of Parental Imagery in Paul's Pastoral Care" (Unpublished Th.M. thesis; Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 1996).

⁴ Three representative works are: James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1961); George B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980); and Peter W. Macky, *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought: A Method of Interpreting the Bible* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990).

Luci Shaw, writing on “The God Who Mixes His Metaphors,” says: “Though most of us are not aware of it, *we think in pictures*.”⁵ This is the reason why God, in Scripture, “expands our imaginative thinking with a multiplicity of metaphors—*images that work*.”⁶ Arthur Pinzatski, a professor of mathematics and physics, used to say: “Abstractions are a poor second cousin to analogies. Analogies always get you closer to truth. Never rely on an abstraction if you can get an analogy.”⁷ Thus literary devices such as metaphors and imagery help us to express diverse and often complex matters in fresh and lucid ways.

Max Black speaks of two possible classes of semantic models: *scale models*, where there is a miniature or representative reproduction of selected features of the “original” and *analogue models*, where one notices a reproduction of the “structure or web of relationships in an original.”⁸ Thus the analogue model does not share a set of features or an identical proportionality of magnitude but *a similar structure or pattern of relationships*.⁹

The parental metaphor thus neatly falls into this latter class of analogue models. The image of the parent and children evokes an ethos as well as a whole range of attitudes and emotions that are to be understood in the framework of a complex web of relationships that exists in the involved communities. This is especially true of the parental paradigm elicited from Paul’s writings.

⁵ In *Crux* 23 (4, ‘87), 2; author’s emphasis.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4; emphasis added.

⁷ Quoted by Murray Pura in “The Divine Game of Pinzatski,” *CRUX* 24 (4, ‘88), 8.

⁸ Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 219–23; 222.

⁹ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 223.

2. A Brief Survey of Ministerial Metaphors in Paul

The metaphors and images we use to describe our ministerial-educational tasks have a way of shaping our imagination and influencing how we feel and act out our calling. This section conducts a brief survey of the major ministerial images in Paul's extant writings.

The term "pastor/shepherd" (*poimēn*) appears to have become, through constant use, almost a "retired" metaphor¹⁰—and as a result it often functions, in contemporary parlance, merely as a common noun, or a title. Paul expresses his apostolic/pastoral ministry in manifold ways, employing different metaphors which were germane to his message and context. While the shepherd image is common in both the testaments, it is noticeably infrequent in Paul—found only in passing in 1 Cor 9:7c and Eph 4:11 (cf. Acts 20:28). This fact moves one to look for other "pastoral" metaphors in Paul's writings.

2.1 Paul as a Brother in the Family: The term *adelphoi* is clearly Paul's favourite way of addressing members of the believing communities. This imagery has the wonderful capacity to accommodate the multifaceted realities of "belonging in the family."¹¹ In this "household of faith" (Gal 6:10b), God the Father has adopted believers as his children through the Spirit (Rom 8:14–23; Gal 4:6), Christ is the elder brother (Rom 8:29)—a family where distinctions of race, sex, and social status were to be transcended.

2.2 The Farming Metaphor: In 1 Cor 3:5–9, Paul uses horticultural imagery to express the various tasks that God has assigned on his farm. While the Corinthian church was God's plantation, Paul and Apollos were mere farm-workers, each assigned their specific tasks. Thus while Paul "planted" and Apollos "watered" it was God who brought forth the growth.

¹⁰ Originally novel metaphors can over time become familiar and jaded; see Macky, *The Centrality of Metaphors*, 80.

¹¹ See the excellent study of Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 85–94.

2.3 *Builders and Buildings*: Paul shifts metaphors at the end of 1 Cor 3:9, from horticulture to architecture, from the field to the building. He then expands on this imagery with a series of sub-images (3:10–15). The church is God’s building and Paul, as the expert/wise builder (*sophos architektōn*), had laid the foundation of Jesus Christ. Now the present leadership was being warned to be careful to build with imperishable material. Paul regularly uses verbs for “building/edifying” to denote his pastoral authority and responsibility (e.g. 1 Cor 8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:3–5; 2 Cor 12:19; 10:8 and 13:10).

2.4 *Servant/Steward of God’s Household*: In 1 Cor 4:1–5, Paul avails himself to the images of a servant and a steward to express the apostolic tasks that he (and others) were given. He asserts that as an “administrator of the mysteries of God” he was ultimately accountable to God rather than the Corinthians. In similar vein, he wants the overseers in Crete to function as responsible stewards of God (Tit 1:7).

