

## **Lessons from History - Discipleship**

The passion that has driven my life for many years is to lead people of all ages from within a decisively faith-based context. I find the Body of Christ absolutely fascinating, people's God-given uniqueness enthralling and inspiring. The culture that seeks to squelch what the Spirit is doing is one that drives my imagination and sense of child-like playfulness that transforms ministry from chore to joy. This paper finds its origins from this call and the overwhelming desire to ground contemporary strategies of ministry in Christian history, biblical tradition, theological integrity. Throughout Christian history, God has utilized the lives of all people and brought them "off the bench" putting them on the playing field of culture to make a dramatic impact.

In what follows, we will investigate two distinct movements in history in which young people were called upon to enter into a rule/discipline of living that prepared them for service and leadership. The first example is for "extra-biblical" history, that is, times that find documentation primarily outside the biblical text but are "biblically" relevant in that we can view instances of the existence of this movement within the writ of scripture. Well-founded historical conjecture can be made that within rabbinic circles of biblical Judaism, disciples of a rabbi were no more than 15 to 18 years of age. The "Talmidim", those attempting to walk in the dust of their rabbi (in other words, be like him in every way) were teenagers learning and growing them to take up the yoke of the Torah. As we shall more thoroughly examine, as children matriculated through three distinct "schools" of training (Bet Sepher, Bet Talmud, Bet Midrash), their propensity for leadership deepened and their theological competency greatly expanded. Since the context of this training is relevant to Jesus' context, it seems historically appropriate to state that most likely, Jesus' own disciples (his "Talmidim") were adolescents. Imagine that! Teenagers were responsible with the power of Holy Spirit of bringing the faith and dynamics of the Kingdom to bear in their culture. I desire to demonstrate to the reader that it is the ministry of everyday "saints" that is liable for the presence of faithfulness in our generation in history. That is significant and potentially revolutionary in the contemporary praxis of the Church.

History also presents us with another model of leadership development in the Novitiate of Monasticism. Under Benedictine and other Monastic Rule, young men (and, conversely, women in their monastic context) were "trained" in the life of contemplation and service. Spiritual direction and exercises in faith formation proved reliable in developing the leaders of the medieval Church. Far from being a process that was relationally static, the Novitiate gives contemporary Christianity a "snapshot" of effective relational mentoring and leadership development that, literally, transformed generations and, arguably, helped steer a floundering institutional Church in the direction of spiritual faithfulness and vitality.

When I was making my way through elementary, junior high, and high school, I was never particularly interested in history. History was a chore...it was something that had to be learned because it was part of the curriculum leading to graduation. It was not exceedingly interesting, not because of the content or people or circumstances of history but rather because of the teacher of history. I do not know what it is but it appeared to

me at a young age that every teacher of History had to be a graduate of S.E.B., the School of Endless Boredom. Having never been exposed to training for classroom teaching, I cannot specifically comment on what became glaringly obvious as I stepped my way through the trenches of history. I have no conclusive proof that there is specific instruction for all History teachers on how to completely make times past torturously boring. In addition, I have no corroboration on my deep suspicion that there is a Robotic manufacturer someplace in the world that churns out History teachers that are gifted at sleep induction. I could go on...you get the point by now. All I know, is that as I grew older, there was something about the lessons of the past that started to make much more sense and became the source of inspiration and intellectual hunger.

In my experience, history communicates two distinct truths: firstly, that contemporary human experience is being lived in the context of a broader story. It is a story that has been occurring for centuries and has a profound impact on our current lives. Without understanding the story, we live our daily lives with no perspective and often with a sense of extreme arrogance. As the author of the book of Ecclesiastes wrote, “there is nothing new under the sun”.<sup>1</sup> I wish many of my peers understood this profound statement. What is often touted as “something new” or as a methodology borne out of the creativity of some cultural superstar is rarely an occurrence experienced in a historical vacuum. What I might call, “historical humility” is a spiritual gift or character trait that I would hope and pray would be a part of every contemporary leaders or teacher’s heart. The story of history provides the framework from which we do all that we do especially in ministry and living the challenge of the making contemporary the realities of the Kingdom of God. Without the story of history, we are bankrupt and irrelevant. I cringe to think of what would occur in the world if ALL we had were the present-day experience of the Church. I have believed for some time, without the lessons and blessings of Christian history, the prevailing Church would be dead in the water.

The second truth that history proclaims is the fact that history is truly “His-story”. I cannot help but think about the biblical fact that the narrative of scripture begins and ends with the presence and power of God. God reveals, acts, dreams, relates, works, weeps, laughs, regrets, redeems, sacrifices, speaks, empowers, and creates. The story of history is more about God than about us. Now, I would caution the reader on making the story of history exclusively “His-story”. As one reads in Genesis 2, “it is not good to be alone”. The story of history is the story of relationship...there is a relational fabric to the universe. It is one that intricately and intimately involves the human species. Even so, it is a relationship that is created in the mind and action of God. His-story would not be complete without our-story. That is what makes the study of history so compelling in my mind. It is fascinating to ask how God was revealing Himself in various times and in specific relationships throughout history. It is also extremely captivating to attempt to understand our part in that journey and to learn the lessons of why we either “got it” or “didn’t get it” as God attempted to transform human lives through His activity in a particular historical era. The lessons of history are the pages that tell us the story of a God who is constantly acting and desirous of relating but often ignored and spurned by the very ones with which He desires to connect.

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9

The lessons that the reader will be exposed to are ones honed from the story of God's relationship with people in the early centuries of the Common Era (A.D. or C.E.) and in the pit of what many people would regard as the "Dark Ages". In the midst of political oppression and theological compromise arose a movement of teachers and students dedicated not only to "living the text" but also to a revolutionary lifestyle. It was from this milieu that a young, itinerant teacher from Nazareth adopted a methodology of training and lifestyle shaping to mold the lives and hearts of those who would be called his "disciples". Beyond that, the middle ages, or the time of medieval history, are one that is fraught with tragedy, mystery, ecclesiastical misstep and apostasy. Even so, out of the struggle emerged a movement of young people pursuing faithfulness to God and taking a prophetic challenge exemplified in word and deed to the prevailing culture. Both movements changed the world, as we know it. But both movements also involved people who were often regarded as ones who had not measured up to the fullness of their potential as human beings. They were young, impressionable, and still not seen by many in their time as having what it takes to be influential or important. These young people were still on a growth curve, emerging, questioning, and having as much potential of experiencing failure as they had in faithfulness. Even so, as we shall see, these movements heavily contributed to the work of God in their time and, in essence, were a significant aspect of the story of history that impacts our lives today.

First of all, we will turn back the historical clock and view the rabbinical tradition of Judaism as it was experienced in the Galilee around the time of Jesus. We will see the methodology of leadership development utilized by the Rabbis to not only insure the future of the Jewish faith and tradition but also as a foundational aspect of the preservation of the culture of faithfulness to God. Secondly, we will examine the Novitiate of Monasticism in the history of the Christian Church. To be able to assume that we will do an exhaustive analysis of Monasticism and its impact on young lives is preposterous. Even so, a brief examination will net us a peek into how young people transformed their world with a revolutionary commitment to the interior life and acts of love and sacrifice in one's world. Then, in what some might call a "bold" move, we will do the important work of correlation or application. In other words, are there lessons to be learned for contemporary ministry to students? I believe so. I pray that your journey into "His-story" and history will be beneficial, enlightening, and interesting. May it be more than just another trip into the boredom morass.

### **Section One - The Talmidim and Disciples of the Sage**

We have a tendency in our time to arrogantly think that people have always behaved as we do. We suppose that since we have access to technology and creative, 21<sup>st</sup> century methodologies that are obviously "superior" (our value judgment) that everything in the past would rank somewhere just east of the Stone Age. To assume that somebody else did life better in the past is a preposterous assumption to many contemporary human beings. Most people assume that the lack of knowledge, primitive living conditions and an absence of all the modern tools for research, teaching and/or living inherently meant that all of the past was 'backward' or inadequate and definitely not applicable to our "enlightened" time. I have heard many a leader comment on the possibilities for

evangelism and Church growth if Jesus would have only had access to television, radio, or modern stadium crusades. Unfortunately, many of these same commentators do not factor in the dehumanizing, marginalization, and market-driven realities of contemporary media. The last thing I would want the Son of God to be subject to is the reduction of His divine nature and transformational message into some sort slogan, logo, or commercial jingle.

