

Lima Evangelical Seminary

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Date: 21 June 2009

Preacher: Donnie Smith

[0 : 00] Brethren, thank you David for the invitation to be here this evening and thank you for your greetings, the greetings of the church to be sent to the seminary. I also bring to the congregations of the Free Church that I have to address greetings from the seminary, so we have a mutual exchange of goodwill there. Some people here know the seminary very well, they've been there, they've lived there, some of them, and some people are very interested in this congregation, in what goes on in the seminary, and they don't need to be told hardly anything about it.

I think most people in this congregation probably know something at least about it, and it's not probably necessary to go into a long story of explanations. But there is a question I would like to raise, and that is one that I'm often asked in Peru and here in Scotland and sometimes in other places too. What is a Free Church of Scotland minister doing working in Peru, in a theological college? What's the connection? What's the reason for this? There is a historical connection. It was a minister of the Free Church of Scotland along with two other ministers from different places, one from the United States and one another from a Scottish-based mission, but he was a Spaniard. These three people founded the seminary and there has been a close connection ever since with the Free Church of Scotland. I myself have worked there for more than 20 years and the Free Church of Scotland is at the present the major donor to seminary funds. I don't know if you're aware of this in this congregation that every one of you who contributes to Free Church funds is also contributing donations to the seminary. And so I would like to thank you personally for this and especially to those who go the extra mile and who give donations explicitly for this work. That's part of the reason that the Free Church is involved in theological education in Peru. But there's another, I think, perhaps more important reason, and that is that the church here in Scotland has had a privilege that the church in other countries has not had in many cases.

We can count our heritage as far as theology is concerned in terms of 15, 16, 17 centuries worth of church and Christian theology. There's a way back at least to Ninian, whom I am told came in the fourth century somewhere up this way, and there's a St. Ninian's Church or more than one perhaps around Aberdeen.

[3 : 21] There were probably other people who were even before that. So since the fourth, fifth century, we've had a theology around these parts, Christian theology, and the Free Church is continuing in that tradition.

Also, the tradition for the last few hundred years in which the Free Church stands is that of Reformation theology, the theology that was worked out by Martin Luther and written up memorably by John Calvin in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, which is perhaps the standard reference work for finding out what is the theology of the Reformation.

And in that book, Calvin begins by asking, what is theology? What is it that people need to know? And he says some very striking things.

Almost everything he says that people need to know can be included in two general statements. People need to know God and people need to know themselves.

And he goes on to say that people can't know themselves very well unless they know God. And then he goes on further to say that you can't know God unless you know him through what the Scriptures say.

[4 : 42] And that's pretty well much what the Free Church stands for as far as basic theology is concerned. There are many other details, but that's where it begins.

The churches in Peru, although they may be numerous and very lively and vigorous, they don't have this kind of theological tradition behind them.

The oldest churches operating today in Peru, they date their organization back to about a century, just over a century.

That is evangelical, Protestant evangelical churches. There are other Christian churches there. The Roman Catholic Church has been there for about five centuries. While the Reformation was going on in Europe, and John Knox was preaching in Scotland, people were taking Christianity to South America.

And Lima was one of the centers of this Christianity, Roman Catholic Christianity. But the theology that was propagated there included a statement that everything distinctive about Martin Luther's and John Calvin's preaching was all wrong, and that you had to look at theology through the eyes of the Council of Trent, which was the Roman Catholic reference point.

[6 : 09] So there's a different kind of tradition there in Peru and in many other parts of Latin America about what theology is. So I would like to ask that question this evening.

What is theology? It is pretty generally agreed on all fronts that theology is basically the knowledge of God. That's what the word means.

There was theology even before there was Christianity. Many centuries before Christianity appeared, there was theology. There was theology among the Greek philosophers, for example. It was they that invented the word. Their theology was very different from ours. What they thought that God was like was very different from what we in our church this evening think about God. So the knowledge of God as a general statement is not enough to describe what theology is, at least from our point of view. Other people have gone further and have said, no, theology is not just the knowledge of God, but theology is a relationship with God.

[7 : 23] It's a knowledge of God that is not just knowing something about God or thinking or saying something about God, but it is actually getting into contact with God.

And even there, there are many notions of theology, Christian theology, non-Christian theology of different kinds. We are told that 90% of the people in the world believe in some kind of God. But the kind of God that many of them believe in is completely different from the God of the Bible and the God with whom we relate through Jesus Christ in our prayers, for example. There are very many answers then to what is God like.