2.5 *Priest and Parish*: While writing to the church at Rome, Paul sees his apostolic calling as “a priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:16). We could also consider here the sacrificial image in Phil 2:17, where he speaks of his present ministry as a drink offering being poured out upon the sacrifice of the Philippians. Under the rubric of this metaphor, one could see Paul’s prayers and letters as being part of the continued priestly service to his churches.

2.6 *Paul as a Parent*: The parental metaphor, which falls under the heading of family metaphors, holds a significant place in Paul’s writings. The following texts make *explicit* use of parental imagery: 1 Thess 2:1–12; 1 Cor 4:14–21; 2 Cor 6:11–13; 11:2, 12:14–18; Gal 4:19–20 (all these referring to churches); Phil 2:19–22; Phlm 10; 1 Tim 1:2, 18; 2 Tim 1:2;

Tit 1:4 (referring to individuals). Most of these texts will receive a brief elaboration in a following section.

3. Parental Imagery in the Old Testament & Other Jewish Writings

Ample uses of the parent metaphor, for both God and humans, are available in the Old Testament. Parenthood often represented protection, nourishing, and helping. The major uses of parental imagery in the Old Testament and in a few Jewish writings are now noted.

3.1 YHWH as Father of Israel: Even though the God of Israel is rarely addressed as “Father,” numerous texts directly speak about the fatherly and motherly aspects of God’s care and dealings with his children, Israel. Hence we see texts such as:

- a. “Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you? . . . You deserted the Rock who bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.” (Deut 32:6, 18)
- b. “For to us a child is born, . . . And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isa 9: 6)
- c. “But you are our Father, . . . you, LORD, are our Father . . .” (Isa 63:16; 64:8)
- d. Other texts are Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10; Deut 1:31; Ps 103:13; 2 Sam 7:14a; Prov 3:11–12.

3.2 YHWH as Mother: Perhaps because of the abundance of pagan uses of mother-goddesses and the patriarchal culture of the OT, God is never addressed as “Mother.” In spite of this, God’s care has sometimes been compared to a mother’s love.

- a. YHWH makes this comparison himself: “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you” (Isa 66:13a; cf. 66:11)

b. God's motherhood could also be seen in the feminine aspects preserved in comparisons from the world of birds.¹² So Israel is to take refuge under God's wings and God is compared to a mother eagle (Deut 32:11, 12a; cf. Matt 23:37).

3.3 *Humans as "Fathers"*: A number of uses of the paternal metaphor for human leaders can be listed.

a. Joseph, as viceroy and caretaker of Egypt, is thus made "father to Pharaoh" (Gen 45:8)

b. The prophets are looked upon as fathers in the community of the prophets. The "sons of the prophets" and even kings addressed the prophets as "fathers" (2 Kgs 2:12; 6:21; 13:14; 1 Sam 10:12)

c. Kings, priests, stewards, and other outstanding persons were often referred to as parents (Judg 5:7; 17:10; 18:19; Isa 22:21; Isa 49:23; cf. 60:16a).

3.4 *Moses—the Nursing Father*:¹³ In a remarkable passage in Num 11:12, Moses is shown remonstrating with and complaining to God about the leadership of Israel.

"Did I conceive all of these people? Did I give birth to them? Why do you tell me to carry them in my bosom, like a wet-nurse (יִמָּא) carries an infant, to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors?"

While God is in actuality the conceiver, begetter, and nursing mother of Israel, Moses finds the delegated responsibility of motherhood an unbearable burden. Thus the term "nursing father" admirably captures the essence of Moses' roles as military deliverer, prophet, judge, intercessor, guide, and teacher.

3.5 *Parental Imagery in other Jewish Literature*: One would expect several metaphorical uses of fatherhood and motherhood in Jewish writings outside the canonical OT writings.

Here are some representative references:

¹² P. A. H. DeBoer, *Fatherhood and Motherhood in Israelite and Judean Piety* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 35.

¹³ The oxymoron "nursing father" aptly encompasses the parental responsibilities of both God and his human instruments. I first noticed this term in Aaron Wildavsky's study of Moses (*The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader* [Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1984]). Interestingly, the *KJV* provides the translation "nursing father" in Num 11:12.