Might the past have more to say to us in our time than we can possibly imagine? I believe so. In fact, imagine with me a dusty, village street or town square. Fill your mind with pictures of animals freely roaming through the dirt and family pets (mostly sheep and goats at this time in history) doing their “business” where a majority of the townsfolk would walk and live. See in your mind's eye all the necessary trades being practiced in full view of everyone...carpentry, winemaking, farming, sheep herding, textile weaving, and the pressing of olives for oil. Imagine the plethora of individuals from all races and societies filling the streets...roman soldiers, travelers making their way to distant lands but stopping for a quick drink from a well, and merchants from other villages hawking their wares. Visualize a different style and pace of living...sunrise to sunset, Sabbath-to-Sabbath. Envision a life where tradition reigned, elders respected, families honored, and children meticulously raised in context of a story of redemption and freedom (the Torah). See humble homes and experience a primitive simplicity almost enviable in comparison with superficiality of the contemporary age. Yet, not all was joyous in the midst of these innocent times. Unfortunately, because of the complex balance of peace between the Herodian lineage and the Roman Emperors, lines of crosses filled many of the passageways from village to village as a grim reminder of who really wielded the power in these tenuous times.<sup>2</sup> Slavery was something that was not only politically correct, but practiced with fervor. Death was not something ushered to funeral parlors and memorial parks...it was a daily occurrence that happened in the home and street. Think about living in such a place, the Galilee, as it was called in the first-century A.D.

### **Education in the Galilee**

History demonstrates that the people of the Galilee were some of the most religious and pious of the Jews of the first century.<sup>3</sup> The physical separation from the core of cultic Judaism (roughly 100 miles separates the Sea of Galilee and Jerusalem, the Temple and Sacrificial system which provided the foundation of Jewish spirituality) prompted many Jews to build their spiritual lives around the community of the synagogue as well as a tenacious dedication to Torah. As biblical scholar Ray Vanderlann notes,

“The Galilean people were actually well educated...more famous Jewish teachers come from Galilee than anywhere else in the world. They were known for their great reverence for Scripture and their passionate desire to be faithful to it. This

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<sup>2</sup> Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press), 395-396.

<sup>3</sup> Ray Vanderlaan, *The Rabbi and His Talmidim* (Holland: That the World May Know Ministries, 2004), 1.

translated into vibrant religious communities, devoted to their families, their country, who synagogues echoed the debate and discussions about keeping the Torah.”<sup>4</sup>

It was in this setting that Jesus grew up from childhood to the beginning of his ministry as an adult at the age of 30. The tiny village of Nazareth might not be what many in our time would regard as a benchmark for passionate dedication to learning and spiritual development. Yet in Jesus’ day, he was part of a community who memorized the text of scripture, debated its application with enthusiasm, and loved God.

Essential religious and cultic development began at an early age in the Galilee. The pedagogical intensity in these Jewish communities was unparalleled in ancient times. Every home was a school and every parent a teacher. Childhood was not seen as a helpless time but as an era in a young life that was filled with possibilities. Spiritual training began with a simple prayer that echoed throughout the community and brought to mind the power and presence of a faithful and covenant-making God; “Shema! Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5ff) These are the words that flowed from the lips of every person in the small Jewish communities that surrounded the Galilee. Quoted in the morning and in the evening, the Torah was summarized in a heart-felt expression of love for God and commitment to the principles of community that provided the security and foundation of life. According to Jewish scholars, the Shema was the “first prayer” that children were taught and the “quintessential expression of the most fundamental belief and commitment in Judaism.”<sup>5</sup>

The Mishnah, Rabbinical interpretations of scripture containing both written and oral traditions from approximately the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., depicts the educational process typically experienced by young Jewish boys at the time of Jesus.

“At five years old (one is fit) for the Scripture, at ten years the Mishnah, at thirteen for the fulfilling of the commandments, at fifteen the Talmud, at eighteen the bride-chamber, at twenty pursuing a vocation, at thirty for authority (possibly Rabbinical standing in the community).”<sup>6</sup>

To assume that the process of training, education, and, what is commonly called in our time “disciple making”, occurred in a vacuum outside of the influence of Jesus’ early community would be preposterous. Because Jesus would have experienced his own teaching in a specific manner it is only logical to assume that the familiar pedagogy of his early years became the foundation paradigm for what would become his “style” of disciple making.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 5:21.

Rabbis and Teachers of the Law would provide the lion's share of the foundational instruction for every child past the age of five in the Galilean area. Schools were established in every community associated with the local synagogue. Teachers were "hired" to be responsible for the education of the children of the community although it appears that no other specific responsibilities were given to wield religious authority. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia,

The founder of the system of elementary education was Simon ben Sheta. The school was not in immediate connection with the synagogue; but sessions were held either in a room of the synagogue or in the house of the teacher. The teachers ranked in the following order: namely, sage, scribe, and rabbi. Between 63 and 65 C.E. Joshua ben Gamla reformed the system by constraining every community, no matter how small, to provide instruction for its children. In accordance with Oriental custom, the pupils sat on the ground in a semicircle about the teacher, who sat on a raised platform. The compensation of the teacher was not stipulated, but consisted of restitution for loss of time. In fact, some teachers combined working at a trade with the teaching of the Law. "Do not use learning as a crown to shine by, nor as a spade to dig with!" said Rabbi Zadok. Girls, equally with boys, were taught to fear God and keep His commandments".<sup>7</sup>

School life began at the age of five or six. In these communities, children were honored in their abilities to comprehend, learn and apply truth, wisdom and specified moral, philosophical and theological guidance. It was written in the Mishnah that,

"Whoso learns in youth is like writing on new paper. Whoso learns in old age is like writing on blotted paper."<sup>8</sup>

Rabbi Gamaliel said, "No pupil may be admitted to the lecture-hall if his character is not in keeping with his allegations".<sup>9</sup> He did not demand special character traits be exhibited by these eager, young students but he did seek adequate preparation. He did insist that students not only be sincere in their desire to learn but demonstrate a propensity to be guided into faithful character and morality. For every twenty-five pupils there was one teacher; for twenty-five to forty, a teacher and an assistant; for fifty, two teachers. The assistant reviewed the lesson with the pupils, as a sort of tutor.<sup>10</sup> The pupils were arranged in rows. Sessions were held during the day and part of the evening. On Fridays the work done during the week was reviewed. Nothing new was presented on Sabbaths. Vacations occurred on days preceding the Sabbaths, feasts, and holy days, and on fast-days; on the last in order that, in keeping with the fast, the teacher might deprive himself of the pleasure he had in teaching. The main aim was to attain morality: "Good is the teaching of the Torah when it is attended by morality".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Various, Jewish Encyclopedia, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Danby, *The Mishnah*, 5:22.

<sup>9</sup> Various, Jewish Encyclopedia.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Danby, *The Mishnah*, 23:5.

Thus, encircled by pupils, regarded by many as a crown of glory, the Rabbi imparted the precious knowledge of the Law, with constant adaptation to their capacity, with unwearied patience, intense earnestness, strictness tempered by kindness, and, above all, with the highest object of their training ever in view.<sup>12</sup> Character molding, moral instruction and spiritual discipline sought to keep children from all sin, to train them to gentleness; even when bitter experiences come their way. Rabbinical teachers strove to show sin in its repulsiveness, rather than to terrify by its consequences; to train to strict truthfulness; to avoid all that might lead to disagreeable or indelicate thoughts; and to do all this without showing partiality, without either undue severity, or laxity of discipline, with judicious increase of study and work, with careful attention to thoroughness in acquiring knowledge.<sup>13</sup> This is what constituted the office of teacher and why teachers in that culture were held in such high esteem.

