

# Theological Education

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#### **The Academic Teacher and the Practical Needs of the Clergy**

*John Bright*



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The Association of Theological Schools is a membership organization of schools in the United States and Canada that conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and advanced study of the theological disciplines. The Association's mission is to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS accredits schools that are members of ATS and approves the degree programs they offer.

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## *Continuing the Conversation*

In order to foster conversation among its readers, *Theological Education* invites responses, of up to 1,500 words, to articles published in the journal. Reader responses may be emailed to the managing editor at brown@ats.edu. Responses are published at the discretion of the editors and may be edited for length.

Unsolicited submissions are reviewed by at least two of the following board members, who make recommendations to the editors regarding their publication.

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# Editor's Introduction

*Stephen R. Graham*

Faculty vocation and governance. This issue focus is clearly not a marketing device chosen to attract readers to the pages of *Theological Education*. And these topics are probably not high on many faculty agendas for subjects of study. If they are on the agendas at all, they probably appear below committee work and student discipline in terms of preference. Yet this may be one of the most important issues of TE in recent memory. It addresses issues that are simply crucial for theological schools and that demand the attention of faculty members, administrators, and governing boards. In fact, governance is one of the three top issues named in accreditation self-studies and team reports (with finances and assessment of student learning), and in many ways governance determines the health of the school's financial situation and the ability of the school to design and implement an effective culture of assessment.

Governance is one of those things that does not get much attention when things are going well. If it is not broken—don't fix it! But when stresses and strains appear within theological schools, especially during times of financial or leadership challenge, flaws in governance become obvious, and the school's path to health looks ambiguous at best. In times of challenge, decisions must be made about strategies and processes, and the spotlight is shined on governance since governance is ultimately about making decisions. The thorny questions are: Who makes what decisions? Who exercises their power in what ways? How do the different stakeholders cooperate to move the institution in the right direction? If an effective governance structure is not in place with lines of authority clearly defined and appropriate power given to the right people, the added pressures of difficult times will reveal all the weaknesses, and the institution can become paralyzed.

And what is the relationship between the vocation of faculty and governance? The response of faculty when governance is mentioned is often, "I thought that is why we have hired so many administrators!" or, "Isn't that the work of the board?" Faculty members often identify teaching and research as their primary duties, duties for which they were trained and that motivate them to be part of theological school faculties in the first place. Usually, faculty take on governance roles only when they must, and there is a strong undercurrent of distaste or even disdain among faculty for administration and its attendant governance functions. Yet for the effective functioning of a theological school, faculty have an essential role to play in governance. Too many schools are hampered by a faculty unwilling to give time and energy to its appropriate governance role, preferring to sit on the sidelines and critique the work of administrators and boards. Other schools find themselves hamstrung by a faculty that is involved in nearly every decision, making the wheels of academic administration grind even more slowly than normal. Good governance within appropriate spheres is part of the faculty vocation too.

In the theological disciplines, most graduate students are trained within systems that reward individual work as they pursue their personal research

agendas in isolation from scholars in other discipline areas. There is some collaboration across discipline boundaries, but even that is usually by choice and can be limited to particular projects. When they join the faculty of a theological school, however, they are handed a range of responsibilities unanticipated in graduate school. Because most theological schools are small, faculty work in governance is highlighted as decisions appropriate to faculty become the work of a relatively small group of people. Few received training for this work, and the processes of orientation to the work are weak in many schools.

The board of The Association of Theological Schools has come to recognize that effective faculty work in governance is *essential* for schools to fulfill their missions. There are some decisions best made by those with expertise in curriculum, evaluation of students, and personal understanding of faculty work. And there are other decisions that must be made by boards of trustees whose members bring expertise in the areas of finance, business, and fundraising. Finally, in between are administrators who need the authority to make and implement the decisions that bridge the academic work of faculty and the fiduciary work of the board. Discerning exactly where the lines might be drawn or where the spheres of power overlap or are separate is the focus of this issue of *Theological Education*. Part of the challenge is that there are so many different models within the schools of the Association that it is impossible to give hard and fast definitions that can apply across the board.

Beginning in the spring of 2006, ATS hosted faculty members and administrators from thirty-two schools in a project on Faculty Vocation and Governance. The schools, grouped into two cohorts, gathered for consultations in 2006 and 2007 to name and explore the transitions happening in theological schools as financial, legal, and curricular changes—just to name a few—forced schools to rethink their governance processes and structures. From those thirty-two schools, twenty requested minigrants to enable them to work on issues of faculty vocation and governance at their institutions. These twenty were gathered for a final consultation in October 2008.

We lead off this issue with a “point-counterpoint” conversation between two faculty members who were part of the consultation. William Greenway reflects on the importance of language in our conversations and Lee Weatherbee responds. Six of the final reports from the group receiving minigrants, selected because of their representative character, are also included in this issue. Their stories and the resources they identify will be of value to a large variety of schools that face similar situations and issues.

For the three meetings of the project, three consultation faculty guided the work of the schools. Each has contributed an essay to this issue. Rebekah Burch Basinger’s extensive experience with administrations and boards in both theological schools and in the larger world of higher education, especially in the areas of fundraising and board development, gave her a distinctive perspective from which to work with the schools in the project. Her article, “More than Simply Getting Along: The Goal of Shared Governance in Theological Schools,” explores whether governance can move beyond an “uneasy truce between competing factions” in order to advance more effectively the mission of the school. Basinger currently serves theological schools through her work with In Trust and as a private consultant.

Two long-tenure presidents of theological schools now retired from that work, G. Douglass Lewis and David L. Tiede, share their wealth of expertise with the participants. In “Governance: What is it?” Lewis explores the mystery of governance and develops a definition that is specific to theological schools; includes the three key stakeholders of faculty, administration, and board; and keeps focus on the work of fulfilling the school’s mission. With distinctive insight and humor, Tiede gives attention to “Faculty Powers in Shared Governance.” His theological reflection on governance as stewardship of powers provides crucial and instructive insights into the distinctive work of theological schools.

From his unique perspective of work with the wide range of theological schools in the United States, Canada, and around the world, Daniel Aleshire explores “Governance and the Future of Theological Education.” While schools may be facing as many and as urgent difficulties and threats to their work as at any time in decades—the changes are unpredictable and discontinuous—Aleshire expresses confident hope that schools will be effective in their work in the future if they will attend to four key disciplines. He concludes that schools *can*, and for the health of the church, *must* govern themselves into the future.

A very important resource for the project was an insightful and thought-provoking article by Gordon T. Smith, “Attending to the Collective Vocation.” From his experience as a faculty member and an academic dean, Smith has deep understanding of the common vocation of a theological school faculty. We have reprinted that article so all our readers may have easy access to it.

Finally, this issue contains an article from the very first volume of *Theological Education* published in 1964. Because of its remarkable relevance and its eloquent and sometimes lighthearted look at the tensions faced by a theological educator, we re-present John Bright’s “The Academic Teacher and the Practical Needs of the Clergy.”

The Faculty Vocation and Governance project was of significant benefit for the schools who participated. We believe this issue of *Theological Education* provides insights and resources that will be of value for many other schools in the Association.





# POINT COUNTERPOINT

## Vocabularies Matter

*William Greenway*

I have been asked to discuss a philosophical concern raised during the course of a fascinating series of conversations on governance sponsored by The Association of Theological Schools (ATS).

A recent *New York Times* headline reads: "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth."<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the headline as reflected in the article is entirely predictable. If the humanities are to justify their worth, they must establish how they contribute to the economic prospects of humanities students. To the degree they cannot justify their worth, then, however enjoyable they may be, a sober analysis must conclude that they are to that degree worthless, and so investment of time or money in the humanities is commensurately unjustifiable—most especially in times of fiscal crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Now, consider other possible headlines for an article on this topic: (1) "In tough times, the humanities must justify their value," (2) "In hard times: the essential value of the humanities," (3) "In hard times, clarity: what's good about a good economy?" (4) "In stressful times, clarity: what really is the value of money?" (5) "In stressful times, *the humanities*—now more than ever." Hopefully, these al-

*Lee A. Wetherbee*

William Greenway notes that a philosophical disagreement regarding vocabularies emerged during an event sponsored by The Association of Theological Schools (ATS). As the one disagreeing, I have been asked to respond to what he has proposed in his well-presented argument in favor of the value of distinct vocabularies.

Interestingly, I find little with which to disagree within the primary premise of the article: Theological education is of value, perhaps most especially in hard times. I also support the author's allusion to a corollary: the unimaginable selfishness and greed that seems to have driven the collapse of one of the world's largest economies may have been prevented (or at least predicted) by theological education. The need to "affirm and live out the wisdom and ideals carried by the theological vocabulary" remains a strong and significant intersection at which we meet without disagreement.

My outlook on my current role as an educator began as a child of two parents who both ran their own businesses. These experiences deeply ingrained in me the value of the practical application of any learning. At the same time, these same parents

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ternative titles help to make clear the distinct orientation with which the *New York Times* headline frames the article.

Let me digress momentarily to define *vocabulary* in a special sense. As I will use the term, a vocabulary is not simply a set of words that a person has at the ready. A vocabulary is a family of words that mutually define one another and instantiate among themselves background sets of associations, priorities, and values. Any given language is made up of a host of vocabularies. Indeed, the understanding of any given individual is constituted by multiple, only roughly congruent vocabularies.

While vocabularies can be distinguished, they, like language itself, are “living” insofar as they are sustained and altered in accord with their ever-evolving use. Because vocabularies evolve unevenly over long periods of time, the precise boundaries of vocabularies are typically not discrete. The evolution of vocabularies is often unnoticed, and it is easy during decades or centuries of transition for a single word to participate in multiple vocabularies.

Consider, for instance, the word *worth*. We are in the southern rural Philippines at an impoverished orphanage that is facing a bleak future, and the missionary gestures toward the kids playing happily in the bare dirt yard and asks, “How much do you think they’re worth?” Or, we are mingling with politicians and financiers at a society gala and someone gestures toward a power couple and asks, “How much do you think they’re worth?” In these two instances the same word, *worth*, participates in two distinct vocabularies that invoke profoundly different associations and ideals.

There is no objective or neutral vocabulary.<sup>3</sup> We literally come to awareness and grow up learning to talk, think, and value *from within* some particular and contingent set of vocabularies. We develop the ability to influence and choose among our vocabularies and to respond to moral and perhaps even divine imperatives that originate beyond any given vocabulary. Nonetheless, vocabularies powerfully speak themselves through us before we speak them, and they never cease to profoundly influence and constrain how we feel and think.

This means that vocabularies are incredibly powerful. The influence of vocabularies is magnified exponentially if their influence remains hidden from explicit awareness, allowing them surreptitiously to frame understanding and delimit easily conceived responses. What can be especially dangerous is a multigenerational, behind-all-scenes evolution wherein one vocabulary slowly and secretly subsumes and displaces another. This is not an explicit transition wherein one vocabulary is overtly and consciously displaced because it is judged to be inferior to another (e.g., when Newton’s explanation of planetary motion replaced Aristotle’s) but a transition dictated by slow changes in habits of usage that can captivate and subvert thinking in ways that we might, if we actually were overtly to consider the matter, judge to be incoherent, undesirable, and/or wrong.

For instance: “In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth.” The word *worth*, as illustrated by the orphanage vis-à-vis the gala, can invoke

very different vocabularies. The headline clearly invokes an economic vocabulary. Without argument, then, implicit invocation of this vocabulary dictates the initial terms of the dispute: valid justification of the humanities' worth must be economic.

According to the article, "The Association of American Colleges and Universities recently issued a report arguing the humanities should abandon the 'old Ivory Tower view of liberal education' and instead emphasize its practical and economic value." Also, "Technology executives, researchers and business leaders argue that producing enough trained engineers and scientists is essential to America's economic vitality, national defense and health care."<sup>4</sup> But, what is the value of economic vitality, national defense, and health care? Why care about these?

Ultimately, the answers to these questions will not be economic. The answers to the value questions are the subject of the humanities. Engineers and scientists will be valued, then, to the degree they play critical roles in realizing values and ideals that are extrinsic to engineering and science but vital to wise and virtuous engineers and scientists.

Significantly, not only is there a host of values for which one should risk or even sacrifice one's life (or, less dramatically, one's career or business), but the displacement of concern for personal survival is a first step toward true wisdom and virtue in every major religious and moral tradition (not only those that celebrate martyred prophets or a crucified Lord).

*[A]s a classic and precise theological vocabulary is slowly displaced by a corporate vocabulary, the ability to articulate, affirm, and live out the wisdom and ideals carried by the theological vocabulary is subverted.*

The surreptitious power of vocabularies explains how "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth" gets away with setting up a conceptual framework that is incoherent because it is precisely backward. In *any* time, it is the humanities that justify the worth of any economic endeavor. In tough times, the wisdom of the humanities and the guidance of wise and virtuous souls are even more critical. The inane conceptual framework is prominent in newspaper headlines and major institutional reports because of the surreptitious power of a vocabulary wherein worth is taken as an economic category.

Consider the gala. "What's that couple worth?" "Nearly a billion," someone whispers as all shake their heads with awe and admiration. Or, "They've got nearly a billion dollars, but they're selfish a—holes who aren't worth a d—n." Or, "They've personally earned nearly a billion dollars, but they're worth so much more. They pay not just livable but generous wages, provide health insurance, treat their workers fairly and with respect, and support charities across the world."

No serious argument exists that defends the amoral first response while rejecting the moral second and third responses. What enables the framework of the first response to appear in supposedly sophisticated circles and in newspaper headlines is not any credible argument, but the degree to which a vocabulary in which worth is defined in economic terms has surreptitiously displaced vocabularies in which worth is a moral category.<sup>5</sup> This is what makes the *secret* role of vocabularies so significant and pernicious: their influence does not depend upon philosophical strength.

The threat to ATS and its members comes from the predominance of the wider vocabulary that sustains the amoral meaning of worth. In this upside-down world, “fiscal responsibility” and “good stewardship” mean that fidelity to the endless fiscal survival of the institution trumps responsibility to the people or ideals of the *koinonia*. “People” become “resources” to be “managed.” “Pastors of congregations” become “leaders of organizations,” and “spiritual formation of pastors” becomes “training of effective leaders.”

Under the aegis of this vocabulary, presidents of seminaries are selected and measured not by virtue of their proven spiritual wisdom, theological insight, and ability to nurture and strengthen the community in prophetic faithfulness but with an eye to fundraising potential and success and the ability to grow the institution. Students become “customers,” faculty (among others) become “employees,” administrators become “management” or, worse, “executives,” the gratitude of alumni/ae becomes “brand loyalty,” admissions counselors become “recruiters,” and numbers (the bigger the better) become gods.

Moreover, models for “governance” and the *meanings* of basic concepts (e.g., “power,” “commitment,” “authority”) that are appropriate within for-profit businesses become ubiquitous. Surreptitiously, the meanings of analogous concepts that should distinguish a seminary (and, arguably, any university) from a for-profit enterprise are erased. Soon—to the degree the vocabulary evolution is completed and seminaries assume a place as businesses among businesses—presidents, financial officers, fundraisers, and board members will have trouble seeing the critical distinctions that should distinguish their theological vocabularies (i.e., reasoning, priorities, and values) from vocabularies appropriate for their analogues (often, they themselves) in corporate America.<sup>6</sup>

No overt argument is ever made. But as a classic and precise theological vocabulary is slowly displaced by a corporate vocabulary, the ability to articulate, affirm, and live out the wisdom and ideals carried by the theological vocabulary is subverted. Over time, an insidious shift in vocabularies could subvert the reflection and efforts of well-meaning people, and one could be left with a seminary that is a spiritually enervated shell of its former self, albeit well endowed. The philosophical concern mentioned at the outset was that ATS alertly guard against this threat.

Finally, let us acknowledge that the humanities themselves bear ample guilt for abandoning moral seriousness and becoming too often not merely self-proclaimed precincts for sheer aesthetic play but centers of attack upon virtue, moral seriousness, and the very idea of confessional faith and of the wisdom of historic religions. In ways complex and subtle, their vocabularies, too, have been co-opted. Though threatened, and despite its own problems,

confessional theology stands within education and society as a rich, deep, and powerful locus of loving resistance and hope. Is this not, unfortunately, an age for prophets? Should not ATS and its members understand themselves as vital and embattled defenders of the most precious and threatened vocabularies of all? Here's a headline: "In Desperate Times, *Theology*—Now More Than Ever."

*William Greenway is associate professor of philosophical theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. Patricia Cohen, "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth," *The New York Times* (February 25, 2009), C1 (New York edition).
2. Ibid. Cohen gives voice to those who argue that the humanities must be justified on noneconomic grounds. Nonetheless, the headline (which Cohen may or may not have written) powerfully orients and structures the article and its portrayal of the larger debate.
3. Thus, we should note, there was no bias-free option available for the headline of the *New York Times* article.
4. Cohen, "In Tough Times."
5. This can sound esoteric until one considers that the failures at the root of the devastating financial collapse now encircling the globe and threatening not only orphans near and far have nothing to do with inadequacies in technology, defense, medical research, or incapacity in math, science, or engineering but are directly traceable to warped conceptions of worth and failures of character and virtue among a multitude of individuals.
6. For instance, one person may be both a bank president and a seminary trustee. Her task is not to choose one vocabulary or another but to remain clear about the distinct vocabularies appropriate to the two roles and contexts. One hopes, to the degree feasible and legally permissible, that the theological vocabulary would influence her work as a bank executive, but the devastating failure would be the reverse. Namely, it would be devastating to her and to her seminary if her corporate vocabulary, with its distinct priorities, values, and ideals, were to displace her theological vocabulary as she pursued her mission as a seminary trustee and her life as a child of God.

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also impressed upon me the value of formal education. The assumption was that with an education, in my father's words, "you won't have to work this hard." My father was right—each of my parents worked much harder than I have had to as a result of my education. My graduate training is built on the solid foundation of an undergraduate liberal arts education, giving me a keen appreciation for the "worth" of this seemingly esoteric learning.

However, this practical formation has had the result that I have struggled mightily to consistently find practical application for what I have learned. This struggle has resulted in a circuitous career path that has brought me to academia later in life than many of my colleagues. Coming to academia in middle age, I confess that I bring an unashamedly "worldly" perspective to my late entry into theological education. The people with whom I have driven trucks, shoveled scrap into furnaces, and repaired cars have placed little value on the study

*[W]e must also accept that there are vulnerabilities within theological education that might benefit from some of the rigor and accountability that comes from other vocabularies that we might be tempted to resist.*

of subjects that seem to them to be "purely academic." These are not individuals who do not have the intellect to pursue postgraduate education. To them, education that does not directly (and as quickly as possible) contribute to improving their situation is of little value.<sup>1</sup>

This perspective is important to those of us who are blessed with

the luxury of academic careers. Feeling the tension for practical application and real financial accountability helps to keep our feet on the ground. It can prevent us from becoming too enamored with the rarified atmosphere of our academic contexts. I remind my students (more frequently than they would prefer) that upon completing their master's degrees, they will possess more formal education than 90 percent of the people in the world. With this level of education comes the very real danger of losing one's ability to communicate with the general public the good news of the gospel.

It seems to me that the danger that using a practical vocabulary will compromise theological education, and by association, the mission of the church is a straw man. I fear more that as we zealously protect what is potentially an arcane and inaccessible vocabulary, we make ourselves too elite to have a voice in the larger culture. In this way, the criticism leveled at those of us in the ivory tower is well placed. Do we risk being so focused on the need for purity in scholarship that we lose track of the legitimate issues of justice, righteousness, or morality? Or do we run the risk of ceasing to be viable specifically



because we don't answer the bottom line questions of how we are to pay for all of this?

Rather, we would be wise to recall the example of the apostle Paul who, while being a zealous evangelist and church planter, maintained the vocabulary of tent making. This practical skill set placed him in a position to have connections with his fellow craftsmen and provided a means of financial support that allowed the freedom to fulfill his primary calling of making disciples. There is not a more articulate and practical apologist than Paul as reflected in his address to the Athenians (Acts 17:16–34).

The practical application and financial accountability (even if it incorporates the dreaded language of business) need not detract from the significant and undeniable value of theological education. Let us not be naïve to the need to stand up for ourselves. But let us also not succumb to the temptation to do so defensively or in a self-righteous manner that has more potential to compromise our value than does any encroachment on our vocabulary. This kind of artificial division between the secular and the sacred has not served us well throughout the history of the church.

I join my colleague in his proposal that theological education can inform and improve the ways in which the business of our world is conducted. Indeed, these are times in which ATS member schools are in a prime position to significantly impact our culture. I agree that we should resist the encroachment of imprecise and inaccurate terms into our vocabularies. But we must also accept that there are vulnerabilities within theological education that might benefit from some of the rigor and accountability that comes from other vocabularies that we might be tempted to resist.

As the world of business loses more influence daily, it is theological education that is most likely to compromise the language of business rather than the converse. Those institutions and forces that Greenway suggests we fear are very vulnerable at present to the sanctifying influence of our students. I join him in cheering, "Theological education—now more than ever!"

*Lee A. Wetherbee is associate professor of pastoral counseling at Ashland Theological Seminary.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. I do not mean to imply that formal education would not "improve" the lives of these practical individuals, but that they typically do not have the luxury of pursuing qualitative self-improvement and therefore may not see this as "valuable."

## Response to Counterpoint

*William Greenway*

I appreciate being invited by ATS into an explicit dialogue. The necessarily limited character of my exchange with Lee Wetherbee is significant, for while our differences appear to be pointed, I have a hunch that extended dialogue would unveil profound agreement.

Let me highlight two apparent points of difference. First, in accord with one obvious reading of Wetherbee's "unashamedly worldly perspective," education is valuable insofar as it yields fiscal security and protects one from having to work too hard. Second, Wetherbee is concerned that theological education will "compromise the language of business rather than the converse."

But there is also Wetherbee's outrage over the "unimaginable selfishness and greed" that drove the world into financial crisis and, a bit less obviously, his outrage over an economic system that apportions leisure to elites while forcing people like his parents to work their fingers to the bone.

Why is Wetherbee's attitude toward business so much more trusting than my own? My hunch: when he thinks of business, he thinks of his mother and father and their businesses. More generally, he thinks of "mom and pop" businesses. And, typically, mom and pop are good people. In mom and pop stores employees are like family. The loyalty between employees and employers is the product of a personal, face-to-face relation among people who know and care for one another. The bottom line is constantly in view and a major factor in decision making, and mom and pop are looking to make a profit, but the bottom line and profitability are not the only or even the paramount business values.

Mom and pop personally know and care about their employees (and their employees' spouses and children). In hard times, protecting their family of workers is a value at least as significant as business survival and profitability. Indeed, business survival and profit are not ends in themselves but are valued largely because of their importance to the well-being of employees and their families.

I also warmly affirm mom and pop business values. When I think about predominant modern business values, however, I think of Goldman Sachs, General Motors, and Bear Stearns. I think of economies of scale and faceless, multinational workforces. I think of businesses where the bottom line is the bottom line, where maximizing profit is the paramount value (often by legal definition), where smart employees are loyal only to the degree it is in their own interest, and where workers—now faceless numbers on a spreadsheet—can be treated in ways that would horrify mom and pop. I believe Wetherbee, too, would criticize such business values.

I focus upon vocabularies because some big business executives are no less moral than mom and pop (e.g., consider most executives on the boards of our theological schools). Certainly, there are selfish and pitiless executives and employees out there. But the most significant threat is more subtle, insidious, and systemic. In part, my essay attempts to make manifest, and therefore vulnerable to theological critique, the conquest of mom and pop values by a fun-



damentally amoral and relentlessly economic modern rationality that often openly affirms selfishness and even greed as core motivating factors. Part of my concern is that this amoral and relentlessly economic vocabulary is beginning to displace mom and pop (let alone *koinonia*) values even in our churches and theological schools. Perhaps, framed in this fashion, a significant area of profound agreement between Wetherbee and myself comes into view.



# Governance and the Future of Theological Education

*Daniel O. Aleshire*

## *The Association of Theological Schools*

*Governance is a necessary, complex, and varying component of a theological school. It is stressed when schools are stressed, and it is especially stressed when substantive decisions are necessary to move a school's mission into an uncertain future. This article reviews some basic concepts of institutional governance as reflected in the Commission on Accrediting Standards of Accreditation, reflects on the history of governance in ATS member schools, identifies some of the contests around governance that schools are experiencing, and argues for the capacity of good governance to carry schools into the future.*

Seldom has an article about governance in theological schools been written when they are facing as many difficulties and threats to their future as they are facing now. In response to the difficulties that schools are encountering and the short timeline in which many of them need to be addressed, a serious question emerges: Can theological schools govern themselves into the future? In a time of trouble or even transformational change, can the schools get where they need to go with the ordered process of governance?

I want to discuss several issues about governance in theological schools and then identify some perceived problems with governance in the present historical moment. In the context of these issues, I will address the primary question: Can good governance get theological schools into the future?

## **Governance and theological schools**

ATS initiated a series of consultations with faculty about governance because of indicators in the context of ATS work that governance might not be functioning as well as it should at some schools, and that part of the reason is that faculties were not always clear about what governance does in a theological school and how it should work. While the consultations focused on faculty, other indicators in the work of the Association suggested that some board members do not understand what governance is and how it influences the health and future of the institution.

### *Defining governance*

There is more than one way to define governance in a theological school, and there is more than one way for it to function. Fundamental differences about power exist among ecclesial communities. Roman Catholic schools operate in a system that understands that governing power is held by individuals—like bishops—and not by committees or boards. Power is personalized. Protestants tend to vest power in structures and exercised by committees or

boards. There are hosts of other differences, but among the many differences, a definition of governance is a necessary starting point for this article.

Governance is the ordered exercise of power in an institution to accomplish the school's mission and purpose.<sup>1</sup> The Commission's accrediting standards identify three elements that are necessary for this power to be exercised in an orderly and appropriate way: authority, structure, and process. The accrediting standards define *authority* as "the exercise of rights, responsibilities, and powers accorded to a theological school by its charter, articles of incorporation and bylaws, and ecclesiastical and civil authorizations. . . ."<sup>2</sup> The *structure* involves the various entities responsible for governing decisions, usually including the governing board, the administration, the faculty, and often student groups. Governance also requires a *process* by which the structure is ordered and implemented. The structure is effectively implemented only through carefully defined procedures that identify which group does what kind of work and how each group's activity is coordinated with that of other groups.

Typically in a theological school, the board decides on the budget, the granting of tenure, and the awarding of degrees. The faculty typically decides what the curriculum will require, who should be admitted to degree program study, and which of those students should be recommended to the board to receive degrees. The administration typically decides how the funds will be administered, who the employees will be, and how the work of the school should be organized and ordered. Students are often involved in decisions related to student conduct and other areas of student life and are often incorporated as members of other governing entities in the school. Schools construct their structures and processes in various ways. The Commission standards state that, "While final authority for an institution is vested in the governing board and defined by the institution's official documents, each school shall articulate a structure and process of governance. . . ."<sup>3</sup> The standards go on to enumerate the roles and responsibilities that different entities should assume in the governance process. These policies and procedures are not bureaucratic encumbrances; they are the means by which authority flows through the structures to produce governance.

### *Continuity and change in the exercise of governance*

Few studies exist of the history of governance in theological education, so the best one can do is to infer from the histories of institutions and theological education in general. The functions of governance have been stable throughout the past century of freestanding theological schools: faculty members have been elected, curricula and budgets have been adopted, and degrees have been granted. Governance responsibilities have historically been located with boards, faculties, and for denominational seminaries, the school's denomination. However, the roles, responsibilities, and powers exercised by these three entities have changed over time, and one additional entity has emerged with a significant governing role.

Some significant struggles in the early twentieth century (Andover, Union, and Vanderbilt, among others), established the primacy of boards as the final authority of a freestanding institution. A denomination cannot overrule the

board except where clearly specified powers are reserved for the denomination or churchly structure. The board was seldom a rubber stamp, but difficulties in communication, coupled with the time and expense of travel for board meetings, kept the boards at some distance from the school in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. They exercised their fiduciary responsibility as a board, but not much more. Most board members were clergy, and they knew the work of the school because they had attended it, and for some, the current faculty members were their teachers. While boards had final authority, it appears that faculties often exercised wide-ranging authority for the operation of the school. They appear to have made significant decisions about institutional operation, and in some schools, the president's formal title was "president of the faculty."

After World War II, the balance of power between the faculty role in governance and the board's role began to shift in many schools. Just as significant struggles redefined board authority from denominational authority at the turn of the twentieth century, some notable struggles served to establish board authority over the faculty. In theory, of course, the board always had this authority, but in practice, many faculties appear to have exercised it. These struggles (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the late 1950s is a rather famous board/faculty case) resulted, once again, in securing the final authority of the board in the institution. To exercise this broad range of authority, boards have increasingly depended on the president—not as president of the faculty but as president of the institution—and the institutional officers the president appoints. The growth of administration has been far more than a function of the board's twice reaffirmed final authority. It is primarily a function of the increasing complexity of theological schools in the last half of the twentieth century.

Prior to World War II, most freestanding seminaries were closely related to sponsoring denominations. The denomination elected the board, funded much of the budget, sent students, and employed graduates. For the most part, that has all changed. While many denominations still elect the members of the board, they no longer can afford to fund a significant amount of the budget. Students are more likely to come from many denominations, or none at all, and go to a wide range of places of service after graduation. Seminaries need development officers to raise money, admissions officers to locate and recruit students, and placement officers to match graduates with positions. These are all administrative functions that were not needed when schools were more tightly related to and funded by sponsoring denominations. And as higher education institutions, seminaries experience continued growth of other administrative functions as well. It is difficult to function effectively without an information technology officer and, increasingly, an educational technology resource person. Students need financial aid in a way they did not need it fifty years ago, so schools now have financial aid officers. In fact, perhaps the largest change in governance in theological schools is the growth of administrative offices and functions, all of which are ultimately supervised by the president, who serves as the chief administrative officer of the school and as the board's executive officer.

### ***Governance and vocation***

Governance may look easy in the rarified settings of written procedures and printed organizational charts, but ultimately, governance is about human tasks to discern the right missional direction for a school, to devise and oversee effective strategies to implement that mission, to find and manage the resources that mission requires, and to oversee the human differences in perspective that accrue to each of these activities. In the end, these are not easy tasks or processes. General Institutional Standard 8 acknowledges this in its introductory statement: "Governance is based on a bond of trust among boards, administration, faculty, students, and ecclesial bodies."<sup>4</sup> I have never seen effective governance without this bond of trust, and I have never seen a governance failure in an ATS member school that, at some level or another, did not involve the breach of trust. For me, governance is not centered in transactional activities that run the machinery of the school; it is about a community who understands its work as a vocation, as a calling, and goes about it with the kind of religious intent its members would bring to their personal sense of calling or vocation. I don't mean to rush over the cliff imposing religious value on what is essentially the fiduciary and utilitarian effort to make theological schools work. However, these schools have a religious mission at their core, and governance cannot be just about fiduciary and utilitarian efforts. It is about the exercise of religious vocation.

Vocation is often understood in quite individualized ways. People think of vocation as what they, as individual persons, are called to do. Corporate bodies, like theological schools, can also have a vocation, and when they do in a religious sense, it is a calling to do what only a corporate body is capable of doing. A congregation has a calling, for example, that only a group of members can attain. Its corporate vocation requires different gifts and abilities of different members. A theological school is similar. It takes a board, faculty, administration, students, donors, and the support of ecclesial bodies to accomplish its calling.

The vocation of the school requires that the governance processes be distributed across different groups that bring different forms of expertise and ability to a corporate mission. The members of the board typically have more expertise than any other group at the school about finances, investment, and legal requirements. The board's expertise, however, cannot be limited to these fiduciary roles. It extends to an understanding of the needs of the school's constituency and publics. The board, composed of nonemployees of the school, also brings the gift of needed independence so that decisions can be made without vested interests at stake. The faculty has the greatest expertise regarding design, revision, and implementation of a curriculum that advances the corporate mission of the theological school. It has the expertise to promote student learning and determine if students have attained the intended learning and formational goals. The faculty has the greatest degree of technical knowledge about the theological disciplines and is best able to support and assess the professional performance and capacity of individual faculty members. The administration has the specialized knowledge necessary for the various offices of the school and the ability to assess how these functions are serving

the overall mission of the school. Together these different groups contribute to a corporate vocation that could not be achieved apart from their distinctive abilities and contributions.

Governance in a theological school is rooted in the corporate calling of a seminary. It functions as the servant of a communal goal. Because governance is rightly anchored in vocation, it is best understood in the more religiously sensitive images of faithfulness and stewardship rather than the more secular images of power and control. The “bond of trust” is necessary not only as a means of connecting the various entities that participate in the governance of a theological school but also as a means of serving the vocation to which the school is called.

### **Perceived problems in governance and the present historical moment**

The governing entities in a theological school continue to be the board, the denomination or church for many schools, the faculty, and this large, newer structure called the administration. Many of the decisions that governance requires continue to be the same, but the number and role of the governing entities have changed. And, whenever fundamental structures of decision making change in social systems like graduate professional theological schools, problems emerge. They are not so much the kind of problems that end up in court battles as the kind of problems that leave contests about who has the power or authority to make decisions and how those decisions share in the missional direction of a school. Any governing system will have some conflict from time to time, and any system that deals with power in the value-laden environment of theological schools will generate contests. The problem is that in historical moments when schools require many and often difficult decisions, these underlying problems can become threats to institutional viability and mission.