- a. In *The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach* God is understood as “the Father” and the teacher is seen as the “father” of the disciples (Sir 3:1, 6–8; 51:10)
- b. God is seen as Father in texts such as Wis 2:16; 14:3; Tob 13:4; 3 Macc 5:7; 6:3, 8; Jub. 19:29.
- c. *The Qumran Community*: In one of the best illustrations of the use of parental imagery in the Qumran literature, the Righteous Teacher praises God for setting him as a Moses-like “nursing father” to the community:¹⁴
- “You have made me a father to the sons of mercy, like a wet-nurse [כְּאִמָּה] to the men of wonder; they open their mouths like a child [on the breast of its mother] like a nursing infant in the lap of its wet-nurse [אִמָּה־בֵּן]” (1QH 15:20-22a).
- d. So we are not surprised when in another hymn, God is likened to a father and nursing mother:
- “For my father did not acknowledge me, and my mother cast me off on you. Because you are father to all the sons of your truth. You rejoice over them, like one who has compassion on her nursing child, and like a wet-nurse [כְּאִמָּה], you nourish all creatures on (your) lap.” (1 QH 17:35–36)
- e. The Damascus Document, pictures the role of the “Inspector of the Camp” as being both paternal and pastoral: “He shall have pity on them *like a father* on his sons, and he will heal all the strays (?) *like a shepherd* his flock” (CD 13:9).
- f. In the *Odes of Solomon*, a collection of early Jewish Christian hymns (ca. 100 C.E.), there is a fascinating text (*Odes* 19:1–4) where, in a developed Trinitarian framework, God the Father is pictured with nourishing breasts and the spiritual milk he provides for his children is mediated through the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Thus we see that God, as Israel’s Parent, provides love, compassion, providential care, and careful correction. His was no sentimental love but one that sought to guide his children into full spiritual maturity.

¹⁴ I have given attention to this matter in my study “The Moses at Qumran: The מוֹרֵה הַצֶּדֶק as the Nursing Father of the יְהוּדִים” (James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Vol. 2 [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006], 351–61).

4. The Parental Paradigm in Paul

Out of all the images that Paul has used for his apostolic/pastoral relationship with his churches and individuals, the parent-children imagery appears to be the most significant for Paul. That this is a legitimate assertion could be surmised from the following:

- a. this imagery has primacy among the other ministerial images in Paul's writings;
- b. it is the most personal and emotive of all the images used, hence, arguably, the one closest to his heart. Thus Ernest Best avers that it is Paul's "preferred imagery" and is "more tender than pastor-shepherd"¹⁵
- c. this image is easily and closely linked to the most important model of God's relationship to his people, in both testaments;
- d. it is also the most universal of images;
- e. the reality God as Parent is usually communicated to his people by God given leaders who themselves reflect this parental care.

4.1 *The Parental Imagery in 1 Thessalonians 2:7–12.* In what is probably the first Christian document we possess, Paul expresses the work of the apostolic team in this manner:

As a nursing-mother cherishes her own children, so we affectionately longed for you, delighted not only to impart to you the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, since you had become so dear to us. . . . Even as you know, we (treated) each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging and comforting and urging you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:7, 8, 11–12).

Paul here uses the noun *trophos*, which comes from the verb *trephō*—meaning "to nurse/feed." *Trophos* used elsewhere in the LXX (Gen 35:8; Isa 49:23; 2 Chron 22:11) has the idea of a "wet-nurse." Since this ties in with the later phrase "her own children," what we have is more than a "nurse" (KJV) but rather "mother" (NIV) or "nursing mother" (NASB) The carefully chosen rare verb (*thalpō* = to care for) further energizes our noun here. (The

¹⁵ Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (BNTC; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1977), 102.

only other use of this verb in the NT is in Eph 5:29, where the husband is expected to “care” for his wife, just as Christ cares for his church.) Paul is thus evoking a whole range of nuances—as metaphorical uses are wont to do—that of sacrificial caring, fostering of warmth and affection. The most natural image to press the relational and self-sacrificial dimension of his ministry was that of the nursing mother’s care for her infant child.

Paul then produces the complementary parental metaphor of the “father” (*patēr*) which covers the range of paraenetic concerns – encouragement and comfort, as well as persuasive insistence to walk worthy of God’s Kingdom purposes. Thus the ultimate purpose of the fatherly exhortation is that they, as good children of “Papa-Paul” would grow up into healthy spiritual adulthood.¹⁶ One wonders at this point, whether Paul, who was steeped in the language of the OT, had in mind the figure of Moses, the nursing father (Num 11:12).