### **First Century Educational Methodology**

Instructing a child in religion and doctrines to the point that they had not only a clear intellectual understanding but also an operational application to daily living was a fundamental principle in first century Jewish education. Beginning early in life with the mother who gave her children the first rudiments of education, she was especially focused on their moral formation. She might continue to advise her children even in adolescence (Proverbs 31: 1), but as the boys grew up to manhood, they were usually entrusted to their father. One of his most sacred duties of a father in this culture was to teach his son the truths of religion (Exodus 10:2; 12:26; 13:8; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7, 20f. 32:7, 46) and to give him a general education (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20). Most teaching, throughout the years of a child's life was done by word of mouth. The parents and subsequently the teachers told biblical stories and rabbinic traditions, gave explanations and asked questions; the pupil repeated the story, and asked or answered questions (Exodus 13:8; Deuteronomy 6:7, 20f. Psalm 78:3-4). This method of teaching continued under the Rabbis, and continues even today in synagogue schools. The word 'school' (*bêth-midrash*) occurs for the first time in the Hebrew text of Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 51: 23 (during the Hellenistic period). There is some conflict as to when an educational system or pedagogy may have risen that impacted the early life and discipleship teaching of Jesus. According to some Jewish traditions, it was only in 63 C.E. that the high priest Joshua ben Gimla decreed that every town and village should have a school which all children would have to attend from the age of six<sup>14</sup>. With the destruction of the temple and the cultic focus on the city of Jerusalem, the need for religious life and instruction shifted dramatically to the synagogue. During the post-70 A.D. period of history, we see the most dramatic rise in the number of synagogues as a result of this Diaspora. It would be fair to assume that this tradition did not occur miraculously, as if dropped into the communities of the Jews. Rather, it evolved as an effective pedagogy over time. That

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<sup>12</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (McLean: Macdonald Press, 1983), 177.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

<sup>14</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), 152.

leads us to the probability that this methodology was alive and well even in the days of Jesus. Although it must be stated that this tradition is contested by some scholars who date the institution of public instruction from the time of John Hyrcanus, about 130 B.C.<sup>15</sup>

It is the sources from the Talmud that give us the most accurate picture of the pedagogy of the Galilee. The Palestinian Talmudic references mention a distinct division between three separate “houses”, or divisions of study in Galilean Judaism.<sup>16</sup> Each of these houses revolved around specific “curricula”. The curriculum was very fluid, focused on age groupings, skill development, and the realities and pressures of daily existence. Often children did not continue on to “higher” houses of learning due to the demands of family, the family business, and trade.<sup>17</sup> The following is a brief description of each of the learning modules or “houses” that were experienced by the maturing Jewish child as they progressed in life to an adult understanding and practice of their faith.

### **Bet Sefer – Elementary School or House of the Book**

Dedicated to the reading of Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament, also known as the “Books of Moses”, the “Law”, or the “Pentateuch”), this specific segment of education was roughly attended by children from ages 5 to 10. Both boys and girls were in attendance during this time of their educational and religious growth. During this period in their maturation, children devoted themselves to learning the alphabet and learning to write. The teacher taught the letters of the alphabet by writing them on small wax or clay tablets with a stylus followed by a recitation by the pupils. Vocal recitation was critical within this culture due to the high degree of commitment to the tradition of oral communication and authority.

From the tablets, children eventually passed to the “megillah” or small scroll on which sections of the Torah were written and systematically memorized.<sup>18</sup> There is historical evidence that states that tradition prohibited certain sections of the Torah to be written on any scroll, small or otherwise. Students were taught to not only respect for the text but also for the name of God and other textual issues that were considered too holy for even written practice.

The Torah was used for the study of a broad array of topics: from math, to geography, history and religion. In most instances, all the children were expected to memorize the Torah by age 10 or 12 (before moving on to the next “house” of study).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>16</sup> Shemuel Safrai and Moritz Stern, *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 950.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 950.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 950.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 952.

There was intentionality and intensity in teaching within ancient Jewish culture that might be considered harsh in our time. One Rabbi stated,

“Before the age of six do not accept pupils; from that age you can accept them and stuff them like an ox”.<sup>20</sup>

There is historical evidence that girls were given specific lessons in additional books of the canon of Judaism specifically the Psalms and Proverbs.<sup>21</sup> Young girls in the culture were often those who grew to be the mothers and subsequently needed not only to learn the worship traditions but also the practices since they would eventually be leading worship in the home.<sup>22</sup> It was usually by the age of 13 that most girls got married.<sup>23</sup> Because of the cultural realities young girls faced, formal education for most ceased by the time they were able to marry and raise a family. For young boys, the educational process could continue given their family circumstances and intellectual abilities.

### **Bet Talmud – House of Learning**

At the age of 10 or 12, most boys were promoted to the study of the oral traditions of the Torah, or the Mishnah. If a boy were not deemed knowledgeable enough in his study and memorization of the Torah, often a father would complete his instruction and begin to introduce him to the family trade.<sup>24</sup> Boys in this pedagogical element frequently took part in vigorous questioning and debate as they began to wrestle with key sections of their growing faith. Since the Talmud is a collection of rabbinical sayings and traditions, students were encouraged and challenged to participate in the historical debate of key texts and teachings of Judaism. It was an exercise that is textually demonstrated in the life of Jesus as He engaged in discussion with temple leaders and teachers while visiting Jerusalem at the age of 12. This schooling challenged students to not only think on their own but also to articulate their beliefs and knowledge of Torah. There is a frequent expression, “the chirping of children”, which those who casually walked used passed the synagogue only to hear the recitation and debate of verse and text.<sup>25</sup> It was an educational reality that permeated the culture and brought joy and structure to the community.

### **Bet Midrash – Secondary School or House of Interpretation**

By the age of 12 or 13, a boy finished his studies at school. If he was gifted and of a mind to pursue deeper education and spiritual development, the boy would move on to another “house” of study, Bet Midrash. It was common at the time for young boys to be in this “house” only if he demonstrated the ability and willingness to pursue a life’s goal of being a rabbinical teacher himself.<sup>26</sup> Methodologically, this stage was dedicated to the

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<sup>20</sup> Danby, *The Mishnah*, 21a.

<sup>21</sup> Safrai, *The Jewish People of the First Century*, 954.

<sup>22</sup> De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Safrai, *The Jewish People in the First Century*, 952.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 953.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 953.

memorization of the entire Tenakh (Law or Torah, Navi'im or Prophets and pre-canonical Ketubim, or Writings). It was also a time when a student began to be rigorously quizzed by the rabbi on the content of the Tanakh that was supposed to be committed to memory and applied to life. In our Greco-Western education system, there is a primary focus on instilling information in students, which is then to be reiterated at the appropriate time in the form of tests or exams. For example: a teacher may ask, "what is four times four?" A student would answer, "sixteen". However, Hebraic pedagogy and rabbinical studies were performed in radically dissimilar manner, the form of dialogical questioning. Again, the Jewish Rabbi would ask, "what is four times four?" and the student might answer, "what is thirty-two divided by two?" thus answering a question with a question.<sup>27</sup> This methodology was specifically employed as a manner of encouraging and building the abilities of young talmid to engage text and theology.

As one examines the New Testament it can be noted how frequently Jesus employed the technique of asking questions as a means of answering questions. Abraham Joshua Heschel summarized the differences between the two approaches by saying that "The Greeks study in order to understand while the Hebrews study in order to revere".<sup>28</sup> Education for people in the biblical world was more than a simple matter of memorizing information and passing tests. It was the search for the hidden plan and presence of God. Educational goals in Scripture always involved the whole person— amoral intellectualism simply did not exist. The ancient Hebrews taught that education, which does not begin with the fear and awe of the Lord, leads to foolishness. An old Hebrew saying stated, "One who acquires knowledge but knows not what to do with it is no more than a donkey carrying a load of books."<sup>29</sup> This pedagogy filled a young boy's days as his time was spent at the feet of a prestigious rabbi or teacher of the Torah. Historically, this is the time when someone became a disciple or talmid (plural, "talmidim").

## **Discipleship and Talmid**

The word "disciple" has taken on a variety of diverse meanings throughout the centuries. In first-century Judaism, to be a disciple meant to be someone who was passionately devoted to their rabbi, noted and transformed their lifestyle to reflect everything he did or said. The rabbi-disciple (talmid) relationship was intense and extremely personal. Talmid were those who not only listen but also watched and imitated everything they experienced in their rabbi's life.<sup>30</sup> It was their intent to completely incarnate the rabbi's life into their own lives so that eventually they could pass on the same to their "talmidim" (students/disciples). Discipleship in modern culture primarily denotes curricula of learning. It is primarily focused on intellectual endeavors that are relatively shallow in comparison with the rigorous nature of its first-century counterpart. Frequently reduced to reading plans, books, journals, or specific intellectual adherence to specific doctrines, discipleship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is primarily a peripheral exercise that

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<sup>27</sup> Ray Vanderlaan, *The Rabbi and His Talmidim*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 200.