Who is God? How can I relate to God? And these many answers, you may know them. We may, if we had a personal survey of everyone in this building tonight, get a variety of some of these answers, depending on who is here.

We don't know until we ask people what they think about God. And there are many answers to it. Well, theological education is the job that I have to try to organize theological education in Peru on behalf of the free church.

[8 : 43] And the free church has a very decided position, a very clear position, on what theological education is and what it ought to be and what we are trying to do. My job is to try to organize in and through the Lima Evangelical Seminary a theological education for the leadership of the churches in Peru.

What kind of people are we trying to cater for? Let me give you some statistics. People groan sometimes at statistics.

But there are a couple of statistics that paint a picture of what it is like to try to understand the leadership of the Peruvian churches, the Evangelical and Protestant churches in Peru.

For example, 12% of the population in Peru nowadays says in the census questionnaires that they are Protestants or Evangelicals.

Now that's about nearly one in eight of the population. And Peru has a population that is getting on for 28, 29 million people.

[10 : 00] So, I don't know if you're good at mental arithmetic, but one in eight, that makes a lot of people who think that they are Evangelical. When they're asked, what is your religion, they say, I am Christian Evangelical.

12% of the population. And this means that there are a lot of churches and a great variety of churches. For example, there was a survey held in Lima a couple of years ago that tried to count the number of Evangelical churches and they got to 7,000.

7,000 Evangelical churches in the city of Lima. And they said at the end of the survey, well, we think we may have got about half of them. So, nobody really knows, at least not these people who did that survey, they don't know how many Evangelical churches there are in Lima.

Lima is a very large city. I don't know if you're familiar with large cities. I certainly wasn't until I went to live there. Lima has in the one city a population that is twice the population of the whole of Scotland.

And it's long journeys to go from one place to another. You can drive from Glasgow to Edinburgh and think you've done a long journey. And that kind of journey you can do pretty well within the city of Lima.

[11 : 25] And it takes a lot longer, actually. Maybe two or three hours instead of just an hour. So, there is a big Christian Evangelical church in Peru today.

And there are lots and lots of church leaders. Lots of people who call themselves pastors and ministers of the gospel. So, you think, well, what's the point then of sending somebody from Scotland to teach people theology out there?

Should we not be asking them to come over here and teach us theology? Well, maybe there would be a good argument for that. And perhaps we'll be seeing something of that in the future. It might shake us up a little bit and make us a little more interested in some sort of subjects that we are not at all interested in at the moment.

Let me give you another statistic. There was a survey taken recently by one of the big newspapers through one of these opinion poll organizations that tries to figure out who's going to win the elections and this kind of thing.

And they asked the question, which professions in Peru, according to the people who were asked in the survey, which professions have the highest credibility?

[12 : 42] And it was quite a surprise to a lot of people, certainly to me, when the fire brigade came out number one. Fire brigade came out 92% or something like that.

92% of the people who were asked which is the most reliable profession in Peru, they said, the fire brigade. I don't know if that would figure in a survey here about reliability of professions.

And the other figure that interested me was how do the Roman Catholic priests come out? Only 51% of the population thought that Roman Catholic priests were reliable.

I thought, well, that just about sums it up. The population in Peru have a Roman Catholic tradition.

Almost 90% say that they're Roman Catholic, 87 point something percent.

But only 50% think that the Roman Catholic priests are reliable. So there's a kind of a drain away from the Roman Catholic Church.

[13 : 46] And that is one of the reasons why the evangelical churches are growing. There's a lot of people leaving the Catholic Church. There's some traffic the other way as well. Why do evangelical pastors get converted and become Roman Catholic priests?

That's another story. But it does happen. It happens more in the United States than in Peru, but it happens. I don't know if it happens in Scotland. Perhaps not, because I read recently that the last Roman Catholic seminary in Scotland was closed down a few weeks ago.

So maybe there's no traffic that way in Scotland. Where did the evangelical pastors come out in this survey? They did come out on the survey.

People thought that it was worth commenting on evangelical pastors. When I tell you that politicians came out with 5%, 5% of the population thought that politicians were reliable, it became interesting to think, well, where do evangelical pastors come out?

30% of the population think in Peru that evangelical pastors are reliable. And I thought to myself, well, that's not very good, is it?