#### ***Perceived problems***

As I listen to presidents and work with boards and faculties, I hear stress in the governance processes of many schools. A dominant concern is a perception of powerlessness. Presidents complain that they can’t accomplish the tasks the institution needs for them to accomplish, even with the board’s support. Faculty complain that they have lost the power they perceive the faculty used to possess. Trustees worry that their exercise of power will alienate faculty, which they generally do not want to do, or feel less empowered than they think they should be to make the difficult decisions they need to make. If I am hearing these gentle laments properly, all of the governing entities perceive that they have difficulty exercising the power or authority that they understand their role calls them to exercise. Another concern is the perception that something has been lost. Presidents talk about predecessors who seemed to run the institution with a great deal of uncontested influence. Faculty members remember that their predecessors had influence on the institution that they do not think they now have. These perceptions are not pervasive or ubiquitous, but they are abundant enough that they point to a story about governance.

As governance has changed and diversified, it is more difficult for any one governing entity to accomplish what it perceives needs to be accomplished for the school. The perception of loss is authentic, particularly for the faculty, because the complexity of operating even a small theological school has moved significant decision making from the faculty to administrative offices.

Beyond these perceptions, there are fundamental problems with the exercise of governance in many schools.

Perhaps chief of these problems is the complexity of shared governance. Shared governance involves different governing entities sharing in the tasks of governing a theological school. The Commission's accrediting standards observe: "Shared governance follows from the collegial nature of theological education. Unique and overlapping roles and responsibilities of the governing board, faculty, administrators, students, and other identified delegated authorities should be defined in a way that allows all partners to exercise their mandated or delegated leadership."<sup>5</sup> Overlapping roles and responsibilities are the basis for considerable misunderstanding. Some board members who are used to corporate governance structures that have very limited "overlapping roles and responsibilities" are baffled by the academic understanding of shared governance. Some faculty members presume that shared governance has a common meaning across schools and that if the faculty at another school has certain powers, then they should have them as well. The virtue of shared governance is that it allocates complex decisions to the entities in the institution with the greatest expertise for making those decisions. When properly implemented, it also provides the means by which all stakeholders share in the mission of the institution. The problem with shared governance is that it has no common definition; each school must determine the design that "allows all partners to exercise their mandated or delegated leadership."<sup>6</sup> It can also be very slow, and in historical moments that require decisions to be made quickly, that can be a problem. Decisions in difficult economic times, with negative impact on some individuals who have worked faithfully for the school, may be all but impossible to make in a shared governance model.

Governance is about the use of power to achieve the school's mission and purpose, and the Christian tradition issues warnings and cautions about the use of power. Any governing entity in a school that has enough power to do good has enough power to do evil. Any one of those entities—the board, the president, and the faculty—can abuse its power, and I have seen instances of abuse by each. (It would be inappropriate for me to name the examples I am thinking of, but these are not theoretical observations.) Other problems with power can be equally as devastating. Governance can be derailed by members of a theological seminary who conclude that power is so theologically dangerous, so given to abuse, that it is intrinsically questionable. Suspicion of power can lead to institutional structures that vivisection it into small units, and to get enough power to get something important accomplished, many entities have to agree to contribute their part of the power to the task. The problem is that smart people, who have been schooled at the most advanced levels of critical thinking, can always come up with good reasons not to contribute their part of the power. The only way that institutions get their work done is through the exercise of



power, and most of them have enough power in the institution to accomplish what needs to be done. However, if shareholders of the power withhold it, the school will not have enough power to accomplish the needed task.

Governance can also be derailed because of fundamental disagreement about the mission of the school. When different governing entities disagree on missional direction, energy is expended, pulling the institution in different missional directions or keeping it from going anywhere. Imagine trying to get a covered wagon across the country in the nineteenth century with horses hitched to the front, back, and both sides of the wagon. The wagon will move as the horses struggle, but it likely will not go in the direction that it most needs to go.

### *The present historical moment*

Theological schools are facing many critical decisions as they move into the future. Some historical moments extend the present into the future in a linear, predictable way. In fact, I think the future emerges in this way most of the time. The future can be extrapolated from significant conditions that exist in the present, and well-ordered processes of governance will address predictable change. At other times, the future is discontinuous from the present; it emerges in ways that are not an extrapolation of the present. As the financial markets have been somersaulting in recent months, and laws have been changing in response, financial analysts have said things like “everything is different,” and “the rules changed in the middle of the game.” This is unpredictable and discontinuous change. While it is never clear in the middle of a moment whether the change that is coming is linear or discontinuous, my hunch is that we are in a discontinuous moment in theological education. So many factors are in play—in the church, in the broader culture, in fundamental social systems—that I think it is unlikely the next fifty years will settle into a progressive extension of the past fifty years. I think we are in a time in which the changes that will need to be made are far greater than fine-tuning or gradual improvements. I have no credentials for predicting the future, but I think the next few decades will introduce as much change to theological education as any two decades have in the past two centuries. While I think we can predict that the amount of change will be substantial, it will be far more difficult to predict the kind of changes that will need to be made. The last time I think theological education was in this position was in the 1960s. Back then, ATS established a commission to study the future forms that theological education should take. It made several recommendations but concluded that “During most of the decade ahead . . . we believe that theological educators, church officials, and concerned laymen will need to learn how to live with a considerable amount of unpredictable change.”<sup>7</sup>

The 1960s commission predicted many changes, and some of them came about. Others did not. What is most significant, however, are the changes that have occurred that were never predicted. In the 1960s, the student body of ATS member schools was almost completely male and, for the most part, white. Now the student body is more than 30 percent female and more than 30 percent racial/ethnic. Evangelical Protestant schools constituted a smaller part of

the overall student enrollment then, and there were no Roman Catholic member schools in 1960. Now, students in Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic schools compose 70 percent of the enrollment of all ATS member schools. In the 1960s, there were virtually no extension sites or branch campuses and no distance education. Now a significant percentage of students are receiving their education from these venues. These are huge changes in theological education, and none of them was foreseen. In fact, efforts that have resulted in decentralizing the theological classroom are exactly the opposite of what the 1960s-era commission recommended. It thought that smaller denominational schools should move to major metropolitan areas where they would form consortia and establish relationships with research universities to increase the educational scope of the schools. Instead of the proposed concentration of theological education, the past forty years have brought a dramatic dispersion of theological education.

### *Governing into the future*

So, the question in the first paragraph of this article is before us: Can theological schools govern themselves into the future? Can governance, with its changing realities and recurring tensions, take theological schools into a future that is unpredictable, except that the changes required will likely be broad and extensive? I am very confident that they can. However, in addition to the careful and skillful exercise of the tasks of governing, the amount of potential change will require governance to attend thoughtfully to four disciplines.

***Let information flow freely.*** The first discipline is that, in order for a shared governance process to work in a precarious time, all of the entities must be well informed by the same data and must be attentive to the best information the school has. This is not the time to keep information away from people, and this is no time for people to presume that the best information available is prejudicial because it does not fit their hopes, preconceived ideas, or personal perceptions. If information has not flowed freely in a system, then it needs to begin flowing as generously as possible, and governing entities need to be given a reasonable amount of time to comprehend and absorb it.

***Advance the school's mission, not its strategy.*** The second discipline is that governing entities accept responsibility to advance the mission of the school and not the strategy that has historically implemented that mission. Mission has deep roots that the governing process must seek to keep alive. While certain strategies for implementing the mission in the past may need to be preserved in the future, strategies must always be understood as secondary to mission. I have observed some governing boards make decisions about strategy that ensured the future of the mission when resources were still available to support a new strategy, and I have seen boards that continued funding an old strategy until the resources were so depleted that they were no longer adequate to meet the mission, regardless of strategy.

***Match the mission to the needs of the school's constituencies.*** The third discipline is that the governing entities need to hold the needs of their constituency in focus. If a school does not know who its constituency is, then the kind and scale of changes that may need to be made will be very difficult,

if not impossible. If a school knows the constituencies whom it serves, then meeting the needs of those constituencies will be a significant guide for the future. A theological school, at least a good one, does not exist for itself. It exists for its mission, and more specifically, for how that mission meets the needs of its constituency. For a theological school, constituency is more than the people and organizations that fund it, send it students, or call its graduates. The center of the constituency of a theological school is the religious vision the school advocates and the mission of God in the world that it seeks to address.

*Extend the school's mission into the future.* The fourth discipline is the constant reminder that a school can extend its mission into the future more than it can recover its history in the future. Theological schools have histories to which they give considerable attention; even recently founded schools tell stories about the struggle, grace, and extraordinary effort that contributed to their founding. History, however, *cannot* be pulled into the future. The mission *can* be, and for most theological schools, it was the effort to advance the mission in previous decades that created the best of their histories.

## Conclusion

The processes of governance are sufficiently robust that theological schools can govern themselves into the future. It is possible to govern these schools into new educational strategies in the context of new financial realities, but this will require that boards and other entities involved in governance understand their work as more than the fiduciary care of the school and its mission. They will need to think generatively to find new models. Unpredictable changes require careful assessment and sometimes quick action. Good governance can take schools into unpredictable moments in the future, but it will be tested and, in some settings, sorely tested.

What about the future and the work of these schools that good governance will make possible? I am hopeful and optimistic about the future of theological schools. They are part of a long Christian tradition that has never had a time when it decided to give up. This tradition has always had people hovering over texts—translating, copying, studying, “commentary-ing.” It has always had communities of faith gathered in worship, wandering through life, and wondering about God. As long as there is a tradition that includes study and communities who worship, there will need to be places that educate leaders and carry the interpretation of the text into new intellectual and cultural moments. I don’t know all the shapes that theological education will take over the next fifty years, but I do know it will exist and have a mission worth our effort and money. These are schools that have made it through more than one great change, and they have the capacity to make it through whatever great change lies ahead. And, I am confident that effective and faithful governance can assure the place of the mission of theological education in that future.

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ENDNOTES

1. This definition of governance is abstracted from a chapter on governance in Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), chapter 4.
2. Commission on Accrediting Standard 8, section 8.1, "Authority."
3. Commission on Accrediting Standard 8, section 8.2.1, "Governance."
4. Commission on Accrediting Standard 8, "Authority and Governance."
5. Commission on Accrediting Standard 8, section 8.2.2.
6. Ibid.
7. *Theological Education* 4, no. 4 (Dayton, OH: The Association of Theological Schools, 1968), 761.

# Governance: What is it?

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*"Governance" and "shared governance" are unfamiliar concepts to many involved in theological education. This article describes governance in theological schools using the core categories of purpose, power, and commitment, and analyzes the important relationship between the individual's vocation and the mission of the theological school. Shared governance requires understanding of these categories and a bond of trust that enables those authorized to exercise power in the structures of theological education—board, administration, and faculty—to fulfill their roles within the structure in conversation and cooperation with one another. The article concludes with reflections on the goals of governance, fulfilling of the school's mission while maintaining economic equilibrium.*

At a conference on governance, I happened to overhear a conversation among some seminary faculty members. One remarked, "This governance stuff is still a mystery to me." The other responded, "Yes, I know what you mean. I think we should leave it to the administration and the board. After all, that is their job." Then a third demurred slightly, "I agree with both of you except when the board and president want to run the school, including the education direction, and rarely, if ever, consult the faculty. Sometimes I feel that the board mainly wants the seminary to be a technical training school for pastors with efficiency and low cost their primary concern."

For many seminary faculties, board members, and presidents, governance is ambiguous at best or a mystery at worst. Amazingly everyone assumes the functions of governance but is not sure exactly what it entails or what it means. The hypothesis of this paper is that governance is the central reality of every institution. How well or poorly it is performed greatly influences the effectiveness and well-being of an institution. My hope is to offer a definition of governance, applied to a theological school, and a framework for understanding and practicing good governance, which is not confined to board and administration but must include faculty, staff, and other critical stakeholders of the seminary.

Turning to *The American Heritage Dictionary* for a definition of governing, one finds: "To control the actions or behavior of; guide, direct. To make and administer public policy for a political unit. To keep under control, restrain. To decide, determine." Next it says: "Governance is the process of governing."

Note that in the definition all the terms are about power. They also assume a social or political unit of people and how they are shaped, directed, and held together. Governance of any social unit is a complex activity. To appreciate it, one must understand the delicate dance that choreographs and holds together a community through purpose, power, and commitment.

## **Purpose, power, and commitment**

Persons join or are a part of a social unit, a corporate body, an organization, large or small, in order to accomplish some things they cannot do alone. Governance of such a social unit is about *purpose, power, and commitment*. These three must be carefully balanced. Individuals are attracted to a particular organization because of its purpose or mission with which they agree. They invest themselves in it in order to achieve something that is important to them. Individual faculty members join a seminary to have a job—not just any job, but a particular kind of teaching job that focuses on an area to which they are committed. Students join to be educated and formed for a ministry to which they are called. Board members join because they believe in the seminary's purpose and want to it to succeed in fulfilling that mission. Other people give financial support because they believe the seminary is engaged in a ministry to which they are committed.

Each person who joins makes a commitment (i.e., they are willing to invest themselves and their time, energy, and resources in that particular organization). They will stay committed and engaged as long as they believe the organization is fulfilling its mission and that their personal goals can be achieved by aligning themselves with this particular institution and its mission.

Finally, every organization governs by power—the capacity to influence the perceptions, thoughts, feeling, and actions of others. Daniel Aleshire talks about good governance as the ordered exercise of power by those authorized to do it. Key questions inevitably emerge: Who has what power? How do they use it? Does it enable the organization to achieve its mission? Does its use enhance or diminish the community members' commitment and investment in the organization? The origin of organizational power is authorization—the designated right to use power to influence others in the organization. In a seminary, the authoritative baseline is its charter and bylaws that spell out who is authorized to govern. As a faith-based community, a seminary must also ask theologically, who is called to this governing task in our community? This governing authority usually starts with a board, which through legal incorporation, is authorized to have final authority, power, and responsibility for the organization. They, in turn, authorize and give power to others, first to the president whose responsibility is to direct the institution through its structures and processes to fulfill its mission as affirmed by the board. The president, in turn, authorizes others, such as senior officers, to assist in carrying out these processes. They have delegated authority that rests in the president's authorization of them.

Academic institutions have another unusual authorized group, namely the faculty, who are authorized by the board through the president to develop and carry out the educational work of the institution. They have delegated power to design and conduct the educational program of the seminary's work. They also have accountability in that their work should always move the institution toward achieving its mission while maintaining its economic equilibrium.

## Individuals and the institution

In every institution there are delicate authorization and power issues between an individual acting independently and an individual acting as a member of an authorized power structure, such as a faculty member and “the faculty,” a board member and “the board,” the president and “the office of the president.” Institutions rarely authorize individuals to govern. Rather they authorize “power structures” such as board, faculty, and presidential office to do the work of governance. In every institution there are individuals—that includes most of us—who desire to influence the institution toward their vision or goals. In short, all want something from the organization or they would not be there in the first place. That reality causes everyone at some point to struggle, resist, and become frustrated with corporate power. All want to influence the organization toward certain goals that are in agreement with their desires and needs. These inevitably come into conflict with corporate power, because the institution organizes around a corporate mission and goals, which attempt to give a vision for the whole community. Not everyone is equally pleased with or supportive of this corporate mission and vision.

Because seminaries are faith-based communities guided and influenced by theological assumptions, another reality comes into play in determining a seminary’s mission and goals. They must continually ask, what is God’s preferred future for our community? What is God doing in and through our seminary? How do we discern and factor in this reality in clarifying our mission and setting our institutional goals? Who is not just legally authorized but divinely called to lead and govern? Governing within the delicate balance among individuals’ desires, divine influence, and institutional mission and goals requires a faithful community that is open to and committed to all three.

## Shared governance

*Shared governance* is a communal effort in which the various power structures interact, trust, and work together for the purpose of achieving the institution’s mission while encouraging and allowing individuals in the organization to share and advocate their own goals for the organization. But it reminds both individuals and the institution that they stand under the call and influence of the divine in shaping and governing this faith community.

Shared governance requires that power be shared and distributed appropriately through various parts of the organization because of the Lord’s affirmation and valuing of every member and entity in the community. As in Paul’s metaphor of “the body,” all parts of the community are connected to each other. All need each other in order to be healthy, effective, and whole. It thus encourages and allows decisions to be made by individuals and groups who have the necessary information, expertise, responsibility, and ability to implement actions based on those decisions. Finally, it requires open systems that provide people with appropriate information and access to influence other parts of that system. An essential element of shared governance is an openness that allows individuals to express their hopes and dreams. Then through dia-



logue, discussion, and negotiation with the aspirations of others, along with a continuing discernment of the divine will, shared governance finally blends them together as goals for the organization.

To be successful, shared governance requires persons who have a commitment to a corporate vocation. As faculty, board, president, and others, they combine interests and discernment through these corporate structures in order to promote and enable the “whole corporate community” to fulfill its purpose or mission. They become the key stakeholders of the organization who have the ownership and commitment continually to advance the organization toward fulfilling its mission.

Dangerous and rogue elements in an institution are individuals or sub-groups whose personal goals for the organization dominate their attitudes and actions. Or, they assume that they actually represent the true purpose and goals of the institution, maybe even proclaiming their desires as God’s will for the community. They often use whatever power they can generate to influence the institution in their direction while undermining the hopes and dreams of others. Faculty members who insist on teaching only what they like regardless of the educational needs of the overall curriculum, board members who care only about efficiency and budgets, and presidents who insist on making all the critical decisions, all undermine a corporate sense of mission and create an environment of mistrust that undermines effective and empowering governance.

## **Transparency**

Finally, shared governance requires *transparency*, which means individuals and structural groups in the organization should know and understand the various functional parts of the organization. They should know who has responsibility and accountability for what and who can make what decisions. They must comprehend the corporate strategy and its goals that are designed to enable the institution to fulfill its mission and maintain its economic equilibrium. Having a broad base of institutional knowledge and trust among its various parts is not easy to achieve. It requires continuing work to maintain connectivity and communication among the parts and to remind each of the ongoing need for discernment. There needs to be a fundamental commitment to the overall institutional mission at every level, along with a willingness to be accountable to each other up and down the hierarchy of power. The president and the groundskeeper need to recognize that they are colleagues in a common enterprise. Acknowledging God’s valuing and calling of each affirms the importance of what both do in behalf of the whole community. Individuals throughout the ranks need a sense of vocation or calling to invest in “the whole” not just “the self.” Finally, leadership at various levels must be committed to this shared governance process and know how to facilitate it.

## **Learning and capacity building**

Is such transparency and shared governance an impossible goal? No, but it is a continuing challenge. It most likely functions as a vision, a com-



mitment, and an inspiration to become and to move in that direction. It is what Peter Senge calls a process, a lifelong discipline, and a continual learning mode. Learning as a lifestyle for individuals and organizations in a theologically based faith community embodies three movements: (1) knowing what we want; (2) seeing reality more clearly to understand where we are; and (3) discerning what we are called to do and be. The creative tension among the three pushes us to “learn” how to achieve what we want, what we are called to do, and how to pursue it in this context. This process, when steadily pursued, is a lifelong process of generative learning. Senge says that to develop such a mastery or competence as person or organization requires several basic characteristics. As he succinctly puts it:

They have a special sense of purpose that lies behind their visions and goals. *For such a person [or organization], a vision is a calling rather than simply a good idea.* They see “current reality” as an ally, not an enemy. They have learned how to perceive and work with forces of change rather than resist those forces. They are deeply inquisitive, committed to continually seeing reality more and more accurately. They feel connected to others and to life itself. Yet they sacrifice none of their uniqueness. They feel as if they are part of a larger creative process, which they can influence but cannot unilaterally control.<sup>1</sup>

One of the challenges for leadership in an organization is continually to encourage and build this learning capacity in individuals and the organization. It requires creating a “culture of learning” through advocacy, affirmation, and modeling. Because governance, when it functions well, is the core of every community’s life, interaction, and direction, it serves as the connective and facilitating nerve system. Learning to govern well is the task of everyone but the primary responsibility of a few.

### **Purpose, mission, and economic well-being**

The purpose or mission of an institution is the reason people join together in this social unit. In order to survive and thrive it must have two fundamental goals. First, it must fulfill its mission, its reason for being; otherwise it falls apart. Second, it must maintain economic equilibrium. Economic equilibrium means having (1) enough resources annually to maintain its life and program; (2) enough long-term resources to assume and plan for its future; and (3) adequate facilities through which it can operate its educational programs effectively and efficiently.

The balancing of these three elements—purpose, power, and commitment—changes during different time epochs. The balance is influenced by the organization’s history and tradition, by cultural trends in the external environment and internal community, by theological assumptions, and by the leadership styles of key individuals such as presidents, certain board members, and some faculty members.

The evolution of the modern seminary over the last century has dramatically changed the governing challenges and forms of governance in most educational institutions. For example, its external environment has been radically altered. Its sources of income have changed. Church support has declined. Tuition charged has escalated, leaving students with significant debt. The demand to raise more money has grown exponentially. Many more external regulations require more administrative staff. At the same time, faculties feel they have lost governing power, because in less complex bygone eras they pretty much ran the school. Presidents feel they have less power now, even though the demands on them and the institution are for more and speedier governing action. Many boards feel they have little power and influence over the seminary other than *proforma* approval of things presented to them by the president and faculty and the demand to raise money.

Governance in seminaries is inevitably “shared governance” in the sense that many individuals and groups have influence, as well as being under the divine influence, in the governing process. How this sharing is done, who has greatest power and influence, will vary from school to school. The critical key is balance and focus. The end results of good governance, no matter how the power is shared, must be the achievement of mission fulfillment and economic equilibrium. David Tiede reminds us that the stewardship of these powers is the balancing of all the competing interests and influences in the community to accomplish the seminary’s educational mission in service of the church’s calling.

### **Summary definition and framework for governance**

Capturing the essence of governance in one definition remains a challenge. As shown earlier, many factors influence the governance process. Finally, I suggest there are two basic criteria for good governance. First, does it provide stability for the organization? That is, does it provide supportive structures—how it arranges itself—that hold the community together and focus it on a common mission? Second, does it allow and encourage movement? That is, does it provide processes—such as educating, assessing, planning, and authorizing—to take the community where it is called and desires to be? Can it deal effectively with the inevitable resistance and sabotage within the community allied against such movement? Governance of any human community or organization is a complex affair. When charged with governing responsibility, keep it as simple as possible. Remind yourself of the component parts. Put them together in a definition that works for you. The one I use is:

Governance is the processes by which the authority structures of a seminary community discern, plan, and make decisions for the purpose of fulfilling its mission while maintaining economic equilibrium.

1. The goals of governance should be balanced:
  - a. Defining and fulfilling the organization’s mission
  - b. Maintaining economic equilibrium

2. The primary “authority groups or structures” that have governing power for educational institutions like seminaries should operate in balance:
  - a. The board, which by incorporation and legal status, has final authority and ultimate responsibility for the institution.
  - b. The board delegates governing authority to the office of the president to design the necessary structures and processes that enable the institution to achieve its primary goals. The president can further delegate authority to senior staff to assist in the governing process. The president has further responsibility to serve as facilitator or gatekeeper of the institutional governing processes by linking the various parts of the community and by integrating their work toward fulfilling the institution’s mission.
  - c. The faculty has authority delegated by the board through the president to design and conduct the educational work of the institution.
  - d. In some seminaries, the sponsoring church authorities have important authority and roles in the governance of the seminary. These vary widely depending on the polity, theology, history, and tradition of a particular church and its educational institutions. They range from advising the seminary only when asked, providing various levels of financial support, and authorizing appointments or approving board members, to more extensive roles such as retaining final authority to approve all critical decisions such as presidential and faculty appointments, the content and style of educational programs, or who shall be enrolled in the educational programs.
  - e. Other individuals and groups may also have power and influence on the life and work of the seminary even when they do not have formal governing authority. Advisory groups, alumni/ae, students, even local communities and congregations may influence the seminary. These constituencies may be encouraged by the seminary to support and influence the seminary’s programs. At other times they may by their own initiative press or seek to influence the seminary’s mission, goals, and governance.
  - f. The seminary as a faith community and its leadership all have responsibility to be open to and discerning of the divine intention and action in the community and the influence it has on the mission and goals of that community.

## **Orchestrating governance**

A symphony orchestra has many instruments, each of which plays the music with its own particular sound and rhythm. All the players know their instruments better than the conductor; yet the conductor must get each to play in harmony with the others and to the end intended by the particular score they are performing. Such directing is no easy task. It takes more than merely waving the director’s wand. It requires prior study, planning, design, and practice, along with confidence and trust between the director and orchestra. In institutional life this process is often called strategic planning. Actually it is more

than that. It is a complex system of organizational structures and processes, all of which are designed to link the various parts of the system together, to focus them on its mission and strategic goals, and then to facilitate and encourage each part to “do its thing” in behalf of the whole. In most educational institutions, the president under the authorization of the board plays this conducting role. In a “seminary orchestra,” conducting must go on at many levels of the community. To be successful, many persons must have the skill and commitment to conduct and empower others. The president should model and facilitate this process but never assume that he or she can accomplish it alone. Only shared governance can truly do that.

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ENDNOTE

1. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990), 132.

# Faculty Powers in Shared Governance

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*This article names many of the changes being experienced by theological schools and their constituencies, identifies new realities in governance, and argues for new understandings of vocations and roles to meet those challenges, particularly with reference to the faculty. To the question of how the school's theological, human, and fiscal powers can be directed to get the right educational work accomplished in the midst of change, the author explores the facets of faculty powers in shared governance. The article insists that the faculty's work of teaching and learning are the most powerful work of an educational institution, but that even in the educational area where the faculty rules, shared governance means shared stewardship. The conclusion challenges faculty to embrace the promise and risk of generative governance to help their schools meet the needs of the twenty-first century church and world.*

When he returned to Harvard from the State Department, Henry Kissinger reportedly noted, "The rancor is high in faculty meetings because the stakes are low!" Grim humor about faculty meetings is a cliché, like jokes about deans, plucking at academic anxieties. Why do faculty with great personal and intellectual capacities feel powerless in the midst of institutional realities? When schools face real and identifiable threats, such as an economic recession, faculty courage can often be rallied to contribute intelligence to wise actions. But when administrations and boards initiate efforts in less critical times to alter the culture or direct the institution's educational mission, diffuse distress may flourish like fungus in the petri dishes of faculty meetings.

Both cynical humor and unfocused anxiety about change are counterproductive for institutions of higher learning. The days are past when shared governance meant merely how much influence the faculty could have in administrative or board decisions. A labor-versus-management mentality is unworthy of faculty vocations and defeating for theological schools. Shared governance is now about the interesting and complex question of how to align every center of authority to accomplish the educational mission needed by those who rely on the institution. In theological schools, the full powers of the faculty need to be put to work as communities confront profound change.

The new authoritative handbook on not-for-profit board governance is *Governance as Leadership* by Chait, Ryan, and Taylor.<sup>1</sup> The word *leadership* already signals change. Because of the external worlds of financial reporting, institutional advancement, and educational accountability, board governance can no longer be as sharply delimited as in the days of "noses in, but fingers out." Presidents and deans must also be involved in the educational work of the school in places faculties often have regarded as their precincts. "Why can't you just leave us alone to teach and do our research?" they ask. Blame the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, or the seminary's reliance on its constituency, or the federal

Department of Education's pressures for accountability in accreditation. But shared governance is the hallmark of vibrant institutions of higher education.

No sane interpreter of the new realities in governance is arguing for a return to times when external systems directly controlled the schools. Some theological faculties with long memories recall days when their boards directly hired and fired the faculty, even annually, or when a president or church official simply appointed teachers. Some of these "governors" even insisted on approving courses and reading final exams. Whenever such rare intrusions happen, the warnings sound: this school's place in its own community may well be in jeopardy, and accreditation standards could soon be invoked.

But the story of the past half century of governance of theological schools has been much more about the ascendance of faculty authority. Deans and presidents, including those who came from the faculty, often shake their heads in disbelief when faculty accuse them of "running everything." Long established and tenured faculty are well aware of their authority, and some use it well to move the school forward. Faculty are right, however, in sensing they will not be left alone to do their work in the "splendid isolation" long admired as the privilege of European academics. They sense the claim on their work in the rising accountability of the schools for educational effectiveness.

In a time of change in the world, in communities of faith, and in theological schools, leadership is needed in every sector, with every group working at full strength: boards, faculties, staffs, and administrations. Reactive barriers against change are futile. Nervous fretting about who has the "most" or the "real" power must yield to a more proactive intelligence: how can the school's theological, human, and fiscal powers be directed to get the right educational work accomplished in the midst of change?

The words *power* or *powers* are used in this essay like the parlance of high school physics to identify the capacity to accomplish work. This is not a simple appeal to trust those in authority. Power and powers are often misused, especially when the purpose served is less than clear. But mere suspicion of "those people in power" is self-serving when the faculty itself exercises the school's greatest educational powers. And schools are places that promise quality learning. *Governance is the stewardship of powers to accomplish and sustain an educational mission in service of the church and the world.* To develop a shared vision of the excellence of a school's work, the governance questions are: Who depends on this institution to do its work? How can its educational mission best be accomplished? And who has which powers to do it well?

Chait, Ryan, and Taylor's interpretation of governance as leadership highlights three distinct phases or moments: fiduciary governance, strategic governance, and generative governance. Their focus is on board governance, but their insight illumines shared governance, welcoming faculty leadership in using their powers.

The following table is an effort to map shared governance with board governance as the foundation. Presidential and administrative governance stand on the bridge between board and faculty governance, all seeking to serve the educational work of the faculty and students. The argument is that faculty leadership in governing the school's educational mission must (1) respect the



separate fiduciary powers for which various groups are responsible, (2) collaborate (“co-labor”) with the powers of other governance groups to advance the effort strategically, and (3) welcome the lively vision of stakeholders from beyond and within the institution of what is needed from the school.

The commentary will begin at the lower left of Table 1 on the next page, rising up the fiduciary governance column through administrative to faculty governance. Then the analysis will move up through the strategic governance column. Finally, generative governance will be explored as the arena where the enterprise becomes a whole. The goal of this essay is to honor, assess, and explore the validity and value of faculty powers in shared governance.

## **Fiduciary governance**

In figure skating terms, *fiduciary governance* is doing the compulsory figures before the free skate. Boards that do not execute their fiduciary responsibilities should be replaced before they are sued or the school loses its accreditation. The graduates, the school’s constituencies, or the state may criticize a faculty or an administration, but the boards will ultimately be held legally and publicly accountable for the educational, fiscal, and operational integrity of the school. The double bottom line on the fiduciary side of the table is both the school’s financial viability and its educational vitality as a theological school. One institution may intend to serve the academic world, another will provide leadership for communities of justice and liberation, the third will tend closely knit communities of conviction. “No money, no mission!” in most theological schools also means “No mission, no money!”

The table is a modest device for mapping the distributions of powers, and the items listed in each section are only suggestive. Each institution must fill in its specifics, rather than arguing with the table. Chait, Ryan, and Taylor’s thorough discussions of fiduciary, strategic, and generative governance will yield deep and rich understandings. Nevertheless, the separation of powers in this left column of the table is a reminder of the ultimate responsibilities of the board for the work of the administration and the faculty.

The approval of degrees and even the financial audit are no longer rubber stamp tasks, although most boards probably still operate as if voting the degrees is perfunctory. In order to own their fiscal accountabilities, many boards regularly ask administrators to leave the room before formally approving the audit. The evaluation of the president and administration is also the board’s work, with faculty and staff counsel as needed. The day may come when boards will also attend more critically and formally to how well the school has accomplished the learning outcomes promised in the degrees of graduates. The solid lines between the fiduciary responsibilities of the groups means each has its own work in this column, with responsibility to the world and the other groups.

Even inside the administration, a segregation of duties will be needed to satisfy the auditors about fund management and to protect educational integrity. Decisions will be required in conflicting claims for financial support. Everyone can’t make all the decisions or the school will be transfixed in processes. Administrators must also make calls in the educational arena. For example,

**Table 1:** Faculty Leadership in Governing the School's Educational Mission

Governance: The stewardship of powers to accomplish and sustain an educational mission in service of the church and the world.				
	<b>Fiduciary</b> Fundamental (Management)	<b>Strategic</b> Logical (Stewardship)	<b>Generative</b> Visionary (Leadership)	
<b>Roles</b>	<b>Separation of Powers</b>	<b>Division of Labors</b>	<b>Fusion of Thinking: Collaboration</b>	
<b>Faculty,</b> Students, and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Design the curricula</li><li>• Guide student learning</li><li>• Teach, publish, and profess</li><li>• Recommend degrees</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show learning results</li><li>• Professional development</li><li>• Honor the school's calling</li><li>• Ask, listen, and learn</li></ul>	"Now you are the body of Christ individually members of it." The Apostle Paul	
	<b>President, Dean,</b> and Administra- tion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Articulate the mission</li><li>• Advocate the curricula</li><li>• Care for the people</li><li>• Build and track the budget</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advance the mission</li><li>• Allocate the resources</li><li>• Track "dashboards"</li><li>• Ask, listen, and learn</li></ul>	"A shared vision is not an idea. It is, rather a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. At its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question, "What do we want to create? Shared visions derive their power from a common caring." Peter Senge
<b>Boards</b> and Constituencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adopt the mission</li><li>• Approve, audit, and budget</li><li>• Award/command degrees</li><li>• Review the president</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify "dashboards"</li><li>• Authorize leadership</li><li>• Develop the boards</li><li>• Ask, listen, and learn</li></ul>	"You got'ta serve somebody!" Bob Dylan	
Financial Viability and Theological Integrity ← → Educational Excellence and Public Impact				



when student dismissals are required, the school's educational integrity must be protected, knowing it may be challenged legally.