<sup>29</sup> Danby, *The Mishnah*.

<sup>30</sup> Ray Vanderlaan, *The Rabbi and His Talmidim*, 2.

infrequently invades a person's lifestyle. Discipleship is something that a person "does" not specifically what defines the individual's identity. It is reduced to specific actions versus a transformation of character. It cannot be overstated that first-century discipleship operated within a completely different framework.

A talmid studied with a rabbi because they had an intense desire to be just like the rabbi. It was not a calling to know, but to be. To be talmid took consuming passion and a constantly commitment to asking in daily life situations, "what would my rabbi say or do?" "Mentor-Protégé" or "Mentor-Apprentice" are modern equivalent might best summarize the intent of the talmid-rabbi relationship. All Jewish boys were desirous of completing the full extent of their education and having the giftedness in hopes of finding a rabbi who would agree to let them follow him. This took place somewhere around age fourteen. Most students sought out the rabbis that they yearned to follow. The rabbi would consider the potential of each boy and whether or not he would be able to do what was necessary to be like the rabbi.<sup>31</sup> Many boys were never asked to follow a rabbi. They were most likely encouraged to return to the family and pursue a godly family and business life. If the rabbi believed the students had what it takes, he would say, "Come follow me", they would leave their family, their compound, and their village, even their local synagogue, to study with him. They would give their life to being exactly like the rabbi. They would follow him everywhere. A popular rabbi phrase was: "May you be covered in the dust of a rabbi," referring to the fact that the student followed the rabbi all day observing virtually everything he said and did.<sup>32</sup> A rabbi would come to the village and behind him would be his apprentices, his talmidim, trying to imitate him. If Jesus' ministry were any example that many readers would be familiar with, rabbinical teachers would do and say anything to teach Torah. They would use pithy sayings, they would use weird analogies, and they would utilize props, set things on fire, put mud in people's eyes, or break things to help the Torah come to life.<sup>33</sup> One of the most widely used techniques of teaching came in the form of parables. More than 3500 parables from the first century rabbis still exist today.<sup>34</sup> Similar in form and content to the teachings of Jesus, these rabbinical parables focused on themes directly taken from the daily experiences of the talmid themselves (kings, farmers, seeds, etc.).

Each rabbi had a yoke, which was a particular set of interpretations about the Torah and the Talmud that carried a certain weight of spiritual authority (i.e. s'mikhah). Every rabbi wanted to perpetuate his yoke, in other words, to teach others to become rabbis and take his particular interpretation to as many people as possible. Usually a rabbinical teacher wanted to know if their talmidim had what it took to be carrying their yoke into the next generation. He would ask questions about the content and interpretation of the scriptures and, through an intensely personal relationship with the talmid, the rabbis would see each disciple's potential lived out before their eyes. The rabbis each had a different way of interpreting the text. Therefore, when you followed that rabbi you took that rabbi's yoke upon you. The yoke was their interpretation, their story, their legacy,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>33</sup> David Olshine, *Covered: The Value of Mentorship* (2004), 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ray Vanderlaan, *The Rabbi and His Talmidim*, 3.

their message, and their ministry. As talmid your dream would be to eventually have s'mikhah imparted into your life (similar to that which took place in Exodus 18 as Moses shared his authority with elders of Israel). Interestingly enough, it is Jesus who, at the end of the gospel of Matthew, passes on his s'mikhah to his talmid and tells them to "go into all the world..." (Matthew 28:18-20).

## Jesus the Sage

An alternative view of the pedagogy of the Galilee and the methods that influenced the life of Jesus comes from our understanding of Jesus as Sage. A Sage is a person of profound wisdom and one who is venerated for the possession of wisdom, judgment, and experience.<sup>35</sup> According to this hermeneutical paradigm, Jesus' primary tool of discourse and training exists within his use of "mashal".<sup>36</sup> "Mashal" is an ancient form of narrative that is depicted in antiquity as the "revealer of hidden things".<sup>37</sup> It is said to have been utilized extensively within the context of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) as well as that of the Apocryphal books (e.g. Sirach). Wisdom literature stressed the hiddenness of truth that needed to be revealed. In fact, Sirach 39:1-9 states that it is the subtleties and obscurities of parables and hidden meanings of proverbs that require being filled with the Spirit of God in order to understand and reveal them to the masses.<sup>38</sup> Hence, the person and ministry of Jesus...revealer of the mysteries of God.<sup>39</sup>

Ben Witherington III, biblical scholar and professor of New Testament at Asbury Seminary, is a proponent of Jesus' role as Sage within the biblical story and historical context. Witherington asserts that Jesus actually becomes, according to prophetic tradition, a living mashal (i.e. symbol or figure of God's message toward the end of the achievement of God's purposes). In this instance, Jesus was God's mashal to the people. He was wisdom incarnate.<sup>40</sup> L.E. Keck, in his book, *A Future for the Historical Jesus*, also states,

"Jesus himself was a parable; he not only tells a shocking story but leads a shocking life..."<sup>41</sup>

Jesus the Sage to his disciples would have been primarily engaged in wisdom laddened discourse along with a pedagogy heavily dependent on extensive conversation. One can hypothesize that because of the intensity of their relationship as well as the amount of time spent with Jesus, that the disciples took advantage of the mashal that he passed on. His was a wisdom that was made flesh. His was a wisdom that extended beyond that of

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<sup>35</sup> Dictionary.com

<sup>36</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage the Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 244.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 202.

<sup>39</sup> Ephesians 1:18-20, NASB.

<sup>40</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage, The Pilgrimage of Wisdom*, 240.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Witherington, 244.

other teachers and sages of his time.<sup>42</sup> According to the narratives of the four canonical gospels, Jesus did not take on a heavily laden yoke but a paradoxical one. Torah according to Jesus was not burden but life and true life came from living the wisdom of God as revealed in Jesus. His yoke bound his disciples to himself and his teaching... a teaching concerning a revolutionary order of reality (i.e. Kingdom of God) that he believed was being brought about through his ministry.<sup>43</sup> This wisdom incarnate was unique in the fact that no one before or after Jesus during the biblical period identified himself or herself as such. For the disciples, they were not only witnessing history being made but had the opportunity to draw close to that wisdom being forever transformed because of it.

### **What did all this mean?**

It would be foolish to assume that Jesus did not enjoy all of the benefits of being raised in the uniqueness of the first-century Galilean culture along with a rich, biblical tradition. Jesus grew up with the education of most Jewish boys and surrounded by the pedagogy of his time. His ideas and eventual relationship with His disciples reflected the examples of the prominent teachers he was exposed to. In fact, it may not be presumptuous to assume (although we have no specific historical evidence) that Jesus was talmid to a well-known rabbi in Galilee. At age 30, when one would normally leave their rabbi and take on their own talmidim, Jesus follows the cultural precedence of the day. Twelve young men Jesus called to be His disciples each most likely in their late teens. Interestingly enough, other rabbis may have rejected each since they were all involved in trades and family business when “called” by Jesus. Jesus was the one who asked each to “Come, follow me!” Is it any wonder that they so rapidly left their nets, their business, and their families and followed? Maybe each had given up hope of ever having the opportunity to serve an apprenticeship and be taught by a famous rabbi. Empowered by the call of Jesus, each talmid embarks on following a rabbi who believes they have what it takes to be like Him.

Was Jesus looking for the best of the previous schools? No. Was He looking for the most astute scholars? No. He was looking for followers, for disciples, for those who wanted to passionately be like Him. It is Jesus who eventually teaches these young adults, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (Matt. 11: 29a). In other words, “Follow me and do what I do. Hear my words and do them.” Jesus gathered them in intentional community and led them through three years of example, challenging teaching, and revolutionary living that would change the course of human history. After the supper that was to be the prelude to the ultimate expression of sacrificial love demonstration of the reality of the Kingdom of God, Jesus said to the talmid, “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16). Jesus was a Jewish Rabbi in the first century, imputing his life to his disciples, preparing them to “do greater things than I have done.” Despite their frailties and failures, Jesus believed that each talmid could perpetuate His yoke.

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<sup>42</sup> See Mark 1 as well as Matthew 11:28-30.

<sup>43</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage, The Pilgrimage of Wisdom*, 208.