[14 : 56] If only 30% of the population think that. You could argue, as some people do, oh, well, the evangelicals only represent 12% of the population, so to get 30% reliability, that's good.

It might be. But it doesn't sound good when you compare it with the figure for Roman Catholic priests, for example. Half of the people that know about priests don't believe that priests are reliable, but only 30%, 3 out of 10, think that Protestant leaders are reliable.

So you can read that statistic as thinking that we don't do very well, to put it mildly. We have quite a number of people graduating from our seminary each year in the basic program, something like 12, 15, sometimes even 20 people.

And in recent years, we've had the public embarrassment of having two of our graduates in jail, convicted of serious crimes.

So, I mean, that's not very good. But it does fit in with the statistic that only 30% of Protestant evangelical leaders are considered to be reliable. Of course, there's a lot of other people who are

not in jail and are doing great work.

[16:13] A third statistic, let me give you a third statistic. 68% of evangelical pastors and ministers have not ever had formal theological education.

Now, that's the one that really gets us in our seminary. Our business is to organize theological education. And you see all the churches out there, more than 7,000 churches, perhaps 10,000, 12,000 churches in Lima.

And yet, seven out of ten pastors have never had theological training in a formal program.

So, you might think, what do they do? And, well, the answer is they do lots of things. Sometimes anything but teach the Bible. Anything but even preach the gospel.

We've been in meetings. I was in a spectacular meeting with my wife not so long ago. And before it was finished, she was saying, come on, let's get out of here.

[17:22] I don't like what's going on here. And we had a little discussion just towards the end of the service whether we were going to stay or not stay. It just didn't look anything like what you and I here would consider to be an acceptable service of public worship to God.

And it was so bad that we really thought of getting out. I couldn't get out because I was on the program and I had to wait until I was called. So, we did stay to the end and it changed for the better a little bit towards the end.

At least I think that. So, there are three statistics that give you an idea of what kind of situation the seminary finds itself in when we have to provide theological education for people in church leadership and ministers in particular of churches in Peru.

12% of the population say they're evangelical. 30% credibility. 68% have no formal theological education when you ask pastors that question.

So, that's what the leadership of the evangelical churches is like in Peru. And you can imagine without trying very hard that many churches have very little Bible.

[18:48] Many churches have no biblical sermons. There are some very good and eloquent preachers in Peru. Very many eloquent preachers.

Peru is a country where eloquence is a very highly prized skill. People who can talk to make others listen are held in great esteem.

Even if they tell a pack of lies they're held in great esteem. They get elected to be president and so on. So, talking, good talking, able talking, persuasive talking is considered to be very important in Peru.

And in part, that's because it's largely speaking an oral and a visual culture. Not many people read very much. Well, I suppose you would say Scotland is going that way too.

But Scotland has a great tradition of learning, book learning. It's one of the things that makes Scotland stand out on world statistics. You go to Peru, you go to the other end of the scale.

[19:49] Very many people, very few people rather, in Peru are really interested in book learning, investigation, reading things, studying and researching.

It's just not part of the culture. Only 4% of people who graduate from Peruvian universities with master's degrees and doctor's degrees do a thesis, a research, a piece of research.

Everybody else graduates according to other mechanisms because people are not interested really in research. Apart from the fact there are very few books, comparatively speaking.

When people want to start a new university, for example, they have to pass an inspection. You must have a library to pass the inspection. So what they do is they hire a library from an existing university for a couple of days.

They move the books and the inspectors come and they see the books and they say, oh great, you've got a library. So then they send it back and nobody ever uses the library again. No students ever go into that library from these universities.

[21:00] So there are some interesting traits in that culture. Scotland is not like that or at least it didn't used to be like that and I hope it doesn't go that way. In Peru, there's a lot of confusion about what theology is or what theological education might be.

When you have a pastor who has no theological education leading a church, then pretty well nobody in his church has any notion, not even an idea, of what theological education might be. They have no sense of urgency about it. They have no sense of what it might involve and if the pastor, for example, is just an organizer of worship, he doesn't study the scriptures himself, he doesn't read theology books, he doesn't do sermons about doctrines, he doesn't speak very much

about why did Jesus die and that kind of questions.