In theological schools, faculty often wear administrative hats. They must be aware when their decisions adjudicate conflicting values. Faculty may wonder if administrators understand what is important, but they recognize the practical reality that someone must make the call. They tease, "That's why you get the big bucks!" The powers of senior administrators are accountable for the well-being of the people, the school's financial health, and ultimately for the educational mission to which the school is called, tracking the effectiveness of curricula to accomplish the learning objectives.

Teaching and learning are, however, the most powerful work of an educational institution. That strong collaborative effort between faculty and students occurs in the upper left hand segment of the table. Everything else flows into this sector and out from it. This is where the significance of the school accumulates its distinctive character and impact. The solid line between administration and faculty does not license faculty to teach whatever they please, but it protects the faculty's authority (power) to pursue the teaching, learning, and research that will accomplish the educational mission.

The classroom or teaching-learning context is the primary location where faculty members lead and govern, stewarding the powers of what is taught and learned in a subject matter or method that will be valuable for students. Experienced teachers have few illusions about the immediate efficacy of their craft, but those entrusted with theological students are aware that this is good (and underpaid) work, if you can get it. In time, their students become colleagues in public leadership and ministries around the world, friends who remember their teachers as important to their lives and vocations.

The privilege of teaching in a theological school, however, increases faculty responsibility for clarity in the school's educational purposes. The old wisdom affirmed the virtues of a good teacher at one end of the log and a good student at the other. The rise of the disciplines of theological education then commended high faculty competence in the methods and contents of biblical, historical, theological, ethical, and pastoral studies. Perhaps excellence could then be tracked by the graduate's mastery of these disciplines. But many faculties know this understanding of educational quality is inadequate.

Leadership in curricular design and tracking is probably the faculty's greatest power beyond the teaching/learning context itself. At their best, curricula are educational strategies to accomplish the school's teaching and learning goals, not mere political *détentes* between disciplines. Curricular reform is not only an exercise to be tolerated once every decade, but an ongoing deliberation about whether the students are learning what their degrees promise to them and to the communities they will lead. Faculty governance requires time and energy attending to the educational work of the school, seeking together how to track and measure what is learned, not only what is taught.

Student enrollments may be enough to justify offering elective courses, even if the topic seems irrelevant to others. Many students long remember their delight on entering a faculty member's research interests or passions. But if a course is required for a degree, that class must be accountable to the

standard that what is taught and learned is demonstrably valuable to what students need to learn. Even in the educational arena where the faculty rules, shared governance means shared stewardship.

As they manage their primary powers to accomplish the educational mission, faculty need to assess whether their committees and faculty meetings are productive. How many professional hours are being expended in plenary meetings? The educational mission identifies the criteria for the question, is this discussion worthy of our time? Raising the stakes in faculty governance means taking leadership in building agenda and exercising discipline in deliberations to focus on effective work in teaching and learning.

All faculty research will not be immediately relevant to the school's educational purposes. The specialized knowledge and interpretive skills of theological faculty are alternatively appreciated, resented, or ignored in congregations, denominations, and other publics. Theological schools are places where scholarship must be shielded from the tyrannies of relevance and enforcement. The public mission of theological education relies upon the work of the faculty in their research and writing, some of which may be solitary, personal, and entrepreneurial, but not private. The teaching office of theological educators is a public calling in the academy and in communities of faith. Although academic freedom can never be an unqualified claim for theological schools, faculty research and teaching are crucial assets that a school's fiduciary governance must protect.

## **Strategic governance**

In the *strategic governance* column, the lines are dashed to recognize a division of labors with increasing interdependence between boards, administrations, and faculty with students and staff. Fiduciary governance is managerial and incremental (i.e., how can we improve what we are doing now in service of our mission?) Strategic governance, in turn, is analytic and forward looking (i.e., given our strengths and/or weaknesses and our opportunities and/or threats, what priorities or changes will we need to strengthen our position in theological education in a three- to five-year period?)

The faculty's greatest influence in the fiduciary column is in stewarding the educational mission. The administration stands on the strategic bridge between the faculty and the board asking: Do we have the right goals? Who have we benefited by this work? Compared to others, what can we do to enhance our results? The assumption of strategic governance is still improvement, not transformation.

On the basis of the learning goals of the curricula as stated by the faculty, the board will seek to help improve the school's performance in a three- to five-year period. Along with annual "dashboard measurements" (imagine automotive gauges, meters, and warning lights) of the institution's resources, graduation rates, and health, the board will publicly identify and plan to enhance the school's educational excellence by meeting institutional goals in a period of years. Boards and administrations also provide strategic leadership raising current funds for the school's priorities and building capital strength.

Seeking to improve the educational results, all the players in shared governance will continue to ask, listen, and learn from those the school serves.

The administration's strategic leadership begins in seeking critical intelligence from all quarters: constituents, faculty, students, and board. Since the mission is education, the faculty's powers with the students and staff make the greatest enduring impact, but shared strategic governance requires faculty to welcome the administration's efforts to identify results that matter beyond the school. This intelligence is essential to developing resources for the effort. Faculty multiply the effect when they join the efforts to raise and allocate resources strategically to "make it happen!" The full powers of every group are needed, and at times they have different values to the institution's mission. Honoring the full fiduciary powers of the faculty and the board (educational and fiscal) empowers the president and administration's leadership in the strategic column.

Strategic thinking is systemic, seeking to multiply the school's excellence, generally without challenging the standards by which that excellence is measured. Strategic leadership builds on strengths to enhance and advance the institution. Faculty engagement, therefore, is essential in building shared understandings of quality. Shared governance in change calls for faculty leadership in defining the school's educational results, and the faculty's professional development must be disciplined to serve the mission. Strategic planning in theological schools is about more than raising more funds to keep the school alive. Even if the goal is simply to do a better job, faculty powers in shared governance must be rallied for the school to become smarter about new hires, course allocations, study leaves, and learning assessment.

Loyal opposition builds the organization's character as the faculty helps devise the right measures and practices. But cynical disdain and skeptical distance undermine the shared stewardship of the school's powers. A senior faculty member once told a young president, "Your job is to make us look good!" It was a prudent place to begin. That same professor later said, "We need to help you do your best too! If this school is going to go somewhere, we are in this together!" The school's strategic culture is healthy when faculty welcome the legitimate strengths of administrations and boards while they are engaged in the use of the powers of the faculty. Everyone is playing "for keeps."

## **Generative governance**

*Generative governance* is inspiring, powerful, and risky. Fiduciary governance is about protecting the school's educational and financial assets. Strategic governance is about building upon the school's distinctive strengths and opportunities and abandoning its weaknesses and threats. Generative governance happens when schools are caught up in a vision of the world God loves and become committed to serve the callings of the communities of faith who need graduates to lead them in new times.

The risks of generative governance are manifold because most theological schools were established to conserve a particular view of the world and the church. Even the university-based divinity schools once had specific theologi-

cal and ecclesial mandates, and their mandates for the study of religion continue to have identifiable publics. The discussion about the future of the MDiv degree in several of these universities signals complex considerations of their identities as graduate theological faculties and/or professional schools. And who shares the governance of their educational missions?

While the debt of the “good theological school” of the mid-twentieth century to a common curricular design was evident, the broad spectrum of schools in ATS resists the dominance of any one “shared vision” in the twenty-first century. In general, theological faculties still tend to own an identifiable responsibility for “conserving” something for some group(s), at least in protecting “what we do” as educators from “what they do.” Liberal schools define their work in reaction to what the fundamentalists do. Evangelicals distinguish themselves from the liberals, Roman Catholics from the Protestants. And confessional theological traditions may define themselves in contrast to everyone else.

Some ATS member schools are highly conscious of what they are designed to prevent, and better, what they are intended to accomplish. Many constituencies of theological schools are impatient with historic academic or denominational differences. They “simply” want better leaders and often challenge the schools by what they see in other traditions. Faculties, in turn, know there is nothing “simple” about leadership in faith communities. The shared governance of theological schools becomes truly powerful when the question becomes how theological interpretation properly equips leadership in faith communities. Faculty can’t raise this question only among themselves, but their participation is essential for their schools to sustain and enact educational responses in new times.

A new president who asked the school’s alumni/ae for counsel received hundreds of responses filled with gratitude for the faculty but also criticism of the school’s educational mission. “Quit preparing your graduates for a church that no longer exists!” Then in the midst of a board-faculty consultation on a strategic plan titled, “Excellence for Ministry,” a faculty member spoke softly, but firmly. “We are rearranging the chairs on the Titanic. We are just getting better at what we know. We must listen and change!”

The board and administration were focused on strategic governance. Many of the faculty were already concerned that the school would betray its historic strengths with fluffy slogans. The courage to welcome profound change requires faculty leadership from within and loyal criticism from outside the school. Generative governance is a change process, collaborative in its soul, calling for courage from experts and wisdom from the faithful. “I have no idea how we should change this school,” said a board member, “but we all know the communities that depend on us need something different.”

What is powerful about generative governance in theological schools is that generative forces are abundant, and these forces come from beyond the walls of institutional identification and transcend the internal divisions of labors. While theological schools are designed to conserve and advance their strengths, generative governance opens the windows to the winds of change,

perhaps redirection or even conversion, in the primary biblical sense of being turned or turning toward God.

Faculty powers are the educational engine in shared fiduciary governance, and they can be driving forces toward excellence in improving and advancing the institution's mission. But what if the very character of that excellence is challenged? Can faculty exercise leadership toward reform without betraying their academic interests or guilds? "No one puts new wine into old wine-skins;" warned Jesus, "otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed . . . And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'" (Luke 5:37, 39 NRSV)

Generative governance depends upon fiduciary discipline in educational and financial management and relies on strategic thinking, planning, and implementation. These logical and empirical disciplines test the validity of any transformative vision. Faculty leadership (1) is essential to doing a good job in our educational mission and (2) is critical in deciding how to improve the benefit of our educational work in three to five years.

Faculty leadership in generative governance, however, (3) comes primarily from welcoming inspiration from outside the institution, opening the windows to new realities. This is why even the dashed lines disappear in the third column of shared governance.

Faculty leadership in shared governance brings more than expertise in the disciplines or even more than competence in effective theological education. In the generative moments of shared governance, faculty leadership means following an inspired vision of a calling into "paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown."

A deep transformation of theological education as leadership education has already begun in many member schools of the Association. No uniformity is possible or desirable because the wealth of traditions and the diverse sizes of the schools are assets. The powers of the faculties are needed at full strength to bring the distinctive strengths of all the schools to identify the changes facing theological education and to address the challenges at the local and global doorsteps of the communities and publics they serve.

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#### ENDNOTE

1. Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor, *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005).



# More than Simply Getting Along: The Goal of Shared Governance in Theological Schools

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*In Trust*

*In much of higher education, shared governance functions as an uneasy truce among competing factions. Within theological schools, however, the commitment to shared governance is about so much more than defending prerogatives; it's about advancing the mission of the school and, by extension, God's purposes for the church. This article explores the myths that can blind campus communities to new possibilities and more faith-filled models of academic governance and suggests four critical steps for revisioning the governance practices in theological schools.*

## Introduction

[T]he academic executive and all his works are anathema, and should be discontinued by the simple expedient of wiping him off the slate; and . . . the governing board, in so far as it presumes to exercise any other than vacantly perfunctory duties, has the same value and should with advantage be lost in the same shuffle.

Thornstein Veblen, 1918<sup>1</sup>

Shared governance is a long-time feature of American higher education, yet it remains a frequently misunderstood and often maligned aspect of academic life. Board members, administrators, and faculty have all, at one time or another, voiced doubts about the concept. The rhetoric of academic governance may have tamed considerably since Thornstein Veblen penned the words with which this essay begins, yet in many places—including some theological schools—shared governance functions as an uneasy truce among competing factions. “Newcomers to the governance and administration of theological schools are likely to be surprised by the intense interest within these relatively small schools in the exercise of authority and power.”<sup>2</sup> Systems of shared governance are frequently inefficient, inflexible, and time-consuming, and it doesn’t take much for campus tensions to escalate into full-blown conflict.

After all, sharing doesn’t come easy, and all the more so when power is in play. “[V]irtually any specific decision, from relocating a parking lot to issuing a new admissions pamphlet, can become a heated debate about shared governance. . . . People tie their passions and preoccupations to any likely proposal or decision, whether it is relevant or not.”<sup>3</sup> Within theological schools, however, the commitment to shared governance is about so much more than defending prerogatives; it’s about advancing the mission of the school and, by



extension, God's purposes for the church. Governance within the context of a faith-centered institution "is a calling, an expression of the human vocation to live faithfully in the image of God by responding with care in matters of daily living."<sup>4</sup> In these days, more than at any earlier time, leaders in theological education are challenged to develop a faith-filled understanding of shared governance that melds the richness of the various ecclesial traditions with the best of organizational theory and practice.

Trustees and presidents are advised that governance within the "good theological school" requires "shared leadership, involves shared accountability and responsibility, and expresses itself in situational adaptability,"<sup>5</sup> but then they are left on their own to determine what that sharing should look like. There is no ready-made curriculum for teaching shared governance, nor a single, commonly agreed upon, one-size-fits-all best model for pursuing it. And herein are both the genius and the frustration of shared governance. The ways by which decision making is distributed and the roles and responsibilities assigned to the various participants in governance, or even identifying who those participants are, are unique to each institution. As a result, that which is labeled as shared governance at one school will likely be different from the theological school down the road, and sometimes starkly so. In fact, persons accustomed to a specific mode of shared governance might question whether decision making in some settings can legitimately be referred to as shared at all.

In an email message to the author on November 15, 2006, longtime seminary president Robert Cooley observed that shared governance is best understood as uniting legitimacy and competency. He continued:

The board as volunteers and "worldly-wise" bring legitimacy to actions and decisions. They are laypersons and part time. Each school must shape a system of shared governance most appropriate to its particular history, culture, and structure. The faculty, as [a group of] full-time professionals, brings competency and educational qualities necessary to fulfilling the education mission. Competency alone cannot get the job done; it needs to be legitimized and held accountable in the interest of students, donors, and other stakeholders. The key to shared governance is presidential leadership. Without the dominant leadership of a president to guide, harmonize, and manage, shared governance will not happen.

In its simplest form, shared governance is collegial decision making or the process of distributing authority, power, and influence for academic decisions among campus constituencies. Cooley also stated that "shared governance is a 'system' and provides a holistic process for the unique parts of the institutional infrastructure to function and fulfill roles and responsibilities in an effective manner. It brings meaning to the decision-making requirements of an institution." Each school must determine the system of shared governance most appropriate to its particular history, culture, and structure.

For more than forty years, discussions of shared governance have been shaped by the 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities,” a collaborative project of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). The statement represented a good-faith effort to mend the breach that had developed among boards, administrations, and faculty. In retrospect, its call for “mutual understanding . . . based on community of interest and producing joint effort” seems almost audacious considering the turmoil on college and university campuses in the mid-1960s. The conciliatory tone of the document, including the prediction that “a college or university in which all the components are aware of the interdependence, of the usefulness of communication among themselves, and of the force of joint action will enjoy increased capacity to solve educational problems,” represented a welcome break from the fiery language of earlier AAUP leaders.<sup>6</sup>

The ATS Commission on Accrediting’s standard on authority and governance builds on the 1966 AAUP/ACE/AGB statement by providing a “structure by which participants in the governance process exercise faithful leadership on behalf of the purpose of the theological school.”<sup>7</sup> The standard addresses in detail the roles of the governing board, administration, faculty, and students in the governance process. Institutional leaders are directed toward a model of governance that incorporates collaborative goal-setting and a problem-solving process built on trust and communication. An appreciation that persons other than board members and the president can make good decisions on behalf of the institution is evident throughout the ATS document. As generations of board members, presidents, and faculty leaders have discovered, however, putting that appreciation into practice is easier said than done.

Because the concept of shared governance is unique to higher education, seminary communities can learn from but should not mimic “good governance” in other organizational settings. Nor does the dominant governance literature of the day provide much guidance when it comes to understanding shared governance, or at least explicitly so. A reader can scour the pages of John Carver’s *Boards that Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* and Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor’s *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* and not once find the words “shared governance.” Certainly it is possible to make a case for shared governance from these models, as David Tiede illustrates in his article in this journal, but to do so requires considerable time, energy, and governance expertise.

Healthy patterns of shared governance are not likely to emerge *ex nihilo*. Gordon Smith cautions, “We must develop the organizational and the political competencies that enable us to be active participants in shaping the culture and the character of the schools where we serve.”<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, the hard work of hammering out a governance model is excellent preparation for shared leadership.

## **Comparing approaches to governance**

Nonprofit governance practice and scholarship is currently dominated by two approaches or schools of thought—policy governance and governance as leadership. As was noted previously, shared governance is neither promoted nor precluded in either model, and in fact, whether shared governance can function within either of these structures is likely a moot concern. The majority of theological schools function with a hybrid model of governance developed over time, with ideas selected piecemeal from a rapidly expanding smorgasbord of organizational literature and governance theory. It is unusual to find a completely coherent, flawless model of governance. This does not, however, detract from the value that comes from studying the latest theoretical models and testing the benefits and challenges that each brings to the governance table.

### ***Policy governance***

Policy governance promises “a coherent framework of concepts and principles that is internally consistent as well as powerful in dealing with whatever practical situations arise.”<sup>9</sup> Carver’s distinction between board-established organizational ends and management means of implementation has helped many organizations (including theological schools) clarify the respective roles of the board and the president. The model locates the work of the board in the realm of ends and hands the means of getting there over to the president and his or her leadership team. Boards are expected to define the boundaries within which the president should work and then to trust him or her to “just do it.” As board members focus on the vision, mission, values, and strategic priorities of the organization, they are freed from the disproportionate attention to trivia that so frequently clogs an institution’s governance “arteries.”

Although policy governance has become a familiar and comfortable framework for many organizational leaders, there are downsides to the model, including:

- Board and staff relations may be vulnerable and disconnected because of the emphasis on separate and distinct roles. This can conflict with a school’s commitment to shared governance.
- Links between policies, operations, and outcomes are often tenuous.
- Power is concentrated in the hands of a few.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Governance as leadership***

Governance as leadership begins with the premise that the problem with institutional governance as it is most often experienced is not one of practice, but rather one of purpose. For those who question whether an activity as complex as governance can be encapsulated in a set of tightly prescribed tasks, governance as leadership is a welcome alternative. By opening up the boardroom to conversation topics beyond fiduciary issues, governance as leadership addresses the problems of bored boards and board member disengagement. When the president and board work as a team, the governance process moves beyond a winner-take-all joust for control. The way is opened for board mem-

bers to interact with administrators other than the president and also with faculty members on strategic and generative issues.

There are, however, barriers that can make it challenging to make the move to governance as leadership. These include:

- Not enough time to fully engage all governance partners in generative thinking and planning.
- Fear by the president of losing control of the governance process. Some presidents prefer *approval from* rather than *dialogue with* the board and/or campus constituents.
- Lack of creativity and bravery among participants in the governance process. There is considerably more risk involved in governance as leadership than in more prescribed models of governance.

### Myths that can derail<sup>11</sup>

Many an attempt at forging a culture of shared governance has been derailed by the “myths and fallacious conceptions of the nature of American academic government”<sup>12</sup> that are firmly embedded in the collective consciousness of governance stakeholders. These “old academics’ tales” contain just enough truth to make them believable, which explains why they continue to be passed from one generation of governance leaders to the next. As Smith notes, “some people have good reason to be ambivalent about the exercise of authority and power” based on past disappointments with the way things have been done in their school.<sup>13</sup> Any week’s edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is likely to include reports of boards, presidents, and/or faculty behaving badly. Almost all longtime residents of the ivory tower can tell a sorry story or two about meddling boards, self-serving presidents, or faculties in revolt. And every campus community has its favorite “fallacious conceptions” about governance.

In some places—most often where the board has adopted the policy governance model—trustees have bought into the myth that shared governance is an abdication of the board’s responsibilities. As a defense against encroachments on their territory, these boards define their work with tightly stated policies that focus almost exclusively on fiduciary matters. To be sure, increased scrutiny by governmental agencies, including application of aspects of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act to nonprofit organizations, has heightened awareness of the oversight responsibilities of boards. However, as Daniel Aleshire warns, “If all the board does is its fiduciary work, it fails the school in other ways.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, if board members make their policies work for them rather than vice versa, and if they employ strategic indicators and dashboard data for tracking basic fiduciary information, board time can be freed for strategic and generative work. “In creating and implementing such structures, the board of trustees does not abdicate any of its constitutive responsibilities, but it acknowledges that it cannot make adequate or faithful decisions without collaboration.”<sup>15</sup>

A second myth that shared governance is too unwieldy to be practical in the modern theological school is gaining converts fast in the current economic downturn. And in fact, it is likely that as boards and presidents grapple with the threat of financial insolvency, there may not be as much sharing of governance as some of the participants might prefer. Governance leaders are going to be challenged to find ways to fast track decision making without seeming to run roughshod over some segments of the community. "In difficult times, especially, there is a pressing need for open and frank communication between administrators and faculty [and the board] about both internal conditions and external realities. Faculty must be privy to as much information as possible, and they must feel free to engage in discussions and debates about the direction of the institution."<sup>16</sup> Given the collegial nature of theological education, it is difficult to imagine any other approach to governance.

That said, it doesn't necessarily follow, as a third myth about shared governance has led some to believe, that everyone must be involved in every decision and in precisely the same way. Shared responsibility does not mean that all stakeholders have an equal voice in all areas of operations. Rather, the weight of each voice is directly proportional to the responsibility that voice has with respect to the issue in question. In many situations, *distributed* might be a more helpful modifier than *shared*. Specifically, responsibility within academic governance is distributed as follows:

- Legislative, for which the board has primary responsibility, shared with the president, and into which the faculty has input;
- Institutional, for which the administration has primary responsibility, as delegated by the board, with employee input; and,
- Educational, for which the faculty has primary responsibility, with administrative and board oversight.

For shared governance to work for the good of the institution, all the partners must be accountable for the proper execution of their roles and responsibilities. After all, "the governance of a theological school . . . involves more than the legal relationships and bylaws that define patterns of responsibility and accountability. It is the structure by which participants in the governance process exercise faithful leadership on behalf of the purpose of the theological school."<sup>17</sup> Within theological schools, faithful leadership is exercised through sharing, and it is sustained on trust.

## **Communication and trust**

Sharing happens and trust develops most naturally among people who are in close proximity to one another. It's simply easier to appreciate the viewpoint of colleagues as ideas are exchanged over a cup of coffee or in the course of several meetings. "Conversation about things that matter is not just inquiry among those who share common interests; it also includes and takes place among all those who are involved in discussion about the nature of the organization itself."<sup>18</sup> Informal interaction outside the formal governance structure

almost always results in greater ownership and understanding, and shared governance succeeds when individuals have the time and space in which to work through competing viewpoints. In particular, “board members benefit from understanding how faculty see a particular issue, and faculty members benefit by having their opinions heard.”<sup>19</sup>

Shared governance establishes the culture of the institution by defining the expectations for dialog, listening, and collaboration between faculty, the administration, and the governing board. Unfortunately, the episodic nature of board work provides limited opportunity for trustees to practice the language of the academic natives or to adjust to the culture of the academy. Perhaps this is why “traditional nonprofit governance approaches tend to be modeled after corporate governance systems, creating a strong demarcation between board and staff, with the executive director serving as the only link between them.”<sup>20</sup> Until fairly recently, it has simply been easiest for the president to act as guide and interpreter for the board than to work at overcoming barriers to communication and trust. The downside of taking the easier way, however, is that when schools have needed “the unique expertise and insight of board members, or when generative and strategic tasks call the board, faculty, and administration into creative partnerships . . . the board, as a whole, does not have sufficient information for close operational decisions.”<sup>21</sup> But such no longer needs to be the case.

By capitalizing on advances in communication technologies, it is possible to eliminate cost, time, and distance as barriers to free-flowing communication among and between governance partners. Nowadays, most trustees have an email account, and many (but probably not yet all) are comfortable receiving information in an electronic format. Electronic newsletters are replacing print materials between the president and the board. Committee minutes, calendars, and other campus documents can be forwarded to trustees with the touch of a finger. And increasingly, theological schools are benefiting from inexpensive web conferencing services as a way to enhance interactions among and between governance partners and as a way to involve trustees in campus-based task forces, committees, and strategy sessions. At a minimal cost, an entire board can be equipped for web conferencing, transforming a far-flung network of personal computers into a virtual meeting room.

It is unrealistic to suggest that better and more frequent communication as facilitated by technology will alleviate old grudges among campus factions or put an end to fallacious conceptions about the governance process. But we can believe that as participants in governance seek to maximize all methods of communication, old and new, they will become more trustful of each other and also of the governance process.

## **Structuring for clarity in governance**

For the majority of seminary communities, shared governance is simply the way things are done. Governance systems tend to run on assumptions more than clearly defined expectations. Although business as usual may be sufficient in good times, if the intent is to soften the inevitable bumps in the



governance pathway, “a new sense of shared responsibility for effective leadership and governance must take hold and shape the enterprise’s culture of collaborative governance.”<sup>22</sup> This begins by pursuing the following four steps.

**Step 1: Identify the key governance stakeholders for the particular theological school.** This first step is easiest within the context of independent seminaries, where full authority for institutional decisions is confined to members of the immediate community and where governance responsibilities are shared by the usual players—board, administration, and faculty. In the case of schools related to colleges, universities, or clusters of theological schools, naming the governance partners (and including them in the governance process) can be more of a challenge. At other theological schools, board and campus personnel share authority for institutional planning and decision making with an ecclesial body.

**Step 2: Identify the key governance decisions facing the school.** The intention of this step is to look as carefully and completely as possible at the plans, challenges, and opportunities facing the school during a specific period of time. Institutional situations shift from one year to the next, and so too does the nature of the governance issues that must be addressed. Board members, although in touch with issues that are top of the mind for external constituents, are usually limited in their ability to identify internal issues that are in need of attention. And administrators and faculty, with their noses pressed to the institutional grindstone, can be late in detecting governance challenges that are coming at the school from beyond the campus. It takes collaboration among and between the governance partners to develop a full list of the key governance decisions waiting in the wings.

**Step 3: Identify the roles of the various governance stakeholders in each of the key decisions.** All governance decisions are not the same, just as the primary functions of the stakeholders are not identical. Ambiguity about jurisdictions of authority invariably leads to conflict. This is a particular challenge in smaller schools where the lines between institutional and educational decisions are often blurred and where individuals fill multiple roles. Taking time to clarify roles and responsibilities does not preclude gray or overlapping areas of authority. Doing so does, however, alert institutional leaders to potential trouble spots to which they should be attentive.

**Step 4: Assess the adequacy of existing governance structures to handle the work ahead.** This step should help in identifying governance functions that have outlived their usefulness and suggest possible new venues (councils, committees, teams, task forces, etc.) that are more likely to facilitate a healthy culture of shared decision making. As specific governance tasks are assigned to the various governance bodies, these should be delineated in handbooks and policy guidelines. It is particularly important to make clear the relationship between the work of campus and board committees that focus on similar issues (e.g., the finance committee of the board and a campus-based budget committee).

Following these four steps should enhance the quality of campus interactions, regardless of the governance model that the participants in the process perceive themselves to be following. The four-step process helps move a school beyond the usual “fractured and time-consuming processes of decision



making.”<sup>23</sup> It can facilitate more permeable boundaries between faculty and administration and also between the campus community and the board. And it establishes an expectation of accountability among and between the governance partners for the proper execution of their roles. In the end, however, the usefulness of the four steps in reshaping governance attitudes and activities depends on the receptivity of the people involved to new ways of working together. “No one, whether on the faculty or on the board, can with good conscience determine that others will run the school while they go about their work in their ‘little’ corner.”<sup>24</sup> Trustees, administrators, and faculty all must believe that institutional governance is worth their best efforts.

### Further implications

In an essay titled “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” David Hester raises a question that, in its answer, could transform the governance of theological schools. He asks: “How can the practice of governance be taught and learned in ways that are appropriate to understanding it as a sacred calling, in which the purpose served is, first and last, God’s purpose?”<sup>25</sup> Hester’s question presupposes a very different definition of shared governance from that which is found in the mainstream literature of higher education. His query frees governance leaders to incorporate the mission, vision, and theological understandings of the school into the what, how, and why of their academic decision making. It challenges participants in the governance process to seek out new and imaginative ways of pursuing their collective vocation in service to the school. And his question reminds leaders in theological education that, for their schools, shared governance must be about more than defending prerogatives or adjudicating intramural power struggles.

For almost a decade now, I have concluded my presentations to theological school boards by asking them to consider that “at the center of [governance] is the basic question of what God calls the organization to be and to do, and the complex issue of how we discern this calling in the muddle of issues, events, conflicts, and trends that make up institutional life.”<sup>26</sup> If today’s leaders in academic governance will pursue this purpose, this center, with their whole hearts, there is the possibility that those who come after them will experience shared governance as a spiritual discipline, as well as an organizational responsibility. That is the goal of shared governance in theological schools.

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ENDNOTES

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# Report of the Faculty Vocation and Governance Project United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

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## Overview

At the time of the Faculty Vocation and Governance Consultation, the time and energy of United Theological Seminary's faculty was committed to discussions in the *Educating Clergy* project of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning. Consequently, the work of the faculty vocation and governance project was scheduled to begin after the conclusion of those discussions in mid-spring 2007. The codirectors believed this would serve the project well since the Wabash discussions would engage faculty members in deep reflection on their vocation as teachers.

The project began in late spring of 2007 with discussions by the Faculty Council<sup>1</sup> of Malcolm Warford's book, *Practical Wisdom*,<sup>2</sup> which offers substantial reflection on the changing vocation of teaching in theological education as this emerged from the work of the Lexington Seminar.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the book's inherent value for discussions of the vocation of theological educators, since United's faculty had participated in the Lexington Seminar, reading and discussing it reconnected the faculty to some of its previous reflections on the nature of theological education. At this stage in the conversation, the notion of theological education as a formational process emerged very clearly. These discussions concluded with consideration of Gordon Smith's essay, "Attending to the Collective Vocation."<sup>4</sup> By June some threads of a possible statement of the corporate vocation of the faculty had begun to emerge. At the same time, a difficult and painful exchange between two members of the faculty raised important questions about the impact of the faculty's relational ethos on its sense of itself as a community having a vocation *qua* community.

Between the June discussion and the annual faculty retreat at the end of August 2007, Faculty Council members were invited to do two things: (1) read John Bennett's book, *Academic Life*,<sup>5</sup> and (2) if they wished, try individually drafting a statement of the faculty's corporate vocation. In addition, the codirectors prepared a presentation on governance as leadership based on the book of that title by Chait, Ryan, and Taylor.<sup>6</sup> The presentation emphasized the book's threefold framework of generative, strategic, and fiduciary governance. The aim of the conversations at the retreat was to connect the emerging articulation of a corporate faculty vocation to questions of the faculty's perspective on and practice of governance and issues in the faculty's relational ethos. The retreat succeeded in this aim. In particular, it achieved some important levels of honesty about relations among faculty members, and, for the first time, it articulated the role of faculty governance practice in the implicit curriculum, linking governance directly to the faculty's vocation as educators. Faculty members also produced a draft statement of their corporate vocation at the retreat based on an initial proposal prepared by one of the codirectors.

Faculty discussions in October 2007, March 2008, and May 2008 continued the conversation on several fronts: refinement of the statement of the faculty's corporate vocation, consideration of the relation of individual vocations to corporate vocation and what that implied for the faculty's workload policy, reflection on the character of faculty governance, and assessment of the relational ethos of the faculty (especially in relation to questions of theological diversity).

One aspect of the project was never implemented. The original plan for the project called for joint trustee-faculty and faculty-administration conversations in the later stages of the project, following the faculty retreat. Since governance in ATS member schools is shared among trustees, administration, and faculty, it seemed important that as the faculty moved into the governance phase of its conversations, these be held in dialogue with the board of trustees in particular. Despite repeated requests for including this issue at the board retreat in September 2007 and at two subsequent board meetings over the ensuing six months, the board's Executive Committee never found space for it on the board's agenda.