If history serves us well, each of these young men, now known as Apostles, were roughly the age of 15 or 16 years when called to follow their rabbi. Rejected by other rabbis or not having the knowledge or expertise to be a Torah teacher themselves, they were busy applying their trade when Jesus plucks them from daily living to be talmid. They were then to be “with” Him, to follow Him, to live by His teaching, to imitate His actions, and to make everything else secondary to the implications of learning from their rabbi.<sup>44</sup> Even if the specificity of this pedagogy, over time, proved to be historically unsound, there is reason to assume that some rabbinical training was prominent at the time of Jesus. Jesus did mature in a explicit historical setting. To come to the conclusion that Jesus did not operate within the methodologies that were prevalent during his years in the Galilee would be erroneous. Jesus most likely reflected the pedagogies of his context. Even in his role as Sage, Jesus assumed a rich history that profoundly influenced his self-identity and pedagogies.

Is it possible that the leadership development and teaching that occurred in the first century would have anything to say to those of us who are committed to engaging and enabling the giftings in leadership for an emerging generation? I believe it would. The intentionality of teaching, the high expectations of dialogical pedagogy, the deliberateness of intense and accountable community coupled with leadership that breathes life into self-doubt, fear and apprehension can potentially release an entirely new generation of talmidim to impact in revolutionary ways an environment that is continually being referred to as “Post-Christian”.

## **Section Two – The Novitiate**

“In the Gospel story, the passionate, the outsized, the out of control have a better shot at seizing heaven than the contained, the calculating, and those of whom the world approves”.<sup>35</sup>

It would appear at first glance that attempting to draw a pedagogical connection between a monastery and contemporary adolescence would be an exercise in the oxymoronic. Most would regard that effort to be one fraught with impossibility. For all it takes is time to allow the mind to meander between the cloister and the present-day high school or local church youth group to be able to come to some amusing images: boys playing video games in their cells as a means of expanding the Exercises of Loyola; youth groups where the leader does not have to quiet a crowd in order to say one word because of a corporate vow of silence; food fights in the refectory; monks doing the hand motions to many of the modern worship songs (e.g. jumping up and down in robes to “Undignified”, that’s a great image!). Frankly, the images are endless and hilarious. Even so, when one starts to ponder the cultural and spiritual impact of the monastic

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 120.

movement in history and how many of these adolescents who filled the abbeys of the world contributed not only to the faithful communication of the Gospel in what many regard as dark ages but also to the revolutionizing of society, one must stand back in awe. History is filled with pictures of young people changing the world. As mentioned above, the seemingly “outsized” and “out of control” can bring about transformation.

In this section the intention is to provide the reader with a brief “snapshot” of the monastic tradition. To assume that an extensive analysis of monasticism and the Novitiate will follow in the coming paragraphs is ludicrous. I would encourage the reader to consult the bibliography for a deeper and more comprehensive entrance into that world. This examination is to be brief only to be able to surface those elements of the Novitiate that illumine the impact that this historical phenomenon (i.e. miracle). In addition, each aspect will be brought to attention as a means of peeking into how the Novitiate developed the spiritual leaders that shaped not only a generation but also an era in history. To hypothesize that the monastic movement has nothing to say to contemporary leadership development within the world of the adolescent is preposterous. History gives us a taste of those serendipitous movements of the Holy Spirit that continued Jesus’ passion to actualize the Kingdom of God within the human sphere. The Novitiate was one of the most powerful movements that not only gives evidence to transformation in a given period of history but also, as lessons are learned from what was experienced, has the capability of converting our lives and praxis.

### **A Brief History of Monasticism**

Monasticism is a movement in the history of Christianity. Literally meaning, “the act of dwelling alone”, the word has evolved to bringing to mind images of seclusion, rule, sacrifice, and orders focused on serving the poor and living communally. Words like “monk, monastery, and monasticism” do not appear in the Bible although depictions derived from lives of Old Testament Prophets, Jesus and the Apostles...lives wholly dedicated to God, prayer, radical allegiance to victims of poverty and injustice, teaching, preaching, communal living and the practices of spiritual discipline are abundant within the pages of Holy Writ.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the entire concept of a "community" which eventually became part of the transformational paradigm that dominated monastic existence, originates from the exemplary relationship of twelve followers (and an extended number that could have reached 120 individuals) under the leadership and teaching of Jesus as He prepared them to impact their world on behalf of the Kingdom of God. In addition, men like Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, and also John the Baptist were holy men of God who spoke (and acted) as they were moved and led by the Holy Spirit, rejecting sin in their lives, and proclaiming the Word of God against King, religious ruler, or that aspect of popular culture opposed to God. In the Books of I and II Kings we hear of the "schools of the prophets" which were for young men attempting to study Torah and live their lives in emulation of the prophets.

Any discussion of monasticism must also include an analysis and appreciation for the sect of the Essenes in Jewish history. The Essenes were members of a small Jewish

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<sup>36</sup> Various, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2005.

religious order, originating in the second century B.C.E. The chief sources of information about the Essenes are Pliny the Elder, Philo's *Quod omnius probus liber*, Josephus' *Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>37</sup> The Essenes lived as a highly organized community that held possessions in common. Ceremonial purity entailed scrupulous cleanliness, the wearing of only white garments, and the strictest observance of the Sabbath. They condemned slavery and prohibited trading because it led to covetousness and cheating; they avoided luxury, abhorred untruthfulness and forbade oaths, with the one exception of the oath a new member took after two years of probation. In this oath, the member pledged piety toward God, justice, honesty with fellow Essenes, preservation of the sect's secrets, and proper transmission of its teachings. The Essenes subsisted by pastoral and agricultural activities and handicrafts; they avoided the manufacture of weapons. The sect ceased to exist sometime in the second century C.E.

In its early forms, monastics were those in seclusion from the world for religious purposes. Most of the time, this involved ascetic practices to some degree. The beginning of monasticism in the Church is traced to Anthony (b. 250) in Egypt. In his youth he sold his possessions, and went into solitude, engaging in prayer and the strictest self-denial. A certain Pachomius supposedly improved monasticism by establishing the first monasteries. Two forms of monasticism soon developed: (1) the *hermitic*, which involved relational isolation and often harsh asceticism, and (2) *cenobitic*, which involved communal living. In the first half of the Sixth Century the Benedictine order was established with its emphasis upon frequent periods of common worship, manual labor, and study.<sup>38</sup>

History demonstrates that many early monastics sought higher levels of spirituality by physical separation from daily life. With the cessation of blood martyrdom because of the rise of Christendom (post-Constantinian), monasticism soon became the greatest sign of the highest level of spirituality to which one could aspire. Soon the title of "green Martyrs" became the rule as those who, leaving behind the comforts and pleasures of ordinary human society, retreated to the woods, or to a mountaintop, or to a lonely island – to one of the green no-man's-lands outside tribal jurisdictions- there to study the scriptures and to commune with God.<sup>39</sup> Some early monastics also esteemed the virtue of a contemplative life more than that of active service to humanity. Although it must be stated that as monasticism developed through the centuries it became immersed in service to the poor and victims of injustice in societies. Early monasticism has been said to have arisen as a quest for knowledge (gnosis); a flight from taxes; a refuge from the law; a new form of martyrdom; a rejection of classical culture; a response to a call from the Gospels.<sup>40</sup> Certain key texts from the Scriptures, especially those having to do with renunciation and detachment, stood at the beginning of desert monasticism, serving as primary sources of inspiration for the whole movement. The characteristic spirituality or expression of holiness, which emerged in the movement,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, 151.

<sup>40</sup> Various, *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

was a fundamentally biblical one: the monks appropriated Scripture so deeply that they came to be seen by their contemporaries as living "bearers of the word."

## **Waves of Monasticism**

It does not take a long period of time in scholarship endeavors to understand that there have been a number of "waves" of monastic movements throughout history. Analogous to waves that come in progressive sets in the ocean, so too we can view in history the succession of distinct movements of monasticism through the centuries. The first Christian monks were essentially "religious Hermits." The desert experiences of these first ascetics is literally not only the beginning of Christian monasticism but is regarded by many of the first "wave" of monastic influence on Christian history.<sup>41</sup> It was a monk named Pachomius (292-346 C.E.) who formed the first organized Monastic Community made up of individual hermit-type monks who of their own accord would gathered together for prayer and the Eucharist.