4.2 *Paul, the Mother of the Galatians*

A most remarkable use of maternal imagery is found embedded in Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia. This lone text, by no means an addendum to the argument, contains a truly *pregnant* image – probably the best concretization and personalization of the apostle’s turbulent feelings and thoughts as he pens this urgent letter.

My children, for whom I am again in birth-pangs until Christ is formed in/among you! How I wish I were present with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you. (Gal 4:19)

This text provides a fine heuristic to grasp the many harsh words in this letter, providing an exemplary disclosure of the very heart of the apostle. These angry words can be seen in the context of a mother’s protective ire. As a mother, Paul had earlier borne the pain of birthing them, but tragically now, due to their foolishness and the under-the-belt tactics of the damnable agitators, he has to go through the agony of childbirth again—this time to see Christ “taking shape” in the community. To describe aptly the pain and perplexity, as well as

¹⁶ And provide a similar kind of “parenting” to others, as reflected in the exhortation in 5:14.

his tender feelings towards them, Paul could not have taken recourse to a more appropriate imagery.¹⁷

4.3 *Paul, the Father to the Corinthians*

Earlier scholars of the Corinthian Correspondence had divined an internal divisiveness as the major problem that Paul tackles in his letters. However, there is greater substance to the arguments of more recent scholars who have shown that the major problem seems is a substantial and serious divide between Paul and the majority of the church. The church seemed to have bought into an over-realized eschatology with a non-Christian view of what it means to be *pneumatikos* (spiritual), with its complementary concepts of wisdom and power. Measured against these perceptions, Paul and his apostleship come out in poor light, which in turn undermines his authority over them. All the four texts we look at breathe this air of conflict and tension.

- *1 Cor 4:14–21*: After calling himself the steward in the earlier part of the chapter, Paul here uses parental imagery to reestablish his authority over his church. *He* is their founding father (“Even though you may have innumerable guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have you birth through the gospel”) Thus he expects them to follow his instructions (“Therefore I implore you to become imitators of me”). He also reserves the right to discipline them (“Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?”). Paul’s children need to imbibe the cruciform life from their parent.
- *2 Cor 6:11–13*: We note that by the time Paul writes 2 Corinthians, he has made a second “painful visit” to Corinth (2:1). By referring to the expected affection between parents and children, Paul wants the Corinthians to reciprocate his affections. (“We are not

¹⁷ Beverly R. Gaventa’s excellent study on the maternity of Paul (*Our Mother Saint Paul* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007]), rightly locates Paul’s theological vision and gospel in its apocalyptic context.

withholding our affections from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children—open wide you hearts also”).

- *2 Cor 11:1–3*: Paul’s unusual language is reminiscent of OT themes when he says:

“I am jealous over you with a divine jealousy, for I have betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray (seduced) from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”

The anxiety of a Jewish father is palpable in the text. Paul had betrothed his daughter (the Corinthian bride-to-be) to Christ. He now had to ensure the bride’s purity till the day of the wedding. His fear is that the Corinthians will be seduced by these impostors, “apostles of Satan” who were now playing rivals against Christ. This fierce paternal protectiveness of a father, for his daughter, is on display here. Again, the many caustic words of Paul (esp. in his “fool’s speech” in 11:1–12:10) can be better understood in this frame of mind.

- *2 Cor 12:14–18*: Several texts in the Corinthian correspondence make it clear that Paul’s refusal to receive financial support from the Corinthians—and the fact that his opponents are accepting (insisting on?) material support and hence catering to the Corinthians’ pride—is a major bone of contention between the apostle and the church.¹⁸ So he addresses the issue one more time, and this time also the parent-child imagery comes to his rescue:

“Now I am ready to come to you for this third time, and I will not burden you; because I do not want what is yours but you. For it is not the duty of children to save up for the parents, but rather parents for their children. I will gladly spend and be expended for you. If I love you more abundantly, am I to be loved less?”

4.4 Paul a Father to Individuals: Paul “attracted friends around him as a magnet attracts iron fillings.”¹⁹ Three of his close associates, Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus, are specifically referred to as his sons. Timothy was Paul’s invaluable and trusted personal assistant. Timothy

¹⁸ See Paul’s defensive rhetoric that becomes necessary because of his refusal to receive Corinthian patronage in 1 Cor 9; 2 Cor 11:7–11.