### **Themes in the conversation**

At the end of this process, the faculty at United Theological Seminary reached a growing consensus around this statement of the vocation of the faculty as a body:

We believe that God in Christ through the Holy Spirit calls the faculty of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities as a community to join God in forming leaders for God's people in the Church and the world (i.e., helping them gain knowledge, acquire skills, develop wisdom in discerning the right use of knowledge and skill, broaden and deepen right relational sensibilities, and deepen both the understanding and the practice of God-centered life so that they may be able to live into their callings as leaders in various forms of ministry, following wherever the Spirit leads into the Church and world). The faculty cultivates this formation through its explicit teaching in the seminary's programs, through other means that add voices to the conversations outside the walls of the seminary, and through its ordering of the academic life of the seminary to focus the formational power of the ways we live and work together.

The articulation of this sense of corporate vocation has been important for us in a number of ways. The expression and ownership of this sense of common purpose in itself contributes to faculty cohesion. It will be useful in attracting and socializing future new faculty, since it articulates in short form the enterprise into which we would welcome them. Most importantly, however, it serves as a starting point for reflection about our common life and work and the ways these are organized. In the United faculty, at least, we are at our best

in thinking concretely about our life and work together if we have an explicit frame of reference such as the one this statement provides.

### *Faculty governance as implicit curriculum*

An important breakthrough occurred in our conversations, especially at the faculty retreat, when several colleagues articulated the notion that faculty governance activities (i.e., the work of Faculty Council and its committees, and related work) are a significant component of our educative work. They are part of the implicit curriculum of the school. In these activities, the faculty teaches by what it models. If this is so, then the faculty's governance activities are an explicit part of the faculty's work as educators. If this idea were to be accepted by most of the faculty, it would represent a major shift in the way governance activities are "named" among the faculty. Predominantly, these have been, and for most still are, seen as a "chore," a kind of necessary evil incurred by being part of a small school with a strong ethos of collective decision making. Some members of the faculty are quite explicit that governance activities are a distraction from the real work for which they trained and were hired. The roots of this prevailing attitude probably lie in the socialization process of PhD programs. These programs are essentially designed to train students to be independent researchers. In our conversations as a faculty, it became clear that for many of us a part of the socialization inherent in these programs was the inculcation of an attitude that "administration" is work of lesser value for people with lesser academic abilities.

A variety of symptoms reflect the prevailing notion of governance activities as a necessary chore. The assumption behind the section on "Committees and Administrative Assignments" in the faculty workload policy is that everyone on the faculty will take a more or less equal share of these duties with the purpose of minimizing the burden any one faculty member has to carry. Although governance activities are considered in review for contract, tenure, and promotion, they are of notably less importance than teaching (i.e., explicit classroom activities), research and publication, and service to the church and academy. Some faculty members do other work during Faculty Council meetings, and some seldom attend Seminary Council meetings.

At this stage, the United faculty is still in transition in its naming of the significance of its governance activities. For some the default mode is still to think of them as a necessary chore. Others have become quite excited with the idea of seeing this work as part of their teaching. In any case, this new conception of the place of governance in faculty work is expressed in the last portion of the faculty's statement of corporate vocation, "through its ordering of the academic life of the seminary to focus the formational power of the ways we live and work together."

What would it mean for this faculty to live fully into this new conception of its governance work as teaching by modeling? Would we acknowledge that we all have different gifts and limitations for this work, just as we accept that we have different gifts and limitations as teachers? Would that then lead us to rewrite the workload policy so that committee and other governance assignments were distributed among us according to who has gifts and passion for



this work, while at the same time supporting in-service training and development in governance for *all* members of the faculty as we do for teaching? Would the dean pay as much attention to coaching and socializing new faculty around governance matters as he does around teaching? Would significant achievement in governance matters weigh more in evaluations for promotion and tenure than just, “has this individual been a good citizen?” Would we invest the time and energy to remake our governance from a model that assumes that governance is only or mostly fiduciary to one that gives proper place to generative, strategic, and fiduciary governance because this models healthy leadership in a time of great change in church and society and is consistent with an explicit curriculum that focuses on cultivating capacities for creative improvisation? As a faculty, we do not know the answer to these questions yet. The discussion in some ways has only begun, but the door has been opened and follow-up work has been assigned to the Faculty Administration Committee that will keep us working on these issues.

### ***Balancing individual and corporate faculty vocation and workload***

Articulating the corporate vocation of the faculty shifted the way we think about the relation between our work as individual members of the faculty and the work of the faculty as a whole. When the work of the faculty is thought of as a list of tasks, the question of the relation between the work of an individual faculty member and the collective can boil down to being sure that everyone has an equitable share of the total list so that no single faculty member is particularly advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to his or her peers. The faculty workload policy at United operates in this way. It allows for individual variation in consultation with the dean, but its essential aim is to see that, as far as is practical and reasonable, each member of the faculty carries a similar share of work in five areas: teaching, research and publication, committee and administrative assignments, community participation, and service to church and academy. This policy was designed to combat anxieties about inequitable distribution of the workload and to define reasonable limits for what the school (or individual faculty members) could expect in a given year.

The policy has achieved its purposes of establishing a sense of equitable treatment and reining in unhealthy workload expectations. In recent years, the faculty has begun to consider a policy that would recognize individual gifts and passions more and be less of a “one size fits all” arrangement. When we introduced the language of vocation to speak of the work of the faculty as a whole, the climate for this conversation changed significantly. Once we spoke of a corporate vocation of the faculty rather than merely a list of work to be done, the question of the relation of the work of an individual to the work of the whole changed into the question of how the vocation of an individual faculty member (and thus the gifts related to that vocation) relates to the vocation of the faculty as a whole. Theologically, the proper basis for the workload policy then becomes this relation of the vocations of the individuals who make up the faculty to the vocation of the faculty as a whole.

A workload policy that intended to honor both the corporate vocation of the faculty and the vocations (and hence gifts and graces) of individual faculty

members would live in a healthy tension between two values. On the one hand, it would need to ensure the fulfillment of the corporate vocation even in those aspects for which no individual faculty member had a particular vocation. On the other hand, it would also need to invite faculty members as much as possible to do that to which they are individually called and for which they therefore have the needed gifts and graces. In this understanding, the corporate vocation of the faculty is achieved not through each member bringing an identical piece to assemble the whole but through each member bringing a unique piece to enrich the whole. In practical terms, this would seem to imply a factoring approach that would enable the defining of equivalence between task lists that looked quite different. But it also invites larger questions such as:

- How do we work together as a community of gifts and callings?
- How are we discerning the gifts God has given each member of this faculty?
- How are we cultivating new skills as a faculty so as to grow more into our vocation(s)?
- How do we recognize that vocations and gifts are not static things but change as we follow God's call?

Here we seem to have achieved the clearest ownership of a change of direction, and the Faculty Administration Committee has been charged to explore the options for making this practical.

### *Governance as a discernment activity*

Ironically, governance itself is one place where we agreed that everyone had to be involved regardless of individual vocations and gifts. This follows from the understanding of governance as a part of our work of teaching but also from the honoring of the unique gifts each individual brings to our corporate vocation. This became particularly evident for us when we began to think about governance in terms of discernment rather than deliberation.

The shift from thinking about governance as a deliberative activity to thinking about governance as a discernment activity was another consequence of the vocabulary of vocation. Once we began to take seriously the language of vocation to describe our work together, several faculty members, especially those working in spiritual formation and related areas, introduced the notion of discernment. The idea of discernment as an important dimension of the governance of a community devoted to the life of the Spirit gained ground among us over the time of our discussions. We do not yet know what form this takes, and it seems more likely that it will complement deliberative processes rather than displace them. It seems, however, an important dimension of modeling governance in the church for our students. Having granted this point, we then became quite convicted that faculty governance needs the participation of every faculty member regardless of gifts and graces because of the unique lens each brings to the task of discernment. So at the level of the Faculty Council, we affirmed an inclusive principle for governance while affirming the possibility of a distributive principle in assigning the work of our corporate vocation, which perhaps then operates at the committee level as far as governance is concerned.

***Making space for the generative and strategic dimensions of governance***

Another dimension of the conduct of faculty governance has emerged clearly for the codirectors, even if it did not claim a very large place in the faculty's own conversations. At a time when seminaries, including United, are faced with rapid environmental change and doing what we have always done as best we can will not be enough to secure a useful future, it is imperative that seminary governance contain healthy generative and strategic dimensions in addition to the traditional and necessary fiduciary dimension (to use the terminology of Chait, Ryan, and Taylor). We observe varying degrees of the generative and strategic dimensions of governance at work in faculty governance activities. However, we also observe that, except for the existence of an Educational Planning and Evaluation Committee of Faculty Council, there is little in the governance structures and meeting conduct of the faculty that routinely makes space for these dimensions. Faculty governance is primarily organized around the fiduciary dimension of governance. This does not offer an appropriate model for our students. It does not make full use of the gifts of the members of the faculty. It does not serve the institution well, although we have managed some very good generative and strategic decision making nevertheless. There may be multiple reasons why conversation about this has yet to take off in the faculty. Apart from trying to streamline Faculty Council meetings, we really have done little prior to this project that would cultivate this part of our life together. We are not aware of models for how to reorganize governance to attend routinely to generative and strategic dimensions without shorting the fiduciary (although attention to governance as a discernment activity may help us find the way). Finally, this probably feels like an expansion of the amount of time given to faculty governance, which will be resisted so long as governance is seen as a chore and distraction from what is truly important.

***Engaging in healthy conflict***

The language of a corporate vocation of the faculty opened the door to another significant conversation among the United faculty. The idea of *corporate* vocation raised the question of whether the faculty really is a "corpus." We certainly are a collection of colleagues who engage together in common work, but the notion of the faculty as the kind of whole that might have and fulfill a singular vocation that is held in common provoked us to reflect on the quality of the human relationships among us. This was stimulated in particular by a rather bitter and painful exchange between two of our members during our June 2007 discussion and was facilitated by the language and categories of John Bennett's book, *Academic Life*, which we discussed at the August 2007 retreat.

Overall, this is a faculty of colleagues who work well together and who collaborate effectively the vast majority of the time. However, the relational system among faculty members themselves suffers at some points from a lack of trust and a resulting wariness or defensive behavior. This is partly a result of patterns of interaction with some former faculty members that left a continuing imprint. In part, this has to do with old wounds that for a long time remained unhealed and in some cases had even been nursed for a time. It also partly has to do with the reality that relational conflicts and tensions among

individual faculty members reverberate in a small faculty even though others are not directly involved in the conflict. These are typical human behaviors. Two systemic or cultural matters complicate this. The first is the influence—by no means pervasive, but still real—of the academic culture of insistent individualism that Bennett decries. The second is a rule of this faculty's own culture, namely, "We don't fight here." This rule enables the faculty to avoid the worst excesses of insistent individualism, but it also means that the faculty then struggles to engage in healthy conflict and is not as welcoming of difference as it needs to be if it is to engage in the kind of governance that we are moving toward as a result of this project.

In particular, we have discovered, thanks to some honest discussion at the faculty retreat, that we are not very welcoming of explicit theological talk to the extent that we may not truly know each other's theological commitments (although we certainly make assumptions about them). As a result, faculty members who feel more vulnerable are naturally more wary in their participation, because they have not had much experience of sharply divergent views on deeply held matters being accepted. It has become clear to all of us that we must change this, and we have made some initial progress, but this will probably be the most difficult set of results to follow up. However, a recently concluded faculty project for the Wabash Center on teaching theologically diverse classrooms pushed this process further.

### *The dynamics of shared governance*

By the end of its conversations, the faculty was extremely conscious of the fact that its understanding of governance was being worked out in a context where other patterns of governance and the exercise of authority are at work. The administration, on the one hand, and the board of trustees, on the other, each have their own distinctive patterns of exercising authority and their own distinctive governance cultures.

In the administration, much more decision-making authority is vested in individuals than is typical in the faculty where most decision-making authority is vested in groups. Within the administration the generative, strategic, and fiduciary dimensions of governance can more readily be kept in balance because of the greater role of individual decision makers and because the work patterns of the Administrative Council and Admissions and Student Life Council are somewhat less structured by fiduciary patterns than is true for the board of trustees and Faculty Council. Although there have been occasions of tension, the different patterns of governance between administration and faculty are not often a problem, because both groups meet together every month in the Seminary Council. Although this body does not have policy-making authority, its membership includes all administrative staff and all regular faculty, and it functions as an effective scene for communication around matters of community life and work among all concerned.

Throughout the project, the faculty has felt a gap between itself and the board of trustees. This is not due to a lack of structured communication between the bodies. There are two faculty trustees on the board. The president and dean often report back to the Faculty Council on matters before the board.

This year, as a result of this project, the Faculty Council also added a regular report-back session from the faculty trustees to its standing agenda. The dean reports at every board meeting on the school's academic programs and initiatives and briefs the board's Academic Committee in depth on these matters and on the school's strategic situation as it relates to academic programs.

Instead, this sense of gap may have more to do with different cultures and expectations around governance between the two bodies. Although both bodies operate by collective rather than individual decision making, this means different things in the two groups. The Faculty Council members are immersed in the life of the school, meet monthly as committees and as a council, and interact constantly outside of meetings. The board of trustees gathers quarterly in committee and full board meetings where the premium is on keeping things short and interesting to promote attendance, and, as individuals, the trustees move in and out of the life of the school and may not interact with one another much outside of meetings. Only a few trustees work in church decision-making contexts where the dynamics are similar to those of the seminary. Most come from the governance cultures of the corporate world or large universities where the decision-making dynamics are quite different from those of a small- to mid-size freestanding seminary (think metropolis vs. village). The trustees struggle to give due weight to the generative and strategic dimensions of governance within structures that are geared almost entirely to the concerns of fiduciary governance. This is similar to the situation with the faculty, but for the trustees, the patterns of committee structures, agendas, and reporting are driven even more strongly by fiduciary concerns. Considerable frustration often results when the board tries to consider generative and strategic dimensions within the rubrics meant to keep fiduciary governance efficient and interesting. Apart from the regular communication between the board of trustees and the Faculty Council and personal relations outside the school, there is little substantive interaction between most board members and most members of the Faculty Council. All in all, this creates a climate in which it is easy for each body to view the actions of the other through its own dearly held norms and stereotypes. So the regular communication is regularly susceptible to misunderstanding. A dozen or so years ago, a small grant allowed the trustees and faculty of the seminary to go on retreat and meet together for a time in ways that created deep and broad understanding of one another's perspectives and concerns. This created a powerful and constructive framework for hearing communications, even in difficult times. Since that time, however, the membership of the board of trustees has entirely turned over, and the membership of the faculty has changed significantly.

### ***The idea of collective vocation for administration and trustees***

Another observation of the codirectors constitutes the last theme emerging from this project. Coming to terms with the possibility that the faculty as a body has a vocation within the school that is something other than a collection of the vocations of its individual members was an important experience. In the case of the faculty, this process had the effect of forging or renewing a kind of covenant that defines the community of the faculty as something more than a



collection of individuals. For the administrative staff and trustees, the codirectors believe that this would have a similar effect and more. In the case of these two groups, the process of considering their corporate vocations within the life of the school also would define the work of these groups as distinct ministries for people who either do not currently see their work as a ministry or who see it as such but do not find that recognized by others. The codirectors expect that this would also lead to changed perspectives on the nature and conduct of their work, as it has for the faculty. In the case of the trustees in particular, this might also contribute to marking the distinctive work and governance culture into which they have entered by joining the board. Were all three groups—faculty, administration, and trustees—able to articulate their distinctive corporate vocations within the school in relation to its mission, they would build a theological foundation for articulating the ways that governance is shared among these three groups in the life of United Seminary.

### Concluding summary

The ATS faculty vocation and governance project at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities began with discussion among faculty members of our vocation as theological educators in a time of change, moved to consideration of the possibility that the faculty as a whole had a singular corporate vocation, reached an articulation of that vocation, joined this to reflection on patterns of faculty governance, and began to reflect on its implications for faculty workload policies, governance practices, and relational ethos. These conversations drew on resources such as *Practical Wisdom* (Malcolm Warford), “Attending to the Collective Vocation” (Gordon Smith), *Academic Life* (John Bennett), and *Governance as Leadership* (Chait, Ryan, and Taylor). Although the desired conversations with trustees and administration were never realized, the project produced important learnings within the faculty that are being followed up in subsequent years. These include:

1. the articulation of a statement of the corporate vocation of the faculty, which was refined and ultimately formally adopted in an edited version;
2. the growing recognition that the faculty’s governance activity is an important component of the implicit curriculum, a form of teaching by modeling, and thus is an essential part of our formational work with our students rather than a necessary, but distracting, chore;
3. the reframing of the relation of the work of individual faculty members to the work of the faculty as a whole as the relation of our individual vocations to our corporate vocation;
4. in consequence of that reframing, the recognition that our current workload policy needs revision in order to organize the work of our corporate vocation in a way that takes more seriously our individual vocations and gifts rather than merely aiming to give each of us roughly identical shares of the work (confusing equity with identity), and the referral of that task of revision to the responsible committee;

5. the entertainment of the notion that governance in a spiritual community is as much or more a discernment activity as it is a deliberative activity, which may in time lead to practices that will more appropriately balance and theologically ground the generative, strategic, and fiduciary dimensions of governance;
6. the recognition that certain personal histories and a set of commonly accepted, but unreflected, norms around conflict have created a relational ethos in the faculty that will impede developing the quality of governance we seek within the faculty if not addressed, and some initial steps that have made progress on those issues;
7. the recognition that the faculty's vocation and its exercise of governance take place in the context of the distinctive vocations and exercise of governance of the administration and trustees, and that the faculty's work in the area can proceed independently but will be enhanced by parallel work and conversation with those groups.

Finally, as important as all the various inputs were for this conversation, the casting of the conversation first in the theological language of vocation was as important as anything else to the outcomes, most directly evidenced by points three through five above.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. The Faculty Council of United Theological Seminary consists of all members of the regular faculty (including the director of the library and the chaplain) plus the president, the director of the DMin program, and the director of community programming (none of who hold faculty appointment, but who hold seats on the council by virtue of their offices).
2. Malcolm L. Warford, ed., *Practical Wisdom: On Theological Teaching and Learning* (2004; repr., New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005).
3. For more information and resources, visit the Lexington Seminar at <http://www.lexingtonseminar.org>.
4. Gordon T. Smith, "Attending to the Collective Vocation," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, 240–261, eds. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002).
5. John B. Bennett, *Academic Life: Hospitality, Ethics, and Spirituality* (Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing, 2003).
6. Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor, *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005).



# Report of the Faculty Vocation and Governance Project Iliff School of Theology

*Jacob Kinnard and Ann Graham Brock*

“Iliff prepares students to inspire, lead, and transform a spiritually, socially complex world and deeply engage religious and cultural traditions.”

With these words, Iliff has encapsulated its newly honed mission statement as part of its multipronged approach and strategic plan to clarify, streamline, and improve its position and outreach as an institution. The vocation and governance project has become an essential component of this endeavor.

## Introduction

The Iliff School of Theology is a relatively small, freestanding United Methodist School. It employs twenty-one full-time faculty members, enrolls approximately 288 students, and offers a variety of degree programs: MDiv, MA, MTS, MAPSC (Master of Arts in Pastoral and Spiritual Care), MASC (Master of Arts in Social Change), and a PhD offered jointly with the University of Denver. In addition to teaching and advising, Iliff faculty members are deeply involved in the governance of the school: most decisions are reached with faculty participation and input. Although Iliff faculty members have greatly valued their involvement in governance matters, such involvement also can take its toll on both teaching and scholarship. Additionally, Iliff has a very effective model of shared governance, with generally good communication and cooperation among the board, the administration, and the faculty. Nevertheless, we were not sure at the outset whether this was, in fact, the best model of governance for us, or whether we were following our own best practices. One general orienting question with which we began was: If we were to rebuild our governance model from scratch, would it look like what we already have in place? Significantly, as we reach the end of this project, the answer to this question is, for the most part, yes—although not without some important qualifications.

The project on which we embarked had relatively clear-cut goals: first, to look at the ways in which Iliff faculty are involved in the governance of the school; and, second, to examine whether we could streamline our governance structures and practices. One of the things we realized in speaking with various faculty members is that we did not collectively really know how our various governance structures had come into being or why they are arranged as they are. Indeed, to many faculty members, it seemed that Iliff's committees and practices had developed over a long, somewhat ad hoc, process. We all agreed that it was time to step back and ask: What are we doing, why are we doing it, and can we do it better or more efficiently?

Identified at the outset as potential areas that needed work were the issue of trust between and among the various participants in governance, the tendency to duplicate tasks and energies, the proliferation of ad hoc task forces to address emergent issues, and the particular burden placed upon the Faculty Personnel Committee as a kind of omnibus crisis manager.

## **Phase one: Faculty-focused initiative**

### *The work*

After attending meetings at The Association of Theological Schools, the two of us realized that we would need to break our project into two interrelated phases. The first would focus specifically on the issue of faculty governance. The second would expand this to include the board and administration. We also realized that governance at a school such as Iliff had to be understood as a distinctly organic matter and that change in one area would necessarily affect other areas. We also recognized, however, the importance of faculty focusing first upon faculty matters, that is, asking questions and working on solutions specifically related to faculty involvement in governance.

We broke phase one of our project into two parts, the first of which entailed several days of discussion at our 2008 fall faculty retreat. The initial part of our discussion focused on sorting out how we as faculty are involved in governance by going through our faculty handbook and listing all our faculty committees, their particular provinces, and the number of faculty members on each committee.

Prior to our work in the vocation and governance project, we had already agreed as a faculty to eliminate two committees (Community Life and ARFA [Admissions, Retention, and Financial Aid]) that we felt duplicated the work handled effectively by the admissions and financial aid offices. Furthermore, the very existence of such committees could inadvertently communicate to these administrators that we did not really trust the job they were doing. Instead, we worked out a relationship between the administrative offices and the faculty and agreed that when there were issues that needed faculty attention, the directors of these offices would consult with relevant individual faculty members.

One of the busiest and most important committees at Iliff is the Faculty Personnel Committee (FPC). This committee's purview explicitly includes a range of personnel issues, including periodic faculty tenure reviews and yearly review of nontenured faculty members. This involves reviewing each faculty member's teaching evaluations, publications, service to the institution and academy, and so forth, along with an interview with each nontenured faculty member. The FPC takes no action on this review but writes a lengthy report which then becomes part of the faculty member's personnel file. The dean also reviews each untenured faculty member annually, providing a review that becomes the basis for merit salary increases. This struck everyone as an unnecessary duplication of efforts. After a lengthy discussion, the faculty agreed that this task could be performed solely by the dean. Several long-term faculty members noted that the original point of the FPC's review of nontenured fac-

ulty was to mentor younger scholars and teachers. The faculty agreed that it would be better to institute a mentoring system, whereby each new faculty member would be assigned an appropriate mentor to serve as a guide through the various layers of Iliff and the larger academy.

We then talked about committee work in general and noted that committees met at set times, regardless of whether they had specific tasks to accomplish. We considered whether it would be more sensible and efficient to determine before each meeting whether that committee, in fact, needed to meet. No new policy was articulated, but the entire faculty agreed to be more conscientious in this regard and to resist creating tasks just to fill meeting time.

Iliff has long had a culture of very active faculty members; few decisions are made that are not first discussed at length, usually at faculty council meetings. Over the years, the increasingly longer agendas routinely turned two-hour meetings into three hours. We spent a good deal of time discussing this phenomenon. Part of the problem—and it was generally agreed that this is a problem—is that every decision made by a committee tended to be fully vetted by the entire faculty. Although this creates a high degree of faculty “buy in,” it also means that a good bit of the work done in committee gets revisited, and thus often redone, by the full faculty. Again, no specific policy was created, but the faculty agreed to make some changes in the informal way we do business. First, we agreed to distribute written reports before faculty council meetings, so that faculty members could digest committee work before the meetings, thus eliminating some background discussions. Second, we agreed to be more intentional in our meetings and to consciously conduct ourselves in a professional manner; in other words, to trust that the committees had done the work assigned to them and to limit critique to serious, substantial matters. Finally, we agreed to set and abide by strict time limits.

The issue of trust came up in a number of ways at our faculty retreat. One thing we began to see was that a subtle, but significant, climate of mistrust had developed at Iliff over the years. This recognition led to a lengthy, and perhaps the most contentious, part of our discussions about the origins of this particular institutional culture and its potential remedies. Many faculty members noted that they were very reluctant to cede power and decision making to the administrators—even in matters that seem somewhat minor—while at the same time recognizing that this put a substantial burden on the faculty. Furthermore, it created tensions with the administration and had the tendency to foster an adversarial climate. Although we recognize that some tensions between faculty and administrators are not only inevitable but also productive, we recognize that we, as a faculty, could do more to foster a sense of trust and mutual commitment to a common mission.

### *The outcomes*

The work we did at our faculty retreat is ongoing, and it is too soon to decide our implementation success. We can say that we have made some significant strides and have certainly streamlined many of our governance practices. Our faculty council meetings have been shorter and more focused. We have reduced the number of standing committees, have streamlined some commit-

tees and are reevaluating the makeup of others, and have begun reducing the number of faculty members on each committee when it is appropriate for the work of that committee. We have also decided that we would benefit from the advice of an outside consultant on how to conduct meetings.

One change that is both subtle and substantial is that we have been more intentional in our faculty discussions. At the suggestion of one faculty member, we agreed to eliminate what was termed “ditto” responses; in other words, the tendency to speak on an issue but only offer up agreement with what had already been stated. The faculty as a whole has been quite good at monitoring and “enforcing” this informal policy.

We have worked hard to eliminate the proliferation of ad hoc committees, such as task forces, and agreed that such groups can be formed only in conjunction with the dean, providing the faculty is in general agreement that such ad hoc committees are indeed necessary. The addition of a new administrative position this year, that of assistant dean, has taken some work away from several committees, which has been seen as a very positive step.

The faculty has provided encouraging and positive feedback in response to these changes, especially since we have strived to minimize “busy work,” and our collective efforts seem more focused and intentional. Certainly, we have more work to do, but we seem to be at a good governance moment at Iliff.

## **Phase two: Bringing the roles of the president and the board into the conversation**

In the second phase of our governance project, which we have only just begun, we are broadening the conversation we started within the faculty to draw the other governing bodies at Iliff into the process. This second phase builds upon the first by explicitly including the governing roles of the board of trustees and the president, thus broadening the scope of the discussion. The overall goal is to continue making fundamental changes to Iliff’s governing structures and practices in order to fulfill our institutional mission as collaborating partners working as an integrated, organic whole. Specifically, these goals are:

- To evaluate the ways we coordinate our collective governance in order to fulfill more effectively our mission as a school and our vocations as teachers, administrators, and board members.
- To identify the parts of the model of shared governance that we already have in place and are working well.
- To recognize which governance practices need improving and restructure or refine them accordingly.
- To build trust among all governance parties.
- To improve communication and to speak across the silos, exploring ways to cross the boundaries that have traditionally separated us.
- To assess our allocations, our economic equilibrium, and how we can improve our generative, strategic, and fiduciary leadership.

In order to fulfill these goals, we have already begun or set into motion several action steps:

- Provide the president, board, and faculty with an assessment tool in the form of the In Trust Institutional Health Checklist, developed specifically for theological schools.
- Request that the faculty, board, and president complete this inventory by a stated deadline.
- Have In Trust tabulate these assessment inventories and collate the results for us.
- Schedule a retreat for the board, faculty, and president to speak together and share a meal with one another in order to discuss our shared governance issues in a congenial environment.
- Invite an In Trust moderator, specifically David Tiede, to come to this retreat to interpret the results of the inventory and to facilitate our discussion.
- Execute necessary follow-up steps identified in the course of our inventory and analysis at the retreat.

We realize that this is an ambitious set of goals, but we believe that what we have proposed is realistic and that the process of moving toward a new vision of joint governance is exciting and vital to our theological and educational mission. We do not yet have all the answers, but we think it is absolutely essential to be asking the right questions. The ATS consultation on vocation and governance has definitely empowered us in that endeavor.

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# Report of the Faculty Vocation and Governance Project Multnomah Biblical Seminary

*John L. Terveen*

## Introduction

Three major groups involved in the governance of Multnomah Biblical Seminary (MBS)—administrative officials, board of trustees, and faculty members—participated in the faculty vocation and governance project, although the group most heavily involved was the faculty.

Two goals describe the content of what we hoped to accomplish at MBS through this project:

1. We as the faculty of MBS will better understand and appreciate our individual vocation as theological educators, embedded in a seminary faculty community context at MBS so that personally and corporately we can more effectively teach and thereby help realize the mission and objectives we have endorsed at MBS.
2. We as the key partners in governance at MBS will better understand and appreciate our respective roles, responsibilities, and accepted limits in decision making at MBS so that we will strengthen the bonds of trust between us and together more effectively accomplish the mission and objectives endorsed at MBS.

We used diverse teaching-learning strategies to meet both goals, such as full faculty interaction on set topics, organized discussion of *The Scope of Our Art*,<sup>1</sup> loosely directed luncheon conversations, surveys related to faculty perceptions on governance at MBS, and retreats for administration and faculty.

The attempts to connect the faculty with the board of trustees proved more difficult to accomplish than expected, due in part to the trustees' rare presence on site and in part to an unexpected merger proposal with Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. With the trustees' attention diverted toward a fast-tracked consolidation, uncertainties and awkwardness about what, when, and how to share information greatly impacted the discussions related to the vocation and governance project and interrupted the project's specific MBS focus. It became a "living lab," bubbling over with governance and faculty vocation issues that were addressed in merger contexts, often overlapping into the project's own specific discussions.

Once the merger was taken off the table, we held a luncheon for the faculty and trustees that proved to be a very positive experience, allaying some fears. All groups—faculty, administration, and trustees—now strongly desire more of this type of interactive gathering in the future.

The following list is a compilation of major issues and themes that came up most frequently and with a sense of urgency—both in the faculty-only conversations and in conversations with administrative officials and the trustees (or their representatives).



## **Personal and corporate vocation as theological educators**

The faculty worked more intentionally through what is normally assumed yet not well understood when tying their personal calling as theological teachers to their corporate vocation as theological educators. Two major themes loomed large: *cultivating a posture of trust* toward other faculty members whose decisions often carry wide impact and *affirming a posture of service* to the seminary faculty community in their collective seminary work.

### ***Mutual trust***

Learning to “lose” gracefully became a fruitful talking point—engendered by several instances over the past few years when less than gracious faculty responses followed “losing” a vote on a cherished matter. Frank and forthright observations (and sometimes confessions) about conflict salted this conversation and made it a real, not just academic, discussion.

### ***Service***

Some faculty members voiced their concern about the lack of faculty support for seminary-endorsed events and conferences for which they bore responsibility. We discussed issues of attendance at such events, whether it was optional or mandatory, and what was communicated by one’s presence or absence. It was good to see faculty members recognize that expectations need to be clearly communicated, understood, and endorsed. The theme of this conversation tied frequently to MBS-specific issues, solidifying them within an overarching service context. We addressed the ongoing issues related to “doing your part” as a member of the seminary faculty, corporately devoted to appropriate levels of service that contribute to meeting seminary missional goals.

## **Who are we? Vision and identity issues**

The potential merger with Western Seminary produced a sense of urgency for us to identify who we are and what our vision is. Several topics surfaced frequently and intensely.

### ***School culture***

The amorphous issue of the school’s culture often topped the charts of concern. Faculty members perceived themselves acting as a group in seminary governance processes rather than as a few core members “ruling” while the remaining faculty willingly or unwillingly “just taught.” Our faculty saw MBS as more community oriented—faculty and students—although there were increasing (and disturbing) tendencies toward more disconnectedness from one another. The faculty also perceived themselves and the school to be more spiritually and theologically open or independent (at least in comparison with Western, a more narrowly Baptist tradition). Finally, much attention was given to the dominant personalities of key players on the faculty and how influential that was to the relational ambience of the faculty as a whole.

### ***Theological orientation***

Some faculty expressed strongly that they (and the school) were in danger of “drifting from our heritage” of firm dispensational theology and devotion to fundamentalist biblical stances. Others indicated that discernable change was appropriate and not nearly so dramatic as imagined by those they called alarmists. The school’s journal (*Cultural Encounters*) and some of its sponsored conferences (along with the main contributing faculty members) seemed to be the flashpoint for this issue of conflicting school identity. Everyone agreed that bringing this disagreement into the open and ensuring that all parties expressed themselves respectfully and in appropriate venues was healthy but quite challenging. In an institution whose faculty were once almost all traditional dispensationalist theologically, the hiring of several loosely or non dispensational faculty members over the last ten to fifteen years has created some strain.

### ***Coexisting in unity while remaining separate***

A less controversial, though still lively, issue arose from the reality that the seminary is part of a larger educational entity—Multnomah University—that includes an undergraduate division and a graduate school. In particular, the seminary faculty must negotiate a good relationship with the undergraduate faculty, a relationship that can occasionally be strained by governance issues and the simple reality of sharing the same campus and facilities. The seminary faculty expressed concern that they did not want the college to somehow overwhelm or disadvantage the seminary in any way. This, too, surfaced as a serious identity issue, especially since the administration (shared administrative officers at the highest levels) desires as much cordial unity and community as possible even though it often places a strain on the seminary faculty.