A Second Wave of Christian Monasticism actually began with St. Basil who founded the Cappadocian Monasteries. St. Basil the Great (329-379) was greatly influenced by Pachomius taking his passion for community further in starting monastic communities in Cappadocia (eastern Asia Minor; now modern-day Turkey). St. Jerome translated an early rule, or guidebook, for monasticism written by Pachomius into Latin ca. 404 C.E. This rule became the foundation of much of what regarded as the earliest structure for communal monasticism.<sup>42</sup> It was Augustine of Hippo (354-430), converted to Christianity in 374 C.E., who along with a few Christian friends founded the *Servei Dei* (Servants of God). Centuries later it would be re-named the Augustinian Order, the oldest Monastic Fraternity in the Western Church.<sup>43</sup> Eventually when Augustine was made Bishop of the town of Hippo, he established a monastery that functioned also as a Seminary, training young monks to be leaders in all of the towns throughout North Africa. Yet it was Benedict of Nursia, or St. Benedict, who lived for many years as a solitary hermit in a cave, who eventually was asked to be head over several monks wishing to experiment with the "new" idea (not necessarily new, it was an idea of Pachomius) of monks living in community. Out of that experiment, the seminal rule for monastic living, The Rule of St. Benedict, emerged. The Rule of St. Benedict became the "Rule" for almost all monastic communities in Europe (with a few exceptions: the Greek and Eastern Orthodox Christian Church, the Celtic Christian Church, the Augustinians, who follow the Rule of St. Augustine, and a few other Orders with their own distinctive rules). It was the custom of most these early monasteries, whether Roman, Orthodox, or Celtic, to only have around twelve members. When another twelve had joined, they would be sent off to "found" a new monastery. In later centuries some individual monasteries would have hundreds of monks.

Included in this second, distinct and definitive wave of monasticism is the Celtic expression. The Celtic portion of the early church began around 300 C.E. when Romans stationed in Wales who had accepted the Christian Faith spread their faith to the local

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<sup>41</sup> Various, *Religion Facts*.

<sup>42</sup> Various, *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

population. It is out of this unique time of history that St. Patrick became a Christian while a slave in Ireland. He later received monastic training before returning as a to Ireland as a missionary (ca. 400 C.E.). The Celtic Church eventually grew and became a monastic-based church that allowed married monks. It held in high regard both *eremitic* (individual hermitage) and *cenobitic* (community monastery) monasticism. Unlike the Orthodox portion of the early church, it eventually placed itself under the authority of the Bishop of Rome at the Synod of Whitby (ca. 600 A.D.) thus ending the Celtic Church's historic independence in England. The Irish Celtic monks returned to Ireland. It was another 500 years before the Irish Celtic Church also submitted to Rome at the Synod of Cashel (ca. 1100 A.D.). This was the end of the practice of traditional Celtic monasticism. The historical Celtic monastic Orders were replaced with the Roman Orders: Augustinians, Benedictines, as well as others.<sup>44</sup>

The Third Wave of Monasticism began with a man by the name of Francis of Assisi. A lover of God and of people whose actions were regarded as lunacy but whose love affair with the faith eventually became a paradigm that transformed the middle ages. A young fool, lover of nature, builder, radical, and mystic, in the 1200's St. Francis, desiring to live for Christ and following Christ as his example, gave up all his possessions and went about preaching the Gospel and helping the poor. Though today we hear of Franciscan "monks," at the time, his return to a "biblical monasticism" was so different from the then-current monasticism, that the new terms, "friars," and "mendicant order" were coined to describe his followers and their Order.<sup>45</sup> St. Dominic also in the 1200's founded the Dominican Order as a "mendicant order." In common with the Franciscans, they were monks who went about preaching, teaching and serving people rather than only remaining in monasteries withdrawn from the world. These two expressions of monasticism are what many would regard as the classic forms despite the argument of that John Wycliffe and The Lollards as well as John Wesley and the movement of men and women called, the "Methodists", are early protestant monastic movements (catholic encyclopedia).<sup>46</sup>

### **The Monastic Movement and The Training of The Novitiate**

A novitiate (also called a novice) is a member of a religious order who has not yet taken his/her vows. Novices were (and currently are) cared for, mentored and "disciplined" by older monks until the novice has met the requirements of the Order. The nineteenth ecumenical council at Trent (1545-1563) determined not only pivotal doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church in answer to the claims of Protestantism but also was key in the execution of a thorough reform of the inner life of the Church by removing numerous abuses.<sup>47</sup> The Council of Trent decreed that everyone aspiring to become a monk participate in the novitiate, or be a novice, for at least one year.

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<sup>44</sup> Various, *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>45</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 7.

<sup>46</sup> Various, *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

The Novitiate refers to a community of novices (most often teenagers historically) dedicated to aggressive spiritual development during a period of time in a monastic order before taking formal and life-long monastic vows. It often is used to describe any persons that are new or not meeting normal requirements for admission to an Order or as "...a time of probation directed to this purpose, namely, that the novices come to know more deeply their divine, and indeed Dominican vocation, experience the Order's way of life, be formed in the Dominican spirit in mind and heart, and manifest their intention and suitability to the brethren".<sup>48</sup> These words served as the foundation of any novitiate community in a monastic Order. In addition, it has been a time-honored historical conviction that coming to knowledge of a religious vocation requires time, silence, prayer, solitude, oversight, and communal accountability.

The following is a section that would be commonly referred to by a majority of those aspiring to enter and Novitiate:

"187. I. The novices shall be instructed thoroughly by the master and his assistants in the history of salvation, in Sacred Scripture, in liturgy, and in the principles of Christian life, and about the priesthood. II. They shall also be instructed thoroughly in the nature of religious life and especially in the history, spirituality, and laws of the Order; they shall be introduced to our observance in such a way that its spiritual and apostolic value becomes apparent. III. They shall be encouraged to develop human and Christian virtues so that by humility of heart, eagerness of spirit, and self-denial they may develop a richer spiritual life. They shall be taught how to approach the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist more fruitfully and apply themselves to mental prayer.

188. It is proper that novices be filled with a missionary spirit, that they understand the conditions and needs of people living in the world and realize "how they must be fervent in preaching at the proper time." Their training, therefore, should be not only theoretical but practical as well, even through participation in some degree in the apostolic activities of the Order".<sup>49</sup>

Individuals who were sensing a call to a religious vocation were often drawn by a desire to preach the Gospel, experience redemptive community, and a love for study. Yet even these motives needed to be tested by the experience of sustained prayer, solitude, accountability and discipline. More than just a time of probation, the novitiate was a place and a people. Pastoral responsibility assigned to the friars of the house was not only to care for a parish but also oversee the spiritual and leadership development of the novices and the Novice Master are part of community.<sup>50</sup>

Monasticism's most careful and articulate expression of rule, or order finds its center in the Rule of St. Benedict. Saint Benedict was not the founder Christian monasticism by any means, since he lived two and a half to three centuries after its

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<sup>48</sup> Georgina Rosalie Galbraith, *The Constitution of the Dominican Order, 1216-1360* (New York: University Press, 1925), 177-188.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 177-188.

<sup>50</sup> Various, *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

beginnings in Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor. He became a monk as a young man and thereafter embraced monastic tradition by associating with monks and reading monastic literature. To say that “he was caught up” in the monastic movement would be an understatement. He diligently re-envisioned monasticism and went on to articulate his passion for the movement in new and fruitful ways. This is evident in the Rule which he wrote for monasteries and which was and is still used in many monasteries and convents around the world. History teaches that St. Benedict lived from 480 to 547 A.C.E., though we cannot be sure that these dates are historically accurate. His biographer, St. Gregory the Great, pope from 590 to 604, does not record the dates of his birth and death, though he refers to a Rule written by Benedict. Scholars debate the dating of the Rule though they seem to agree that it was written in the late sixth century. Benedict was born in Nursia, a village high in the mountains northeast of Rome. His parents sent him to Rome for classical studies. Soon Benedict himself discovered a need for a spiritual and moral cleansing after the result of living in Rome. Though it was referred to as the eternal city, it was also too degenerate for Benedict in light of his personal commitments.. Consequently he fled to a place southeast of Rome called Subiaco where he lived as a hermit for three years tended by the monk Romanus.