¹⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Pauline Circle* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985), 8.

had served with Paul in the cause of the gospel “as a son with his father” (Phil 2:22). Titus was another “son” who enjoyed Paul’s confidence and appreciation (Tit 1:4). Like Timothy, Paul could trust Titus as his “trouble shooter” (sent to Corinth) and with the responsible task of the collection for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:6). As his true son, Paul can boldly say that Titus walks in his footsteps (2 Cor 12:18). We also read of Onesimus, the runaway slave, who becomes Paul’s son while he is in prison (Phlm 10); hence the letter to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, whom Paul calls his “very heart” (literally “bowels”, as in v. 7).

In conclusion, we could say that, for Paul, the parent-child metaphor is more than just a “pedagogical metaphor” but rather a truly “transforming and relational” metaphor. Peter Macky has explained the major functions of the “transforming” metaphors are: providing insight, arousing emotions, and calling hearers to a new way of life; and “relational” metaphors serve to create, enhance, and reinforce good personal relationships.²⁰ The apostle used parental imagery, not as a mere descriptive tool but as a transforming metaphor—a paradigm of a metaphorical world he inhabited. We could hence expect Paul to concur with the conclusion that *Christian ministry (and theological education) could be seen as a mediation of the parental care of God the Father and Christ, in all its multiform ways, through the power of the Holy Spirit*. Thus the parental paradigm is inherently capable of serving well as a universal paradigm for the tasks of Pentecostal theological education in the service of the church.

5. The Teacher and the Goal of Theological Education

This parental paradigm can be put to fruitful use especially as we think about our efforts related to the spiritual/pastoral formation of the students in our theological institutions.

²⁰ See Macky (*The Centrality of Metaphors*, esp. 249–63), who also refers to Paul’s parental imagery and the fatherhood of God as potent relational metaphors (*ibid.*, 259–63).

But before I reflect upon the role of teacher in this parental paradigm, it would be beneficial to discuss the goal in Pentecostal theological education.

5.1 Defining the Goal of Pentecostal Theological Education: As one would imagine, designating the “end product” or “goal” of theological education is fraught with some difficulty, not least because of different theological paradigms in use among theological educators. I would aver that the following four components should be integral to the goal of Pentecostal theological education:

- (i) Formation of *Christian character*
- (ii) Acquisition of *biblical/theological knowledge*
- (iii) Inculcation of *ministerial skills*
- (iv) Impartation of *plērophoria*

Since the first three components need no elaboration here, I want to explain what I mean by the use of the Greek word *plērophoria*. This word is a hapax in the NT, occurring only in 1 Thess 1:5. *Plērophoria* has been variously translated as “deep conviction” and “much assurance.” I use this rare word analogically to stand for the *spiritual impartation* that the Thessalonians received from the Pauline team. The gospel came to the Thessalonians, not only with words, but also with power, and the Spirit, and with *plērophoria*. This resulted in their becoming imitators of Paul and his companions and of the Lord (1:6). I seek to underline the fact that the Thessalonians were not only “taught” but they also “caught” something from their missionaries. This impartation from person to person, of a role model, of caring devotion through the work of the Spirit²¹—which at best can be described as parental care—must be seen as an essential ingredient of the teaching-learning process in theological education. Something of this aspect is seen in Luke’s record, when Peter and John were recognized as “men who had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). I believe, especially as

²¹ Michael I. N. Dash, “Exploring Spiritual Formation in the Classroom,” *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Centre* 20 (1/2, ‘92/’93), 71.

Pentecostal theological educators, we are conscious of the need for the impartation of *plērophoria*.

5.2 *The Role of the Pentecostal Teacher.* This is where the person and passion of the Pentecostal educator comes into play. The teacher is in a sense the mediator of the parenting of God—the instrument of the Spirit, who is the Ultimate and Perfect Teacher.

Spiritual formation has to do with living from the Spirit, being nourished by the Spirit, being attentive to the Spirit, being empowered by the Spirit for ministry.²²

So how do we do this in the context of a theological institution? It is obvious that we cannot leave this crucial ministry in the hands of a few persons, however gifted they may be. The *community of educators* must shoulder this responsibility.