### ***Missional orientation***

A final and major piece of the identity theme in our conversations was that of the seminary’s dominant missional orientation. Throughout its history (a short one admittedly), MBS has had a very practical theology orientation toward its curriculum and programs. Some curricular changes, to include more academic biblical and theologically based courses and the addition of a PhD-preparation MDiv track (MDiv in Theological Studies) devoid of ministry type course work, have created significant tensions among the faculty. Basically, some expressed a sense that we’re drifting from the historical mission of the school of preparing seminarians for ministry and instead becoming academic. Others indicated such a view is not a fair way of seeing what is happening and lauded a “both-and” approach as wise and nonthreatening to a still heavily practical MDiv curriculum. Many suggested that the school’s growth and the advent of two departments (Bible-theology and pastoral) has exacerbated that sense of division and created additional communication hurdles. The faculty is still working on this identity issue.

### ***Who’s in charge around here? Shared governance fuzzy areas***

The three groups involved in shared governance all participated in conversations that reflected concerns related to decision making, authority, and

leadership responsibility issues. Several interrelated governance issues arose, whether in the context of this ATS project or in the coinciding merger meetings. In particular, what decisions are made, by whom, and how they are made proved to be a thorny issue with great potential for disrupting institutional governance.

Perhaps the greatest good that occurred through conversations on governance was a deeper understanding of the respective roles played in governance by the administration, trustees, and faculty. For the various governance shareholders to meet personally and converse in a nonthreatening environment was very helpful in showing our commonly shared commitment to the mission of the school. We all now see such simple trust-building exercises as necessary for affirming a sense of mutual ownership of the school's mission and for effectively accomplishing it.

The old question of who owns the curriculum became an issue when the board of trustees told the seminary faculty to begin a certain degree program. Faculty wondered whether such a directive was an invasion of their delegated area of responsibility and authority, though the trustees said it needed to be done. One side, it was felt, saw the other as "dragging its feet," and the other side felt there was an implied lack of trust to construct and carry out an educational curriculum and program effectively. The administrative officials (dean and president) tried to serve more as liaisons, though their responsibility directly to the trustees seemed to be the stronger tie.

In a number of conversations, we intentionally sought to identify "fuzzy areas" of authority, power, and responsibility in governance among the three groups involved in seminary governance. After identifying numerous areas, large and small, where the lines of authority seemed to be unclear, a growing consensus emerged that policy statements—as much as possible—would help clarify these fuzzy areas. Although every possible contingency could not be covered, most expressed that intentional efforts should be made by all parties to agree on certain key governance border areas that need definition the most.

### **Comments on the merger-consolidation talks with Western Seminary**

The proposal to explore in a very serious and fast-tracked way a merger with nearby Western Seminary happened while this project was in progress. Many of the faculty vocation and governance issues raised in this report were repeatedly and passionately discussed in conversations for this project and also in the multitude of merger meetings. Eight members from each school, along with a consultant, formed a task force that worked toward merger with great vigor and intentionality for a year and a half. Many assumed it would happen. Nevertheless, the board of Western decided to pull away from the process, effectively ending the merger.

Though the merger talks appeared to be fruitless, they did surface many self-understanding issues for us. Many of these learnings about ourselves are reflected in this report, though many more are not. Those that proved to be most crucial to us and gave us a renewed sense of our place as theological educators were (1) a better understanding of our distinctive culture at MBS,

(2) a deeper appreciation of our missional distinctives, (3) a growing understanding of governance concerns (especially our institutional connection to the university itself), and (4) a better sense of our missional success and the general fiscal vitality of our school.

*John L. Terveen is director of the Master of Arts in Biblical Studies program.*

## Appendix A

### Shared Governance Assessment Survey Multnomah Biblical Seminary Faculty (Pre-test)

[results below listed in bold for each item]

**Note:** All individual responses are strictly confidential and will not be shared in any individualized manner. Group average responses, however, will be made known in appropriate contexts to the seminary faculty, administration, and board members for further interaction. Finally, the group average results will be shared in the context of a written report submitted to ATS, possibly part of a published governance work in an ATS document compiled for the benefit of all associated seminaries. Your participation is warmly appreciated as helping to meet the objective of enhancing the quality of shared governance experiences in our theological school.

Give your responses on a sliding scale of 1 to 10 (1 = “negative” pole and 10 = “positive” pole). One of a variety of terms may more specifically express your “negative” or “positive” response, as will be clear in each response item. For example:

1 = **Negative** . . . i.e., *no, low, none, very little, poor, bad, lousy, weak*  
10 = **Positive** . . . i.e., *yes, high, a lot, very much, good, excellent, strong*

Consider the mid-point (“5”) as average and generally acceptable, though somewhat mixed in the positive/negative range of response. Insert your legible response to each item (and each item’s subsections where they exist) in the left column.

<b>Numeric Response</b>	<b>Response Item</b> <i>Where applicable, be careful to respond to all subsections of each item.</i>
Sample Response <u>10</u>	[Sample Item] I love contributing to the quality of shared governance at our seminary by joyfully completing this survey.
1.a. <b>6.2</b> 1.b. <b>6.8</b> 1.c. <b>7.1</b> 1.d. <b>6.7</b>	1. Rate your perception of the “bond of trust” between you (as an individual faculty member) and the . . . a. Board b. President c. Dean of seminary d. Seminary faculty as a whole

<p>2.a. <b>6.1</b> 2.b. <b>6.8</b> 2.c. <b>6.9</b> 2.d. <b>6.0</b></p>	<p>2. Rate your perception of the “bond of trust” between the seminary faculty (as a whole) and the . . . a. Board b. President c. Dean of seminary d. College (MBC)</p>
<p>3.a. <b>5.8</b> 3.b. <b>6.3</b> 3.c. <b>7.6</b> 3.d. <b>5.3</b> 3.e. <b>6.9</b></p>	<p>3. Generally, how “safe” (without fear of consequences) do you feel to share your honest input in shared governance situations at the seminary in . . . a. Full faculty meetings with administrator/s present? b. Full faculty meetings without administrator/s present? c. Departmental meetings? d. Meetings where board members are present? e. General committee meetings?</p>
<p>4. <b>5.7</b></p>	<p>4. Do you feel your interaction in shared governance situations at the seminary is sought, welcomed, valued, and taken into account adequately?</p>
<p>5. <b>5.5</b></p>	<p>5. Given the sometimes unique and sometimes overlapping roles and responsibilities of the seminary stakeholders in governance (board, administration, and faculty) at MBS, how would you characterize the patterns of sharing the governing process <i>collaboratively</i> and in a <i>collegial manner</i>?</p>
<p>6. <b>5.8</b></p>	<p>6. In your recent (last five years) seminary governance experiences, rate how well you thought the authority given fit (was appropriate to) the responsibilities/tasks given.</p>
<p>7.a. <b>6.2</b> 7.b. <b>7.3</b> 7.c. <b>7.7</b> 7.d. <b>6.8</b> 7.e. <b>6.8</b> 7.f. <b>6.3</b></p>	<p>7. Rate how well you feel you understand the roles, responsibilities, and authority of the seminary’s major stakeholders in governing the school. a. Board b. President c. Dean of Seminary d. Departments e. Full Faculty f. Program Coordinators</p>
<p>8.a. <b>6.3</b> 8.b. <b>6.8</b> 8.c. <b>4.0</b></p>	<p>8. Do you perceive the patterns of shared governance (its structures) and its ways of working out practically at MBS as . . . a. compatible with your spiritual values? b. appropriately fitting and serving the school’s mission and purposes? c. badly compromised by self-serving intentions, as you perceive them?</p>

9.a. 6.9	9. Concerning the “documents” (handbooks, manuals, catalogs, contracts, etc.) of governance that guide and give structure to decision making at MBS, how do you perceive them in terms of . . .
9.b. 6.8	a. importance to accomplishing the school’s missional objectives?
9.c. 6.5	b. clarifying relationship lines in governance/decision making?
9.d. 6.6	c. sufficiency in quantity (i.e., enough policies laid out)?
9.e. 6.5	d. ensuring a reasonable level of fairness to all parties concerned?
	e. compatible with the spiritual values of the school?
10.a. 8.9 10	10. Rank in order your perception of the general shared governance issues faced by the faculty of this seminary that present the greatest challenge (i.e., <i>problematic</i> ) now and in the near future. (Place a number ranking your choice next to the corresponding letter in the left column. 1 as the greatest challenge and 10 as the least difficult challenge. Though the ten issues listed here are not exhaustive of the possibilities, nor highly specific, the issue-areas listed should be broad enough to include the majority of more specific issues you may have in mind.)
10.b. 8.2 9	a. Facilities . . . now and not-yet
10.c. 6.4 7	b. Admissions . . . and graduation
10.d. 5.3 5	c. Recruitment, enrollment management
10.e. 5.1 4	d. Degree/Program initiation, creation, launch
10.f. 2.8 1	e. Curriculum creation, development, management
10.g. 5.5 6	f. Climate of collaboration/collegiality with others in governance
10.h. 4.9 3	g. Policies and practice of faculty hiring, advancement, and termination
10.i. 2.9 2	h. Missional focus, clarity, and commitment
10.j. 6.9 8	i. Cultivating an environment of trust between governing partners
	j. Writing, evaluating, and revising key governance documents

## Appendix B

### Shared Governance Assessment Survey

MBS Faculty  
(Pre-Test)

#### Optional . . . Open Comments

In the space below, briefly note any comments concerning any governance issues at the seminary that you want to voice. You may wish to specify a particular issue for emphasis. It may be a problem, a praiseworthy item, an expanded explanation, or just an unnoted general matter you feel should be addressed. Once again, your responses will be individually confidential, though they will be compiled and then shared in appropriate contexts (with our own faculty, administration, and board; and possibly an ATS published work in the future).

ENDNOTE

1. We adopted *The Scope of Our Art* as a “textbook” for the project. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds., *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).



# Report of the Faculty Vocation and Governance Project St. Peter's Seminary

*John Dool and Brian Dunn*

## Background

St. Peter's Seminary, founded in 1912, is a Roman Catholic diocesan seminary that was established to prepare candidates for the priesthood. Since the late-1960s, it has also provided education and formation for candidates for lay ecclesial ministry. In the past twenty-five years, a new era began in terms of faculty vocation and the governance of the seminary. New developments led to the formation of a larger board, a larger administrative staff, and the inclusion of lay people as full- and part-time members of the faculty. Today the seminary has a board that consists of the diocesan bishop and other board members who meet three times a year and make decisions for the overall direction of the seminary. Historically, while the board existed from the beginning, the day-to-day decisions concerning the operation of the seminary (e.g., devising and offering the curriculum, hiring faculty, discerning the call of seminarians, etc.) were made by the rector with the faculty.

## Faculty vocation

The idea of faculty vocation, presented at the academic faculty meeting on November 24, 2006, was introduced by considering some themes from Gordon T. Smith's article, "Attending to the Collective Vocation."<sup>1</sup> The faculty then discussed the question: How does the living out of my individual vocation fit in with the collective vocation of St. Peter's Seminary? Some of the responses included:

- individual vocation lived out at the seminary provides new possibilities and new growth in the vocation for some priests;
- the seminary experience facilitates new relationships among laity (both married and single), religious, and ordained, with a new experience of the witness of all the faculty;
- the vocation of the seminary has changed with the inclusion of the education and formation of lay ecclesial ministers;
- individual vocations can evolve;
- collective vocation seems to deepen as a result of prayer;
- collective vocation calls for adaptation and compromise;
- some kind of ritual celebration of collective vocation might be important in acknowledging its beginning or development.

During the annual planning meetings in May 2007, the faculty reflected further on Smith's article. Some faculty members responded that a wide variety of variables exists within "faculty" and "vocation"; others said that leadership is a gift for the whole faculty; and some responded that the faculty needs

to continue to review the signs of the times and allow the creative working of the Holy Spirit.

The strengths of the faculty include the welcoming of new faculty members, the social times that contribute to a sense of cohesion and growth in friendships, and a deep appreciation of the unique gifts each member brings to the faculty. Faculty strengths also include the frequent reflection on the seminary's 1998 mission statement and on the ministry of teaching, as well as the commitment to spiritual growth on the part of individuals and the whole community.

The faculty also became aware of new issues and insights affecting faculty vocation:

### *Issues*

- intentionally bringing new faculty into an awareness of the faculty vocation;
- recognizing that change is difficult, and the whole faculty needs to consider issues of resistance;
- realizing that a clarity is needed about those involved with decision making;
- supporting and sustaining all who form part of the faculty;
- appreciating the diverse gifts, creativity, and expertise of individual members.

### *Insights*

- the need to deal with change using an appropriate process;
- the call to be part of a team;
- the need to continue the examination of our identity as a community;
- the need to see conflict as an essential means to growth;
- the need to be aware of communal vocation;
- the need to welcome new faculty and develop the area of communication.

Since several of these insights needed further clarification, the faculty established a committee on collective vocation. The committee devised a survey in light of Gordon Smith's article and compiled the results of reflections from each faculty member.

The committee presented its final report to the faculty in February 2008 and proposed the following: (1) the seminary's mission statement needs to be reviewed as a whole, to ensure that it addresses the seminary's current and future needs; (2) the board should entrust the faculty with the responsibility for initiating the above review and for ensuring that other stakeholders (board members, staff, students) participate in the process; (3) the faculty should consider how the mission statement might better reflect the faculty's collective vocation, by taking into consideration the individual and collective dreams and longings of the community, whether the values and vision of individuals are congruent with the institution, and how the mission is lived out in worship, learning, conversation, business practices, attitudes, etc.; and (4) initial work should be done on this process during the annual May faculty meetings and ultimately completed by the fall meeting of the board. This proposal was adopted by the board of shareholders on February 19, 2008.

Our reflections during the past two years led to increased awareness on several fronts. First, the faculty came to appreciate that the relationship be-

tween individual and collective vocation is extremely complex and reciprocal. Both individual and collective vocations evolve, often as one interacts with the other; just as the particular ministry of an individual changes or as a program evolves, so individual and collective vocations develop.

Second, the faculty grew in its awareness of the importance of articulating and making explicit the qualities that compose the collective vocation of the faculty. This articulation leads to discernment, provides direction, and leads the faculty to a new sense of responding to the needs of the contemporary Church. Thus, the awareness of collective vocation presumes an ongoing examination of how the institution and the faculty will respond to the needs of the Church today.

Third, the faculty grew in its awareness of the importance of creating a welcoming atmosphere for new faculty members, of reaching out to those on the margins of the community, of recognizing the importance of leadership, and of articulating its vision for the whole faculty. Connected to this was the realization that the faculty needs to clarify the concepts and responsibilities of part-time and full-time faculty.

Fourth, the faculty deepened its appreciation of collective vocation, especially in the perception that the faculty works as a team, recognizing the contribution of each person. Individual faculty members bring their gifts; nurture the values of interdependence, respect, and collaboration; and, ultimately, model for students a sense of cooperation. The collaboration of the faculty presumes an openness to learning how to do things differently, a readiness to accept the creativity of everyone, a realization that unity emerges in the midst of diversity, and a need to grow in servant-leadership.

## **Governance**

Faculty members reviewed Daniel Aleshire's presentation from the March 2006 consultation, which provided essential background for their workshop on governance. Aleshire's presentation highlighted historical shifts in governance at theological schools, which have been mirrored at St. Peter's, especially the perception among faculty that other stakeholders have taken on progressively greater governance roles in recent years. It was also noted that the structure of a Roman Catholic diocesan seminary means that the bishop's governance role must be accounted for alongside that of the board. Aleshire's presentation also provided the valuable three-fold distinction of governance functions that were adopted for our process: vision/planning, management, and stewardship/accountability. This served to define governance in a preliminary way and to broaden the sense of what and who might be included within the governance process.

Faculty members quickly recognized that dialogue with the board and the administration would be essential to deepening their understanding of governance. Any reflection by faculty would have to be undertaken concurrently by the board and the administration, and the three sets of perspectives would also need to be brought into a shared conversation.

The workshop revealed a lack of precise clarity about governance due to the complexity of relationships among the faculty, board, and administration.

It is not always clear which decisions are shared and which properly belong to one group. Since many faculty members also perform administrative functions, the lines of responsibility could become blurred. We recognized that our model of governance is often more implicit than explicit, that we may not have identified and owned our model of governance, and that we may also shift our governance practices without an explicit decision to do so. This can create confusion and differing expectations as to how decisions will be made and implemented.

After separate workshops for the board and for administrative personnel, they joined faculty for joint workshops. Out of the dialogue engendered in the first workshop, additional themes and concerns emerged. The first was the need to revisit the seminary's vision/mission statement. The current version has been in place for nearly ten years. Furthermore, the terms *vision* and *mission* are currently used interchangeably. The question was raised as to whether we need to distinguish between who we are (mission) and where we want to go (vision). This might help to distinguish tasks and respective roles in governance.

There was also a recognition, especially on the part of faculty, that governance is a major part of what we do, even though we may not think of day-to-day activities in those terms. The board's activities are clearly a matter of governing the seminary. But when governance is defined to include daily management and stewardship, much that the faculty does can be seen under this rubric as well. This reflected a deepening sense of the intertwining of the formational work that is the faculty's explicit focus and the decision making that regularly coincides with that work.

Along with further refinement of the responsibilities of faculty, board, and administration according to the three functions of governance, further learnings and themes emerged in the second joint workshop.

Due to the complexity of the process and the number of people involved, considerable discussion centered on what really constitutes governance. All actions of formation include some planning, managing, and stewardship. What formally defines an action or process as governance? The workshop participants initially focused on the final decision-making action as the essence of governance yet also recognized that decision makers are often dependent upon the input of others for the information and ideas that lead to a decision. So, for example, the bishop is ultimately responsible for appointing the rector but receives input from the faculty on that decision. The board is ultimately responsible for making decisions regarding long-term visioning but receives input from the faculty. The board also has ultimate responsibility for strategic planning but would receive input from the rector, faculty, and administrative personnel. The collaboration with these other persons and bodies, given their experience and expertise, is often crucial in making sound decisions. This whole process is governance.

This important point helped the faculty to understand its role within governance. Faculty members often initiate things, such as the introduction of a new program, provide the research and development, and write the relevant documents; the board then gives the final approval. The preponderance of faculty input can obscure the essential role of the board in making the final

decision; however, the substantial, creative role of the faculty needs also to be acknowledged as crucial to the governance process.

Substantial clarity was achieved regarding which person or body makes the final decision and who is consulted in a variety of areas. (Persons and bodies in brackets indicate those giving consultative input).

The bishop is responsible for extending invitations to board membership (board), for diocesan/seminary integration (rector), and for appointments of the rector and clerical faculty (rector and/or faculty).

The board is responsible for the review, revision, implementation, and promotion of the mission/vision statement (faculty, administration, staff, students); long-term visioning (faculty); strategic planning (faculty, rector, temporal administration); financial planning (faculty, temporal administration); legal issues (rector); self-assessment of the board and board succession planning; contract negotiations for unionized and nonunionized staff (temporal administration); approval of reports from advisory committees (finance, building and grounds, the rector); affiliation with other diocesan or educational boards and institutions (rector, faculty); conformity to Commission on Accrediting standards (rector and some faculty); and approval of new academic programs (faculty).

The rector is responsible for changes in the four integrated areas of intellectual, human, spiritual, and pastoral formation (faculty, students); faculty succession planning and staffing; and temporal administration succession planning.

Further governance issues remain to be addressed. In the notes from the final workshop, the faculty were not listed as making final decisions in any area. In fact they do, especially in regard to the programs of formation. In notes from earlier workshops, this had been listed as an area of responsibility of the rector/faculty; in the final notes, it is listed as an area for the rector to make decisions with input from the faculty. In practice, the faculty often take votes on matters in this regard and these votes are treated as final decisions. They are not merely making recommendations to the rector but are exercising a governance role as such.

This points to a need to clarify the role of the rector in relationship to the faculty. In what areas and respects is he simply another faculty member voting on a given matter, and in what areas and respects is he functioning as an administrator distinct from the faculty? This concern may also apply to other faculty members who exercise administrative functions.

## **Conclusion**

The parallel discussions concerning faculty vocation and governance were substantive and enriched the faculty's sense of its role. Two major themes emerged from the discussions. The first is the need to revisit the seminary's mission/vision statement. The faculty recognized that renewed clarity in articulating the institutional and communal mission is needed to establish parameters for the faculty's collective vocation and role within governance.

A second theme that emerged was a sense of the dynamic of diversity within unity. This is particularly appropriate given the centrality of this theme in recent Catholic ecclesiology. Varied gifts are brought by individual faculty

members for the enrichment of the whole community. In the case of faculty vocation, ongoing reflection will help individuals to identify their unique contributions to the collective vocation. This reflection will also allow the community to recognize and respect those unique gifts. In regard to governance, the respective roles of administration and faculty need to be clarified further through an appreciation of the unique perspectives each brings to the process of consultation and decision making. The goal in reflection on both vocation and governance is to integrate diverse gifts into communal activity without obscuring or detracting from particular contributions.

St. Peter's Seminary's participation in this ATS consultation has been a lengthy process and one that remains unfinished. The gradual and progressive nature of that process has allowed some significant insights to emerge. What may prove even more valuable is the identification of questions and issues that will require further deliberation and clarification.

*John Dool is dean of studies at St. Peter's Seminary. Brian Dunn is auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie. He is the former dean of studies at St. Peter's Seminary.*

#### ENDNOTE

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Faculty members reviewed Daniel Aleshire's presentation from the March 2006 consultation, which provided essential background for their workshop on governance. Aleshire's presentation highlighted historical shifts in governance at theological schools, which have been mirrored at St. Peter's, especially the perception among faculty that other stakeholders have taken on progressively greater governance roles in recent years. It was also noted that the structure of a Roman Catholic diocesan seminary means that the bishop's governance role must be accounted for alongside that of the board. Aleshire's presentation also provided the valuable three-fold distinction of governance functions that were adopted for our process: vision/planning, management, and stewardship/accountability. This served to define governance in a preliminary way and to broaden the sense of what and who might be included within the governance process.

Faculty members quickly recognized that dialogue with the board and the administration would be essential to deepening their understanding of governance. Any reflection by faculty would have to be undertaken concurrently by the board and the administration, and the three sets of perspectives would also need to be brought into a shared conversation.

The workshop revealed a lack of precise clarity about governance due to the complexity of relationships among the faculty, board, and administration.

It is not always clear which decisions are shared and which properly belong to one group. Since many faculty members also perform administrative functions, the lines of responsibility could become blurred. We recognized that our model of governance is often more implicit than explicit, that we may not have identified and owned our model of governance, and that we may also shift our governance practices without an explicit decision to do so. This can create confusion and differing expectations as to how decisions will be made and implemented.

After separate workshops for the board and for administrative personnel, they joined faculty for joint workshops. Out of the dialogue engendered in the first workshop, additional themes and concerns emerged. The first was the need to revisit the seminary's vision/mission statement. The current version has been in place for nearly ten years. Furthermore, the terms *vision* and *mission* are currently used interchangeably. The question was raised as to whether we need to distinguish between who we are (mission) and where we want to go (vision). This might help to distinguish tasks and respective roles in governance.

There was also a recognition, especially on the part of faculty, that governance is a major part of what we do, even though we may not think of day-to-day activities in those terms. The board's activities are clearly a matter of governing the seminary. But when governance is defined to include daily management and stewardship, much that the faculty does can be seen under this rubric as well. This reflected a deepening sense of the intertwining of the formational work that is the faculty's explicit focus and the decision making that regularly coincides with that work.

Along with further refinement of the responsibilities of faculty, board, and administration according to the three functions of governance, further learnings and themes emerged in the second joint workshop.

Due to the complexity of the process and the number of people involved, considerable discussion centered on what really constitutes governance. All actions of formation include some planning, managing, and stewardship. What formally defines an action or process as governance? The workshop participants initially focused on the final decision-making action as the essence of governance yet also recognized that decision makers are often dependent upon the input of others for the information and ideas that lead to a decision. So, for example, the bishop is ultimately responsible for appointing the rector but receives input from the faculty on that decision. The board is ultimately responsible for making decisions regarding long-term visioning but receives input from the faculty. The board also has ultimate responsibility for strategic planning but would receive input from the rector, faculty, and administrative personnel. The collaboration with these other persons and bodies, given their experience and expertise, is often crucial in making sound decisions. This whole process is governance.

This important point helped the faculty to understand its role within governance. Faculty members often initiate things, such as the introduction of a new program, provide the research and development, and write the relevant documents; the board then gives the final approval. The preponderance of faculty input can obscure the essential role of the board in making the final

decision; however, the substantial, creative role of the faculty needs also to be acknowledged as crucial to the governance process.

Substantial clarity was achieved regarding which person or body makes the final decision and who is consulted in a variety of areas. (Persons and bodies in brackets indicate those giving consultative input).

The bishop is responsible for extending invitations to board membership (board), for diocesan/seminary integration (rector), and for appointments of the rector and clerical faculty (rector and/or faculty).

The board is responsible for the review, revision, implementation, and promotion of the mission/vision statement (faculty, administration, staff, students); long-term visioning (faculty); strategic planning (faculty, rector, temporal administration); financial planning (faculty, temporal administration); legal issues (rector); self-assessment of the board and board succession planning; contract negotiations for unionized and nonunionized staff (temporal administration); approval of reports from advisory committees (finance, building and grounds, the rector); affiliation with other diocesan or educational boards and institutions (rector, faculty); conformity to Commission on Accrediting standards (rector and some faculty); and approval of new academic programs (faculty).

The rector is responsible for changes in the four integrated areas of intellectual, human, spiritual, and pastoral formation (faculty, students); faculty succession planning and staffing; and temporal administration succession planning.

Further governance issues remain to be addressed. In the notes from the final workshop, the faculty were not listed as making final decisions in any area. In fact they do, especially in regard to the programs of formation. In notes from earlier workshops, this had been listed as an area of responsibility of the rector/faculty; in the final notes, it is listed as an area for the rector to make decisions with input from the faculty. In practice, the faculty often take votes on matters in this regard and these votes are treated as final decisions. They are not merely making recommendations to the rector but are exercising a governance role as such.

This points to a need to clarify the role of the rector in relationship to the faculty. In what areas and respects is he simply another faculty member voting on a given matter, and in what areas and respects is he functioning as an administrator distinct from the faculty? This concern may also apply to other faculty members who exercise administrative functions.

## **Conclusion**

The parallel discussions concerning faculty vocation and governance were substantive and enriched the faculty's sense of its role. Two major themes emerged from the discussions. The first is the need to revisit the seminary's mission/vision statement. The faculty recognized that renewed clarity in articulating the institutional and communal mission is needed to establish parameters for the faculty's collective vocation and role within governance.

A second theme that emerged was a sense of the dynamic of diversity within unity. This is particularly appropriate given the centrality of this theme in recent Catholic ecclesiology. Varied gifts are brought by individual faculty

members for the enrichment of the whole community. In the case of faculty vocation, ongoing reflection will help individuals to identify their unique contributions to the collective vocation. This reflection will also allow the community to recognize and respect those unique gifts. In regard to governance, the respective roles of administration and faculty need to be clarified further through an appreciation of the unique perspectives each brings to the process of consultation and decision making. The goal in reflection on both vocation and governance is to integrate diverse gifts into communal activity without obscuring or detracting from particular contributions.

St. Peter's Seminary's participation in this ATS consultation has been a lengthy process and one that remains unfinished. The gradual and progressive nature of that process has allowed some significant insights to emerge. What may prove even more valuable is the identification of questions and issues that will require further deliberation and clarification.

*John Dool is dean of studies at St. Peter's Seminary. Brian Dunn is auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie. He is the former dean of studies at St. Peter's Seminary.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. Gordon T. Smith, "Attending to the Collective Vocation," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, eds. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, 240–261 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002).

# Report of the Faculty Vocation and Governance Project Denver Seminary

*W. David Buschart and Bradley J. Widstrom*

## Introduction

At the time of the Faculty Vocation and Governance Consultation in spring 2006, Denver Seminary had experienced, and seemed likely to continue to experience, significant changes. These changes included the death of a president and transition to a new president, transition from a challenging chapter to a chapter of increased health and vitality, relocation to a newly built campus, and considerable turnover in the faculty. The latter comprised a combination of replacements for faculty departures and filling of new positions that accompanied growing student enrollment.

Having come to the consultation (cohort A) from this institutional context, we left the consultation with a clear sense that at this point in the institution's history we needed to focus on faculty vocation. Therefore, we designed a plan wherein the faculty, both individually and corporately, could formulate and/or clarify their understandings of vocations, both individual and corporate.

## Phase 1: Individual vocations

Faculty members were introduced to the vocation and governance project at the annual faculty retreat in August 2006. They listened to two presentations on individual vocation, signed up for books that would help them reflect on the issue, and submitted suggestions for phase 2, corporate vocation. (See appendixes A and B.)

Over the next nine months, faculty members composed and made presentations to the faculty on individual vocation, following the guidance delineated in appendix B. During that time, faculty convened a forum for mid-year review of the project and discussed (1) the assigned reading, (2) colleagues' individual presentations to date, (3) each member's own reflections on vocation, and (4) plans for phase 2. (See appendix C.)

## Phase 2: Corporate vocation

At the next annual faculty retreat, in August 2007, Gordon T. Smith, guest speaker for the retreat, conducted sessions on the corporate vocation of the theological faculty that expounded on his essay, "Attending to the Collective Vocation,"<sup>1</sup> which faculty had read in advance. At the end of the retreat, faculty members submitted their observations on corporate vocation and suggestions for the project.

In a forum setting in October, three of the longest-serving faculty members made presentations, with discussion, on the history of the seminary and the history of the faculty's sense of vocation.

Three months later, faculty members and their spouses attended a social event. This social event, as well as the one in May 2008, was a direct result of a prompt from a faculty retreat speaker and the October 2007 forum and was intended to foster a greater sense of community.

In February 2008, another faculty forum was devoted to the corporate vocations of the four academic divisions of the seminary: Biblical Studies, Christian Thought, Christian Ministries, and Counseling. Each division formulated a statement of its corporate vocation and identified the ways in which it is related to the seminary's student learning outcomes. Over the next three months, each academic division had a meeting at which each faculty member within that division discussed his or her individual vocation in relation to the corporate vocation of the division and in relation to the corporate vocation of the faculty. Phase 2 included a social event for the faculty members within each of the academic divisions. These events included spouses and were intended to facilitate a greater sense of community. (See "Desire for familial relationship" below.)

## **Outcomes**

### ***Awareness and appreciation***

The first outcome was an awareness and appreciation of the value of intentional reflection upon individual vocation. Many of our faculty members had given thought to the events of their life's journey but never in an intentional, in-depth, and comprehensive manner. As a result of this project, individuals formulated an autobiographical description of the people, influences, and events that brought them to their present position as a teaching faculty member in a theological institution. (See appendix B.) What before was an ad hoc and incomplete personal history now became more comprehensive and rich. Not only were they aware of the more obvious influences, but now even the more subtle and tacit influences were also brought to light. New pieces of the puzzle were remembered, and in the process, faculty members were able to clarify and, as one individual expressed it, "own" their vocations.

There also arose a great appreciation for the tension—almost a dance—between each individual's personal role and God's sovereign, guiding hand in the discovery and development of both self and vocation. In many cases this involved experiences of deep pain. In all of the stories there was joy, excitement, and positive remembrance. There surfaced an appreciative realization of the vast number of people and events that had played a role in shaping them. Furthermore, even though each autobiography was unique, there was a shared sense that the storylines of their lives had unfolded under the providence of God and had shaped them for the callings they are fulfilling today.

In the first stage of the project, all faculty members shared with their colleagues both a 20-minute presentation reviewing their life's journey and a personal mission statement that succinctly summarized their life's calling—their individual vocation. People wanted to—indeed, seemed to need to—tell their stories. They desired to be heard and understood.



### *Interest and encouragement*

A second outcome was that all faculty members were interested in and encouraged through their colleagues' sharing of their individual vocation. Even though some found the exercise difficult because of feeling vulnerable and exposed, there was a unanimous sense of being valued and accepted for who they were and what they are called to do. It was seen as a safe environment in which they could share the steps and stages of their journeys.

We had each come to this profession and to Denver Seminary in unique and diverse ways. No one expressed that they had had "seminary professor" as their professional goal early in life, yet God had ordered their lives in such a manner that . . . here they were. One image used was that of a rich tapestry—unique pieces, all so different yet beautiful in their own ways, stitched together to make a gorgeous, powerful whole. They realized that as gifted, talented, and skilled as each one is, they need one another. They are unique but share a common commitment to their disciplines, corporate vocation, students, and to equipping God's people for Kingdom ministry. Denver Seminary's mission can only be fulfilled when everyone comes together, using the gifts and strengths that each individual faculty member brings to the mix.

### *Discovery of commonalities*

A third outcome was the manifestation of a high degree of commonality among individual vocations within each academic division. This was reflected, in part, in the ease and excitement with which each division was able to come together and draft a statement of divisional vocation. Perhaps this kind of commonality can be expected within a division, but it is still notable because of the ease with which the exercise unfolded; the positive, collegial nature of the interaction; and the enthusiasm with which these divisional vocations were articulated.

### *Increased respect*

A fourth outcome was increased appreciation and respect for colleagues in other academic divisions. There was a fresh realization that it takes all divisions to make up the whole of Denver Seminary. Fulfilling our corporate mission would not be possible without the unique contributions made by each division.