The hermit, Benedict, was then discovered by a group of monks who prevailed upon him to become their spiritual leader. It was during this time that Benedict starts to shape what we would now know as his Rule (i.e. way of life). The beginnings of the Benedictine regime soon became too much for the monks (that Gregory would referred to a “lukewarm) so they plotted to poison him. Gregory recounts the tale of Benedict's rescue: as Benedict consecrated a pitcher of poisoned wine, it broke into many pieces thus sparing his life. Benedict left the wayward monks and established twelve monasteries with twelve monks each in the area south of Rome each “led” by his magnum opus, The Rule of St. Benedict. The Rule is the sole known example of Benedict's writing, but it manifests his genius to crystallize the best of the monastic tradition and to pass it on to the European West.

The Rule of Benedict denotes as clear of a picture of the training and formation of the Novitiate as we have within Christendom. Each young person entering the stage of monastic novice was initially evaluated by elders within the communities for their sincerity and willingness to engage in formational behaviors. After being admitted to the Novitiate, a one year process of spiritual development would occur. This period soon became the norm for much of the monastic movements of the Western Church.<sup>45</sup> It was during this time in antiquity that novices lived in a special section of monasteries and were entrusted to a monk who is described an one with a proven skill for “winning souls”.<sup>46</sup> The twelve months of training that each novice received was in the context of community and included periodic opportunities to affirm the sincerity of one’s initial commitment to enter the Order’s rule of life. Each novice was challenged and instructed to live a life of:

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<sup>45</sup> Timothy Fry, O.S.B., *The Rule of Benedict* 1980 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), 440.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

Lectio - divine reading, spiritual reading, or "holy reading," representing a method of prayer and scriptural reading intended to promote intimacy with God. Lectio is a way of praying with Scripture that calls one to study, ponder, memorize, listen and, finally, pray from God's Word.

Meditatio – a divine study which was confined to sacred texts whose goal was not intellectual assent but existential appropriation of the Word of God in forming life.<sup>47</sup>

Obedience to the Work of God – within the Rule of Benedict this meant the “divine office” or rhythm of life that the novice dedicated themselves to in the context of the community. Divine Offices are worship and contemplative acts of prayer focused on the recitation of scripture and psalm singing. Each office occurred at regular intervals through the monastic day. It is critical to understand that the prime qualification of entrance into monastic living is obedience to the rule of the Order.<sup>48</sup>

Opprobia – this term is unique to the Benedictine Order and reflects a novice’s eagerness to enter into personal trial. This does not infer personal injury or risk but rather an intentionality of engaging in humble tasks and other jobs that people in the world would consider as humiliating.<sup>49</sup>

Once a novice would demonstrate through their training and willingness to enter the lifestyle outlined by the Rule, they would have the opportunity to commit the rest of their lives to the Order. Their verbal and written vows would be formulated around their sincere desire and commitment to enter into a life of obedience, a way of life that converts their behavior (in latin, “conversatio”), and their commitment to a life of stability (the discipline of “stabilitate sive perseverantia”), or a perseverance to remain in a lifestyle that promoted the values of community, poverty, silence, humility and daily work.<sup>50</sup>

The Novitiate received their most important spiritual formation by actually living the religious life. Classes in the life and traditions of the Order and assigned duties are part of the life (even though primacy was often given to the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours).<sup>51</sup> Whereas the historical leaders of monastic orders (e.g. Francis and Benedict) called the novices to vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, they were to live out their spiritual passion through being migratory and nomadic instead of stationary. They were to “mingle with the world without becoming entangled with the world”.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the rigorous construction of a vibrant inner life, the Novitiate was to engage in apostolate. Some worked in prisons, others visited the elderly and homebound. Others still engaged in a ministry with the disabled. A long history of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 448.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 448.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>51</sup> Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1984), ii.

<sup>52</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 93.

intentional community gave the Novitiate (are currently gives the Novice) clarity of spirit and formation of faithfulness to the call of the Gospel. It is said that Francis did not call his followers monks; and it is not clear, at this time at least, that he even thought of them as monks. He called them by a name, which was rendered in English as the Friars Minor...literally, “the Little Brothers”.<sup>53</sup> This demonstrates the desire for monastic community and underscores the relational foundation that perpetuated a movement despite the complications and horrors of human history.

The Novitiate was taught to take on the powers of the world through their fervent spirit and revolutionary action. Francis is said to have made the journey to Rome to take on the Emperor, enthroned among his armies under the eagle of the Holy Roman Empire, to intercede for the lives of “little birds”.<sup>54</sup> Dedicated to being the mirror of Christ, it is perfectly true and it is vitally important that Jesus became the pattern on which the monastics fashioned themselves.<sup>55</sup> The Novitiate was characterized in community as those who passionately pursued the character and nature of Jesus. For example, through learning humility and sacrificial love, young novices took on the person of Jesus in their lives. Francis once said, “I beseech you, little brothers, that you be as wise as Brother Daisy and Brother Dandelion; for never do they lie awake thinking of to-morrow, yet they have gold crowns like kings and emperors or like Charlemagne in all of his glory”.<sup>56</sup> Mockery of the idea of possessions, disarming the enemy with generosity, bewildering the worldly with the unexpected, and carrying a spiritual and Kingdom enthusiasm to an illogical extreme marked the lives of the leaders of Novitiate. Francis was said to have iterated that, “You could not rob a person whose only possession was a harp. You could not threaten a man who was already fasting. You could not ruin a man and reduce him to beggary for he was already a beggar”.<sup>57</sup> It was this type of single-minded devotion that changed the course of history and eventually led to the Church’s reformation in the 16th century (promoted, incidentally, by the theology and praxis of clergy, professors, and leaders whose heart and passion for Jesus was formed in the rules of Augustine, Dominic and Francis).

### **The Impact of the Novitiate/Monasticism**

“...The restoration of the church will surely come only from a new type of monasticism which has nothing in common with the old but a complete lack of compromise in a life lived in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount in the discipleship of Christ. I think it is time to gather people together to do this”  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Noted Benedictine and Spiritual Theologies Scholar, Gabriel O’Donnell wrote, “Once or twice in a week of centuries a culture manages to renew itself and express again its finest ideals and values. In much the same way, the Church has known moments of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 95.

clarity and insight that became sources of renewal and a new surge of energy...the monastic movements brought such moments".<sup>58</sup> It is indisputably important to note the contributions of monastic training on young people in history. From radical community to impassioned practices of spiritual discipline; from an adherence to a belief in the growth potential of every servant of God to the personal search for holiness; from a reinforcement of the importance of both inner and outer lives to the lifting up of forgotten biblical imagery (e.g. the power of the desert and wilderness as a place of prayer and purification and the reinforcement of the importance of silence as a practice of awe before the Lord God), without debate, the monastic movements and the institution of the Novitiate changed the way life was lived. Through the efforts of followers of Jesus who took on the rule of discipline, solitude, sacrificial service and prayer, continents were changed and the journey of Christianity makes its way through medieval history into the present day.

History shows us that it is the proclamation of God's saving work in Jesus that becomes the driving force that releases the central vocation of every Christian man or woman who enters the Novitiate. It is in these major lessons of the mendicant movements where the apostolic ideals permeate each age with a renewed sense of confidence in the mission of Jesus.<sup>59</sup> New leadership that is visionary, missional, empowering, authentic, community-oriented, and Kingdom conscious takes on the powers that may be. Despite the story that history tells us of the successes and failures of many of the activities of Christians throughout the centuries, present-day leaders should take notice of the lessons learned, victories won, and lives transformed that was brought about by the institution of the Novitiate within monasticism.

### **History's Balm to Contemporary Praxis Adolescent Leadership Development in Ministry**

"At first glance, Dorothy is all wrong as a model of leadership. She is the wrong gender (female) and the wrong age (young). Rather than being a person with all the answers, who knows what's up and where to go and what's what, she is herself lost, a seeker, often bewildered, and vulnerable. These characteristics would disqualify her from modern leadership. But they serve as her best credentials for postmodern leadership."<sup>60</sup>

In a very astute article written for a website, "Rev. Magazine", Brian McLaren identifies a number of wizardly characteristics of that have epitomized Church leadership in the ages of modernity. Each focuses on the authority of a "chosen" instrument of God who owns the sheer technical knowledge of their profession, an individualist with specialized training and academic degrees, a conquest attitude of soul, the knack of always wanting to be on stage and in public view, the narcissistic focus on being "above" the normal laity, and who abides on the top of the church's organizational chart. Without

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<sup>58</sup> Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 83.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>60</sup> Brian McLaren, *Dorothy on Leadership* (Rev. Magazine, Winter 2003).

a doubt, most people who love the Bride of Christ would assess that the growth, development, and effectiveness of the cause of the Kingdom of God is in trouble because of this type of leadership paradigm. Many are calling for a release of the post-reformation captivity of the Church.<sup>61</sup> In order for there to be any hope for the future of God's Kingdom of earth through the calling, passion and ministry of the Church, new paradigms for leadership and the development of new leaders must be explored.