We are aware that we impact our students both inside and outside the classroom. In a previous study based on responses from graduates of my institution, I was able to demonstrate (though to no one's surprise!) that the primary things that positively influence theological graduates (and continue to do so after many years) were aspects of a teacher's person and the nature of their relationship with students.²³ This reality requires that the context of spiritual formation be relational.

Our task is not over once we leave the lectern and the classroom. Both in and outside the class, in one-on-one as well as group situations, we are to make ourselves available to our students, so that they are taught, encouraged, and directed towards full maturity in Christ. We are to provide prayerful assistance in the identification and removal of hindrances to Christ-likeness, whether in the past or present (often both), so that they may experience the parenting of God mediated through the Holy Spirit, and they in turn learn to parent others in the family of God.

²² Dash, "Exploring Spiritual Formation," 71.

²³ Jacob Cherian, "Role of Life-Style in Seminaries," *Association of Evangelical Theological Education in India Journal* 6 (1993), 18–22.

Like responsible and sensitive parents, we need to “exegete the human document” that our students present us with. As teachers become available to the Holy Spirit and to students in need, they provide that atmosphere where persons begin to understand themselves and the intricacies of their pain and problems, as well as their strengths, so as to be able to apply the resources of Scripture for their needs. “Effective empathy assumes a cosmic permission to get in touch with one’s own deepest experiencing. Persons who are offered this empathic gift tend to grow toward more appropriate self-acceptance and self-understanding.”²⁴

It appears that underlying the motivations that bring students to theological institutions is a primary need for personal wholeness and a sense of direction. This need will be met through concrete personal relationships within the Christian community, more often between teachers and students, as well as in structured and non-structured small group contexts.

There is a close psychological link with our experiences of parenting—both in our biological families and in the church—and our relationship with our Divine Parent. Thus the obvious challenge to the church and theological institutions, especially when we consider the pastoral formation of our students, is to mediate the Parenting of God to an increasingly parentless (especially “fatherless”)²⁵ society. This dominant feature of modern life was hardly noticed until the twentieth century.²⁶ James Houston, an expert soul-geographer, speaks of the need for “reparenting” and “a second childhood.”²⁷

²⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 19.

²⁵ See David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

²⁶ James Houston, *The Transforming Friendship* (Batavia, IL: Lion, 1989), 167.

²⁷ James Houston, *The Heart’s Desire: A Guide to Personal Fulfilment* (Batavia, IL: Lion, 1992), 229. Houston speaks of how the “mutilated childhoods” of people such as Freidrich Nietzsche, Stalin, and Hitler, contributed to the “diabolical history of the twentieth century” (ibid., 236 - 37).

In texts such as 1 Thess 2:7–12, Paul applies the imagery to the mission team who acted as the *soul-parents* to the Thessalonians. We can take the parental team paradigm and envisage the faculty-staff team as those who become the Spirit's primary instruments of spiritual formation.

Concluding Reflections

Thus the task of spiritual formation is in a most real sense a parental task.²⁸ The teaching and non-teaching staff must possess tender and tough love and “be prepared to take on certain parental responsibilities.”²⁹ Spiritual parents need to be aware that they are in partnership with the triune God, who ultimately is the Parent. Our theological institutions will need to structure into their curricula and programmes such avenues that will foster relational interaction between students and their teachers. We will need to move away from a model overly influenced by the Enlightenment—often with an unbalanced emphasis on reason, empiricism and the cerebral—to a more biblical model of education.

We need spiritual fathers and mothers in theological education. The cognitive aspects of our education are not irrelevant, rather they are incomplete without a clear emphasis on meeting the personal needs of our students—which includes imbibing the cruciform life from their spiritual parents. May I also mention here, that one aspect of our South Asian culture appears to be conducive to the use of the parental paradigm—the pervasive (though somewhat ancient) *Guru-shishya* (Guru-Disciple) tradition. Guruship can often be tied to parenthood. Thus our theological centers are not to be seen as mere storehouses full of “goods” meant to be disseminated to whoever will come and buy them, but as

²⁸ Kenneth Leech (*Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality*. [San Francisco: Harper & Row], 71), speaking on the writings of Abbe Sandreau, outlines the characteristics of spiritual direction as being paternal, firm supernatural and practical.

²⁹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 160.

places where there is also a transmission of a *mantra*—an impartation of spiritual values, personal concern, caring love and sense of mission—all in the power of the Spirit.