At some institutions, there exists a so-called pecking order between different divisions and along with this a counterproductive hierarchy—both real and perceived—among teaching faculty. This is sometimes based on faculty rank but, even more so, grows out of labels—whether explicit or tacit—assigned to the divisions: Biblical versus Systematic versus Practical, Theoretical versus Practical, Content-driven versus Skills-driven, Academic versus Professional, Academic versus Practical. Hearing one another's stories and passionate explication of individual vocations helped to dismantle these barriers as we realized we were more similar than dissimilar. We discovered that we share a common commitment to academic excellence, quality teaching, personal development, and caring formation of our students.

In the context of divisional discussions regarding the fulfillment of the corporate vocation of the seminary, each division was given the task of decid-



ing which of the officially stated student learning outcomes their coursework and curriculum accomplish. Everyone clearly recognized that none of the four divisions focuses on all of the outcomes, but when viewed in the aggregate, all are being addressed in the education and equipping of our students.

### ***Genuine interest***

A fifth outcome is the discovery that faculty members are genuinely interested in exploring their corporate vocation, which prompted the October 2007 forum at which the three longest-tenured faculty members provided historical recollections with respect to the corporate vocation of the faculty. They observed that this had never been a matter of conscious, explicit conversation, though suggested that it has existed in a tacit or implicit manner. They further suggested that it was an ethos or shared set of values, more than a sense of vocation per se. Faculty members greatly appreciated this session, indicating that they needed to gain historical perspective in order to better engage the matter of corporate vocation today.

### ***Desire for familial relationship***

A sixth outcome, which emerged from gaining historical perspective, was that some of the sense of “family” which had marked the faculty earlier in the seminary’s history had been lost, and that the current faculty would like to recover this sense. Relationships had drifted to the point where they saw one another as not much more than coworkers. This observation combined with Gordon Smith’s suggestion along this line informed the shape of phase 2 going forward. Opportunities for “eating, playing and socializing together” were incorporated into the plan. These took the form of two all-faculty (with spouses) social gatherings, and each division gathering as a division. The responses to these kinds of events—which had not taken place in years—were very positive.

### ***Movement toward more explicit corporate vocation***

A seventh outcome was the realization, despite the fact that corporate vocation had not previously been explicitly addressed, that there is among the current faculty (a) a clear and strong sense of corporate vocation at the divisional level, (b) a clear and strong sense of commitment to the historical tacit corporate vocation, and (c) as a result of this project, movement toward a more explicitly articulated corporate vocation. As noted above, when the four academic divisions were asked to formulate a statement of their corporate vocation and to identify the ways in which this relates to the seminary’s student learning outcomes, the tasks were accomplished with relative ease and clearly shared enthusiasm. When reflections were presented on the history of the common ethos or values of the faculty in years past, current faculty saw and affirmed the congruity with the ethos and values of today. And, while we have not yet officially or formally drafted a statement of corporate vocation, in the course of this project there was a clear and growing sense of appreciation for one another and for the ways in which all of us, as individuals and as divisions, contribute to the work of the seminary.

## Conclusion

The outcomes of this project can be summarized in a manner parallel to the mission statement of the seminary—a statement of commitment to knowing (think biblically), being (live faithfully), and doing (lead wisely). Through this project, the Denver Seminary faculty came to a much deeper knowledge and understanding of who they are as individuals, as academic divisions, and as a faculty. And, the understanding of one another as individuals encompasses both the professional and elements of the personal. Second, the faculty as a whole was in some measure changed through this project. It is difficult to put into words, but it is fair to say that the “being” of the faculty as a whole has in some measure changed for the better as a result of the activities and conversations we shared together. For example, one faculty member observed that we had moved “from reflection to conversation.” Finally, because of this growth in knowing and being, the faculty can more effectively and rewardingly engage doing—our work together. An increased understanding of and appreciation for one another as persons, for one another as professionals, for each of our disciplines and academic divisions, and for the work we do together provides an invaluable resource to draw upon as together we carry forward the work of our vocations and our vocation.

*W. David Buschart is associate dean and professor of theology and historical studies. Bradley J. Widstrom is assistant professor of youth and family ministries.*

## Appendix A

### **Orientation to the Denver Seminary Faculty Vocation Project** **(Faculty Retreat, August 2006)**

#### **Background and Overview: The Project**

- The grant
- Purpose
- Plan: Timeline, August 2006–January 2008
  - o Phase 1: Individual Vocation
    - August 2006
    - Fall 2006
    - January/February 2007
    - Spring 2007
  - o Phase 2: Corporate Vocation
    - August 2007
    - Fall 2007
  - o January 2008: Submit report to ATS

#### **Thinking Together: Faculty Reflections**

- Why: Purpose and benefits
- What: See “Template for Faculty Reflections”
- When: Sign-up during retreat

### Resources for Reflection: The Books

- Four options—your choice of one
  - Guinness, Os. (1998). *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*. Thomas Nelson: Nashville.
  - Jones, L. Gregory and Stephanie Paulsell, (eds.). (2002). *The Scope of our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids.
  - Placher, William C., (ed.). (2005). *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids.
  - Warford, Malcom L., (ed.). (2005). *Practical Wisdom on Theological Teaching and Learning*. Peter Lang: New York.
- Sign-up: During retreat

## Appendix B

### Template for Faculty Reflections on Vocation

#### Story: Autobiography, My Life Story

*Highlight the elements of your life that have shaped who you are as it relates to your sense of vocation. Potential topics include but are not limited to:*

- life-changing events, life-directing experiences
- “aha” moments
- influential people
- influential books or ideas
- training or education

#### Vocation: Calling/Mission

*Brief yet concise statement of what you see as your personal calling and vocation. Potential conversation points include but are not limited to:*

- 25-word statement of life-mission
- changes and continuities over the years
- 2–3 current objectives/goals

#### Incarnation: Living-Out My Vocation/Calling/Mission

*Examples, illustrations, or stories of how you currently live out your vocation. Please touch on both areas listed below.*

- professional life, both in and beyond Denver Seminary
- “the rest of life”: relationship between your professional life and the rest of your life (e.g., home and family, church, neighborhood, community)

## **Appendix C**

### **Denver Seminary Faculty Vocation Project** **(Faculty Forum, February 13, 2007)**

1. **READING:** How have you benefited from your reading in the book that was provided? Have you encountered any ideas or perspectives that were helpful or challenging or . . . ? If so, describe.
2. **COLLEAGUES' REFLECTIONS:** What musings or observations do you have on your colleagues' vocational reflections that have been presented to date? Are there any themes that you have observed? Any perspectives that you have found helpful? Any stories that you found particularly heartening or challenging? Or . . . ?
3. **YOUR OWN REFLECTIONS:** If you have already presented your reflections or you are preparing to do so, what have you gained from pausing at this point in your life and work to reflect on your vocation? Did it prompt you to call to mind significant people or events or influences that you had forgotten about? Has it prompted you to think about your present or future pursuit of your vocation in a different way? If so, describe.
4. **CORPORATE VOCATION:** As we anticipate thinking together about our corporate vocation as a faculty, collectively, what questions should we be asking? What issues or topics should we be addressing? What suggestions do you have for meaningfully exploring together, as the Denver Seminary faculty, our corporate vocation?

## **Appendix D**

### **Vision and Mission**

#### **Vision**

#### **Where is the seminary going over the next five years?**

Our vision is to commit ourselves and our resources to:

- Cultivate vibrant and transformative graduate level theological education.
- Partner with church and parachurch leaders nationally and globally to equip graduates to serve God effectively.
- Establish a well-informed biblical voice in the public dialogue that will help people to unite their Christian faith with their vocations and roles as global citizens.
- Produce graduates who embrace, understand, and minister skillfully to people and communities of diverse ages, genders, ethnicities, beliefs, socioeconomic backgrounds, and disabilities.
- Maintain a sustainable, financially healthy institution.

We desire that Denver Seminary be an effective place to become godly leaders through our integrated emphases upon spiritual formation, academic quality, and leadership preparation. Above all, we want God to receive the honor.

## **Mission**

Denver Seminary seeks to glorify God by equipping leaders to think biblically, live faithfully, and lead wisely for a lifetime.

## **Student Learning Outcomes**

**Biblical Worldview:** Demonstrate a Christian worldview that integrates biblical, theological, and historical truth.

**Healthy Relationships:** Exhibit healthy relationships with self, family, church, community, and the world.

**Sensitivity to Human Diversity:** Love, understand, and be equipped to minister among people of diverse ages, genders, ethnicity, beliefs, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Christ-Like Maturity:** Display emotional stability, personal integrity, and spiritual vitality.

**Organizational Expertise:** Participate with understanding and sensitivity in a variety of Christian organizational structures.

**Critical Thinking:** Research, analyze, and address issues of life and ministry, utilizing critical and strategic thinking.

**Passion for Ministry:** Minister with a holy passion, especially in the areas of natural and spiritual giftedness.

**Effective Communication:** Communicate effectively with those to whom they minister.

**Leadership Skills:** Demonstrate visionary leadership—influencing, motivating, and empowering others for Christ and his kingdom.

**Disciple-Making:** Display effective skills in evangelism, disciple-making, acts of compassion, and the pursuit of justice both within the home culture and cross-culturally.

## **ENDNOTE**

1. Gordon T. Smith, "Attending to the Collective Vocation," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, eds., L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, 240–261 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002).

# Report of the Faculty Vocation and Governance Project Ashland Theological Seminary

*Wyndy Corbin Reuschling and Lee Wetherbee*

## Focus and structure of the project

The purpose of the project was to revisit our committee structure in light of our revised mission statement; Anabaptist/Pietistic heritage; and multi-denominational student body, faculty, and constituency. We were particularly interested in examining the following questions:

- How does our Anabaptist/Pietistic heritage inform our understanding of faculty governance and involvement at Ashland Theological Seminary?
- What is the relationship between faculty and administration given our heritage, organizational structure, and governance?
- What are the roles of committees in faculty governance?
- How might we revisit and redesign our committee structure in light of a focused reflection on these questions?

This project emerged after the “yearly ritual” of assigning faculty to committees for the following year. In observing this process at a year-end faculty meeting in 2007, the president wondered whether there were better ways of making faculty committee assignments that might take into consideration gifts, areas of expertise, and the roles and purposes of committees. Our invitation to participate in The Association of Theological Schools’ Faculty Vocation and Governance Consultation was timely, and we took the opportunity to flesh out this idea in our request for the funding offered by ATS from the Lilly Foundation.

We attended the first meeting of Cohort B in October 2007. The president introduced the project to the faculty in March 2008 at our regular monthly faculty meeting, and a copy of the proposal was distributed to the faculty. We purchased copies of *The Scope of Our Art*<sup>1</sup> at the end of the academic year in anticipation of two work days that were scheduled before the start of the fall quarter 2008. Our first work day in September focused on issues related to faculty vocation and calling in light of reflections on selected readings from *The Scope of Our Art*, COA General Institutional Standards 6 and 8, an article by the dean, and Ashland Seminary’s mission and heritage. The second work day later that month provided more concrete focus on specific areas of faculty governance identified on the first work day that, in turn, yielded three foci selected to guide the implementation of a revised committee structure. The three areas are academic oversight of degree and cocurricular programs; faculty development, promotion, and tenure; and assessment. We attended the second session of Cohort B, along with Cohort A, in October 2008 where we gave an oral report.

## **Themes, concerns, and issues**

Two issues arose in the design, preparation, and implementation of this grant proposal. The first issue related to the composition of the faculty. Faculty members fall under one of two designations: those who are full-time teaching faculty and those whose primary responsibilities are in administration but who are contracted to teach from one to three courses each academic year. The invitation was extended to all who have faculty status, which included the seven individuals who are administrators with teaching responsibilities. When the invitation went out by email, two responded, indicating their confusion as to whether they were considered faculty and therefore required or able to participate. Of the seven administrators, three were participants for both work days, while four did not participate in either work day. Four full-time faculty members did not attend the work days.

The second issue was an underlying narrative concerning the expectations and aspirations for this project. Certain faculty members expressed that “we” have a tendency to start projects and conversations that are important and energizing without ever bringing them to completion or closure. For this purpose, the grant proposal was designed to have a very specific focus and outcome that we hoped would reenergize colleagues to participate in important conversations with an assurance that their voices and contributions would secure the desired ends.

As our work progressed, common themes and concerns arose in the small and large group discussions on the work days and in work related to the implementation of the grant.

### ***Faculty vocation and calling***

The topic of faculty vocation and calling is important to our colleagues. The language of “calling” is familiar to us and resonates with our community in profound ways. To think of our calling as theological educators, teachers, and scholars in light of our callings as faculty members added to commitments that are already a part of our ethos. The small group discussions and interaction among faculty members helped to build on a sense of community that, for the most part, already exists at Ashland. One particular incident that occurred in a small group discussion revolved around the interaction between one of our younger and new faculty members and one of our “older,” more seasoned, and well published colleagues. The newer faculty member expressed a desire for mentoring as he starts his journey, which prompted an offer to help from one of our senior colleagues, thereby forging a more intentional relationship between these two individuals in different departments and disciplines. This example reflects a dual theme that came out in our work days, which was the desire for more intentional interaction and conversation among colleagues and the recognition that professional development in the areas of teaching and writing represents an important contribution to the mission of the seminary.



### *Clarifying roles and responsibilities*

In response to a presentation on the function of faculty, particularly in reference to administration and trustees, some small groups focused on the issues of roles and identity. We noted the need for increased clarity of the roles and responsibilities of faculty. This brought into fairly stark relief the historical lack of such basic elements as job descriptions at Ashland Seminary. It was the sense of at least some group members that as the institution has grown larger, the structure of interaction between increasingly specialized elements has not kept pace. It seems as though the expectation remains that faculty will do whatever is necessary for the good of the larger institution. But the roles and responsibilities asked of faculty are in direct competition with the corresponding growth of the academic workload. We observed that as a community we continue to operate informally when there is a real need for a structure to support the size and complexity we have achieved. In this way we are potential victims of our own growth. A more insidious outgrowth of this is the tension some faculty feel between the demands of “community” involvement (e.g., student life events, mentoring relationships, social events, etc.) and the more traditional roles of academy and classroom. Some faculty feel taken advantage of when their social availability to students and administration compromises their sense of academic availability to students and the academy. Finally, the ongoing debate about the role of administrators with teaching responsibilities regarding decisions about curriculum remains significant. The risk that persons with the least investment in curricular decisions could have a numeric majority in decision-making bodies seems an issue that grows directly out of the lack of clarity in the function of “faculty.” Put another way, what is distinctive about those who are called to full-time teaching and scholarship in contrast to administrators who teach part time if at all?

### *Decision making in shared governance*

We used the chapter by Gordon Smith, “Attending to the Collective Vocation,” in *The Scope of Our Art* on our second workday and presented his definition of shared governance:

Shared governance means that we acknowledge the need of many to speak to a matter while reserving the right of some to make a decision when that decision is inherent in their role or responsibility in the school.<sup>2</sup>

Most agreed with this definition in principle yet wanted clarification on who the “many” are and who the “some” are, especially as it applies to the relationships between faculty, administrators with faculty status, and administrators. In practice, we noticed that many decisions are made by the many at the expense of the some, those who ought to be making the decision but who are relegated to only input. This definition surfaced some of the difficulties in the structures and practices of Ashland Seminary that arise from time to time and that impact the constitution, work, and decisions of committees.

Ashland Seminary has valued a model of consensus decision making due to its Anabaptist/Pietistic heritage that desires to minimize authority assignment based on roles in order to have the broadest and most inclusive participation possible, a value that is shared in the seminary community. In reality, however, as in all institutions, roles do exist, and authority and responsibility are assigned based on these roles. A lack of clarity creates confusion, distrust, and even some inefficiencies. The seminary has grown considerably over the last twelve to fifteen years, making the practice of consensus decision making at the larger community level more difficult, especially when pressing issues demand more immediate decisions than consensus decision making can offer. A commitment to consensus decision making elevates the expectation that all voices will be heard and taken into consideration. When this does not happen, the result is a sense of mistrust, suspicion, and disappointment that we have somehow not lived up to our own ideals. This was a legacy and a fear that informed and even constrained some of our discussions.

An underlying assumption held that working for more precision and clarity on roles of faculty members and the purviews of our decision making would undermine commitments to consensus decision making. Our conversations indicated a further need to untangle some of the issues in this topic for the purpose of learning how to practice consensus decision making in a large and complex institution. For example, is shared governance the same as consensus decision making? We seem to collapse these ideas into one, thereby assuming that since we make decisions by consensus, we are in fact sharing governance. Can we talk about roles, responsibilities, and appropriate areas of authority that do not translate into exclusivity and hierarchy? How can we work with and through the theological (and ideological) commitments to consensus decision making in light of institutional realities and complexities and a breakdown in actual practices? What does consensus decision making look like in a large institution? What are the appropriate venues for many to speak to a matter while reserving the right of some to make a decision? How does this inform the constitution and authority of committees, their functions, and their designated areas of responsibilities? Who are the many and the some when it comes to committee assignments?

### *Shaping the vision for the school*

Another emerging theme concerned the generation of vision for the institution. In one of the large group discussions, a senior administrator stated that it is the role of the board and administrators to define and “cast” vision. Many faculty members responded that this statement does not indicate the value of shared governance or consensus decision making. One faculty member pressed the issue by asking how faculty members can contribute to shaping a vision for theological education so that vision is not driven by just bottom line, pragmatic decisions, or fanciful new programs. There was a sense that shared decision making with administration was being asked of the faculty (i.e., administrators sharing in faculty decisions about the curriculum) but not of the administration (i.e., faculty sharing in administrative decisions about envisioning new programs to expand our mission). How can faculty in their respec-

tive disciplines offer imaginations to the mission and vision of the seminary as part of our vocation and calling? How does our work as biblical scholars, theologians, ethicists, counselors, and practitioners inform the aspirations and commitments of the institution? In what directions do our reflections on Scripture point us? How do our theological claims inform our vision? Where does our commitment to the ministry and mission of the church in the world direct our concerns and inform our curriculum? There was a fairly strong interest in exploring the contributions that faculty make to constructing the vision and mission of the seminary in cooperation with the board and administrators.

At our annual faculty retreat in September, held two days after the first work day, the entire community was involved in strategic planning, including some members of the Seminary Committee of the board of trustees. Quite a bit of time was spent in “cross-fertilized” small groups, listening to the visions and aspirations of the various groups that compose the seminary. All of this informed important emerging plans and helped to reinforce key commitments from our heritage about the role of a community in generating and realizing vision.

### ***Building on a good foundation***

The majority of faculty, even those from non-Brethren traditions, share the ethos and commitments of Ashland Seminary and the ideals of consensus decision making. What strengths on which to build! The theological elasticity and warm inclusivity of the Anabaptist/Pietistic spirit has drawn faculty from diverse backgrounds to the seminary and keeps them committed to all that is possible. Faculty members see this as a place where they can fulfill their personal callings and collective vocations. So, perhaps a theme that surfaced and on which to build is that of betterment. How can we better live up to the ideals of community, high academic standards, spiritual formation, and providing a broad tent of evangelicalism? How can we better practice what we preach about these things in our classes and in our institutional life? The questions are difficult, yet important, and need to continue. The pursuit of excellence will require both clarity and flexibility for better ways of carrying out our common vocations and for deploying faculty gifts, expertise, and experience in areas appropriate for faculty oversight and governance.

### **Summary and future directives**

We are now left with the task of synthesizing the insights from the work days and the ongoing discussions into a proposal for a revised committee structure that reflects areas of faculty vocation and governance and lends clarity to faculty roles and responsibilities in the institution. The three foci around which committees will be reorganized are oversight of academic programs and policies; assessment pertinent to faculty governance (i.e., in classrooms, of degree programs, of faculty, etc.); and professional development, promotion, and tenure. The next step is to describe the functions of these committees, with clear indications of what tasks they are given to perform, their areas of oversight and authority, where they fit in the flow of decision making, and how they fit within

the institution. Once this task is complete, we will then begin to identify how the committees are constituted (i.e., full-time faculty, faculty and administrators, administrators, staff, students, etc.) for the anticipated implementation of a revised committee structure heading into the 2009–10 academic year.

Because of the importance of the ongoing conversation about governance, we will use the remaining funds from the grant to purchase copies of *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* by Daniel Aleshire for faculty, administrators, and the Seminary Committee of the board of trustees. We recognized in the implementation of the grant that governance is important and that our conversations as faculty must take place in conversation with administration and the Seminary Committee. The president of Ashland has worked hard to include the Seminary Committee in the life of the seminary as indicated by its inclusion in our faculty retreats the last two years. Another example was the installation service in Chapel for the Seminary Committee, at which one of the committee members preached. We are hopeful that the conversation around our common vocations, common callings, and areas of specialization can continue and can involve all members of the Ashland Seminary community, which seems particularly important given the current challenges facing seminaries.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. Gordon T. Smith, "Attending to the Collective Vocation," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, ed. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, 240–261 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002).
2. *Ibid.*, 253.

# Attending to the Collective Vocation

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Editor's Note: The following essay is reprinted with permission. Gordon T. Smith, "Attending to the Collective Vocation," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, ed. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, 240–261 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002).

## Finding affinity with a collective vocation

In the 1996–1997 academic year I was involved with a colleague, Ken Badley, in a qualitative study of long-term vocational vitality of faculty in theological schools in Canada (Roman Catholic, Evangelical, and Mainline Protestant). The project sought to identify the factors that would determine, or at least foster, long-term vocational vitality. To this end, Badley and I interviewed faculty who in their senior years were generally viewed to be highly engaged and alive in their teaching and research. We asked them questions designed to determine if there was any consistent pattern to the choices they made in their life and work in mid-career. From this we hoped to identify the elements in the life and work of theological teachers who would likely thrive in their vocation.

The results confirmed what we suspected: those who were alive and vital in their senior years were individuals with a love of teaching, a love of students, and a well-developed capacity to adapt their teaching to the changing character and needs of their students. However, our research also highlighted elements that we had not anticipated. A theme that came up again and again in the interviews was the relationship between individual theological teachers and the institutions where they had taught or were teaching. In this regard, two things stood out to us.

In some cases the professors we interviewed had been mistreated, sometimes in ways that were astonishing, by the schools where they taught, either by their colleagues acting in concert, or by the administration. Some were forced to resign and leave to seek a position elsewhere. What was striking in each of these interviews was the lack of resentment. They had each moved on in their careers with passion, commitment, and joy without allowing their spirits to be derailed by the setback.

We were also impressed with the degree to which these individuals found themselves, by the time they reached their senior years (which we defined as 55 and older), in institutions where they could enjoy a high degree of congruency between their own vision and values and those of the institution where they were teaching. They were at home vocationally.

Our conclusions have been reinforced by the work of the Auburn Center, particularly Barbara G. Wheeler's findings in her study on the cultivation of effective theological school faculties. She stresses that "the most effective forms

of faculty cultivation are those that are deeply and permanently enmeshed in the policies and everyday practices of the schools.”<sup>1</sup> And further, that “The most important steps that a school can take to cultivate its new faculty are those that promote their integration into the institution’s culture.”<sup>2</sup> It only follows, then, that faculty “should be chosen with the greatest care for their fit with the purpose and mission of the school.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, integration with the culture, mission, ethos, and values of the school is a profoundly significant indicator of likely success as a faculty member.

Both of these studies highlight the obvious reality that schools are different. There is no such thing as a generic theological school. And I would suggest that the most helpful way to think of these fundamental differences is through the lens of *vocation*. Just as it is possible to speak of the vocation of the theological teacher, one of the most helpful ways to think about theological schools is to consider the matter of a communal or corporate vocation. The assumption behind such a suggestion is that, from a theological perspective, we cannot speak of the individual vocation except in the context of the community. All vocations are fulfilled in solidarity with others; each person fulfills an individual vocation in partnership with another. In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul uses the image of the body to capture the principle that we do our work and fulfill our vocations with a high degree of mutual interdependence. Our individual potential is achieved in collaboration and partnership with others, whether it is our potential of personal transformation or the potential of making a difference in the world. Therefore it follows that we must determine that we will do our work not merely as individuals with particular and unique commitments, but also as a collective, as a community of scholars who in our work with administrators and trustees embrace and actually serve something that is bigger and more all encompassing than the sum of our individual vocations. Indeed I would go so far as to say that we will only be effective in the fulfillment of our individual vocations if we do so in the light of and in a manner that is congruent with the collective vocation.

I would propose that this will, at the very least, require three commitments: (1) that we discern and do our work in a manner that is congruent with the distinctive vocation of the school where we teach; (2) that we develop the organizational competencies to work with others toward a common goal, a capacity that at heart is the ability to work within a system of shared governance or power; and, (3) that we sustain a healthy distinction between our individual vocations and that of the school in which we serve.

## **Discerning a school’s vocation**

We will thrive in our institutional context if we discern the distinctive vocation of the collective of which we are a part—the communal or institutional vocation of the school where we teach. When I joined the faculty of Regent College in the summer of 1998 as dean and associate professor of spiritual theology, I was confronted once more with discerning the unique vocation of a theological school.



I had been the dean and taught at three previous schools: the Alliance Biblical Seminary in Manila, Philippines, and both the Canadian Bible College and the Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina, Saskatchewan. One was an undergraduate college; the other two were denominational seminaries. When I arrived in Vancouver, I came with a growing conviction that vocation is something that applies not merely to individuals but also to the schools in which we fulfill our vocations as theological teachers. I accepted the invitation to Regent College largely because I observed or at least had a preliminary sense that my own values and vision were congruent with those of the school; I suspected that I had found a place in which I could be faithful to my own vocation while contributing enthusiastically to a collective vocation. But Wheeler's conclusions in the Auburn Series were a reminder that nothing could be taken for granted. Further, I was convinced that ultimately the collective vocation is discerned from *within*. When joining a theological faculty, one accepts an appointment on the basis of an appreciation of the school's history and mission statement and perhaps some explicit institutional values. But one only really discerns vocation from within the faculty and within the school. And this of necessity was a central priority to my first year in the role for my own sake, but also for the sake of those I would serve as dean.

The mission statement is an obvious point of departure. But discerning the vocation of a school is much more than merely reading the mission statement, which probably only represents a focus or direction. The distinctive vocation of a theological school is by its very nature something far more complex, nuanced, and more pervasive than a mission statement can express, for it cannot be comprehended except in the context of the institutional and educational culture, which includes what kind of scholarship is valued and how—what role or value is given to teaching and to research. It incorporates the patterns of community life outside of the formal academic agenda, including decision-making processes and formal and informal governance procedures. It includes “the way things are done here,” as well as those underlying dreams and longings within the community that represent both individual and collective hopes and aspirations. Discerning the vocation and character of a school includes appreciating the school's history and its patterns of institutional life and decision making, which means that we recognize and affirm both distinctive strengths and limitations, which in some cases are probably institutional pathologies or at the least negative propensities. Discerning the culture and vocation of the school also means appreciating the way that the mission of the school is lived out in its spaces, particularly those places where people gather for worship, learning, conversation, or business. In other words, vocation is lived out in a set of practices, patterns of behavior, and attitudes.

But most of all, the vocation of the theological school is found in the unique interplay of two realities: the founding charisma of the school and how that founding vision is to be adapted and lived out in the current context. It requires that the collective understand its *present* position and possibilities, and how the original founding vision or charisma will find expression today. Invariably in this debate there will be some who would just as soon shed the original founding vision or charisma. There are many schools, for example,



that have concluded that their original purpose is not relevant and that have intentionally distanced themselves from that heritage (for example: schools that have distanced themselves from their original church or religious foundations). On the other hand, there are just as many whose posture is one of resisting change, contending that faithfulness to the original vision requires no adaptation or adjustment to contemporary realities. The end of the matter invariably is one in which the collective is able, doubtless with many internal tensions, to come to clarity about the meaning of the original vision and its implications for the life of the theological school today.

What makes this a unique challenge is that, just as an individual's vocation evolves over time, so does an institution's vocation. Even a relatively young school like Regent College, founded in the late 1960s, will live out its vocation differently in the different chapters of the school's history. Further, many times we find ourselves in institutions in transition where the character or focus of a vocation may well be in flux.

### *The vocation of Regent College*

In some cases, discerning the vocation of a school is a matter of institutional survival. In a recent visit to an Anglo-Catholic episcopalian school, I was impressed with both board members and faculty who recognized that in keeping to the original founding vision they were clinging to an impossible ideal, one that had died decades ago, and that their only possibility of thriving (let alone surviving) was to determine how the distinctive Anglo-Catholic vision and ideal would find unique and dynamic expression today. They recognized that it would necessarily mean letting go of some cherished structures and patterns of life and embracing with innovation and creativity some new possibilities. But this takes special discernment: the capacity to determine what lies at the heart of the original vision or charisma and how that founding dynamic can animate the current collective vision and vocation, so that any necessary changes do not so alter the contours of the school that it no longer is faithful to its vocation, so that pragmatic concerns do not leave it disconnected from its defining calling.

In the case of Regent College, the original founding vision was to provide *graduate* theological education for the laity. The school was established in 1968 by leaders within the Plymouth Brethren, who out of their unease with clergy and all things associated with a professionalization of the ministry sought to establish a school for the "whole people of God." Consequently, Regent initiated something new for North America: postbaccalaureate academic programs in theology designed for the laity. And while Regent has initiated other programs since then, including the Master of Divinity designed for ministerial formation, this original vision for graduate theological education for people in every walk of life and work continues to be the defining purpose of the college.

However, the original vision also included a particular understanding of scholarship and learning evidenced most fully, perhaps, in the resolve that piety and learning were to be integrated, and that theological education was to be informed by interdisciplinary studies. That original vision or charisma has evolved in a number of ways, and there are many other distinctive features

of the Regent educational philosophy. But my read of this school's charisma is that these two elements lie at its heart: (1) the focus on the laity; and (2) the character of scholarship (notably the fact that piety and scholarship are integrally related, and that theological learning is informed by interdisciplinary studies). Whatever Regent College becomes and whatever form or shape it takes in its academic programs, its vocation as a theological school is necessarily defined by these two elements.

First, Regent College will only be faithful to our original defining vision if we sustain a resolve and capacity to provide theological education for the whole people of God—theological education for women and men whose vocations will take them into the world and the church. It will likely always be the case (and probably should be the case) that the majority of the students at Regent are those who enroll in degree programs that are not linked to professional religious leadership: they study theology at Regent with a view to being bankers, lawyers, carpenters, school teachers, artists, and politicians. They take their undergraduate and perhaps some graduate studies elsewhere that train them professionally; but at Regent College they study theology with a view to integrate their faith with their God-given vocations. In other words, at the heart of the Regent College vision for theological education is this commitment to provide graduate theological education not for professional religious leadership, but for the empowerment of all of God's people as they seek to serve Christ in the world.

However, Regent College also has a Master of Divinity (MDiv) program, and many come to Regent with the anticipation that they will from here seek ordination and become, in effect, professional religious leaders within congregations. Given the defining vision of the college, it is no surprise that there has been ambivalence about the program throughout the twenty years that it has been offered. However, there is no inherent reason why Regent should *not* have a strong MDiv program, with the imperative proviso that it be defined in the light of the college's original vision and charisma: the formation, equipping, and empowerment of the laity. This will have many potential implications, but at the very least we can hope that a student who graduates with an MDiv appreciates that as she enters into the ministry, she does so as one who has come to appreciate that in all of her theological studies she has learned side by side *with* lay persons, so that while in ministry she is never the only "learned" one, but rather one who is learning with her people. Second, I would also deeply hope that while being trained and equipped for the ministry a graduate of Regent who assumes a pastorate knows that he is never taking over a role in which he will "run the church" but rather one in which he is entering into a partnership with lay leaders in his congregation, leaders who will share the ministry with him and lead with him.

Further, just as Regent has always had a commitment to "the whole people of God," the defining charisma of the college has also included a distinctive understanding of scholarship and learning. Regent College is a school with a strong academic reputation, with a remarkable number of students who have gone on to postgraduate studies. But Regent has never allowed its notion of scholarship and learning to be defined by or limited by the disciplinary guilds.

It has through its history appointed full professors in one discipline whose actual doctoral training was in a completely different discipline rather than a cognate one (i.e., Spiritual Theology and Geography); it has appointed full professors whose expertise lay as much in the quality of their devotional writing and the depth of their piety as in their academic credentials. It has fostered an environment in which scholarship for students includes academic assignments that would seem anything but “academic,” including aesthetic projects, or journal-writing or devotional reflections, all of which pushed the boundaries in such a way that one could easily wonder if academic integrity was jeopardized. But while there is no doubt that the boundary was indeed crossed at times, and scholarship was compromised by this kind of flexibility, it has been an inherent part of Regent’s identity to push these boundaries. And it would be a fair observation to say that despite this, the school has never lost credibility as a venue for serious theological scholarship. Just the opposite: Regent is looked to as a school where piety and scholarship are (finally) integrated, and where learning is never bound by the strictures of the academic or disciplinary guilds.