Then the church follows down the line and some of these pastors are preaching to six and seven thousand people. So you can see that the lack of theological education in the culture and in the evangelical pastors is transmitted through to the church members and that really there are very many basic things that people in churches like this in Scotland know about God that they have the faintest idea about in many Peruvian churches.

So there is a reason for us being there. People who come from churches with a strong and clear theological tradition like the free church can help in that situation.

[22 : 52] And the way that we try to help in our seminary is to organize programs of theological education which try to direct pastors' attention to these big questions.

How can you get to know God? Can you get to know God in any other way than through the Bible? How do you study the Bible? What is in the Bible?

What have people said about what the Bible contains? What are the consequences for a church that doesn't organize itself according to the way the Bible thinks?

And in a more general way how can Christians have a positive influence on the country if they don't know what God wants them to do?

And they only can know that if they know what God has said. And you can only know what God has said if you can get into contact with the Scriptures. So there are these very basic questions that we try to deal with.

[23 : 53] And the seminary organizes a degree program which you might if there's any students here you might groan when you hear this. degrees in Peru are five years long. You can't get a university degree unless you do five years of study full time study.

And if you do it part time it might take you ten or fifteen years. Anyway degrees are long. But there's not much in the way of theological degrees and we organize a theological degree program.

We have 104 students at the moment on that kind of program. We are trying to establish a postgraduate program with the master's degrees and real research.

And we've been trying to do that for about 15 years and so far have failed. We're still trying. We're not going to give up. At least not while I'm there. We're going to try again.

And in August we hope to start classes with a master's degree. And I hope somebody signs up for it this time because we've had it. We've tried a few times and the best performance we got on this score was to have an entrance exam a few years ago about ten years ago.

[25 : 06] We had four candidates for our master's degree program and I was in charge of the entrance exam. So I organized the simplest kind of entrance exam that I could possibly think of and they all failed miserably.

So we didn't admit anybody into the program and we didn't start it. So we're going to have another go this year and we've got sixteen people we're being crafty this time we have a pre-master's degree program so we're training up people to try to get into the master's degree and we hope this will work.

Maybe we'll have a master's degree program the next time around if there's going to be another time sometime in the future. Well this lack of theological education and lack of ideas about theology in the church leadership is one of the basic reasons why we try to work.

Another one is that people who know something about the word of God and who have ideas about the word of God very often have a Roman Catholic idea of that.

Now I don't know if you're aware that the Council of Trent defined the word of God as coming through two channels through the holy tradition and through the holy scriptures and that has been emphasized again in the first Vatican Council 1860 something like that and the second Vatican Council which is what norms gives the norms for modern Roman Catholic education in 1964 they defined again that the word of God comes through the holy scriptures and it also comes through the holy tradition which is in the hands of the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church and just to make sure that nobody was getting confused about where the emphasis lay they said the church needs an authoritative interpreter and what they call the magisterium of the church that is the pope he has to say what the word of God is so the pope according to the Roman Catholics has in his hands the key to the interpretation of scripture and the interpretation of tradition and only through the pope the word of God can come to the church well you can go and read that in

[27 : 42] Dei Verbum which is one of the the documents of the second Vatican Council that's what it says and that is what Roman Catholics think those who are educated in their own theology that's

what they think about what the word of God is we have a big movement of Bible reading in Peru today and a lot of Roman Catholics are reading the scriptures the Bible Society sells more Bibles to Roman Catholics than to Protestants because in the Evangelical churches there's not all that much interest in serious Bible study in the Roman Catholic Church there is probably more a good bit more in some areas certainly some areas of Lima a good bit more of interest in serious Bible study and that means getting right into biblical languages and things like that they really take it very seriously more so in the Catholic Church than in the Protestant Church and this is something that that we also try to address so you can't just stand up in a pulpit in Peru and say oh the word of God says therefore and expect to be understood clearly when you say the word of God some people are going to understand you as speaking about the scriptures if they've had a Protestant