One of the dominant factors in any ministry that acts as a harbinger for renewal lies on the laps of its leadership. Over ten years ago, a man with spiritual fortitude and a passion for the Church sat in a coffee shop and wrote down the words, "the local church is the hope of the world and its future rests primarily in the hands of its leaders".<sup>62</sup> As the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century casts its gaze on to the horizons of the future, current strategies utilized to prepare it and its emerging leaders for the exponentially changing world seem shortsighted and inadequate. The demands of doing ministry within a postmodern context, which is rapidly proving to be explosive time in human history, appear daunting. Despite those actualities, most experts who measure the dynamism of change within current ministries especially within the current climate of the American brand of contemporary Christianity agree that change occurs slowly and at miniscule increments.<sup>63</sup> Hence, the disconnect... it seems again that the Church is out of step with the times at hand. That is why, in many respects, hope for the contemporary Church as well as the Church of the future lies not in the effectiveness of its current leadership but in the preparation, release and anointing of the emerging generations of leadership. How to be able to engage future leaders in a manner that encourages, equips and faithfully enables the call of God upon their lives to be difference makers in the culture should be at the pinnacle of the concerns of the contemporary Church. Leadership needs to be developed at younger and younger ages to be effective.<sup>64</sup> As leaders age the likelihood of them being moldable and teachable decreases. There is high likelihood and probability of significant impact on leadership development if we start early in a student's spiritual formation.

We need to move from Wizard of Oz leadership to leadership honed through the crucible of character-formation and community-based foundations. The time of the solo pastor who is seen as expert, prime minister and CEO of the corporate gathering of believers has ended. A new day where leaders are formed in communities not dependent on size or political structure, where participation and service matters more than quality, where expert is changed to sage, broadcaster to listener, technician to friend, salesman to artist, careerist to amateur, problem solver to co-journeyer... where there is a transformation from knower to seeker and from spotlight headliner to team builder are going to be the factors that have the potential of moving Christianity into the new millennium.<sup>65</sup> A new movement that breeds enthusiasm, hope, self-renunciation, and

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<sup>61</sup> Greg Odgen, *The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 12.

<sup>62</sup> Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 27.

<sup>63</sup> George Barna, *The State of the Church 2005* (Ventura: The Barna Group, 2005), 44.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> Brian McLaren, *Dorothy on Leadership*.

“faith in a holy cause as a... substitute for the lost faith in ourselves” must be birthed in our time.<sup>66</sup>

Gamaliel in the book of Acts said in regards to a movement of young people who were radically and sacrificially following their rabbi, “if it is not of God – it will burn up – if it is of God, no stopping it” (Acts 5:39). To understand the foundation of a new, subversive, difference-making discipleship is to understand relationship, spiritual experience, and self-sacrifice. Parker Palmer put it this way, “to know something or someone in truth is to enter troth with the known...to become betrothed, to engage the known with one’s whole self”.<sup>67</sup> A relationship with God engulfs the totality of a person’s mind, heart, soul and strength (i.e. Deuteronomy 6:4ff). Contemporary culture is a cult. It is a system of revelation. It is the entire range of corporate ritual, of symbolic forms, human expressions, and productive systems. It quietly converts, calls for commitment, transforms, inspires heroics, and emits a sense of fulfillment. Culture does not teach, it propagandizes. It is an idolatry – in whose image humans are recreated and diminished. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is a revelation – an ultimate source of reference wherein we find ourselves and the world revealed. The Gospel is a response to the questions of who we are, what we may hope for, how we may aspire to act, what endures, what is important, what is of true value. Following Jesus, if it is real and true, can not merely change the way you worship...it has got to change the way we play, work, buy, sell, love, do life. The movement of Christianity has got to be about defining the ultimate in terms of God’s Kingdom breaking into the world to redeem a new global community. Jesus tells us that we will find our ultimate satisfaction not in seeking life but in losing it in service to others.

We can no longer be adherents to dualistic discipleship. In spite of all the talk about Christ’s Lordship, everyone knows that the expectations of the culture come first. That is the unspoken façade of modern Christianity. Christ followers tend to make decisions like everyone else – based on income, professions and social status. Modern Culture shapes our lives – overwork, single-family detached homes, congested time schedules. Following Jesus can no longer be trivialized as little more than a devotional lubricant to keep us from stripping our gears when pursuing our own lives. It can no longer be reduced to quiet times and Sunday mornings...highly privatized and spiritualized and disconnected. Following Jesus has got to begin to define the good life.

The first community of followers turned the world upside down. They were constantly challenging the dominant values of their culture AND paying the price. The contemporary church often is one of the strongest apologists for protecting the dominant values of the world. The church should be a counter-cultural community. Being a Christ-follower cannot be something that you work around the edges of an already overcommitted life. It is a whole-life proposition...it challenges us to reorder our entire existence. Instead of trying to excuse what Jesus actually said, followers act on what the Lord commands. That’s why the Talmidim and the Novitiate play such a major role in

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<sup>66</sup> Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 9.

critiquing our current praxis of leadership development. That's why these time-honored and Spirit-inspired efforts need to be resurrected in new ways as we learn from history how to invest in lives and how to take students extremely seriously by pushing them to live in transformational community through which they will impact the world. John Kavanaugh says it this way as he answered the question of this generation as to whom or what was going to shape our lives,

“If we say Jesus Christ, then we are called by him to a life of simplicity, a life without racism or vengeance, a life of compassion and trust, a sharing of our goods, a consciousness of and attention to the world's poor, and a committed covenant in faith, hope, and love. In a culture that increasingly demands the “thingification” of human life, we are called to struggle with the “personhood”.<sup>69</sup>

That appears to this writer as a call that is completely consistent with the call that was followed in history...the same call that changed the lives of young people and consequently changed the culture and the world.

Because of the fact that we, as the Body of Christ, need every member of the spiritual community to passionately and recklessly be part of “the cause” through the use of their gifts in order to be faithful to the call of Jesus, I believe that the church must challenge young people to be actively on the playing field of ministry. Throughout the New Testament, young leaders were encouraged to “lay it all on the line” for the Kingdom without regard to their “tender” age. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12,

“...It is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness...but God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked.” (1 Corinthians 12:22ff)

Again, in specifically addressing his young spiritual apprentice, Paul challenges Timothy,

“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example to those who believe.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

To be able to build into the lives of young and emerging leaders is the call of the contemporary body of Christ. Not only is the next generation depending upon our faithfulness but also the Lord God is watching as we demonstrate faithful stewardship of the gifts and people that we have been graciously given. To NOT seek to release the spiritual passions and giftedness of young people today would be simply one way of disobeying God's call to bring the Kingdom to our world. Biblical examples of mentoring and leadership development (i.e. Paul and Timothy, Jesus and the twelve)

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<sup>69</sup> John Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 126.

provide ample documentation of how young lives can be leveraged for the future of the Church.

In embarking on a historical journey, one is never far from the realities and perils that lay ahead. I pray that I can adequately meet the impending challenges and proficiently convince the reader of my specific thesis. Because of the nature of the contemporary Church and emerging realities of postmodernity, it is imperative that spiritual leaders not only consult but also actively learn from the lessons of history in regard to revolutionary leadership development practices. As we stand at the threshold of an explosive new century, the impact made upon the generations of the past by young people needs to be taken seriously. If you and I are here, asking questions of the faith, seeking to follow Jesus with authenticity in our time, it is because of the faithfulness, dedication, sacrifice and commitment of young people who turned the world upside down in their time. I pray that as you journey with me, that you too will be inspired by their example and that you will struggle with me in discovering ways of applying the lessons of the past to an ever-demanding today and future.