In the case of the first element of the defining vision, there is always a threat on the one hand that the college would exclude those who wish to train for religious leadership in the church (at times they have felt like second-class students here), and the threat on the other hand that the college would succumb to the professionalization of the ministry and fall prey to clericalism. With respect to the second vision, we will always struggle with compromised scholarship on the one hand, or on the other hand the threat of overreacting and falling prey to a narrow definition of scholarship. These tensions will likely never go away; they are, somehow, inherent in the vocation of the college. That is, if my reading of the college is right, whatever shape or form or expression the school takes, it will only be faithful to its vocation if it allows its original defining vision to continue to shape the heart and center of its character and purpose.

This is offered as one example, and only as one person’s reading of that example (and I am very conscious that as a relative newcomer to the college, I am still listening and learning and seeking to discern what it will take for Regent to fulfill its vocation), but nevertheless as an example of the attempt to discern the school’s vocation by attending to both the original founding vision and its contemporary potential. It is also an attempt to address the reality that a theological school does not need to be all things to all people; rather, it is “called” to fulfill a particular agenda, which at root is something that is viewed as a “vocation”: a calling and purpose that ultimately derive from God. Discerning vocation also means that we affirm and accept that there will be many potential faculty members who would not thrive at Regent College; they would not find a vocational “fit” if they came.

## **The challenge of shared governance**

The vocation of the theological teacher is necessarily fulfilled within the context of a collective vocation, the calling of the theological school where one teaches. Ideally, of course, we would find ourselves in schools where there is a

high degree of congruence between our individual vocations and the collective vocation. Working in tandem with a collective vocation is a matter not only of discerning that vocation, together; it also requires that we find a way to fulfill the vocation. And increasingly it is apparent to those in theological education that the context most conducive to this end is one in which we work with a model of *shared governance*. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) actually identifies this as an essential standard for a good theological school, specifying that “Shared governance follows from the collegial nature of theological education.”<sup>4</sup> This follows from the fundamental assumption behind the ATS [Commission] standard on authority and governance that “Institutional stewardship is the responsibility of all, not just the governing board.”<sup>5</sup>

The matter of shared governance is made all that more complex because of the changing character of theological education and the inevitable need for an effective response to these changes. Theological schools are facing a bewildering number of environmental changes, changes that are in many ways threats to the potential of theological schools, threats that for some schools may place in question their viability, especially if they are dependent on tuition income. Higher education is changing in a manner that is fundamental and permanent; and, further, change itself has become a permanent feature of the landscape of theological schools. Student demographics are changing with an ever increasing number of part-time students. All theological schools are attempting to make sense of information technology and respond to the demands and the opportunities of these new technologies in ways that are congruent with their philosophy of education. Denominational schools are facing the reality of declining denominational loyalty and the demand that the locus of biblical and theological scholarship shift from the academy to the church. And through and in the midst of all of this, those of us in theological schools—whether we serve on the faculty, the administration, or the trustees—will find that our schools will not thrive, let alone survive, unless we develop the capacity to respond with innovation and courage to these changes. We will not thrive in the midst of the changes unless we come to see that, while many of these changes are threats to the viability and credibility of theological education, they are also opportunities for renewal within our schools.

William A. Barry has made the observation that:

A burning question for our day . . . is how to make those institutions [in which we work and worship] and structures more attuned to God’s will. . . . There is, perhaps, no greater challenge to religion today than to foster the conditions that make communal discernment possible.<sup>6</sup>

While there are many factors that would foster effective communal discernment, our capacity to discern and respond well to the changing environment in which we work will be in direct proportion to (1) clarity about our collective vocation and (2) the capacity to work with a model of shared governance. Without the first, we will always be driven by the “market” and the pragmatics of mere survival—legitimate to a point, but hardly the basis for a

collective identity and purpose. The commodification of theological education threatens some of the most fundamental values of good theological learning. And the only way we will be able to respond effectively to the changing character of the environment of our work is if we have a clear sense of the vocation of the theological teacher—its character and essential practices—and if we have a clear sense of the distinctive vocation of the theological school. We need to *think* vocationally and ask the question: What is the inherent and essential calling of this school at this time and place in response to these circumstances and in the light of our essential defining charisma or vision?

But without the second, shared governance, even if we agree on our vocation, we will lack a means by which we can fulfill that vocation together. In other words, even if we were able to come to clarity about our “vocation,” we would be incapable of implementing it. Without a model of shared governance, we will lose our capacity to draw on the wisdom of many and we will alienate key constituencies as we respond to the inevitable changes. A model of shared governance empowers a school to draw on the wisdom and expertise of all while also, as much as possible, assuring a high degree of ownership of the actions that are taken to respond to these changes. We must respond proactively to the changes in our environment; without an empowering model of shared governance we will either be left to a hierarchical model wherein those “at the top” make the decisions, or we will find ourselves in a perpetually conflicted state that makes effective decision making impossible. Only with a model of shared governance will we genuinely be able to own together the appropriate response(s) to these changes.

Shared governance also means that everyone is, in some form or another, involved in governance. No one, whether on the faculty or on the board, can with good conscience determine that others will run the school while they go about their work in their “little” corner. The changing character of theological education demands responsible participation from each trustee and each member of the faculty. Faculty in particular need to hear this and realize that we will thrive in our vocations only if we develop organizational expertise—the capacity to live and work with an astute understanding of the culture, patterns of governance, mission, values, and ethos of the school(s) where we are invited to teach. It is from this posture that we have the opportunity to respond to the changes that are inevitable, changes that invariably shape the contours of our work.

In other words, we cannot be naïve about how our institutions, organizations, or schools “work.” We must develop the organizational and the political competencies that enable us to be active participants in shaping the culture and character of the schools where we serve. Only then can we engage together in the process by which we determine our collective vocation and assure, together, that our vocation is the primary and fundamental point of reference in the decisions we make about curriculum, resources, and personnel.

### ***Shared governance enables us to be a learning organization***

In a consideration of how organizations work effectively and how individuals can thrive within organizations, there are few resources as helpful as those

produced by Peter Senge and his associates, most notably, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.<sup>7</sup> Senge and his associates emphasize the need to think *systemically*. We are effective when we see ourselves within a system—a whole and complex network. Senge's work is valuable in large part because it is written for all who work within organizations. So much literature on the quality of organizations and what makes them effective is written for those in leadership and management. And clearly these roles have a critical part to play. But to thrive in our common efforts, all of us need to see what it is that makes for effective organizations.

Senge and company's most distinctive contribution is their call for *learning* organizations. He contends that those organizations that are most effective are those that have developed the capacity to foster continuous learning, not merely in the resource and development department, but throughout the organization. Their work is a reminder that all of us at Regent College, for example, need to be attentive to the changing environment in which we do our work and the changing character of the kinds of students who matriculate with us. We need to bear in mind that the changing character of the church as well as of the economy is the context in which our students will live and work when they complete their studies. And while we may have experts who help us describe and interpret these changes, none can choose a posture of passivity. As it is ably stated in the standards of the [ATS Commission on Accrediting], "The collaborative nature of governance provides for institutional learning and self-correction. . . ."<sup>8</sup> At Regent College, for example, we are learning together what it means that the majority of our students enroll in our two-year master's program rather than being content with our one-year diploma; that the majority of our students are no longer taking a break from their career for eight months of theological study but rather coming for two years and viewing this as a time of vocational discernment; and that all of our students, not only those enrolled in MDiv, must come to terms with the changing character of the church and its mission.

Good learning means that we are able to examine the changes in the environment without always feeling threatened or defensive. It means that we accept the wisdom of those who have been with the institution a long time—the wisdom of those who have been with the institution through changes, perhaps many changes, and observed its capacities to respond and adapt well (or not so well). But it also means that we recognize the distinctive contribution of those who are newer to the community: we must not so limit credibility in decision-making that newcomers are marginalized because they "do not know how we do things around here." The reality is that in many cases it is new faculty members and board members who may be best positioned to suggest ways in which the school's vocation can be most effectively sustained and fulfilled.

### *The meaning of shared governance:*

#### *Mutual respect, deference, and accountability*

Shared governance requires mutual respect and mutual submission out of a fundamental acceptance of the distinctive roles within the governance process. It means that trustees necessarily appreciate that their role is that of



support and encouragement of their most valuable and significant resource: the faculty. It is a contradiction in terms for a board to develop an adversarial relationship with the faculty; their very reason for being is to support the mission of the school by assuring the necessary fiscal and infrastructural system that assures that the faculty can do their work. Conversely, there is probably nothing more insidious to the well-being of a theological school than adversarial posture by board members towards members of the faculty.

Yet just as surely, faculty are highly dependent on the expertise of the trustees. And though it is often the case that the culture of the board is that of the corporate world, so seemingly different from the academic culture of the faculty, it is nevertheless imperative that faculty view the board as their partners, not their adversaries. The same could be said of administrators—presidents, deans, and others who provide administrative support and leadership for both trustees and faculty. They play a necessary and critical role in the capacity of the school to be effective in response to change. Indeed, both trustees and faculty depend heavily on those in administrative roles who as often as not are those who profile and anticipate the environmental changes that call both the trustees and the faculty to a creative and courageous response.

Mutual respect requires us to rely on one another, allowing the other to play his or her rightful role within the institution, out of a deeply held conviction that no one person can be all things to the school. This also includes a gracious acknowledgment that we are accountable to one another for our work—faculty to deans and deans to faculty. And if we yield to one another, it means that we acknowledge the legitimate authority of the other, authority that is integral to the role of the other in the school. The trustees, for example, have real authority, and they are only responsible in the exercise of their roles if they exercise that authority. And nothing is gained by faculty members who either resent the fact that the board has such authority or resist it. It is a necessary element in the life of a school. But there is also a distinctive sense in which the board recognizes the necessary and inevitable authority of the faculty. While their authority is less hierarchical, it is no less real, and a board that denies the reality of this authority and power fails to understand the power inherent in presence. The faculty are necessarily at the center of the life and work of the college; they embody its mission and values week by week in the classroom and the places where the common life of the school is sustained and practiced.

To stress the need for shared governance, then, is not to suggest that all share equally in every aspect of governance. I might question, for example, a practice of equal representation from both the faculty and the student body on a key committee if that committee is one in which the faculty should have a privileged voice. The common concern that “everyone would have a say” has the unfortunate effect of minimizing the voice or contribution of those who should have the most influence in a particular decision. Shared governance means that we acknowledge the need of many to speak to a matter while reserving the right of some to make a decision when that decision is inherent in their role or responsibility in the school. In other words, in affirming the place of shared governance, we are highlighting not only a participation in decision



making; we are also affirming a distribution of tasks and responsibilities, a distribution essential to the well-being of the school.

This acknowledgment of the rightful place and even authority of the other, and thus the need for mutual accountability, is required for another reason as well. James Fowler has aptly noted that:

There is likely no area of potential self-knowledge where we are more subject to self-deception and more tempted to resort to self-serving rationalizations than in accounting for our efforts to influence and determine the social collectivities of which we are a part and the lives of those involved in them.<sup>9</sup>

Accepting a model of shared governance means that we graciously work within structures where our own “self-serving rationalizations” can be challenged.

Finally, mutual respect and accountability also imply a fundamental hospitality, a *hospitality* in the process of decision making that is reflected in empathic listening, attentiveness to the legitimate concerns of each one who is affected by the decisions and actions of the collective.

***Shared governance means we accept the reality of conflict***

As soon as we accept the place of divergent voices and perspectives, we assume that conflict will be part of the decision-making process and part of what it means to govern together. Conflict is an inherent part of a lively community and a necessary source of strength to a vital organization. While we will hopefully have a high level of congruence when it comes to identifying the defining vision, charisma, or vocation of our particular theological school, we will never likely agree on the way in which that vision is implemented. In their superb study of the nature of effective leadership, Michael Jenkins and Deborah Bradshaw Jenkins argue that:

Poor leadership attempts to homogenize . . . various and divergent voices into a single voice. Good leadership cultivates [a] discordant plurality for the sake of the good of the society. . . . a society enjoying creative conflict will enjoy vitality, will encourage the vigorous participation in its life of diverse voices, and will be the stronger for it.<sup>10</sup>

Conflict can, of course, be destructive; some schools can become so conflicted one wonders if there is any possibility of resolution and health with the current players. The institutional pathologies have become so deep-seated that only through extensive and expert help will some level of harmony be found. But we cannot, regardless of previous experience, so fear conflict that we shrink from disagreements or subtly or implicitly shut down discordant voices. Conflict and disagreement is an essential element in shared governance.

This being the case, we do not need to hope for the elimination of conflict. Robert Kegan suggests that a postmodern view of organizations calls us to not merely tolerate the reality of conflict, but actually view disputants as parts,

necessary parts, of a whole.<sup>11</sup> Rather than viewing the other with whom I differ as an enemy, why not view the other as enabling us all to be complete and whole? The reality of conflict is a reminder that our lives, our work, and the issues we face are anything but simple. And we will not appreciate their complexity unless we have diverse opinions and perspectives on the table.

But it should be stressed: conflict can be insidious. And we will consequently only be able to thrive in a model of shared governance if we sustain strong interpersonal skills and capabilities.

### ***Shared governance means effective communication***

A model of shared governance means that information is not used as a means of control or power. While everyone in a learning community recognizes the need for privacy and confidentiality in matters particular to individuals—whether it is the grade on an assignment or the details that are part of a faculty review and evaluation for performance—the community is served best when it is well informed. As many have noted, there is no such thing as *overcommunication*.

An essential element of effective communication is good conversation. Good conversation means, among other things, the leisured give and take of empathic listening and honest speech, which in turn form the context for effective communal discernment. It is the conversation that happens before, after, and around the formal business of the faculty and the board, the conversation of the board or faculty when they are on retreat, or the conversation that happens in the common room when there is no formal agenda. This is not the conversation of complaint. Rather, it is the honest conversation about the joys and sorrow of our work, the dreams and aspirations we have for our work, and the shared wisdom of learning to live with grace in the midst of it all. This conversation then becomes the essential backdrop for the formal actions taken in a business meeting, the actions that necessarily shape the contours of the expression of our collective vocation.

I often feel that one of my primary responsibilities as a dean is merely that of fostering good conversation—making sure that the faculty have the time and a plentiful supply of good coffee to be able to step back from the harried pace that so easily besets the academy to talk about their work, their goals and aspirations, the challenges they are facing, and what it is going to take for us to be effective together. In this I recognize that presidents and deans have the capacity either to foster an environment of good conversation and communication or to subtly but essentially “shut it down.”

### ***Shared governance calls for trust***

Shared governance presumes a posture of trust, a trust that is ultimately nothing more than a resolve to let others make decisions that affect the contours of our common lives. A model of shared governance does not imply that all decisions are made by a committee of the whole; it does not mean that everyone does everything. It rather calls us to accept the legitimate decision-making role of the *other* and then trust the other to act in our best interests and, ultimately, in the best interests of the whole. It means that we accept that oth-

ers will make choices and decisions that affect the well-being of the institution as a whole; it means that we accept the principle of *delegated* authority.

This posture of trust seems particularly difficult for some in Western institutions and organizations. Robert Bellah has made the observation that:

Americans often think of individuals pitted against institutions. It is hard for us to think of institutions as affording the necessary context within which we become individuals; of institutions as not just restraining but enabling us; of institutions not as an arena of hostility within which our character is tested but an indispensable source from which character is formed.<sup>12</sup>

And this deeply felt ambivalence about institutions in general is often translated into a conscious or unconscious distrust of institutions in general and of institutional administrators in particular. In some cases people have good reason to be ambivalent about the exercise of authority and power; many faculty have seen trustees and administrators abuse authority; trustees have experienced the disappointment of having a senior administrator not provide them with all the information they need when called upon to govern well. And the consequence is that people are hesitant to trust.

However understandable, the lack of trust undercuts the capacity of the community to govern well together, to be confident in each other as we serve one another and as we serve on behalf of one another. The irony is that a spirit of mistrust actually fosters a hierarchical climate in which distrust can only fester. The only alternative is a model of shared governance wherein we *choose* to trust the other—where faculty choose to trust the governing board and where subcommittees of the board and the faculty are able to function without fear that their every move is viewed as suspect, and where administrators are not assumed to have personal agendas. However, this is only possible if there is space for the leisured conversation described above. Further, everything said here presupposes that we need to *gain* trust, build trust, and keep trust; and that when trust is broken it may not be easily restored. It may take considerable time. However, building trust is essential to the well-being of the collective, a critical element in shared governance.

### ***Shared governance calls for a fundamental posture of service***

Finally, shared governance assumes that we are servants of one another and, ultimately, of our common vocation. Administrators often speak of the calling to serve, perhaps because presidents and deans are in positions in which authority and power can be abused. Regularly, presidents and deans need to stand back and ask the question so ably posed by Jinkins and Jinkins: “How would I behave as a leader in this organization if the organization’s purpose had a higher claim on me than my own comfort and security?”<sup>13</sup> But while it is perhaps doubly imperative that administrators ask this question, surely the posture of service should not be theirs alone. If we are going to fulfill our common vocation, we must choose a posture of self-giving generous service in

which personal agendas are secondary to the fundamental commitment to the goals of the collective. It means that we do not enter into a committee meeting with the assumption that as one individual we happen to know what is the best alternative or outcome of our deliberations. Rather, we acknowledge that the outcome will be the fruit of a group process of deliberation and discernment, and we enter into the process without preconceived notions of what the outcome will be. It means that we come to a committee meeting with our own convictions and perspectives, but that our posture is one of attending to the other, of listening so that one knows the mind of the collective and so that one contributes in one's speaking to an outcome that is only possible through the deliberation, an outcome that no one could anticipate because it arose out of the collective, and not merely in the accumulation of majority votes. It means, quite simply, that we choose to give priority to the collective vocation and consistently come back to the resolution that our work, our teaching, our research, and our driving concerns are all understood and incorporated within the vocation that we embrace *together*.

### **Personal responsibility and differentiation**

I am making the case that if we are effective within organizations, it is because we have the capacity to discern, together, our collective vocation and that we have the capacity to work with a model of shared governance. A third commitment is equally essential. If there is a strong interplay between the vocation of the individual and that of the collective, we must sustain the capacity for both engagement *and* personal autonomy.

#### ***Taking personal responsibility***

We must take personal responsibility for our lives, our work, and our vocations as theological teachers. We cannot allow ourselves to be victimized by the inevitable changes that are coming to higher education or by the equally inevitable wrongs that will be committed against us by the institutions in which we serve. It means that we never so lose ourselves within the collective that we are alienated or marginalized from our own vocations.

We will only be able, in the end, to respond well to the schools in which we teach if we assume personal responsibility for our own lives and work. Our lives and our work are our own; they do not belong to these organizations, and we must sustain a critical distinction between our own identity and vocations and those of the schools in which we teach. This does not mean that we are independent contractors. But it does mean that we maintain a fundamental detachment. Our vocation is never synonymous with that of the organization(s) where we are employed. They are, rather, both housed within the theological school, and they are exercised in partnership with the theological school and with one another.

Taking personal responsibility also means that we are attentive to those elements within the collective that have the capacity to undermine our individual vocations. For example, every school has organizational or cultural pathologies. Some can be held at bay and kept from poisoning the well; but

some are capable of crippling the school and the individuals who work there. I have found it helpful to be sensitive to the prevailing emotion within the school. I once worked in a situation where the dominant energizing (actually, it was enervating) emotion was anger, and I could not help but conclude that if a person was susceptible to anger, this school would be a highly destructive place to be. But more to the point, I concluded that while it is possible to serve without anger in such a place, it was possible only if one was both conscious of the climate within which one worked and if one consciously chose to sustain a fundamental differentiation from that climate.

### *People who are differentiated*

Personal responsibility, then, is only possible if we are differentiated. Success in the collective vocation requires enculturation and assimilation to the ways and values and vision of the collective. But it also requires that we sustain a healthy autonomy. As a senior dean approaching retirement stressed in his counsel to new, younger deans, “Never let them reduce you to your role as dean.” He urged his hearers to not take things personally when they are directed to the dean in the role of dean. To be effective, he stressed, it is imperative to distinguish yourself from the role and constantly strive to be authentic in the role.

The same could be said of trustees and faculty members: our identity is never solely that of one who fulfills a role in the school; neither is our personal vocation continuous and synonymous with that of the school. We work within the collective, but we do so as individuals whose identity and call find expression both within the collective as well as on its own merits, distinct from the collective.

Only with this kind of differentiation can we give ourselves with generosity to our colleagues and to the collective vocation, in a generous service that is given with discernment, courage, and hope. Only then can we say “No” when the dean asks us to do one more thing(!) and we know that to accept is to take on more than we can do with serenity and inner peace. Only as we are differentiated can we truly let go of the collective whole enough to trust another and not demand that we are in on every decision, and every action. And then, of course, only as we are differentiated can we accept with grace that decisions will be made with which we differ, decisions in which we vote in the minority. Such actions, an inevitable aspect of shared governance, will not crush our spirits or leave us dejected or feeling mistreated. We can accept with grace both the times in which the collective agrees with us and those in which it chooses not to agree with us, quite simply because we have not linked our personal identities and vocations too closely with that of the collective. Differentiation also means that as faculty members we can call for and encourage change; we can stand “outside” of the collective and call each other to rethink the way we do our work, engage the changing environment, fulfill our common vocation, and teach effectively.

Then also, only as we are differentiated, can we let go with grace when it is time to resign or retire. Retirement is essentially a call to “let go” and accept that the school, the collective vocation, continues and is held in trust by others.

***The individual within the collective***

Finally, the call for personal responsibility assumes the reality of communal responsibility. It is essential that we think in terms of the collective vocation and that as faculty and trustees we work together toward a common mission, sustained by a common vision and set of values. But this common identity and commitment never so override the individual that we lose touch, individually, with our own call, our own sense of vocation. Indeed, in many respects the very calling of the trustees is to sustain and maintain an environment in which the vocation of the theological teacher can thrive. They are stewards of an extraordinary resource: the teachers of the Church. And their commitment to the school's mission, viability, and financial well-being can never be so defined that they lose a sense of their stewardship of the vocations of those who are called to teach. The trustees, in this regard, do not merely react to the changing environment but also act as a buffer to those changes, insofar as the changes threaten the elements that are essential to the viability and integrity of good theological education. Further, they can never think of their faculty as commodities to be retained or dispensed with in response to the whims of a "market." The very character of theological education demands that trustees view their role as one of sustaining the very environment that makes good teaching possible, an environment in which a student can be confident of a strong residential faculty who are sufficiently protected from the whims of the environment that they can fulfill their vocations with courage and grace.

Ultimately, though, we are each personally responsible for our lives and our work. Even though we have received an appointment to a job, it is *our* job. We are not owned by the school. We ultimately and finally work for ourselves, "as unto the Lord" (Col. 3:23, KJV), and we are ultimately and finally responsible for our own professional development, our own mental, emotional, and spiritual health, and our own capacity to be effective in our work. But all this is immensely easier when trustees and presidents and deans view their work as enabling faculty to be all that they are called to be.

On the other hand, effective trustees work with faculty to assure that there is an effective response to a changing environment, challenging faculty to think in terms of a changing student body, changes in information technology, and changes in the economy that of necessity affect the contours of theological education and call theological teachers, individually and collectively, to rethink and adapt and adjust and thereby be faithful to their vocation. And the ideal, of course, is that this is all the fruit of good conversation: good conversation that sustains a common awareness of the collective vocation, of what makes for good theological education, and of the discernment that is needed for a courageous, creative response to the changing environment in which we fulfill that vocation.

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ENDNOTES

1. Barbara G. Wheeler, *Tending Talents: The Cultivation of Effective and Productive Theological School Faculties*, Auburn Studies, no. 5 (New York: Auburn Theological Seminary, March 1997), 3.
2. Ibid., 20–21.
3. Ibid., 21.
4. *Bulletin 43* of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, Part 1, specifies standards of accreditation, including Standard 8, Authority and Governance; for this reference, see Standard 8.2.2.
5. ATS Standards of Accreditation, Standard 8 (Introduction).
6. William Barry, “Toward a Theology of Discernment,” *The Way, Supplement: The Place of Discernment* 64 (Spring 1989): 129–140.
7. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); and the sequel, Peter M. Senge et al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1994).
8. ATS Commission on Accrediting Standards of Accreditation, 8.2.3.
9. James Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 109.
10. Michael Jinkins and Deborah Bradshaw Jinkins, *The Character of Leadership: Political Realism and Public Virtue in Nonprofit Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 117.
11. Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 319–326.
12. Robert Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 6.
13. Jinkins and Jinkins, *The Character of Leadership*, 118.





# The Academic Teacher and the Practical Needs of the Clergy

*John Bright (deceased)*  
*Union Theological Seminary*

Editor's Note: Over the past forty-five years that *Theological Education* has been in print, a number of outstanding scholars have written articles from their perspective as theological educators. From time to time we will reprint articles that have particular relevance to issues and trends today. This article comes from *Theological Education* volume one, number one, published in autumn 1964. At that time, John Bright, already recognized as a top Old Testament scholar, had taught for twenty years at Union Theological Seminary. His reflections on the tension between the work of the academic teacher and scholar and those who come to theological schools for training to be pastors remain amazingly relevant. He names many of the questions and tensions in the training of pastoral leaders that are regularly identified today by stakeholders in the academy and the church. Academics whose training is in a narrow specialization must train generalists for the church. Scholars whose expertise and writing may be highly technical and aimed at a relatively small group of academic specialists are also charged to speak and write for pastors and laypersons on a more practical level. Many faculty members today can identify with Bright's description of their role as being in "a bridge position, a mediating position between the forefront of scholarship in our respective fields and this pastor whom we must train—who cannot move on the forefront of scholarship, cannot grapple with scholarly research or even understand its problems, yet who must know something of its fruits if he is rightly to instruct the people who will be entrusted to him."

Bright speaks with insight and humor about the inevitable conflict between students not adequately trained in the humanistic disciplines or even knowledge of the Bible and the professor's task to bring them to an academic level appropriate to leadership in ministry. He notes the multiple demands on the theological educator's time, including responsibilities for teaching and preaching in churches, teaching at denominational gatherings, and serving as consultants for a variety of church endeavors. In 1964 there was more to be done than time in which to do it! And arguably the role of the theological school professor was more clearly defined then than now. Bright also wrestles with the question of the length of the basic ministerial degree program. Three years is not enough, he argues, but can a four-year curriculum be feasible? He concludes with some advice for administrators that could have been written in 2009.

This article also offers a number of unintended insights. After discussion of the question with the TE editorial board and ATS staff, we decided to leave the exclusive language in the article as it is. It is jarring, but instructive to read about theological faculty members and students spoken of exclusively as “he” without a hint that there were a few, at least, women teaching and learning in theological schools at that time. There are also assumptions about the denominational affiliation of schools, the relationship between theological schools and the church, and the ministry to which students were headed that powerfully illustrate dramatic changes that have taken place in the world of theological education in the subsequent decades.

We hope the article will be valuable and enjoyable for readers, both for the insights that continue to be relevant and for the changes it illuminates within our world, the church, and theological education.

The paper that I have been asked to present under the general theme, “The Two Worlds of Our Living,” bears the title, “The Academic Teacher and the Practical Needs of the Clergy.” As it was originally stated to me, it also carried a subtitle, which, I believe, defines more precisely that aspect of the subject to which it is desired that I address myself: “The tension between the intellectual canons of scholarship and the practical concerns of vocational training.”

Now one might complain that, from the point of view of formal logic, that subtitle falls into the fallacy of *petitio principii*. It takes it as assumed that such a tension exists. It does not say: Is there a tension between the canons of scholarship and the practical task of vocational training? or: Is there necessarily such a tension? It simply says: We will just assume that there is a tension—you go ahead and talk about it. And from the point of view of formal logic, that does beg the question. Yet you and I know that it does not beg any question. There is no question to beg! There *is no* question about it: a tension does exist. Essentially, it is a tension between the seminary professor as a student and scholar who has received academic training, and who knows what academic standards are; and the seminary professor as a teacher who must train pastors most of whom are not even potential scholars—perhaps not even good students—who may be incapable of grappling with the problems of scholarship, and who, possibly, have no desire to do so. A tension indeed exists, and it is no begging of the question to assume it.

But to talk about it is another matter. I confess that I do so with a strange mixture of confidence and misgiving. Confidence, because I know my subject! Indeed, I feel that I am by way of being an authority on that subject. I am well acquainted with this tension. I have encountered it existentially, I live in it daily, and have for some twenty years. Moreover, I feel that I have to some degree made my peace with it. So I speak with some confidence. Yet with great diffidence! What can I possibly tell you about this tension that you do not already know? If I am an authority on it, so is practically everyone who has anything to do with theological education. Some of you, I dare say, live in tensions far more gaudy than any I have ever known, and have adjusted to them far better than I have done; you could give me both practical lessons in how to ease the tension, and spiritual lessons in the achievement of peace within it.

Moreover, the subject is a many-sided one, and not one that yields to objective analysis; it can only be approached subjectively. There are no statistics on this tension, no body of objective data to be presented; each of us can discuss it only as he has felt it and experienced it. And since my experience may not at all points agree with yours, I had best begin by indicating the vantage point (or disadvantage point) from which I see this tension. I can only see it from where I sit: in the chair of Old Testament in a denominational seminary. I say "chair," but I have never seen it. Actually, the only seat provided us poor profs is a tall stool, like a bookkeeper's stool, on which we may perch precariously like large birds whenever the bones grow weary. And since these stools are not chained down, they have a way of disappearing, with the result that we have nowhere to sit at all. I suspect the administration of conspiring in this to ensure that at least one person remains awake during lectures. I take that chair on faith—but I fear that someone has demythologized it.

But, as I say, I view the tension as one who teaches Old Testament in a denominational seminary: a medium-sized seminary controlled by four Synods of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., and responsible primarily to those Synods for providing them with pastors. And, although some of our graduates become teachers, or missionaries, or enter other forms of service to the church, the vast majority of them (perhaps 95%) do in fact become pastors. Moreover, although we do have a small graduate department, I speak as one the bulk of whose duties have to do with the training of theological undergraduates (candidates for the BD). And this gives my tensions their peculiar shape. I suspect that if I were on the faculty of a university graduate school, engaged in training candidates for the PhD, most of the tensions I shall mention would not be felt (though I would surely find myself other tensions). I suspect, too, that if I were teaching in a non-church-related seminary, which had no specific responsibility for providing a given church with pastors, some of my tensions would recede or disappear—to be replaced by other sets of tensions. Then, too, the fact that I am a professor of Old Testament in my seminary gives my tensions an unusual shape. Not that being in the Biblical department means that one's tensions are peculiarly Biblical in character, distinct in essence from everybody else's tensions! But in my seminary all BD candidates are required by denominational standards to take both Hebrew and Greek, however little taste they may have for such delights. And this undoubtedly provides me with odd tensions that may not be felt even by many of my colleagues in Old Testament elsewhere (whose students take Hebrew willingly or not at all), while relieving me of some that they may feel (e.g., how to interest good men in electing my courses).

Our tension with our job is a private thing, and no two of us will feel it in exactly the same way. Yet I am confident that the situations we face are sufficiently similar, and the nature of the problems confronting us so essentially the same, that, although, each of us can discuss the tension involved only subjectively, we can communicate with one another. "The tension between the intellectual canons of scholarship and the practical concerns of vocational training" is one that we all know, and know well.

## I

If it is true that we all share the same tension (and I believe that it is), this is so because the tension is one that is rooted in the task to which we are all committed. It roots in the nature of a theological institution and, beyond that, in the nature of the ministry and, I venture to say, in the nature of the Christian faith itself. It also roots in our academic position as professors in faculties of theology or as administrators of theological institutions.

The task of a theological seminary is, of course, conditioned by the nature of the ministry for which its students are being prepared. And the ministry both is, and is not, a learned profession. It is, in that it requires some learning if it is to be discharged effectively, and with honor to religion; it cannot be done in ignorance. It is not, in that learning is by no means the only (I would say, not even the chief) standard of excellence by which effectiveness in the ministry is measured. Many a brilliant man fails in the ministry; many a man of moderate intellectual ability in the truest sense succeeds.

Now I am not a Philistine who scoffs at the value of sound learning. On this point, indeed, I am "an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee." We have had too much anti-intellectualism as it is, and it has done great harm to the quality of theological education. I am prepared to say that by and large, as I have observed it, the better students make the better ministers, the poorer students the poorer. The man who is lazy, disorganized, and scamps his work in seminary, is likely to be equally irresponsible toward his duties in the ministry. But we are naïve, or snobbish, if we do not know that scholarship is not the only standard of excellence. Some mediocre students, who would have flunked had we set standards too high, turn out to be excellent pastors. Some men of no intellectual pretensions can do a work up at the forks of the creek, or in mill village, that a PhD would disdain to do—or perhaps with the best of will could not do. We must uphold standards, we must demand good work; but what is our obligation to these "average" men? (And note: I do not refer to the incurable flunkee, the bum, but to the average man of average ability, of whom too much cannot be expected by way of scholarship).