Evangelical background but some other people are going to understand you as speaking the way the Roman Catholic Church does and they have the word of God all mixed up in their sacred tradition and in the decrees of the Vatican the Pope's statements so you have to be careful when you teach what is the relationship between scripture and the word of God and this is another main subject that we treat in our seminary courses we have seminars for pastors which are one day workshops we have about 150 pastors coming to these workshops every month and we organise them in the seminary and in churches around Lima and even in other places in the provinces and that is probably where the most effective and immediately the most immediately effective work that the seminary is doing is happening in these one day workshops and the subject that always comes up is what is the word of God how do you get to the word of God do you have to go through sacred traditions do you have to go through priests do you have to go through a hierarchy is there a special interpreter of the word of God or can people read the scriptures and find the word of God directly for themselves well these are the kind of questions that we have to address there's also the phenomenon in many churches partly because of the lack of theological education in the pastors that pastors speak with great authority and the people believe what they say most of the time although they only have 30% of credibility you have to remember that people generally speaking if they're members of churches they believe what their pastor is saying to them but if this pastor has no clear idea of what is the word of God he might think and many people do think and say very clearly the word of God comes through me and they don't have anything to do with the scriptures really and they think and feel that the word of God comes personally through them and they impose their authority on the church and sometimes they say things which contradict openly what the Bible says so therefore a discussion begins anybody who knows that part of the Bible says the pastor says the word of God is this but the Bible says that and this creates a lot of confusion as well so you have all these kind of problems and you can add another one onto that there's very little use of the Old Testament in Peruvian churches maybe one in a hundred

Peruvian churches has a regular reading from the Old Testament many churches read something from the New Testament very few read anything from the Old Testament and theology students they haven't got much idea of what's within the Old Testament so part of our reading tasks that we give to students even very advanced students fourth and fifth year in their theology degrees is well read the book of Genesis for next week's class and you get to your next week's class and you ask how many people have read the book of Genesis three out of fifteen have actually read it and some people say oh I read up to chapter five and I got fed up I read chapter six I heard a sermon in chapter fifteen and that's about the level of Bible knowledge that people have even at fourth and fifth year in seminary courses and something else that adds to the confusion about theological education is that there are more than one hundred competing programs of theological education in the evangelical churches in Lima so anybody who likes chaos welcome to come and visit us and join in join in the fray because it is it is a fray well I could go on talking about these things and telling you stories but this is the longest day in the year but I don't think you're wanting to spend much more of it here what is the key to good theological education we have read a passage in Hebrews chapter one the first three verses there give us a very good summary Hebrews 1:1 says in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in many and in various ways what this is saying quite clearly is that the prophets whose words are recorded in the Old Testament were spoken to by God and what they said and what is written down for us in the books that bear their names is the word of God so there's a simple answer to the question how do you get to know God read what the prophets said because God spoke to the prophets and what they said was written down and your only problem then is to understand to study

and understand what the prophets said which makes theological education for evangelicals for bible believing evangelicals in the reformed tradition it puts it in the direction of bible study and this paragraph goes on to say but in these last days

God has spoken to us by his son so that the prophets spoke the word of God but through Jesus you get even more clearly and more extensively and more profoundly the word of God so the bible does provide clear and simple answers to this basic question about religion how do you get to know God through the scriptures and it goes on to speak about this son of God what is it that is said here a magnificent a magnificent summary of a Christian theology he was appointed heir of all things and through this son God made the universe the son Jesus Christ is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being so if you want to get to know God you can get to know God through

[36 : 16] Jesus Christ very clear in this statement in Hebrews and it goes on to say something else the son is sustaining all things or perhaps it's God is sustaining all things by his powerful word so that it's not just something of the past Jesus lived 2000 years ago but this is in the present who sustains who keeps the earth where it is and the moon going around the earth and the global warming under control and all this kind of thing who does that God is sustaining it and the son of God who created it all is there involved in that sustaining and then it goes on to say after he had provided purification for sins just as if it was a kind of a something in brackets you know after he had provided purification for sins

Jesus the son of God provided purification if people want to be better want to be purified that is the way Jesus provided it after that he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven there's no sense in the world there's no order in the universe well this statement says there is there is sense in the world there is order in our universe because there's a throne there's government and on that throne is seated Jesus Christ the son of God so if you're in theological education and you're speaking to people who are confused you have something to offer if you go down this road and that's what we try to do in our seminary God spoke through the prophets and God spoke through the son we can see God in Jesus we are being upheld by Jesus whether we believe in him or not we can be purified by Jesus if you're worried about that if you feel guilt if you feel that you're a sinner you can be purified by Jesus and we are being ruled and governed by Jesus the king of kings and lord of lords so it's a great message that we have to communicate a great task and if anybody is interested in getting involved and helping us you're very welcome because there is lots to do thank you very much indeed for your attention may God bless you better
Jen can try a ting or a gon