To say that the ministry both is and is not a learned profession is not a strange thing, for it but reflects something of the nature of the Christian faith itself. On the one hand, the Christian faith is a gospel, a commitment; it is something to be received, believed, lived, and proclaimed. It does not require of him who accepts it any particular learning—or even great intelligence. Indeed, simple folk with no pretension to learning whatever may follow their Lord, witness to the truth of the gospel in word and deed, and stand higher in the kingdom than doctors of the law. But, on the other hand, the Christian faith is also a historical phenomenon. That is to say, it is a religion that has had a history, has certain traditions, and that has in the course of history formulated its faith in a variety of ways. Moreover, it bases its faith in one way or another on certain historical documents (the Bible). It therefore cannot be received, believed, lived, and proclaimed *intelligently* without knowledge.

But all this means that a theological seminary is inevitably in an ambiguous position academically. It is an academic institution and, as such, must

maintain academic standards, or lose its self-respect and the respect of others (to say nothing of its standing in the AATS). It is also a school of vocational training set up to impart certain practical skills (and graces) as well as academic knowledge, and obliged to deal with students who may not meet the strictest academic standards, yet whose promise in their calling cannot be judged solely by their academic excellence. To put it in another way, the seminary is a graduate school in the sense that all its students (at least, all the BD candidates) are college graduates with the BA degree or its equivalent. It is not a graduate school, in that it accepts many men who could not get into a reputable graduate program, and perhaps would have no desire to do so. That is to say, the seminary is indeed a graduate school of theology, and as such must have academic standards; yet it cannot be run precisely as a graduate school would be. Were we to set before our students proper graduate programs, and require of them standards suitable to candidates for the MA or the PhD, I shudder to think of the thinning of the ranks that would ensue. I also shudder to think of the howl we should hear from the church! Where are the pastors we need? We sent you the men; you are there to train them, not break them!

The tension that we feel thus has its roots in our very position as teachers in institutions engaged in preparing men for the ministry. By virtue of our jobs we stand in a bridge position, a mediating position between the forefront of scholarship in our respective fields and this pastor whom we must train—who cannot move on the forefront of scholarship, cannot grapple with scholarly research or even understand its problems, yet who must know something of its fruits if he is rightly to instruct the people who will be entrusted to him. Now the seminary professor may himself be one who moves near the forefront of scholarship, who perhaps contributes to research in his field. He may, on the other hand, be a gifted preacher, a genial teacher capable of communicating the fruits of theological scholarship to the humblest of the laity. In rare instances he may even be both. But his position *qua* seminary professor is a bridge position. He reaches from that high shelf of scholarship, to which is students cannot reach, and hands down to them something of what he finds there, hoping that they, in turn, will receive from him sound instruction and mediate its fruits to their people.

But that sets up his tension. To live in a bridge position is to live between two poles. The seminary teacher finds his time and energies in continual oscillation between the world of scholarship in which he has been trained, and in which he is perhaps at home, and the practical needs of the church and the ministry, with which he must be concerned, and to which his scholarship is responsible. Perhaps you will object: But are not all teachers similarly in a bridge position? Of course they are. Our troubles are not unique; other teachers feel the tension too. Yet I dare say that there is no group of teachers that feels it more sharply than we. Our students are such that we cannot as a group bring them across the bridge into the world of scholarship, make scholars of them, nor would it be to their best interests were we to try. Yet we cannot consent just to cross over to their side, burn the bridge behind us, and devote ourselves thereafter to teaching them the minimal elementary facts and the requisite practical skills—lest we soon lose our competence to teach them anything, and thereby betray both ourselves and them. The tension is built into our position as teachers of preachers, and it is inevitable that we should feel it.

## II

But let us examine that tension more narrowly as to its nature. For it is apparent that it is no simple tension, but a whole interlocking complex of tensions, a regular wiregrass of a tension. It is, on the one hand, a tension within our own lives, one that revolves about the disposal of our time and talents. It is, on the other hand, a tension between ourselves and our students, between our own scholarly interests and standards and the needs of the students, and their level of knowledge. To put it another way, it is a tension of quantity: that is, a fight for time to do all that is asked of us and the fight for time to teach the students what we feel they must know within the limits of the hours allotted to us. It is also a tension of quality, the pull between the ideally desirable and the practically possible. It is the tension of doing too much badly; it is the tension between the standards we want to require and the standards that in practice we can require.

Let us look at that tension from the two poles between which essentially it lies: the professor and the student. Here is your typical seminary professor (if there is such a person)—who is he? Ideally he is a man of some intellectual ability who is intellectually awake. He has had good training in his field (the PhD or equivalent), and he keeps abreast of his field. He is, moreover, concerned for the well-being of the Church and the education of its ministry, and convinced of the importance of his field to that end; if he were not, he wouldn't be teaching it, or should not be. But because he is convinced of the importance of his field, he feels obliged to insist that his students gain some mastery of it. And, because he himself has scholarly standards, he feels equally obliged to demand of them a standard of work at least conformable to his own.

And here is the student. Well, as we all know, there *is* no typical student. Some are excellent—men of great native ability who would make their mark in any profession they might choose. These are capable of receiving the best the teacher can give, and they deserve the best; and the best can be asked of them. To teach them is a joy. Some are hopelessly bad; they seem able (or willing) to learn nothing well. These are the flunkees; like the poor, they are with us always. We accept the fact of their existence, we are concerned for them as persons, but academically nothing can be done for them: they cannot meet even minimal standards. Then there is the ruck—and there's the rub. This is the average student, the so-so, the gentleman's pass, the student neither good nor bad. Perhaps he is of modest ability, and is doing as well as he can; perhaps he has never been awakened. His standards tend to be those of the college undergraduate; he wants to be a minister, and tends to view his studies as hurdles to be negotiated on the way to that goal. He has no real taste for study, but he will not let himself fail at his studies; he is satisfied to do tolerably well. The work he submits is not good enough to thrill me, or bad enough to anger or amuse me; frankly, it bores me. Yet this man, numerically, is far the greater part of my job; I must teach him.

Students differ in other ways, too. Some have had courses in religion (perhaps even a major in religion) in a good college or university, and are so far advanced that they find elementary instruction boring. Some have no prior



knowledge of Bible and theology at all. Some are theologically sophisticated, and even take delight in questioning inherited beliefs. Some are theologically naïve, even to the point of rigidity, and are quick to be hurt when inherited beliefs are questioned—perhaps even ready to find the professor guilty of heresy. Many are theologically illiterate, and seem to have no curiosity in the matter, one way or the other. And all these students—good, bad and indifferent, sophisticated, naïve—will sit before the professor in the same class. How shall he proceed with them?

But, if my experience is any criterion, there is one point at which students tend to be distressingly similar: almost *all* of them exhibit a woeful ignorance of the fundamentals (in my case, a simple knowledge of Bible content). The typical student has come from a Christian home, has attended the church school from childhood, has come through the communicants' class, perhaps has been active in youth work and attended youth conferences. Quite likely, he has gone to a denominational college where Bible is required, and perhaps has even taken a major in religion. Yet he doesn't know the simplest facts of biblical history and content. It is all too common to find a student who is glib in the latest theological fashions—who can discourse on *Heilsgeschichte*, *Formgeschichte* and *Entmythologisierung*, on Bultmann and Tillich—but who can't tell you with any precision who King David was, or what Isaiah or Jeremiah had to say. The whole structure of theological education (at least in Biblical studies) has sunk a story into the mud of ignorance for want of a foundation. The professor can presuppose almost nothing upon which to build.

Obviously *this* teacher and *this* student cannot collide without tension. The situation is loaded with tension; the teacher who does not feel it either had a rare degree of grace—or is positively bovine. How shall he deal with this great variety of abilities, and of sophistication, that confronts him in every class? How shall he deal with this almost universal ignorance of the fundamentals, and still impart some kind of a theological education, within the limits of the few hours allotted him? Shall he drill the students in the fundamentals, and run the risk of having no time left for those matters that are his proper concern? Shall he by-pass the fundamentals, and leave the students without the firm foundation upon which at least the best of them may be expected to build? I assure you, it is a dilemma.

The teacher also faces tension in the disposal of his own life. It is a tension of quantity—a perpetual fight for time. The seminary professor wears more hats than any man that I know. He is a teacher with a class load (often heavy) who probably devotes a good deal of time to his students individually, who serves on faculty committees and has the usual round of academic duties—all of which is a full-time job. He has to keep up with his field, and that is another full-time job. There is no end to the literature that must be read; it is literally impossible to keep up with it all. Yet if he does not keep up he is on the way to becoming a fossil, and he knows it. Perhaps he is a scholar who has the ability and the desire to contribute to the literature in his field. His institution is probably pleased when he does so—may even expect it of him. If he does not, he is in tension with himself. Yet his primary job does not require it, and the pressure of time may all but forbid it. Even if he does not contribute to schol-

arly literature, his church will probably look to him to provide literature for practical instruction—will expect him to be a teacher of the church through church school literature, study guides for the laity, and the like. Moreover, he is, or should be, a churchman, in some way actively identified with the life of his church. He will be called on—and how! If only because he is known to be free on Sundays and in the summers, he will be asked to supply pulpits, teach leadership groups, address conferences—etc., etc. and etc. Refuse altogether to do such things? He does not want to. And if he does—well, his institution will lose good will, and neither he nor the administration wants that! And, the better he does such things, the more he will be asked to do.

So, the tension of quantity. No teacher on earth can do all of these things, and do them well. The teacher could easily devote his entire life to any one of these aspects of his job. But what shall he do? Simply drop some of them? But in that event, which? Or must he go through life with a bad conscience, knowing that he is doing everything that is expected of him—badly?

So we see that the tension of quantity has already blended into the tension of quality. All of us feel this tension both in the distribution of our own time, and in the conduct of our classes. For example, I know that I ought to take time to be a better teacher. In virtually every course that I teach my lecture notes need radical revision. I am ashamed of how out-of-date some of them have gotten; what I see written before me corresponds little to what I know—and actually say. I know, too, that I should take more time to cultivate the students, to get to know them, to be a pastor to them, especially to encourage those who show interest and promise in their work with me. But if I do this, what will become of the projects to which I am committed? Where will I find time to read in my field? In short, if I took the time to be the teacher I ought to be, and want to be, I should sacrifice other aspects of my job equally as important. So I compromise; I patch up my lecture notes here and there, confer with students, read in my field, work at my desk, each as I can find the time—and am satisfied with nothing that I do.

Then, too, the better scholar I become, the more competent in my field, the greater is the tension between my own level of knowledge and that of my classes. You see, the teacher who works at his job will find inevitably that each year he knows more and more—while the class level remains exactly the same. And this both creates problems of communication, and sets up tensions. How much of his own technical knowledge can the teacher—ought the teacher—try to communicate to the students? To what degree may he expect them to measure up to his own standards of scholarship? Obviously, he cannot be content with *no* standards; yet to expect too much is unrealistic. What is the minimum—of Greek and Hebrew; Biblical history, criticism, and exegesis; Biblical theology; or church history, or current theological thinking, etc.—that the professor must insist that each student master? Or, how bad may a student be before you just have to flunk him?

Or this: in a class that contains students ranging from superior to poor, to whom shall I beam my teaching? Shall I speak to the best students, stimulate them to their best efforts—and leave the rest of the class to fall behind in confusion? Shall I address the great “undistributed middle”—and leave the good

students to flounder in boredom? Or, shall I section the class according to ability—and run the risk of killing myself with an overload?

Or this: how shall I deal with the student who is theologically naïve, who, I sense, is in a perpetual state of shock (say) at a historico-critical approach to the Bible, however reverently presented? Of course, I cannot in honesty pretend to beliefs I do not hold, or conceal from the class problems and issues just to spare the feelings of a few. At the same time, I am a teacher! I am there to lead men, not destroy them. How shall I ease men tactfully into problems, loosen their minds for the consideration of new viewpoints, without utterly boring men who have already made the transition? In other words, do the needs of the few ever take precedence over the needs of the many, and to what degree is this the case?

### III

Perhaps the nature of our tension between scholarly standards and practical training would be made clearer if I were to illustrate it by one or two examples drawn from my own work as a teacher.

As I have said, all BD candidates at our seminary are required to take both Biblical languages, Hebrew as well as Greek. I will not debate the wisdom of this requirement except to say that, in spite of the fact that it adds to my tensions (I have to deal with mediocre, and often unwilling, students who would never have *elected* Hebrew), I approve of it. I am quite aware that only a small proportion of the students ever gain a real knowledge of the language and that, of these, only a few will keep it up through life. Most of them are “slow but sure”: slow to learn, but sure to forget! But their noses have been rubbed in it! They have been given a first-hand introduction to the tools and methods of exegesis and have, I hope, gained some sense of its importance. I trust that this will carry over into their preaching, if only by giving them a sense of responsibility to the text they expound, and perhaps the ability to make use of the best commentaries available. This will not prevent them from committing exegetical sin, I know. But my hope is that they will be unable to enjoy it!

But that is neither here nor there. My point is that I believe in the importance of the Biblical languages to the minister—or I wouldn’t be teaching them. And I know that before the student can use the languages as exegetical tools he must have some grounding in the fundamentals of grammar and syntax, and some ability to read. But here one is frustrated both by time and by the students themselves. By the students obviously. The professor knows, or should know, that his students are not candidates for the PhD in Semitic studies, but candidates for the ministry. Many of them have no taste for languages in general and are taking Hebrew (in my situation) simply because they must. Not only does this mean, as it should, that instruction must be very simple and practical in its orientation, aimed at an elementary reading knowledge of Hebrew and the ability to use it as a practical tool of exegesis, it also puts an enormous pressure on standards. How much may one in fairness expect of these men? When one knows that most students will ultimately forget their Hebrew, is it right to cut off from the BD degree men who never really learned it, or learned it poorly?

I assure you that standards get bent out of shape! Many poor students pass; those who flunk are very, very, very poor indeed.

And limitations of time add to the tension. We have only three semesters of required work in Hebrew, and in these the student must be given the elements of grammar, some ability to read the language, and an introduction to the principles and methods of exegesis. And it can't be done according to standards! Ground them thoroughly in the fundamentals of grammar, drill them until all who can be taught to read do so with some fluency, and no time is left for the actual use of the language as an exegetical tool—and many a student wonders why he has sweated so to learn a subject the practical use of which has never been made clear to him. But hurry them through the grammar, give them a few elementary exercises in reading in order to save time for the actual exegesis of texts—and even those who have the ability to master the language do not gain a sufficient grasp of it ever really to use it as a tool. One sails ever between the Scylla of a doctrinaire and impractical thoroughness, and the Charybdis of superficiality. And the tension is fearful.

This struggle of academic standards against the pressure of time and the practical realities of the situation carries through all of one's exegetical courses. Shall I stress method, reading carefully with the class a very few selected passages, dealing with all matters of textual criticism, form and historical setting, and doing with them a thorough exegesis of the text designed to bring out its precise meaning? Then I run the risk that my students will never see anything whole; gazing at every tree, and indeed the bark on every tree, they emerge quite unaware of the grandeur of the forest they have been exploring. But if, determined that they *shall* see the book we are reading whole, I lecture through it before them, exegeting its salient passages, expounding its message and theology—well, the students will probably be glad to let me; it is pleasanter so. But they will not have *learned* exegesis, because I did it all for them. So one compromises and compromises—and is never happy.

And what about the contemporary relevance of the text? What about the problems of hermeneutics—of how to preach from the Old Testament? Whose job is hermeneutics, anyhow? (I pose that as a burning question for the curriculum committee). Of course, I could say: It's not my job to teach homiletics. My job is exegesis—leave preaching to the homiletics department! And that is correct: I can't teach homiletics—I simply haven't the time. (Perhaps some of my colleagues would mutter: That's not all you haven't got!) Yet this student of mine is going to be a preacher. If the contemporary relevance of the Old Testament text, and its proper use in the Christian pulpit, is not made clear to him, then all that I teach him will seem to him a howling irrelevancy; he will either never preach from the Old Testament, or will misuse it egregiously. And the homiletics department is not likely to help in this. It may be that the homiletics professors are in no position to work with the Hebrew text; it may be that matters of voice, delivery, and sermon construction crowd so heavily on their time that they have none left over. Or perhaps they tell themselves (I think, most wrongly) that hermeneutics is none of their business, but is the proper possession of the Biblical department. In any event, everybody's business becomes nobody's business, with the result that a veritable chasm yawns

between exegesis and sermon, study and pulpit. Who is going to bridge this gap?—for, by heavens, it *must* be bridged. And that adds to my tension. Shall I stick to exegesis and leave the student to figure out the living significance of the text for himself—and take the risk that he will not? Or shall I turn aside to discuss hermeneutics—even throw in little homiletical suggestions—and take so much time at it that the solid exegetical foundation upon which all homiletics worthy of the name must rest is never laid? Again, it is tension between the academic and the practical. And again, I compromise—and am not happy.

As a final illustration, my courses in Old Testament Introduction. All seminaries have such courses (whatever they call them and however they conduct them), and we do too. And here again I feel the tension. I feel absolutely helpless to convey to the students the best that I am capable of, and the minimum that they need. I am limited on every side: by the hours allotted me; by the mass of material to be mastered; by the average student's abysmal ignorance of Biblical content, which makes the critical issues involved almost unintelligible to him; and by the fact that the students are not all on the same level of ability and sophistication. To nurse the weak is to bore the strong; to nurture the strong is to bumfozzle the weak. I feel frustrated by my inability to communicate to the students what I know, and think they should know. Shall I try to cover everything, running through the various books in rapid survey, saying a bit about each? Perhaps that's what they need. I dare say they would make better grades on examination if I did so (so many students seem absolutely unable to learn anything the professor didn't "cover" in class). But it is so superficial! Shall I present to the class "studies in depth"—some particular problem of history, or critical issue, or facet of theology upon which I am working or have worked? They might then gain an impression of scholarly method and scholarly standards; and the creative minds among them would be stimulated. But is this what that average student most needs? I confess that I do not know. So, like most of us, I suppose, I compromise between the two. But one does not escape tension by compromise.

#### IV

But enough of my tensions! I fear that I have been like those preachers who analyze and deplore the *status quo* (which is, I take it, a euphemism for the mess we're in) at such length that they have no time left for constructive proclamation. You will be saying: Yes, Yes! We know all about the tension. Now tell us how to resolve it. Well, if these be your thoughts, I fear I shall disappoint you. For my main point is precisely that the tension cannot be resolved—it has to be lived with. The tension between the professor's standards, his scholarly integrity and his aspirations, and the demands laid upon him both by the pressure of time and the practical needs of his students, is built into his job. It is built into the nature of theological education, it is inherent in the nature of the ministry and the Christian faith itself. It will, therefore, always continue. It cannot be escaped; one must just live with it. The man who cannot live with it probably ought not to be a seminary professor.



There is really no way out. The tension cannot be resolved by adhering to standards in defiance of practical realities, or by yielding to realities to the point of abandoning both standards and integrity. If I follow either of these courses, I may indeed after a fashion relieve my tensions; but the end of it will be failure at my job, and the very fact of failure will create new and greater tensions. Suppose I say: I shall demand of my students the same standards that I demand of myself, and I shall ruthlessly flunk every student who does not measure up. I shall teach at the level of my own development and interests, and let him follow me who can—and the devil take the hindmost! I might indeed salve my little scholarly conscience. I might, moreover, benefit those few exceptional students who expect to go on to graduate studies. But the majority would have gotten little or nothing from me. And I would not have fitted them for their practical task. After all, I was there to *teach* them—and I did not teach them.

But suppose I say: Let's roll with it! These fellows are just going to be preachers. They like the practical, the inspirational—sermons even. So I will make it all very practical, very popular—and I will pass everybody. Well, doubtless I would be popular, a favorite of the students—and my electives would be crowded! But I would have betrayed my integrity. I would have betrayed my best students too; they had the right to expect solid instruction—and I didn't give it! I once knew a minister who was very bitter toward the seminary he had attended. He was an able man; he had graduated with honors, been given a fellowship for graduate study, and had entered the graduate department of a certain well-known institution. Then he learned how little his honors meant. He saw that he had not been well prepared, had not been trained theologically. He found himself far behind his fellow students—and he was bitter. No, we can neither let go our scholarly standards nor forget our practical task; we have to live in balance, in compromise, between the two. But to live in compromise is to live in tension.

Just as little can we resolve our private tensions between our scholarly aspirations and the multifarious demands laid on our time. Of course, I can just resolve to be a scholar, spend all my time in my study, and let students and classes go hang! Perhaps I would produce something of worth; no doubt I would be respected far and wide and would reflect credit on my school. But I would, quite simply, have failed at the primary job I was called to do. Or I could become the genial teacher, and the pastor and pal to the students, and let my studies drop (after all, I am far enough ahead of the students as it is). No doubt I would be much beloved, sought out by my students, in my home, in my study, on the campus. And I would no doubt do good. But I would earn my own contempt, and the contempt of the better students—who would sooner or later see through me. In a word: I can resolve my tension neither by twisting my job to suit my standards and desires, nor by passively yielding myself to the claims laid upon me. The word is tension, tension—and again I say, tension.

Let it be said, too, that I can't escape the tension by running away from it. I may tell myself that the grass is greener over there; but if "over there" is another theological school, it is *not* greener. To swap jobs to escape tension is probably to swap one set of tensions for another. Besides, wherever I go, myself

goes too—dragging his tensions behind him. Of course I do not imply that a man ought never move to escape tensions: often he must. There are situations that are fraught with intolerable and unnecessary tensions which can only be escaped by leaving: perhaps an unsympathetic administration that overloads its faculty beyond reason, perhaps unfairness or niggardly remuneration, perhaps a doctrinal climate that has become uncongenial. Or perhaps the man is one who is unfitted by temperament to be a teacher, or who feels a genuine vocation to some other line of work. I do not speak of these. I speak simply of the man fitted to be a teacher, well treated where he is and subjected to no cruel and unusual hardships, who tells himself that he will escape the tension between his scholarly standards and aspirations and his practical task by transferring to another theological faculty. I don't think he will. He may find less tension, he may find more; but he will never completely escape it. It is built into his job wherever he goes.

Wherever professional training of men for the ministry is carried on there is bound to be tension, the pull and tug between academic standards and practical realities. After all, a university graduate school admits only exceptional college graduates, and can demand of them the highest standards; it has no obligation to train them if they fail to meet such standards. But a denominational seminary, at least, normally accepts any who have a degree from an accredited college, regardless of the fact that most such men could never get into a reputable graduate school. It would, therefore, be both unrealistic and grossly unfair to demand that these men measure up to "graduate" standards of work, and to flunk them out when they fail to do so. The seminary has the obligation to take these men and to train them as best it can for the ministry of the church. A tension between the standards it would like to demand, and the standards it can actually demand of *these men* is, accordingly, built into the situation.

The theological professor will, therefore, accept this as inevitable, and will strike the best bargain with it that he can. That is to say, he will live in a precarious balance between the academic and the practical side of his job. He will of course demand standards of his students—the highest standards he *can* demand. He will insist upon honest work; he will never praise or condone sloppy work. Equally, he will take the trouble to praise and to criticize good work, and will encourage every student who is doing his level best. But he will remember whom he is teaching and what he is training them for. He will rigidly maintain his own standards of academic integrity, and will exhibit that integrity as he addresses his class. But he will not shrink from presenting his subject in a practical way, suited to the needs of the men he is teaching. And he will not break his heart that so few of them show signs of academic excellence; he will teach them what they can learn. And he will never escape tension. What is that realistic standard which, for the honor of religion, he must ask every student to meet? What is that minimum permissible level below which he must simply enter "Failure"? How shall he bring as many as possible up to that minimum, and still spur his best students to their maximum efforts? He is never sure—and he is never happy.



V

But to say that tension is unavoidable is not to say that there are not ways of easing it. Every teacher has sought such ways, and perhaps found some. For example, he may offer advanced seminars to which only the better students are admitted. Here in a small group he can give the students individual attention, drive them hard, and ask the best of them. He can also cultivate promising and interested men outside of class. Sometimes he has the pleasure of watching a student develop over the years into a colleague—and this is sheer joy. Again, if his school offers a graduate program (ThM or ThD), this can be a real help. This is an academic program, and only superior students are admitted to it; the highest standards of work can be demanded of them. Here the professor finds students with whom he can converse. Even in large required undergraduate courses, a sectioning of the students according to ability *may* help to ease the tension. I say “may”: we tried it in exegetical courses at our seminary and found it to have good points and bad. We divided the class into three groups: a small group of excellent students, an equally small group of marginal or near-hopeless students, and a large group of average students. This had advantages. To teach the excellent students with no weak students there to hold them back, was a pleasure: one could really *teach*. Work with the marginal students was indescribably painful; but occasionally one succeeded in lighting a fire under one of them and salvaging him. (I recall one chronic near-flunkie who in his final semester began to do A-grade work!) But there were disadvantages too. We found that without a leaven of bright students, the poorer students lacked stimulation and tended to resign themselves to mediocrity. And one had to ask, too, whether or not the labor expended on marginal students was a wise expenditure of a professor’s time, in view of the admittedly meager results.

The above, of course, are but random suggestions and by no means exhaust the possibilities. I should think that any scheme that aims at raising the level of instruction for the abler students, while dealing realistically with the needs of the vast majority, would do much to ease the tension between academic standards and practical training. But it goes without saying that no such scheme can succeed without the sympathetic assistance of the administration, for all such schemes involve an increased demand upon faculty time. If students are to be given more individual attention, if too-large classes are to be sectioned, if adequate advanced electives are to be offered, if there is to be time for graduate seminars and conferences with graduate students—then faculty loads will have to be re-examined and, in most cases, faculty strength increased. That will take money, I know. But most of us are already committed up to the hilt. If we were asked to add to our load, even in the interests of better instruction, we should only ease one set of tensions to compound another.

I should hope, too, that administrations would study ways and means whereby capable students might be assured of going beyond the three-year program, at least to a fourth year. I believe that this would help greatly in easing the tension. Now I, for one, doubt the feasibility or the wisdom of a four-year course for everybody. But three years is simply not enough for a theological

education—especially in view of the average student's level of preparedness on beginning. In three years the student gets an introduction to each of the fields of theology, but a solid mastery of none: there simply isn't time. Each of us has students who breeze through the required courses, chomping at the bit, as it were, held back by the crowd from setting the pace they are capable of; they then gobble up every elective that is offered in our field and seem eager for more. But then, just as they begin to blossom, they are gone. And that is my tension with these fellows: Could I not have done better by them? Ought I not to have hurried the pack along at their speed, so that they might have gotten from me all they were capable of getting—and I of giving? I could conduct my basic required courses with a much easier conscience if I knew that every man who had the ability to go faster and farther than his fellows would assuredly have the opportunity to do so later.

But when all is said, the teacher will have to hammer out his answer to his problems for himself and in himself. The pressure of many duties will end only with death or retirement. The standards the teacher sets for himself and the standards he can ask of the students, the claims of scholarship and the claims of vocational training, will always remain in tension. But how he will dispose of his own life is, in the final analysis, strictly up to him. He will of course maintain his scholarly integrity; he will of course keep abreast of his field and remain competent in it. He would do well to identify himself with the life of his church through preaching and teaching as he finds time and opportunity, so that the practical side of his job will never be unreal to him. But, beyond that, he will have to decide. He will have to decide what his gifts are and where his distinctive contribution is to lie—whether scholarship, or the teaching of the church, or the pastoral office among students, or whatever contribution a seminary professor may be expected to make—and give himself to it. He will have to realize that he cannot do everything, and that he would probably have fewer tensions if he resolved to do a few things well. Whichever course he chooses will involve firm decision, the rigid discipline of time, and the use of the word “no” frequently and firmly. Even so, it will not be easy to find the time. But it is possible.

Here too (I should say, especially here) the administration can help greatly. Chiefly, by a sympathetic awareness of what a professor's job entails. I stress this because I have known of institutions (not my own, I thank God) where it is not the case. To be a professor in a theological institution is itself a full-time job. There is no need to look at his classroom load and wonder what he does with his time. True, there are professors who loaf (and pastors, and deans, and big wheels of all varieties). There are professors who use their chairs as roosts from which they flit incessantly hither and yon across the church on projects of their own, to the neglect both of studies and students. But the professor who works at his field has all that he can do; he never goes to bed telling himself he has finished. It is helpful when he knows that the front office realizes this.

The administration can help in tangible ways, too, of course; by paying enough, so that professors are not forced to supplement their incomes by outside activities, and by paying equitably and to scale; by providing a program of regular sabbatical leaves, so that professors may periodically refresh them-

selves intellectually, or may relieve their tensions by getting ahead with long-deferred projects; but above all, I should say, by day in and day out taking all reasonable measures to guard the professor's time. I cannot stress this last too strongly, for time is the nub of the professor's tension, and many a professor gets the feeling that the administration, far from helping him to guard his time, is positively conniving in the wastage of it. Of course teaching loads must be constantly reviewed and kept at a reasonable level. Too heavy a teaching load is the best possible way to ruin a potential scholar, and it does not make for the best teaching either, since it drains the *charisma* from the teacher and leaves him mentally and physically depleted. In evaluating loads, moreover, the teacher's *total* load should be taken into consideration. Those hours that he spends in class do not look to be very much. But what drains away his time, and frustrates him the most, is probably not his classroom load at all, but those odd jobs and additional duties that nowhere appear on his schedule: conferences with students, committees that meet endlessly and perhaps more frequently than necessary, departmental responsibilities, miscellaneous rotating responsibilities that seem always to devolve upon him at the most inconvenient moment. Sometimes he feels that every one's hand is snatching at his time, and the left hand never knows what the right is doing. And if, on top of this, he is given an inconvenient schedule that scatters his teaching hours across the day—he is sunk. I recall one semester when a full teaching load, plus heavy committee work, plus a schedule of maximum inconvenience, left me with neither a free morning nor a free afternoon between Monday and Saturday. Work at my desk was halted dead in its tracks, for productive work simply cannot be done an hour here, an hour there, but requires long blocks of uninterrupted time. I called this situation loudly to the attention of the administration and it was corrected; but I know teachers who get no such sympathy, but have to fight all their lives against a needless shredding of their time. The seminary teacher has no call to reach for the crying towel, and he does not need to be pampered. But his scholarship, actual or potential, is a valuable investment. I know of nothing sadder than to see a potentially creative mind go to seed over the years because of the press of miscellaneous and often unimportant duties. But, gentlemen, it happens.

Yet I must repeat: the tension between our academic standards and aspirations, and our practical task of vocational training for the ministry, cannot ultimately be resolved. It is inherent in the positions to which we have been called; we have to accept it and live with it. No one made us become professors in theological institutions; we did so of our own free will. It therefore does not befit us to whine ourselves into frustration over the tensions our job entails, or to use our positions as stepping stones to something else. The task to which we are committed, of training men for the ministry, is a worthy one, worth a man's life. We have, therefore, to accept its tensions, insofar as they are unavoidable, and resolve that in the midst of them we will serve our Lord and his Church to the best of our ability. Perhaps we shall give thanks that we are permitted to do so.

*John Bright (deceased) was professor emeritus of Hebrew and Old Testament interpretation at Union Theological Seminary.*

## Theological Education Submission Guidelines

*Theological Education*, the journal of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, is devoted to the distinctive concerns of graduate theological education in North America. The journal supports the mission of the Association by providing those concerned with theological education—including administrators, faculty, and independent researchers—with scholarly discourse and reports on issues and trends, research findings and resources, and models of critical analysis and effective practices in graduate theological education.

### Format of the Journal: Theme Focus and Open Forum

The **theme focus** section of the journal contains articles that have been **solicited** by the editors or the editorial board. These articles address current topics and issues in theological education, identified areas of the Association's work, and/or reports of work undertaken by ATS projects.

**Unsolicited** submissions are generally considered for publication in the **open forum** section. These articles may focus on any of a variety of subjects related to graduate, professional theological education in North America. The open forum may also include articles drawn from presentations at ATS leadership education events and other Association venues in order to make them more widely available.

### Submission Guidelines

*Theological Education* invites submissions of articles that are consistent with the journal's purposes as enumerated in its mission statement. Unsolicited submissions are reviewed by at least two members of the editorial board, who make recommendations to the editors regarding their publication. The editorial board will not consider articles that are being submitted simultaneously to other publications.

1. Recommended length of articles is 3,750 words (approximately 15 double-spaced pages).
2. Follow *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. for style and formatting, using one-inch margins, left justification, and endnotes. Convert footnotes to endnotes.
3. Write in the third-person form when possible.
4. If quoting Scripture, include the Bible translation with each reference.
5. The *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* are the references for preferred spellings.
6. Provide a paragraph abstract of approximately 80 words at the beginning of the article.
7. Add a short (2–3 sentence) paragraph at the end of the article identifying the author(s), institution or relationship to the project/topic, position held, and/or other information relevant to the experience of the writer(s).
8. Submissions should be emailed to the managing editor, Eliza Smith Brown, at [brown@ats.edu](mailto:brown@ats.edu).

**Responses** to prior articles are encouraged and are published at the discretion of the editors. The suggested length for a reader response is 1,500 words; responses may be edited for length.

### Author's Checklist

1. Does the article contribute significantly to discourse about theological education?
2. Does the article represent new ideas or experiences that colleagues at other theological schools can incorporate into their teaching or administration?
3. Will the article spark useful debate on the topic?
4. Does the article have a clear focus, and are the arguments well-developed?
5. Does the article make accurate use of the data available from ATS and other sources?
6. Does the article conform to the Submission Guidelines listed above?

